

INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION
WASHINGTON

REPORT NO. 3439
THE CANADIAN NATIONAL RAILWAY COMPANY
IN RE ACCIDENT
AT SWIFT, MINN., ON
NOVEMBER 17, 1951

SUMMARY

Date: November 17, 1951
Railroad: Canadian National
Location: Swift, Minn.
Kind of accident: Head-end collision
Trains involved: Freight : Freight
Train numbers: Extra 3234 West : Fourth 714
Engine numbers: 3234 : 3333
Consists: 42 cars, cabooses : 47 cars, cabooses
Estimated speeds: 30 m. p. h. : Standing
Operation: Timetable and train orders
Track: Single; tangent; 0.11 percent
descending grade westward
Weather: Snow flurries
Time: 1:25 a. m.
Casualties: 1 killed; 1 injured
Cause: Failure to obey meet order

INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION

REPORT NO. 3439

IN THE MATTER OF MAKING ACCIDENT INVESTIGATION REPORTS
UNDER THE ACCIDENT REPORTS ACT OF MAY 6, 1910.

THE CANADIAN NATIONAL RAILWAY COMPANY

January 23, 1952

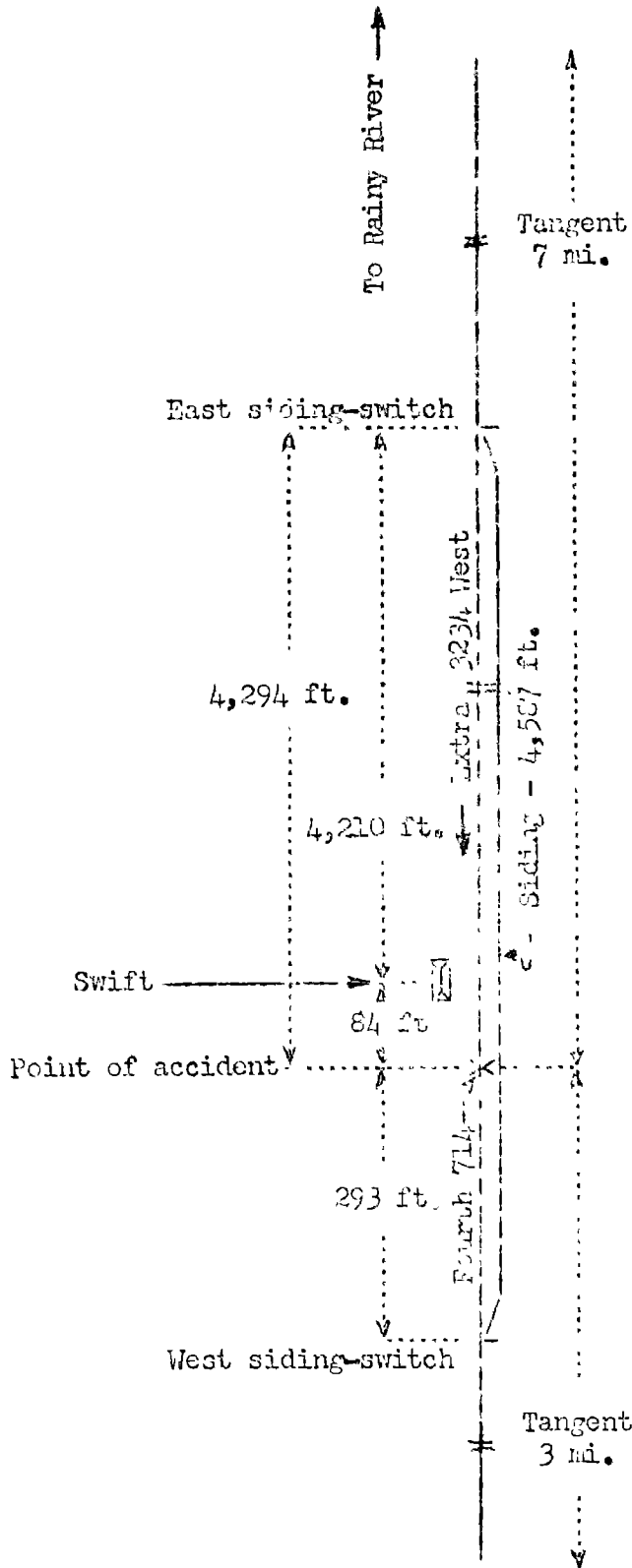
Accident at Swift, Minn., on November 17, 1951, caused by
failure to obey a meet order.

REPORT OF THE COMMISSION¹

PATTERSON, Commissioner:

On November 17, 1951, there was a head-end collision between two freight trains on the Canadian National Railway at Swift, Minn., which resulted in the death of one employee, and the injury of one employee.

¹ Under authority of section 17 (2) of the Interstate Commerce Act the above-entitled proceeding was referred by the Commission to Commissioner Patterson for consideration and disposition.



- | | | |
|---|---------------------|------------------|
| o | Rainy River, | Ontario, Canada |
| | 1.6 mi. | |
| o | Baudette, Minn. | 30.4 mi. |
| X | (Point of accident) | |
| | Swift | 6.0 mi. |
| o | Warroad, Minn. | 19.6 mi. |
| o | Sprague, | Manitoba, Canada |
| | 90.3 mi. | |
| o | Paddington, | Manitoba, Canada |

Report No. 3439
 Canadian National Railway
 Swift, Minn.
 November 17, 1951

Location of Accident and Method of Operation

This accident occurred on that part of the Port Arthur Division extending between Rainy River, Ontario, and Paddington, Manitoba, Canada, 147.9 miles. In the vicinity of the point of accident this is a single-track line, over which trains are operated by timetable and train orders. There is no block system in use. At Swift, Minn., 32 miles west of Rainy River, a siding 4,587 feet in length parallels the main track on the south. The east siding-switch is 4,210 feet east of the station. The accident occurred on the main track at a point 4,294 feet west of the east siding-switch. The main track is tangent throughout a distance of 7 miles east of the point of accident and 3 miles westward. The grade for west-bound trains varies between 0.04 percent and 0.64 percent descending throughout a distance of 3 miles east of the point of accident, and it is 0.11 percent descending at that point.

The switch stand at the east siding-switch is equipped with a standard switch lamp of the oil-burning type. The lamp is located 9.6 feet south of the center-line of the main track and 6.3 feet above the level of the tops of the rails. When the switch is lined for movement on the main track the lamp displays a green light in the direction of approaching trains.

This carrier's operating rules read in part as follows:

73. Extra trains are inferior to regular trains.

89. (SINGLE TRACK) At meeting points the inferior train must take the siding * * *

The inferior train must pull into the siding when practicable. * * *

90. * * *

Unless otherwise provided, on freight * * * trains in motion between stations, conductors and enginemen will see that trainmen are at the front and rear of trains (in cupola of caboose where provided) in position to observe the safe operation of trains * * *

* * *

210e. Conductors and enginemen must require members of their crew to read aloud and know the contents of all train orders as soon as practicable after they have been received. Members of the crew are required, if necessary, to remind conductors and enginemen of their contents.

FORMS OF TRAIN ORDERS

Form A--(SINGLE TRACK)

FIXING MEETING POINTS FOR OPPOSING TRAINS.

(1) * * *

No 788 Eng 405
meet Extra 701 West
at B.

* * *

Trains receiving these orders will run with respect to each other to the designated points and there meet in the manner prescribed by the rules.

The maximum authorized speed for the trains involved was 35 miles per hour.

Description of Accident

Extra 3234 West, a west-bound freight train, consisted of engine 3234, 42 cars and a caboose. At Rainy River the crew received copies of train order No. 319 reading in part as follows:

Eng 3234 run Extra
Rainy River to Paddington
meet Fourth 714 Eng 3333 at Swift
* * *

This train departed from Rainy River at 11:35 p. m., November 16, departed from Baudette, Minn., 30.4 miles east of Swift and the last open office, at 12:20 a. m., November 17, passed the east siding-switch at Swift, where it was required to enter the siding to meet Fourth 714, and while moving at a speed of about 30 miles per hour it collided with Fourth 714 at a point 4,294 feet west of the east siding-switch.

Fourth 714, an east-bound fourth-class freight train, consisted of engine 3333, 47 cars and a caboose. At Sprague, Manitoba, 25.6 miles west of Swift, the crew received copies of train order No. 319. This train departed from Sprague at 11:30 p. m., November 16, 8 hours 45 minutes late, departed from Warroad, Minn., 6 miles west of Swift and the last open office, at 12:50 a. m., November 17, 8 hours 50 minutes late, and stopped on the main track at 1:20 a. m., with the engine standing 4,294 feet west of the east siding-switch at Swift. About 5 minutes later it was struck by Extra 3234 West.

The engine, the tender, the first eight cars, and the front truck of the ninth car of Extra 3234 West were derailed. The engine stopped upright and in line with the track. The cab was demolished, and pipes and fixtures in the cab were sheared off. The backhead of the boiler was punctured, the main frame was broken in several places, and the engine was otherwise badly damaged. The body of the tender was demolished. The derailed cars stopped in various positions on or near the track. The first car was demolished, the second to the seventh cars, inclusive, were considerably damaged, and the eighth car was slightly damaged. The engine of Fourth 714 was moved westward 35 feet. The engine, the tender, the first two cars, and the front truck of the third car were derailed. The engine stopped upright and in line with the track. The smoke box and both cylinders were demolished, the main frame was broken on the left side behind the cylinders, and the boiler was shifted on the frame. The tender was punctured. The first car was overturned to the north and was considerably damaged. The second car was demolished. The third car was slightly damaged.

The engineer of Extra 3234 West was killed. The fireman of Extra 3234 West was injured.

A light snow was falling at the time of the accident, which occurred at 1:25 a. m.

Discussion

The crews of both trains held copies of train order No. 319, which established Swift as the meeting point between Extra 3234 West and Fourth 714. Under the rules Extra 3234 West, the inferior train, was required to enter the siding at the east siding-switch. Surviving members of the crews of both trains so understood.

The conductor of Extra 3234 West received copies of train order No. 319 at Rainy River. He delivered a copy of the order to the engineer, and the engineer, the fireman, and the front brakeman each read the order aloud and understood that their train was to meet Fourth 714 at Swift. The brakes of the train were tested at Rainy River. The conductor said the automatic brake was not used between Rainy River and the point where the accident occurred. Between Rainy River and Baudette the conductor and the front brakeman rode on the engine, and the flagman rode in the caboose. The train entered the siding at Baudette to meet an east-bound passenger train. After the passenger train departed, the conductor instructed the front brakeman to proceed to the rear of the train and inform the flagman that it would be necessary to move the train eastward a short distance so that the front end could be inspected by customs officers. After the inspection was completed the train departed westward. The conductor boarded the engine as the train moved westward through the siding. He informed the engineer that he intended to remain on the engine so as to be in a position to operate the west siding-switch at Baudette and the east siding-switch at Swift. The engineer volunteered to operate the switch at Swift and suggested that the conductor ride in the caboose, and the conductor, after closing the west siding-switch at Baudette, boarded the caboose at that point. When the conductor entered the caboose he showed train order No. 319 to the flagman, who read and understood it. As this train was approaching the point where the accident occurred the enginemen were in the cab of the engine, and the members of the train crew were in the caboose. The conductor and the front brakeman were in the cupola. The fireman, who was making his first westward trip over this portion of the railroad, said that the engineer was in his usual position and appeared to be maintaining a lookout ahead. After the train passed the last siding east of Swift the fireman was tending the fire, and he was not aware that the train had passed the east siding-switch until he looked ahead and saw the opposing train immediately before the collision occurred. He said that the engineer made an application of the brakes at the same time that he looked ahead, but the collision occurred before the engineer could close the throttle. The engineer, who died as a result of injuries incurred in the accident, did not make a statement regarding the cause of the accident. The employees in the caboose said that blowing snow restricted their range of vision and that the caboose passed the east siding-switch at Swift before they realized that the train was closely approaching that station. When the caboose passed the switch, the conductor opened the conductor's valve. There had been no application of the brakes up to this time. These

employees were unable to estimate the speed of the train at the time the brakes were applied, but they thought that the speed had been slightly reduced when the collision occurred. An average speed of 28.06 miles per hour was maintained between Baudette and the point where the accident occurred.

When Fourth 714 stopped at Swift the enginemen and the front brakeman were on the engine and the conductor and the flagman were in the caboose. The train was stopped near the west siding-switch because it could be started on the ascending grade more easily from that location than from the east siding-switch. The employees on the engine said that a light snow was falling, but they could see the switch lamp of the east siding-switch. When the train stopped they observed the headlight of Extra 3234 West at a point east of the east siding-switch. A short time later they became aware that Extra 3234 West had passed the east siding-switch, and they descended to the ground immediately before the collision occurred. They said that the headlight of each train was lighted brightly until the collision occurred.

Cause

It is found that this accident was caused by failure to obey a meet order.

Dated at Washington, D. C., this twenty-third day of January, 1952.

By the Commission, Commissioner Patterson.

(SEAL)

W. P. BARTEL,
Secretary.