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INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION,
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REPORT NO. 3011
ERIE RAILROAD COMPANY
IN AN ACCIDENT
AT WELLSVILLE, IND., ON
SEPTEMBER 5, 1965

SUMMARY

Date: September 6, 1955

Railroad: Erie

Location: Decatur, Ind.

Kind of accident: Rear-end collision

Equipment involved: Track motor-car : Freight train
879

Train number: : Extra 803 West

Locomotive number: : Diesel-electric
units 803A,
803B, and
803D

Consist: : 162 cars, caboose

Estimated speeds: 10 m. p. h. : 15 m. p. h.

Operation: Signal indications

Tracks: Double; tangent; 0.20 percent
ascending grade westward

Weather: Clear

Time: 8:48 a. m.

Casualties: 1 killed; 2 injured

Cause: Mistaking a train that had passed
prior to the issuance of a line-up
for a train that was included in
the line-up

INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION

REPORT NO. 3681

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

ERIE RAILROAD COMPANY

October 7, 1955

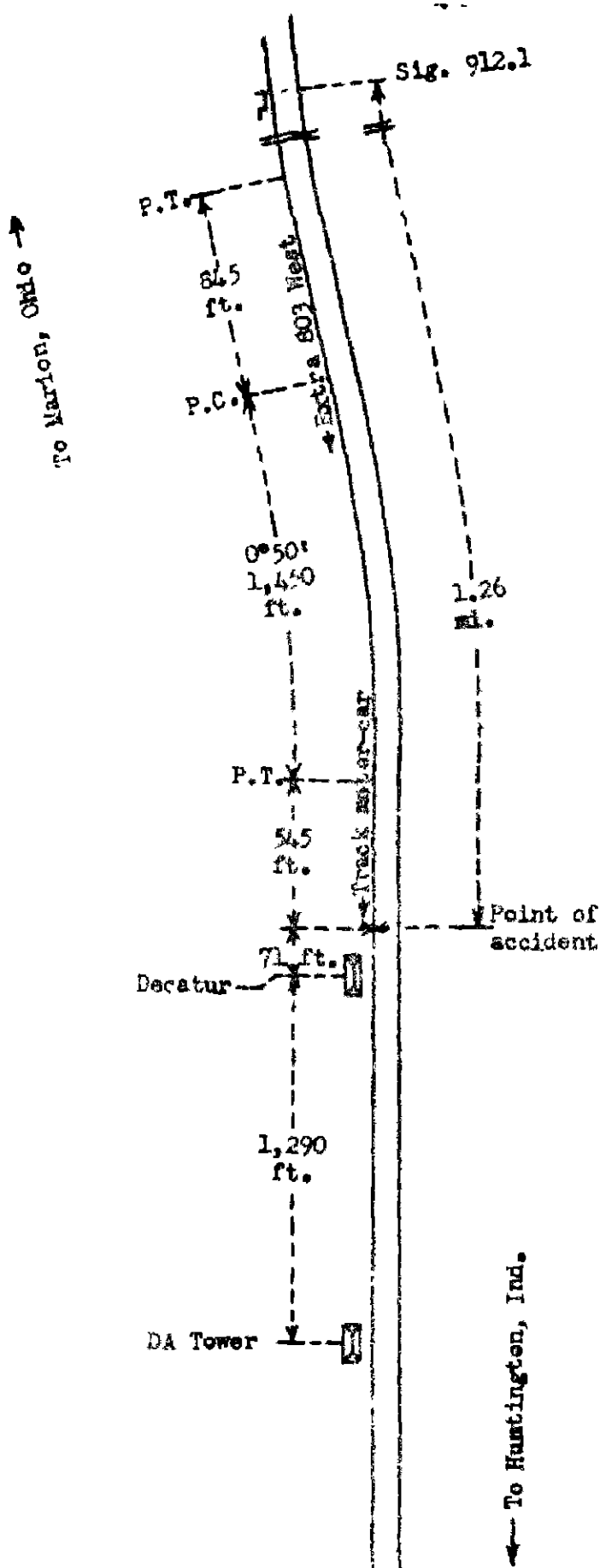
Accident at Decatur, Ind., on September 6, 1955, caused
by mistaking a train that had passed prior to the
issuance of a line-up for a train that was included
in the line-up.

REPORT OF THE COMMISSION¹

CLARKE, Commissioner:

On September 6, 1955, there was a rear-end collision
between a track motor-car and a freight train on the Erie
Railroad at Decatur, Ind., which resulted in the death of
one signal department employee, and the injury of one signal
department employee and one train-service employee.

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



•	Marion, Ohio	64.8 mi.
•	Spencerville	14.5 mi.
•	Ohio City, Ohio	16.7 mi.
•	Decatur, Ind.	0.3 mi.
•	DA Tower	30.3 mi.
•	Huntington, Ind.	

Report No. 3651
 Erie Railroad
 Decatur, Ind.
 September 6, 1955

Location of Accident and Method of Operation

This accident occurred on that part of the Marion Division extending between Marion, Ohio, and Huntington, Ind., 126.6 miles. In the vicinity of the point of accident this is a double-track line, over which trains moving with the current of traffic are operated by signal indications. The accident occurred on the westward main track at a point 96.0 miles west of Marion and 71 feet east of the station at Decatur, Ind. From the east there are, in succession, a tangent 845 feet in length, a 0°50' curve to the right 1,450 feet, and a tangent 545 feet to the point of accident and a considerable distance westward. The grade is 0.20 percent ascending westward at the point of accident.

Automatic signal 912-1, governing west-bound movements on the westward main track, is located 1.26 miles east of the point of accident.

This carrier's rules for the operation of track motor-cars read in part as follows:

770. * * *

* * *

(h) When employees operating cars have means of communication with dispatcher or operator, they must not proceed until the dispatcher has been informed of their movement and has furnished them in writing on the prescribed form, a line-up of trains and other equipment operating in the section in which the movement is to be made, but this will not relieve those in charge of cars from full responsibility of protecting them. Cars must be kept clear of main tracks for all scheduled trains, and no movement must be made on the time of such trains unless full flag protection is afforded or written information is obtained from the dispatcher or operator as to the location of trains, and there is ample time to make the movement to the next open telegraph office or point of clearing main track. No open telegraph office, or telephone booth in lieu thereof, will be passed without stopping and checking the line-up and making a notation thereon of the time and location where check was made. When impracticable to communicate with the dispatcher or operator to obtain information with regard to the movement of trains, unless the track is seen or known to be clear, extreme precaution must be observed and full flag protection afforded.

* * *

The maximum authorized speeds are 20 miles per hour for track motor-cars and 50 miles per hour for freight trains.

Description of Accident.

About 8:40 a. m. track motor-car 879, occupied by a signal maintainer, a signal maintainer helper, and a welder foreman, departed east-bound on the westward main track from DA Tower, an interlocking station located 1,292 feet west of the station at Decatur. The track motor-car was in backward motion. The car was stopped and the occupants alighted at a point 748 feet east of the station. Several minutes later the signal maintainer and the helper boarded the car. The car was started westward, and while it was moving at a speed of about 10 miles per hour it was struck by Extra 803 West. The accident occurred 71 feet east of the station at Decatur.

Extra 803 West, a west-bound freight train, consisted of Diesel-electric units 803A, 803B, and 803D, coupled in multiple-unit control, 162 cars, and a caboose. This train passed Ohio City, Ohio, 16.7 miles east of Decatur and the last open office, at 8:23 a. m., passed signal 912-1, which indicated Proceed, and while moving at a speed of about 15 miles per hour it struck track motor-car 879.

The track motor-car was not derailed. It was somewhat damaged. Extra 803 West stopped with the front end of the locomotive 315 west of the point of accident. The locomotive was not damaged.

The signal maintainer helper who was on the track motor-car was killed. The signal maintainer and the conductor of Extra 803 West were injured.

The weather was clear at the time of the accident, which occurred at 8:48 a. m.

Track motor-car 879 is powered by a 2-cylinder 10.1-horsepower engine and is equipped with a clutch and transmission. It is provided with an enclosed body with safety glass windshield and side and rear windows. The body is 62-1/4 inches in width and 52-1/4 inches in length, and the top is 70 inches above the level of the tops of the rails. The car weighs approximately 560 pounds and has seating capacity for four persons. It is insulated to prevent the shunting of track circuits.

During the 30-day period preceding the day of the accident the average daily movement in the vicinity of the point of accident was 18.3 trains.

Discussion

On the day of the accident the signal maintainer and the helper reported for duty at 8 a. m. and worked in the vicinity of DA Tower for some time. They intended to proceed to a point west of DA Tower after this work was completed. About 8.15 a. m. the maintainer entered the interlocking station and obtained a line-up of train movements. This line-up, which was written on a prescribed form, read as follows:

EASTBOUND TRAINS

34 -- 857 -- Called 8 a. m.

WESTBOUND TRAINS

Extra 803 -- Spencerville
7:55 a. m.

35 -- 858 -- Called 9 a. m.

Spencerville is 31.2 miles east of Decatur. The line-up bore a notation that it had been issued at 8 a. m. and expired at 9:30 a. m. A west-bound freight train had passed DA Tower at 7:28 a. m. The maintainer had seen this train, and he said that when he read the line-up he gained the impression that this train was the train shown on the line-up as having passed Spencerville at 7.55 a. m. He left the interlocking station immediately after he obtained the line-up. He did not mention

train movements to the operator. He showed the line-up to the helper, but the helper did not mention Extra 803 West. After leaving the interlocking station the maintainer met the welder foreman. The foreman told the maintainer that he was interested in facilities for parking a trailer near the tracks, and the maintainer offered to show him a place at which the trailer could be parked. The maintainer and the helper then placed the track motor-car on the westward main track at a point a short distance east of the interlocking station, and these employees and the welder foreman proceeded to a point 748 feet east of the station. After they reached this point the maintainer and the welder foreman walked northward a short distance to inspect the trailer site. The helper remained with the track motor-car and the engine of the car was left running. Several minutes later the helper observed that the automatic gates at a rail-highway grade crossing a short distance east of the car had been actuated by a train, and he called that a west-bound train was approaching. The welder foreman then heard the sound of the pneumatic horn and saw the approaching train. He thought that at this time the locomotive was about 800 feet east of the track motor-car. He ran toward the train and gave stop signals. The maintainer returned to the track motor-car, and he and the helper boarded the car and started it westward in an attempt to stay ahead of the train. The maintainer said that as the car was closely approaching the station he became aware that it would be overtaken by the train. He thought that at this time the speed of the car was 10 or 15 miles per hour. The maintainer and the helper both jumped from the car immediately before the collision occurred.

As Extra 803 West was approaching the point where the accident occurred the speed was about 45 miles per hour. The fireman was operating the locomotive under the supervision of the engineer. The enginemen and the front brakeman were maintaining a lookout ahead from the control compartment at the front of the locomotive, the swing brakeman was in the control compartment at the rear of the locomotive, and the conductor and the flagman were in the caboose. The headlight was lighted.

The brakes of the train had been tested and had functioned properly when used en route. As the train was moving on the curve immediately east of the point of accident the enginemen's view of the track ahead was somewhat obstructed by a pole line on the north side of the track. The engineer said that as the locomotive was moving on this curve he saw the top of the track motor-car, but because of track curvature he could not determine which track the car was on, this time the grade-crossing whistle signal was being sounded and the locomotive bell was ringing. When the locomotive reached a point about 800 feet east of the track motor-car the enginemen saw that the car was occupying the westward main track and that a man near the car was giving stop signals. The fireman immediately made an emergency application of the brakes, and he thought that the speed had been reduced to 10 or 15 miles per hour when the collision occurred. The conductor was injured as a result of slack action when the brakes were applied.

The train dispatchers on this line are instructed to issue line-ups for the use of track motor-car operators at 6 a. m., 8 a. m., 9:30 a. m., 11:30 a. m., and 1:30 p. m., daily, and the operators of track motor-cars are instructed that a line-up may not be used for more than 2 hours after it has been issued. In the instant case the line-up which was received by the signal maintainer was issued by the train dispatcher at 8 a. m. At this time the west-bound train which preceded Extra 603 West, and which was seen by the signal maintainer, had already passed DA Tower. For this reason it was not included in the line-up transmitted to the operator at that point.

During the past 10 years the Commission has investigated 62 collisions, including the present case, in which track motor cars were involved. These accidents resulted in the death of 97 persons and the injury of 180 persons.

Cause

This accident was caused by mistaking a train that had passed prior to the issuance of a line-up for a train that was included in the line-up.

Dated at Washington, D. C., this seventh day of October, 1955.

By the Commission, Commissioner Clarke.

(SEAL)

HAROLD D. McCOY,
Secretary.