

INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION.

REPORT OF THE CHIEF OF THE BUREAU OF SAFETY IN RE INVESTIGATION OF AN ACCIDENT WHICH OCCURRED ON THE NORFOLK & WESTERN RAILWAY AT CRUMPLER, W. VA., ON JUNE 30, 1922.

July 14, 1922.

To the Commission:

On June 30, 1922, there was a head-end collision between a light engine and a freight train on the Norfolk & Western Railway at Crumpler, W. Va., resulting in the death of 1 employee, and the injury of 8 employees.

Location and method of operation.

This accident occurred on the North Fork Branch of the Pocahontas Division, extending between North Fork and Crumpler, W. Va., a distance of 7.1 miles, which in the vicinity of the point of accident is a single-track line. Under time-table rules, extra trains using this branch are required to register "on" and "off" branch, on the register located at North Fork Junction, on entering or leaving the branch, the first extra train having the right thereto without protecting, and the following extra trains protecting against those trains occupying the branch. A conductor of an inferior train is obliged to rely on commercial telephones, located in the offices of the various coal companies stationed along this branch, for the purpose of locating the conductor of the superior train, after which a meeting or a passing point is established, no record of this conversation being made, and the engineman operating on the information imparted to him by the conductor. The accident occurred about 1,400 feet east of the station at Crumpler; approaching this point from the west, there are about 1,000 feet of tangent, followed by a 6-degree curve to the right approximately 430 feet in length, the accident occurring on this curve at a point about 346 feet from its western end, where the grade is 3.15 per cent descending. The view in each direction is very restricted, owing to a deep cut. The weather was clear at the time of the accident, which occurred at about 1.12 p.m.

Description.

Westbound extra 902 consisted of engine 902, without cars, and was in charge of Conductor Chambers and Engineman Gibson. This engine had completed work at various mine tracks, and was en route to Crumpler in order to assume the next passenger train schedule, when it collided with extra 61 while traveling at a speed estimated to have been about 20 miles an hour.

Eastbound freight train extra 61 consisted of 3 cars and a baggage, hauled by engine 61, headed west, and was in charge of Conductor Porter and Engineman Oder. This train left Crumpler, at about 1.10 p.m., and collided with extra 902 while traveling at a speed estimated to have been about 20 miles an hour.

Both engines and the first car were considerably damaged, although none of the equipment was derailed. The employee killed was the engineman of extra 902.

Summary of evidence.

Before leaving North Fork, Conductor Chambers, of extra 902, made a notation in the proper column on the train register, located at North Fork Junction, to the effect that work would be performed between Crumpler and Jones passing siding, between the hours of 10.00 a.m., and 1.00 p.m., after which the train proceeded to Greenbrier Junction, about 3 miles from Crumpler, at which point Conductor Chambers remained while the rest of the crew were performing switching movements in the coal yards in this vicinity. While these movements were in progress, extra 61 entered the branch, stopping at Gilliam, just east of Jones passing siding, from which point Conductor Porter, of this train communicated by telephone with Conductor Chambers, and was instructed to proceed to Greenbrier Junction, which was done. According to Conductor Chambers, arrangements were then personally made for a meeting at Crumpler, after work that had been assigned to each crew was completed; Conductor Porter claims it was arranged that in the event extra 902 did not return to Crumpler at 1.00 p.m., at which time the right of extra 902 to the main track expired, according to the train register, the trains would then meet at Ashland Junction, about midway Greenbrier Junction and Crumpler. Both conductors were positive that the meeting point was arranged for according to their individual understanding.

Brakeman Patterson, of extra 61, stated that while at Crumpler he inquired of Conductor Porter as to the meeting point with extra 902, as it was getting close

to the time for that engine to assume the schedule of passenger train No. 102, due to depart from Crumpler at 1.20 p.m., and was informed it was at Ashland Junction.

Brakeman Dillon and Simmons, of extra 902, were of the opinion that the meeting point with extra 61 was to be at Ashland Junction, thinking that that train was performing work at Cherokee, a spur leading off the branch at Ashland Junction, while Brakeman Combs, also of extra 902, understood the meeting point was at Crumpler.

On account of the restricted view, none of the employees on the engines saw the opposing train until just before the accident occurred.

Conclusions.

This accident was caused by a misunderstanding as to the meeting point arranged for between extra 902 and extra 61.

As Conductor Chambers, of extra 902, and Conductor Porter, of extra 61, were both positive that the meeting point had been arranged for according to their own individual understanding of what had been agreed upon during their conversation, and as no written record is made of movements of extra trains on these branches, it is impossible to determine which conductor is actually at fault.

Greater safety in train operation on this branch undoubtedly would be provided by the adoption of standard methods as contained in the operating rules recommended by the American Railway Association.

The employees involved were experienced men; at the time of the accident all of them had been on duty less than 6 hours after having been off duty 10 hours or more.

Respectfully submitted,

W. P. Borland,

Chief, Bureau of Safety.