

INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION  
WASHINGTON

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REPORT NO. 3390  
CHICAGO, MILWAUKEE, ST. PAUL AND PACIFIC  
RAILROAD COMPANY

IN RE ACCIDENT  
AT MITCHELL, S. DAK., ON  
MARCH 6, 1951

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SUMMARY

Date: March 6, 1951

Railroad: Chicago, Milwaukee, St. Paul  
and Pacific

Location: Mitchell, S. Dak.

Kind of accident: Rear-end collision

Trains involved: Maintenance-of-way : Freight  
service train

Train numbers: Work Extra 977 : 65

Engine numbers: Diesel-electric : Diesel-electric  
unit 977 unit 979

Consists: 2 cars, caboose : 10 cars, caboose

Estimated speeds: 2 m. p. h. : 31 m. p. h.

Operation: Timetable and train orders;  
yard limits

Track: Single; 2° curve; 0.85 percent  
ascending grade westward

Weather: Clear

Time: 8:20 a. m.

Casualties: 1 killed

Cause: Failure properly to control speed  
of train moving within yard limits

INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION

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REPORT NO. 3390

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

CHICAGO, MILWAUKEE, ST. PAUL AND PACIFIC RAILROAD COMPANY

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May 3, 1951

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Accident at Mitchell, S. Dak., on March 6, 1951, caused by  
failure properly to control the speed of a train  
moving within yard limits.

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REPORT OF THE COMMISSION<sup>1</sup>

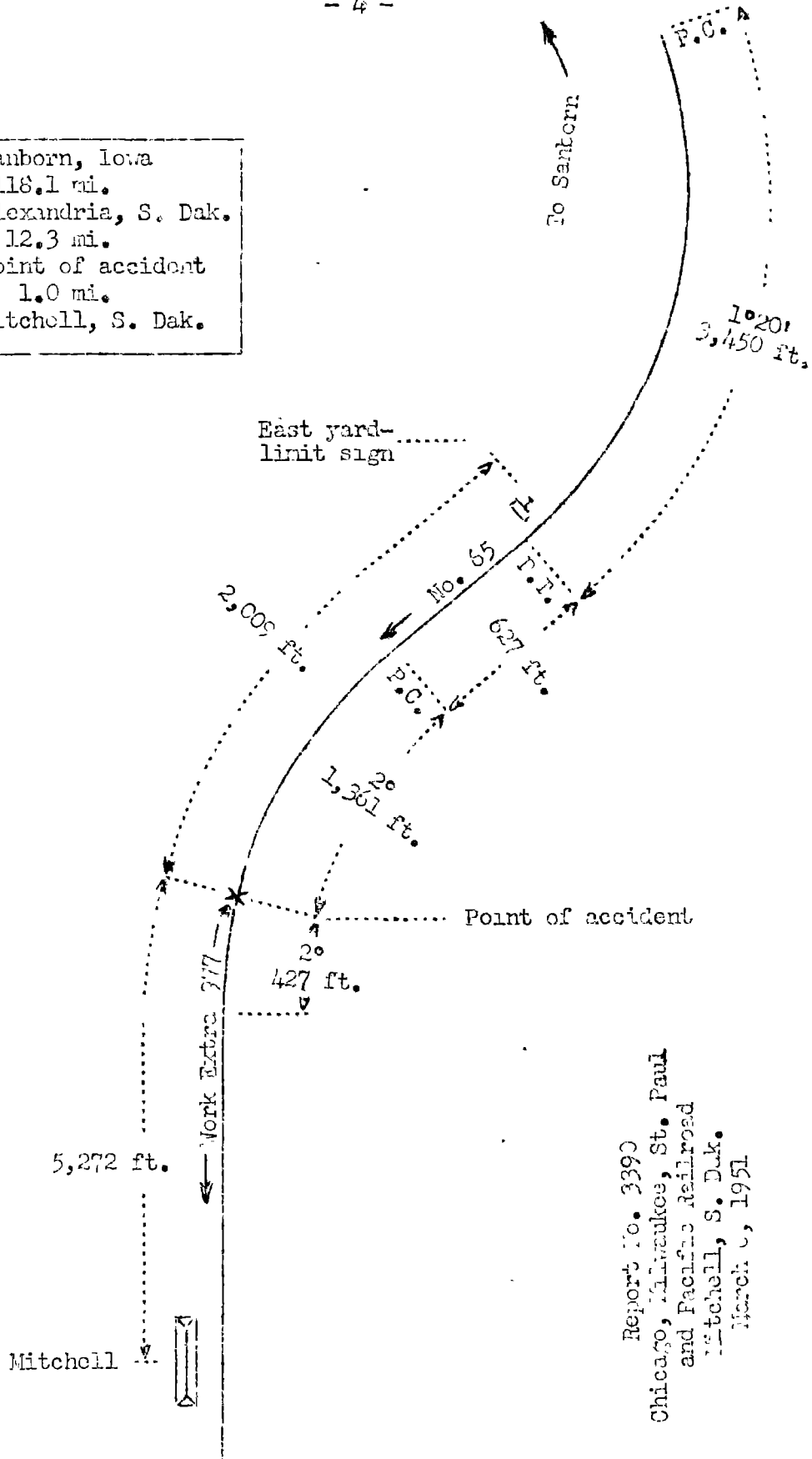
PATTERSON, Commissioner:

On March 6, 1951, there was a rear-end collision  
between a maintenance-of-way service train and a freight  
train on the Chicago, Milwaukee, St. Paul and Pacific Railroad  
at Mitchell, S. Dak., which resulted in the death of one  
employee.

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

- o Sanborn, Iowa
- | 118.1 mi.
- o Alexandria, S. Dak.
- | 12.3 mi.
- X Point of accident
- | 1.0 mi.
- o Mitchell, S. Dak.



Report No. 3390  
 Chicago, Milwaukee, St. Paul  
 and Pacific Railroad  
 Mitchell, S. Dak.  
 March 6, 1951

Location of Accident and Method of Operation

This accident occurred on that part of the Iowa and Dakota Division extending between Sarborn, Iowa, and Mitchell, S. Dak., 131.4 miles, a single-track line, over which trains are operated by timetable and train orders. There is no block system in use. The accident occurred on the main track, within yard limits, at Mitchell at a point 2,009 feet west of the east yard-limit sign and 5,272 feet east of the station. From the east there are, in succession, a 1°20' curve to the right 3,450 feet in length, a tangent 627 feet and a 2° curve to the left 1,361 feet to the point of accident and 427 feet westward. At the point of accident the grade is 0.85 percent ascending westward.

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

DEFINITIONS

Restricted Speed.--Proceed prepared to stop short of train, obstruction, or anything that may require the speed of a train to be reduced.

93. \* \* \*

Within yard limits the main track may be used without protecting against second and inferior class, extra trains and engines.

Within yard limits second and inferior class, extra trains and engines must move at restricted speed.

\* \* \*

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

Description of Accident

Work Extra 977 consisted of Diesel-electric unit 977, headed westward, two cars and a caboose, in the order named. This train departed eastward from the station at Mitchell about 8 a. m. and stopped on the main track within yard limits about 8:10 a. m., with the rear end at a point 1,990 feet west of the east yard-limit sign. About 10 minutes later, when it had just started to move westward, the rear end was struck by No. 65.

No. 65, a west-bound second-class freight train, consisted of Diesel-electric unit 979, 10 cars and a caboose. This train departed from Alexandria, the last open office, 12.3 miles east of the point of accident, at 7:59 a. m., 3 hours 34 minutes late, passed the east yard-limit sign at Mitchell, and while it was moving at a speed of 31 miles per hour it struck the rear end of Work Extra 977.

The caboose of Work Extra 977 was demolished and the rear car was derailed and overturned. The rear car was considerably damaged. The first car and the Diesel-electric unit of Work Extra 977 were moved westward about 360 feet. No. 65 stopped with the front end of the Diesel-electric unit 432 feet west of the point of accident. The front end of the Diesel-electric unit was badly damaged. No equipment of No. 65 was derailed.

The conductor of Work Extra 977 was killed.

The weather was clear at the time of the accident, which occurred about 8:20 a. m.

#### Discussion

The crew of Work Extra 977 held copies of a train order authorizing its movement within working limits that extended westward from Mitchell. The crew of this train had received instructions to unload bridge material at a location within yard limits at a point approximately 1 mile east of the station at Mitchell. The conductor and the engineer had discussed the movements that would be required to perform the assigned work before the train departed eastward from the station at Mitchell about 8 a. m. There was no discussion among the members of the crew about No. 65, which was due to arrive at Mitchell at 5 a. m. When the train stopped at the point where the bridge material was to be unloaded the enginemen were in the control compartment of the Diesel-electric unit. The conductor was in the caboose, and the flagman and the front brakeman were on the ground on the south side of the track and in the vicinity of the caboose. The flagman said that several minutes after the train stopped he heard the sound of the pneumatic horn of a Diesel-electric unit. He thought it was from a yard engine and entered the caboose to obtain a fusee. When he observed a train approaching from the east he called a warning to the front brakeman and to the conductor, who was at the desk in the caboose. He said that the train was closely approaching when he alighted from the south side of the caboose and that he did not have time to give stop signals before the collision occurred.

The front brakeman said that when he heard the sound of the pneumatic horn he immediately started toward the rear of the train. He said he first observed No. 65 at a distance of about 900 feet, and gave stop signals as he ran toward it. He had reached a point about 150 feet to the rear of the train when No. 65 passed him. From the fireman's side of the cab, the engineer observed No. 65 approaching. He immediately returned to the right side of the control compartment, released the brakes and started the Diesel-electric unit in forward motion. The train had moved westward only a short distance when the collision occurred.

As No. 65 was approaching the point where the accident occurred the speed was 32 miles per hour. The enginemen were maintaining a lookout ahead from their respective positions in the control compartment at the rear of the Diesel-electric unit. The front brakeman was seated near the center of the control compartment and the conductor and the flagman were in the caboose. The brakes of this train had been tested and had functioned properly when used en route. The engineer said that after the Diesel-electric unit passed the east yard-limit sign the speed was reduced slightly by manipulating the throttle. From the engineer's side of the control compartment the view of the point where the accident occurred was materially restricted by track curvature and the hood structure of the Diesel-electric unit. The engineer said he first observed the caboose of Work Extra 977 at a distance of about 150 feet. He immediately placed the brake valve in emergency position but the collision occurred before the speed of the train had been materially reduced. The engineer said that he thought his train could have been stopped short of the caboose if he had been warned when it first became visible. The fireman was regularly employed as a brakeman. Because of a shortage of firemen he accepted an assignment to act as fireman although his experience in such capacity was limited to several occasions when he had assisted the firemen of trains to which he had been assigned as a brakeman. He said that soon after the Diesel-electric unit passed the east yard-limit sign he looked at his watch and told the engineer that it was 8:17 a. m. The fireman said that when he again looked forward he observed the caboose of Work Extra 977. Before he could call a warning the engineer made an emergency application of the brakes. He said that he did not observe anyone giving stop signals in the vicinity of the rear end of the standing train. The front brakeman said that from his seat in the center of the control compartment of the Diesel-electric unit he was unable to see the track ahead. He said that when the train was approaching the east yard-limit sign he made preparations to alight from

the train at Mitchell. He did not see the east yard-limit sign but he thought the speed of the train was being properly controlled before the accident occurred.

This accident occurred within yard limits and, under the rules of this carrier, second and inferior class, extra trains and engines are required to be so operated that they can be stopped short of a train or an obstruction.

Cause

It is found that this accident was caused by failure properly to control the speed of a train moving within yard limits.

Dated at Washington, D. C., this third day of May, 1951.

By the Commission, Commissioner Patterson.

(SEAL)

W. P. BARTEL,

Secretary.