

IN RE INVESTIGATION OF AN ACCIDENT WHICH OCCURRED
ON THE DELAWARE & HUDSON RAILROAD AT ESSEX
SIDING, N. Y., ON SEPTEMBER 26, 1918.

November 21, 1918.

On September 26, 1918, there was a head-end collision between two freight trains on the Champlain Division of the Delaware & Hudson Railroad at Essex siding, N. Y., which resulted in the death of two employees and injury of three employees. After investigation of this accident, the Chief of the Bureau of Safety reports as follows:

The Champlain Division extends between Houses Point and Whitehall, N. Y., a distance of 113.3 miles. With the exception of about five miles of double track between South Junction and Plattsburg, the division is a single track line. Trains are operated by time-table and train orders, the movements being protected by automatic block signals. Southbound trains are superior to trains of the same class running in the opposite direction. The automatic signals are home and distant two position, normal danger, semaphores, giving their indications in the lower quadrant. The night indications are red, yellow and green for stop, caution, and proceed indications, respectively. The signal circuits provide a full block overlap for trains moving in the same direction and a half block overlap for opposing trains. At the fouling point on passing tracks two arm bracket signals are installed, one arm governing main track movements, and the other governing movements from the passing track to the main.

The trains involved were extra 548, southbound, and extra 755, northbound. The former consisted of engines 548 and 848, 56 cars and a caboose in charge of Conductor Kerwood and Enginemen Owens and Whalen. It left Rouses Point at 6.00 p.m., and at Plattsburg received order No. 70, reading as follows:

Engine 548 run extra Plattsburg to Whitehall
Extra 548 South meet extra 755 North at Essex
Siding and extra 751 North at Burdicks.

This train left Plattsburg at 9.15 p.m.; arrived at Essex Siding about 1.03 a.m., and stopped on the main track about two hundred feet north of the south switch.

Extra 755 north consisted of engines 755 and 840, 47 cars and a caboose in charge of Conductor Scott and Enginemen Fields and Powers. It left Whitehall at 5.50 p.m. and at Port Henry received a copy of order No. 70. At 1.10 a.m., while running at a speed variously estimated at from 12 to 20 miles an hour, it collided with extra 548 about 750 feet north of Essex Station and approximately 200 feet north of south end of Essex Siding. The weather at the time of the accident was cloudy and a light rain was falling.

The fireman of engine 755 and one trainman were killed. Engine 755 turned over and came to rest on its left side. This engine was considerably damaged. Its tender and helping engine 840 of this train were slightly damaged. Engine 548, the lead engine of extra 548 was damaged; there was also some damage to cars and slight damage to the track.

Approaching the scene of accident from the south there is a tangent 1795 feet long followed by a 2-degree curve to the

left about 800 feet long. Automatic block signal 136.1 is located near the north end of this curve. From this signal to the point of collision a clear and unobstructed view can be had. Following the curve is a tangent 4252 feet in length which has a slight descending grade northward of approximately 0.2 per cent. The collision occurred on this tangent about 225 feet from its north end, and approximately 500 feet in advance of automatic signal 137.1 which was in the stop position at the time.

Conductor Merwood of extra 548 stated that he had orders to meet extra 755 at Essex Siding; that his train reached that point about 1.03 a.m., and that soon after it stopped, Brakeman Crowley started down to the station to send a message. This train had been standing about 8 minutes when the collision occurred and Conductor Merwood stated that he was in the caboose when he first heard extra 755 coming. From the sound it appeared that one engine had shut off but the other was working steam almost up to the time of the collision. The block signals were working and were set against train 755. The signal light at the switch was burning.

Engineman Owens of extra 548 stated that when he stopped at Essex Siding to meet No. 755 the track was clear; that he was just finished eating his lunch when he saw the reflection from the approaching engine. He realized that it was on the main track, but it was too late to do anything to avert the collision.

Brakeman Crowley stated that he was the middle brake-

man on extra 548; that he had read train order No. 70 arranging a meet between extras 548 and 755 at Essex Siding; that when the train stopped at Essex Siding he was on the head end; that he went down to the switch and unlocked it in order to have it ready for someone to throw and then went down to the station to deliver a message; that the light was burning on the switch and the block was red. He stated that he was in the station but was not looking out when extra 755 went by; that he could tell from the sound that the pusher was not using steam and the lead engine was; and that he considered the speed unusual for a man who had a meet.

Engineman Whalen on engine 548 stated that after arriving at Essex Siding his train backed until it was five or six car lengths from the block and waited for extra 755. He said 755 was using steam almost up to the time they struck, that the speed was probably 20 miles an hour, and that even had the switch been lined up, it was unsafe for anyone to attempt to take it at the rate this train was moving.

Conductor Scott of extra 755 stated that at Port Henry he received orders to meet extra 548 at Essex Siding; and that at the time of the accident he was riding in the caboose. He estimated the speed of his train at 15 miles per hour and believes that had the switch been lined up his train could safely have taken it at the speed at which it was moving.

Engineman Fields on the lead engine of extra 755 stated that he was promoted to emergency engineman about a year ago; that at Port Henry he received train order No. 70 to meet extra

548 south at Essex Siding. He had an inexperienced fireman whom he found it necessary to assist in order to keep up proper steam pressure. Several times he left his cab and went back to the second cab to instruct his fireman, at the same time putting in a fire himself. He stated that he was just returning to the front cab and was crossing the running board when he came in sight of signal 136.1, which is located nearly a mile south of Essex Station. He noticed the signal was yellow, and from this point could plainly see the home signal, 137.1, showing red. He was running 20 or 25 miles an hour and could see plainly the head lights of extra 548 which he was expecting to meet and take siding for. Approaching nearer he thought he could see someone standing by the switch stand, and although he could not see the switch lamp burning, he took it for granted that someone had thrown the switch allowing him to take the siding, as it is generally customary for one of the train crew when holding the main track and arriving first at the meeting point, to throw the switch although there is nothing to this effect in the book of rules. Presuming that the switch was lined up for him, and wishing to make a good showing as to time, he made no effort to stop his train. He did not know that the switch was not turned until he was passing it. His train was then only about two hundred feet from extra 548. He threw his brake valve into emergency and opened the sand lever, but the distance was so short it did not seem to have any effect on the speed of the train. He stated that he was moving at

about twenty miles an hour before he shut off and that he shut off steam just south of the station, the pusher having shut off steam a short time before. He assumed full responsibility for the accident, saying: "I am wholly to blame for it. I did not stop for the block when it was against me, nor did I stop when I could not see the switch. I am wholly to blame for this accident."

Engineman Powers on engine 840 stated that as he passed the curve leading to Essex he shut off steam and let his engine drift. He saw the block was red and the order board green and was astounded that Engineman Fields went by the signal not attempting to bring his train to a standstill. He stated that his first thought was to attempt to stop the train and he was about to reverse when the crash came. He thought when the train passed Essex that they were going rather fast but presumed that the lead engineman had a clear signal from a man at the switch. He said that he could not see the switch on account of the engine ahead of him with three cars as spacer and the other engine was blowing steam; that he did not hear Engineman Fields blow his whistle after leaving Whallonsburg and did not see anybody at the switch.

Fireman Anderson on engine 840 confirmed the engineman's statement that steam on the second engine was cut off near the first southbound block south of the station and estimated the speed of his train at the time of the collision as 10 or 15 miles an hour.

Rule 504(a) reads as follows:

Within yard limits and at meeting and passing points, second-class and extra trains (except passenger extras), may pass an automatic block signal in normal position, in no case exceeding a speed of 6 miles per hour, and prepared to stop within the range of vision, until a clear signal is indicated.

This accident was caused by the failure of Engineman Fields to obey this rule. Had he reduced speed to not more than 6 miles an hour and proceeded prepared to stop within range of vision, he could have seen that the switch was set for the main line in time to have stopped before colliding with extra 548. According to his own admission he purposely disobeyed the indication of the signal in order to make a good showing for himself in making time.

Both Engineman Fields and Engineman Powers of extra 755 were what is known as "emergency" enginemen, that is, they were not yet promoted enginemen, and held only firemen's rights, being used as enginemen only in emergencies. Engineman Fields was employed as fireman on March 8, 1914, and Engineman Powers was employed as fireman on March 24, 1913. At the time of the collision Engineman Fields had been on duty about 9 hours and 40 minutes after 29 hours and 40 minutes off duty. The crew of extra 755 had been on duty about 9 hours and 20 minutes and the crew of 548 about 8 hours and 40 minutes when the accident occurred.