

In Re Investigation of Accident on the Virginian Railway
near Keever, Va., on November 29, 1913.

December 17, 1913.

On November 29, 1913, there was a head-end collision on the Virginian Railway near Keever, Va., which resulted in the death of 4 employees and the injury of 2 employees.

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

Westbound train No. 33, en route from Victoria, Va., to Roanoke, Va., consisted of 14 cars and a caboose, hauled by locomotive No. 456, and was in charge of Conductor Cox and Engineman Wood. This train left Victoria at 7:00 a. m., arrived at Phenix, Va., at 9:49 a. m., at which point the crew in charge received a copy of train order No. 42 reading as follows:

"No. 33, Eng. 456, take siding and meet
extra 468, C. S. 60, at Keever."

This train left Phenix at 10:06 a. m., left Brookneal, Va., at 11:40 a. m., and at 11:55 a. m., collided with extra 468 at a point about 1,515 feet east of Keever while running at a speed of about 10 miles per hour.

Eastbound extra 468, Contingent Schedule 60, consisted of 70 loaded steel hopper and gondola cars, 10 miscellaneous loaded cars and a caboose, hauled by locomotive No. 468, and was in charge of Conductor Cooper and Engineman Linkous. This train left Roanoke at 7:15 a. m., and at 10:23 a. m., passed Altavista, Va., where the crew in charge received a copy of train order No. 42 directing them to meet train No. 33 at Keever. This train left Seneca, Va., at 11:30 a. m., and proceeded toward Keever, 6.2 miles distant, where it was to meet train No. 33. Extra 468 did not stop at Keever but passed there at a speed of about 20 miles per hour and collided with train No. 33 as above stated.

Both locomotives were quite badly damaged while the first three steel cars on extra 468, the first six cars on train No. 33, and both tenders were destroyed. At the time of the accident the conductor and head brakemen of extra 468 were riding in the cab of the locomotive, the conductor having boarded the locomotive at Seneca, and they, together with the engineman and firemen of that train, were instantly killed by being crushed and scalded between the tender and engine. The weather at the time of the accident was clear, while the air brakes on both trains were in good condition and working properly.

The division upon which this accident occurred is a single track line and no block signals are in use, trains being operated by the train order system. Trains running in the same direction are spaced 10 minutes apart at open telegraph offices. The track at the point of accident is on a curve of 2 degrees at the point where the curvature is the greatest. The grade was slightly descending for eastbound trains. Train No. 33 had just passed through a deep rock cut and was approaching the curve from the east when the engineman saw extra 408 about 600 feet distant. On account of the curve and the cut through which his train had just passed he was unable to see extra 408 before this time. He at once applied the air brakes in emergency and jumped, as did the fireman and brakeman. From the position of the bodies of the men on locomotive No. 408 it would appear that they had no knowledge of the approaching train until the collision occurred, as they were found in the position in which they would naturally be riding.

Rear Brakeman Linkenhoker of extra 408 stated that as his train passed Altavista he and Conductor Cooper were standing on the rear of the caboose of that train and he received order No. 42 requiring his train to meet train No. 33 at Keever. He handed it to Conductor Cooper who read it and handed it back to him to read, which he did aloud, and then handed it back to the conductor. After reading the order Conductor Cooper said "No. 33 will take siding and meet us at Keever." When extra 408 approached Keever Brakeman Linkenhoker states he was on the rear end of the caboose of that train looking for train No. 33, and when he saw that train No. 33 was not on the passing track he applied the air brakes by opening the angle cock. Almost immediately the collision occurred. He said that the speed of his train at the time of the collision was about 20 miles per hour and that the locomotive was working steam. He also stated that he fully understood order No. 42 requiring his train to meet train No. 33 at Keever, and the only reason he could assign for the engineman failing to obey it was that he overlooked it.

After the accident copies of train order No. 42 were found on the bodies of both Engineman Linkous and Conductor Cooper.

Conductor Cox of train No. 33 stated that his train was running at a speed of about 20 miles per hour when he felt the brakes being applied in emergency, which reduced the speed of the train to about 10 miles per hour. After running about 350 feet the collision occurred, the force of the collision pushing his train back about 6 car lengths. Upon examining locomotive No. 408 after the accident he found the throttle closed and the brake valve in the emergency position.

Conductor Cooper was employed as a brakeman on October 27, 1909, and was promoted to conductor on February 29, 1913. His record was good. Engineman Linkous had been employed as such by the Virginian Railway since October 5, 1910, previous to which he had been employed as fireman and engineman on the Norfolk & Western Railway. His record was good. Neither of these employees

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had been on duty in violation of any of the provisions of the hours of service law, which was also the case with the other employees involved, all of whom were experienced men with good records.

This accident was caused by the crew of extra 406 failing to obey train order No. 42, requiring them to meet train No. 36 at Heever. What caused the four employees riding on locomotive No. 406 to overlook train order No. 42 could not be ascertained as all of them were killed, and any reason for the error which may be assigned would be only a matter of conjecture.