

## 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 ROCK, W VA., ON OCTOBER 6,  
1926.

November 17, 1926.

To the Commission:

On October 6, 1926, there was a head-end collision between a freight train and a gasoline motor car on the Virginian Railway near Rock, W. Va., resulting in the death of two employes and the injury of four employes.

Location and method of operation

The accident occurred on the Fourth Sub-Division of the New River Division extending between Princeton and Elmore, W Va., a distance of 34 5 miles, in the vicinity of the point of accident this is a single-track electrified line over which trains are operated by time-table and train orders, no block-signal system being in use. The accident occurred near the western end of a cut located about 2 miles west of Rock, approaching this point from the east the track is tangent for a considerable distance, followed by a compound curve to the right 1,068 feet in length, the curvature varying from  $2^{\circ}$  to  $12^{\circ}$ . The accident occurred on the curve about 200 feet from its eastern end where the curvature was  $8^{\circ}$ . Approaching from the west there are a series of sharp curves and short tangents followed by the curve on which the accident occurred. The grade at the point of accident is 0.04 per cent ascending for westbound trains. The view of the point of accident from the engine cab of the westbound train was very limited, while that of the motor car crew was restricted to approximately 200 feet.

The weather was clear at the time of the accident, which occurred between 5.10 and 5.16 p.m.

### Description

Westbound freight train Extra 107 consisted of 90 cars and a caboose, hauled by electric locomotive 107, and was in charge of Conductor Bishop and Engineman Gilkerson. It departed from Kegley, 6.5 miles east of Rock, at 4 36 p.m., and collided with the gasoline motor car on reaching a point about 2 miles west of Rock while traveling at a speed estimated to have been about 14 miles an hour.

Eastbound gasoline motor car 892, hauling a four-wheel trailer loaded with tools and repair parts, was in charge of Line Foreman Stultz and was carrying a crew of six electric line repairmen, en route to line trouble near Pembroke, located 48.1 miles from Rock. As the motor car passed MX tower the end of double track, located 10.5 miles west of Kegley, at about 5 07 a.m., the operator delivered a message to the line foreman reading as follows:

"Kegley is holding all trains west for you"

On reaching a point about 2 miles east of MX tower, however, while traveling at a speed estimated to have been about 15 miles an hour, motor car 892 collided with Extra 107.

The gasoline motor car was thrown to the south of the track and completely demolished, while locomotive 107 was only slightly damaged. The employees killed were line repairmen, who were riding on the motor car at the time of the accident.

### Summary of evidence

Engineman Gilkerson, of Extra 107, stated that the first intimation he had of anything wrong was on nearing the western end of the cut while rounding the curve at a speed of about 14 miles an hour. At this time he saw the gasoline motor car about 180 feet away and immediately applied the air brakes in emergency, at the same time using the speed lever and accelerator lever to bring the train to a stop as quickly as possible. He thought that the accident occurred at about 5.11 p.m. The statements of Helper Brinkley and Head Brakeman Moore practically corroborated those of Engineman Gilkerson.

Line Foreman Stultz, of motor car 892, stated that the power director instructed him to proceed to Pembroke as soon as he could, there being line trouble near that point. He departed from Herndon at about 4.20 a.m., with verbal authority from the dispatcher to proceed to MX tower, the end of double track. No stop was made at MX tower, the operator at that point giving him a proceed signal and delivering the message, previously quoted, as

the motor car passed. While rounding the curve at a speed of about 15 miles an hour he saw extra 107 approaching about three or four rail-lengths distant, and immediately applied the brakes, shouted a warning of danger and jumped

Operator Fry, stationed at MX tower, stated that he asked the dispatcher for a line up when he heard motor car 892 approaching, knowing that it was desired to get it to the point of trouble as quickly as possible and therefore trying to avoid stopping it for orders. At the time he talked to the dispatcher, Operator George, stationed at Kegley, who was also on the telephone, was instructed to hold all westbound trains for motor car 892, after which the dispatcher inquired of Operator Fry as to whether or not he understood what was told Operator George, and Operator Fry answered in the affirmative. Operator Fry then prepared the message advising the crew of motor car 892 that all westbound trains would be held for them at Kegley and handed the message to Line Foreman Stultz as the motor car passed the tower, at about 5.07 p.m. Operator Fry further stated that he made no inquiry as to the whereabouts of extra 107 and knew nothing about its having departed from Kegley.

Operator George, stationed at Kegley, stated that extra 107 left Kegley at 4.36 p.m. Later, around 5 p.m., the dispatcher instructed him to hold all westbound trains for motor car 892. Operator George said that at this time he knew the motor car was proceeding eastward, but that he did not know anything about its location and it did not occur to him that the motor car might have passed MX tower and was then between that point and Kegley. He further stated that he gave the OS on extra 107 to the dispatcher and also to the power director.

Dispatcher Harlan said he reported for duty at 3.50 p.m. on the day of the accident to take his place as second-trick dispatcher at 4.00 p.m. On account of the heavy movement of trains, with the first-trick dispatcher being busy arranging the various movements and change of movements occasioned by the power line failure near Pembroke, the transfer was not finished for Dispatcher Harlan to take charge until 4.20 p.m. He said at about this time the line foreman in charge of motor car 892 telephoned from Herndon, 12.3 miles west of MX tower, and asked for a line up for the movement of motor car 892 to the scene of the power trouble, and the line foreman was instructed to proceed on the eastbound track to MX tower, the end of double track, at which point further instructions would be given. In the meantime extra 107 was at Kegley for two eastbound trains, and as soon as they had cleared Operator George reported to him that extra 107 had departed at 4.36 p.m. At 5.02

or 5 03 p.m. Operator Fry, at MX tower, informed him that motor car 892 was approaching, and the dispatcher said that it was at this time that he made the mistake, saying that he called the operator at Kegley and instructed him to hold all westbound trains until motor car 892 cleared, after which he authorized motor car 892 to proceed, overlooking the fact that extra 107 west was then between Kegley and MX tower, although he glanced at the train sheet at the time. <sup>between</sup> Dispatcher Harlan did not discover his mistake until 5.10 and 5.15 p.m., and at this time he immediately called the power director and told him to shut off the current, but at this time it was too late to avert the accident. Dispatcher Harlan also said that a contributing factor to his error might have been the fact that his dispatching district had been extended to cover the territory from Princeton to Elmore, necessitating a new train sheet; Princeton was shown on the bottom of the old train sheet but now appears near the center of the new train sheet. He said, however, that this new train sheet had been in use for 15 days, and that he had been working it for 12 days.

#### Conclusions

This accident was caused by Dispatcher Harlan authorizing motor car 892 to proceed from MX tower to Kegley, having momentarily overlooked the fact that extra 107 had departed from Kegley for MX tower.

Dispatcher Harlan admitted his responsibility for the accident, saying he overlooked the fact that westbound extra 107 was between MX tower and Kegley at the time he authorized eastbound motor car 892 to depart from MX tower, when he discovered his mistake he immediately communicated with the power director for the purpose of having him shut off the current, but it was then too late to avert the collision.

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

Respectfully submitted,

W. P. BORLAND,

Director.