INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION

WASHINGTON

INVESTIGATION NO. 2527

THE LOUISVILLE & NASHVILLE RAILROAD COMPANY

REPORT IN RE ACCIDENT

NEAR HAROLD, FLA., ON

SEPTEMBER 20, 1941

SUMMARY

Railroad:	Louisville & Nashville	
Date:	September 20, 1941	
Location:	Harold, Fla.	
Kind of accident:	Head-end collision	
Trains involved:	Freight	: Deadhead passenger equipment
Train numbers:	Second 171	: First 4
Engine numbers:	297	: 296
Consist:	19 cars, caboose	: 2 cars
Estimated speed:	Practically stopped	: 33 m. p. h.
Operation:	Timetable and train orders	
Track:	Single; 0°30' curve; 0.23 percent ascending grade southward	
Weather:	Clear	
Time:	About 7:06 a. m.	
Casualties:	1 killed; 14 injured	
Cause:	Accident caused by failure to clear the time of opposing superior train	
Recommendation:	That the Louisville & Nashville Railroad Company establish an adequate block system on the line involved in this accident.	

INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION

INVESTIGATION NO. 2527

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

THE LOUISVILLE & NASHVILLE RAILROAD COMPANY

November 5, 1941.

Accident near Harold, Fla., on September 20, 1941, caused by failure to clear the time of opposing superior train.

REPORT OF THE COMMISSION[1]

PATTERSON, Commissioner:

On September 20, 1941, there was a head-end collision between a freight train and a deadhead passenger-equipment train on the Louisville & Nashville Railroad near Harold, Fla., which resulted in the death of 1 train-service employee and the injury of 11 dining-car employees and 3 train-service employees.

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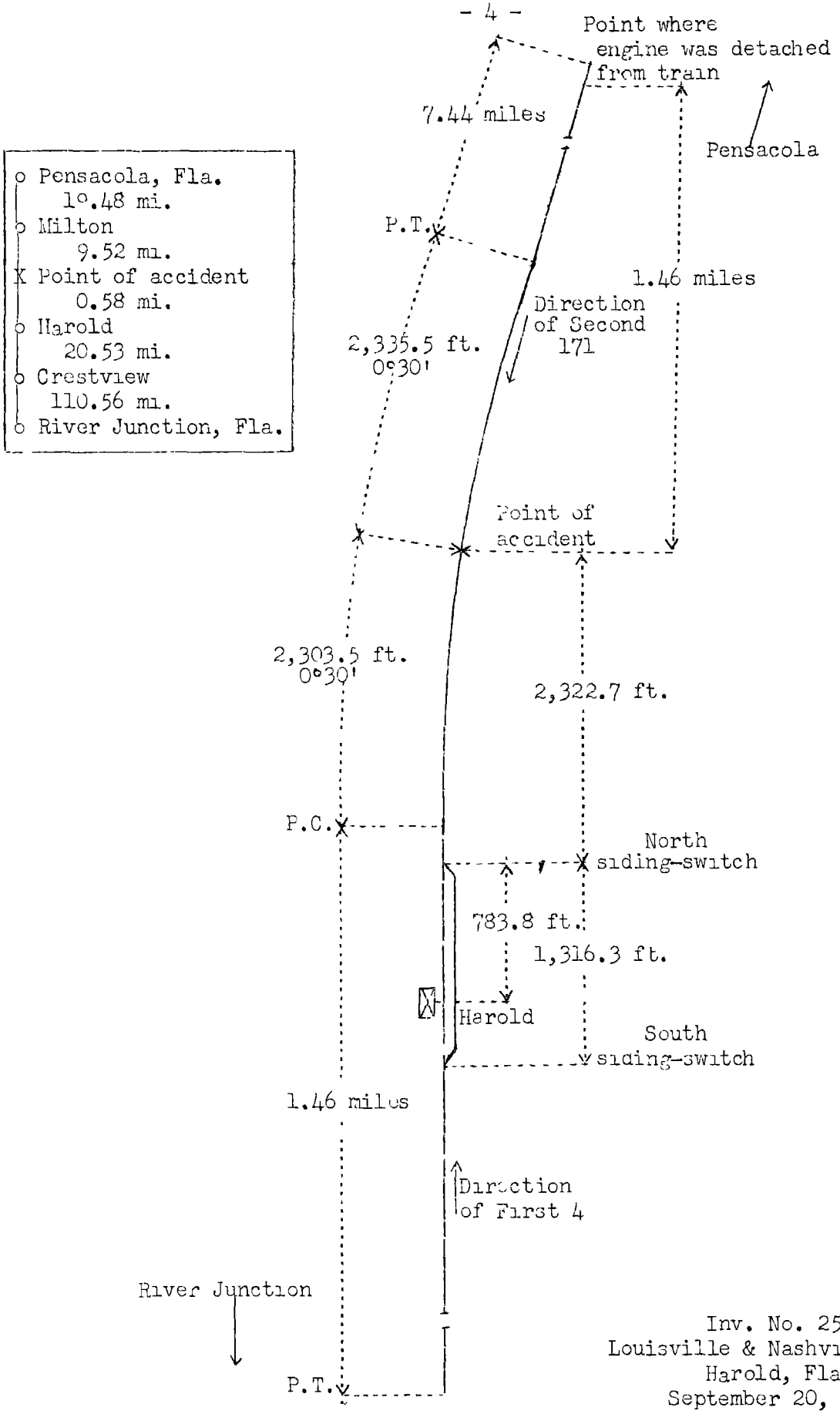
[1] Under authority of section 17 (2) of the Interstate Commerce Act the above-entitled proceeding was referred by the Commission to Commissioner Patterson for consideration and disposition.



Inv. No. 2527
Louisville & Nashville Railroad
Harold, Fla.,
September 20, 1941.

Location of Accident and Method of Operation

This accident occurred on that part of the Montgomery, New Orleans and Pensacola Division which extends between Flomaton, Ala., and River Junction, Fla., a distance of 204.42 miles. In the vicinity of the point of accident this is a single-track line over which trains are operated by time-table and train orders; there is no block system in use. Timetable directions, which are north and south, are used in this report. At Harold a siding 1,316.3 feet in length parallels the main track on the east. The north switch of this siding is 783.8 feet north of the station. The accident occurred on the main track at a point 2,322.7 feet north of the north siding-switch. As the point of accident is approached from the north there is a tangent 7.44 miles in length, which is followed by a 0°30' curve to the left 2,335.5 feet to the point of accident. As the point of accident is approached from the south there is a tangent 1.46 miles in length, which is followed by a 0°30' curve to the right 2,303.5 feet to the point of accident. Starting at a point 9.62 miles north of the point of accident the grade for south-bound trains varies between 0.17 and 1.40 percent ascending throughout a distance of 6,500 feet; for the remainder of the distance to the point of accident it is undulating. In the vicinity of the point of accident the grade for south-bound trains is 0.23 percent ascending.

Operating rules read in part as follows:

5. * * *

The time applies to the switch where an inferior train enters the siding; * * * .

S-87. An inferior train must keep out of the way of opposing superior trains and failing to clear the main track by the time required by rule must be protected as prescribed by Rule 99.

S-89. At meeting points between trains of different classes the inferior train must take the siding and clear the superior train not less than five minutes, * * * .

90 (a). No train will leave a station expecting to meet or be passed at the next station by a superior train unless it has sufficient time, under existing conditions, to make the meeting or passing point and clear the main track as prescribed by Rules * * *, S-87, * * * and S-89.

92. * * *

A train must not leave a station in advance of its schedule leaving time.

99. When a train stops under circumstances in which it may be overtaken by another train, the flagman must go back immediately with flagman's signals a sufficient distance to insure full protection. * * *

99 (c). The front of the train must be protected in the same way when necessary by the front brakeman. * * *

In the vicinity of the point of accident the maximum authorized speed for passenger trains is 50 miles per hour, and for freight trains, 40 miles per hour.

Description of Accident

Second 171, a south-bound second-class freight train, consisted of engine 297, 18 loaded cars, 1 empty car and a caboose. After a terminal air-brake test was completed this train departed from Pensacola, 29.58 miles north of Harold, at 5:50 a. m., according to the dispatcher's record of movement of trains, 5 hours 35 minutes late, and departed from Milton, 10.1 miles north of Harold, at 6:38 a. m., 5 hours 8 minutes late. Because of the ascending grade south of Milton, the usual running time was not maintained. This train was required to be into clear at Harold for First 4 not later than 7 a. m. At a point 1.9 miles north of the north siding-switch at Harold, it was stopped about 7 a. m., the engine was detached and it proceeded toward Harold to furnish flag protection against First 4. The engine was practically stopped at a point 2,322.7 feet north of the north siding-switch at Harold when it was struck by First 4.

First 4, a north-bound first-class deadhead passenger-equipment train, consisted of engine 296, one coach and one dining car, in the order named. Both cars were of steel construction. At River Junction, 131.09 miles south of Harold, the brakes were tested and they functioned properly at all points where used en route. This train departed from River Junction at 3:05 a. m., according to the dispatcher's record of movement of trains, on time, departed from Crestview, 20.53 miles south of Harold and the last open office, at 6:35 a. m., 5 minutes late, passed Harold at 7:05 a. m., according to statements of the crew, on time, and, while moving at an estimated speed of 30 or 35 miles per hour, it collided with the engine of Second 171.

Because of track curvature and trees adjacent to the track, the view from the left side of a north-bound engine of the point where the accident occurred is restricted to 2,150 feet, and from the right side of a south-bound engine, to 1,923 feet.

The force of the collision moved engine 297 backward a distance of 477 feet. The engine truck and the front end of engine 297 were demolished. The front-end frame, both sides of the main frame and both cylinders were broken. The tender cistern was badly damaged. Engine 296 became derailed and stopped, upright, 68 feet north of the point of collision and in line with the track. The smoke box and the engine truck were demolished. The front-end frame, both sides of the main frame and both cylinders were broken. The cab, the tender frame and the tender cistern were badly damaged. The front truck of the first car was derailed and the front coupler and the vestibule were badly damaged.

The weather was clear at the time of the accident, which occurred about 7:06 a. m.

The train-service employee killed was the engineer of First 4, and the train-service employees injured were the engineer and the fireman of Second 171 and the fireman of First 4.

Data

During the 30-day period preceding the day of the accident, the average daily movement over the territory involved was 10.36 trains.

According to the timetable, No. 4 was due to leave Harold at 7:05 a. m. There was no siding between Milton and Harold.

Discussion

The rules governing operation on the line involved provide that an inferior train must keep out of the way of opposing superior trains, and an inferior train must clear the time of an opposing train of superior class not less than 5 minutes. If an inferior train fails to clear the time of an opposing superior train, flag protection must be provided. All members of both crews involved understood these requirements. All members of both crews had compared time before they started on their respective trips.

Second 171, a second-class train, was proceeding to Harold to clear for First 4, a first-class train. Under the rules, Second 171 was required to be into clear at Harold not later than 7 a. m., or to furnish sufficient flag protection to en-

able First 4 to stop short of the fouling point of the north siding-switch. No order restricting the movement of First 4 with regard to Second 171 had been issued. According to the dispatcher's record of movement of trains, Second 171 departed from Milton, 10.1 miles north of Harold, at 6:38 a. m., but according to the statement of the engineer, it departed about 6:39 a. m. The tonnage of this train was 70 tons less than the maximum tonnage for the class of engine involved. According to statements of the conductor and the engineer of Second 171, between 20 and 25 minutes are required for a full tonnage train to proceed from Milton to Harold and to clear. When Second 171 departed from Milton, not more than 22 minutes remained for it to proceed to Harold and to clear for First 4. All members of the crew said that the usual speed was not maintained on the ascending grade south of Milton. The engine was in good condition, and full steam pressure was being maintained. About 5 miles south of Milton, the engineer was aware that insufficient time remained to proceed to Harold with all his train to clear for First 4, and that it would be necessary to detach the engine and to take a flagman to Harold to protect against First 4 until Second 171 could get into clear; however, since he was doubtful that the train could be started on the ascending grade, he delayed detaching the engine until the train passed over the top of the grade. After the train passed over the top of the grade, he was confident that sufficient speed could be attained for his train to reach the north switch before First 4 was due to leave Harold. It was 7 a. m. when the train reached a point 1.9 miles north of the north siding-switch and the train was stopped to detach the engine. The engineer said that after the engine was detached it was 7:01 a. m. but the conductor said that it was 6:59 a. m. As the engine was approaching the point where the accident occurred, the front brakeman, who had flagging equipment in his possession, was on the pilot of the engine and the fireman was maintaining a lookout around the curve to the left. Because of the curvature, the view ahead was somewhat restricted. The fireman warned the engineer that First 4 had passed the north siding-switch at Harold and the engineer applied the brakes in emergency. At the same time, the brakeman was waving stop signals with a red flag, but the distance was not sufficient for First 4 to stop short of engine 297. The engine was practically stopped at a point 2,322 feet north of the north siding-switch when the accident occurred. Both the conductor and the engineer of Second 171 said that the accident occurred about 7:03 a. m., or 2 minutes before First 4 was due to leave Harold. The conductor, the fireman and the flagman of First 4 said that their train passed Harold at 7:05 a. m. and the accident occurred about 7:06 a. m. Since the accident occurred at a point 1.46 miles south of the point where the engine was detached, and since the engineer said that the speed of the light engine did not exceed 20 or 25 miles per hour, it appears

that this engine reached the point where the accident occurred later than 7:05 a. m. If proper action had been taken to provide flag protection after it became apparent that Second 171 would not be able to clear the time of First 4, this accident could have been averted.

Trains are operated on the line involved by timetable and train orders only. If an adequate block system had been in use on this line, this accident would not have occurred.

Cause

It is found that this accident was caused by failure to clear the time of an opposing superior train.

Recommendation

The Louisville & Nashville Railroad Company should establish an adequate block signal system on the line involved in this accident. A rule to show cause why it should not do so will be served on said carrier.

Dated at Washington, D. C., this fifth day of November, 1941.

By the Commission, Commissioner Patterson.

(SEAL)

W. P. BARTEL,

Secretary.