

INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION
WASHINGTON

INVESTIGATION NO. 3064
THE PENNSYLVANIA RAILROAD COMPANY
REPORT IN RE ACCIDENT
NEAR PITCAIRN, PA., ON
JANUARY 26, 1947

SUMMARY

Railroad: Pennsylvania

Date: January 26, 1947

Location: Pitcairn, Pa.

Kind of accident: Side collision and derailed car struck engine of passenger train moving on adjacent track

Equipment involved: Yard engine: Freight train: Passenger train
with cars

Train numbers: : Extra 6416 : 78
West

Engine numbers: 7151 : 6416 : 3765

Consists: 13 cars : 97 cars, : 9 cars
caboose

Estimated speeds: 2 m.p.h. : 2 m.p.h. : 50 m.p.h.

Operation: Operating rules : Signal indications

Tracks: Yard : Secondary : Double; 2° curve;
track; track; 2° 0.2 percent
turnout curve; 0.2 ascending grade
percent des- eastward
cending grade
westward

Weather: Misting

Time: 4:02 a. m.

Casualties: 1 killed; 5 injured

Cause: Failure properly to control speed of yard engine approaching switch, and derailed car striking engine of passenger train moving on adjacent main track

INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION

INVESTIGATION NO. 3064

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

THE PENNSYLVANIA RAILROAD COMPANY

March 4, 1947

Accident near Pitcairn, Pa., on January 26, 1947, caused by failure properly to control the speed of a yard engine approaching a switch, and derailed car striking the engine of a passenger train moving on an adjacent main track.

REPORT OF THE COMMISSION¹

PATTERSON, Commissioner:

On January 26, 1947, there was a side collision between a yard engine with cars and a freight train on the Pennsylvania Railroad near Pitcairn, Pa., and a derailed car of the freight train struck the engine of a passenger train moving on an adjacent main track. This accident resulted in the death of one train-service employee, and the injury of three passengers, one railway-mail clerk and one train-service employee.

¹Under 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.

Location of Accident and Method of Operation

The collisions occurred on that part of the Pittsburgh Division extending between Division Post, near Altoona, and Pittsburgh, Pa., 112.6 miles, a double-track line in the vicinity of the point of accident, over which trains moving with the current of traffic are operated by automatic block-signal and cab-signal indications. The main tracks from south to north are designated as No. 3, eastward, and No. 4, westward. In the vicinity of Pitcairn, 98.5 miles west of Altoona, an auxiliary track 3.55 miles long and designated as secondary track No. 2 parallels track No. 3 on the south. Movements on secondary track No. 2 are authorized in accordance with operating rules applicable to secondary tracks, and time-table special instructions. There is no block system in use on this track. In this vicinity two yard tracks, designated as yard tracks Nos. 5 and 6, parallel secondary track No. 2 on the south. Switch 2, which connects secondary track No. 2 and the west end of yard track No. 5, is 1.05 miles west of the station at Pitcairn. The east switch of a crossover 190 feet long, which connects yard tracks Nos. 5 and 6, is 296 feet east of switch 2. The yard engine was moving westward on yard track No. 5, the freight train westward on secondary track No. 2 and the passenger train eastward on main track No. 3. The first collision occurred at the fouling point of secondary track No. 2 and the turnout of switch 2, and the second collision occurred on main track No. 3 in the immediate vicinity of the point where the first collision occurred. From the west on main track No. 3 there is a tangent 2,320 feet in length, then a 2° curve to the left 765 feet to the point of accident and 1,052 feet eastward. The grade is 0.2 percent ascending eastward.

Automatic signal 3388, governing east-bound movements on the eastward main track, is 180 feet west of the point of accident. This signal is of the position-light type, and is approach lighted.

Switch 2 and the east switch of the crossover are in the charge of a switchtender. The switchstands of these switches are located between yard tracks Nos. 5 and 6, and are of the hand-throw low-stand type. Each switchstand is provided with an oil-burning lamp. The normal position of switch 2 is for movement on secondary track No. 2, and the normal position of the east crossover-switch is for movement on yard track No. 5. When these switches are lined normally each lamp displays a green aspect. When switch 2 is lined for movement from yard track No. 5 to secondary track No. 2 a yellow aspect is displayed. When the east crossover-switch is lined for movement from yard track No. 5 through the crossover to yard track No. 6 a yellow aspect is displayed.

Operating rules read in part as follows:

DEFINITIONS

* * *

Reduced Speed--Prepared to stop short of train or obstruction.

* * *

Secondary Track--A designated track upon which trains and engines may be operated without time-table authority, train orders or block signals.

* * *

102. When a train is disabled or stopped suddenly by an emergency application of the air brakes or other causes, adjacent tracks * * * that are liable to be obstructed must be protected at once in both directions until it is ascertained they are safe and clear for the movement of trains.

104a. Trains and engines must approach switches where switch tenders are stationed prepared to stop clear of any switch or route unless signal to proceed is received from the switch tender.

* * *

105a. Unless otherwise provided, trains and engines using a secondary track must proceed at Reduced speed * * *

* * *

A system of train communication known as a trainphone system is in effect in this territory. This system provides for communication between employees at a wayside station and the employees on an engine of a passenger train that is so equipped. WG Tower, 1.08 miles west of the point of accident, and engine 3765 of No. 78 are provided with equipment of the trainphone system. Where trainphone equipment is provided, it is installed in the cabs of passenger-train engines, and in the cabooses and in the cabs of freight-train engines. The equipment consists of hand-set telephones, loud speakers, control panels and associated apparatus installed in such manner that communication can be had between any two units so equipped.

The maximum authorized speed was 60 miles per hour for the passenger train moving on track No. 3, and 15 miles per hour for the freight train moving on track No. 2.

Description of Accident

Yard engine 7151, headed eastward, was pulling a cut of 13 cars westward on yard track No. 5 and was moving at an estimated speed of 2 miles per hour when the engine entered the turnout of switch 2 and struck the fifty-seventh car of Extra 6416 West, which was moving westward on secondary track No. 2. Yard engine 7151 was not derailed, but the tender was damaged.

Extra 6416 West, a west-bound freight train, consisting of engine 6416, 97 cars, and a caboose, was moving on secondary track No. 2 at an estimated speed of 2 miles per hour when the fifty-seventh car was struck by yard engine 7151. The fifty-seventh car and the front truck of the fifty-eighth car were derailed, and these cars were damaged. The fifty-seventh car struck the right side of the engine of No. 78, which was moving on track No. 3.

No. 78, an east-bound first-class passenger train, consisted of engine 3765, one passenger-baggage car, two coaches, one dining car, four sleeping cars and one hospital ward car, in the order named. All cars were of steel construction. This train passed WG Block Station, the last open office, 1.08 miles west of the point of accident, at 4 a. m., 1 minute late, passed signal 3388, which displayed proceed, and while moving on track No. 3 at an estimated speed of 50 miles per hour the engine was struck by the fifty-seventh car of Extra 6416 West. None of the equipment of No. 78 was derailed. The right side of the cab of the engine was crushed inward. The right sides of the cars of No. 78 were somewhat damaged.

The engineer of No. 78 was killed, and the fireman was injured.

It was misting at the time of the accident, which occurred about 4:02 a. m.

Discussion

Yard engine 7151 was moving westward in backward motion and pulling a cut of 13 cars on yard track No. 5 in a switching movement when the engine passed the east switch of the crossover, entered the turnout of switch 2 and struck the fifty-seventh car of Extra 6416 West, a west-bound freight train moving on track No. 2. This car was derailed to the north and it struck the right side of the engine of No. 78, an east-bound passenger train moving on track No. 3. There is a train communication system in use in this territory. Trainphone equipment is provided at WG Tower, 1.08 miles west of the point of accident, and the engine of No. 78 was equipped with a trainphone.

However, the engine of No. 78 was struck by the derailed car of Extra 6416 West before any surviving member of the crew of either train, or the other employees involved, were aware of anything being wrong.

When the collision occurred the headlight on the tender of the yard engine was lighted brightly, and the enginemen were maintaining a lookout to the east for hand signals. The conductor of the yard engine and one brakeman were in the vicinity of the east end of the cut of cars, and these employees were not aware of anything being wrong until the accident occurred. The other brakeman, who was on the top of the fifth car from the engine, was giving stop signals with a lighted white lantern when the collision occurred. The members of the crew of this engine understood that, under the rules, the speed of their engine was required to be so controlled that the movement could be stopped short of the east crossover-switch, unless authority to proceed was given by the switchtender who had charge of the switch. These employees said that it was not their intention to use yard track No. 5 west of the east crossover-switch, nor to use or to foul secondary track No. 2 during this switching movement. The enginemen said that they did not see the stop signals being given by the brakeman, and they did not realize that their engine had passed the east crossover-switch and had entered the turnout of switch 2 until the collision occurred. The switchtender was about 400 feet west of the east crossover-switch, and he was not aware that the yard engine was moving on yard track No. 5 until after the accident occurred.

Cause

It is found that this accident was caused by failure properly to control the speed of the yard engine approaching a switch, and derailed car striking the engine of a passenger train moving on an adjacent main track,

Dated at Washington, D. C., this fourth day of March, 1947.

By the Commission, Commissioner Patterson.

(SEAL)

W. P. BARTEL,

Secretary.