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IN RE INVESTIGATION OF AN ACCIDENT WHICH
OCCURRED ON THE DELAWARE, LACKAWANNA & WESTERN RAILROAD
AT TAYLOR, PA., APRIL 28, 1919.

May 18, 1919.

On April 28, 1919, there was a collision between two freight trains on the Delaware, Lackawanna & Western Railroad at Taylor, Pa., which resulted in the death of 4 employees and the injury of one employee. After investigation of this accident the Chief of the Bureau of Safety submits the following report:

The accident occurred on the Keyser Valley Branch, a double-track line about 5 miles in length extending from Cayuga, Pa., to Taylor Crossover. Trains are operated by rule and verbal telephone orders issued by the yard master, this branch being entirely within yard limits. Trains on this branch run with the current of traffic on the left hand track. Approaching the point of collision from the west there is 850 feet of tangent followed by a curve to the left about 420 feet in length having a maximum curvature of five degrees and 3 minutes; then comes 160 feet of tangent and another curve to the left of 8 degrees and 43 minutes about 130 feet in length. The collision occurred in about the center of the last mentioned curve. The grade is nearly 1% ascending for eastbound trains. The weather was clear.

Transfer engine 25, handling 25 freight cars, in charge of Drill Foreman Conway and Engineer T. Ryan, was running westbound from Beranton yard to Taylor yard. On arriving at Taylor crossover at the eastern end of Taylor yard, verbal orders were received from Yard Master Gavin to make a reverse movement over the eastbound track as far as Taylor Tank, about 1,000 feet west

of the point of collision, the movement between these two points to be flagged by Switchtender Bartholomew, stationed at Taylor Tank. The engine was then to be cut off and returned east to Taylor crossover on the westbound track, the yard master flagging this part of the movement. The train then proceeded westward, using the eastbound track, and when the head end was about 25 car lengths from Taylor Tank, the engine was cut off and crossed over to the westbound track, leaving the train standing on the eastbound track without protection by any member of the crew and without a light having been placed on the leading car. The engine ran around the train and cut off the rear 15 cars, and these were being classified in the yard when the 10 cars which had been left on the eastbound track were struck by an eastbound extra.

The eastbound extra consisted of 3 engines and a caboose in charge of Conductor Smith and Enginemen Clark, Carney and J. Ryan. After having hauled a train westbound into Hampton Yard, about 1½ miles west of Taylor crossover, the 3 engines were backing to Taylor yard over the eastbound track with the caboose east of the engines. It was while this movement was being executed that the extra collided with the cars standing on the eastbound track while traveling at a speed estimated to have been about 8 or 10 miles an hour.

The caboose was caught between the tender of engine 820 and the first car of the standing train, which was a steel underframe gondola, resulting in the entire superstructure of the caboose being demolished. Slight damage was sustained by

the gondola and by the tender of engine 830. All of the employees killed and injured were riding in the caboose.

Yard Master Gavin stated that 3 other westbound freight trains were following transfer engine 25, and that it was for the purpose of facilitating the handling the cabooses of these three trains that he moved the transfer train against the current of traffic. He called up Switchtender Bartholomew on the telephone and told him that he was running a train on the eastbound track against the current of traffic and for him to protect it until it reached Taylor Tank. He also said that the train would be left on that track to be switched, which would be as soon as the engine could run around it. Such a movement had been made on several previous occasions, and in every case he either notified the switchtender when the track was clear, or the switchtender called him up on the telephone. In this particular case he did not tell the switchtender to protect the eastbound track until such time as he notified him that the track was clear, taking it for granted that the switchtender would understand the situation. Yard Master Gavin further stated that he had never received instructions that trains should not be run against the current of traffic between Taylor Tank and Taylor crossover, although instructions to that effect had been issued before he became yard master. He also stated that during the past few months, the main tracks had been blocked almost every night, due to congestion of traffic.

Switchtender Bartholomew stated that the yard master told him he was running a train on the eastbound main track

against the current of traffic, and that he should protect the movement by flagging until the engine had been cut off, and that the train would be removed from that track as soon as the engine had run around it. He was positive that the yard master did not tell him to flag until such time as he was notified that the track was clear, and considered that he had fulfilled his instructions in regard to flagging as soon as the train arrived at Taylor Tank, thinking that the drill foreman would protect his own train after that time. At the time the three engines and cabooses approached, he did not know that the track was clear, but took it for granted that such was the case, in view of the length of time which had elapsed since engine 25 left Taylor Tank, saying that he would have flagged any east-bound engine or train approaching within a reasonable time after the departure of engine 25. In the past, however, trains making a similar movement had been protected by him until he was notified that the track was clear, or else they were protected by a member of their crew. He did not think it was his duty to protect cars left on this track. Switchtender Bartholomew further stated that for several years it had been the practice to run trains against the current of traffic between Taylor Tank and Taylor Crossover. Several months ago, however, instructions had been received from Superintendent Lawrence to notify the superintendent of any such movements, these instructions being issued on account of the occurrence of a similar accident in the same vicinity. Since that time the main track had been blocked by cars on only one occasion, and at that time he did not notify the

superintendent, as the yard master told him that the track would be cleared immediately.

Drill Foreman Conway stated that at Taylor Crossover he received verbal orders from Yard Master Gavin that he was to use the eastbound Keyser Valley main track to Taylor Tank and that the switchtender at that point would protect the movement. On reaching Taylor Tank, the engine was to be cut off, crossed over to the westbound track and the yard master was to protect the return movement to Taylor crossover. Drill Foreman Conway said that he did not talk with his engineer in regard to the movement or the manner in which it was to be protected. On the arrival of the train at Taylor Tank he told Switchtender Bartholomew that he would notify him when he had cleared the eastbound track. He did not leave a light on the head car or a member of his crew to protect the cars, taking it for granted that the switchtender would protect until notified that the track was clear. After running around the cars the engine was coupled to them and 15 cars were cut off, the entire 25 cars not being moved on account of a defective coupler on the first car, on account of which he did not think the entire train could be handled at one time. He further stated that he did not consider he should flag after his train arrived at Taylor Tank, as he had made the same movement on many previous occasions, always under the protection of the switchtender, and had never placed a light on the head car while running around the train. He knew that a light should be on the end of a train while obstructing the main track, but did not think it was neces-

easy while under the protection of the switchtender.

Engineman T. Ryan, in charge of Engine 35, stated that after Foreman Conway had talked with the yard master, the switches were lined up for a movement on the eastbound track. He did not know what protection was to be afforded, but was satisfied that the movement was being protected, as it was the practice for movements of this character to be protected by the switchtender at Taylor Tank. Had he cut off his engine in a similar manner while out on the road, he would have seen to it that a light was placed on the end of the cars, but as this was within the yard limits, he did not consider it necessary, protection always being afforded by the switchtender. He also said that the yard master had full charge of these tracks, and that he had a right to run trains against the current of traffic at any time. He also said that he and Drill Foreman Conway had blocked the main track once during the past two months in a similar manner and with the same kind of protection.

Engineman J. Ryan, in charge of engine 320, which was next to the caboose, stated that when backing up past the switchtender's building, he saw the switchtender sitting down inside, apparently wide awake. It was not necessary for him to receive a signal from the switchtender at this point, as he was running with the current of traffic. On account of being on the inside of the curve his view was not obstructed by the caboose, but on account of the darkness he was unable to see that the track was obstructed by cars until the collision occurred. He did not receive any signal prior to the collision. He estimated the speed at the time to have been 8 or 10 miles an hour.

Conductor Smith stated that when the three engines and cabooses were being backed toward Taylor cressover, he rode with two members of the train crew on the caboose platform until they reached the viaduct located a few hundred feet west of where the collision occurred. From this point no cars could be seen on the main track, and he then went inside the caboose together with one of the brakemen, leaving the flagman out on the platform. He had just reached his desk when the collision occurred. He thought the speed at the time was about 8 or 10 miles an hour. Conductor Smith further stated that he had been stopped at Taylor Tank on four or five occasions and notified that the track was blocked, but he did not know of any cars ever having been left on the main track without a light.

The primary cause of this accident was the failure of Switchtender Bartholomew to hold the eastbound extra until certain that the eastbound track was clear. Yardmaster Gavin should have had a definite understanding with the switchtender with respect to the protection desired, and is also at fault.

Yardmaster Gavin admits that he did not tell the switchtender to protect until such time as he was notified that the track was clear. On the other hand, Switchtender Bartholomew knew what kind of a move was being made and he should not have allowed any train to pass on the eastbound track until he knew definitely that the track had been cleared. His own statement that he thought a sufficient amount of time had elapsed to clear the track indicates that he realized his responsibility, even without definite instructions from the yardmaster.

A contributing cause was the failure of Drill Foreman Conway and Engineman T. Ryan to place a light on the head end of the train after cutting off the engine, or in the absence of a light to leave a member of the crew to protect their train. They were leaving a portion of their train on the main track for an indefinite period of time and a proper regard for safety should have prompted them to see that a light or a flagman was left with this portion of the train.

Yardmaster Gavin was 23 years of age. He entered the service as a caller in 1907, was made yard-clerk in 1908, and in August, 1916, promoted to yard master. Switchtender Bartholomew was employed in 1879 as a brakeman and promoted to conductor in 1886. After several suspensions he was dismissed in January, 1912, on account of an accident and was reemployed as a switchtender in February of the same year. Drill Foreman Conway was employed as a switchman in 1910. Engineman T. Ryan entered the service as a fireman in 1901, and was promoted to engineman in 1906. He had been suspended on several occasions, and in November, 1911, was dismissed on account of an accident. In July, 1912, he was reinstated for work in yard or mine service only.

Yardmaster Gavin had been on duty 3 hours and 40 minutes, Switchtender Bartholomew 6 hours and 40 minutes. None of the employees involved had been on duty in violation of any of the provisions of the Hours of Service Law.

The two main tracks between Taylor crossover and Taylor Tank are only about 45 car lengths long and merge into the ladder

track at the east end of the yard. There are no schedule train movements over them and apparently no good reason why they should be classed as main tracks. Under the circumstances it is believed that their use as main tracks should be discontinued, and that they be used in the same manner as any other yard tracks. All trains and engines would then run on these tracks under full control, as required by the rules governing yard movements.

G.V.L.