

INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF THE BUREAU OF SAFETY IN RE
INVESTIGATION OF AN ACCIDENT WHICH OCCURRED ON
THE VIRGINIAN RAILWAY NEAR INGLESIDE, W. VA , ON
MAY 24, 1927.

June 24, 1927

To the Commission:

On May 24, 1927, there was a head-end collision between a passenger train and a freight train on the Virginian Railway near Ingleside, W. Va., which resulted in the death of 2 employees and the injury of 18 passengers, 1 person carried under contract and 10 employees

Location and method of operation

This accident occurred on the Third Subdivision of the New River Division, which extends between Roanoke, Va., and Elmore, W. Va., a distance of 131.6 miles, which is a single-track line over which trains are operated by time-table and train orders, no block signal system being in use. Passenger trains are hauled by steam engines and freight trains by electric motors. The point of accident was about 1,980 feet west of the west passing-track switch at Ingleside, approaching this point from the east, beginning at this switch, there are 34 feet of tangent, followed by a compound curve to the right, 1,997.8 feet in length, the maximum curvature being $8^{\circ} 26'$. The accident occurred on the spiral at the western end of this curve. Approaching from the west there is an 8° curve to the right 1,327.9 feet in length and then 67.7 feet of tangent, followed by the curve on which the accident occurred. The grade at the point of accident is 1.25 per cent ascending for westbound trains. On account of a tunnel located just east of the point of accident, in addition to a cut 50 feet in depth at the point of accident, the range of vision of eastbound crews is materially restricted, while the crews of westbound trains have practically no view of the track ahead.

The weather was clear at the time of the accident, which occurred at about 11 53 a m.

Description

Westbound passenger train No. 3 consisted of one combination car, one express car, two coaches and one club car, hauled by engine 212, and was in charge of Conductor Hamilton and Engineman Aldrich. At Norcross,

23 miles east of Ingleside, the crew received, among others, a copy of train order No. 218, Form 19, reading as follows:

"Engine 103 run extra MX Tower to
Roanoke and meet No 3 Eng 212 at
Ingleside No. 3 take siding "

Train No. 3 departed from Norcross at 10 54 a.m., nine minutes late, stopped at Ingleside, a flag stop, to pick up passengers and shortly after departing from that point it collided with extra 103 while traveling at a speed estimated to have been between 18 and 20 miles per hour

Eastbound freight train extra 103 consisted of 90 cars and a caboose, hauled by motor 103, and was in charge of Conductor Aumann and Engineman Weaver At MX Tower, 20 3 miles west of Ingleside, the crew received a copy of train order No 218, previously quoted Extra 103 departed from MX Tower at 10 23 a.m., and collided with westbound passenger train No 3 while traveling at a speed estimated at about 14 miles per hour

The impact forced the passenger train backwards a distance of 310 feet. Engine 212 came to rest in an upright position, entirely derailed, with its front end mounted on the leading unit of motor 103, both the engine and the motor were quite badly damaged, none of the other equipment was derailed and it sustained only slight damage. The employees killed were the engineman and fireman of the passenger train

Summary of evidence

Operator Wright, on duty at Norcross, stated that he had received several train orders for the crew of train No. 3, among them being train order No 218. When the train arrived at his station he delivered one copy of each of the orders to Engineman Aldrich and another set to Brakeman Agee. He checked the meeting points named in the orders with Brakeman Agee but did not do so with Engineman Aldrich

Brakeman Agee stated that he received several orders at Norcross, including train order No. 218, all of which he read and then delivered to the conductor in the club car. The conductor read them and returned them to him, at which time he again read them and was positive he understood their contents Brakeman Agee

said he was familiar with the rules requiring trainmen on passenger trains to sound the meeting-point signal when approaching a meeting point and enginemen to sound the regulation meeting-point whistle signal, neither of which requirements was observed as the train approached Ingleside. His statements were to the effect that all other orders were complied with except train order No 218, which he entirely overlooked, not having thought of it since his train departed from Norcross.

Conductor Hamilton, of train No 3, stated that he was eating lunch in the club car at the time Brakeman Agee handed him the train orders at Norcross. He immediately read them to the brakeman, who also read them for himself, the orders were then discussed and thoroughly understood. After departing from Norcross, Conductor Hamilton did not again recall the meet order with extra 103 and he said that after the station work at Ingleside had been completed he told the brakeman to give the engineman a proceed signal. Conductor Hamilton said that among his passengers were a sick lady and a crippled man, both of whom required considerable attention, and that this situation might have caused him to overlook the meet order, he was unable to give any other reason for his oversight.

Helper Buchanan, of extra 103, stated that among the orders received at MX Tower was train order No 218 which he read and understood. As his train was approaching Ingleside the engineman sounded the meeting-point whistle signal, which signal Helper Buchanan acknowledged by pressing the signal button provided for that purpose, the engineman responding with another blast of the whistle. Helper Buchanan did not see train No 3 prior to the accident as he had been inspecting the motor and was located in the rear end of the leading unit.

Head Brakeman Clowers, of extra 103, who was riding on the motor prior to the accident, stated that he understood the contents of train order No 218 and at the time the engineman sounded the meeting-point whistle signal he called the number of the train involved. His first knowledge of an approaching train was when he observed smoke in a cut about 200 feet ahead of his own train. The statements of Conductor Aumann and Flagman Keeney, of extra 103, brought out nothing of importance.

Electrical Engineer Sharples said he arrived at the scene of the accident shortly after its occurrence and upon inspection he found a file of train orders on a hook in the cab of engine 212, train order No. 213 being located directly under the clearance card which was at the top of the file.

Conclusions

This accident was caused by failure to obey a meet order, for which Conductor Hamilton, Engineman Aldrich, and Brakeman Agee, of train No 3, are responsible.

Under the requirements of train order No 218, train No. 3 should have taken siding at Ingleside to meet extra 103. Both the conductor and the brakeman clearly understood what was required of them under this order, yet both of them entirely overlooked the order after their train had departed from Norcross, the point at which the order was received. On account of the death of the engineman and fireman, no definite reason can be assigned for their failure to obey the order, the evidence indicated, however, that the order was delivered to the engineman and after the accident it was found on a hook in the cab of the engine. In view of the fact that the engineman did not sound a meeting-point whistle signal when approaching Ingleside, and in view of the further fact that he accepted the proceed signal given after the station work at Ingleside had been completed, it seems clear that he also had forgotten about the meet at that point with extra 103. The fireman was engaged in taking water when the order was delivered to the engineman by the operator at Norcross, and it is entirely possible that he was not acquainted with the contents of the order.

Had an adequate block-signal system been in use on this line, this accident probably would not have occurred, an adequate automatic train stop or train control device would have prevented it.

The employees involved were experienced men, at the time of the accident they had been on duty approximately 4 hours, after off-duty periods varying from 11½ hours to more than 60 hours.

Respectfully submitted,

W. P. Borland,

Director