

INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION

WASHINGTON

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INVESTIGATION NO. 2692

THE ERIE RAILROAD COMPANY

REPORT IN RE ACCIDENT

AT NILES, OHIO, ON

FEBRUARY 22, 1943

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SUMMARY

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Railroad. Erie  
Date: February 28, 1943  
Location: Niles, Ohio  
Kind of accident: Collision and derailment  
Equipment involved: Freight train : Wreckage of automobile  
Train number: Extra 4217 West :  
Engine number: 4217 :  
Consist: 40 cars, caboose :  
Speed: 8 m. p. h. : Standing  
Operation: Automatic block-signal system  
Track: Double; tangent; 0.59 percent ascending grade eastward  
Highway: Tangent; crosses tracks at angle of 54°30'; grade undulating  
Weather: Clear  
Time: 2:24 a. m.  
Casualties: 2 killed; 3 injured  
Cause: Accident caused by a freight train striking the wreckage of an automobile which stalled on a grade crossing and was struck by a passenger train on an adjacent track

INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION

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INVESTIGATION NO. 2682

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

THE ERIE RAILROAD COMPANY

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April 17, 1943

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Accident at Niles, Ohio, on February 28, 1943, caused by a freight train striking the wreckage of an automobile which stalled on a grade crossing and was struck by a passenger train on an adjacent track.

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

PATTERSON, Commissioner:

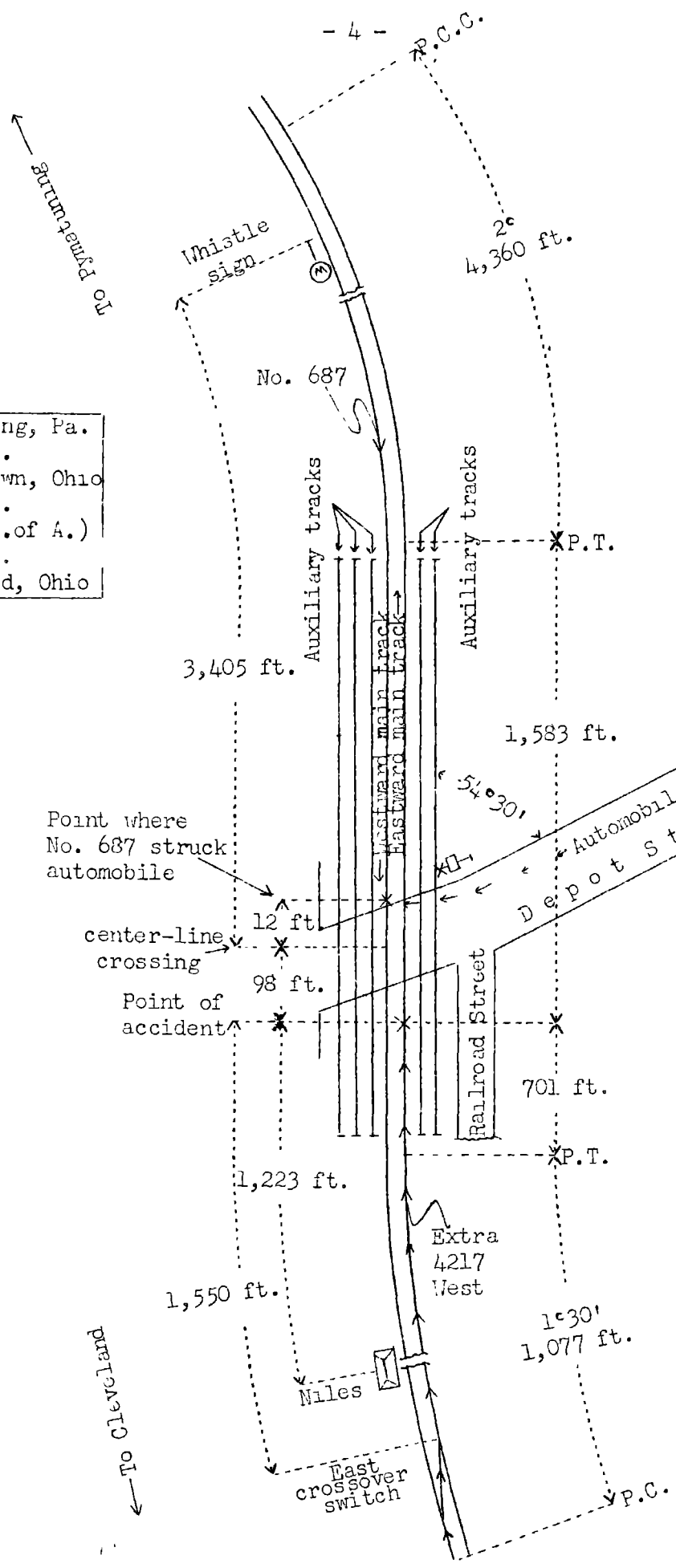
On February 28, 1943, there was a derailment of a freight train after it collided with the wreckage of an automobile which had been struck by a passenger train at Niles, Ohio. The accident resulted in the death of one automobile passenger and one employee, and the injury of the automobile driver and two employees.

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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.

- Pymatuning, Pa. 22.1 mi.
- Youngstown, Ohio 8.8 mi.
- X Niles (P. of A.) 57.6 mi.
- Cleveland, Ohio



Inv. No. 2682  
 Erie Railroad  
 Niles, Ohio  
 February 28, 1914

Location of Accident and Method of Operation

This accident occurred on that part of the Mahoning Division designated as the First Sub-division and extending between Pymatuning, Pa., and Cleveland, Ohio, 88.5 miles. In the vicinity of the point of accident this is a double-track line over which trains are operated with the current of traffic by an automatic block-signal system. Signal indications supersede time-table superiority. The accident occurred on the eastward main track at a point 1,223 feet east of the station at Niles and 98 feet west of the point where the railroad is crossed at grade by Depot Street. At the grade crossing the main tracks are paralleled on the north by three auxiliary tracks and on the south by two auxiliary tracks. A trailing-point crossover connects the eastward and the westward main tracks. The east switch of this crossover is located 1,648 feet west of the crossing. Approaching from the east on the railroad there is a compound curve to the right 4,360 feet in length, the curvature of which varies between  $1^{\circ}45'$  and  $2^{\circ}$ , which is followed by a tangent 1,583 feet to the point of accident. Approaching from the west on the railroad there is a  $1^{\circ}30'$  curve to the right 1,077 feet in length, which is followed by a tangent 701 feet to the point of accident. The grade for east-bound trains is 0.59 percent ascending.

Railroad Street parallels the railroad on the south. Approaching the crossing from the south on Depot Street there is a tangent a considerable distance to the intersection with Railroad Street, and then a slight curve to the right to the crossing. Depot Street crosses the tracks at an angle of  $54^{\circ}30'$ . The grade for north-bound vehicles is 2.42 percent ascending to the crossing. Because of different levels of the tracks, the surface of the crossing is uneven. Depot Street is 27 feet wide and is paved with brick. The crossing is 26 feet wide and is paved with macadam.

A standard cross-buck highway crossing sign is located to the right of the direction of north-bound traffic on Depot Street and in the southeast angle of the crossing at a point 8.9 feet south of the nearest rail. This sign bears the words "RAILROAD CROSSING" in black letters on a white background. Beneath the cross-buck a rectangular sign bears the words "WATCHMAN ON DUTY 6 A. M. TO 11:30 P. M." A crossing whistle sign for west-bound trains is located 3,405 feet east of the crossing.

Operating rules read in part as follows:

14. ENGINE WHISTLE SIGNALS.

Note.--The signals prescribed are illustrated by "o" for short sounds; "—" for longer sounds. \* \* \*

SOUND

INDICATION

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(1) — — o o

Approaching public crossings at grade. To be prolonged or repeated until crossing is reached.

102. \* \* \*

When a train is disabled or stopped suddenly by an emergency application of the air brakes or other causes, adjacent tracks \* \* \* that are liable to be obstructed must at once be protected until it is ascertained they are safe and clear for the movement of trains.

103. When cars are pushed by an engine, \* \* \*, a trainman must take a conspicuous position on the leading car. \* \* \*

The maximum authorized speed for passenger trains is 60 miles per hour. Trains using crossovers are restricted to 10 miles per hour.

Description of Accident

The automobile involved was a 1939 Ford coupe bearing Ohio license plates S-697-H, and was being driven by a man who held operator's license R-5504029. The automobile, moving northward on Depot Street, entered upon the crossing, passed over two auxiliary tracks and the eastward main track and was passing over the westward main track when the right front wheel slipped off the east edge of the crossing and both front wheels caught against the north rail of the westward main track, and the automobile stalled. About 8 minutes later the automobile was struck by No. 687.

No. 687, a west-bound first-class passenger train, consisted of engine 2929, one mail car, one express car, one mail car, one baggage car, one coach and one Pullman sleeping car, in the order named. All cars were of steel construction. After a terminal air-brake test was made this train departed from Youngstown, 8.8 miles east of Niles, at 2:09 a. m., according to the dispatcher's record of movement of trains, 6 minutes late, and while moving at an estimated speed of 5 to 10 miles per hour it collided with the stalled automobile. The wreckage of the automobile was moved westward by engine 2929 a distance of 110 feet, at which point the train stopped about 2:21 a. m., with the wreckage fouling the eastward main track.

Extra 4217 West, a west-bound freight train, consisted of engine 4217, 14 loaded and 26 empty cars and a caboose. This train stopped on the westward main track at Niles about 2:11 a. m. About 13 minutes later, while it was moving in backward motion and proceeding eastward through the crossover to the eastward main track at an estimated speed of 8 miles per hour, the caboose struck the wreckage of the automobile at a point 1,550 feet east of the east crossover switch.

The automobile was demolished. The east truck of the caboose was derailed and the caboose stopped, slightly damaged, about 150 feet east of the point of collision.

It was clear at the time of the accident, which occurred about 2:24 a. m.

The employee killed was the fireman of No. 687 and the employees injured were the engineer of No. 687 and the flagman of Extra 4217 West.

#### Discussion

The stalled automobile had been obstructing the westward main track at Depot Street crossing about 8 minutes prior to the approach of No. 687, a west-bound passenger train. During this period an attempt was made by the occupants of the automobile to move it from the crossing, but no effort was made to provide protection for an approaching train. To protect his train the flagman of Extra 4217, a west-bound freight train which was moving through the crossover from the westward to the eastward main track, flagged No. 687 at a point about 2,000 feet east of the crossing. The flagman of Extra 4217 and the engineer of No. 687 said they did not see the stalled automobile prior to the collision. The engineer said the fireman, who was killed in the subsequent accident, informed him after their train had been stopped in response to the flagman's signals that it had struck the automobile. No. 687 stopped with the front end of the engine and the wreckage of the automobile standing 110 feet west of the point of collision about 2:21 a. m. About 3 minutes later the wreckage of the automobile was struck by the caboose of Extra 4217. The engineer of No. 687 and the flagman of Extra 4217 said no action was taken to provide flag protection against approaching trains on the eastward main track after No. 687 struck the automobile. The engineer of No. 687 said he saw the lighted markers on the caboose of Extra 4217, but he was not aware that the train was moving eastward until it struck the wreckage. The enginemen of Extra 4217 were on their engine, and the conductor and the front brakeman were in the vicinity of the east crossover switch. These employees were not aware of anything being wrong until after their train had struck the wreckage. They understood that, under the rules, a member of the crew is required to be on the front car when cars are pushed by an engine, but no member of the crew had been instructed to remain on the caboose during the time their

train was moving through the crossover and on the eastward main track. If a member of the crew of Extra 4217 had been on the caboose and had taken action to stop the train before it struck the wreckage of the automobile, this accident could have been averted.

Cause

It is found that this accident was caused by a freight train striking the wreckage of an automobile which stalled on a grade crossing and was struck by a passenger train on an adjacent track.

Dated at Washington, D. C., this seventeenth day of April, 1943.

By the Commission, Commissioner Patterson.

(SEAL)

W. P. BARTEL,  
Secretary