

INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF THE BUREAU OF SAFETY CONCERNING AN
ACCIDENT ON THE NEW YORK CENTRAL RAILROAD NEAR NEW
LEXINGTON, OHIO, ON NOVEMBER 2, 1933

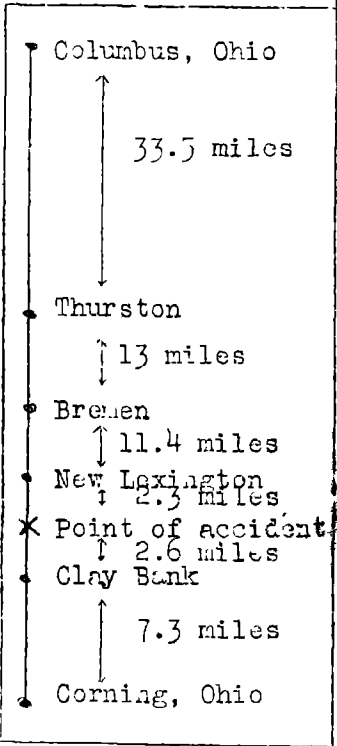
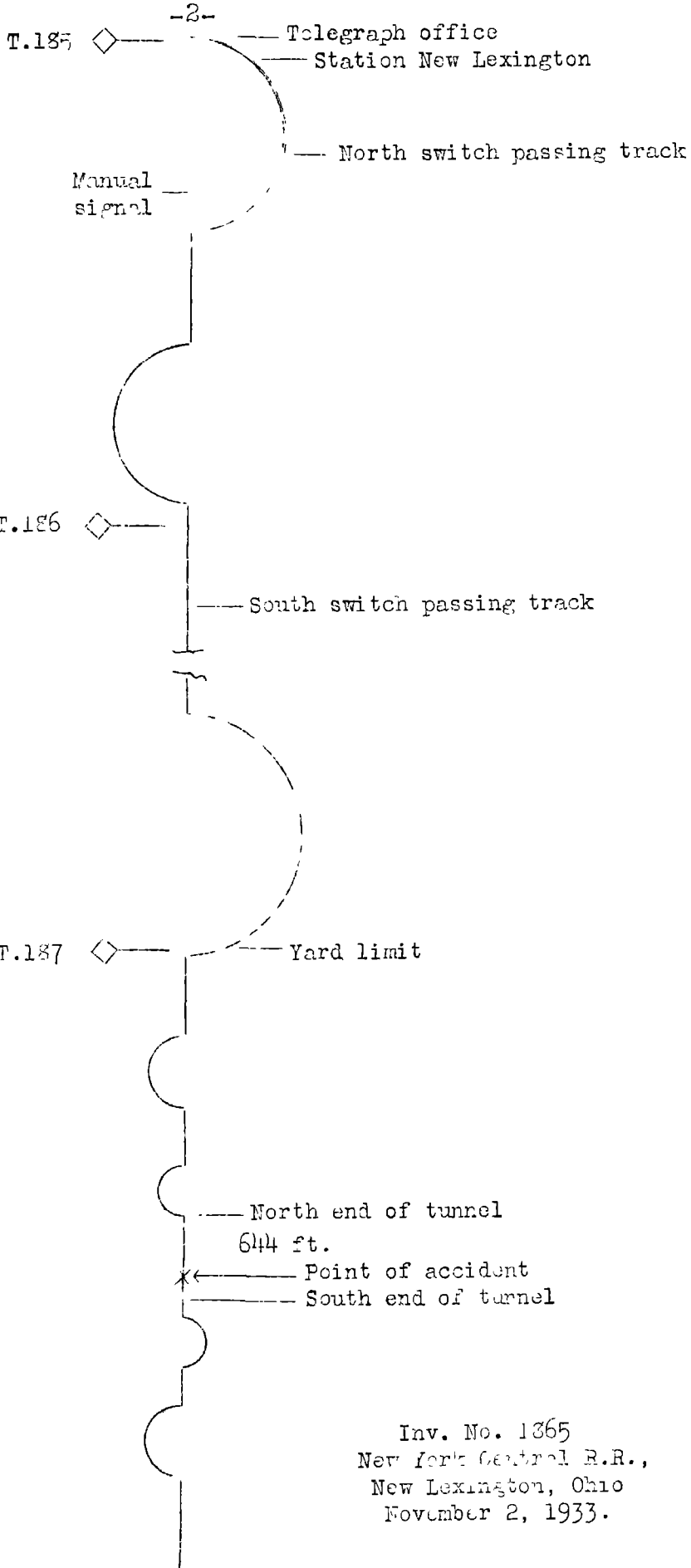
January 17, 1934.

To the Commission:

On November 2, 1933, there was a head-end collision between a light engine and a freight train on the New York Central Railroad near New Lexington, Ohio, which resulted in the death of 1 employee and the injury of 5 employees. The investigation of this accident was made in conjunction with representatives of the Public Utilities Commission of Ohio.

Location and method of operation

This accident occurred on that part of the Ohio Division extending between Corning and Columbus, Ohio, a distance of 70.1 miles. This is a single-track line over which trains are operated by time table, train orders, and a manual block-signal system, trains being operated by the New York Central Railroad except from Bremen southward to New Lexington, a distance of 11.4 miles, where the operation is handled by the Pennsylvania Railroad. The accident occurred at a point about 2.3 miles south of the joint passenger station of the two railroads. From New Lexington southward to Clay Bank, a distance of 4.9 miles, there are many short curves and tangents, and the track passes through an unlined tunnel 644 feet in length, cut through solid rock, the accident occurring in this tunnel at a point 155 feet from its southern end. Approaching the tunnel from the south, the track is tangent for a distance of 977 feet, followed by a 4° curve to the right 470 feet in length, tangent track for a distance of 155 feet, a 4° curve to the left 398 feet in length, and 740 feet of tangent track on which the tunnel is located. Approaching from the north, there is a compound curve to the right 1,770 feet in length with curvatures varying from $1^{\circ}25'$ to $4^{\circ}50'$, tangent track for a distance of 626 feet, a $4^{\circ}15'$ curve to the left 692 feet in length, tangent track for 473 feet, and a 6° curve to the left 210 feet in length, followed by the tangent track on which the accident occurred. The grade approaching the tunnel from either direction is ascending, with a maximum of 1.016 percent on the south and 1.05 percent on the north, reaching the summit at a point about 112 feet north of the tunnel; in the immediate vicinity of the point of accident, through the southern half of the tunnel it is 0.6 percent. Due to the curves on either side of the tunnel the view is limited to a distance of about 1,000 feet and is materially restricted by smoke and steam after the engines enter the tunnel. Northbound trains are superior to south-bound trains of the same class unless otherwise specified. The speed for freight and work trains is restricted to 40 miles per hour.



Inv. No. 1365
 New York Central R.R.,
 New Lexington, Ohio
 November 2, 1933.

The train order, manual block, and train register office is located just north of the station at New Lexington and the south-bound train-order and manual-block signal is located on the west side of the main track about 200 feet south of the office and 166 feet south of the north switch of the passing track which parallels the main track on the east.

The weather was cloudy at the time of the accident, which occurred about 4 a.m.

Description

Engine 9741, in charge of Engineman Turner, was turned at Thurston, 24.4 miles north of New Lexington, after helping a north-bound train to that station, and after receiving orders it proceeded southward and arrived at New Lexington at 3:45 a.m., according to the train sheet. The engine was stopped near the office where the train register was examined by the engineman and train orders nos. 16 and 64, form 19, were received; train order no. 13 provided in part for a meet with train second no. 81 at Corning, while the other order was a slow order; nothing was received concerning train first no. 81, due at New Lexington at 1:05 a.m. A clearance card also was received showing that the signal was at stop for the two orders, but the line on the clearance card giving the block indication was left blank; under such circumstances the crew of engine 9741 should have been governed by the foot-note at the bottom of the clearance card which read as follows:

Where Clearance Card is used when the block is not clear, the line giving block indication will be left blank, and Permissive Card used in addition to Clearance Card.

Extra 9741 proceeded without a permissive card, however, passed the train-order and manual-block signal in the stop position, and collided with train first no. 81 in the tunnel south of New Lexington while traveling at a speed estimated to have been from 30 to 35 miles per hour.

North-bound second-class freight train first no. 81 consisted of 39 loaded and 61 empty cars and a caboose, hauled by engine 40, assisted by engine 9737 coupled ahead of the caboose, and engine 7989 behind the caboose, and was in charge of Conductor Brotton and Engineman Fleming. At Corning a clearance card was received showing the block as clear, and at Clay Bank, 4.9 miles from New Lexington, engine 7989 was coupled behind the caboose as a helper to New Lexington. This train departed from Clay Bank, under a clear block-signal indication, at 3:53 a.m., 3 hours and 8 minutes late, and collided with extra 9741 while traveling at a speed estimated to have been 10 or 12 miles per hour.

Engines 9741 and 40 were partially derailed and considerably damaged; the first four cars in train first no. 81 were damaged, one being destroyed. The employee killed was the fireman of engine 9741, and those injured were the engineman and flagman of engine 9741 and the engineman, fireman and head brakeman of train first no. 81.

Summary of evidence

Engineman Turner, of engine 9741, stated that at New Lexington he and Flagman Hoke went to the office, where he received the orders and then handed them to the flagman, who also read them; he then checked the register and saw that it was complete except for train no. 81. When he returned to the engine he handed the orders to his fireman who read them, made the remark that they would meet them at Corning, and placed the orders in his pocket instead of returning them to the engineman, while as Flagman Hoke boarded the engine the flagman stated that they had a clear block, nothing further being said about meeting any trains. Engineman Turner stated that they then proceeded, and he was operating his engine at a speed of 30 or 35 miles per hour when he eased off just before entering the tunnel and as they entered it he saw the headlight of the opposing train, which was just entering the south portal, and it then occurred to him what they had done; he at once applied the brakes, shut off steam and reversed the engine. The manual block signal at New Lexington was in stop position when he left there but he did not pay any attention to it, saying that many times he would receive a clearance card with the black space left blank, as they are permitted to go to the south end of the passing track where they call up for the block; he realized that he should not have left without a permissive card, and said that he simply overlooked train first no. 81. Engineman Turner did not remember hearing the operator make any statement to them not to be in a hurry as they could not go at that time, and said there was nothing urgent that would cause him to make any unusual haste. Engineman Turner further stated that during the past month he had not been feeling well and that this had interfered with his sleep; he had been working about every other day and while home he would rest frequently.

Flagman Hoke, of engine 9741, stated that at New Lexington he went to the office first, as sometimes he gets the orders and checks the register, but in this case he did not get them right away as the operator did not have them ready and then the engineman came into the office. Flagman Hoke then went back to the engine to turn the lights and put up the flags and as Fireman Parsons was having trouble with his slides he assisted him, and he said it must have been about 10 minutes before Engineman Turner came out with the orders; the engineman did not give them to either the fireman or himself, but said "we are going to Corning for everything. We have a clear block." Flagman Hoke and Fireman Parsons were still working on the slides and did not get them fixed until after they had departed.

Engineman Fleming, of train first no. 81, stated that he entered the tunnel at a speed of about 10 miles per hour and the fireman called his attention to an approaching train; he immediately applied the air brakes in emergency, the accident occurring about 5 seconds afterwards. Fireman Murray stated that the first he saw was a marker on the approaching engine. These employees were interviewed at the hospital and due to their condition no further statements were obtained. Head Brakeman Schreiner, of train first no. 81, estimated the speed of their train to have been 12 or 15 miles per hour while Conductor Brotton, who was in the caboose, said the train was traveling at a speed of 10 or 12 miles per hour.

Flagman Nelson, of train first no. 81, stated that after assisting the injured men he talked with Engineman Turner, who asked him to look at the orders the engineman had in his pocket. The engineman handed him two sets of orders, one covered the run from Thurston to Bremen and the other from Bremen to New Lexington; there was nothing among them which had been received at New Lexington.

Flagman Wheeler, of helper engine 7989, stated that after the injured men had been carried out of the tunnel he talked with Flagman Hoke and asked him if he had seen their train orders, and the flagman said that neither he nor the fireman had seen the orders; that they were busy working with the slides and the engineman had told them they had a clear block.

Operator Robinson, at New Lexington, stated that on the arrival of engine 9741 the engineman and flagman entered his office about the same time, the flagman sitting down while the engineman asked for the orders. Operator Robinson inquired of the engineman if he had anything on train second no. 81, to which the engineman replied that he did not, and the operator then said "There is no special hurry, they are leaving Clay Bank", not mentioning the train but meaning train first no. 81. He called Clay Bank and was advised that the helper was being coupled to the train, and then called the dispatcher and received order no. 16, which he handed to the engineman. At that time he did not know whether the flagman had left the office, although he stated that the flagman was there when he told the engineman that there was no hurry. Engines frequently go down to the south end of the passing track, which is permissible except on the time of first-class trains, and Operator Robinson did not realize that engine 9741 had gone until he heard it going up the hill.

Conclusions

This accident was caused by the operation of extra 9741 against an opposing superior train without authority, and by the failure of the crew of extra 9741 properly to observe and obey the stop indication of a manual block signal.

There is a discrepancy in the statements as to whether the fireman and flagman of engine 9741 read the orders received at New Lexington, including the clearance card. Engineman Turner read the orders, checked the register, and admitted that he overlooked train first no. 81 and then paid no attention to the block signal, his statement indicating that this was due to his custom of proceeding to the south end of the passing track, more than 1 mile from the office, before asking for the block. Flagman Hoke was in the office part of the time, but stated the orders were not ready while he was there and that he then returned to the engine and became engaged in helping the fireman, and he said the engineman did not show them the orders and that he and the fireman still were busy when the engine departed. Engineman Turner stated that he gave the orders to the flagman to read while in the office and then gave them to the fireman to read on boarding the engine and that the fireman placed the orders, after reading them, in his own pocket. So far as the engineman is concerned, it is clear he overlooked the opposing superior train and also disobeyed a block-signal indication; with respect to the fireman and flagman, they were experienced men and even if the flagman's statement of the facts is correct, they should not have become so engrossed with their repair work as to cause them to fail to ask for the orders and to find out whether they had authority to enter the block and to move against a train long overdue.

The third car in train first no. 81 was a tank car loaded with gasoline. Under regulations prescribed by the Commission governing transportation by rail of explosives and other dangerous articles, paragraph 677(e), it is provided that such cars when practicable must be placed not nearer than the sixth car from the engine; a similar provision is contained in the New York Central book of operating rules, rule 1255, under the rules to be observed by freight conductors. The purpose of such requirements is to provide for the safe handling of dangerous articles and it is believed that a railroad is not warranted in placing an elastic interpretation on the phrase "when practicable". In this particular case there does not appear to be any good reason why this car of gasoline could not have been so placed in the train as to comply fully with the intent of the rules.

Respectfully submitted,

W. P. BURLAND,

Director.