

## INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF THE BUREAU OF SAFETY IN RE  
INVESTIGATION OF AN ACCIDENT WHICH OCCURRED ON THE  
LOUISVILLE & NASHVILLE RAILROAD AT LEEWOOD, TENN.,  
ON NOVEMBER 11, 1928.

January 9, 1929.

To the Commission:

On November 11, 1928, there was a rear-end collision between a passenger train and a yard engine on the Louisville & Nashville Railroad at Leewood, Tenn., resulting in the death of one employee and the injury of five employees and six passengers.

Location and method of operation.

This accident occurred on that part of the Memphis Division extending between Paris and South Memphis, Tenn., a distance of 132.78 miles, in the vicinity of the point of accident this is a single-track line over which trains are operated by timetable and train orders, no block-signal system being in use. The accident occurred within yard limits at Leewood, 3,677 feet south of the north yard-limit board, on a track known as the old main line, at a point 364 feet south of a switch leading from the main track to the old main line. This is a facing-point switch for southbound trains, with the switch stand located on the engineman's side, and leads off the main track to the right. Approaching from the north the track is tangent for about 2 miles, the grade in the vicinity of the point of accident is practically level.

The weather was clear at the time of the accident, which occurred at about 9 a.m.

Description

Yard engine 367, in charge of Engine Foreman Cannon and Engineman Murrell, was headed south, it entered upon the old main line at the main track switch and then the switch was left open and unattended while work was performed some distance away in the yard. On hearing train No. 101 approaching an attempt was made to reach the switch in time to close it, but after backing northward about 20 or 30 car-lengths it was

definitely realized that this could not be accomplished and the yard engine was brought to a stop and reversed, being struck shortly afterwards by train No. 101.

Southbound passenger train No. 101 consisted of one express car, one baggage and mail car, two coaches, two Pullman cars, and one dining car, in the order named, hauled by engine 201, and was in charge of Conductor Clark and Engineman Sills. This train passed Bartlett, the last open office, 6.24 miles north of Leewood, at 8 56 a.m., according to the train sheet, 1 hour and 23 minutes late, headed in at the open switch and collided with yard engine 967 while traveling at a speed estimated to have been about 30 or 35 miles per hour.

Yard engine 967 came to a stop at a point 1,521 feet south of the point of collision, on a yard-lead track, with the tender and the cab of the engine badly damaged, the forward truck of the tender was derailed. Engine 201 was derailed and badly damaged while the tender, which was practically demolished, telescoped the engine cab, the engine came to rest in an upright position and parallel with the track, its forward end being 221 feet south of the point of collision. The first two cars and the forward truck of the third car were derailed, these cars remained upright. The employee killed was the engineman of train No. 101.

#### Summary of Evidence.

On arrival of yard engine 967 at Leewood from North Memphis, at about 3.47 a.m., with seven cars and a caboose, Engine Foreman Cannon was instructed by yardmaster Newsom that the cars would have to be taken to the north end of the yard. Foreman Cannon then inquired as to whether any passenger trains were due and was informed by Yardmaster Newsom that they had all passed, which information was conveyed to the entire yard crew. After instructing Switchman Harris as to what switching to perform Foreman Cannon walked to the yard office in connection with the performance of his duties, 3,528 feet south of the switch involved in the accident. Yard engine 967 then made a back-up movement with the cars to the north end of the yard, and on reaching about the middle of the yard Switchman Hodges got off, leaving only Switchman Harris to accompany the yard engine. On arrival at the old main line switch,

Switchman Harris opened it and then boarded the leading car, the yard engine entering upon the old main line and the switch being left open and unattended.

Switchman Harris acknowledged that he was familiar with the rule requiring that whoever opens a main-track switch must remain at that switch until it is closed, unless relieved by another member of the same crew, but since he was needed in connection with the work of switching, and in view of the yardmaster's statement that all passenger trains due had passed, and in view of the further fact that second-class and inferior trains are required to run carefully through the Memphis Terminals expecting to find the main track occupied, responsibility resting with the moving train in case of accident, he did not deem it necessary to remain at the switch and thought it was all right to leave it open and unattended for a period of from four to six minutes. Another reason why he did not close the switch was that almost every day bad-order cars have to be set out of cuts of cars which are so long as to necessitate using the main-track switch, and if he had closed the switch it probably would mean that he would have to walk back about 20 or 25 car-lengths in order to open it again. It further appeared from Switchman Harris' statements that he had never seen an engine foreman check the register on arriving at Leewood yard, but occasionally he had seen him make such a check when ready to depart southward. Switchman Harris also said that at times he had seen the yardmaster have a train order stating that certain first-class trains were running late.

Engineman Murrell, of yard engine 967, knew it was the duty of the yard crew to check the register for overdue trains, but said that work was performed in the usual manner on this occasion, it being a practice of long standing to make such overviews on verbal instructions of the yardmaster, which in this case were delivered to the engine foreman, and to his knowledge this was the first instance of a mistake having been made on account of wrong information having been given, in fact, he said the practice was of such long standing that he thought the yardmaster had authority from superior officials to have it handled in this way. Engineman Murrell further stated that he did not recall ever having received a train order to the effect that all superior trains had arrived, such train orders applying only to trains that are being run late, nor did he ever recall having received a written line-up as to expected trains, the yardmaster's word being accepted. The statements of Fireman Gaia and

Switchman Hodges developed nothing additional of importance. Switchman Hodges was not closer to the switch than about 30 car lengths in distance prior to the time the attempt was made to reach and close it just before the accident occurred.

Engine Foreman Cannon stated that on some occasions the yardmaster imparts verbal instructions as to overdue first-class trains, and then again the yardmaster would show him a Form 19 train order. The reason the rule in regard to closing main-track switches was not complied with on this occasion was that it was thought all overdue first-class trains had passed, and he interpreted the time-table provision in regard to second-class and inferior trains as meaning that the yard engine was fully protected against such trains. Foreman Cannon did not think that the rule in regard to having some one remain at an open main track switch applied within yard limits, but only outside thereof. It further appeared from the engine foreman's statements that upon arriving at Leewood he never checked the train register for information concerning first-class trains but that the register was always checked before departing. He acknowledged that on arrival of engine 967 at Leewood it was only about 15 car-lengths from the telegraph office, where the train register is maintained, and that by going to the office he could have checked the register and personally have ascertained whether or not train No. 101 had passed, but said he knew of no instruction or practice that required engine foremen to make such a check, and that in this case he depended entirely upon the verbal information from Yardmaster Newsom that all passenger trains had passed.

Yardmaster Newsom stated that at about 7.30 a.m. he called the dispatcher, for the purpose of getting a line-up on passenger trains and was informed that train No. 101 was running one hour late. There were several things to attend to on the morning in question, assembling cuts, opening up the yard which was blocked with cars, watching out for an extra foreman and an extra helper, etc. Yard engine 967 arrived at 8.40 a.m. and he instructed Engine Foreman Cannon to take the cars to the north end of the yard, and, as was the general practice, informed the engine foreman verbally that all overdue passenger trains had passed, having completely overlooked the fact that train No. 101 had not passed. Yardmaster Newsom was familiar with the instructions relative to obtaining copies of train orders when passenger trains are being run late, and delivering same to engine foremen and

yard enginemen, but said that on this occasion he did not think that one hour available under the run-late order would be of service to any of the engines and therefore did not go to the telegraph office for copies of the run-late order issued in connection with train No. 101, which had been put out at Humboldt, Brownsville and Leewood. He understood that these orders should be delivered to engine foremen and yard enginemen and said that as far as he knew, since the latest instructions concerning them were issued on August 8 and 10, 1928, such orders were obtained from the telegraph office at Leewood and shown to all concerned. Yardmaster Newsom had only been back at Leewood yard since October 23, 1928, although he had been a yardmaster in the Memphis terminals since 1917, and he said that he recalled only one instance where a run-late order was received, and on that particular occasion it was not used as the train involved passed Leewood before any yard engine arrived. Yardmaster Newsom further stated that on numerous occasions when the old main line switch was being used by him he was very careful about the handling of it and either left some one at the switch or had it closed, in the event that it was necessary for the yard engine to go some distance away from the switch

Fireman O'Brien, of train No. 101, stated that he was putting in a fire when Engineman Sills sounded the whistle for Leewood, the whistle board being located 1,590 feet inside of the yard-limit board. Fireman O'Brien finished putting in the fire and was just getting ready to get on his seat box when the engineman applied the air brakes in emergency, when about 200 or 250 feet from the switch, at which time the fireman estimated the speed to have been between about 50 or 55 miles per hour, he estimated that the speed had been reduced to about 30 miles per hour when the accident occurred. Fireman O'Brien said that at no time did he look to see what indication was displayed by the switch target. While in his estimation Engineman Sills did not approach Leewood yard in accordance with the provisions of rule 93 which requires trains to approach yard limits under control, and to run carefully expecting to find the main track occupied, yet he said that the train was being operated in the usual manner. Conductor Clark, Flagman Hampton and Train Porter Boyd were unaware of anything wrong until the air brakes were applied in emergency, at which time they estimated the speed to have been between 30 and 50 miles per hour, and at the time of the collision at 30 or 35 miles per hour. Conductor Clark said it was not customary to find the old main line switch open or the track obstructed at that particular point, that the speed

limit for passenger trains was 60 miles per hour, and that it was customary for trains to approach Leewood at the speed at which his train was traveling in this instance, in order to make the time required, expecting to find the way clear.

#### Conclusions.

This accident was caused by an open switch, for which Yardmaster Newsom is responsible.

Under the instructions issued to the general yardmaster on August 8 and transmitted to Yardmasters Newsom, Wheatley and Mayo on August 10, it is required that time must be given on train orders, Form 19; when passenger trains are late the yardmaster on duty is required to obtain a copy of such run-late orders for each engine crew and hand the orders to them when they enter the yard and before they get on the main track. In this particular case Yardmaster Newsom had been informed that train No. 101 was running one hour late, this information having been received more than one hour prior to the arrival of engine 967. He failed to go to the telegraph office and get this time in train-order form so that he could deliver copies of the order to the yard crews, with the result that he overlooked train No. 101 entirely and told the crew of engine 967 that all overdue passenger trains had gone. The run-late order on train No. 101 had been put out at Leewood, addressed to the yardmaster and to the operator, and had Yardmaster Newsom complied with the instructions and delivered a copy of the order to the crew of engine 967, the oversight on his part which led directly to the occurrence of this accident would have been averted. Yardmaster Newsom is also at fault for his failure to obey rule 583; this rule relates to the duties of yardmasters and reads as follows:

They must give close attention to the proper handling of main track switches, having same protected at all times and in proper position for safe passage of trains.

While a yardmaster can not have personal knowledge at all times of the position of the various main track switches in the yard or yards under his supervision, yet under the rule above quoted there is no question but that he should be fully acquainted with the practices

followed in the handling of such switches and see to it that his subordinates comply with the rules. The evidence indicates, however, that the methods followed by the crew of engine 967 represented a more or less general practice and one which was clearly in violation of the rules and which should have been corrected by the yardmasters.

So far as the members of the yard crew are concerned, it appeared that they accepted the yardmaster's statement as to the passage of overdue passenger trains and then proceeded with their work, opening the main track switch and leaving it in that position while they moved some cars a considerable distance southward on the yard track. Under rule 104-b it was clearly incumbent on Engineman Murrell of the yard crew to see that the switch was closed before leaving it, while Switchman Harris, after opening the switch, should have closed it after the engine had entered on the yard track or else he should have remained at the open switch until relieved. With respect to Engineman Sills of train No. 101 it appeared that he was operating his train at a speed of approximately 50 miles per hour whereas rule 93 requires all trains to approach yard limits under control and to run carefully through those limits.

The evidence indicated that these employees were following the usual practices. Instructions had been issued requiring yardmasters to furnish copies of time orders to yard crews and a special notice had been issued calling attention to the fact that rule 93 was not being complied with, but the duty of supervising officials does not end with the issuance of instructions and notices. Effort should be made to know that instructions of all kinds, as well as the operating rules, are being enforced and obeyed. The situation disclosed in this investigation, however, shows that such was not the case in this instance. The rules and instructions were sufficient to have prevented the occurrence of this accident, and it is strongly recommended that the responsible officials take energetic steps toward improving their methods of supervision with a view to seeing that the rules and instructions in question are strictly enforced and obeyed.

All 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.