

INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF THE BUREAU OF SAFETY IN RE INVESTIGATION OF AN ACCIDENT WHICH OCCURRED ON THE NEW YORK, SUSQUEHANNA & WESTERN RAILROAD NEAR MARKSBORO, N. J., ON MAY 25, 1926.

June 24, 1926.

To the Commission.

On May 25, 1926, there was a head-end collision between a freight train and a light engine on the New York, Susquehanna & Western Railroad near Marksboro, N.J., resulting in the death of one employee and the injury of four employees.

Location and method of operation

This accident occurred on that part of the New York, Susquehanna & Western Railroad extending between Beaver Lake, N. J., and Snobs, Pa., a distance of 48.1 miles, in the vicinity of the point of accident this is a single-track line over which trains are operated by time-table and train orders, no block-signal system being in use. The accident occurred in a rock cut, at a point 1,890 feet west of the station at Marksboro, the passing track at Marksboro is 3,060 feet in length and parallels the main track on the south, the east switch being 5,635 feet east of the point of collision. Approaching the point of accident from either direction there are numerous short curves and tangents, while the grade at the point of accident is 0.43 per cent descending for westbound trains. Owing to the curvature of the track, buildings and embankments, the view of the point of collision from the cab of either engine was limited to about 100 feet.

Trains of the Lehigh & New England Railroad operate over the tracks of the New York, Susquehanna & Western Railroad between Swartswood Junction and Hainesburg Junction, these stations being located 8.3 miles east and 3.6 miles west of Marksboro, respectively.

The weather was clear at the time of the accident, which occurred at about 3.05 p.m.

Description

Westbound L.& N.E. engine 39, running light, was in charge of Engineman Lessig. At Swartswood Junction a copy of train order No. 216, Form 31, was received, reading in part as follows:

*** L&NE engine 39 *** will meet extra 2476 east at Marksboro Siding. L&NE 39 take siding."

Engine 39 departed at about 7.50 p.m., but on reaching Marksboro, however, instead of heading in at the east switch of the passing track, it continued westward on the main track for a distance of more than 1 mile, colliding with extra 2476 while traveling at a speed estimated to have been about 30 miles an hour.

Eastbound N.Y., S. & W. freight train extra 2476 consisted of 25 cars and a caboose, hauled by engine 2476, and was in charge of Conductor Rodenbaugh and Engineman Gordon. At Hainesburg Junction the crew received a copy of train order No. 216, Form 31, previously referred to. Extra 2476 departed from Hainesburg Junction at 7.15 p.m., left Blairstown, 3.1 miles west of Marksboro, at 7.53 p.m., and was approaching the west switch of the passing track at Marksboro, traveling at a speed estimated to have been between 25 and 30 miles an hour, when it collided with light engine 39.

Engine 39 was not derailed but was driven backward a distance of 528 feet by the force of the impact, its head end was badly damaged. Engine 2476 was not derailed but its head end was considerably damaged, two cars in this train were derailed and damaged. The employee killed was the engineman of engine 39.

Summary of evidence

Fireman Buskirk said he went into the telegraph office at Swartswood Junction with Engineman Lessig and Flagman Geiger, and that the enginemen read the order aloud, his recollection of the order was confined to that part of it which required his engine to take siding at Marksboro. The enginemen did not give him the order to read for himself, nor did he see the enginemen again after they boarded the engine, which was of the double-cab type. Fireman Buskirk said he rode on the left side of the forward cab together with the flagman until within about 1 mile of Marksboro, when he went back to the rear of the engine for the purpose of fixing the fire prepara-

tory to pulling in on the passing track to meet the opposing train. He did not notice that the engine had not stopped at the passing track, and did not know of the impending danger until the accident occurred.

Flagman Geiger, of L. & M. E. engine 39, stated that he thoroughly understood the contents of train order No. 216, that he and the fireman had been sitting on the front of the engine, on the pile, and that when in the vicinity of Stillwater, 4.4 miles from Marksboro, the fireman went back to work on the fire while he himself returned to the cab, on the left side of the engine, for the purpose of eating his lunch, and he said the accident occurred just as he was reaching for his lunch. Flagman Geiger was positive that both he and the fireman understood the contents of train order No. 216, but he said that Marksboro Siding was passed before he realized it. Flagman Geiger also said that he was thoroughly familiar with the road; that he did not notice any evidence of life on the engine-man's side of the cab between the time water was taken at Swartswood and the point of collision, nor did he hear the engine whistle sounded when approaching Marksboro. He estimated the speed to have been about 30 to 35 miles an hour from Swartswood to the point of collision.

None of the members of the crew of extra 2476 was aware of anything wrong until just prior to the accident. Engineer Gordon said that he did not see engine 39 approaching owing to the curve to the left, and the first he knew of anything wrong was when Fireman Mengle shouted just as the collision occurred. Conductor Rodenbaugh, Fireman Mengle, and Head Brake man Snyder estimated the speed of their train to have been about 25 miles an hour at the time of the accident. The statements of Brake man Weaver and Flagman Williams practically corroborated those of the other members of the crew.

Agent-Operator Carris, stationed at Marksboro, stated that he was on his farm about one-half mile west of Marksboro station at the time of the accident. He said he heard the engine whistle sounded for the crossing at Marksboro station by engine 39, indicating to him that Engineer Lossig must have been in possession of his faculties after passing Marksboro Siding, as the crossing at the station is located west of Marksboro Siding. He also said that people living in the immediate vicinity of the station said they saw Engineer Lossig wave his hand as he passed the crossing.

Operator Hill, on duty at Sportswood Junction, said the fireman and flagman were the first to come into the office, they looked at the order and one of them, he thought it was the fireman, read it aloud. Engineman Lessig then entered and read the order aloud before signing it and Operator Hill said the engineman gave a copy of the order to the fireman. In his opinion all three of these employees thoroughly understood that they were to meet extra 2476 at Marksboro.

Conclusions

This accident was caused by the failure to obey a meet order, for which Engineman Lessig, Fireman Buskirk, and Flagman Geiger, of L. & N.E. engine 39, are responsible.

Under the requirements of train order No. 216, engine 39 should have headed in at the east switch of Marksboro Siding to meet extra 2476. The reason why Engineman Lessig did not comply with the requirements of train order No. 216 could not be ascertained.

Under the rules firemen and flagmen are required to read train orders carefully and to keep them in mind. The collision occurred at a point 5,635 feet west of the east switch of Marksboro Siding, at which point engine 39 should have cleared the main track. Had Fireman Buskirk or Flagman Geiger been on the alert and complied with the requirements of the rules this accident would have been averted. Instead of so doing, Fireman Buskirk paid no attention to the meet order, while Flagman Geiger entirely overlooked the fact that the meeting point had been passed, being engrossed in eating. For such disregard of duty there can be no excuse.

Had an adequate block-signal system been in use on this line, this accident probably would not have occurred, an adequate automatic train stop or train control device would have prevented it.

All of the employees involved were experienced men. At the time of the accident Engineman Lessig and Fireman Buskirk had been on duty approximately 9½ hours, and Flagman Geiger 9 hours, prior to which they had been off duty from 21 to 25 hours.

Respectfully submitted,

W. P. BORLAND

Director.