

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 PORTLAND, TENN.,
ON FEBRUARY 11, 1925.

June 1, 1925.

To the Commission:

On February 11, 1925, there was a side collision between a light engine and a freight train on the Louisville & Nashville Railroad at Portland, Tenn., which resulted in the death of one employee and the injury of five employees.

Location and method of operation

This accident occurred on that part of the Nashville Division which extends between Nashville, Tenn., and Bowling Green, Ky., a distance of 73.03 miles. In the vicinity of the point of accident this is a single-track line over which trains are operated by time-table and train orders, no block-signal system being in use. The collision occurred near the south wye-track switch located 1,785 feet south of the station at Portland. The main track is tangent for a considerable distance in either direction from the point of accident, while the grade for northbound trains is 1.22 per cent descending for a distance of approximately 2,000 feet and is then practically level to the point of accident, an additional distance of about 500 feet.

The south passing track at Portland parallels the main track on the east and extends from a point 265 feet south of the south wye-track switch northward a distance of 2,408 feet; the station is located to the east of this track at a point 368 feet south of its northern end. The wye lies to the east of the main track, the north wye-track switch being located 648 feet south of the station.

One or more freight train crews are regularly assigned to what is known as Portland turn-around service moving freight cars from Nashville to Portland and leaving them there for northbound trains which increase tonnage at that point.

A strong wind was blowing and it was snowing at the time of the accident which occurred, at 9.15 a.m.

Description

Northbound second-class freight train third No. 78, consisting of 18 cars and a caboose, hauled by engine 1365, in charge of Conductor Nirro and Engineman Houk, departed from Radnor Yard, Nashville, at 5.15 a.m., and arrived at Portland, according to the train sheet, at 9.05 a.m.. It entered upon the south passing track at the south switch and moved northward on that track and was brought to a stop with the engine about opposite the station. The engine was cut off, moved out on the main track, and backed southward on that track, being again brought to a stop opposite the station. The engine-men then got off and joined the conductor in the station for the purpose of securing orders for the return trip to Nashville. Several minutes later the fireman and head brakeman, without instructions to do so, decided to turn the engine on the wye, backing in on the north leg of the wye and heading out on the south leg. While this engine was moving slowly toward the main track, on the south leg of the wye, northbound train first No. 74 was observed approaching, the light engine was brought to a stop, fouling the main track, and the collision occurred before it could be backed into clear.

Northbound second-class freight train first No. 74, consisting of 22 cars and a caboose, hauled by engines 1247 and 994, coupled, was in charge of Conductor Bird and Enginemen Lindsey and Morrison. It departed from Radnor yard at 5.53 a.m., passed South Tunnel, the last open office, 7.88 miles from Portland, at 9.02 a.m., according to the train sheet, and collided with light engine 1365 at Portland while traveling at a speed estimated by the crew to have been between 15 and 20 miles an hour.

Engine 1247, the leading engine of train first No. 74, turned over on its left side and was considerably damaged, while engine 994 came to rest upright between the main track and the wye track. The first car in the train was destroyed, while the second and third cars were derailed. Engine 1365 was driven backward on the wye track a distance of about 150 feet, it was not derailed and sustained only slight damage. The employee killed was the engineman of the leading engine of train first No. 74.

Summary of evidence

Engineman Houk, of train third No. 78, said his train was brought to a stop about opposite the station upon receiving a hand signal from the operator. The head brakeman got off the engine and after talking with the operator uncoupled the engine and upon receiving a signal from the brakeman Engineman Houk said he moved the engine out on the main track and then backed it down that track and stopped opposite the station. He then left the engine and with Conductor Nimmo went into the office for orders. While in the office he looked out of the window and saw the fireman backing the engine toward the wye, and while this movement was being made without authority and against his will he did not signal or make any attempt to stop the engine as he thought the brakeman and fireman were only going to put the engine in on the north leg of the wye and there await his arrival. Shortly afterward he left the office with Conductor Nimmo and they started toward the wye; on account of the stormy weather, the falling snow limiting the range of vision to a very short distance, it was necessary to proceed to the wye before it was realized that the engine was not there. It was at this time that a distress signal was heard in the direction of the south wye-track switch and they both hurried to the scene of the accident.

The statements of Conductor Nimmo practically corroborated those of Engineman Houk. He also said that it was not necessary for every movement to be made under the personal supervision or observation of the conductor and he did not think Head Brakeman Newman exceeded his authority in turning the engine without specific orders to do so, saying this was his regular crew and that it was always necessary on this run to turn the engine at this point. On this particular occasion the only instructions he had given to any member of the crew consisted of orders to the flagman to protect the engine until it had gone in on the wye.

Fireman Covington, of train third No. 78, stated that shortly after the engineman went into the office with the conductor, the brakeman suggested that they turn the engine, to which he assented, and accordingly the engine was backed in on the north leg of the wye and headed out on the south leg toward the south wye-track switch. After the engine had reached the south leg of the wye a proceed signal was given by the brakeman and as the engine passed the brakeman got on the pilot and was lost to sight until the engine approached the main track. Fireman Covington said he was of the

opinion that they were to go out on the main track, back in at the south end of the passing-track, and push their train to the north end of the passing-track. This belief was caused by the fact that Brakeman Newman rode on the pilot of the engine en route to the main track in a heavy snow storm, and by the further fact that when the brakeman stepped off the pilot as the engine approached the main track he faced and walked toward the switch, to all appearances intent upon operating it. The engine was not brought to a stop at the clearance point, Fireman Covington saying he permitted it to drift slowly ahead and that it was moving about as fast as a man can walk, fouling the main track, when he saw train first No. 74 approaching about six or seven car lengths distant; he had not heard any previous whistle signals. He brought the engine to a stop and attempted to back up, but the collision occurred before he could start the back-up movement. Fireman Covington said Brakeman Newman had talked with the operator upon the arrival of their train at Portland and he supposed the brakeman had been informed of the expected arrival of trains and would not have suggested the intended movement unless it could be made in safety. Fireman Covington stated that he had turned engines at Portland for other enginemen and supposed that he had done so for Engineman Houk, although he was unable to recall a specific instance.

Instead of telling the fireman they would turn the engine, Head Brakeman Newman said he told him they would put the engine in on the wye. With this exception the statements of Head Brakeman Newman practically agreed with those of Fireman Covington as to the events which transpired up to the time engine 1345 reached the south leg of the wye track and began to move toward the main track. He stated that when the engine reached the clearance point he gave the fireman a stop signal and got off the pilot on the engineman's side of the track, as the engine did not stop he said he turned and gave a back-up signal, having heard a station whistle signal sounded by train first No. 74, and knowing that his own engine was not clear of the main track, but the collision occurred before engine 1365 could be backed into clear.

Fireman Crockett, of the leading engine of train first No. 74, said Engineman Lindsey shut off steam and permitted the train to drift down the grade approaching Portland, and that it was running at a speed of about 15 or 20 miles an hour when the brakes were applied in emergency and Engineman Lindsey attempted to open the cab door as if to leave the engine. Fireman Crockett said he tried to open it for him, but on failing to do so he swung out of the gang-way and saw an engine fouling the track a short distance ahead; he shouted a warning

of danger to the student fireman and brakeman and jumped just before the collision occurred. Fireman Crockett said that as far as he knew the brakes were not applied in a service application after the train started down the grade coming into Portland.

The statements of Head Brakeman Rigsby practically agreed with those of Fireman Crockett. Engineman Morrison, of the second engine, did not know there was anything wrong until he saw the fireman jump from the leading engine; he was unable to give any information concerning the application of the air brakes. The statements of the other members of the crew of train first No. 74 did not bring out any additional facts of importance.

Conclusions.

This accident was caused by engine 1365 obstructing the main track on the time of train first No. 74, an over-due second-class train, for which Fireman Covington and Head Brakeman Newman were responsible.

Fireman Covington assumed that because Brakeman Newman had talked with the operator upon the arrival of their train at Portland he had acquainted himself with the expected arrival of over-due trains, and therefore when the brakeman suggested that they turn the engine, he thought the movement could be made in safety, including moving the engine out on the main track. As a matter of fact Brakeman Newman had not acquainted himself with the expected arrival of over-due trains, while the stop signals and also the back-up signals which he claimed to have given were not seen by the fireman, although apparently he was within the fireman's range of vision.

It did not appear that it was customary for the fireman and head brakeman to turn the engine and move it out on the main track, but rather that the most that would be done would be to move it in on the north leg of the wye and remain there until orders were received for the return movement to Radnor Yard.

With the exception of the student fireman on the leading engine of train first No. 74, all of the employes involved were experienced men, none of whom had been on duty in violation of any of the provision of the hours of service law.

Respectfully submitted,

W. P. BORLAND,

Director.