

July 14, 1913.

In re investigation of accident on the Pittsburgh, Shawmut & Northern Railroad, near County House, N.Y., May 26, 1913.

On May 26, 1913, there was a head-end collision between two extra trains, on the Pittsburgh, Shawmut & Northern Railroad, near County House, N. Y., resulting in the death of one employee and the injury of four employees.

After investigation of this accident, the Chief Inspector of Safety Appliances reports as follows:

At the place where the accident occurred the Pittsburgh, Shawmut & Northern Railroad is a single track line operated under the train order system, both the telegraph and the telephone being used for the transmission of train orders.

The trains involved in this collision were southbound extra 226, consisting of an engine, 39 cars and a caboose, with Conductor Rice and Engineman Pistner in charge; and northbound extra 65, consisting of an engine and a caboose, with Conductor Mapes and Engineman Cooper in charge.

Extra 226 left Hornell, N. Y., at 1:55 a.m., having received the following order:

Order No. 99:

"Eng. 226 will run extra Hornell to Angelica and will meet 229 north of Hornell and Extras 71 and 69 north from Angelica at Moraine. Extra 226 will not pass Canaseraga."

At Canaseraga, 12 miles from Hornell, the following orders were received:

Order No. 11:

"Eng. 69 will run extra Canaseraga to Angelica. Extras 226 and 69 south will meet Extras 66 and 40 north at Childs."

Order No. 13:

"Extras 226 and 69 south will meet Extras 66 and 40 north at Center instead of Childs. Extras 226 and 69 south will not pass Childs. Extra 226 south may go."

The dispatcher also issued the following order, addressed to Engine 65 and Extras 226 and 69 south at Angelica:

Order No. 19:

"After Extra 74 south arrives at Angelica, Eng. 65 will run extra Angelica to Moraine and will meet Extras 226 and 69 south at Childs. Extras 226 and 69 south get this order at Childs."

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The only night telegraph office between Hornell and Angelica, a distance of 34.8 miles, is Conaseraga. At other places there are telephone booths and train crews receive orders from the operators at telegraph stations. Train orders to be received by train crews at Childs are transmitted by the dispatcher at St. Marys, Pa., to the operator at Angelica and by him relayed by telephone to the train crew.

On the date of the accident order No. 19 was not relayed to the crews of extras 226 and 69 at Childs. Extra 69 was used as a helping engine between Conaseraga and Tracy, being coupled behind the caboose of extra 226; it was cut off at Tracy to be run to Angelica as a separate train.

Conductor Rice stated that Extra 226 arrived at Childs at about 6:00 a.m. He went to the telephone booth and found that the engineman had called up the operator at Angelica and asked for orders. The conductor took the phone and received order No. 20, a "may go" order.

This was the only order he received; he had some conversation with the operator regarding the movement of other trains, but nothing was said about extra 65 north. He handed a copy of order No. 20 to the engineman and when the train left Childs.

Extra 65 left Angelica at about 6:10 a.m., having received order No. 19 at that point. The collision occurred at about 6:30 a.m., on a one-degree curve and on a grade of about one per cent descending toward the south, about 2 miles south of Childs and 3.8 miles north of Angelica. At this time a dense fog prevailed and it was impossible to see a distance of more than a few car lengths. The speed of extra 226 was about 15 or 20 miles per hour and of Extra 65 about 20 or 25 miles per hour.

Engineman Pistner of extra 226 stated that he waited at the telephone booth at Childs until the conductor received the order, and then he returned to the engine and the train proceeded. He thought extra 65 was about seven car lengths away when he first saw it; he immediately applied the brakes in emergency and then jumped.

Engineman Cooper of extra 65 was killed in the collision. Fireman Lacy of this train stated that the engineman applied the brakes just before the collision occurred, and at the same time called to him and he immediately got off. The conductor and brakeman of this train stated that they could see a distance of five or six car lengths through the fog.

This accident was caused by the failure of the operator at Angelica to relay order No. 19 to extra 226 at Childs. The dispatcher was also at fault for not ascertaining definitely whether or not order No. 19 had been delivered to extra 226 before issuing order No. 20 which permitted the train to pass that point.

Operator McMahon, who was on duty at Angelica, was about 35 years of age, and had been an operator for about 30 years. He had been employed by this company on eight different occasions. The date he entered the employ of this company is not given in the copy of his service record which was furnished the Commission, but the date he first left the service was July, 1904, and since then he had been employed seven times, the date he last entered the service being March 29, 1913. When Dispatcher Brice was asked whether or not he considered McMahon a competent operator he said that he believed him to be a man of considerable experience; he said McMahon was not a good telegrapher and frequently messages sent to him had to be repeated. He did not notice anything unusual in connection with this operator's work on the morning of the accident. After Operator McMahon was relieved on the date of the accident, he disappeared and at the time of this investigation he had not been located.

Dispatcher Brice was 33 years of age, and had had about six years' experience as agent and operator. He had been employed on five different railroads, and had been in the employ of the Pittsburgh, Shawmut and Northern Railroad as an operator about 5 months and as a dispatcher about 4 months. When he was informed by the operator at Angelica that extra 236 was at Childs, knowing that the operator had order No. 19 for that train, he issued the "may go" order, assuming that order No. 19 had been delivered and would be observed by the crew of extra 236.

The investigation of this accident disclosed lax methods and a dangerous practice in the operation of trains on this road. When an order was issued to a train crew at a telephone booth communicating with a telegraph office, the order being transmitted by the dispatcher to the operator at the telegraph station and then relayed by telephone when the crew called up the operator and asked for orders, the operator was not required nor was it customary for him to notify the dispatcher that such an order had been delivered. In this case the dispatcher apparently took it for granted that order No. 19 had been delivered to the crew of extra 236 at Childs and issued a "may go" order, when as a matter of fact this crew had not received order No. 19 and knew nothing about that order. Some method should be provided for informing the dispatcher when orders of this character had been delivered, and regardless of the rules a proper sense of the responsibility of his position and a proper regard for the safety of train operation should have impelled the dispatcher to make certain that order No. 19 had been delivered to the train crew before issuing the "may go" order. Dispatcher Brice stated that it was his custom in cases of this kind to ask the operator whether the order had been delivered and he thought he did so on this occasion but he could not state positively that he did. For the purpose of eliminating the danger involved in this method of train operation instructions have been issued by the assistant superintendent of this company that in cases of this character the "may go" order shall be in the following format

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"After receiving order (or orders) No. \_\_\_\_\_ Extra \_\_\_\_\_ may go."

Furthermore, several of the orders issued to the trains involved in this accident were combination orders for which no form is provided in the rules of the company. Order No. 13 was a combination of "meet", "hold" and "may go" orders. The rules specify forms to be used for "meet" and "hold" orders, and provide that when a train has been held it must not proceed until the hold order is annulled or an order is given to the operator in the form "\_\_\_\_\_ may go". Dispatcher Brice stated that in strict conformity with the rules these three orders should have been issued separately, but he issued them in combination form to save time.

In this connection attention is called to the recommendation of the Commission for the standardization of railroad operating rules. The danger in the method in train operation in vogue on this railroad should have been recognized and eliminated before attention was directed to it by a disastrous accident.

None of the employees involved in this accident was on duty contrary to any of the provisions of the hours of service law.