

INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION
WASHINGTON

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR
BUREAU OF SAFETY

ACCIDENT ON THE
WABASH RAILWAY

LAFAYETTE, IND.

OCTOBER 25, 1937.

INVESTIGATION NO. 2214

SUMMARY

Inv-2214

Railroad: Wabash
Date: October 25, 1937.
Location: LaFayette, Ind.
Kind of accident: Rear-end collision
Trains involved: Freight : Freight
Train numbers: No. 96 : Yard
Engine numbers: 2903 : 517
Consist: 60 cars and : 11 cars
caboose
Speed: Standing : 10-25 m.p.h.
Track: Tangent; slightly ascending grade.
Weather: Clear overhead; patches of fog
near the ground.
Time: About 2:00 a.m.
Casualties: 1 killed, 3 injured
Cause: Failure of crew of engine 517 to
operate their train under control
on a siding.

November 18, 1937.

To the Commission:

On October 25, 1937, there was a rear-end collision between a freight train and a yard engine hauling a cut of cars, on a siding of the Wabash Railway at LaFayette, Ind., which resulted in the death of one employee and the injury of three employees. This accident was investigated in conjunction with the Indiana Public Service Commission.

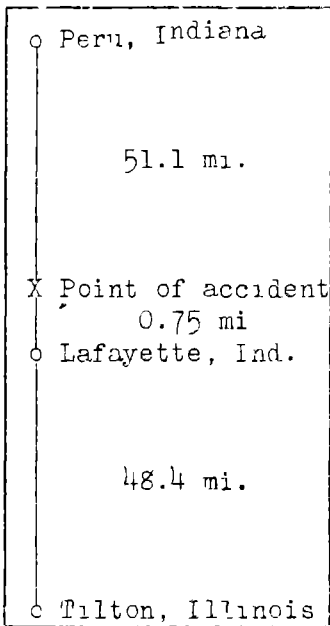
Location and method of operation

This accident occurred on the Second District of the Montpelier Division which extends between Tilton, Ill., and Peru, Ind., a distance of 101.3 miles. In the vicinity of the point of accident this is a single-track line over which trains are operated by timetable, train orders and an automatic block-signal system.

Double track ends about 400 feet west of the station at LaFayette, and a general instruction in the timetable provides that between LaFayette and East Yard all east-bound trains except first-class shall use the first track south of the main track. The track designated in this instruction is called South Track and extends eastward from the end of double track approximately 7,800 feet to East Yard where it connects with the main track by means of a cross-over. Between the end of double track and the east end of East Yard at LaFayette there are, in addition to the main track and south track, several yard and house tracks. One of these tracks, designated "Track 3", is about 1,000 feet long and lies about 50 feet to the south of South Track, following the alinement of the latter track in a general way; this track connects with the South Track by means of a trailing-point switch located 2,550 feet west of the point of accident.

The accident occurred on South Track at a point 4,745 feet east of the end of double track. From the west the main track is tangent for over 5,000 feet to the point of accident and for a considerable distance beyond. From the end of double track eastward the south track closely parallels the main track for a distance of 1,100 feet and then for 1,300 feet is offset several feet to the south around the former location of a coal dock; from the east end of the offset it again closely parallels the main track for a distance of 2,345 feet to the point of accident and for a

Point of collision



18th Street

1,450 ft

1,100 ft

Direction of trains

4,745 ft.

Main Track
South Track
Track 1
Track 2
Track 3

Station

Main Street

End of Double Track

Inv. No. 2214
Wabash Railway
Lafayette, Ind.
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considerable distance beyond. For east-bound trains the grade is slightly ascending for about 1,650 feet, ranging from 0.193 percent to 0.262 percent, and is at its maximum at the point of accident.

At the time of accident, about 2:00 a.m., the weather was clear overhead but there were patches of fog lying close to the ground.

Description

East-bound second-class freight train No. 96 consisted of 60 cars and a caboose, hauled by engine 2903, and was in charge of Conductor Ross and Engineman Wagner. This train which passed LaFayette at 1:46 a.m., according to the train sheet, proceeded on South Track to East Yard where it stopped to pick cars and while this work was being done the caboose was struck by switch engine 517.

Switch engine 517, headed west, was in charge of Switch Foreman Kessen and Engineman Honeck. This engine pulled a cut of 11 cars eastward from yard track 3 to South Track and while moving along this latter track at a speed estimated at between 10 and 25 miles per hour it collided with the rear end of train 96.

The body of the caboose was lifted from its trucks and the west end was forced along the frame of the tender, pushing the cistern forward through the cab of the engine and against the boiler head. One pair of driving wheels on the engine was derailed. Except the west truck of the rear car of train No. 96 none of the cars in either train was derailed.

The employee killed was the engineman of the switch engine, and the employees injured were the fireman of the switch engine, the switch foreman and one of his helpers.

Summary of evidence

Conductor Ross of No. 96 stated that at the end of double track his train entered the track just south of the main track and continued eastward until the caboose was about 300 feet east of 18th Street. When he got off the caboose to go to the head end of the train he noticed that the markers showed red to the rear but he was unable to say whether they were turned later. He had no knowledge that the accident had happened until after the cars had been picked up and placed at the head end of the

train. It was then found impossible to charge the brake pipe and he was making an inspection of the train to locate the trouble when the brakeman came from the rear and informed him of the collision. Later his engine coupled to the rear of the cut of cars which were being handled by the switch engine at the time of the accident and before this cut could be moved it was necessary to release the train brakes by cutting in the air. He stated that there is no flagging requirement on South Track. He described the weather as being foggy in patches to the west of their caboose.

The statement of Rear Brakeman Ebey, of No. 96, agreed with that of Conductor Ross regarding the arrival of that train at LaFayette and its movement through South Track; he said that he turned the markers to show green to the rear as soon as the train cleared the main track. He stated that no flagging is required on sidings and trains are expected to run on such tracks prepared to stop short of obstructions. His description of weather conditions was similar to that of his conductor.

Switch Foreman Kessen, of switch engine 517, stated that after 96 passed on South Track his engine completed some switching in the yard and then coupled to 11 loaded cars on track 3 which were to be delivered to an industry on a belt line track. After the air had been pumped up and the train had started out of track 3 on South Track he and the head brakeman mounted to the engine cab. At that time the fireman was running the engine and the switch foreman got on the left seatbox and went about checking his bills. In the meantime the engineman was standing on the left side of the cab facing the front end of the engine and the head brakeman was sitting on the floor of the right side of the cab back of the reverse lever with his feet on the firing deck. When the switch foreman had finished checking the bills he looked in the direction the train was moving and saw the rear end of 96 two or three car lengths away. He called a warning to the fireman who then made an emergency application of the brakes, but as they were moving 20 to 25 miles per hour he was unable to stop in time to avert the collision. The weather was foggy in spots but he thought he could have seen the rear end corner if he had been looking that way. His recollection was that the markers of train No. 96 were showing red but he was not sure of this.

Switchman Kolthoff, of engine 517, estimated the speed at the time of accident as between 15 and 18 miles per hour.

Fireman Klutzke, of engine 517, stated that although he has been firing for about 18 years he is not promoted. At the time of the accident he was handling the engine for Engineman Honeck at the request of the engineman, who stated that he felt "all in"; it is not unusual for the fireman to handle the engine

and he has done so for other enginemen as well as for Engineman Honeck. He had seen No. 96 pass through the yard and noted that the markers were showing red; he knew that it would be picking up cars in East Yard. When his engine left track 3 with 11 cars for an industry east of town the air was cut in on the cars. In the vicinity of 18th Street patches of fog were encountered and he had passed through two of these foggy spots when he noticed the markers of train 96 about 40 feet ahead. At that time they were moving at a speed of between 12 and 15 miles per hour and the emergency application which he made immediately after sighting the train ahead reduced the speed to between 10 and 12 miles per hour at the time of collision.

Section Laborer Lake who had been called to repair a switch at the east end of the yard had completed the work and was walking along the tracks toward the section house with Section Foreman McCoy when No. 96 stopped at East Yard. As he passed the caboose he noticed that the rear markers showed red, and at that time two members of the train crew were about two car lengths east of the caboose. He described the weather as slightly foggy. Section Foreman McCoy did not notice the indication of the rear markers, but stated that the visibility was fairly good.

Discussion

The evidence indicates that there was no misunderstanding concerning the status of South Track; all parties involved in the accident agreed that it was a siding. Rule 98 requires that trains using a siding proceed with caution expecting to find it occupied by other trains. Under this rule no flagging is required and trains should proceed prepared to stop short of any obstruction.

The fireman, who was handling engine 517 in place of the engineman, stated that he passed through two banks of fog before sighting the rear lights of train No. 96; at that time his train was moving at a speed of between 12 and 15 miles per hour and he had done nothing to reduce its speed.

Rule 762 pertaining to the duties of enginemen reads:

"They must not permit the fireman to operate the engine except in an emergency or upon an order from proper authority."

To what extent, if any, the violation of this rule contributed to the accident is not determinable.

Conclusion

This accident was caused by failure of the crew of engine 517 to operate their train under control on a siding.

Respectfully submitted,

W. J. PATTERSON,

Director.