INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF THE BUREAU OF SAFETY CONCERNING AN ACCIDENT ON THE NEW YORK, CHICAGO, & ST. LOUIS RAILROAD AT MUNCIE, IND., ON AUGUST 26, 1933.

December 19, 1933.

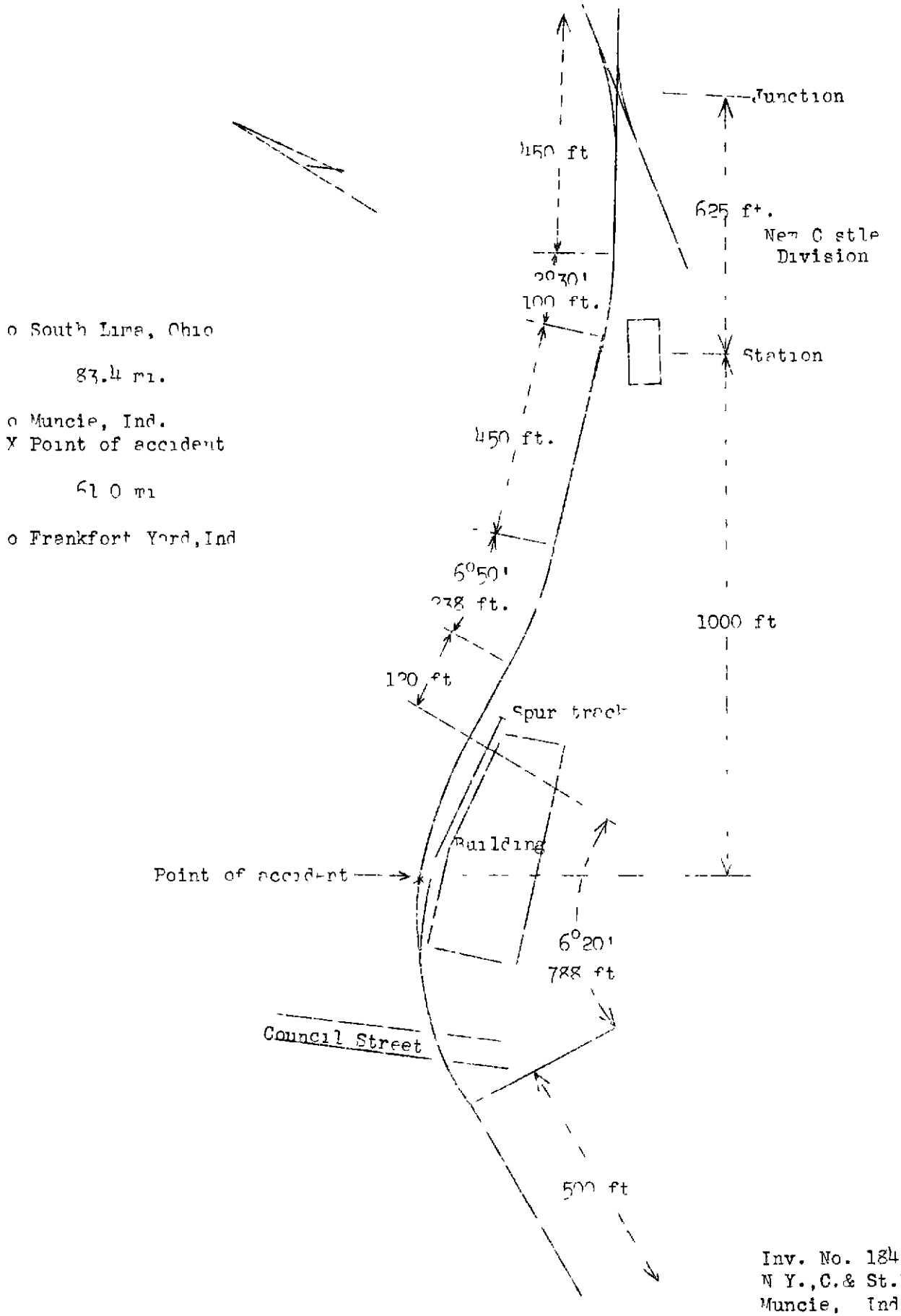
To the Commission:

On August 26, 1933, there was a head-end collision between a freight train and a transfer train on the New York, Chicago & St. Louis Railroad at Muncie, Ind., which resulted in the death of one employee and the injury of two employees.

Location and method of operation

This accident occurred on that part of the Sandusky Division of the Lake Erie & Western District extending between Frankfort Yard, Ind., and South Lima, Ohio, a distance of 144.4 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 New Castle Division crosses the Sandusky Division at a point about 625 feet east of the station at Muncie and yard-limit boards are located approximately 2 miles to the east and west of the junction of these divisions and about 1-1/2 miles to the north and south thereof. The accident occurred at a point about 1,000 feet west of the station; approaching this point from the east, the track is tangent for a distance of about 450 feet, followed by a 2°30' curve to the right 100 feet in length, 450 feet of tangent track, a 6°50' curve to the right 238 feet in length, tangent track for a distance of 120 feet, and then a 6°20' curve to the left 788 feet in length, the accident occurring on this latter curve at a point about 300 feet from its eastern end. Approaching from the west, there is a 5°30' curve to the left 350 feet in length and then a tangent track for a distance of 500 feet, followed by the curve on which the accident occurred. The grade for eastbound trains for a distance of 400 feet to the point of accident is 0.85 percent ascending, and the grade for west-bound trains approaching the point of accident for 400 feet is 0.15 percent descending.

A spur track parallels the main track on the south for almost the entire length of the curve on which the accident occurred, and adjacent to the spur track is a low building about 400 feet in length. At the time of the accident there were a number of high cars standing on this track, which, together with the building obstructed the vision approaching from either direction to a distance of approximately 165 feet.



Inv. No. 1848
N Y.,C.& St.L.
Muncie, Ind.
Aug. 26, 1933

The weather was clear at the time of the accident, which occurred about 10:25 a. m.

Description

East-bound second-class train second No. 66, a rail-oiling train, consisted of 1 rail oiler, 1 empty tank car, 2 loaded tank cars, engine 457, 1 bunk car, and a caboose, in the order named, and was in charge of Conductor Ley and Engineman Blymyer. The first car was of wooden construction with steel center sills, the second, third and fourth cars were of all-steel construction, and the last two cars were of wooden construction. This train departed from Frankfort Yard at 7:10 a. m., departed from Alexandria, the last open office, 16.2 miles west of Muncie, at 9:29 a. m., 2 hours and 24 minutes late on the schedule of train No. 66, stopped for coal at the coal dock at Muncie about 10 a. m., and then proceeded at a low rate of speed, colliding with the transfer train while traveling at a speed estimated to have been between 5 and 8 miles per hour.

The transfer train consisted of 2 empty and 7 loaded cars, hauled by engine 123, with the air coupled, and was in charge of Conductor Thorpe and Engineman Cochran. This train, returning from the Chesapeake & Ohio yard to the west yard of the Nickel Plate Road, stopped at the junction of the New Castle and Sandusky Divisions, where it met train first No. 66. After the passage of that train the transfer train proceeded through the wye onto the main line of the Sandusky Division, stopped for the rear brakeman to close the wye switch, and then proceeded westward at an estimated speed of 5 or 6 miles per hour, but had nearly stopped when it collided with train second No. 66.

Engine 123 of the transfer train telescoped the front end of the rail-oiler car, the coupler of this car being forced through the door of the smoke box of the engine, while the rear end of this car was telescoped by the following tank car a distance of about 3 feet. The second and third tank cars in train second No. 66 sustained slight damage, but except for one pair of wheels under the first tank car none of the equipment was derailed. The employee killed was an oiler and those injured were the oiler foreman and the head brakeman, all of whom were riding in the rail-oiler car.

Summary of evidence

Foreman Rail Oiler Harvey, in charge of the rail-oiler, stated that the head brakeman was riding on the right side of the cupola, which was located near the front end and was equipped with a whistle cord and emergency valve, while he and two other employees were at the extreme front

end of the car operating the levers controlling the flow of oil. On rounding the curve on which the accident occurred the train was traveling at a speed of about 8 miles per hour, with the brakeman sounding the whistle and the oiler bell ringing. He first saw the transfer train when it was about three car lengths distant, the view being obscured by cars on the inside of the curve, and called to the others to jump. He thought the air brakes were applied in emergency from the engine, but due to the oil on the rails the wheels slid a distance of about two car lengths and he did not think there had been any appreciable reduction in the speed of his train at the time of the accident. Foreman Harvey said the transfer train was not traveling very fast and he thought it slowed down before the collision occurred. He further stated that before leaving Frankfort he had talked with the engineman and told him that extreme caution was necessary in handling the train, due to the fact that the wheels would slide when applying the brakes, and he said the engineman used good judgment in stopping the train en route.

Oiler Green, of train second No. 66, who was standing operating the oil machine, stated that the rail-oiler car had a glass front and that he first saw the transfer train when it was about one and one-half car lengths distant. He estimated the speed of his own train to have been about 6 or 7 miles per hour, but did not know whether or not the brakes were applied prior to the accident.

Head Brakeman Cummings, of train second No. 66, stated that the cupola was practically enclosed in glass, but due to the cars on the siding he was unable to see ahead for more than three car lengths. When he saw the approaching train he gave his engineman a stop signal and immediately jumped down to the floor of the car, the train traveling about one and one-half car lengths after he gave the stop signal. Brakeman Cummings estimated the speed of his train to have been 5 or 6 miles per hour; he did not know whether or not the air brakes were applied prior to the accident. He estimated the speed of the transfer train to have been 7 or 8 miles per hour. Brakeman Cummings further stated that he was an extra man and this was his first trip on the rail-oiling train; he did not know that the rail-oiler car was equipped with an emergency air valve.

Engineman Blymyer, of train second No. 66, stated that the train was drifting at a speed of 6 or 7 miles per hour. He saw the stop signal given by the head brakeman and immediately applied the brakes in emergency, and it was about this time that he saw the approaching engine, 10 or 15 feet from the front of his train. The brakes took hold, but the speed did not slacken because of the fact

that the wheels slid and he was unable to get sand on the rails before the train had practically stopped. Engineman Clymer further stated that he had experienced difficulty in stopping the train en route, due to the wheels sliding.

Conductor Thorpe, of the transfer train, stated that he was standing on the front footboard on the right side of the engine and on arriving at the junction of the New Castle and Sandusky Divisions, they met train first No. 66 and signals were received indicating that a second section was following. After the passage of the first section, however, he gave a proceed signal and his train entered the Sandusky Division and was proceeding at a speed of 4 or 5 miles per hour when he heard the whistle of an approaching train; he immediately gave a stop signal to his engineman, the applied the air brakes in emergency, and the train had practically stopped when the collision occurred. When he first saw the rear of the first section it was about one and one-half car lengths distant. In describing how he would obtain information concerning the expected arrival of trains, Conductor Thorpe stated that he would get this information before leaving the west yard of the Nickel Plate en route to the C & O yard, and he said that he did so on this occasion before departing at 8:45 a. m. At the C & O yard he could have thrown a switch on the dispatcher's telephone and thus become connected with the Nickel Plate dispatcher but he said this phone was hardly ever used for calling the dispatcher and that he could not obtain any information by means of the telephone at the junction unless there was someone on duty in the west yard; that he had tried it without success, and that he was governing the movement of his train simply by yard rules, proceeding with caution. In a subsequent statement, Conductor Thorpe stated formerly there was an operator on duty at the west yard but that this operator had been removed and since that time there had been so many times when the telephone was not answered that he had gotten out of the habit of inquiring about expected trains. He said his engine worked on both divisions and that he was not required to ascertain the whereabouts of trains when going from one division to another, but if he knew a train was due or past due he would wait for it. He had never been disciplined or criticized for making a movement without telephoning for information. It further appeared from his statements, however, that he could have communicated with the operator, located in the dispatcher's office, by means of the block telephone, that this procedure had been followed both before and after the accident, that information so obtained was as reliable as information formerly obtained from the operator at the west yard, and that had he obtained the information the accident would have been prevented.

Engineman Cochran, of the transfer train, stated that

after passing through the wye he stopped for the flagman to close the switches; he received a proceed signal and was operating the train at a speed of 5 or 6 miles per hour when the fireman said "steady". He applied the straight air brake and then received a stop signal from the conductor and applied the brakes in emergency, and he said the train had stopped at the time of the collision, after traveling a distance of about 60 feet. Due to the curve being to the left he was unable to see the approaching train and he did not hear the whistle or the bell. The bell on his own engine was ringing, but he did not sound his whistle due to a city ordinance which prohibits the sounding of whistles. Engineman Cochren further stated that at times the conductor obtains information relative to the movement of trains, and sometimes he is unable to get it, but on the day of the accident he did not know whether or not the conductor or any other member of the crew obtained the information. He further stated that the air brakes were working properly.

Fireman Duffy, of the transfer train, stated that when he first caught a glimpse of the cupola of the sprayer car about two car lengths distant he called "steady" to the engineman, thinking it might be a car on the siding, but when he saw it was on the main track he called to the engineman to "look out". The engineman had applied the straight air brake but when he told the engineman to look out the latter applied the air brakes in emergency.

Crossing Flagman Williams, stationed at Council Street, located about 200 feet west of the point of accident, stated that as train second No. 66 passed him its speed was about 6 miles per hour. He also stated that he had witnessed several near collisions at this point between trains and yard cuts and had flagged some of them in order to prevent collisions.

Trainmaster Stonecifer said that second-class and extra trains were governed by rule 93 and that yard engines were required to keep off the time of first-class trains, but would move under control against second-class and extra trains. Rule 93 reads as follows:

> "Within yard limits the main track may be used, protecting against first-class trains.
>
> "Second-class and extra trains must move within yard limits, prepared to stop unless the main track is seen or known to be clear".

Trainmaster Stonecifer also stated that yard conductors were required to obtain information regarding the movement of through trains; that observations had been made to ascertain if the rules were being obeyed, especially the speed of trains through yard territory, and that while he had not noticed any flagrant violations he had talked to

several men in road service within the preceding month; there is no prescribed speed limit within yards, trains being required to move under control. As to the cause of the accident, Trainmaster Schneifer said he did not think either of the crews was moving at a hazardous rate of speed and had it not been for the character of the rail-oiler train, causing the rails to be slippery, he did not think there would have been an accident.

Conclusions

This accident was caused by the failure of the railroad company to make adequate provision for the safe operation of the rail-oiler train.

Under rule 93, each of the trains involved had the right to use the main track providing the movement was made prepared to stop unless the main track was seen or known to be clear. Both trains were being operated at low speed. However, the rail-oiler train was difficult to stop even under such circumstances, and it was the duty of the company to provide such additional precautions as might be necessary to enable it to be moved in safety, particularly when the existing physical conditions at this point limited the view to 135 feet.

The yard transfer train had been in a siding to meet second class train first No. 66, and both Conductor Thorpe and Engineman Cochran knew that a second section was following. However, they left the siding without ascertaining the whereabouts of second No. 66. Engineman Cochran said he did not know whether the conductor or any other member of the crew had obtained information about trains from the west before starting out, and according to the statements of both Engineman Cochran and Conductor Thorpe, they proceeded on their yard rights expecting to stop when required and protect themselves against train second No. 66. Special instructions formerly were printed in the time table requiring yard crews to call the yard operator or yardmaster and obtain information regarding movement of through trains before making a movement from one part of the yard to another; such instructions apparently had been destroyed with old records and were not included in the current time table; while the evidence indicated that yard employes were familiar with these instructions, the practice of making telephone inquiries in accordance with the original instructions was not strictly adhered to. Conductor Thorpe said the former means of obtaining information was not now available because there was no longer an operator at the west yard; that he was not required to ascertain the whereabouts of trains when going from one division to another, and that he had not been criticized for making movements without first obtaining this information. However, having just met the first section of train No. 66, and knowing that a second section was being operated, the crew of the

transfer train exercised bad judgment in going out on the main line without first obtaining information concerning the location of the second section. The arrangements available for obtaining such information may not have been convenient but Conductor Thorpe said he could have used the block telephone and that had he obtained information concerning the rail-oiler train the accident would not have occurred.

There is evidence that the movement of second and inferior class trains and yard engines through this yard is attended by considerable danger because of the physical characteristics existing in the vicinity. The company should take such steps as may be practicable and necessary to eliminate these existing hazards. The company undoubtedly should adopt a definite procedure to be followed in obtaining information concerning the arrival of trains, and supervision should be given the matter to insure that employees fully understand what is expected of them, rather than to depend upon a custom or practice, and that they rigidly obey such instructions as may be established in connection therewith.

Respectfully submitted,

J. P. BORLAND,

Director.