

INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF THE BUREAU OF SAFETY IN RE
INVESTIGATION OF AN ACCIDENT WHICH OCCURRED ON THE
WESTERN PACIFIC RAILROAD AT WINNEMUCCA, NEVADA,
ON NOVEMBER 14, 1931.

December 18, 1931.

To the Commission:

On November 14, 1931, there was a collision between portions of two freight trains on the Western Pacific Railroad at Winnemucca, Nevada, which resulted in the death of one employee.

Location and method of operation

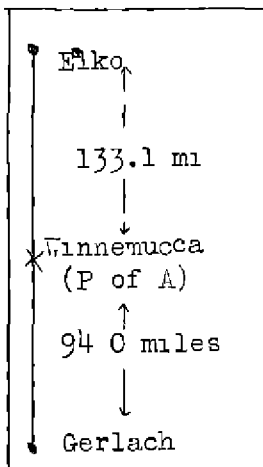
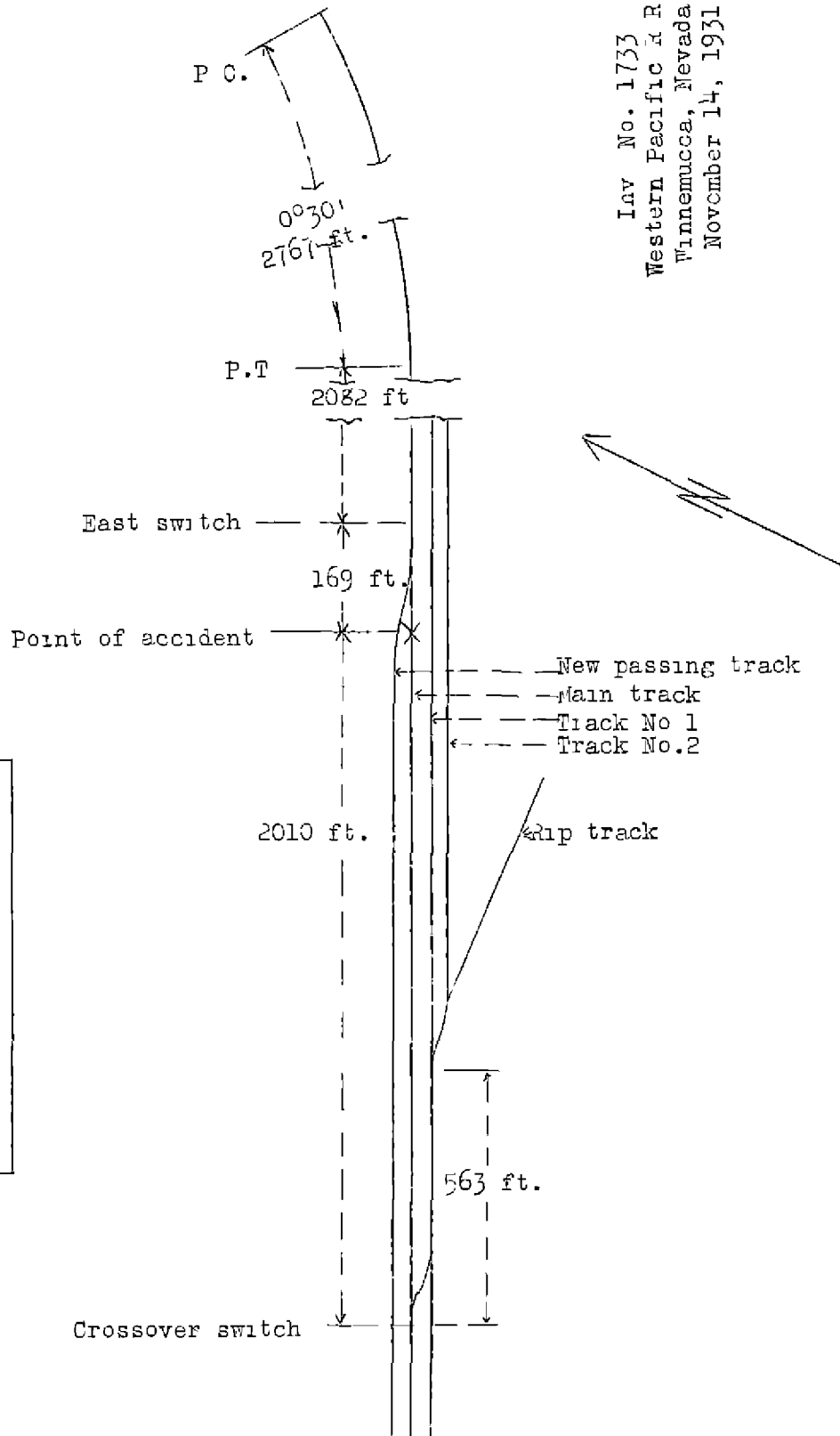
This accident occurred on that part of the Eastern Division extending between Gerlach and Elko, Nev., a distance of 227.1 miles. The point of accident was within yard limits, where the main track is a single-track line over which trains are operated by time-table and train orders. In the immediate vicinity of the point of accident there are four tracks which parallel each other and are designated, from north to south, new passing track, main track, track 1 and track 2, the accident occurring on the main track at a point 169 feet west of the east switch leading to the new passing track. There is a crossover between the main track and track 1, the main track switch of this crossover being located 2,010 feet west of the point of accident, this is a trailing-point switch for westbound trains. At a point 563 feet east of the main-track crossover switch there is a switch leading from track 2 to the rip track, this latter track extending towards the east. Approaching the point of accident from the east, there is a $0^{\circ} 30'$ curve to the right 2,767 feet in length, followed by tangent track to the east switch of the new passing track, a distance of 2,082 feet, and for a considerable distance beyond that point. The grade is level at the point of accident.

The weather was clear at the time of the accident, which occurred about 4.30 a.m.

Description

Winnemucca is the junction point between the First and Second Sub-divisions; there is no switching crew maintained at this point, it being the practice for freight crews to assemble their own trains. At the time of the accident two freight trains were being made up preparatory to leaving this point, one train westbound and the other

Inv No. 1733
 Western Pacific R.R.,
 Winnemucca, Nevada
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train eastbound.

Westbound freight train extra 332 was in charge of Conductor Damon and Engineman Vetter. The crew of this train pulled 40 cars out on the main track and left them standing between the east switch of the new passing track and the main track crossover switch. The engine then moved through the crossover to track 1, where it picked up about 30 cars which were standing on the east end of that track and moved them forward to the rip track switch, where a car in damaged condition was set out, and just after the two sections of this portion of the train, on track 1, were recoupled, the cars which had been left standing on the main track were struck by a cut of cars being handled by the engine of extra 323.

Eastbound freight train extra 323 was in charge of Conductor Jones and Engineman Woods. The crew of this train was assembling their train on track 2, and while doing so a movement was started westward on the main track with the engine headed east, shoving three cars and pulling the caboose. It was while this movement was being made, at a speed of from 8 to 10 miles per hour, that it collided with the cars of extra 332.

As a result of the collision the leading car being shoved by engine 323 coupled to the car at the east end of the cut on the main track, moving them forward about 100 feet. None of the equipment was derailed, although the end car in the cut of cars and the three cars coupled to engine 323 were damaged to some extent. The employee killed was a brakeman of extra 332, who was between the two cars at the west end of the 40-car cut.

Summary of evidence

Engineman Vetter, of extra 332, stated that after picking up about 30 cars on the east end of track 1, one of these cars was found in bad order and was set out on the rip track; it was just after coupling up the 30 cars again, that he heard a crash and noticed that the 40 cars on the main track moved ahead about 100 feet. The statements of Fireman Thorne, of extra 332, substantiated those of Engineman Vetter.

Conductor Damon, of extra 332, stated that the cars on track 1 had just been recoupled, after setting out a bad-order car, and that he was standing between the main track and track 1, 10 or 15 car lengths from the east end

of the 40-car cut on the main track, when those cars were struck by the cars handled by engine 323. The reason the cars were left standing on the main track was that they comprised the head end of his train, and that in view of the bad-order car in the rear portion of the train he considered the best movement was to set this car out before the head end was coupled to the rear end on track 1, so as to avoid a long switching movement. He also said that it was dark but the weather was clear and he estimated that standing cars could have been distinguished for a distance of 15 or 20 car-lengths. He further stated that it is not customary to place lighted lanterns on cars left standing on the main track within yard limits while making switching movements when no first-class trains are due. The statements of Brakeman Blakesley added no facts of importance.

Brakeman Stephens, of extra 323, stated that his engine left the sandhouse track at 3.30 a.m., and began making up the train. While doing so he was instructed by the conductor to look out for extra 332 and not to delay that train. As his engine was switching cars into track 2 he noticed engine 332 placing a caboose on some cars standing on track 1 and formed the opinion that that train was about ready to leave the yard. He rode on the west end of the leading car while the engine was shoving them westward on the main track and was keeping a sharp lookout ahead, but did not discover that the track was occupied until he was within about three car-lengths of the cars standing on the main track. He immediately gave stop signals and they were acted upon promptly, but before this portion of his train could be stopped it collided with the standing cars. He estimated that his train was traveling at a speed of not more than 10 miles per hour at the time he gave the first stop signal, and said that on account of the darkness it was impossible to have seen the cars ahead any sooner than he did in this case.

Engineman Woods, of extra 323, stated that he coupled to three or four cars which had been left standing on the main track and was moving them westward at a speed of 8 or 10 miles per hour when he received a stop signal from the brakeman who was riding on the leading car of this cut, he immediately placed the automatic brake valve in emergency position, closed the throttle, and set the reverse lever in the center of the quadrant, but by the time he had taken this action the cut of cars his engine was handling had collided with the cars standing on the main track. He did not see the cars prior to the accident as he was watching closely for signals from the brakeman riding on the leading car, and he thought that the distance his engine

moved after he received the first stop signal and before the collision occurred was about one car-length. He further stated that while the movement was being made at a speed of about 10 miles per hour, he considered that this speed was not excessive in view of his dependence upon receiving signals from the brakeman. Fireman Perry, of extra 323, stated that he did not see any signals given from his side of the engine, and his first intimation of anything wrong was when the engineman applied the brakes in emergency, the engine moving a distance of about one car-length before the collision occurred.

Conductor Jones, of extra 323, was examining the cars of his train which were standing on track 2, and when the cut of cars moving westward on the main track passed him he notified Brakeman Stephens, who was riding on the leading car, to be on the alert for extra 332 as the caboose of that train was still standing on track 1. He estimated that the engine and cars passed him at a speed of about 4 miles per hour. He heard the crash of the collision shortly afterwards, about 25 car-lengths from where he was located.

Brakeman Keller, of extra 323, was riding on the step at the rear of the tender while the engine and cars were moving westward on the main track and saw the first stop signal given by Brakeman Stephens, which he in turn repeated to the engineman. The engineman took immediate action to stop the cut of cars, which was then moving about 8 or 10 miles per hour, but was unable to do so before the collision occurred. He said that the air was coupled to the car next to the engine and when the brakes were applied it sounded like an emergency application. He did not see the cars on the main track prior to the accident and was unable to state how far his cut of cars traveled after the brakes were applied and before the collision occurred.

Trainmaster Renner stated that according to his interpretation of the rules the crew of extra 332 had a right to leave cars temporarily standing on the main track within yard limits and without flag protection while they were setting out a bad-order car from the rear portion of their train.

Conclusions

This accident was caused by the failure to operate under proper control within yard limits, for which Brakeman Stephens and Engineman Woods are responsible.

The rules provide that within yard limits the main track may be used, protecting against first-class trains; all trains and engines must move within yard limits prepared to stop unless the main track is seen or known to be clear.

According to the evidence, the crew of extra 332, westbound, left a cut of cars standing on the main track, and during the course of making up extra 323, an east-bound extra, a movement was started westward on the main track with three cars west of the engine and with Brakeman Stephens riding the leading car. A speed of 8 or 10 miles per hour had been attained when the brakeman discovered the cars standing on the main track, about three car-lengths distant but it then was too late to avert the accident. Brakeman Stephens said that it was impossible to have seen the cars on the main track any sooner on account of darkness, and Engineman Woods stated that he did not see the cars as he was constantly watching for signals from the brakeman. It is quite apparent that these employees either were not maintaining a proper lookout, or else the movement was being made at too high a rate of speed.

The employees involved were experienced men, and at the time of the accident none of them had been on duty in violation of any of the provisions of the hours of service law.

Respectfully submitted,

W. P. BORLAND

Director.