

INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION
WASHINGTON

INVESTIGATION NO. 2871
ST. LOUIS SOUTHWESTERN RAILWAY COMPANY
REPORT IN RE ACCIDENT
AT PINE BLUFF SHOPS, ARK., ON
FEBRUARY 14, 1945

SUMMARY

Railroad: St. Louis Southwestern
Date: February 14, 1945
Location: Pine Bluff Snops, Ark.
Kind of accident: Rear-end collision
Trains involved: Freight : Passenger
Train numbers: Extra 681 South : 1
Engine numbers: 681 : 661
Consist: 77 cars, caboose : 7 cars
Estimated speed: 5 m. p. h. : 55 m. p. n.
Operation: Timetable and train orders
Track: Single; 2° curve; level
Weather: Clear
Time: 1:16 a. m.
Casualties: 2 killed; 9 injured
Cause: Inferior train occupying main track
on the time of following superior
train without adequate protection
Recommendation: That the St. Louis Southwestern
Railway Company establish an ade-
quate block system on the line
on which this accident occurred

INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION

INVESTIGATION NO. 2871

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

ST. LOUIS SOUTHWESTERN RAILWAY COMPANY

April 7, 1945.

Accident at Pine Bluff Shops, Ark., on February 14, 1945,
caused by an inferior train occupying the main track
on the time of a following superior train without
adequate protection.

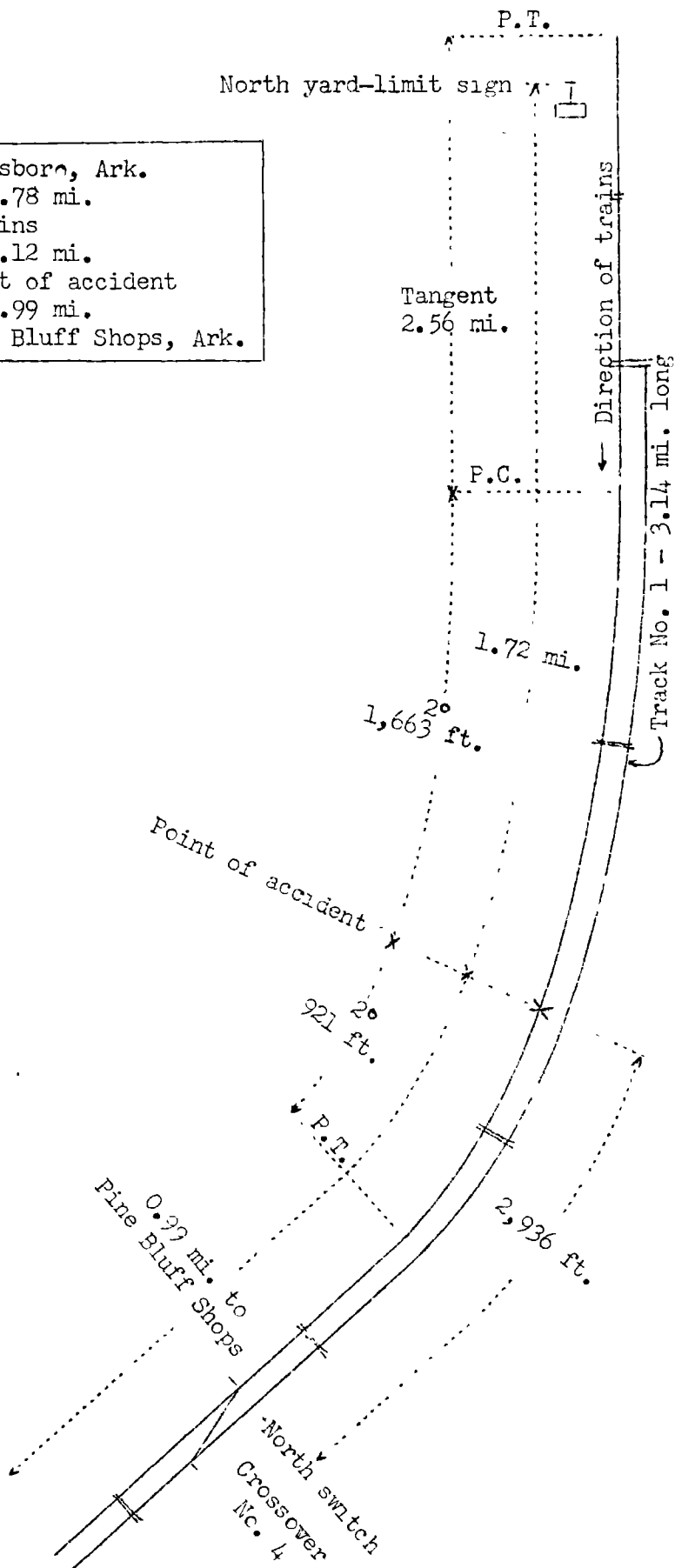
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REPORT OF THE COMMISSION

PATTERSON, Commissioner:

On February 14, 1945, there was a rear-end collision between a freight train and a passenger train on the St. Louis Southwestern Railway at Pine Bluff Shops, Ark., which resulted in the death of two train-service employees, and the injury of one passenger, one Pullman employee, two railway mail clerks, one express messenger and four train-service employees.

Under 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.

○ Jonesboro, Ark.	137.78 mi.
○ Wilkins	3.12 mi.
X Point of accident	0.99 mi.
○ Pine Bluff Shops, Ark.	



To Jonesboro ↑

Inv. No. 2871
 St. Louis Southwestern Railway
 Pine Bluff Shops, Ark.
 February 14, 1945

Location of Accident and Method of Operation

This accident occurred on that part of the Northern Division designated as the Jonesboro Subdivision and extending southward from Jonesboro to Pine Bluff Shops, Ark., 141.89 miles. This was a single-track line over which trains were operated by timetable and train orders. There was no block system in use. The accident occurred within yard limits on the main track at a point 0.99 mile north of the station at Pine Bluff Shops and 1.72 miles south of the north yard-limit sign. From the north on the main track there was a tangent 2.56 miles in length, which was followed by a 2° curve to the right 1,663 feet to the point of accident and 921 feet southward. The grade was level.

In this vicinity an auxiliary track, 3.14 miles long and designated as track No. 1, paralleled the main track on the east. The north switch of a crossover 205 feet long and designated as crossover No. 4, which connected the main track and track No. 1, was 2,936 feet south of the point of accident. Crossover No. 4 was facing point for movements from the main track to track No. 1.

Operating rules read in part as follows:

DEFINITIONS.

* * *

Restricted Speed.- Proceed prepared to stop short of train, obstruction, or anything that may require the speed of a train or engine to be reduced.

* * *

11. A train finding a fusee burning on or near its track must stop and extinguish the fusee. Train may then proceed at restricted speed.

15. The explosion of two torpedoes is a signal to proceed at restricted speed. The explosion of one torpedo will indicate the same as two, but the use of two is required.

* * *

35. The following signals will be used by flagmen:

* * *

Night signals (A red light,
Torpedoes and
Fusees.)

91. Unless some form of block signal is used, trains in the same direction must keep not less than ten minutes apart, except in closing up at stations.

* * *

93. Within yard limits the main track may be used, clearing first-class trains as herein prescribed:

* * *

Outside of Automatic block signal territory, unless otherwise provided, second and inferior class, extra trains and engines, must be in the clear at the time a first-class train is due to leave the next station in the rear where time is shown; except that if the time between stations is less than ten minutes the inferior train or engine must be in the clear at least ten minutes in advance of time shown for superior train at station where the inferior train or engine clears the main track.

* * *

In case of failure to thus clear the main track, protection must be given as prescribed by Rule 99.

Within yard limits the main track may be used without protecting against second and inferior class, extra trains and engines.

* * *

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 maximum authorized speed for the passenger train was 60 miles per hour on tangents and 55 miles per hour on curves.

Description of Accident

Extra 681 South, a south-bound freight train, consisting of engine 681, 77 cars and a caboose, passed Wilkins, 4.11 miles north of Pine Bluff Shops and the last open office, at 12:18 a. m., and stopped on the main track at Pine Bluff Shops about 12:28 a. m., with the rear end standing about 1.58 miles south of the north yard-limit sign. About 48 minutes later, when this train had moved southward about 750 feet and was entering track No. 1 through crossover No. 4 and moving at an estimated speed of 5 miles per hour, the rear end was struck by No. 1.

No. 1, a south-bound first-class passenger train, consisted of engine 661, one mail-express car, one baggage car, three coaches and two Pullman sleeping cars, in the order named. The third car was of steel-underframe construction, and the remainder were of all-steel construction. This train passed Wilkins at 1:13 a. m., 7 minutes late, and while moving at an estimated speed of 55 miles per hour it struck Extra 681 South.

The caboose and the rear car of Extra 681, and the engine and the first car of No. 1 were derailed. The caboose and the rear two cars of Extra 681, and the engine of No. 1 were considerably damaged. The first car of No. 1 was slightly damaged.

The weather was clear at the time of the accident, which occurred about 1:16 a. m.

The conductor of Extra 681 and the engineer of No. 1 were killed. The flagman of Extra 681 and the conductor, the brakeman and the fireman of No. 1 were injured.

During the 30-day period preceding the day of the accident, the average daily movement in the vicinity of the point of accident was 18.7 trains.

Discussion

As No. 1 was approaching the point where the accident occurred the speed was about 60 miles per hour. No train order restricting the authority of No. 1 to proceed in this vicinity had been issued. The air brakes had functioned properly at all points where used en route. The headlight was lighted brightly, and the enginemen were maintaining a lookout ahead. The fireman said that no warning signals were seen or heard until the engine was a short distance north of the point where the collision occurred, where the engineer moved the brake valve to emergency position and called a warning. At this point, on account of the view of the track ahead from the left side of the engine being materially restricted because of the curve to the right, the fireman crossed to the right side of the engine and looked southward. Then he saw a lighted fusee and the red marker lamps of the preceding train, and the collision occurred immediately afterward.

Extra 681 South had waited on the main track about 45 minutes before a yard track was available on which it could clear

for No. 1. This train had been moving nearly 3 minutes and had advanced about 750 feet when the accident occurred. Immediately prior to the accident the conductor and the flagmen of Extra 681 South were in the caboose, the swing brakeman was on the rear platform of the caboose and the other members of the crew were in the vicinity of the front end of the train. The surviving employees understood that, under the rules, their train was required to be clear of the main track not later than 1:05 a. m., which was 10 minutes prior to the time No. 1 was due to arrive at Pine Bluff Shops. The flagman said that about 12:50 a. m. he proceeded northward to provide flag protection against No. 1 and placed two torpedoes on the west rail of the main track about 3,000 feet north of the point where the accident occurred. Then he returned southward about 2,500 feet and, about 1:10 a. m., when his train started to move southward, he placed a lighted 10-minute fusee on the main track and boarded the caboose. He was not aware that No. 1 was closely approaching until the accident occurred. He thought the flag protection he furnished was sufficient. The swing brakeman said that, when the flagman boarded the caboose, he moved from inside the caboose to the rear platform and was displaying a lighted fusee from the platform until just before the collision occurred.

In this territory, trains were being operated by timetable and train orders only. If an adequate block system had been in use on this line, the crew of the following passenger train would have received definite information that the preceding train was occupying the main track within the same block, and this accident would have been averted.

Cause

It is found that this accident was caused by an inferior train occupying the main track on the time of a following superior train without adequate protection.

Recommendation

It is recommended that the St. Louis Southwestern Railway Company establish an adequate block system on the line on which this accident occurred.

Dated at Washington, D. C., this seventh day of April, 1945.

By the Commission, Commissioner Patterson.

(SEAL)

W. P. BARTEL,
Secretary.