

INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF THE BUREAU OF SAFETY IN RE
INVESTIGATION OF AN ACCIDENT WHICH OCCURRED ON THE
BALTIMORE & OHIO RAILROAD AT MARTINSBURG, W. VA.,
ON JULY 25, 1928.

August 31, 1928.

To the Commission:

On July 25, 1928, a cut of runaway freight cars struck the rear end of a helper engine on a siding and drove it forward afoul a crossover where it was again struck in the side by a freight train on the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad at Martinsburg, W. Va., resulting in the death of one employee.

Location and method of operation

The accident occurred on that portion of the Cumberland Division designated as the East End, extending between Cumberland and Weverton, Md., a distance of 99.5 miles; in the immediate vicinity of the point of accident this is a double-track line over which trains are operated by time-table, train orders and an automatic block-signal system. The initial and final collisions occurred just east of the passenger station at Martinsburg, between Martin and Burke Streets; approaching this point from the west there is a $3^{\circ} 45'$ curve to the left about 600 feet in length, then about 525 feet of tangent, a 3° curve to the right about 650 feet in length, followed by about 1,050 feet of tangent, the initial collision occurring on this tangent at a point approximately 375 feet from its western end and the final collision 225 feet beyond. The average grade of the eastbound siding is 0.68 per cent descending eastward.

In this vicinity the westbound main track is designated as track 1, and the eastbound main track as track 2; the eastbound siding parallels the main tracks on the south. Martin Street is immediately east of the passenger station and extends from north to south; it is approximately 500 feet west of and parallels Burke Street. The passenger station is south of the tracks. At a point about 200 feet east of Martin Street there is

a telegraph office, also located south of the tracks. Directly opposite the telegraph office on the eastbound main track there is located the west switch of the crossover; this crossover is about 225 feet in length, extends from northwest to south east, and connects the eastbound main track with a track known as track 4, a slow speed track and practically a continuation of the eastbound siding. There is a freight house located about 1,600 feet west of the passenger station and south of the tracks, just west of Queen Street. There is a mechanically operated interlocking plant at the telegraph office and the signal involved, the eastbound home signal, is under the control of the operator.

The weather was clear at the time of the accident, which occurred at about 3.30 a.m.

Description

The cut of six runaway freight cars involved were being assembled by yard engine 1796, in charge of Yard Foreman Callahan and Engineman Orem, on the eastbound siding opposite the freight house and west of Queen Street. They consisted, from west to east, of four cars of stone and two empty box cars. These cars started to move eastward down the siding and after proceeding a distance of about 1,770 feet struck the rear end of the tender of helper engine 6016, which was in charge of Engineman Eutzy and Fireman Murray, and was standing on the siding with its pilot directly opposite the west switch of the crossover, awaiting the arrival of extra 6127, in order to assist that train. The impact drove the helper engine forward and it was brought to a stop at a point approximately 200 feet beyond, fouling the crossover, where it was again struck in the gangway on the left side, about the rear end of the fire box, by extra 6127.

Eastbound freight train extra 6127, consisted of 100 loaded freight cars, hauled by engine 6127, and was in charge of Conductor Cooper and Engineman Reel. This train left West Cumbo, 5.2 miles west of Martinsburg, at 3.10 a.m., and while proceeding through the crossover, at a speed estimated to have been about 18 miles per hour it struck helper engine 6016.

Helper engine 6016 came to rest on its right side, parallel with the tracks. Engine 6127 had its cylinder and valve chamber torn from its right side and the trailer truck wheels derailed; the first twelve cars in extra 6127 were slightly damaged but not derailed. No damage was sustained by the six runaway cars. The employee killed was the fireman of helper engine 6016.

Summary of evidence

Yard Foreman Callahan, of yard engine 1796, stated that the duty of seeing to it that the cars set out on the siding were properly looked after and secured was delegated to Yard Brakeman Mongan. Two empty box cars were first set out on the eastbound siding, after which a car of stone was dropped down against the box cars, Brakeman Mongan riding this car, then another car of stone was dropped down, Brakeman Mongan catching this car also. Other cars were then shoved in against the four cars standing on the siding and coupled thereto, and the entire string was shoved eastward by yard engine 1796 far enough to hold one more car clear of a spur track switch, located about 600 feet west of the freight house. A cut was then made and at this time two more cars of stone were left coupled to the four cars already on the siding. Later, while work of switching was still in progress in the vicinity of the freight house, west of Queen Street, it was noticed that the cut of six cars left standing on the eastbound siding had gone and at this time extra 6127 was passing; nothing could be done at this time to prevent the accident. Yard Foreman Callahan said that the six cars involved were standing still when the cut was made on the siding but he did not notice whether they started to move immediately after leaving them as he was depending on Brakeman Mongan to see to it that the cars were properly tied down and that Brakeman Mongan had always performed this duty in the proper manner before, for at least a couple of months on this particular turn. Prior to the accident Yard Foreman Callahan had no knowledge whatever that Brakeman Mongan had left the cut of cars unattended.

Yard Brakeman Mongan, of yard engine 1796, stated that he was thoroughly familiar with conditions at Martinsburg and that he had been in continuous yard service since 1920. He fully understood what switching movements were intended and the necessity for setting a proper number of hand brakes on cars left standing on the siding. He rode the first two cars that were set out on the eastbound siding and set the hand brake on the east car by club; then he rode the third car down the siding and released the hand brake as that car coupled to the first two, after which he rode the fourth car and it was coupled to the other three. Following this movement and while riding a car on the spur his lantern was knocked off a car and fell to the ground, breaking the globe. Afterwards he made another cut on the spur and called the signal to Yard Brakeman Sencindiver, and then without notifying anyone Yard Brakeman Mongan left the cut of cars involved standing on the grade unattended and went across both main tracks and some distance eastward to a hostler's shanty in order to procure a globe; not finding one there he proceeded farther eastward towards the shops and while thus engaged in looking for a lantern globe the cars ran away and the accident occurred. Yard Brakeman Mongan admitted his responsibility for the accident, saying he fully realized that Yard Foreman Callahan was depending on him to properly set hand brakes and that it was his duty to have remained and protected the cars instead of going off without saying a word to anyone and looking for a lantern globe, leaving only one hand brake set and that on an empty car, the east car of the cut. Yard Brakeman Mongan acknowledged that the accident was a result of his carelessness or neglect.

The statements of Engineman Orem, Fireman Wilson and Yard Brakeman Sencindiver developed nothing additional of importance. They were engaged with work of switching and were unaware of anything wrong prior to the cars running away.

Engineman Eutzy, of helper engine 6016, stated that his engine was standing in the clear on the eastbound siding awaiting the arrival of extra 6127, in order to assist that train, when he was called down from the engine by Engineman Mosier and while standing on the ground at a point about 7 or 8 feet from the engine cab, talking together, Engineman Eutzy noticed the cut of cars moving down the siding. At first he thought they were going to head in the Frog Hollow Branch track, this track leading off the east-

bound siding to the southeast at Martin Street, but on seeing them pass the switch and continue on the eastbound siding he shouted to Fireman Murray, who was on the engine, to look out for the cut of cars; the fireman evidently realized that the cut of cars was about to strike the helper engine and released the brakes on the engine, but did not work steam, then the cut of cars struck the rear end of the tender, after which Engineman Eutzzy waved stop signals to Fireman Murray and the fireman brought the helper engine to a stop fouling the crossover, where it was struck again, this time on the left side, by extra 6127. Engineman Eutzzy further stated that when the cut of cars struck the rear end of the helper engine the pilot of engine 6127, of the freight train, was in the immediate vicinity of the crossover. The statements of Engineman Mosier practically corroborated those of Engineman Eutzzy. Engineman Mosier also stated that there was not enough time within which to flag extra 6127, as at the time the cut of cars struck the rear of helper engine 6016 the headlight of engine 6127 was very close.

Engineman Reel, of extra 6127, stated that on passing the freight house at Martinsburg the speed of his train was about 15 miles per hour, then the speed was increased slightly, to about 18 miles per hour when the eastbound home signal, located half-way between Martin Street and the telegraph office, just west of the west switch of the crossover, came into view. When the pilot of his engine was within a few feet of the eastbound home signal the indication changed from clear to stop, therefore, he immediately applied the air brakes, first in service and then in emergency, then the accident occurred. Engineman Reel said he saw a cut of cars in the vicinity of the crossover but thought nothing of it as they looked like they were standing and it was nothing unusual to see cars at that point. He did not see helper engine 6016 fouling the crossover until his engine started to enter the crossover. Fireman Levi was unaware of anything wrong until just prior to the accident.

Operator Schroder, stationed in the telegraph office at Martinsburg, stated that when he heard the noise caused by the cut of runaway cars striking helper engine 6016 he looked out of the window and seeing what the trouble was he immediately changed the indication displayed by the eastbound home signal from clear to stop, directly in front of extra 6127. At the same

time he started the time release to work, in an endeavor to line the crossover switch back for a straight movement on track 2 for extra 6127, instead of through the crossover to track 4. It was too late to accomplish this, however, as it requires 1 minute and 45 seconds for the time release to operate and the route can not be changed until that time, while extra 6127 was then almost at the crossover.

Conclusions

This accident was caused by the failure of Yard Brakeman Mongan to set a sufficient number of hand brakes on a cut of cars.

Yard Brakeman Mongan admitted full responsibility for the accident, saying that he was thoroughly familiar with conditions at Martinsburg and realized that he was being depended upon to properly attend and secure the cut of cars. Instead of doing this, however, he said that his lantern was knocked off a car during the course of switching and it fell to the ground, breaking the globe. He left the cars unattended and with only one hand brake set and that on an empty car, the east car of the cut, went off without notifying anyone, crossed both main tracks and walked some distance eastward looking for a globe to replace the broken one in his lantern and while so engaged the accident occurred.

None of the employees involved had been on duty in violation of any of the provisions of the hours of service law.

Respectfully submitted,

W. P. BORLAND,

Director.