

INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION
WASHINGTON

INVESTIGATION NO. 2772
THE WESTERN PACIFIC RAILROAD COMPANY
REPORT IN RE ACCIDENT
NEAR PULGA, CALIF., ON
FEBRUARY 10, 1944

SUMMARY

Railroad: Western Pacific
Date: February 10, 1944
Location: Pulga, Calif.
Kind of accident: Head-end collision
Equipment involved: Freight train : Track motor-car
and trailer
Train number: Extra 22 East :
Engine number: 22 :
Consist: 3 cars, caboose : Motor-car 818,
trailer 1556
Estimated speed: 15 m. p. n. : 10 m. p. h.
Operation: Timetable and train orders
Track: Single; 5°03' curve; 0.92 percent
ascending grade eastward
Weather: Clear
Time: 11:50 a. m.
Casualties: 3 killed; 3 injured
Cause: Failure to provide protection
for movement of track motor-car
and trailer

INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION

INVESTIGATION NO. 2772

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

THE WESTERN PACIFIC RAILROAD COMPANY

March 6, 1944.

Accident near Pulga, Calif., on February 10, 1944, caused
by failure to provide protection for the movement of
a track motor-car and trailer.

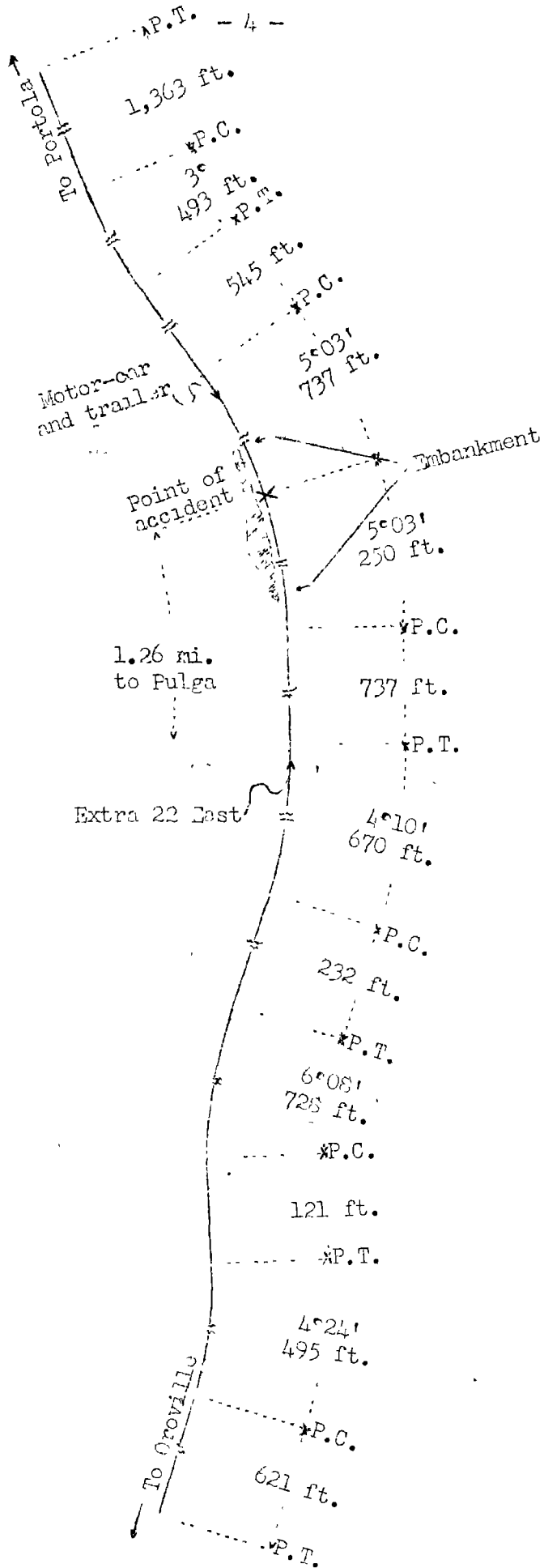
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REPORT OF THE COMMISSION

PATTERSON, Chairman:

On February 10, 1944, there was a head-end collision between a freight train and a track motor-car on the Western Pacific Railroad near Pulga, Calif., which resulted in the death of three employees, and the injury of three employees. This accident was investigated in conjunction with a representative of the Railroad Commission of California.

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.

- Fortola, Calif. 66.10 mi.
- Camp Rodgers 14.84 mi.
- X Point of accident 1.26 mi.
- Pulga 21.60 mi.
- Bloomer 12.50 mi.
- Oroville, Calif.



Inv. No. 2772
 Western Pacific Railroad
 Pulga, Calif.
 February 10, 1944

Location of Accident and Method of Operation

This accident occurred on that part of the Western Division designated as the Third Subdivision and extending between Oroville and Portola, Calif., 116.3 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. The accident occurred 1.26 miles east of Pulga. From the west there were, in succession, a tangent 621 feet in length, a 4°24' curve to the left 495 feet, a tangent 121 feet, a 6°08' curve to the right 728 feet, a tangent 232 feet, a 4°10' curve to the left 670 feet, a tangent 737 feet and a 5°03' curve to the left 250 feet to the point of accident and 737 feet beyond. From the east there were, in succession, a tangent 1,363 feet, a 3° curve to the left 493 feet, a tangent 545 feet and the curve on which the accident occurred. The grade for east-bound trains was 0.92 percent ascending.

Operating rules read in part as follows:

EXTRA GANG, SECTION, BRIDGE
AND TUNNEL FOREMEN

1114. Operation of hand and motor cars on curves must be protected properly by flag, except when view conditions are sufficiently favorable that car can be stopped and taken off on approach of train or other hand or motor car.

Safety rules governing operation of track motor-cars read in part as follows:

4. * * *

Gang cars with trailers, maximum speed...
15 MPH on straight track, 10 MPH on curves;

* * *

10. Employees operating cars on main tracks shall, when practicable, obtain information regarding trains but such information will not relieve them from the responsibility for protecting their cars as required by the Book of Rules. They will see that their cars are clear of the main track for all trains.

12. The men on the car must keep a sharp lookout at all times for approaching trains, * * *

17. Motor cars must not be run without taking along sufficient men to handle the car properly on and off the track and foremen should see that the gang is instructed and trained in regard to proper procedure in case of emergency, first to avoid injury to employees, and second, to motor cars.

The maximum authorized speed for the train involved was 20 miles per hour.

Description of Accident

Extra 22 East, an east-bound freight train, consisting of engine 22, headed westward, three cars and a caboose, in the order named, departed from Pulga, the last open office, at 11:45 a. m., and while moving at an estimated speed of 15 miles per hour it collided with track motor-car 818 at a point 1.26 miles east of Pulga.

Track motor-car 818 and trailer 1556, coupled, in the order named, departed west-bound from a point about 3 miles east of Pulga about 11:45 a. m., and while moving at an estimated speed of 10 miles per hour it collided with Extra 22 East.

Motor-car 818 was demolished. Trailer 1556 and the front end of engine 22 were slightly damaged.

From a west-bound motor-car moving in the vicinity of the point of accident, the view of an east-bound engine was restricted to a distance of about 200 feet, because of embankments adjacent to the track and track curvature.

It was clear at the time of the accident, which occurred about 11:50 a. m.

The employees killed and injured were members of a bridge force.

Discussion

The rules governing operation of track motor-cars on this line provide that flag protection must be provided in territory where the view is obstructed. Operators of motor-cars were authorized to obtain information regarding the movement of trains, but they were instructed that such information did not permit the operation of motor-cars without proper flag protection. The purpose of issuing such information was to prevent trains being stopped by a flagman of a motor-car.

A bridge force was engaged temporarily in repair work at a point about 3 miles east of Pulga, and made frequent trips by motor-car between that point and Pulga. A portable telephone

was provided for communication on the train dispatcher's circuit. About 11:35 a. m. the foreman of the bridge force communicated with the train dispatcher to obtain information regarding train movements between Pulga and the point of work. The foreman understood the dispatcher to say that no train would depart eastward from Pulga prior to 1:30 p. m. The train dispatcher said he thought that the section foreman at Bloomer, 21.6 miles west of Pulga, had asked for information regarding train movements between Pulga and Bloomer. Extra 22 East had passed Bloomer. This train was en route to Camp Rodgers, 16.1 miles east of Pulga, and then it would return to Oroville, 34.1 miles west of Pulga. The dispatcher expected this train to depart from Pulga on its west-bound trip about 1:30 p. m., and he issued the information with reference to the west-bound trip. There was considerable line interference on the telephone circuit and he thought this condition caused him to misunderstand the location of the person calling for information. On previous trips the foreman had required a flagman to precede his motor-car to provide protection at points where the view was obstructed. He understood that, according to the rules, flag protection was required in this instance, but he thought he would arrive at Pulga prior to 1:30 p. m., and he permitted the motor-car and trailer to be operated without protection. He relied considerably upon the fact that recently practically all train movements had been discontinued, because of fire in a tunnel about 18 miles east of Pulga. He was on the front end of the motor-car and first observed the approaching train when it was about 200 feet distant. He immediately called a warning to the men on the motor-car and the trailer, then jumped just before the collision occurred. The engineer of Extra 22 East saw the motor-car when it was about 200 feet distant, and he immediately moved the brake valve to emergency position. The speed of Extra 22 was about 15 miles per hour when the collision occurred.

If the movement of the motor-car and trailer had been made under flag protection in accordance with the rules, this accident would not have occurred.

Cause

It is found that this accident was caused by failure to provide protection for the movement of a track motor-car and trailer.

Dated at Washington, D. C., this sixth day of March, 1944.

By the Commission, Chairman Patterson.

(SEAL)

W. P. BARTEL,
Secretary.