

March 29, 1913.

In re investigation of accident on Southern Railway,  
near Jennings, Va., on February 23, 1913.

On February 23, 1913, there was a head-and collision on  
the Southern Railway near Jennings, Va., which resulted in the  
death of 1 employee and the injury of 5 employees and several  
passengers.

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

Northbound passenger train No. 8 was enroute from Charlotte,  
N. C., to Richmond, Va. It consisted of 1 baggage car, 1 mail  
car, and 2 coaches, hauled by engine No. 912. It was in charge  
of Conductor Atwell and Engineman Cogbill. At Drake's Branch,  
31.3 miles south of Jennings, the crew in charge of train No. 8  
received a copy of train order No. 207, reading as follows:

"No. 8, engine 912, will meet No. 13, engine  
950, at Jettersville."

Train No. 9 left Drake's Branch at 11:26 a.m., 1 minute late,  
and proceeded northward, colliding with train No. 13 at 12:34  
p.m., at a point about 1 mile north of Jennings or 5 miles south  
of Jettersville.

Southbound train No. 13 originated at Richmond, Va. It  
consisted of 2 baggage cars, 2 coaches and 1 sleeping car, hauled  
by engine No. 950, and was in charge of Conductor Clark and  
Engineman Durvan. At Chula, 19.8 miles north of Jennings, the  
crew in charge of this train received a copy of train order No.  
207, reading as follows:

"No. 8, engine 912, will meet No. 13, engine  
950, at Jennings."

Train No. 13 left Chula at 1:58 a.m., 2 minutes late, and pro-  
ceeded southward to the point of collision.

Both engines were badly damaged and the baggage car of  
train No. 8 was telescoped by the tender of engine 912 the full  
length of the tender. The ends of the first 3 cars of train No.  
13 were knocked in while the fourth and fifth cars in this train  
were slightly damaged. The engineman of train No. 8 was crushed  
between the roof of the baggage car of his train and the boiler-  
head of his engine. The other members of both engine crews  
jumped before the collision occurred. The speed of the trains  
at the time of the collision was probably in the neighborhood  
of 20 miles per hour.

This portion of the Southern Railway is a single track line. No block signals are in operation, train movements being governed by train orders transmitted by telegraph. The collision occurred on a two-degree curve, 1,450 feet in length, at a point about 570 feet from its south end. While rounding this curve the track passes through several small cuts, the deepest of which is about 10 feet; at the point of collision there is a cut about 3 feet deep. There are woods on both sides of the track for some distance north of the point of accident. The engineman of train No. 13 was on the outside of the curve and could not see more than 400 or 500 feet ahead. The engineman of train No. 8 could see about 1,500 feet across the inside of the curve.

The investigation of this accident showed that Dispatcher Rector called the operators at Drake's Branch and at Chula to give them the order for the two trains to meet at Jennings, the regular meeting point. This was necessary in order to help train No. 13, which would be slightly delayed on account of having to take coal at Jetersville. Operator Chalkley, at Drake's Branch, copied the order for train No. 8, the superior train, and repeated it back to the dispatcher, who in turn copied it in his train order book as it was repeated, showing the meeting point at Jennings. After the dispatcher had given Operator Chalkley an "OK", the operator at Chula, who had copied the order for train No. 13, also repeated the order, the dispatcher underlining each word of the order in his train order book as it was repeated. The operator at Chula repeated the name of the meeting point at Jennings, and the copy he delivered to the Conductor of train No. 13, as well as his file copy showed the same meeting point.

On account of grit in the point of his pencil, the operator at Drake's Branch tore the original order when copying it, and after repeating it to the dispatcher rewrote it, following the original with his finger as he did so. After rewriting the order he did not repeat it to the dispatcher. On the copy as originally written by him the name of the meeting point is badly written and cannot consistently be read either as Jennings or as Jetersville, while as it was rewritten and delivered to the crew of train No. 8 it clearly shows the meeting point to be Jetersville. Operator Carter, located at Chula, stated that he followed the operator at Drake's Branch as the latter repeated the order back to the dispatcher, and that it was repeated as Jennings.

Operator Chalkley stated that to the best of his recollection he repeated the meeting point in the order as Jetersville; he did not remember thinking anything about Jennings. He did not hear Operator Carter repeat the order; there were many people around the station and while he did not remember exactly what he was doing at the time Operator Carter repeated it, thought he might have been selling a ticket.

(3)

Rule No. 209 of the Southern Railway book of rules reads as follows:

"Operators receiving train orders must write them in manifold during transmission and if they cannot at one writing make the requisite number of copies, must trace others from one of the copies first made."

Rule No. 210 provides in part that "each operator receiving the order should observe whether the others repeat correctly." Neither of the above mentioned rules were complied with by Operator Chalkley.

Operator Chalkley had been in the employ of the Southern Railway and its predecessors for 30 years, 23 of which had been spent at Drake's Branch. Both his character and record were excellent. On the day of the accident he went on duty at 8:15 a.m. after being off duty since 5:30 p.m. the previous day.

This accident was caused by Operator Chalkley, at Drake's Branch, delivering to the crew of train No. 8 an order providing that that train would meet train No. 13 at Jetersville, whereas the order should have stated the meeting point as Jennings. For this error Operator Chalkley is alone responsible. Had he complied with that part of rule No. 210 requiring him to follow the other operator when the latter was repeating the order to the dispatcher it is probable that the error would have been observed. Had he obeyed rule No. 209 and traced the order when receiving it, he could have discovered in which the meeting point was absolutely unintelligible, and possibly could have called the dispatcher for the purpose of verifying the same, at which time the error could have been discovered.

While this accident was due directly to the failure of an employee properly to perform his duty, it was rendered possible by the system of train operation employed, and displays the inherent weakness of such a system; in fact, a large proportion of the collisions which have been investigated has been due to mistakes which have occurred under the train order method of operation.