

INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF THE BUREAU OF SAFETY IN RE
INVESTIGATION OF AN ACCIDENT WHICH OCCURRED ON THE
ST. LOUIS SOUTHWESTERN RAILWAY NEAR McNEIL, ARK.,
ON AUGUST 2, 1930.

September 13, 1930.

To the Commission:

On August 2, 1930, there was a head-end collision between two freight trains on the St. Louis Southwestern Railway near McNeil, Ark., resulting in the death of five employees and two trespassers, and the injury of one employee.

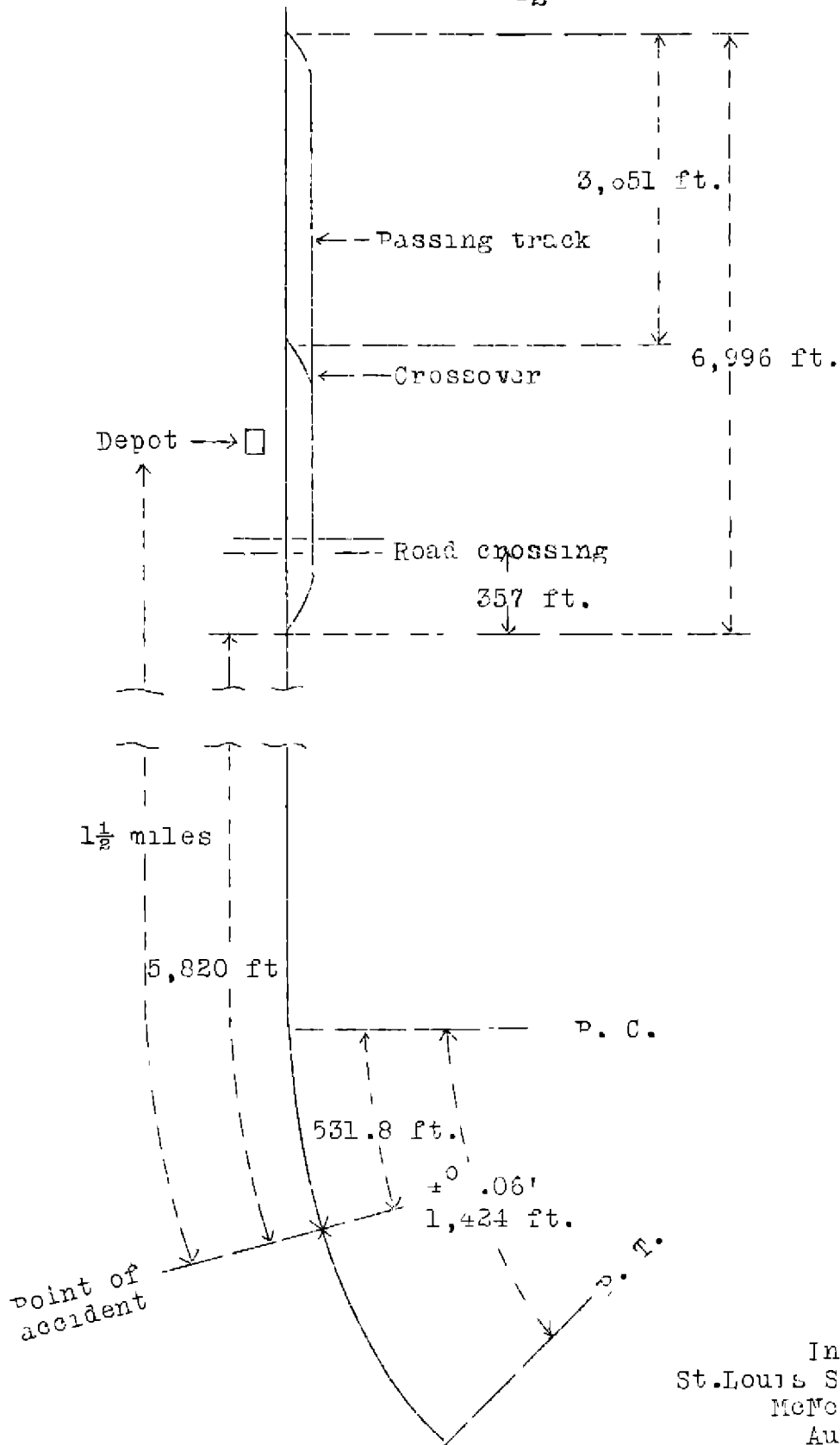
Location and method of operation

This accident occurred on the Pine Bluff Subdivision of the Northern Division, extending between Pine Bluff Shops and Texarkana, Ark., a distance of 152.43 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 accident occurred about $1\frac{1}{2}$ miles south of the depot at McNeil or 5,820 feet south of the south switch of the passing track, which is 6,996 feet in length and parallels the main track on the east. There is a crossover 198 feet in length and extending from northwest to southeast, that connects the main track and the passing track, the north switch of the crossover is located 3,651 feet south of the north switch of the passing track or 1,216 feet north of the depot. Approaching the point of accident from the north, the track is tangent for a distance of 4,913 feet, followed by a $40^{\circ} 06'$ curve to the left 1,424 feet in length, the accident occurring on this curve at a point 531.8 feet from its northern end, approaching from the south, the track is tangent for a distance of 8,930 feet, followed by the curve on which the accident occurred. The grade at the point of accident is 0.33 per cent ascending for southbound trains.

Owing to a cut on the curve south of the point of collision, with trees on the inside of the curve, neither engine crew could obtain a clear view of the opposing train across the inside of the curve until they were within approximately 550 feet of each other.

The weather was clear at the time of the accident, which occurred between 11.52 and 11.55 a.m.

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Inv. 1656
St. Louis Southwestern Ry.,
McMol, Ark.
August 2, 1930

Description

Southbound freight train extra 775, at the time of the accident, consisted of 43 cars and a caboose, hauled by engine 775, and was in charge of Conductor DeMaine and Engineman Simpson. At Pine Bluff Shops, 101.33 miles north of McNeil, the crew received among others copy of train order No. 104, Form 19, together with a clearance card, reading in part as follows:

"Eng 775 run Extra Pine Bluff Shops to
Texarkana Yard has *** right over No. 18 Eng
unknown Pine Bluff Shops to crossover McNeil
***".

Extra 775 left Pine Bluff Shops at 3.50 a.m., according to the train sheet, and on arrival at McNeil, at 11.35 a.m., according to the train sheet, it entered upon the passing track at the crossover and continued thereon without stopping. While passing the telegraph office at a low rate of speed, a copy of train order No. 132, Form 19, together with a clearance card, was delivered to both the front and rear ends of the train, reading as follows:

"Second 18 Eng 778 meet Extra 775 South at
Stamps".

Stamps is located 17.15 miles south of McNeil. After receiving this order, the speed of the train was increased, it being estimated to have been between 15 and 20 miles per hour as the caboose went out of the south switch of the passing track and shortly thereafter extra 775 collided with train first No. 18 while traveling at a speed estimated to have been between 20 and 30 miles per hour.

Northbound second-class freight train first No. 18, at the time of the accident, consisted of 44 cars and a caboose, hauled by engine 587, and was in charge of Conductor Bouric and Engineman Jennings. At Lewisville, 21.63 miles south of McNeil, the crew received, among others, a copy of train order No. 104, Form 19, previously referred to, together with a clearance card. Train first No. 18 departed from Lewisville at 11 a.m., according to the train sheet, 3 hours and 20 minutes late, passed Waldo, the last open office, 5.21 miles from McNeil, at 11.46 a.m., according to the train sheet, 3 hours and 1 minute late, and on reaching a point about 3.7 miles beyond that station it collided with extra 775 while traveling at a speed estimated to have been between 20 and 25 miles per hour.

Both engines were badly damaged, their boilers were knocked off their frames and came to rest on the west side of the track, the boiler of engine 775 being on its left side, while that of engine 587 was on its right side, both tenders were also badly damaged. The first 12 cars in each train were derailed, and of the total, 10 cars were destroyed. The employees killed were the engineman, fireman and head brakeman of extra 775, and the engineman and fireman of train first No. 18, while the employee injured was the head brakeman of train first No. 18.

Summary of evidence

Conductor DeMaine, of extra 775, stated that he thoroughly understood that train order No. 104, received at Pine Bluff Shops, only gave his train right over train No. 18 from Pine Bluff Shops to the crossover at McNeil. On arrival at McNeil, his train came to a stop and then headed in at the crossover to the passing track, moving at a low rate of speed. The switches were closed behind the train, and then Flagman Dorman got on the right side of the caboose and rode there, taking up a copy of train order No. 132 headed on by Agent-Operator Key. Conductor DeMaine said that the flagman looked at the order and then handed it to him without comment, this being the only order received at McNeil, and the conductor stepped inside the caboose and proceeded to read it, saying that he misread the order as "meet No. 18 at Stamps". As the caboose neared the south switch of the passing track, Flagman Dorman mentioned "second 18", and then the conductor reread the order and saw that it read "second 18". He immediately asked for his other orders, which were on the clip board in the caboose cupola, thinking that he had overlooked some other order on train No. 18. Middle Brakeman Craig then climbed up into the cupola and got the other orders down for him and Conductor DeMaine said that he and both brakemen then looked over the other orders together as quickly as possible, but the collision occurred before all of them had been examined, and while the train was moving at a speed the conductor estimated to have been from 22 to 25 miles per hour, he thought the brakes were being applied when the accident occurred. Conductor DeMaine said that the orders received on this trip were not confusing, that the clearance card received with train order No. 132 at McNeil was properly filled out, that he talked with Engineman Simpson and Fireman Hilborn when he went to the engine at Pine Bluff to compare watches and deliver the orders and at that time the engineman and fireman appeared normal in every respect, and that while at Pine Bluff he also discussed the requirements of train order No. 104 with Head Brakeman McKenzic, he last talked to the engineman at Camden, located 30.41 miles north of McNeil. Conductor DeMaine did not recall anything having been said to him by Flagman Dorman or Middle Brakeman Craig about applying the

air brakes from the rear of the train prior to the accident, and said that he was in position to have heard them had they called to him; at another point, however, he said he did not apply the brakes because he did not think of it in time. From the time he was handed train order No. 132 by Flagman Dorman, the conductor did not deliver to or place the order where Middle Brakeman Craig could read it before the accident occurred.

Flagman Dorman, of extra 775, stated that he was a qualified conductor and that he read all train orders received on this trip immediately after the orders were delivered, except the orders received at McNeil, and he was aware that train order No. 104 gave his own train right over train No. 18 only to the crossover at McNeil. The train-order signal at McNeil was displayed, and when the caboose was almost opposite the depot, Agent-Operator Key handed on a copy of train order No. 132 to the flagman, no hoop being used, just then the caboose gave a lurch and the flagman said he knew that his train was leaving that point. Flagman Dorman opened the order and read it correctly as "second 18" and then handed it to the conductor, the flagman said that the conductor told him to "highball the switch", therefore, the flagman inquired as to who was going to close the south switch of the passing track and the conductor told him that it would be closed by the section employee, so the flagman watched to see that the section employee properly closed the switch. This statement, however, was denied by the conductor, who said he did not know his train was not going to stop, so some member of the crew could close the switch, until the caboose passed over it. Flagman Dorman said that he then went inside the caboose and asked Conductor Delaine where their train was going for train first No. 18, at which time the caboose was 5 or 10 car-lengths south of the switch, and the conductor said "let's see, what did we have on them". The flagman maintained he told the conductor, provided nothing had been received in regard to train first No. 18 at McNeil, to apply the air brakes from the rear, but that the conductor said "No, you don't suppose Simpson is pulling against anybody". The flagman then said that he would apply the air brakes from the rear, but that the conductor said not to do so until the other orders were read, and it was while the conductor was reading the orders that the collision occurred. Flagman Dorman also said that at the time he went inside the caboose, after the south switch of the passing track had been closed by the section employee, Middle Brakeman Craig was in the caboose, and that the middle brakeman also cautioned the conductor about applying the brakes from the rear, provided no order had been received at McNeil advancing their train against train No. 18. Flagman Dorman stated that he did not know how many orders were handed on to him by the agent-operator at McNeil, and

that he did not look at the clearance card attached, and he took no action toward having his train remain in the clear on the passing track, as he assumed that another train order had been received there advancing his own train against train first No. 18. Flagman Dorman thought that an air-brake application must have been made just prior to the accident, judging from the manner in which the caboose gradually came to a stop. Middle Brakeman Craig, of extra 775, stated that he was riding in the caboose cupola, on the right side, as his train moved southward on the passing track. He said that the train-order signal was in the stop position and just as the agent-operator handed on the train order to the flagman he saw the head brakeman running toward the south switch of the passing track, therefore, the middle brakeman shouted outside of the cupola window that their train was heading out and that if nothing was received on train No. 18 to apply the air brakes from the rear, but he said he received no answer to his warning. The middle brakeman then got down from the cupola and asked the conductor what they had on train No. 18 and all the conductor said was a meet with second No. 18 at Stamps, so the middle brakeman told the conductor if something had not been received on train No. 18 to apply the air brakes from the rear, but the conductor said "No, hand me the orders." The middle brakeman climbed up into the cupola and got the other orders, received before reaching McNeil, and gave them to the conductor, saying that the conductor was still going through them when the accident occurred. Middle Brakeman Craig said that the caboose was in the immediate vicinity of the public road crossing, located 357 feet north of the south switch of the passing track, at the time he got down from the cupola to inquire as to what orders had been received at McNeil, and that the caboose was just going out of the south switch at the time he told the conductor to apply the air brakes, provided the only order they had against train No. 18 was the meet with second No. 18 at Stamps. Middle Brakeman Craig stated that he heard Flagman Dorman tell Conductor DeMaine, while the conductor was going through the other orders, that if they had nothing on train No. 18, to apply the air brakes, and to look at the other orders later.

None of the surviving members of the crew of train first No. 18 was aware of anything wrong until just prior to the accident. Head Brakeman Neill was riding on top of the engine tank, having just climbed over from the adjacent car, when he saw extra 775 rounding the curve about two telegraph pole lengths away, and he jumped just as the collision occurred, estimating the speed of his own train to have been between 20 and 25 miles per hour at the time. Head Brakeman Neill could not tell whether the air brakes were applied on

his train prior to the collision. Statements of Conductor Bouricand, Middle Brakeman Johnson, and Flagman Smedley, all of whom were riding in the caboose at the time of the accident, brought out nothing additional of importance.

Agent-Operator Key, stationed at McNeill, stated that as train No. 67, the local, stood on the main track in front of the depot, blocking the passing track at that point, he requested and saw Middle Brakeman Tolson, of that train, deliver a copy of train order No. 132 to the engine crew of extra 775 as it passed by on the passing track at a low rate of speed. Agent-Operator Key personally delivered a copy of this order to the rear end of extra 775, and then returned to the office, thinking that extra 775 would stop at the lower end of the yard, and he was unaware that it had headed out of the south switch until being informed of the accident. He said that there was no train, engine or caboose at McNeil at the time extra 775 arrived to indicate that train first No. 18 had arrived.

Assistant Superintendent Townsend stated that after the main track had been cleared at the point of accident, he went to McNeil and while at that point he was asked to go to a drug store with Clerk McDaniel, an employee of the railroad, and Fireman Meyers, as the watch and purse of Engineman Simpson had been left there. The watch and purse were wrapped in a package, and this package was opened in the presence of these three men and it also contained the engineman's copy of the train orders received en route, among which were copies of train orders Nos. 104 and 132.

Conclusions

This accident was caused by extra 775 being operated against the first section of an opposing superior train without authority, for which Engineman Simpson and Conductor DeMaine are responsible.

Conductor DeMaine claimed that he thoroughly understood that under the requirements of train order No. 104, his own train had no authority to proceed south of McNeil against train No. 18, but said that when train order No. 132 was received at McNeil, advancing his train to Stamps, 17.15 miles beyond, against train second No. 18 only, he misread the order as "meet No. 18 at Stamps." When his attention was called to the fact that train order No. 132 read "second 18", he asked for the train orders received prior to reaching McNeil, thinking that he had possibly overlooked some other order on train No. 18, and it was while he was reading these other orders that the collision occurred.

Flagman Dorman and Middle Brakeman Craig said they told Conductor DeMaine to apply the air brakes, but the conductor denied having heard them say anything about the matter. Conductor DeMaine should have had a thorough understanding of all orders received en route, and have applied the air brakes from the rear of his train as soon as his attention was called to the fact that train order No. 132 advanced their train to Stamps only against "second 18", instead of waiting to look over the orders received prior to reaching McNeil.

Engineman Simpson apparently received the copy of train order No. 132 delivered to the engine crew at McNeil, but there is no way of saying definitely how he made the error which resulted in his failure to remain at McNeil, nor is there any way of telling whether Fireman Hilborn or head Brakeman McKenzie had read train order No. 132; if they did not read it, however, then it was their duty to see to it that their train remained in the clear on the passing track at McNeil for train No. 18, in line with orders previously received.

Flagman Dorman read train order No. 132 when he received it from the agent-operator, but said he did not check the clearance card and thought there might be two orders instead of one order. This does not sound reasonable. Flagman Dorman knew his train could not proceed without further orders against train No. 18, and when he read train order No. 132, giving rights only against the second section of train No. 18, he should have realized at once that something was wrong and have been more energetic in his endeavors to stop the train, instead of waiting until the entire train was by the south switch and then going inside the caboose and asking the conductor where they were going for the first section of train No. 18.

All of the employees involved were experienced men, at the time of the accident the crews of extra 775 and train first No. 18 had been on duty 8 hours and 55 minutes and 4 hours and 10 minutes, respectively, prior to which both crews had been off duty 13 hours or more.

Respectfully submitted,

W. B. BORLAND,

Director.