

IN RE: INVESTIGATION OF ACCIDENT WHICH OCCURRED  
ON THE SAN PEDRO, LOS ANGELES AND SALT LAKE RAILROAD AT LOS ANGELES,  
CALIFORNIA

ON MAY 17, 1915

On May 17, 1915, there was a head-end collision on the San Pedro, Los Angeles & Salt Lake Railroad at Los Angeles, Calif., which resulted in the injury of 2 Employees. After investigation of this accident, the Chief of the Division or safety reports as follows:

This accident occurred near the western end of a curve of 3 degrees 50 minutes, about 1,700 feet in length, within the yard limits of Los Angeles, on what is known as the San Bernardino mail line, these yard limits extending to Platt's Spur, a distance of about 4 miles. On account of the view being limited by a high bank on the inside of the curve, automatic block signals were placed either side of this curve, the distance between them being 8,962 feet. The easterly automatic block signal is overlapped a distance of 1,222 feet; there is no overlap at the western end. The weather me cloudy.

Westbound passenger train No. 1 consisted 1 refrigerator car, 1 baggage car, 2 chair cars, 1 Pullman sleeping car and private car, hauled by locomotive 3485, and was in charge of Conductor Owen and Engineman Bailey. It left Ontario, the last open telegraph office, about 35 miles east of the point of collision, at 6:35 a.m., on time, and at about 7:41 collided with yard locomotive 19, the speed at the time being estimated to have been about 15 or 30 miles per hour.

At about 7:35 a.m., Engine Foreman Hines, while in the yard office at Los Angeles, received a message over the telephone which he stated he had some difficulty in hearing. He understood the message to be that some cars had fouled the main track at Platts Spur, and to ask if a yard engine could be sent out either to pick up the cars or to push them back on the spur into clear. Hines replied that an engine would be sent right away. He then informed the assistant yard master, who instructed him to go out and clear the main line so that train No. 1 could pass. He then started east on the main line with locomotive 19 and collided with train No. 1 while running at a speed estimated to have been about 10 miles per hour.

Both locomotive were derailed and considerably damaged, while the tender of the locomotive hauling train No. 1 telescoped the first car in that train.

The telephone message received by Engine Foreman Hines was sent by Fred Hoge, whose duties were to check cars on industry tracks. He stated that he telephoned from Platt's Spur to the yard office at Los Angeles that there was a dead Mexican at the water tank at East Yard and that he could flag train No.1 if necessary, in order that the body might be brought in to Los Angeles. He stated that he talked over the telephone with Foreman Hines, who seemed to have difficulty in hearing and understanding what he was saying, and that it was necessary for him to repeat the message several times. After saying that he could flag train No. 1 if desired, Hines told him not to do so, that he would send out a switch engine. Hoge further stated that he was absolutely certain that he said nothing about any cars fouling the main track. He further stated that Foreman Hines did not ask him who he was because he told him who was speaking when he first answered the telephone.

Engine Foreman Hines stated that he was in the yard office when the telephone bell rang,

he answered and understood the party calling to say that some cars were fouling the main line at Platt's Spur and to ask if he should flag train No. 1. Hines replied to flag train No. 1 if the cars fouled the main line. The party then asked if he could send out a switch engine and he replied that he would send one right away. He immediately to go out and clear the main line so that train No. 1 could pass. He then boarded yard locomotive 19 and told Engineman Johnsey where they were to go. He stated that the engineman asked him about train No. 1 and he told the engineman that that train could not pass on account of the cars fouling the main track at Platt's Spur. When approaching the automatic block signal west of the curve he looked at it and saw that it was in the clear position.

He further stated that he did not know with whom he had been talking over the telephone; he asked who it was but could not understand the name and he then asked the man where he was, the reply being that he was at Platt's Spur. He stated that he had not been in the habit of occupying the main track in this manner on the time of first class trains without train orders, and that he should have had a train order, form 31, or a message, before Proceeding on the main track on the time of train No. 1. The only authority he had however, was the instructions of the assistant yard master; he also supposed that the main track was blocked and that train No. 1 could not pass.

Assistant Yardmaster Pearce stated that Foreman Hines told him that three cars of rock had run out on the main line at Platt's Spur, and he told him to go out and push them back on the Spur. Nothing was said about getting orders as he did not think the switch engine would be run on the main line when train No. 1 was due, but would use the San Pedro main line, which runs parallel to the San Bernardino main line.

Engineman Johnsey, of yard locomotive 19, stated that he saw Foreman Hines talking with the assistant yardmaster; the foreman then boarded the engine and said that they were going to Platt's Spur. He inquired about train No. 1 and was told that some cars had fouled the main track at the spur and that the instructions were to go and push the cars into clear so that train No. 1 could pass. He then started on the main line toward Platt's Spur. He stated that the automatic block signal west of the curve was clear until after his engine passed it, when it changed to red. Engineman Jonsey stated further that he often used the main line on the time of first class trains without orders; in fact, ever since he had been working in this yard, a period of five years. He also stated that if it was necessary to have a train order in a case of this kind he did not know it, and that as long as he was working under a foreman that he would do as the foreman instructed and not ask any questions. All of the employees who were on the yard locomotive at the time of the accident stated that the automatic block signal west of the curve was in the clear position when the locomotive approached it at about 7:38 a.m.

Engineman Bailey, of train No. 1, stated that just west of the water tank at East Yard it was 7:37 a.m. A short distance beyond this point his train passed the automatic block signal east of the curve, and at that time it was in the clear positions. While rounding the curve he saw the yard locomotive three or four car lengths ahead and at once applied the emergency air brakes. The speed of his train at the time was about 20 miles per hour. He further stated that at no place had there been any cars fouling the main track. His statements were corroborated by those of his fireman.

General Yard Master German stated that a switching crew should not work on the main track on the time of first class trains without orders and that the engine foreman was responsible in case the crews should take their engine out on the main line without such

orders.

From the statements of the employees involved it clearly appears that there was a misunderstanding on the part of Engine Foreman Hines of what was said to him over the telephone by Yard Checker Hoge. Apparently he did not hear distinctly and understand fully, and in some manner thought that cars were fouling the main track at Platt's Spur, and that a yard locomotive would have to be sent out to clear the main line so that train No. 1 could pass. He then informed the assistant yard master and the latter told him that he should go to this spur and push the cars into clear, but did not think that he would use the main track in making this movement on the time of train No. 1, there being another track paralleling the main line track which could have been used. Operating rule No. 98-a Provides in part as follows:

"Stations having yard limits will be designated in special rules in timetable. All trains and engines will have the right to work within such yard limits, regardless of all except first class trains, but will give way as soon as possible upon their approach."

Rule No. 301 provides in part as follows:

"For movements not provided for by time-table, train orders will be issued by authority and over the signature of the Superintendent or his authorized representative."

Knowing that train No. 1 was due, the crew of yard locomotive 19 had no right whatever, under that part of rule No. 98-a quoted above, to occupy the main track on the time of that train, regardless of whether or not they supposed it was blocked on account of cars fouling the main track, unless furnished with a train order as per rule No 301, or unless properly protected.

Attention is called to the fact that the engine crew of train No. 1 stated that the automatic block signal east of the curve was in the clear position when they passed it. The crew of the switching engine also stated that the automatic block signal passed by them west of curve was in the clear position. After the wreckage was cleared away, and necessary repairs made where damage to the track had been caused by the accident, the signals worked properly. It also appeared that there never has been any trouble experienced with the proper operation of these signals. One of these block signals have indicated danger when it was passed, and in view of the fact that the accident occurred nearer the end of the block entered by the switching locomotive, and that there was an overlap at the end entered by the passenger train, it is believed that the signal at the western end of the block indicated danger when it was passed by the switching locomotive.

This accident was caused by yard locomotive 19 occupying the main track within yard limits on the time of a first class train without authority to do so or without proper protection and by the failure properly to observe and be governed by automatic signal indications, for which Engine Foreman Hines and Engineman Johnsey are responsible.

Engine Foreman Hines had had 4 years railroad experience, while Engineman Johnsey had had 8 years experience as an engineman. Engineman Bailey of train No. 1 had been employed as an engineman for nearly 11 years, while Fireman Birzee was employed as a fireman in 1907 and at the time of the accident was a promoted engineman. All of the employees involved were competent men. At the time of the accident the engine crew of the passenger train has been on duty 6 hours and 30 minutes, while the crew of the yard locomotive had been on duty but a few minutes