

INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION
WASHINGTON

INVESTIGATION NO. 3087
SOUTHERN PACIFIC COMPANY
REPORT IN RE ACCIDENT
AT LORDSBURG, N. MEK., ON
MARCH 21, 1947

SUMMARY

Railroad: Southern Pacific
Date: March 21, 1947
Location: Lordsburg, N. Mex.
Kind of accident: Rear-end collision
Trains involved: Freight : Freight
Train numbers: Extra 4193 West : Extra 2434-
5041 West
Engine numbers: 4193-2446 : 2434-5041
Consists: 63 cars, caboose : 65 cars, caboose
Estimated speeds: Standing : 10 m. p. h.
Operation: Timetable, train orders and
automatic block-signal
system; yard limits
Track: Single; tangent; 0.44 percent
ascending grade westward
Weather: Clear
Time: 9:10 p. m.
Casualties: 2 killed; 2 injured
Cause: Failure properly to control speed
of following train moving within
yard limits and in accordance
with signal indications

INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION

INVESTIGATION NO. 3087

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

SOUTHERN PACIFIC COMPANY

April 23, 1947

Accident at Lordsburg, N. Mex., on March 21, 1947, caused
by failure properly to control the speed of the
following train moving within yard limits and in
accordance with signal indications.

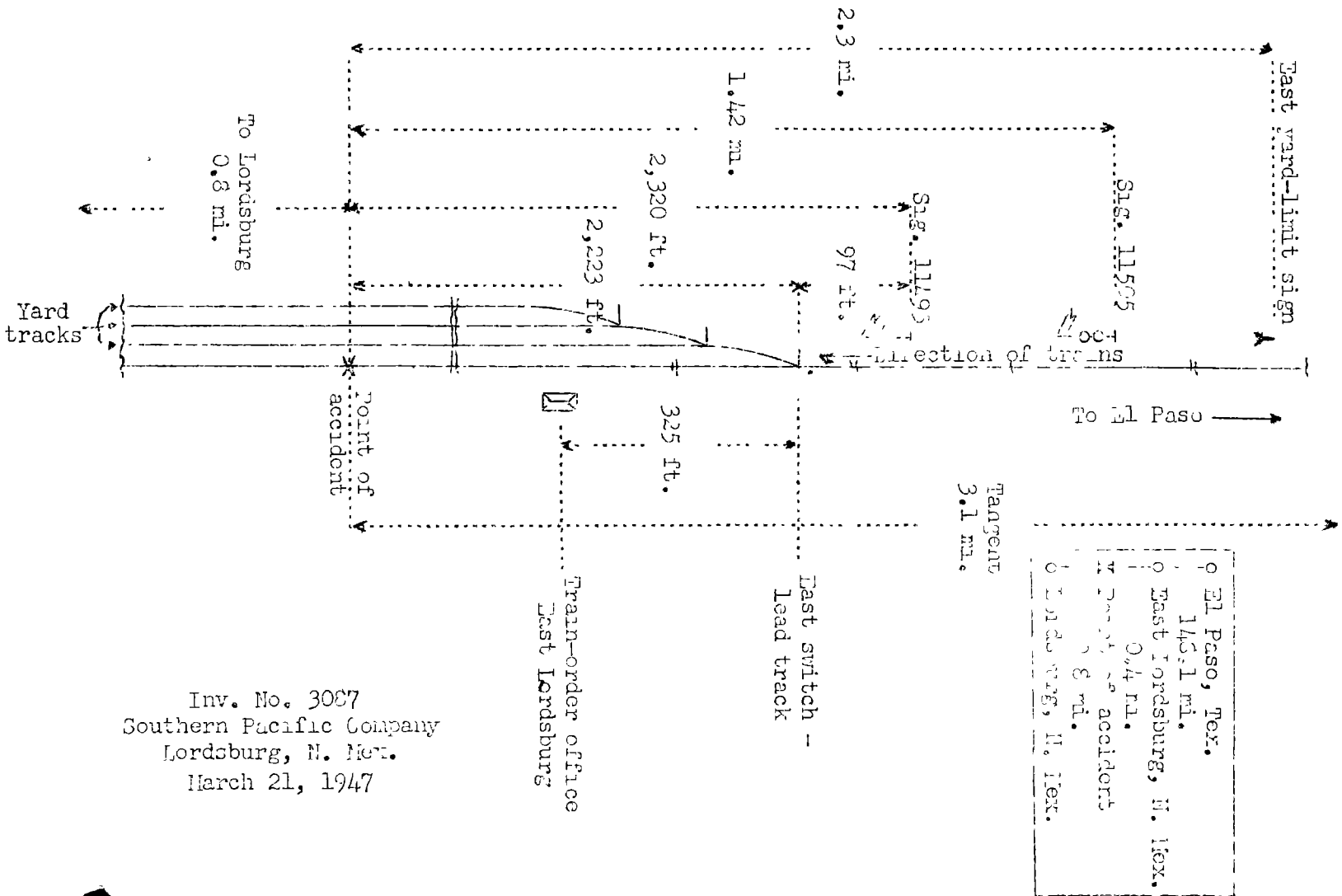
REPORT OF THE COMMISSION¹

PATTERSON, Commissioner:

On March 21, 1947, there was a rear-end collision
between two freight trains on the line of the Southern
Pacific Company at Lordsburg, N. Mex., which resulted in
the death of two employees, and the injury of two employees.

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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. 3087
 Southern Pacific Company
 Lordsburg, N. Mex.
 March 21, 1947

Location of Accident and Method of Operation

This accident occurred on that part of the Rio Grande Division extending between El Paso, Tex., and Lordsburg, N. Mex., 149.3 miles, a single-track line in the vicinity of the point of accident, over which trains are operated by timetable, train orders and an automatic block-signal system. The accident occurred within yard limits on the main track at Lordsburg, at a point 2.3 miles west of the east yard-limit sign and 0.8 mile east of the station. The main track is tangent throughout a distance of 3.1 miles immediately east of the point of accident and a considerable distance westward. The grade for west-bound trains varies between 0.06 percent and 0.60 percent ascending throughout a distance of 0.91 mile immediately east of the point of accident, where it is 0.44 percent ascending.

Automatic signals 11505 and 11495, governing west-bound movements, are, respectively, 1.42 miles and 2,320 feet east of the point of accident. These signals are approach lighted. Signal 11505 is of the one-arm, lower-quadrant, semaphore type. Signal 11495 is of the two-arm, lower-quadrant, semaphore type. The involved night aspects and corresponding indications of these signals are as follows:

<u>Signal</u>	<u>Aspect</u>	<u>Indication</u>
11505	Yellow	Proceed with caution
11495	Red over yellow	Stop

East Lordsburg is 1.2 miles east of Lordsburg. The east switch of a lead track, which connects the main track and the east ends of several yard tracks located north of the main track, is 2,223 feet east of the point of accident, 325 feet east of the train-order office at East Lordsburg and 97 feet west of signal 11495. The lead-track switch is hand operated and is in the charge of the operator at East Lordsburg.

Operating rules read in part as follows:

DEFINITIONS

Fixed Signal--A signal of fixed location indicating a condition affecting the movement of a train, such as * * * block, * * * yard limit boards * * *

* * *

With Caution - To run at reduced speed, according to conditions, prepared to stop short of a train, engine, * * * or other obstruction, or before reaching a stop signal. * * *

* * *

7 (B). * * *

* * *

Hand, flag, and lamp signals to proceed do not * * * dispense with the observance of fixed signals, * * *

34. All members of train and engine crews must, when practicable, communicate to each other by its name, the indication of each signal affecting the movement of their train.

93. * * *

Second and inferior class trains, extra trains, and engines, must move with caution within yard limits.

* * *

509. When an automatic block signal indicates "stop", train, without stopping, may proceed with caution, not exceeding twelve miles per hour, under the following conditions:

* * *

(b) To enter a yard when the switch is set for the receiving track and the route is clear to the fouling point of the switch.

* * *

509 (J). Except as provided in Rule 509, * * * when an automatic block signal indicates "stop", train must stop and send a flagman ahead immediately, wait at least five minutes after he has started, and then follow, keeping at least one-fourth mile behind him * * *

Description of Accident

Extra 4193 West, a west-bound freight train, consisted of engine 4193, 63 cars, a caboose and engine 2446, in the order named. The cars of this train arrived at Lordsburg

about 8 p. m. in the train of Extra 4390 West, which stopped on the main track. After the incoming engine and caboose were detached, the outgoing engines and caboose were coupled to the cars. About 9:10 p. m. the rear end of Extra 4193 West was struck by Extra 2434-5041 West at a point 2.3 miles west of the east yard-limit sign.

Extra 2434-5041 West, a west-bound freight train, consisting of engines 2434 and 5041 coupled, 65 cars and a caboose, passed the east yard-limit sign, passed signal 11505, which displayed proceed-with-caution, passed signal 11495, which displayed stop, and while moving at an estimated speed of 10 miles per hour it struck Extra 4193 West.

The tender of the second engine of Extra 4193 West, and the first engine of Extra 2434-5041 West were derailed and badly damaged. The second engine of Extra 4193 West and the second engine of Extra 2434-5041 West were somewhat damaged.

The engineer of the first engine of Extra 2434-5041 West and the fireman of the second engine of Extra 4193 West were killed. The engineer of the second engine of Extra 4193 West and the front brakeman of Extra 2434-5041 West were injured.

The weather was clear at the time of the accident, which occurred about 9:10 p. m.

Discussion

Extra 4193 West was standing on the main track within yard limits at Lordsburg, with the rear end 2.3 miles west of the east yard-limit sign, when it was struck by Extra 2434-5041 West.

The fireman of the first engine of Extra 2434-5041 West said that the speed of this train was about 45 miles per hour as it was approaching the east yard-limit sign. The headlight of the first engine was lighted brightly. Soon after the engines passed the yard-limit sign the engineer of the first engine, who had charge of the train air-brake system, made a service brake-pipe reduction. The speed was about 25 miles per hour when the engines were in the vicinity of signal 11505, which displayed proceed-with-caution, and the engineer of the first engine placed the throttle lever in drifting position. When the engines were in the vicinity of signal 11495, which displayed stop, the speed was about 15 miles per hour. Then the fireman saw a proceed signal being given with a white lantern some distance west of signal 11495, and he said the engineer called "highball," and sounded two short blasts on

the engine whistle. Immediately afterward, the engineer of the first engine placed the headlight switch in dim position during a period of a few seconds. When the headlight was again lighted brightly, the enginemen of both engines, and the front brakeman, who was in the gangway of the first engine, saw the preceding train about 500 feet distant. The engineer of the first engine immediately moved the brake valve to emergency position. The speed of Extra 2434-5041 West was about 10 miles per hour when the collision occurred. The engineer of the first engine was killed.

Under the rules governing movement within yard limits in automatic block-signal territory, if the route is lined for entry to a yard track a train may pass a signal displaying a stop indication, and proceed at a speed not exceeding 12 miles per hour. Second and inferior class trains, extra trains and engines must be operated within yard limits prepared to stop short of a train or an obstruction. The investigation disclosed that it had been a long-standing practice in the yard involved for the crews of freight trains to accept a proceed hand or lantern signal as authority for their trains to pass a signal displaying a stop indication and to proceed on the main track west of the lead-track switch at the east end of the yard. In the instant case, immediately prior to the accident, members of the crew of the preceding train were giving proceed lantern signals from the vicinity of the rear of their train for their train to proceed, and it is probable that the engineer of the first engine of the following train misunderstood these signals and thought they were being given for his train to proceed on the main track west of the east lead-track switch notwithstanding the stop indication displayed by signal 11495. Evidently he was not aware that the main track was occupied by the preceding train until immediately prior to the collision.

Cause

It is found that this accident was caused by failure properly to control the speed of the following train moving within yard limits and in accordance with signal indications.

Dated at Washington, D. C., this twenty-second day of April, 1947.

By the Commission, Commissioner Patterson.

(SEAL)

W. P. BARTEL,
Secretary.