

INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION  
WASHINGTON

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INVESTIGATION NO. 2776  
THE NORTHERN PACIFIC RAILWAY COMPANY  
REPORT IN RE ACCIDENT  
NEAR BELMONT, WASH., ON  
FEBRUARY 25, 1944

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SUMMARY

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Railroad: Northern Pacific  
Date: February 25, 1944  
Location: Belmont, Wash.  
Kind of accident: Head-end collision  
Trains involved: Freight : Passenger  
Train numbers: Extra 1836 East : 313  
Engine numbers: 1836 : 2195  
Consist: 31 cars, cabooses : 3 cars  
Speed: Practically stopped : 30 m. p. h.  
Operation: Timetable and train orders  
Track: Single; 3°30' curve; 0.6 percent  
ascending grade westward  
Weather: Snowing  
Time: 11 p. m.  
Casualties: 1 killed; 11 injured  
Cause: Inferior train occupying the main  
track on the time of an opposing  
superior train  
Recommendation: That the Northern Pacific Railway  
Company establish an adequate  
block system on the line on which  
this accident occurred

INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION

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INVESTIGATION NO. 2776

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

THE NORTHERN PACIFIC RAILWAY COMPANY

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March 24, 1944.

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Accident near Belmont, Wash., on February 25, 1944, caused  
by an inferior train occupying the main track on the  
time of an opposing superior train.

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

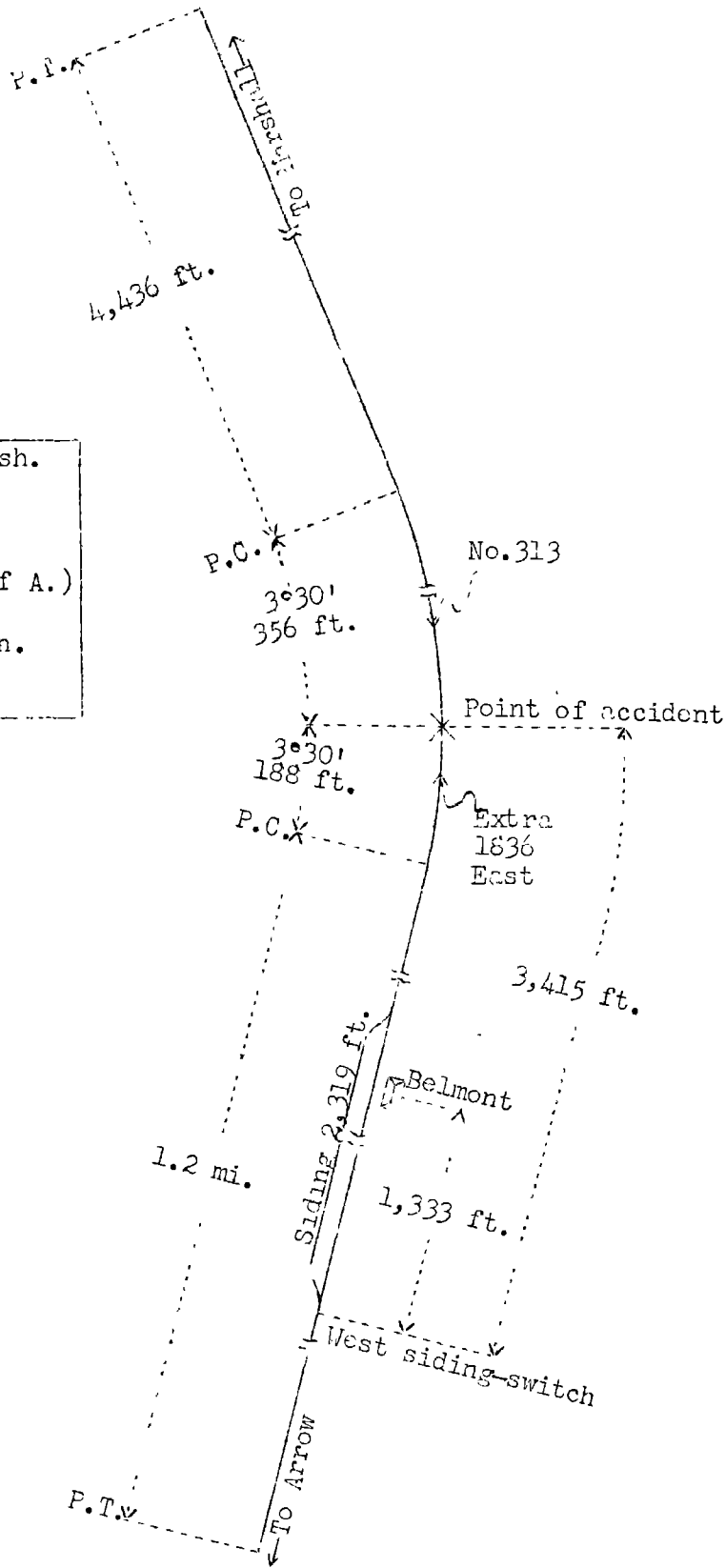
PATTERSON, Chairman:

On February 25, 1944, there was a head-end collision  
between a freight train and a passenger train on the Northern  
Pacific Railway near Belmont, Wash., which resulted in the  
death of 1 employee, and the injury of 11 passengers.

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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 Chairman Patterson for consideration and dis-  
position.

- Marshall, Wash. 37.6 mi.
- Oakesdale 5.3 mi.
- X Belmont (P. of A.) 16.1 mi.
- Palouse, Wash. 64.3 mi.
- Arrow, Idaho



Inv. No. 2776  
 Northern Pacific Railway  
 Belmont, Wash.  
 February 25, 1944

Location of Accident and Method of Operation

This accident occurred on that part of the Idaho Division designated as the Sixth Sub-Division and extending between Arrow, Idaho, and Marshall, Wash., 123.3 miles. This was a single-track line over which trains were operated by timetable and train orders. There was no block system in use. At Belmont a siding 2,319 feet in length paralleled the main track on the north. The west switch of this siding was 1,333 feet west of the station. The accident occurred on the main track 3,415 feet east of the west siding-switch. From the west there was a tangent 1.2 miles in length, which was followed by a  $3^{\circ}30'$  curve to the left 188 feet to the point of accident and 356 feet beyond. From the east there was a tangent 4,436 feet in length, which was followed by the curve on which the accident occurred. At this point the grade for west-bound trains was 0.6 percent ascending.

Operating rules read in part as follows:

73. Extra trains are inferior to regular trains.

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.

Extra trains must clear the time of opposing regular trains not less than five minutes \* \* \*.

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, placing two torpedoes, and when necessary, in addition, displaying lighted fuses. When recalled and safety to the train will permit, he may return.

When the conditions require, he will leave the torpedoes and a lighted fusee.

The front of the train must be protected in the same way when necessary by the forward brakeman, fireman, or other competent employe.

\* \* \*

The maximum authorized speed for passenger trains was 45 miles per hour.

Description of Accident

Extra 1836 East, an east-bound freight train, consisting of engine 1836, 31 cars and a caboose, passed Palouse, 16.1 miles west of Belmont and the last open office, at 9:46 p. m. This train was required to be into clear at Belmont, if it proceeded to that point to meet No. 313, not later than 10:59 p. m., or to provide flag protection. No. 661, a west-bound second-class train, was occupying the siding at Belmont. Extra 1836 passed the west siding-switch and stopped on the main track between the siding switches about 10:55 p. m. Then the engine was detached, and it proceeded eastward to furnish flag protection against No. 313. The engine had reached a point about 3,415 feet east of the west siding-switch and was practically stopped when it was struck by No. 313.

No. 313, a west-bound first-class passenger train, consisted of engine 2195, one mail car, one passenger-baggage car and one coach-sleeping car, in the order named. The second car was of steel-underframe construction and the remainder were of all-steel construction. This train departed from Marshall, 42.9 miles east of Belmont and the last open office, at 9:51 p. m., 5 minutes late, and while moving at an estimated speed of 30 miles per hour it collided with engine 1836.

The front wheels of the engine truck of engine 2195 were derailed. The front end of each engine was considerably damaged. The tender of engine 2195 telescoped the engine cab, and the cistern and the cab were badly damaged.

From an engine moving in either direction in the vicinity of the point of accident, the view of an engine approaching from the opposite direction was materially restricted, because of vegetation on the inside of the curve.

It was snowing at the time of the accident, which occurred about 11 p. m.

The engineer of No. 313 was killed.

During the 30-day period preceding the day of the accident, the average daily movement in the vicinity of the point of accident was 7.7 trains.

According to information shown in the timetable, the capacity of the siding at Belmont was 41 cars.

Discussion

The rules governing operation on this line provide that an inferior train must keep out of the way of opposing superior trains, and extra trains must clear the time of opposing regular trains not less than 5 minutes. If an inferior train fails to clear the time of an opposing superior train, flag protection must be provided.

No. 313, a west-bound first-class train, was due to leave Oakesdale, 5.3 miles east of Belmont, at 10:51 p. m., and Belmont at 11:04 p. m. No train order restricting the authority of No. 313 to proceed had been issued. The crews of No. 661 and Extra 1836 East held copies of a train order which established Belmont as the meeting point between these trains. The crew of Extra 1836 held copies of a message which stated that No. 661 consisted of 45 cars and would arrive at Belmont about 10:30 p. m. However, some cars were set off at Oakesdale, and No. 661 consisted of 40 cars when it arrived at Belmont. This train stopped into clear on the siding at Belmont about 10:35 p. m. to clear for No. 313 and to meet Extra 1836. Extra 1836 was proceeding to Belmont to clear for No. 313 and to meet No. 661. Under the rules, Extra 1836 was required to be into clear at Belmont not later than 10:59 p. m., or to furnish flag protection.

As No. 313 was approaching the point where the accident occurred the speed was about 45 miles per hour. The headlight was burning brightly and the engineer was maintaining a lookout ahead. The fireman was tending the fire, and the first he knew of anything being wrong was when the engineer moved the brake valve to emergency position and called a warning, and the accident occurred almost immediately. The speed of No. 313 was about 30 miles per hour when the collision occurred. Vegetation on the inside of the curve on which the collision occurred materially restricted visibility.

As Extra 1836 East was approaching Belmont the speed was about 15 miles per hour. The enginemen were maintaining a lookout ahead from the engine cab. The front brakeman was on the tender, and the conductor, the swing brakeman and the flagman were in the caboose. These employees understood that their train was required to be into clear for No. 313 not later than 10:59 p. m., and that flag protection was required against No. 313 east of the west siding-switch if their train was not clear of the main track at the required time. The engineer of Extra 1836 said that he had intended to stop his train west of the west siding-switch but, when his engine was a few hundred feet west of the switch, he observed the classification lights of an engine on the siding flash on and off. He interpreted this to be a signal by the crew of No. 661 that his train was to stop between the siding switches. Because he understood that No. 661 consisted of more cars than the siding would contain, he thought the rear portion of that train was occupying the main track east

of the east siding-switch under flag protection. Extra 1836 stopped on the main track between the siding switches about 10:55 p. m., then the engineer observed that No. 661 was into clear on the siding, and realized that flag protection was necessary against No. 313. The engine was detached and moved eastward to take the front brakeman to a point where he could provide flag protection, but the engineer permitted the engine to proceed beyond the point where he intended it to be stopped. He saw the reflection of the headlight on the engine of the approaching train a few hundred feet distant. He was attempting to reverse the movement of his engine and the front brakeman was attempting to light a fusee when the collision occurred. The railroad experience of the front brakeman was 4-1/2 months and the fireman, 7 months. They were depending upon the other members of the crew, who were experienced employees, to comply with the rules. The conductor said that he was not aware that his train had passed the west siding-switch until the flagman warned him, then he opened the emergency valve on the caboose. He was proceeding toward the front end of the train when the accident occurred.

The book of operating rules of this carrier contains manual-block rules which provide for blocking of opposing movements, but these rules were not in effect in the territory involved. If an adequate block system had been in use in this territory, these opposing trains would not have been permitted to occupy the same block simultaneously, and the accident would not have occurred.

#### Cause

It is found that this accident was caused by an inferior train occupying the main track on the time of an opposing superior train.

#### Recommendation

It is recommended that the Northern Pacific Railway Company establish an adequate block system on the line on which this accident occurred.

Dated at Washington, D. C., this twenty-fourth day of March, 1944.

By the Commission, Chairman Patterson.

(SEAL)

W. P. BARTEL,  
Secretary.