

July 16, 1912.

Accident upon the Ligonier Valley Railroad near Ligonier, Pa., on July 5, 1912.

On July 5, 1912, there was a collision on the Ligonier Valley Railroad near Ligonier, Pa., which resulted in the death of 3 employees and 16 passengers, and the injury of 4 employees and 24 passengers. One of the injured employees and 3 of the injured passengers died afterwards from their injuries.

This accident was reported by telegraph on the date of its occurrence, and after investigation of the same the Chief Inspector of Safety Appliances reports as follows:

The passenger train involved in this accident was east-bound, and consisted of a combination baggage and passenger car, hauled by engine No. 10. It was in charge of Conductor Kuhn and Engineer Dunlap. On this trip the combination car was ahead of the engine, which was backing up, the passenger end of the combination car being at the head end of the train. This train left Ligonier at 3:25 p. m., five minutes behind its scheduled time, for Wilpen, Pa., the terminus of the line. The collision occurred at a point about 1-1/2 miles east of Ligonier.

The freight train involved consisted of 14 loaded cars, hauled by engines Nos. 7 and 14. It was in charge of Conductor Knox and Engineers Dentle and McDonough. It left Wilpen at 3:20 p. m., and was running at a speed estimated to have been between 20 and 25 miles per hour at the time of the collision. The speed of the passenger train was between 10 and 15 miles per hour. The weather at the time of the collision was clear.

The combination car was destroyed, while both of the freight engines were badly damaged. The passenger engine was slightly damaged.

This railroad is a single track line extending from Latrobe, Pa., to Ligonier, a distance of 10-1/2 miles. The branch on which this accident occurred is also a single track line, extending from Ligonier to Wilpen, a distance of 3 1/2 miles, with several spur tracks leading to coal mines and coke ovens. It is known as the Mill Creek Branch. The passenger service on this branch consists of two round trips each week day, starting at Ligonier. The freight service consists of hauling empty cars to the mines and coke ovens, doing the necessary switching, and hauling the loaded cars back to Ligonier. The passenger trains on this branch are not known by numbers. No block signal system of any kind is used, the movement of trains being governed by orders given by the dispatcher, either verbally or by telephone, to the conductor, who in turn conveys them to the engineer and the other members of his crew. No record is kept of train orders; no train register is maintained, and the road

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has no printed rules of any kind governing train operation.

The collision occurred on a 60° curve, which runs through a cut. On the inside of this curve the wall of the cut is about 25 feet high, limiting the vision of approaching engine crews to a distance of less than 200 feet. The grade is slightly descending for west-bound trains.

Before the freight train left Wilpen, Conductor Knox telephoned to the dispatcher at Ligonier and asked for an order permitting him to meet the passenger train at Ligonier. Car distributor Noel answered the telephone and on instructions given to him by Dispatcher Minech, who was working at the same desk, told Conductor Knox to bring his train to Ligonier, and that Conductor Kuhn's train would be held for him. Conductor Knox communicated these instructions to the members of his crew and started his train on its way to Ligonier.

Dispatcher Minech states that he notified Conductor Kuhn on three different occasions to hold his train at Ligonier until the freight train arrived; once while the conductor was in the baggage end of the compartment car, and twice while he was on the station platform.

Freight clerk Clogg stated that he was in the baggage compartment and heard the dispatcher give the instructions to the conductor to hold his train, while the janitor and station baggageman, Wm. Fortney, corroborated the dispatcher by saying that he heard the latter tell Conductor Kuhn to hold his train while he was standing on the station platform.

The members of the crew of the passenger train stated that they had no knowledge of any instructions having been given to Conductor Kuhn by the dispatcher relative to holding the train at Ligonier pending the arrival of the freight train.

Conductor Kuhn was interviewed in the hospital to which he had been taken. He stated that he had no knowledge of the freight train having been given orders to meet his train at Ligonier. He insisted that the only instructions received by him from the dispatcher related to a freight train which ran between Latrobe and Ligonier. This train was in the Ligonier yard at the time, and Conductor Kuhn stated that he was told that as soon as it was out of the way his train could go.

All of the employees connected with this accident were experienced men, and none of them had been on duty in violation of any of the provisions of the hours of service law.

This accident was caused either by the failure of the dispatcher to deliver, or of the conductor of the passenger train to understand or obey, the order requiring the latter to hold his train at Ligonier until the freight train arrived. The weight of evidence, as given by the employees, seems to be

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with the dispatcher, and the conclusion is therefore reached that Conductor Kuhn is responsible for this collision, either by his failure to understand, or by his failure to obey, the order delivered to him by the dispatcher. The whole matter, however, is a question of veracity between the conductor on the one hand, and the dispatcher and other employees on the other hand, since there is no written record of the order involved.

As previously stated, the combination car was being handled ahead of the engine. This is an extremely dangerous manner of carrying passengers. There was ample opportunity of turning this train at Ligonier, so that this car could have been handled behind the engine instead of in front of it. Had this been done, and there seems to have been no excuse whatever for its not having been done, there could undoubtedly have been a material reduction in the loss of life attending this accident.

The method of train operation on this road is extremely faulty, and until some adequate rules governing train operation are adopted and enforced, accidents of this character are liable to occur.