

IN RE INVESTIGATION OF AN ACCIDENT WHICH OCCURRED ON  
THE WESTERN MARYLAND RAILROAD, NEAR CONBOY, PA.,  
JULY 23, 1920.

On July 23, 1920, there was a rear-end collision between two freight trains on the Western Maryland Railroad near Conboy, Pa., resulting in the death of one employee and the injury of one employee. After investigation of this accident the Chief of the Bureau of Safety reports as follows:

This accident occurred on the Lurgan Sub Division, of the Hagerstown Division, which extends from North Junction, Hagerstown, Md., to Shippensburg, Pa., a distance of 35 miles. The line is double track from North Junction to Wingerton, Pa., a distance of 6.4 miles, single track from Wingerton to Conboy, a distance of 8 miles, double track from Conboy to Brandon, a distance of 7 miles and single track from Brandon to Shippensburg, a distance of 13.6 miles. Trains are operated by rules, time-table, and train orders transmitted by telegraph or telephone, no block signal system being used.

During part of the period of Federal control, eastbound freight movement between Hagerstown and Lurgan was made over the Cumberland Valley Railroad and westbound movement over the Western Maryland Railroad, this method of operation was continued until July 18, 1920, when eastbound freight movement was restored to the Western Maryland Railroad. Since that date the line between Conboy and Brandon, has been operated as double track. On account of the advantage of grades for eastbound or loaded trains, trains are operated over the left hand track between Conboy and Brandon.

The junction of the Waynesboro Subdivision with the Lurgan Subdivision is east of the end of double track on the westbound track, and trains of the Waynesboro Subdivision make a reverse movement on the westbound track of the Lurgan Subdivision to reach the eastbound track. To protect this movement, there is a signal located east of the junction which is connected to the switch controlling the route to or from the Waynesboro Subdivision. To further protect this movement, as well as trains standing at the end of double track, there is a yard limit board on the westbound track, located 3698 feet from the west end of double track.

The accident occurred 435 feet west of the Yard Limit Board. Approaching the scene of the accident from the east there is a tangent 1800 feet in length, then a 6° curve leading to the right, 517.8 feet in length, followed by a 1° curve leading to the right and the engine was standing 300 feet from the beginning of this curve. From the yard limit board to the point of accident a distance of

435 feet the grade is .307 per cent descending for westbound trains, and for about 2/3 of a mile east of the yard limit board the grade is 1.184 per cent descending for westbound trains.

On the right side of the westbound track in the vicinity of the yard limit board the eastbound track is on an embankment about 20 feet in height, which obstructs the view of westbound trains beyond the 6<sup>th</sup> curve. The yard limit board is located 135 feet from the west end of the 1<sup>st</sup> curve, and on account of shrubbery it is not visible for any great distance. The weather was foggy at the time of the accident.

The trains involved in this accident were westbound Western Maryland Extra 783 and Philadelphia & Reading Extra 1701, both of these trains being en route from Rutherford, Pa. to Hagerstown, being operated over the P. & R. R. R. from Rutherford to Lurgan, and over the W.M. Ry. west of Lurgan. Extra 783 consisting of engine 783 and 75 cars, and a caboose, in charge of Conductor Wilhide and Engineman Kuhn, left Rutherford at 10.00 p.m., July 22, and arrived at Conboy at 4.35 a.m. July 23; while waiting for eastbound trains to clear on single track, its rear end was struck by P.&R. extra 1701.

P.&R. extra 1701, consisting of engine 1701, 72 cars and a caboose, in charge of Conductor Turns and Engineman Walton, left Rutherford, at 10.30 p.m., July 22, left Brandon at 4.18 a.m., and while running at a speed estimated to be 10 miles per hour collided with rear end of extra 783, at about 4.50 a.m.

As a result of the collision the caboose and one hopper car of extra 783 were destroyed and two freight cars were damaged. Flagman Crim and Brakeman Wiley, who were in the caboose of extra 783 at the time of the collision received serious injuries, which resulted fatally to Flagman Grim.

Engineman Walton of P.&R. extra 1701, stated that on this trip the fog was thick in low places and there was more or less mist at other places. On the descending grade east of Conboy he kept his train punched with the straight air until a speed of about 20 miles per hour had been attained when he applied the train brakes by making a reduction of fifteen pounds, he thought he was then about 35 or 40 car lengths east of the yard limit board, and expected that this application would bring his train to a stop at the board. He had misjudged the location of the board, thinking it was 6 or 8 car lengths farther west. He did not notice the yard limit board until he was passing it, and he thought the speed was then about 12 miles per hour. He saw the caboose of extra 783 about 7 or 8 car lengths ahead of him, and placed

the brake valve in emergency position but did not get the emergency effect of the brakes on account of the previous service application which he had not released. Conductor Turns was riding on the engine pilot and gave him a slow signal when approaching the yard limit board and a stop signal when he saw the caboose of the preceding train, but the brakes had already been applied.

Conductor Turns said the fog was very heavy, lying like a cloud in the swamp near the yard limit board and around the curve toward the junction. Approaching the yard limit board he signaled Engineman Walton to slow up; when near the yard limit board he stepped over to the left side of the pilot to look around the curve as far as possible, and when he was about opposite the yard limit board he saw the caboose of extra 783 in the mist ahead. He crossed back to the right side and signaled the engineman to stop, then stepped to the left side again and jumped off. He thought he was then about 4 car lengths from the caboose. He saw no one on the caboose platform or around the rear of extra 783.

Brakeman Wiley of extra 783, who was injured in the collision, stated that he rode in the caboose from Lurgan to the point of accident and at the time of the collision both he and Flagman Crim were sitting in the rear of the caboose. He thought he had fallen asleep shortly before the accident occurred as he did not remember when his train stopped at Conboy, and did not hear the approaching train.

Rule 93 of the Western Maryland Railway Company reads as follows:

"Within established yard limits as designated in the Time-table the main tracks may be used, protecting against first and second class trains.

"Third class and extra trains may move within such yard limits prepared to stop unless the main track is seen or known to be clear."

From the evidence in this case Engineman Walton did not operate his train on the descending grade approaching the yard limit board at Conboy in such a manner as to have his train under control at the yard limit board as required by this rule. Not knowing the exact location of the yard limit board he assumed it to be farther west and did not bring his train down to a safe speed before passing the yard limit board. Engineman Walton was aware that Extra 783 was only a short distance ahead of his train as he had followed it from Rutherford and had been flagged twice previously on this trip. In view of the heavy fog, he should have taken extraordinary precautions and should

have had his train under absolute control when approaching Conboy.

The cause of this accident was the failure of Engineman Walton of P.&R. extra 1701 to operate his train within yard limits prepared to stop as required by the rules.

While the rules do not require flag protection against third class or extra trains within yard limits, it is a dangerous practice to allow a train to stand without protection within a short distance of the extreme end of a yard limit on a descending grade, particularly when the view is obscured by a curve and heavy fog. At the time of the collision Extra 783 had been standing at that point for about 15 minutes. Had Engineman Grim gone back to protect his train when it stopped at this point, this accident might have been averted.

All of the employees involved in this accident were men of experience, and none of them was on duty in violation of the Hours of Service Laws.