



NO. 94-113

TRAIN 238

COLLISION WITH MOTOR VEHICLE

HALCOMBE

30 APRIL 1994

ABSTRACT

As the motorist attempted to cross the railway line alongside the level crossing his vehicle "bottomed" on the tracks. He failed to leave the vehicle before the approaching train collided with it some five minutes later. The motorist was killed in the collision.

TRANSPORT ACCIDENT INVESTIGATION COMMISSION

RAIL ACCIDENT REPORT NO. 94-113

Train Type and Number: Express Freight 238

Locomotive: EF 30007

Date and Time: 30 April 1994, 2253 hours

Location: Stanway St Level Crossing, Halcombe 166.02 km NIMT

Type of Occurrence: Collision with motor vehicle.

Persons on Board: Crew: 1

Injuries: Crew: Nil
Others#: 1 Fatal

Nature of Damage: Substantial to motor vehicle

Information Sources: Transport Accident Investigation Commission field investigation

Investigator in Charge: R Chippindale

#Motor vehicle driver

1. NARRATIVE

- 1.1 Train 238 was a Wellington to Westfield express freight, with a gross weight of 1327 tonnes. There was one crew member on board, a Locomotive Engineer who was sitting on the right hand side of the cab.
- 1.2 On 30 April 1994 at 2253 hours, some 200 m from the level crossing the Locomotive Engineer noticed a car apparently stationary on the crossing. The train was travelling at 80 km/h and the locomotive's headlights were illuminated. When the Locomotive Engineer sighted the car he sounded the train's horn continuously and applied emergency braking. There was insufficient distance for the train to stop and the locomotive collided with the stationary car, knocking it clear of the line but into a deep ditch alongside.
- 1.3 The driver of the car had been at a nearby hotel and left some ten minutes before the train's approach. He was seen to turn right at the level crossing instead of continuing across it to the main road to make the turn. As he crossed the railway line his car bottomed on the rails and became stuck. An observer saw the driver open the car door and assuming the driver was leaving the vehicle went to the hotel for assistance to get the car off the line.
- 1.4 Before the assistance arrived the car was struck by the train. Unbeknown to the onlookers the driver was still in the car.
- 1.5 The driver was thrown clear of the car in the impact but received fatal injuries in the accident.
- 1.6 This was the second time that the driver had turned down the railway line at that point after drinking in the hotel.
- 1.7 The driver's blood alcohol level was in excess of the legal limit for being in charge of a motor vehicle.
- 1.8 The crossing alarms and half arm barriers were serviceable and operated normally.

2. FINDINGS

- 2.1 The train was being operated normally prior to the accident.
- 2.2 The Locomotive Engineer was keeping a good lookout and took the correct action promptly when the vehicle was seen to be stationary on the line ahead
- 2.3 It was impossible for the Locomotive Engineer to stop the train in the space available.
- 2.4 The motorist's failure to vacate the car after it became stranded on the track was probably due to the effects of alcohol.
- 2.5 The barrier arm did not trap the car on the crossing as the car was off the right hand side of the road when it became stranded.

24 August 1994

M F Dunphy
Chief Commissioner