

INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF THE BUREAU OF SAFETY IN RE
INVESTIGATION OF AN ACCIDENT WHICH OCCURRED ON THE
NORFOLK-SOUTHERN RAILROAD AT HERTFORD, N. C., ON
FEBRUARY 25, 1923.

March 19, 1923.

To the Commission:

On February 25, 1923, there was a side collision between the front and rear portions of a freight train on the Norfolk-Southern Railroad at Hertford, N. C., resulting in the death of one employee, and the injury of one employee.

Location and method of operation.

This accident occurred on the Norfolk District of the Northern Division, extending between Norfolk, Va., and Marsden, N. C., a distance of 139.1 miles, in the vicinity of the point of accident this is a single-track line over which trains are operated by time-table and train orders, no block-signal system being in use. The accident occurred approximately 1,200 feet north of the north switch of the passing track at Hertford, at the junction of the Oil Mill track with the main track; this is a trailing-point switch for northbound trains, and leads off the main track to the southeast. Operating rule 90-D provides that "when a train is standing on ascending or descending grade, if engine is detached, conductor will see that hand brakes are set on caboose and as many additional cars as may be necessary, to prevent rear part of train from moving until engine is recoupled to train." Approaching from the south the track is tangent for a considerable distance to and beyond the point of accident. The grade is 0.48 per cent descending for northbound trains for a distance of 800 feet, to within about 400 feet of the point of accident, from which point it is 0.29 per cent descending. The weather was misty at the time of the accident, which occurred at about 6.15 a. m.

Description.

Northbound third-class freight train No. 80 consisted of 23 cars and a caboose, hauled by engine 222, and was in charge of Conductor Pearce and Engineman Munden. After allowing a passenger train to pass, it pulled out of the

Passing track and was brought to a stop by means of the independent engine brake in the engine just south of the switch leading to the Oil Mill track, after which the engine and first two cars were cut off, the rear portion of the train being left standing on the grade without any hand brakes having been set. Shortly afterwards, while the engine and first two cars backing in at the switch, for the purpose of picking up 10 cars standing on the Oil Mill track, the rear portion of the train ran down the grade and collided with the left rear corner of the engine cab, at which time both portions of the train were traveling at a low rate of speed.

Both air pumps, the running board, and part of the engine cab were torn away, while the forward end of the first car in the rear portion of the train was derailed. The employee killed was the fireman.

Summary of evidence.

On arrival of train No. 80 at the Oil Mill track, Engineman Munden brought the train to a stop south of the switch with the independent engine brake, instead of using the automatic air brakes. Immediately afterwards, Head Brakeman Wood cut off the engine and first two cars, closing both angle cocks before so doing, then gave a proceed signal. While backing in on the Oil Mill track, Engineman Munden received a violent back-up signal. He said Fireman Lockhart was sitting on the seat box with his head out of the window, but he suddenly raised up, and as he did so the accident occurred. Engineman Munden stated he was thoroughly familiar with the grades at Hertford, and did not consider it necessary to leave the air brakes applied on trains at this point, when making a movement such as was made on this occasion. Conductor Pearce had ridden on the engine until just before the train stopped at the switch, and was checking up on the cars to be picked up when the accident occurred. He stated that it was not the custom to set hand brakes on cars when making a movement at this point such as was made in this instance, and could only explain the accident by saying the train line must have been so tight that leakage did not cause the brakes to apply after the engine was cut off. Conductor Pearce further stated that the air brakes worked properly and no trouble had been experienced in making the various stops en route. Head Brakeman Wood stated there was air in the hose, after closing the angle cocks, when he made the cut between the second and third cars. Flagman DeLoach said it never had been customary to set either hand or air brakes at this point, the flag-

man had closed the passing-track switch after his train pulled out on the main track, and was not on the caboose when the engine was out of from the train.

Although the rules require the setting of hand brakes when trains are left on descending grades without an engine attached, Trainmaster Hawkins said he did not think it necessary to set hand brakes before making such a movement at this point, if the air brakes were working properly.

Conclusions.

This accident was caused by leaving the rear portion of the train on a descending grade without the air brakes being applied, and without hand brakes being set as required by the rules, for which Conductor Pearce is primarily responsible.

Although Conductor Pearce was thoroughly familiar with the grade in this vicinity, he took no action to secure the rear portion of his train while the intended pick-up movement was being made. Engineman Munden was also negligent in not taking some action to see that hand brakes were applied on the portion of the train left on the main track.

All the evidence indicates that it is not the practice to set hand brakes when stopping a train at this point, and even an official of the company said he did not think it necessary if the air brakes were working properly. Rule 90-D, previously mentioned, requires the use of hand brakes when a train is left on a grade without an engine attached to it, however, in failing to comply with the requirements of this rule the employees were doing only that which was customary, apparently with the full knowledge of supervising officials. When the officials of a railroad do not enforce obedience to the rules, it is not to be expected that the employees under their supervision will render that obedience which should be required.

All of the employees involved, with the exception of the flagman, were experienced men, at the time of the accident they had been on duty about eight hours, after eight hours off duty.

Respectfully submitted,

W. P. BORLAND

Director.