

INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION.

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF THE BUREAU OF SAFETY IN RE INVESTIGATION OF AN ACCIDENT WHICH OCCURRED ON THE NORFOLK & WESTERN RAILWAY AT SHENANDOAH, VA., ON APRIL 2, 1923.

April 26, 1923.

To the Commission:

On April 2, 1923, there was a collision between a yard engine and two light engines, coupled, on the Norfolk & Western Railway at Shenandoah, Va., which resulted in the death of one employee and the injury of one employee.

Location and method of operation.

This accident occurred in the yard of Shenandoah at a point about 310 feet south of the water tank and 34 feet north of a switch leading off to the west from yard track 9 toward the water tank. The alignment of the track from the water tank southward to the point of accident is as follows: from the water tank there is a tangent 85 feet in length, followed by a curve of 12° to the left 95 feet long, and 80 feet of tangent, followed by a curve of 10° to the right 84 feet in length, extending to the switch connecting with track 9, the accident occurring on this curve at a point about 34 feet from the leaving end. Proceeding northward, beginning at the switch connecting the coal wharf track with yard track 7, there are several short curves and tangents extending to the switch leading to the left from yard track 9 toward the water tank. It was daylight, and the weather was clear, at the time of the accident, which occurred at about 6:40 a.m.

Description.

Yard engine 776, in charge of Conductor Storle and Engineman Beaghan, had been switching in the yard, and about 6:30 a.m. proceeded to the water tank; water was taken and while backing southward toward the yard tracks, traveling at a speed estimated to have been between 4 and 5 miles an hour, the engine collided with engines 490 and 1019, coupled.

Light engines 490 and 1019, coupled, and headed north, in charge of Hostlers Thompson and Grimsley, were en route from the coal wharf to yard track 9, where engines are placed preparatory to going out on the road, and were traveling at a speed estimated to have been about 4 or 5 miles an hour, when the leading engine, 490, collided with yard engine 776.

Engines 776 and 490 sustained minor damage; the rear portion of the tender of engine 776 was considerably damaged, the force of the impact shifting the cistern forward about 18 inches on the tender frame. The employee killed was the fireman of engine 776, who was crushed between the engine cab and the tank.

Summary of evidence.

Yard engine 776 is of the deckless type, the boiler head extends back to the gangway and is so designed that the fireman is not visible to the engineman while attending to his duties in the pit. Engineman Beaghan stated that after taking water at the tank he could hear Fireman Koontz and Brakeman Pritchett talking in the pit and when he was ready to start he asked if the way was clear, Fireman Koontz replying "O.K., everything is clear." On starting back he looked out and as far as he could see the way was clear, and then directed his attention to the injector and had just finished putting it on when the collision occurred. He said his engine was moving at a speed of about 4 miles an hour at the time of the collision. Engineman Beaghan stated that it was customary for only one brakeman to go with the engine for water, this being for the purpose of handling switches and watching out for other engines; that Brakeman Pritchett should have been in position to see that the track was clear, and that he was unable to say why it was that the brakeman was not maintaining a lookout on this occasion.

Conductor Storle was in the yard office and knew nothing about the occurrence of the accident, while no statement was obtained from Brakeman Pritchett on account of injuries he sustained. Conductor Storle, stated, however, that Brakeman Pritchett informed him that he and Fireman Koontz were in the pit talking when some one shouted and he immediately went to the right side of the engine and Fireman Koontz to the left side, at about which time the accident occurred.

Hostler Grimsley, in charge of engine 1019, said he backed the engine out of the coal wharf track, then saw engine 490 backing out, and waited for it, the two engines were then coupled for the purpose of making the movement northward. The air brakes, however, were not coupled between the two engines. Hostler Thompson, who was in charge of engine 490, which was the leading engine stated he thought yard engine 776 must have gone to the water tank at the time he was at the coal wharf, although he did not see it or know

definitely that it was there. He also said he had previously observed that the switches were lined for the track on which he wished to leave the engines and that he was proceeding northward at a speed of about 4 or 5 miles an hour, intending to go in on yard track No. 9. When he arrived at the switch leading to the water tank, he noticed that it was set against him, started to apply the air brakes, and at the same time saw an engine backing toward his engine. He said it was not more than 25 or 30 feet distant and that after applying the brakes, he jerked lightly on the whistle cord and reversed the engine. Hostler Thompson explained his failure to stop when he found the switch lined for the wrong track by saying he was so sure the switch was right that he was looking at other switches beyond it. He thought no one on the yard engine saw engines 490 and 1019, and said that from his position on the right side of the engine cab, on the outside of the sharp curve, he was unable to see the approaching engine until it was too late to avert the collision. He advanced the opinion that had either the fireman or the brakeman of engine 776 maintained a proper lookout the collision would not have occurred. Hostler Grimsley on engine 1019, said that after the engines were coupled, he used enough steam to assist in starting the engines and then shut off steam. He said his first indication of anything wrong was when Fire Cleaner Thomas, who was riding on the right side of the engine, crossed over to the left side to get off, looked out and called a warning, the collision occurring immediately afterwards. Hostler Grimsley also estimated the speed at 4 or 5 miles an hour. Fire Cleaner Thomas said he did not see any one on engine 776 looking out as the engines were backing up.

Fire Cleaner Sly, who was working in the ash pit nearby, stated that he saw engines 490 and 1019 as they started from the south end of the yard, and that after leaving the coal-wharf track and heading north, these engines ran at a speed of about 10 miles an hour. He did not pay any more attention to them until he heard the noise of the collision.

Conclusions.

This accident was caused by the failure of the crew of yard engine 776 and of the hostler in charge of engine 490 to maintain a proper lookout.

The evidence indicates that none of the three employees on engine 776 was maintaining a lookout approaching the point of accident, the fireman and brakeman apparently

were on the deck of the engine, while the engineman had not looked out after starting from the water tank. The fact that the hostler in charge of engine 490 failed to notice that the switch was wrong, resulting in his engine passing through this switch, leading to the wrong track, for a distance of 34 feet to the point of collision, shows that he also was not maintaining a proper lookout. Had any of these employees been watching the track ahead of his engine, it is probable that this accident would not have occurred.

All of the employees involved were experienced men, at the time of the accident they had been on duty less than 7 hours, after from 8 to 16 hours off duty.

Respectfully submitted,

W. P. BORLAND,

Director.