

## INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF THE BUREAU OF SAFETY IN RE  
INVESTIGATION OF AN ACCIDENT WHICH OCCURRED ON  
THE SOUTHERN RAILWAY AT GREENVILLE, S. C., ON  
FEBRUARY 28, 1925.

July 2, 1925.

To the Commission.

On February 28, 1925, there was a collision between a car of runaway cars and a switch engine on the Southern Railway at Greenville, S. C., resulting in the death of two employees and the injury of two employees.

## Location and method of operation

There are three yards at Greenville, which are known as the North, Middle and South yards; North and Middle yards adjoin while Middle and South yards are about 1/8 mile apart, and are connected by a lead track, on which track the accident occurred. Train movements in this vicinity are governed by yard rules. The runaway cars started from the south end of South yard, on track 4, proceeding northward on track 4 there are 3,140 feet of tangent to the north switch of this track and then for a distance of about 550 feet there are a number of leads and crossovers which vary in curvature from  $7^{\circ}$  to  $9^{\circ} 30'$ , generally to the right; then there is a  $4^{\circ}$  curve to the left 700 feet in length, followed by tangent track to the point of accident, 410 feet distant. At the point where the cars stood on track 4 the grade is 0.9 per cent descending, this grade extending northward a distance of about 4,400 feet, beyond which point it is level to the point of accident, an additional distance of about 400 feet.

The weather was clear at the time of the accident, which occurred at about 2 a.m.

## Description

The crew of engine 209, in charge of Conductor Collins and Engineman Rhodes, were working in South yard and had placed 7 loaded cars on track 4. While they were engaged in assembling other cars on nearby tracks the cars placed on track 4 started to move, ran down

track 4, out on the lead track, and collided with engine 387 which was backing southward on that track.

Engine 387, headed north, pulling 22 loaded cars, was in charge of Conductor Haynes and Engineman Wright. It had been working in North and Middle yards and was backing southward on the lead track, en route to South yard, moving at a low rate of speed when the tender was struck by the cut of runaway cars.

The tender was derailed and the cistern jammed against the boiler head of engine 387, destroying the cab and appurtenances; the 7th, 10th and 11th cars in the train were slightly damaged. The front pair of wheels of the leading car in the cut of runaway cars was derailed, and the forward end of the car damaged. The employees killed were the engineman and fireman of engine 387.

#### Summary of evidence

Yard Conductor Collins, in charge of engine 209, stated that at about 1.40 a.m. on the morning of the accident he started to make up a train on track 5 in the south end of South yard. The engine was coupled to 15 cars on track 7; 4 of these cars were switched to track 3; 6 cars were switched to track 4, Switchman Long riding the cars in on that track; 3 others were switched to track 5, being ridden by Switchman Ellis; then 1 car to track 3, and the last car to track 4, no one riding on this last car. About 20 minutes later, when about to switch some more cars to track 4, he noticed that the seven cars which had been placed on that track were missing, at about which time Switchman Ellis came up and told him that the cars on track 4 had rolled out of the yard. After disposing of 11 of the 15 cars then attached to the engine an effort was made to catch the runaway cars but by the time the engine arrived at the north end of the yard the collision had occurred.

Switchman Long said Conductor Collins cut off 6 cars on track 4 and instructed him to hold them in to clear, and that he, the conductor, would switch some more cars in on track 4. Switchman Long said he rode the leading car of the cut of six in on track 4 and when in to clear brought the cars to a stop. The car he was riding on the north end of the cut had a good brake, which he set extra hard, using a brake club for that purpose. Later when the single car was switched in on

track 4, the impact caused the cut to move forward and he immediately checked them by setting the brake on the second car in the cut. After the cars had stopped moving he released the brake on the second car, as it was customary in switching movements to apply only enough brakes to hold the cars and in the present instance the brakes on the first car had been applied extra hard and appeared to be holding satisfactorily. Several minutes later he joined Switchman Ellis near the switch leading to track 3 to wait at that point for the conductor to return from track 7 with another cut of cars in order to be ready to ride other cars to the various tracks. While at this switch he looked toward track 4 and when he did not see the cars where he had left them he told Switchman Ellis they were running away and ran down track 4 in an effort to overtake them, but had just about reached the north end of track 4 when he heard the noise of the collision farther ahead.

Switchman Ellis said that after stopping the out of 3 cars on track 5 he got off and started back, and at this time noticed that the 6 cars in track 4 started to move when a single car was switched against them. Upon seeing Switchman Long on the cars he continued toward the head end of the yard, walking around the cars on track 4 to see if the knuckle on the last car was open, and he said that at the time of looking at this knuckle the cars in the cut were not moving. Later when Switchman Long came up to track 3 and told him that he thought the cars on track 4 had gotten away, he said he went into an office nearby and telephoned the yard office that a out of cars was running away and to look out for them. Prior to telephoning he had shouted to Conductor Collins in an effort to inform him of the cars getting away but the conductor was making a movement with a out of about 21 cars and he could not make himself understood at the time. Later he and the conductor took the engine and attempted to overtake the runaway cars but the accident occurred before they could do so.

The statements of Switchman McClure and of the engine crew of engine 209 brought out no additional facts of importance.

Switchman Sullivan who was working with engine 387, said the engine was coupled to a cut of about 22 cars in North Yard and was en route to the scale track in South Yard; he was riding on the foot board at the

rear of the tender. As his engine approached the point of accident he observed some cars on the lead track some distance ahead and immediately got off the foot board, boarded the steps on the fireman's side of the gangway, and told the engine crew that there were some cars ahead and to look out for them. He then realized that the cars were moving toward his engine, called a warning to the crew and jumped from the engine, the collision occurring, he thought, before the engine had been brought to a stop.

P. P. Jenkins, caller, said he was in the office of the yardmaster at about 3 a.m. when the telephone rang; he answered it and was told by some one in South Yard that a cut of cars was running away and to look out for them. He delivered this message to Yard Clerk Bailey, who was in the office, and they both made every effort to stop engine 387, but as the engine had passed the office by that time, they were only able to give stop signals to a switchman who was riding on top of one of the cars being hauled by the engine, and this switchman was in turn giving stop signals to the engine crew at the time the collision occurred.

The testimony of Yard Clerk Bailey agreed in substance with that of Caller Jenkins, and brought out no additional facts of importance. Yard Clerk Bailey thought engine 387 was moving at a speed of about 6 or 8 miles an hour at the time of passing the yard office.

#### Conclusions

This accident was caused by the failure of Switchman Long, of engine 209, to apply a sufficient number of hand brakes to hold a cut of cars on a descending grade, resulting in the cars running out of the yard and colliding with an engine moving in the opposite direction.

The rules provide that cars left standing on yard tracks must have a sufficient number of hand brakes set to hold them, and on account of the grade in South Yard, bulletin notices have been issued from time to time by the general yardmaster calling special attention to the necessity for knowing that cars left standing on the tracks in this yard have a sufficient number of hand brakes applied to prevent them from running out of the yard and colliding with other cars, as

appears to have been the case on previous occasions. The rules and instructions in this respect are adequate to prevent accidents of this nature if they are properly observed.

All of the employees involved were experienced men, at the time of the accident the crew of engine 209 had been on duty 4 hours and the crew of engine 387 about 3 hours, previous to which they had all been off duty 15 hours or more.

Respectfully submitted,

W. P. BORLAND

Director.