

INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION

WASHINGTON

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR

BUREAU OF SAFETY

ACCIDENT ON THE

NASHVILLE, CHATTANOOGA & ST. LOUIS RAILWAY

JUNTA, GA.

AUGUST 9, 1936

INVESTIGATION NO. 2090

SUMMARY

Railroad: Nashville, Chattanooga & St. Louis
Date: August 9, 1936
Location: Junta, Ga.
Kind of accident: Cornering collision between two freight cars
Train involved: Freight
Train number: Extra 657
Engine number: 657
Consist: 33 cars, cabooses
Speed: 4-6 m.p.h.
Track: 2° 26' curve; accident occurred at north switch of passing track; descending grade northward
Weather: Cloudy and dark
Time: 1:55 a.m.
Casualties: 1 killed
Cause: Loaded coal car did not couple to cars of train left standing on main track when it was backed against them, following which it rolled down grade and cornered box car being set off on passing track

September 19, 1936.

To the Commission:

On August 9, 1936, there was a side collision between a loaded coal car and a box car which was being set off on the passing track of the Nashville, Chattanooga & St. Louis Railway at Junta, Ga., which resulted in the death of one employee.

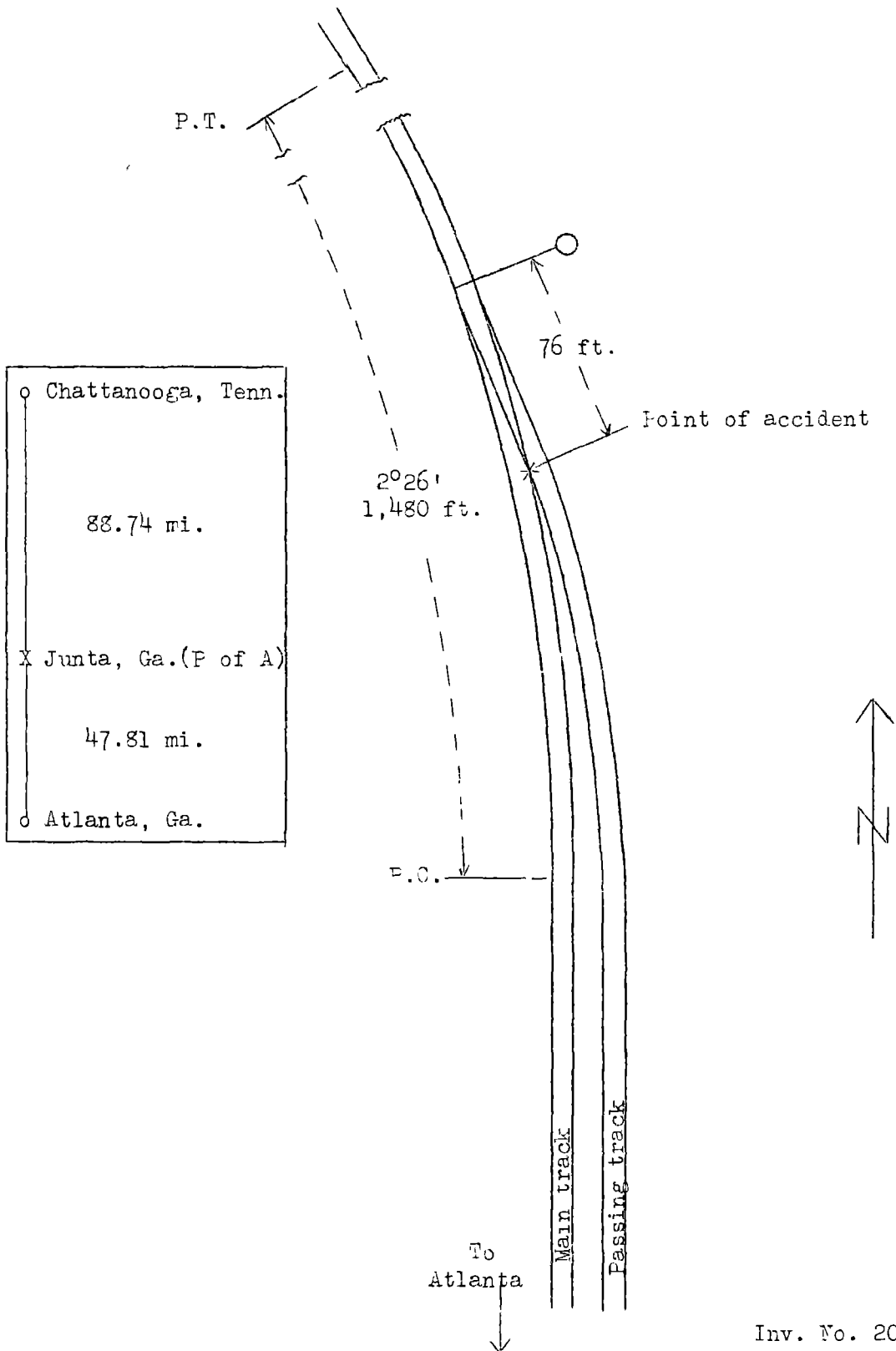
Location and method of operation

This accident occurred on the Atlanta Division, which extends between Atlanta, Ga., and Chattanooga, Tenn., a distance of 136.55 miles; in the vicinity of the point of accident this is a single-track line over which trains are operated by timetable, train orders and an automatic block-signal system. The accident occurred at the frog of the north switch of the passing track at Junta; the passing track parallels the main track on the east, with a high switch stand on the east side of the north switch, the point of frog being located 76 feet south of the point of switch. Approaching from the south the track is tangent for about 1,000 feet, followed by a 20° 28' curve to the left 1,480 feet in length; the accident occurred on this curve at a point 126 feet from its southern end. The grade on the main track at the point where the forward end of the train stood, is 0.65 percent descending northward.

In the vicinity of the north switch of the passing track the view is unobstructed; it was dark and the weather was cloudy at the time of the accident, which occurred about 1:55 a.m.

Description

Extra 657, a north-bound freight train, consisted at the time of the accident of 33 cars and a caboose, hauled by engine 657, and was in charge of Conductor Kerr and Engineman Barton. This train left Atlanta, 47.81 miles south of Junta, at 12:01 a.m., according to the train sheet, and arrived at Junta at 1:49 a.m., stopping on the main track just south of the north switch of the passing track. The first car in the train, R.I. 157998, a steel underframe box car with wooden body and metal corrugated ends, was to be set off on the passing track, and a car of coal, L. & N. 87437, an all-steel hopper car, was to be picked up. Brake-man Evans uncoupled the first car from the train and the engine backed it into the siding where it was coupled to the car of coal, following which both cars were backed against



o Chattanooga, Tenn.
88.74 mi.
X Junta, Ga. (P of A)
47.81 mi.
o Atlanta, Ga.

2°26'
1,480 ft.

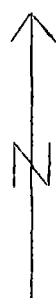
76 ft.

Point of accident

P.C.

P.T.

To
Atlanta



Inv. No. 2090
Nashville, Chattanooga & St. Louis Ry.
Junta, Ga.
Aug. 9, 1936

the train; the car of coal did not couple to the train, but as the brakeman was not aware of this he uncoupled the box car and it was pulled northward over the switch. The switch was then lined for the passing track, and the brakeman climbed the end ladder on the south end of the box car, preparatory to setting the hand brake. As the engine was backing the box car through the switch at a speed of about 4 or 6 miles per hour, the southwest corner of the box car was struck by the north end of the coal car, which had rolled away from the train.

The ends of both cars were damaged, and the rear truck of the box car was derailed. The employee killed was the brakeman.

Summary of evidence

Engineman Barton stated that Brakeman Evans was on the engine on arrival at Junta; the train was stopped on the main track with the engine about 2 or 3 car lengths south of the north switch of the passing track. The brakeman made a cut behind the first car in the train, and it was pulled ahead and backed into the passing track and coupled to L.&N. hopper 87437. Both cars were then backed against the train with sufficient force to make a coupling and the engineman thought the coupling was made. The brakeman then made a cut behind the box car and it was pulled ahead to clear the switch, then backed into the siding. It was dark and cloudy but the Engineman saw the signals given by the brakeman. After handling the switch for this movement the brakeman gave another back-up signal to the fireman, then climbed the ladder on the south end of the car. While backing in on the passing track, at a speed of about 4 or 5 miles per hour, the box car obscured the engineman's view of the cars on the main track. He did not know that the coal car had failed to make the coupling before it cornered the box car; he immediately applied the air brakes. Brakeman Evans later told the engineman that he saw the coal car approaching and had made an attempt to get out of the way but was unable to do so. Engineman Barton said that the air brakes were tested and worked properly. After the accident he did not inspect the coupler on the south end of L.&N. 87437, to see whether the knuckle was open or closed. Fireman Head gave testimony similar to that of Engineman Barton and said that he was also unaware that the cars had failed to couple.

Conductor Kerr and Brakeman McHan were at the rear end of the train and were not aware of anything wrong until the engineman sounded the whistle to call the conductor ahead. The truck of the box car was later rerailed and both cars

were placed on the passing track, following which the tender of the engine was coupled to the head car of the train and the train departed; nothing was wrong with the north coupler of the head car and no trouble was experienced in making the coupling; the conductor examined the drawhead of that car and found it to be all right. The conductor did not know the position of the knuckles on either the coal car or the adjoining car at the time the coal car was backed against the train, but he did know that they worked all right. Brakeman McHan said that after the accident he noticed that the coupler on the head end of the first car in the train standing on the main track was open, and he also said that no trouble was later experienced when coupling the tender of the engine to this car and that the curve on which the train stood was not sufficient to interfere with the coupling. He said that an experienced employee can tell by the sound whether or not a coupling is made. Brakeman McHan could not account for the failure of the coal car to couple when it was backed against the train.

Car Inspector Kitchens stated that he inspected L. & N. hopper 87437 as it stood coupled to some other cars on the passing track at Junta, at about 4 p.m. on the day prior to the accident, the knuckle on the south end not being open at this time; he did not find anything wrong. After the accident he again inspected this car at this point, the two cars involved having been left coupled on the passing track, but found no defects except those caused by the accident. He made a special inspection of the coupler on the south end of L.&N. 87437, and found it to be all right, and the knuckle worked properly; he also measured the height of the coupler and it was within the prescribed limits.

General Car Foreman Carman made a careful inspection of the two damaged cars involved in the accident as they stood coupled on the passing track at Junta after the accident. Apparently when the collision occurred the coupler on the north end of the hopper car passed under the end sill of the box car, and the coupler on the box car struck the end sill of the hopper car, shoving it back from 12 to 14 inches, and evidently causing the rear truck of the box car to become derailed. The only damage resulting to the couplers was that the operating levers on both cars were knocked off and the knuckle lock-lift was broken off on the hopper car. Inspection of the couplers on the opposite ends of the damaged cars showed them to be in good condition and of proper height, and there were no defects on these cars except those which were caused by the accident.

Discussion

On arrival of Extra 657 at Junta the train stopped on the main track with the engine about two or three car lengths south of the north switch of the passing track, on a slight grade descending northward. The first car in the train was to be set out and a car which stood on the passing track was to be picked up. Brakeman Evans made a cut behind the first car and the engine then backed that car in upon the passing track and coupled to the coal car, after which both cars were backed against the standing train with sufficient force to make a coupling. The brakeman then made a cut behind the box car in order to set it on the passing track, following which he handled the switch and gave signals to the engine crew to back into the passing track, without first having definitely ascertained whether the coal car had coupled to the cars standing on the main track. The brakeman rode on the ladder on the south end of the box car while it was being backed into the passing track and he did not see the car rolling down the main track until it was but a short distance away; he tried to get out of the way, but was unable to do so. Inspection of the couplers involved, both before and after the accident, failed to disclose anything wrong with them; the reason for their failure to couple when the loaded coal car was backed against the north car of the train standing on the main track was not determined.

Conclusion

This accident was caused by the failure of a brakeman to ascertain that a coupling had been made between a car which was picked up and the train against which it was placed.

Respectfully submitted,

W. J. PATTERSON,
Director.