

INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF THE BUREAU OF SAFETY IN RE
INVESTIGATION OF AN ACCIDENT WHICH OCCURRED ON THE
NEW YORK CENTRAL RAILROAD AT MOTT HAVEN JUNCTION,
N. Y., ON SEPTEMBER 4, 1928.

January 2, 1929.

To the Commission:

On September 4, 1928, there was a side collision between a New York Central Railroad train and a New York, New Haven & Hartford Railroad train, both trains consisting of empty passenger-train equipment, on the New York Central Railroad at Mott Haven Junction, N. Y., resulting in the death of one Pullman porter.

Location and method of operation

Mott Haven Junction is located 5.28 miles northeast of Grand Central Terminal by compass direction, in the time-table, however, train movements from Grand Central Terminal to Mott Haven Junction and beyond are classed as westward. This accident occurred on the Electric Division within yard and interlocking limits, at Mott Haven Junction the tracks of the Hudson Division diverge toward the north and parallel the Hudson River, on the east bank, while the tracks leading to the Harlem Division continue toward the northeast. "MO" tower is located in the angle formed by the diverging tracks, near Park Avenue and E. 150th Street, while Mott Haven yard, consisting of numerous tracks, is also located in this angle, north of "MO" tower and between E. 152nd and E. 161st Streets, Sheridan and Morris Ave. Two tangent main lead tracks, one known as the west main and the other as the east main, parallel each other, extend southward from Mott Haven yard and connect with the tracks of the Hudson Division at a point just south of "MO" tower; the west main lead track crosses track 1 of the Hudson Division at a point about 120 feet south of "MO" tower and then connects with track 2 of the Hudson Division at a point approximately 157 feet beyond, Hudson Division track 2 connects with Harlem Division track 4 at a point 264 feet farther south. The accident occurred at the intersection of the west main lead track with track 1 of the Hudson Division.

There is an electro pneumatic interlocking plant at Mott Haven Junction, operated from "MO" tower, and train movements between the tracks of the Hudson Division and those leading to the Harlem Division and the east and

west main lead tracks to the yard are controlled from "MO" tower. Interlocking signal 10R which governs movements on the west main lead track is a 3-arm home signal and is located opposite "MO" tower, just south of this signal there is a derail, located on the west rail of the west main lead track, which works in conjunction with signal 10R. The switches and signals of "MO" tower are so arranged that when the route has been lined for a movement from Mott Haven Junction northward on track 1 of the Hudson Division and across the intersection of the west main lead track, the stop indication of signal 10-R is displayed and the derail is set against a train moving southward on the west main lead track. At a point about 300 feet north of signal 10-R there is a crossover, which connects the east main lead track with the west main lead track. No. 1 tower is located at the south end of Mott Haven yard between E. 151st and E. 152nd Streets, just east of the crossover.

The weather was clear at the time of the accident, which occurred at about 9 40 p.m.

Description

Westbound NYC storage train 1st 144 consisted of four coaches, one dining car, seven Pullman cars, and one club car, all of steel construction, hauled by electric locomotive 1131, and was in charge of Conductor ~~Rich~~ and Engineman Campbell. This train left Grand Central Terminal at 9 10 p.m. and arrived at Mott Haven Junction at 9 36 p.m. The route was lined for a movement westward on track 1 of the Hudson Division and across the intersection of the west main lead track, it being intended to continue westward to a wye track switch and on reaching that point to make a back-up movement into Mott Haven yard. The contemplated movement was started, but as the train was moving across the intersection of Hudson Division track 1 with the west main lead track at a speed estimated to have been about 10 miles per hour the twelfth car was struck on its right side near the forward end by the leading car in NYNH&H deadhead equipment train extra "Y" engine 0303.

NYNH&H deadhead equipment train extra "Y" engine 0303 consisted, from south to north, of one baggage car, two coaches, two Pullman parlor cars, and six Pullman sleeping cars, all of steel construction, shoved by electric locomotive 0303 backing up, manned by a NYNH&H train and engine crew, and was in charge of Conductor Callaghan and Engineman Hoffman. This train was to be operated from Mott Haven yard to Boston, via New Haven, and its route from Mott Haven yard to Harlem Division track 4 was via the east main lead track, through the crossover to the west main lead track, and thence to Hudson Division track 2 and then to Harlem Division track 4, a back-up movement

being required for this distance. As the NYNH&H train crew were not familiar with conditions and not qualified to operate in the yard, a pilot started this train out of the yard, but before the movement out of the yard had been completed the pilot got off the train without telling the train crew that he was going to do so, and shortly afterwards, while traveling at a speed estimated to have been about 10 miles per hour, the train passed signal 10-R, which was displaying a stop indication, encountered the derail just beyond and was derailed, the derailed wheels of the first two cars in the train closely followed their respective rails and after traveling about 100 feet the leading car struck the side of the twelfth car in NYC storage train 1st 144.

The three rear cars in the NYC storage train and the two leading cars in the NYNH&H deadhead equipment train were derailed and damaged. All of the derailed cars remained upright and in general alignment with the tracks upon which they were moving with the exception of the twelfth car in the storage train, which car came to rest on its left side between tracks 1 and 2 of the Hudson Division, with its rear end at a point about 100 feet north of the crossing. The front end of the leading car in the deadhead equipment train cornered the front end of the rear car in the storage train, these cars came to rest with their forward ends just south of the intersection.

Summary of evidence

Assistant General Yardmaster Reisinger stated that he had been employed in the New Haven yard for about 12 years, about 3 years of which was in his present position, and that he was thoroughly familiar with conditions there. On the date of this accident he received word at about five o'clock that the New Haven equipment train was to be made up and operated to Boston. The train was ordered for seven o'clock, it was made up but because of congestion in the yard it was not ready to move until about eight o'clock and the movement was started at about 9:35 a.m. Shortly before that time when train No. 50-Y, a storage train, was leaving the yard, he telephoned to "10" tower and asked the director whether the New Haven equipment train could be handled after train No. 50-Y, and was advised that it would be handled right after that train. He then walked to the equipment train to start it out of the yard and on his way he stopped at an automatic telephone located about two car lengths from the deadhead equipment train, called No. 1 tower, told that towerman that "10" was going to handle the deadhead equipment train after train No. 50-Y cleared, and that he was on his way to the deadhead equipment train for the purpose of starting that train from the yard; as he could not see the signal at "10" tower from the yard, he asked the towerman in No. 1 tower to sound three blasts on the tower whistle

to advise him when "all signals were set". Yardmaster Reisinger said he was advised by the towerman of No. 1 tower that this would be done. Yardmaster Reisinger understood from this conversation that when three blasts were sounded on No. 1 tower whistle the route would be lined all the way through from "ott Haven yard to Harlem Division track 4, past No. 1 tower and also "10" tower. He then proceeded to the NYNH&H headhead equipment train and called to the train crew that they were going to move. He got on the leading car which was a baggage car, and when the two breakers came into the leading car he showed them where the conductor's emergency brake valve was located. Shortly afterwards, three blasts were sounded on No. 1 tower whistle, Yardmaster Reisinger said he was inside the leading car, near the forward end and he could see the signal at No. 1 tower about three city blocks away, and that signal was clear, he could not see the indication displayed by the signal at "MO" tower, but he assumed that signal was also clear in accordance with the understanding he had with the towerman. The yardmaster pulled the whistle signal cord three times for the engineer to start the back-up movement, but as the movement was not started, he again gave the back-up signal, and then back-up signals were given by the use of hand lanterns, after which the train started. Prior to that time he had not seen the conductor on the train. After the train started Yardmaster Reisinger said he walked through the baggage car to the coach, saw the conductor sitting there and pointed out the location of the conductor's emergency valve to him. The yardmaster then went outside and stood on the step on the west side and south end of the coach and as the speed began to increase he jumped off at a point near E. 153rd Street. He said he took it for granted that the signal at "MO" tower was clear and the route was lined up all the way through as it was his understanding that this would be the case when three blasts were sounded on No. 1 tower whistle. The first he knew of anything wrong was, on hearing a noise caused by the breakers blowing out, and then the train came to a stop, at which time he was alongside of it, near the motor, having walked in the same direction the train was moving toward the yardmaster's office. He stated that at this time of the year there are often two or three movements of this character during the night and it is customary to handle them in the same manner. The New Haven train crews never start out of the yard until they are told it is all right to go, however, it is not the practice for a pilot to stay on all the way out to the main line but to jump off as near as they can to "10" tower. In this case he didn't know whether or not the crew in charge of the equipment train was familiar with the route over which the train was to be moved to the main track, but he remained on the train until it had passed over the yard switches and as the remainder of the movement was governed by high signals he thought the crew were well able to take the train. He expected all signals would be clear, but if they were given a red signal he expected them to apply

the brakes by means of the conductor's valve, the location of which he had pointed out. When asked concerning his understanding as to the duties of a pilot, Yardmaster Reisiger said it was his duty to take the train as far as the crew is not familiar with the track they are going over, and from what happened afterwards it was apparent he did not fulfill his duties as pilot in this instance although at the time he thought it was safe for the crew to handle the train without a pilot from the point where he left it to the main line toward which they were moving. He stated that he did not notify either the brakemen or the conductor that he was going to get off, and admitted that he should have done so. The yardmaster said that it was not the practice, nor was it his intention on this occasion, to start a deadhead equipment train from the yard unless the route was clear all the way through both No. 1 and "MO" interlocking plants as to do so with the route clear only as far as "MO" tower would result in blocking one leg of a wye track at the south end of the yard, which leg crosses the west main lead and east main lead tracks at nearly right angles in the immediate vicinity of No. 1 tower.

Under the instructions relative to switching passenger equipment, it is required that when switching cars not equipped with platform air device in proper working order, or where the conductor's valve is not quickly accessible, the back-up hose must be used. Yardmaster Reisiger said that it was not the practice to use a tail-hose for making back-up movements similar to that involved, and said that no back-up hose was required in this instance as with the brakemen stationed as they were the conductor's valve in the baggage car was quickly accessible. The rules also require that when cars are pushed by an engine a trainman must take a conspicuous position on the front of the leading car, Yardmaster Reisiger said that this rule applied in this instance and that it was his duty to see that it was complied with, the two brakemen were inside the baggage car, at about the middle of the car, near the air cord, and he was of the opinion that this rule was fully complied with.

Leverman Wells, stationed at No. 1 tower, stated that he had been engaged in service at that point since July 8, 1928. After talking on the telephone with Yardmaster Reisiger in this instance, when it was arranged to have the back-up movement of the NYNH&H deadhead equipment train started from the yard upon the sounding of three blasts on No. 1 tower whistle, which was the first time that such a request had ever been made of him. Leverman Wells stated that he telephoned "MO" tower and informed Tower Director Hassell that the deadhead equipment train was ready to depart from the yard and that the tower director replied that it was "all right". Leverman

Wells said he then lined up the route which permitted the movement to be made past No. 1 tower toward "MO" tower, and that he sounded three blasts on the tower whistle. As soon as he saw the deadhead equipment train moving, he said that he again called "MO" tower and informed the tower director that the train was coming to "MO" tower on the west main lead track and that the tower director again replied that it was "all right". Shortly afterwards the accident occurred. Leverman Wells was certain Yardmaster Reisinger did not request that the tower whistle be sounded when the routes through both plants were lined. He intended the three blasts on the tower whistle to mean that it was all right to start the back-up movement from the yard, however, Leverman Wells stated that he would not have lined No. 1 tower route and had the back-up movement started unless "MO" tower had informed him it was all right, as to have started such a movement from the yard without the route lined all the way through would result in practically all of No. 1 tower territory being blocked and thereby prevent other yard movements being made. Leverman Wells took it for granted that Yardmaster Reisinger was going to act as pilot and that "MO" tower was ready to handle the movement, on account of having been told by the tower director that it was "all right". It was the general practice to inquire of the tower director whether the train could be handled at "MO" tower before lining No. 1 tower route. After asking the tower director to handle a train movement from the yard Leverman Wells never made it a point to observe the indication displayed by interlocking signal LOR at "MO" tower before lining No. 1 tower route, but permitted the train to move as far as "MO" tower, regardless of the indication displayed by that signal, however, interlocking signal LOR usually displayed a proceed indication a considerable time before a train moving from the yard reached it, thereby making it unnecessary for the train to come to a stop. On this occasion he watched interlocking signal LOR until it was hidden from view by the deadhead equipment train making the back-up movement and it displayed a stop indication as long as he could see it. There is a bell code system in effect between No. 1 tower, "MO" tower, and other towers by which means advance notice is given of train movements, however, Leverman Wells said that this system was not applicable to NYNH&H deadhead equipment trains, or at least he had no instructions to use it for such movements, and it was not used in this instance.

Tower Director Hassell, stationed at "MO" tower, stated that he had worked for this railroad for two years and two months. Since August 1, 1938, he had been employed as a regular relief director, from which time he had worked at "MO" tower every Tuesday, prior to that he had had a little experience at that point working on a sheet. According to the tower director, Leverman Wells

telephoned and said that train No. 50-Y was ready to depart from the yard and Tower Director Hassell said "all right", then Leverman Wells said that the deadhead equipment train would be next, no mention being made as to when the deadhead equipment train would be started. Tower Director Hassell stated that he did not inform Yardmaster Reisiger that the deadhead equipment train could be handled after train No. 50-Y and could not remember having had any such conversation with the yardmaster, nor did he tell Leverman Wells, or any one else to his knowledge, when the deadhead equipment train could be handled, claiming that he had no knowledge whatever as to that train departing from the yard and being enroute to "10" tower or that No. 1 tower route had been lined for the movement. The first knowledge he had of anything wrong was when the leading car of the deadhead equipment train encountered the derailed device and was derailed. Tower Director Hassell said that it was the practice for No. 1 tower to give notice by means of a bell code system, of any movement between No. 1 and "10" tower but that no such signal was given in this instance, although it was used in the case of train No. 50-Y, in addition to the telephone call from No. 1 tower. Furthermore, even now Leverman Wells telephoned or communicated with "10" tower by means of the bell code system and requested that "10" tower route be lined for the deadhead equipment train. Tower Director Hassell said that the request could not have been complied with as train 1st 144 was already on the circuit enroute northward on track 1 of the Hudson Division, he said he had lined the route for the northward opposing movement just after train No. 50-Y cleared.

Brakeman Van Haaften, of the NYNH&H deadhead equipment train, said that just before the train started the back-up movement Yardmaster Reisiger, the pilot, went into the baggage car. When the train started to move Brakeman Van Haaften went from the coach into the baggage car, then came back into the coach to get his lantern, after which he returned to the baggage car, and stood beside Flagman Costello in about the center of the leading car, both end doors of the car were open. On returning to the leading car the second time Brakeman Van Haaften did not see the pilot, nor did he know where the pilot was; however, as he understood there was a pilot on the train, he did not look for signal indications, and was unaware of anything wrong until the derailed was encountered. Brakeman Van Haaften then shouted a warning of danger and Flagman Costello pulled the air cord, applying the train brakes from the leading car, and then the collision occurred. He said the last time he had been in this yard was about four years ago.

Flagman Costello, of the NYNH&H deadhead equipment train, stated that he had never before been in Mott Haven yard. He said that just before the back-up movement was started the pilot went to the extreme forward end of the leading car, to the point where the markers were located, then the pilot returned to the center of the car, gave two back-up signals to the engineman by pulling the communicating whistle signal cord, and as the train did not start to move hand lantern back-up signals were transmitted and the train started. Flagman Costello said that after the train moved about one car length he saw the pilot go out the door at the front end of the baggage car but after that he did not again see the pilot prior to the accident, he assured that the pilot was on the front end of the leading car. Flagman Costello was riding inside the baggage car in about the center of that car, and the first knowledge he had of anything wrong was when Brakeman Van Haaften shouted a warning of danger. The flagman immediately pulled the air cord, applying the brakes in emergency from the leading car. Flagman Costello said that the air brakes took proper effect.

Conductor Callaghan, of the NYNH&H deadhead equipment train, stated that the last time he had been in Mott Haven yard prior to the night of the accident was about two years ago. He was not familiar with the territory nor qualified to operate in the yard and did not consider that he was in charge of the train, or functioned as conductor, in the event that there was a pilot. It was his understanding that the train would be in charge of a pilot from the yard to the main line, and that the conductor's responsibility for the same did not begin until the train was turned over to him by the pilot on the main line and a proceed signal was received; otherwise he saw no necessity for a pilot. Conductor Callaghan said that on two previous occasions his train had been piloted out of the yard. In the present instance he saw Yardmaster Reisinger, whom he did not actually know at the time but who he assumed was the pilot, take charge of the train. The conductor had instructed Brakeman Van Haaften and Flagman Costello not to take signals from any one except the pilot. Conductor Callaghan was in the coach working on his records for another trip; he heard the communicating whistle signal sounded for the engineman to start the back-up movement and assumed those signals were given by the pilot. The conductor was not in the rear car when the back-up movement was started but thought that as Brakeman Van Haaften and Flagman Costello were in that car with the pilot that was sufficient. Just after the train started to move the pilot came into the coach and pointed out the conductor's emergency valve and then the pilot returned toward the baggage car. Conductor Callaghan was unaware of anything wrong until the brakeman ran into the coach just prior to the collision, the conductor immediately opened the emergency valve but at this time the air brakes were either just applying or had

already been applied. Conductor Callaghan had no idea that the pilot had left the train, believing all the time that his train was being properly piloted, otherwise he said he would never have remained seated in the coach and permitted the back-up movement to be made, but would have stopped the train or placed himself in position to have protected the movement. Conductor Callaghan said that in this instance he depended entirely upon his train being properly piloted, and said that had he not seen the pilot on the train immediately after the back-up movement was started he would have pulled the emergency air brake cord; also, had the pilot given him any notice at all, or even hinted, that he was going to get off, the conductor could have stopped the train and the accident would thereby have been averted.

Enginemen Hoffman and Fireman Richmond, of the NYNH&H deadhead equipment train were unaware of anything wrong prior to the accident.

In order to determine the visibility of the tracks and signals in Mott Haven yard from the rear of a train making a back-up movement from the yard tests were made with a train which was moved from the yard to interlocking signal 10R under practically similar conditions except for the opposing train movement. From a position on the forward, west step of the coach, the position from which Yardmaster Reisinger stated that he left the coach, interlocking signal 10R could not be seen until a point was reached 300 feet beyond the point where the yardmaster stated he left the train. From a position in about the center of the forward car, where Brakeman Van Hapften and Flagman Costello stood, a shifting view of tracks and signals could be had through the forward door of the car. The range of vision was dependent upon the direction the car was moving and changed as the car swung from right to left and back again over the route. Interlocking signal 10R could be seen and identified, by a person familiar with its location and looking for its indication, from a point on the east main lead track 515 feet from the signal, as the car moved through the crossover the view of the signal was lost until the car straightened out on the west main lead track, 368 feet from the signal, and then the indication displayed remained in view until the end of the car reached a point about 50 feet from the signal when the line of vision was obstructed by the end of the car. The derail device, in derailling position, could be seen when the end of the car was 100 feet from the derail, however, from this distance the derail looked like the shadow of interlocking signal 10R across the rail and would not have been recognized by a person as a derail unless it was known that there was a derail at that point, nor would it have been seen unless a person was particularly looking for it. From the forward end of the leading car interlocking signal 10R could first be

identified by one knowing its location when 540 feet from the signal, from that point the signal remained in constant view. At night the many lights and tracks present a confusing layout to a person not acquainted with the yard.

Conclusions

This accident was caused by the failure of Assistant Yardmaster Reisiger properly to perform his duties when acting as pilot of the New York, New Haven & Hartford equipment train, a contributing cause was the failure of Conductor Callahan of that train properly to look after the movement, safety and care of his train.

The evidence clearly shows that no member of the train crew of the New Haven equipment train was qualified over any part of the route, from the track on which this train was standing in Mott Haven Yard to Harlem Division main track No. 4, the territory over which the pilot was required. Assistant Yardmaster Reisiger placed himself in charge of this train as pilot and he was therefore responsible for its safe movement from the point where it stood until it reached Harlem Division main track No. 4, from which point the crew was qualified. According to his own statement Yardmaster Reisiger abandoned this train after it had moved only approximately one third of this distance, he was depending upon an understanding which he had with the towerman at No. 1 tower that a signal would be given authorizing the movement to be started only when the route for the entire movement through both No. 1 and "MO" interlocking plants was lined up. However, there was a misunderstanding between the yardmaster and the towerman, and when the movement was started the route was not clear through "MO" interlocking; furthermore, even though the complete route had been lined up, the signals could have been changed subsequently and it was not safe to permit the movement to continue beyond the point where Yardmaster Reisiger left the train except under the direction of a competent employee familiar with the signals and other physical characteristics of the route. Not only did Yardmaster Reisiger abandon the train before the movement was completed, but he did so without informing any member of the train crew that he intended to leave the train and without having a definite understanding with all concerned as to just what was to be done. In the New York Central book of rules a pilot is defined as "An employee assigned to a train when the engine man or conductor, or both, are not fully acquainted with the physical characteristics or rules of the railroad, or portion of the railroad, over which the train is to be moved." Had Yardmaster Reisiger remained with this train until it arrived at a point where the crew was qualified, he could have prevented this accident.

The rules require that when cars are pushed by an engine a trainman must take a conspicuous position on the front of the leading car and when switching cars not equipped with a platform air device in proper working order or where conductor's valve is not quickly accessible a back-up hose must be used. It does not appear that the requirements of either of these rules were observed. In his dual capacity as yardmaster and pilot, Yardmaster Reisinger should have seen to it that provision was made for complying with both of them. Had he done so this accident would probably have been averted.

Rule 1301 of the New York Central operating rules reads as follows:

Passenger Conductors:

"They will be responsible for the movement, safety and care of the train, for the vigilance and conduct of the men employed thereon and must report any misconduct or neglect of duty."

Conductor Callaghan at no time ceased to be the conductor of the train, regardless of the fact that he had been advised a pilot could be furnished to move the train from the yard. Notwithstanding that this rule places upon the conductor the responsibility for the movement, safety and care of the train and for the vigilance and conduct of the men employed thereon, he at no time exercised any supervision over the movement of his train prior to the occurrence of the accident. When the movement was started he had no definite or direct knowledge that a pilot was on board and properly functioning as such nor did he know whether or not rules applicable to back-up movements were being observed. The work upon which he was engaged had no connection with the movement of his train which was then in progress and he had no other duty to perform which would have prevented him from being definitely informed by personal observation as to what was going on. Had he as a matter of reasonable precaution observed and informed himself as to the manner in which his train was being operated he could have prevented this accident.

Yardmaster Reisinger's statement indicates that it is common practice to operate trains out of this yard in the same manner. This is a matter which requires corrective action by the responsible operating officers.

Some of the employees involved in this accident apparently did not have a clear understanding of the responsibilities of pilot and conductor, this is a matter which should be clearly set forth in rules or instructions.

At the time of this accident 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.