

INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION

WASHINGTON

INVESTIGATION NO. 2790

THE ST. LOUIS SOUTHWESTERN RAILWAY COMPANY

REPORT IN RE ACCIDENT

NEAR KENT, ARK., ON

APRIL 8, 1944

SUMMARY

Railroad: St. Louis Southwestern
Date: April 8, 1944
Location: Kent, Ark.
Kind of accident: Head-end collision
Trains involved: Engine : Freight
Train numbers: : Extra 813 South
Engine numbers: 569 : 813
Consist: : 56 cars, caboose
Speed: Unknown : 35 m. p. h.
Operation: Timetable and train orders
Track: Single; 3°02' curve; level
Weather: Cloudy
Time: 1:23 a. m.
Casualties: 3 killed; 1 injured
Cause: Runaway engine occupying
main track

INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION

INVESTIGATION NO. 2790

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

THE ST. LOUIS SOUTHWESTERN RAILWAY COMPANY

May 16, 1944.

Accident near Kent, Ark., on April 8, 1944, caused by a
runaway engine occupying the main track.

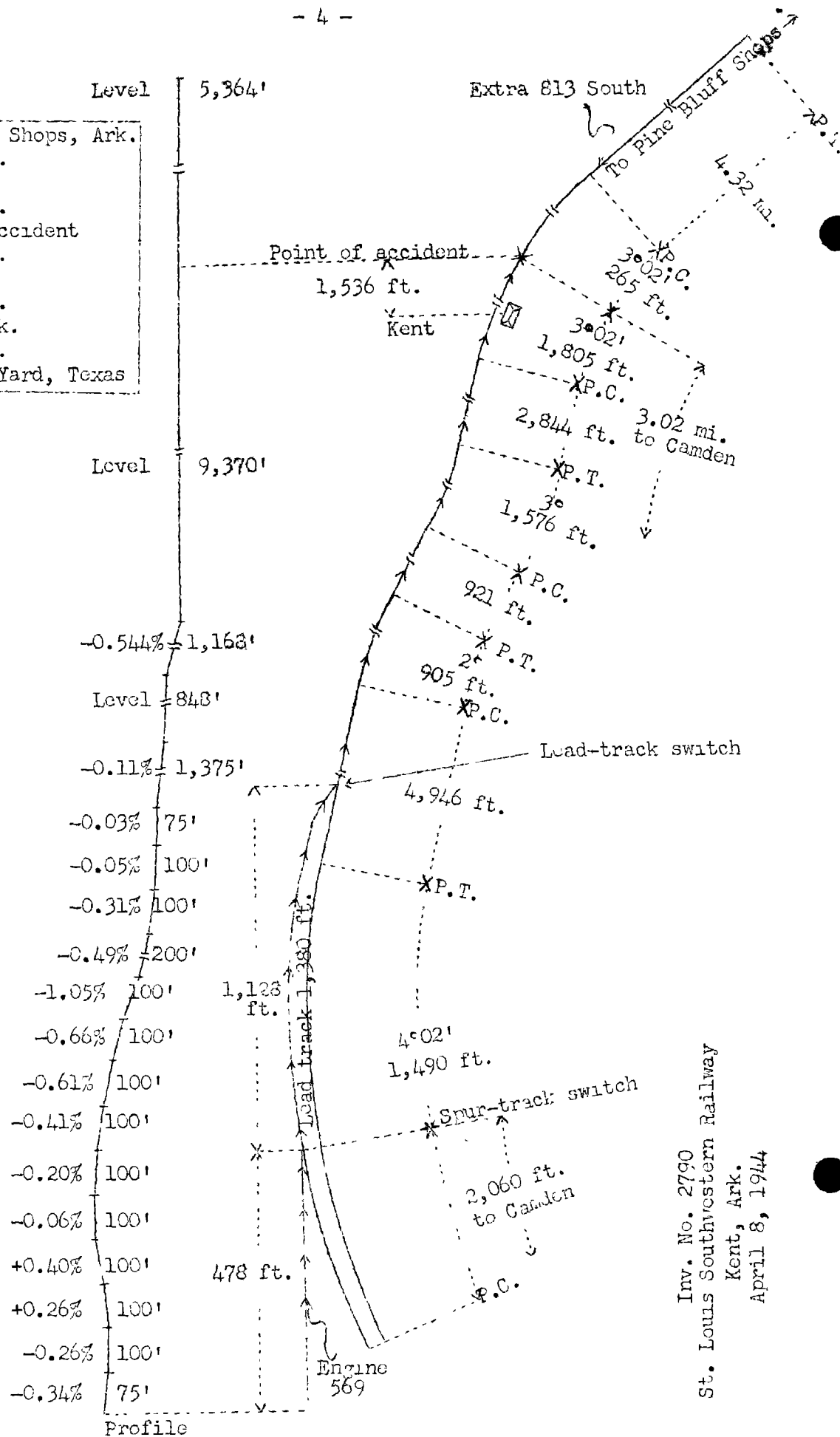
REPORT OF THE COMMISSION¹

PATTERSON, Chairman:

On April 8, 1944, there was a head-end collision between a runaway engine and a freight train on the St. Louis Southwestern Railway near Kent, Ark., which resulted in the death of three employees and the injury of one employee.

¹Under authority of section 17 (2) of the Interstate Commerce Act the above-entitled proceeding was referred by the Commission to Chairman Patterson for consideration and disposition.

- o Pine Bluff Shops, Ark.
54.47 mi.
- o Bearden
13.43 mi.
- * Point of accident
0.29 mi.
- o Kent
2.73 mi.
- o Camden, Ark.
81.51 mi.
- o Texarkana Yard, Texas



Inv. No. 2790
St. Louis Southwestern Railway
Kent, Ark.
April 8, 1944

Location of Accident and Method of Operation

This accident occurred on that part of the Northern Division designated as the Pine Bluff Subdivision and extending northward from Texarkana Yard, Texas, to Pine Bluff Shops, Ark., 152.43 miles. In the vicinity of the point of accident this was a single-track line over which trains were operated by timetable and train orders. There was no block system in use. At Camden, 81.51 miles north of Texarkana Yard, the north switch of a lead track 1,380 feet long, which practically paralleled the main track on the west, was 3,188 feet north of the station, and was trailing-point for north-bound movements. A spur track 478 feet long was west of the lead track. It was connected to the lead track at a point 2,060 feet north of the station, and its switch was trailing-point for north-bound movements. The runaway engine moved from the spur track to the lead track, then to the main track, and collided with the freight train 3.02 miles north of Camden, at a point 0.29 mile north of the station at Kent. The spur track was tangent. From the south on the main track there were, in succession, a $4^{\circ}02'$ curve to the right 1,490 feet in length, a tangent 4,946 feet, a 2° curve to the right 905 feet, a tangent 921 feet, a 3° curve to the left 1,576 feet, a tangent 2,844 feet, a $3^{\circ}02'$ curve to the right 1,805 feet to the point of accident and 265 feet beyond. From the north on the main track there was a tangent 4.52 miles in length, which was followed by the curve on which the accident occurred. The grade for north-bound movements from the spur track to the lead track and then on the main track was, successively, 0.34 percent descending 75 feet, 0.26 percent descending 100 feet, 0.26 percent ascending 100 feet, 0.40 percent ascending 100 feet, then it was descending, successively, 0.06 percent 100 feet, 0.20 percent 100 feet, 0.41 percent 100 feet, 0.61 percent 100 feet, 0.66 percent 100 feet, 1.05 percent 100 feet, 0.49 percent 200 feet, 0.31 percent 100 feet, 0.05 percent 100 feet, 0.03 percent 75 feet, 0.11 percent 1,375 feet, then it was level 848 feet, 0.544 percent descending 1,168 feet, level 9,370 feet to the point of accident and 5,364 feet beyond.

The spur-track switch was of the hand-throw, low-stand type, and was normally lined for entry to the lead track. The lead-track switch was of the hand-throw, high-stand type and was normally lined for movement on the main track. Derails were not provided.

Safety rules read in part as follows:

190. All locomotives standing, unattended, on inbound, outbound or other designated shop or engine tracks, or in enginehouses, must have throttle closed and latched, reverse lever latched in center of quadrant, cylinder cocks, relief valves or cut-out cocks used for that purpose, always left open, and either the air pump left running and independent brakes set with brake valve handle left in application position, or pump shut off and brakes released, with the main pair of drivers properly blocked by using chain made of 7/8" material or larger under front and back of wheel. * * *

The maximum authorized speed for the freight train was 40 miles per hour.

Description of Accident

Engine 569, of the 2-8-0 type, headed southward, was stopped on the spur track at Camden about 1 a. m. About 1:23 a. m., after this engine, unattended, had moved northward from the spur track to the lead track and thence to the main track, and had proceeded a distance of about 2.41 miles at an unknown speed, it collided with Extra 813 South at a point 1,536 feet north of the station at Kent.

Extra 813 South, a south-bound freight train, consisted of engine 813, 56 cars and a caboose. This train passed Bearden, 13.72 miles north of Kent and the last open office, at 1:04 a. m., and while moving at an estimated speed of 35 miles per hour it collided with engine 569.

The force of impact moved engine 569 southward 649 feet. Engine 569 and its tender were badly damaged. Engine 813 was derailed and stopped on its left side, east of the track, with the front end 376 feet south of the point of collision, and was badly damaged. The first 19 cars of Extra 813 were derailed and badly damaged.

It was cloudy at the time of the accident, which occurred about 1:23 a. m.

The engineer, the fireman and the front brakeman of Extra 813 were killed. The swing brakeman of Extra 813 was injured.

Discussion

The investigation disclosed that engine 569, which was equipped to burn oil as fuel, had been used in yard service at Camden two days immediately prior to the day of the accident. No unsafe condition of the engine was reported. About 7 hours prior to the time of the accident, the air-compressor feed valve

became inoperative during switching operations. When the engineer was draining both main reservoirs, a considerable quantity of water and oil was discharged, then the feed valve and the compressor functioned satisfactorily.

About 1 a. m., after the yard crew's tour of duty was completed, the engine was moved to its designated tie-up location on the spur track. The engineer informed the engine foreman of the difficulty he had experienced with the feed valve, and requested the foreman to drain the main reservoirs. After they had completed an inspection of the engine, the engineer and the fireman proceeded to a near-by restaurant. They said that when they left the engine the fire was burning, the left injector was supplying water to the boiler, the steam gauge registered 180 pounds pressure, the air-compressor throttle was in open position, the main throttle lever was in closed position and latched, the cylinder cocks were open, the reversing lever was latched in center position and the brake valve was in application position. No blocking material was placed against the main driving wheels, nor any other wheels. About 1:08 a. m., the foreman opened the drain valves of both main reservoirs, and then entered a building adjacent to the location of the engine. Soon afterward, while the foreman's helper was engaged in supplying the air-compressor lubricator with oil, the engine started moving. The foreman thought the engineer had returned to the engine and was operating it, and the helper thought the foreman was in the engine cab. When these employees became aware that the engine was unattended, it had moved a considerable distance. Then the foreman ran northward in an unsuccessful attempt to overtake the engine. A few minutes later, after the engineer and the yard conductor were notified of the departure of engine 569, they operated another engine northward in an unsuccessful attempt to overtake engine 569. It could not be determined when the enginemen and the front brakeman of Extra 813 South first became aware of anything being wrong, as they were killed in the accident. Extra 813 had passed the last open office before engine 569 started its movement, and therefore the crew of this train could not be notified.

After the accident, the air-compressor throttle was in closed position, and the main throttle was open. It was not determined who placed these throttles in such positions, but apparently the air-compressor throttle was closed when the foreman opened the valves to drain the main reservoirs. Prior to the accident, the foreman did not observe the position of the reversing lever or the main throttle. The engine was standing on a 0.34 percent descending grade when the pressure of the air-brake system was depleted and, since no blocking material

was placed against the driving wheels, there was nothing to prevent the engine from moving. Apparently the reversing lever was in position for backward movement and the main throttle was not fully closed and latched, as the engine began to exhaust heavily immediately after it began to move. The foreman was the only person in the engine cab between the time the enginemen left it and the time of the accident.

The employees concerned understood that, under the rules, proper blocking material must be placed against the main driving wheels of engines standing unattended on designated engine tracks. The foreman said it had not been the practice at Camden to block the wheels of engines standing on the spur track until after all work required had been completed. In the instant case, if proper blocking material had been placed against the driving wheels of engine 569, this accident would not have occurred.

Cause

It is found that this accident was caused by a runaway engine occupying the main track.

Dated at Washington, D. C., this sixteenth day of May, 1944.

By the Commission, Chairman Patterson.

(SEAL)

W. P. BARTEL,
Secretary.