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IN RE INVESTIGATION OF ACCIDENT WHICH
OCCURRED ON THE NORFOLK & WESTERN
RAILWAY, AT ROANOKE, VA.,
JULY 22, 1915

On July 22, 1915, there was a head-end collision between two yard engines on the Norfolk & Western Railway at Roanoke, Va., which resulted in the death of one employee. After investigation of this accident, the Chief of the Division of Safety reports as follows:

Yard engine 853, backing up, hauling 38 shop cars, in charge of Conductor Myers and Engineman Dyerle, left the west yard at Roanoke about 4:00 a.m., and was moving the cars eastward to the Roanoke Machine Works shop for repairs. This train was passing down the ladder track at the east end of the middle yard, when the engineman noticed a light coming from the opposite direction. He immediately applied his brakes, but released them upon discovering that the light moved away from the track toward the yard office. A moment after releasing the brakes he saw another light on the top of an approaching box car. He again applied the brakes and brought his train to a stop near the switch leading to No. 6 track. The train had been stopping but a few seconds when a westbound cut of cars being pushed by engine 893 collided with it at about 4:30 a.m.

Yard engine 893, in charge of Conductor Weinmann and Engineman Poole, pushing a cut of cars consisting of 7 loads and 7 empties, left the track known as the "Old West-bound Main," east of the middle yard, and was taking these

cars to the middle yard to be switched. This out of cars had proceeded about 2,100 feet westward from its starting point and had just entered the ladder track of the middle yard and was running at a speed of 8 or 8 miles per hour when it collided with the tender of engine 353.

The leading car, in the out being pushed by engine 353, was a box car, and the force of the collision raised the east end of this car and allowed it to slide over the west end of a steel gondola car which was the second car in the out. It was on the end of this gondola car that the employee who was killed was riding at the time of the accident. Both of these cars were badly damaged; the end sill on engine 353 was broken and the upper part of its tank was slightly crushed.

This accident occurred on the lead, or ladder track, at the east end of the middle yard, near the Roanoke Yard office. Beginning at the point where the westbound out started, the route taken is tangent for 1,550 feet westward, where it branches off to the north through a switch; it is then tangent for about 160 feet, where it again branches off to the north into the lead or ladder track at the east end of the middle yard. This lead extends northwest and is tangent for about 1,250 feet. The point of collision is about 200 feet west of the east end of this tangent. Parallel to this route on the north are two tracks used for storing engines that have been made ready for outgoing trains. At the time of the accident these tracks were occupied by locomotives which obstructed the view of the enginemen. The weather at the time of the accident was clear.

Engineman Dyerle of eastbound engine 853 stated that when approaching this lead he always expects to find it occupied. On the morning in question when his engine entered this track it was clear, but as he approached the east end a light appeared on the track some distance ahead, and thinking it was a switch engine approaching he applied the brake, releasing it a few moments later when he discovered the light moving away from the track toward the yard office. Just after releasing the brake he saw another light on the top of an approaching box car. He immediately applied the brake and sounded one blast of the engine whistle, which he directly afterwards followed by another blast. He brought his train to a stop and had been standing about half a minute when the collision occurred. He stated that when he first saw the light on top of the car it was about seven car lengths distant. He did not see any stop signal given from the head end of the approaching cut of cars.

The Conductor, Timekeeper and one brakeman of engine 853, who were riding in the engine at the time of the accident, practically corroborate the statement of Engineman Dyerle, except that they saw a stop signal given with a lantern from the top of the approaching cut of cars.

Conductor Weinman, of the westbound crew, stated that when he started with the cut of cars he and Switchman Munn got on the front end of the leading car; Brakeman Roby was riding on the top of a box car about 4 cars back, and Brakeman Marsh was on top of a box car two cars ahead of the engine. Brakeman Martin got on between the first and second

head car. When opposite the yard office switchman Nunn got off and went to the yard office to get information in regard to some switching. Shortly after Nunn got off, he stated that he noticed a light ahead which he at first thought was an engine backing westward for a train, but almost immediately he discovered that it was an engine backing eastward pulling a train of cars. He at once gave a stop signal, which was answered from the approaching engine. When he realized that his train was not going to stop in time to avoid a collision he got off. He stated that when he realized that the light was the headlight of an approaching engine and he gave the stop signal it was about 7 car lengths distant, and when he gave the stop signal, he looked back and saw only Brakeman Roby. He was unable to say, however, whether Brakeman Roby repeated the stop signal to the engineer. Conductor Weirmann stated that he had been the conductor on this assignment since July 1, 1918; he was familiar with the work in this yard and knew that it was a custom for a train of shop cars to be moved over this route at about this same time each morning. He also stated that when starting out with this cut, he instructed Brakeman Martin to ride on top of the cars.

Brakeman Roby stated that when the cut of cars started from the lower yard he got on a large steel hopper car, which was the sixth car from the head end. While the cut was on the straight track he could see the outline of the form of the conductor, but did not see anything of him after the cut had entered the first switch. Approaching the point of accident he was sitting on the edge of the car with his feet on the

brake stop, and was watching for a switchman stationed near the track, intending to shout some instructions to him relative to his dinner bucket, when he heard one blast of a whistle. He looked in both directions, and seeing nothing gave one wave of his lantern and jumped off. He stated that he realizes he should have been on top of a box car in a position where he could more readily have observed and transmitted signals.

Brakemen Marsh stated that when the cut started he was on top of the box car ahead of the engine. He saw Conductor Weinmann's light until the cut started through the switch, when it disappeared around the curve behind the engines on the storage track. He did not see any other light between the point where he stood and the conductor on the leading car. He did not see any stop signal given and the first intimation he received of an accident was when he heard the blast of the engine whistle, immediately followed by the collision.

Engineer Peole stated that when the cut of cars started he had a view of the lights on the leading car until they took the switch and were hidden by the engines on the storage tracks. As soon as the lights disappeared he closed his throttle and was drifting along at a speed of two or three miles per hour when he heard an engine on an adjoining track whistle for brakes. He started to apply his brakes when the collision occurred. He further stated that after closing the throttle his train drifted about four car lengths before the collision occurred, and that he did not receive any stop signal from any of the members of his crew.

This accident was caused by the failure of the members of a switching crew properly to transmit signals to the engineman on a cut of cars being pushed through yard limits, for which Conductor Weimann is responsible. General Rule 527, defining the duties of conductors, reads:

"They are responsible for the movement, safety and proper care of their trains, and for the vigilance and conduct of the men employed thereon and must report any misconduct or neglect of duty."

Conductor Weimann knew the conditions under which this movement was to be made, and under this rule he should have insured the safety of his train by so instructing and placing his brakemen that signals could have been promptly transmitted to the engineman. Brakeman Roby was in a position where he could not see the signal when most needed, and Brakeman Martin was down between the cars where he could neither see nor give a signal, and Conductor Weimann should have known this.

If the physical conditions were unfavorable to make this move with safety, Conductor Weimann should have instructed one of his men to proceed ahead of the train to assure that the track was clear. With a cut consisting of only fourteen cars, and manned by an engineman, a fireman, a conductor and four trainmen, there is no excuse for the occurrence of an accident such as this.

A proper realization of their responsibilities on the part of Brakemen Roby and Martin, would have required that they station themselves on the top of their train in a position where they could both see and transmit signals. In all probability the death of Brakeman Martin can be attributed to the position which he occupied at the time of the accident.

Conductor Weinmann entered the employ of the Norfolk and Western Railway in July, 1911, as yard brakeman, and was promoted to yard conductor in March, 1914, and all of his service being in the Roanoke yard.

Brakeman Martin entered the employ of the Norfolk and Western Railway as yard brakeman in Roanoke Yard in October 1911.

Brakeman Roby had been in the employ of the Norfolk & Western about one month, during which time he had worked but eleven days. His previous railroad experience consisted of about one month as brakeman on the Chesapeake & Ohio Railroad.

The crew of engine 693 had been on duty 10 hours and 30 minutes, and the crew of engine 333, 9 hours and 30 minutes at the time the accident occurred.