

December 28, 1912.

**Collision on the Seaboard Air Line Railway near
Granite, N. C., November 19, 1912.**

On November 19, 1912, there was a head-end collision on the Seaboard Air Line Railway near Granite, N. C., which resulted in the death of 2 engineers, 2 firemen, 2 express messengers and 1 train porter, and the injury of 1 porter, who died 6 days afterwards, 6 passengers, 2 conductors, 2 baggage masters and 2 express messengers.

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

South-bound train No. 81 was en route from New York, N. Y., to Jacksonville, Fla. It consisted of 1 express car, 1 combination baggage and express car, 1 day coach and 3 Pullman sleeping cars, hauled by engine No. 93. The train was in charge of Conductor Shannonhouse and Engineman Falson. It left Richmond, Va., at 1:21 a. m., 11 minutes late and at 4 a. m., collided with train No. 84 at a point about one-half mile north of Granite, which is 90.8 miles south of Richmond. At this time the train was about 18 minutes late.

North-bound train No. 84 was en route from Jacksonville, Fla., to New York, N. Y., and consisted of 1 express car, 1 combination baggage and express car, 1 day coach and 3 Pullman sleeping cars, hauled by engine No. 91. The train was in charge of Conductor Tilghman and Engineman Beckham. It left Raleigh, N. C., at 1:49 a. m., nearly one hour late, and after leaving a sleeping car for Portsmouth, Va., at Norlina, N. C., departed from that station at 3:48 a. m., one hour and eight minutes late, and proceeded northward to the point of collision.

The impact of the collision was terrific. Both engine boilers were torn from their frames, the boiler of the engine on train No. 81 being thrown down an embankment on the west side, imbedding itself in one end of the combination car of train No. 84, while the boiler of the engine on train No. 84 was thrown a distance of about 140 feet south of the balance of its machinery. Both express cars were demolished, while both combination cars were so badly damaged that they were burned at the scene of the accident. Both day coaches were damaged, while the sleeping cars of both trains were practically uninjured and continued on their runs. The speed of each train at the time of the accident was probably about 50 miles per hour.

This division of the Seaboard Air Line Railway is a single track line and trains are operated by train orders.

Granite is located 7.4 miles north of Norlina, the point where train No. 84 received its orders, while a station known as Grandy, Va., is located 17 miles north of Granite. The station at Granite is on a curve of 3 degrees leading toward the left for north-bound trains. At the northern end of this curve is one-half mile of straight track and then there is a 3 degree curve leading toward the right. It was near the junction of the half mile of straight track with this second curve that the accident occurred. Rounding this curve the engineman of the south-bound train was on the outside, and this, coupled with the fact that there is a cut of 12 feet deep at this point, limited his range of vision approaching the scene of the accident to about 500 feet. The engineman of the north-bound train had a clear view approaching the scene of the accident, but on account of the curve beyond the straight track could not have seen the approaching south-bound train until almost at the point of collision. North-bound train No. 84 had been descending a grade of one per cent for two or three miles with the exception of a short stretch of level track near Granite station. South-bound train No. 81 had been descending a one per cent grade previous to striking the ascending grade leading to the point of the accident. It had been ascending this grade for a distance of about one mile.

When train No. 84 reached Norlina, they received a copy of train order No. 23, reading as follows:

"Order No. 9 is annulled. No. 84, Eng. 91, will meet No. 81, Eng. 93, at Granite."

Order No. 9 had provided that these trains would meet at Hagood, 8 miles north of Granite. After receiving order No. 23 at Norlina, together with two other orders and a clearance card, Conductor Tilghman went to the engine and delivered a copy of order No. 23 to Engineman Beckham. The engineman read his order back to the conductor and the train then departed from Norlina with the understanding, it is claimed by Conductor Tilghman, that their train would meet train No. 81 at Grandy. Train No. 81 received train order No. 23 at La Crosse, Va., and the copy they received stated the meeting point to be Granite.

Conductor Tilghman stated that while reading the order back to Operator Watson at Norlina the latter went to the ticket window to sell a ticket to a passenger for Petersburg, Va., instead of checking over the order as the conductor read it as required by the rules. He states that when reading it to the operator he read the meeting point as Grandy and that the order was plain enough to read without difficulty. While he was reading it the operator said nothing to him about it. He also claims that the engineman read it as Grandy when he received his copy. He further stated that when leaving Norlina

he mounted the steps on the rear end of the combination car and went forward to the baggage end and read the order to the baggage master at Grandy, that he then gave the order to the baggage master to read himself and that the latter also read it as Grandy, as well as spelling out the name. The conductor's copy of the order was not found after the accident as it was on a seat in the car when the accident happened and was lost in the confusion following.

Operator Watson denied that he sold a ticket as claimed by the conductor and stated positively that he checked the order as read by the conductor, and that the latter read the meeting point as Granite. He also stated that when transmitting the conductor's signature to the dispatcher the latter said "You have that Granite", and that he (the operator) replied in the affirmative. He said he sold no tickets on that night. He was also sure that the ticket agent sold no tickets after train No. 84 arrived at the station. He stated that he had his stamp in his pocket the entire night, as he had no occasion to place it in the ticket stamping machine. He had some Western Union Telegraph Money in his pockets at the time and thought it was ticket money and so told Ticket Agent Hawk, but when the latter looked and saw no tickets had been sold he then remembered that it was Western Union Money.

The copy of the order held by the operator was very dim; that held by the conductor could not be located, while the copy taken from the body of Engineman Beckham was in a torn and wet condition and difficult to decipher. The word "Granite" as written in the order is not very legible. In crossing the letter "t" and in making the letter "e" at the end of the word a downward stroke was used which makes it look much like the letter "y", and the word can easily be mistaken for "Grandy".

Baggage Master Bryant, of train No. 84, stated that the conductor read the orders to him and he understood the meeting point to be at Grandy. He repeated back to the conductor the name of the meeting point, and at that time the conductor remarked that it was bad policy to have two station names so similar as Granite and Grandy.

Conductor Shannonhouse, of train No. 81, stated that the collision occurred just as the engineman sounded the whistle signal for the station at Granite. The speed of the train at this time was 50 miles per hour. No application of the brakes was made prior to the collision.

Ticket Agent Hawk stated that Operator Watson turned over to him money for tickets sold during the night, but did not remember for what points the tickets were bought.

He was very positive that some money was turned over to him, and was sure it could not have been Western Union money, because that money is always turned over to the first trick operator. As soon as train No. 84 reached Norlina he went out of the station to attend to the transferring of baggage. He stated that he did not get back into the station until train No. 84 pulled out. He then asked the operator where the two trains would meet and was told at Granite. Just as soon as word was received of the collision, both he and the operator read over the order together and he read it as fixing the meeting point at Granite.

There appears to be a question of veracity between the conductor and the operator as to the sale of the ticket to Petersburg. The auditor's report of tickets collected on train No. 84 on the date in question shows one ticket for a passenger from Norlina to Petersburg. It is dated the 18th and die No. 8 was used. This die is supposed to be used only by the second trick operator, who works from 3 p. m. to 11 p. m.

Both express cars and both combination cars were of wooden construction. The coaches and the sleeping cars were of steel underframe and all-steel construction, respectively.

All of the employees involved were experienced men with good records. Operator Watson was 24 years of age and had been an operator seven years and had been employed by six different railroads. He had been employed at Norlina about 6 months.

Conductor Tilghman was 52 and Enginemen Beckham 46 years of age. Each had been in the regular passenger train service since 1900.

None of the employees had been on duty in violation of the provisions of the hours of service law.

This accident was caused by the failure of Operator Watson to furnish the crew of train No. 84 with a legible copy of train order No. 23 and for not having as clear an understanding with Conductor Tilghman as to the meeting point fixed by the order at the time of its delivery as the train dispatcher had with him at the time he repeated the signature to the order. The fact that after the order had been written the dispatcher called his attention to the meeting point being Granite, together with the fact that when the ticket agent asked the name of the meeting point he answered "Granite", makes it appear that the operator knew Granite was to be the meeting point. On the otherhand, from the conversation had between the conductor and the baggage master, it seems evident that the former supposed the meeting point was Grandy. On this railroad enginemen do

not sign for orders and when the conductor gave a copy of order No. 23 to the enginemen, who was on his engine, the latter, according to the conductor, read the meeting point as Grandy, and that he was of this impression was evident when he ran his train past Granite at full speed.

Attention is called to the danger of having stations so close together with names so similar as Granite and Grandy, which can easily lead to errors when written or pronounced hurriedly and to insure safety and prevent a recurrence of such an accident the name of one of these stations should be changed.

As in the case of many other disastrous collisions which have resulted from neglect or misunderstanding upon the part of employees, no block signal system of any kind was in operation.