

ICC Reports on Erie Wreck

"On August 11, 1958, there was a head-end collision between two passenger trains on the Erie Railroad near Sloatsburg, N.Y., which resulted in the death of two passengers and three train-service employees . . ." Following is an abstract of Interstate Commerce Commission Report No. 3818.

IN THE AREA where the accident occurred, the railroad is double tracked with an automatic block signal system designed for unidirectional running. Trains are operated by time table and train orders, with train orders being required for trains moving against the current of traffic.

At about 5:15 a.m., the operator at NJ tower informed the dispatcher at Hoboken that Extra 703 East, a local freight, was approaching his tower from the Graham Line. This freight was to perform switching in the vicinity of Hillburn. To expedite the movement of this freight and prevent delay to No. 50, an eastbound passenger train, the dispatcher decided to allow X703 East to use the normal eastbound main, and run No. 50 around him on the westbound main to the crossover just west of Hillburn.

At 5:16 a.m., the dispatcher announced "31 West" to tower SF and "19 East" to tower NJ. Under the rules of the carrier, the operator at NJ was required to immediately ascertain that the east bound train order signal was at STOP, block the lever in that position, display a YELLOW flag or light on the interlocking station, and tell the dispatcher "stop displayed east." The operator complied with the instructions except for the announcement to the dispatcher. Although required by the rules, it was not the practice for the operator receiving a 19 order to make the announcement.

The operator at SF was required to immediately ascertain that the westward train order signal was at STOP,

block the lever in that position, display a RED flag or light on the interlocking station, and then tell the dispatcher "stop displayed west." The operator did not block the lever, did not display the RED flag or light, nor did he make the required announcement to the dispatcher, although it had been the practice to comply with this rule.

Train Orders Issued

The train dispatcher then transmitted train order No. 103 without requiring the operators to give the "stop displayed" announcement. Order No. 103 was issued on form 31 to the operator at SF interlocking addressed to C&E all westbound trains, and on form 19 to the operator at NJ interlocking addressed to C&E No. 50. It read as follows:

Order No. 103

No. 50 Engine 859 has right over opposing trains on westward track Newburgh Jct to first crossover west of Hillburn.

The form 19 order for the crew of No. 50 was made complete at 5:18 a.m. The crew of No. 50 received copies of the order as it passed NJ at slow speed. Under the rights conferred by this order the eastbound No. 50 entered the westbound main at 5:32 a.m.

The operator at SF said that while the order was being transmitted a phone was ringing in another room. After repeating the order to the dispatcher, the operator gave the "stop displayed" announcement, although he had not displayed the proper signals and which should have been given be-

fore the order was copied. He then answered the telephone.

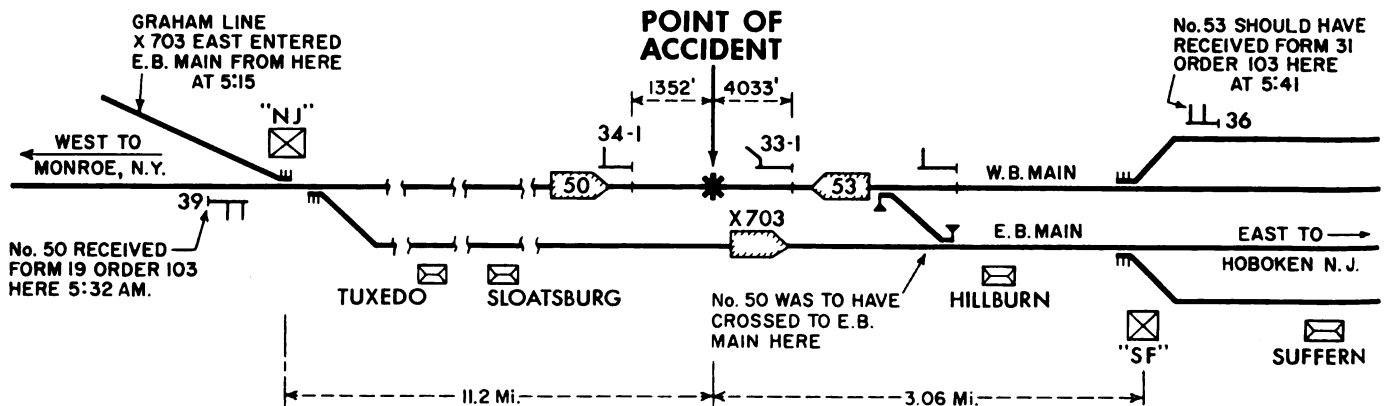
The SF operator said that his attention was distracted by the telephone conversation, and that he then became preoccupied and overlooked the fact that he held a form 31 train order for No. 53. After No. 53 had caused the approach bell to be sounded he cleared signal 36, allowing No. 53 onto the westbound main at 5:41 a.m.

31 Order Not Delivered

After No. 53 had passed his station, the operator realized that he had not delivered copies of the train order to the crew. He immediately attempted to call the crews of No. 50, 53 and X703 East by radio, but was unsuccessful. He then notified the dispatcher. The dispatcher called the agent at Tuxedo by telephone, but found that No. 50 had already passed. The operator at SF continued to attempt radio contact with the three trains. Eventually he contacted X703, but No. 53 had passed that train.

No. 53 passed signal 31-1, which displayed a CLEAR aspect, and signal 33-1, which displayed an APPROACH aspect. The engineer said he reduced the speed of the train to comply with the approach signal. As the train approached the point of accident, the enginemen were in the control compartment of the diesel electric unit, and the members of the train crew were in various locations throughout the cars of the train. The brakes had functioned properly when tested, and the headlight was lighted dimly. The flagman said the brakes were applied in emergency immediately prior to the collision. He estimated the speed of the train was 20 mph when the collision occurred. The engineer, the fireman, and the conductor were injured in the accident.

No. 50 had stopped at Southfields, Tuxedo, and Sloatsburg. The train had



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attained a speed of 50 mph as it approached the point of accident. The brakes had functioned properly when tested, and the headlight was lighted dimly. The engineer was operating the locomotive, the fireman was seated on the brakeman's seat, and a road foreman of engines was seated on the fireman's seat. The conductor, the front brakeman, and the flagman were in the first coach.

As the fireman and road foreman saw the headlight and observed that No. 53 was also on the westbound main, they called a warning to the engineer who initiated an emergency brake application. The road foreman estimated that the speed of the train was reduced to 15 to 20 mph when the collision occurred. The engineer and fireman had entered the engine compartment before the collision. They and the front brakeman were killed. The conductor, flagman, and road foreman were injured.

The ICC report concluded, "Cause: This accident was caused by failure to deliver a right-of-track order. Recommendation: It is recommended that the carrier take steps to insure full compliance with operating rules." Signed by H. D. McCoy, Secretary January 16, 1959.

RAILWAY SIGNALING AND COMMUNICATIONS

News Briefs

CORRECTION: Headings on the tables on page 19 of the February issue were reversed. The top table lists causes of false proceed failures, and the bottom table lists false restrictive failures of signals, etc. for the year ending June 30, 1958, reported by the ICC.

CANADIAN NATIONAL has ordered equipment from General Railway Signal Co. for the installation of 106 miles of CTC between Redditt, Ont., and Anola, Man. A Traffic Master control center with a triple-decked track diagram will be located in the Winnipeg passenger station.

CHICAGO & EASTERN ILLINOIS has ordered equipment from General Railway Signal Co. for the installation of 40 miles of centralized traffic control between Danville, Ill., and Clinton, Ind. The control machine will be located in the dispatcher's office at Danville.

SOUTHERN PACIFIC LINES IN TEXAS AND LOUISIANA expects that by June of this year it will have completed close to 90 per cent of its
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