In re Investigation of Accident on the Oregon Short Line Railroad near Banks, Idaho, on August 31, 1913.

On August 31, 1913, there was a derailment of a light engine on the Oregon Short Line Railroad near Banks, Idaho, resulting in the death of 2 employee and the injury of 3 employees, one of whom subsequently died.

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

On the morning of August 31, 1913, locomotive No. 724, in charge of Engineman Eggers and Conductor Moffatt, left Nampa, Idaho, with a special westbound passenger train bound for Belvidere, Idaho. On their arrival at Montour, a station 41 miles west of Nampa, a pilot was furnished on account of the engineman being unfamiliar with the road beyond that point. On arrival at Belvidere, Locomotive No. 724 was cut off from the train and the crew was directed to return east to Banks, a station 23.1 miles west of Montour, to help an extra westbound freight train to Smith's Ferry, 18.9 miles west of Banks. On account of an insufficient supply of coal on locomotive No. 724 the crew in charge were directed to proceed to Smith's Ferry, secure a car of coal there and take it to Big Eddy, a station 7.7 miles east of Smith's Ferry and 11.2 miles west of Banks, and at that point have men shovel the coal into the tender of the locomotive. After this was done the crew in charge left Big Eddy with only the locomotive, with the intention of running light to Banks to help the freight train as directed. Shortly after leaving Big Eddy the engineman lost control of the locomotive, and while running at a speed of about 60 miles per hour it was derailed at a point about 6.3 miles east of that station.

This accident occurred on a ten-degree curve loading toward the right. After leaving the rails the locomotive traveled about 200 feet before coming to a stop against the mountain, resting on its left side about 12 feet from the north side of the track. The tender was torn loose from the locomotive, the frame being about 15 feet from the track on the north side of the same, with the cistern about 6 feet away from it. The damage to the track was slight; in fact none of the ties had to be removed. The weather was clear.

That part of the Idaho Northern Branch of the Oregon Short Line Railroad on which this accident occurred, extending from Montour to Smith's Ferry, was under construction, but was to be turned over officially to the transportation department at 12:01 a.m., September 1, 1913. Between Big Eddy and Banks the track is on a 2.5% grade, descending for southbound trains, with many curves varying from 6 *** to 12 ***.

Locomotive No. 724 was equipped with a No. 2 New York air pump, Von McKee old style New York brake valve, and plain New York driving and tender brake triples, all in good condition. There is a two-way valve in the cab which, when placed in the cut-out position, applies the driving wheel brakes independently, and cuts them out of the train brake system, so that they cannot be applied automatically. Engineman Eggers had this valve in the cut-out position while coaling at Big Eddy, and it was found to be in the same position after the accident. It is evident, therefore, that during the time the engine was being coaled the driving wheel brakes leaked off, and when Engineman Eggers started away from there he forgot to place the valve in the cut-in position, leaving him with only the tender brakes to depend on, and they were not sufficient to hold the engine, especially as they were improperly manipulated, according to the statement of Engineman Eggers himself. Engineman Eggers stated that the brakes worked properly when hauling the car of coal from Smith's Ferry to Big Eddy. At Big Eddy a stop of 25 or 30 minutes was made while the locomotive was being coaled. During this period the valve was in the cut-out position.

Before leaving Big Eddy he applied and released the brakes, but did not observe the piston travel on the tender or driving wheel brakes, neither did he do so when leaving Smith's Ferry for Big Eddy. The brakes worked properly after leaving both places, and the gauge indicated a train line air pressure of 90 pounds. He stated positively, however, that when he left Big Eddy all the brakes were cut in. The reverse lever was two notches from the full forward position, which he considered to be the proper position while descending this grade. After leaving Big Eddy he made the first application of the air brakes within a distance of about 200 yards; this reduced the speed of the locomotive. After proceeding about 200 yards further he made a second application of the brakes, which again checked the speed of the locomotive, which at that time was about 10 miles an hour. When about a mile from Big Eddy he made a third application of the brakes and then discovered that the locomotive was beyond his control and running away. He tried to reverse the locomotive but was unable to do so and called the fireman to assist him. With their combined efforts, however, they were unable to reverse the locomotive. Just as the derailment occurred he told the fireman to jump; he did so and was killed, while Engineman Eggers remained in the cab. He stated that at several other times on this trip it had been necessary for the fireman to assist him in reversing the engine. He thought the accident was due to the brakes not being sufficient to hold the engine on such a heavy grade.

Brakeman Coons stated he noted as pilot on locomotive No. 724 when it was hauling the special train from Montour to Belvidere, and had cautioned Engineman Eggers about the steep grades, advising him to be careful and not let his train get the best of him. On previous occasions he had advised other engineman to reverse their engines when going down this grade in order to control the speed.

Assistant Engineer Elliott, who had supervision of the engines in work train service on this division, stated that he did not consider it necessary to furnish a pilot on locomotive No. 724 on its return trip from Belvidere to Smith's Ferry. However, in case a pilot was needed Brakeman Scott, who went back with locomotive No. 724, was familiar with the road and could have acted in that capacity.

Several employees who had operated this locomotive on this division during the month preceding the date of the accident stated that the brakes were in good condition and that no trouble had been experienced in properly controlling the speed.

Conductor Moffatt, who was on locomotive No. 724 at the time it was derailed, stated that the engineman seemed to make all the stops previous to reaching Big Eddy without any difficulty, and be thought the brakes were sufficient to hold the locomotive on the grade on which the accident occurred.

This accident was caused by the failure of Engineman Eggers to place the two-way valve on locomotive No. 724 in the cut-in position before leaving Big Eddy. His failure to do so left him with an inadequate air pressure to work the air brakes, resulting in losing control of his locomotive. Engineman Eggers was negligent in not assuring himself that this two-way valve was in the cut-in position and that the brakes worked properly before starting down the 2.5% grade from Big Eddy.

Engineman Eggers entered the service of the Oregon Short Line Railroad as a fireman on March 7, 1907, and on July 26, 1912, was promoted to engineman. During his service as a fireman he was discharged on one occasion for refusing to go on duty, while on January 20, 1913, he was derated for failure carefully to inspect his engine. At the time of the accident Engineman Eggers had been on duty 13 hours and 10 minutes, after a period off duty of about 36 hours.