

INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION  
WASHINGTON

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INVESTIGATION NO. 2572  
THE LOUISVILLE & NASHVILLE RAILROAD COMPANY  
AND  
THE SEABOARD AIR LINE RAILWAY COMPANY  
REPORT IN RE ACCIDENT  
AT WELLINGTON, ALA., ON  
FEBRUARY 20, 1942

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## SUMMARY

Railroads: Louisville & Nashville : Seaboard Air Line  
 Date: February 20, 1942  
 Location: Wellington, Ala.  
 Kind of accident: Side collision  
 Trains involved: Passenger : Passenger  
 Train numbers: 85 : 9  
 Engine numbers: 186 : 223  
 Consist: 3 cars : 7 cars  
 Speed: Standing : 2-6 m. p. h.  
 Operation: Timetable and train orders : Timetable, train orders and manual-block system for following passenger trains only  
 Track: Single; tangent; 0.35 percent descending grade southward : Single; tangent; level  
 Weather: Clear  
 Time: 12:33 p. m.  
 Casualties: 1 killed; 2 injured  
 Cause: Accident caused by failure to operate S. A. L. train in compliance with crossing signal indication

INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION

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INVESTIGATION NO. 2572

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

THE LOUISVILLE & NASHVILLE RAILROAD COMPANY  
AND  
THE SEABOARD AIR LINE RAILWAY COMPANY

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April 3, 1942

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Accident at Wellington, Ala., on February 20, 1942, caused  
by failure to operate S. A. L. train in compliance  
with crossing signal indication.

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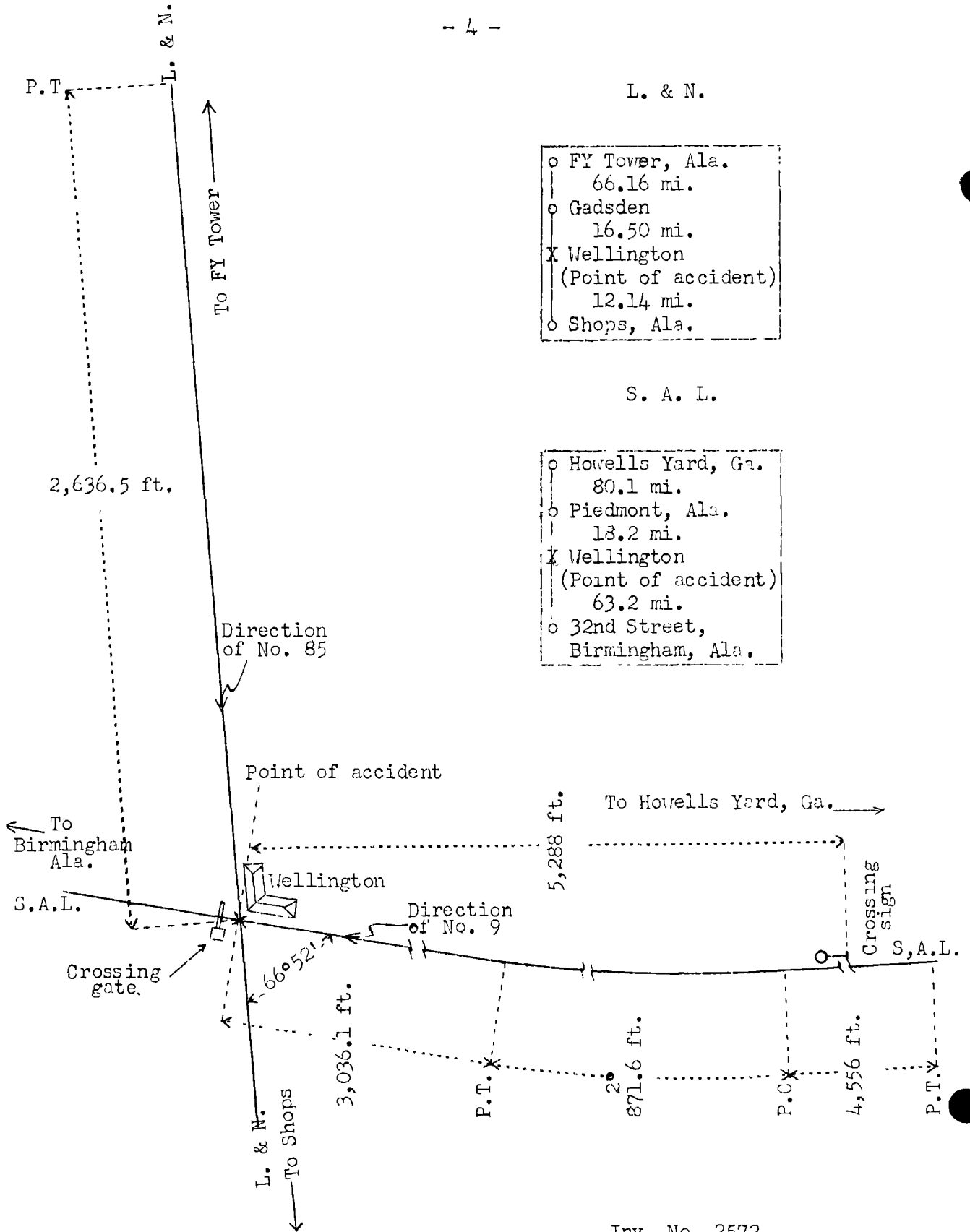
REPORT OF THE COMMISSION<sup>1</sup>

PATTERSON, Commissioner:

On February 20, 1942, there was a side collision between  
a passenger train of the Louisville & Nashville Railroad and  
a passenger train of the Seaboard Air Line Railway at  
Wellington, Ala., which resulted in the death of one employee  
and the injury of two employees.

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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.



Inv. No. 2572  
 Louisville & Nashville Railroad  
 and  
 Seaboard Air Line Railway  
 Wellington, Ala.  
 February 20, 1942

Location of Accident and Method of Operation

This accident occurred at an intersection of the Louisville & Nashville Railroad, hereinafter referred to as the L. & N., and the Seaboard Air Line Railway, hereinafter referred to as the S. A. L. Wellington is located on that part of the Birmingham Division of the L. & N. which extends between Fry Tower and Shops, Ala., a distance of 94.80 miles, and on that part of the Birmingham Sub-division of the Georgia Division of the S. A. L. which extends between Howells Yard, Atlanta, Ga., and 32nd Street, Birmingham, Ala., a distance of 161.5 miles. In the vicinity of the point of accident both are single-track lines. On the L. & N. trains are operated by timetable and train orders. There is no block system in use. On the S. A. L. trains are operated by timetable, train orders and a manual-block system for following passenger trains only. These tracks intersect at an angle of  $66^{\circ}52'$ . As the crossing is approached from the north on the L. & N. the track is tangent 2,656.5 feet to the crossing and some distance beyond. At the point of accident the grade for south-bound trains is 0.35 percent descending. As the crossing is approached from the east on the S. A. L. there are, in succession, a tangent 4,556 feet in length, a  $2^{\circ}$  curve to the right 871.6 feet and a tangent 3,036.1 feet to the crossing and some distance beyond. The grade for west-bound trains varies between 0.25 percent and 1.00 percent descending throughout a distance of 3,750 feet, and then is level 575 feet to the crossing.

Movements over the crossing are governed by a gate which is manually controlled under the supervision of the agent-operator at Wellington. The gate is triangular in shape, constructed of 1-1/2-inch iron pipe, and mounted on a post located in the southwest corner of the intersection in such manner that it may be swung across either track. The post is 16 feet 6 inches in height and a switch lamp is mounted on top in such manner that it displays red at right angles to the gate and green in line with the gate. The lower bar of the gate is 19 feet 9 inches in length. Anchor posts are provided on each line so that the lower bar can be latched and locked at its outer end. A rectangular sign, 12-3/4 inches by 36 inches, bearing the word "STOP" in black letters 6-3/4 inches high on a white background, is mounted on the gate 6 feet above the level of the base of the rail. A switch lamp mounted above the sign displays a red aspect at right angles to the gate. The normal position of the gate is against movements on the S. A. L. On the S. A. L. a sign bearing the words "RAILROAD CROSSING" is located at a point 5,288 feet east of the crossing involved.

Central Standard Time is used on the L. & N. and Eastern Standard Time on the S. A. L. Eastern Standard Time is used throughout this report.

Operating rules of both lines read in part as follows:

98. Trains must approach \* \* \*  
railroad crossings at grade, \* \* \*  
prepared to stop, unless \* \* \*  
signals indicate proceed, and track  
is clear. \* \* \*

Special time-table instructions of the S. A. L. read in part as follows:

RAILROAD CROSSINGS.

\* \* \*

D-8- Railroad crossings at grade  
protected by gates:

\* \* \*

Wellington, \* \* \* L. & N. Ry.,  
15 miles per hour. \* \* \*  
\* \* \*

Bulletin No. 71, dated August 30, 1937, and addressed to all concerned, reads in part as follows:

REF: Crossing Gates-Wellington, Ala.

\* \* \*

Trains must approach this crossing  
under full control, expecting to find  
the gate set against them, \* \* \*

\* \* \*

In the vicinity of the point of accident the maximum authorized speed for passenger trains on the L. & N. is 45 miles per hour and on the S. A. L., 55 miles per hour. On the crossing involved all trains of the L. & N. are restricted to 10 miles per hour and all trains of the S. A. L. to 15 miles per hour.

Description of Accident

No. 85, a south-bound first-class L. & N. passenger train, consisted of engine 186, one baggage-mail car and

two coaches, in the order named. The first car was of all-steel construction and the remainder were of steel-underframe construction. After a terminal air-brake test was made this train departed from Birmingham, 86.16 miles north of Wellington, at 9:35 a. m., according to the dispatcher's record of movement of trains, 11 minutes late, departed from Gadsden, 16.5 miles north of Wellington and the last open office, at 12:03 p. m., 16 minutes late, stopped at Wellington with the front end of the engine standing about 40 feet south of the crossing and the tender standing on the crossing, and immediately afterward it was struck by S. A. L. No. 9.

No. 9, a west-bound first-class S. A. L. passenger train, consisted of engine 225, one mail-express car, one express car, one passenger-baggage car, two coaches, one Pullman lounge car and one Pullman sleeping car, in the order named. All cars were of steel construction. At Atlanta, 101.7 miles east of Wellington, a terminal air-brake test was made. This train departed from Atlanta at 9:43 a. m., according to the dispatcher's record of movement of trains, 1 hour 58 minutes late, soon after it departed from Atlanta a running test of the brakes was made. The brakes were used to control the speed of the train at various points en route, and they functioned properly. No. 9 passed Piedmont, 18.2 miles east of Wellington and the last open office, at 12:06 p. m., 2 hours 16 minutes late, and while moving at an estimated speed of 2 to 6 miles per hour it collided with L. & N. No. 85. There was no condition of engine 225 that distracted the attention of the crew or obscured their vision.

L. & N. engine 186 and its tender were overturned to the right by the impact. The front end of the engine stopped on the roadbed and the rear end of the tender 18 feet west of the crossing. The right side of the cab was crushed. Steam pipes in the cab were broken. The left side-frame of the tender was bent inward 16 inches, the left side sheets were punctured, and the right side of the frame was broken. The first car was not derailed but was slightly damaged. Engine 225, of S. A. L. No. 9, stopped with the front end standing about 4 feet west of the center-line of the crossing. The front end was considerably damaged.

It was clear at the time of the accident, which occurred at 12:33 p. m.

The employee killed was the engineer of L. & N. No. 85. The employees injured were the fireman of L. & N. No. 85 and the engineer of S. A. L. No. 9.

Data

During the 30-day period preceding the day of the accident the average daily movement on the L. & N. over the crossing involved was 7.1 trains and on the S. A. L., 12.53 trains.

Discussion

The rules governing operation on the lines involved provide that when a train is approaching a railroad crossing at grade it must be prepared to stop unless the signals indicate proceed and the track is clear. All surviving members of the crews involved understood these requirements.

The crossing involved is protected by a crossing gate. When it is desired to authorize the movement of an L. & N. train over the crossing, the gate is swung across the track of the S. A. L. and locked to an anchor post. If the gate is across the S. A. L. track, it displays stop signals in both directions on the S. A. L. track. The gate is operated by a station porter under the direction of the agent-operator. About 10:57 a. m. the porter placed the gate across the S. A. L. track to permit the movement of a south-bound second-class L. & N. freight train over the crossing. The gate remained in this position until the time of the accident.

According to the statement of the fireman of the L. & N. train, as his train was approaching the crossing the engineer controlled the speed so that the train could be stopped short of the crossing. Throughout a distance of about 1,500 feet, the fireman observed that the gate was across the S. A. L. track. He was not aware of the approach of S. A. L. No. 9 until that train collided with the tender of his engine immediately after his train stopped.

According to the statements of the engineers of the S. A. L. train, they were maintaining a lookout ahead from their respective sides of the cab as their train was approaching the crossing, and the speed was about 55 miles per hour. The engineer stated that at a point about 4,000 feet east of the crossing he made a 10-pound brake-pipe reduction and, after about 100 feet, another 10-pound reduction; then at a point about 100 feet farther west he made still another 10-pound reduction. When his engine reached a point about 1,500 feet east of the crossing the speed was about 25 miles per hour. At that point the engineer misread the position of the gate and thought it was in position for passage of trains on the S. A. L. He called to the fireman that the gate was "clear" and, since it was his intention to stop the



train at the station with the engine standing west of the crossing, he manipulated the brake valve so that graduated release was effected and brake-cylinder pressure throughout the train was reduced about 20 pounds. When the engine was 500 feet east of the crossing the speed was about 20 miles per hour and the engineer observed that the gate was set against movement on the S. A. L. He immediately moved the brake valve to emergency position, opened the sander valve, and placed the reverse lever in position for backward motion, but the distance was insufficient to stop short of the crossing. He said that the L. & N. train did not occupy the crossing until after the brakes on the S. A. L. train were applied in emergency. The fireman said that he did not hear the engineer call the position of the gate and he was unable to see its position until the engine was about 500 feet east of the crossing. Before he could call a warning, the engineer had taken action to stop the train. Both engineers jumped off about 150 feet east of the crossing, at which point the speed was about 4 or 5 miles per hour. According to the statements of the conductor and the baggageman of the S. A. L. train, as their train was approaching the crossing the speed was being reduced and both thought their train was being operated so that it could be stopped short of the crossing. Neither was aware of anything being wrong until the brakes were applied in emergency.

The rules required that the S. A. L. train be prepared to stop short of the crossing unless the signals indicated proceed and the way was clear, but the investigation disclosed that at a point 500 feet east of the crossing the speed was 20 miles per hour. The brakes of the S. A. L. train had been tested and had functioned properly. The weather was clear and there was nothing to obstruct the vision. If the S. A. L. train had been operated prepared to stop short of the crossing this accident would have been averted.

Cause

It is found that this accident was caused by failure to operate the S. A. L. train in compliance with a crossing signal indication.

Dated at Washington, D. C., this third day of April, 1942.

By the Commission, Commissioner Patterson

(S.M.)

W. P. BARTEL,  
Secretary.