



When the *Nashville Tennessean* reported the deadly train wreck at Dutchman's Curve, its [July 10, 1918](#) article began with these words:

*Because somebody blundered ...*

The article—displayed above, which you can click-on to greatly expand the view—continues with words painting a picture of unbelievable chaos set against the backdrop of a quiet summer cornfield.

Because the disaster occurred during America's [Jim-Crow era](#), the article uses the words and the customs of the day:

*Because somebody blundered, at least 121 persons were killed and fifty-seven injured shortly after 7 o'clock on Tuesday morning, when Nashville, Chattanooga & St. Louis Railway passenger trains No. 1 from Memphis and No. 1 [actually No. 4] from Nashville crashed head-on together just around the sharp, steep-graded curve at Dutchman's Bend, about five miles from the city near the Harding road.*

*Both engines reared and fell on either side of the track, unrecognizable masses of twisted iron and steel, while the fearful impact of the blow drove the express car of the north-bound train through the flimsy wooden coaches loaded with human freight, telescoped the smoking car in front and piling high in air the two cars behind it, both packed to the aisles with negroes en route to the powder plant and some 150 other regular passengers.*

*Just where lies the blame, it is impossible now to say. Officials of the road are silent. But one of three things is reasonably sure -- that the engineer of No. 4 was given wrong instructions, ran by his signal, or overlooked, the schedule on which he was supposed to run. That he knew the Memphis train to be a little late, leads to the conjecture that he was attempting to reach the switch at Harding station, a short distance beyond the scene of the wreck, before the inbound train arrived at that point.*

*Engineer Given Wrong Signal.*

*As Engineer Kennedy's train approached the signal tower in the new shops, it is authoritatively stated, he blew for his signal and was given a clear board. Before the train had passed under the tower, however, the red board was dropped, signaling him to stop. The supposition is that he never saw this signal, as both the tower man and switch engineer tried in vain to attract his attention. Besides this, getting a clear signal gave him no right to proceed, as he knew that another passenger train having the right-of-way was approaching at no great distance.*

*Orders given him upon leaving the station are said to have advised him, that train No. 1 would meet train No. 7 (a accommodation from Waverly) at Harding Station, and are also reported to have given the engine number of train No. 1. The conductor of Kennedy's train is understood to have stated that he was busy taking up tickets after leaving the station and did not notice that the train had run past the double tracks, which extend for three quarters of a mile beyond the new-shops, until it was almost at the scene or the wreck.*

*The speed of the two trains when they met is estimated by old and experienced railroad men as being not less than sixty miles an hour.*

*Scene of Horror Indescribable.*

*The scene immediately following the collision is indescribable. Those escaping unhurt or with*

lesser injuries fled from the spot in a veritable panic. The cornfield on both sides of the track was trampled by many feet, and littered with fragments, of iron and wood hurled from the demolished cars. The dead lay here and there, grotesquely sprawling where they fell. The dying moaned appeals for aid or, speechless, rolled their heads from side to side and writhed in agony. Everywhere there was blood and suffering and chaos.

From the wreckage, beneath which many still lived, shrieks and muffled cries arose, and here and there helpless yet visible victims prayed for speedy deliverance or death.

As soon as possible every available doctor and nurse was rushed to the scene, and a steady stream of ambulances and automobiles, turned over by their owners to assist in the work of mercy, began the task of transporting to local hospitals and undertaking establishments the dying and the dead.

Among the very first to arrive and who plunged immediately into the work of rescue, doing much effective "first aid" before even the doctors or the wrecking train reached the scene were Alfred T. Levine, Frank Sanderson, Frank David, John J. Vertrees, Jr., and Harry Friedman. At a time when conditions were at their worst, these men labored practically without tools and struggled tirelessly against great odds.

#### *Mutilated Bodies Beneath Debris.*

In spite of the most strenuous work, however, the labor of recovering the bodies of the dead, many of whom are mangled beyond the possibility of recognition, has not yet been completed. At a late hour in the afternoon the bodies of six negroes, fearfully mutilated, were discovered beneath a pile of debris thought to be merely a scrap heap from the demolished engines.

All morning long attention centered about the telescoped smoking car of the outbound train, train crews working hard to raise with jacks the heavy body of the express coach beneath which was pinioned or crushed most of the white victims. In one of the seats, his body held as in a vise, sat one of the passengers, still conscious, but with three of the dead crushed against him. Here the work began. The side of the car was chopped away and the man released, apparently in a dying condition.

From beneath the express car, some thirty men were later removed, only the last of their number being alive. His name could not be ascertained, but in the band of his hat were stamped the initials E. T. B.

The last victims to be discovered were found in a portion of one of the coaches upon which the boiler

[sic: break in text due to typesetting error]

beyond the possibility of recognition, was not completed until late at night. At a late hour in the afternoon the bodies of six negroes, all fearfully mutilated, were discovered beneath a pile of debris thought to be merely a scrap heap from the demolished engines.

Wearing apparel of every description strewed the ground, among which were several women's slippers, but it is believed that they belonged to the few negro women passengers who either fled the scene or are numbered among the unidentified or undiscovered dead.

#### *Five Men of Train Crews Dead.*

Of the train crews five are dead: Engineer William F. Floyd and Fireman Thomas Kelley of train No. 4 and Engineer David C. Kennedy, Fireman Luther L. Meadows and Baggage Master Tom Dickinson, of train No. 1. The first four resided in Nashville.

Of the known dead at least 80 per cent were negroes. In the majority of cases the end came to them without warning. Corpses were piled everywhere beneath the heaps of iron and shattered wood and tin work of the fragile cars. An entire day was employed in undoing the work of devastation that an instant had wrought.

Fortunately fire played no part in piling on the horrors of the day, a slight blaze started at the end of one of the coaches being almost instantly extinguished by those first arriving on the scene.

#### *Huge Crowds Flock to Scene.*

Huge crowds, some seeking friends and loved ones thought to have been on the wrecked train, but in the majority of cases composed of morbid curiosity seekers reveling in the gruesome sights lined the viaduct and crowded the adjoining fields. Only the prompt and efficient work of Chief of Police Barthell and his men prevented their crowding so close as to actually hinder the work of the wreckers in removing the bodies of the dead to awaiting ambulances and cars.

Chief Rozetta and engine company No. 7 also arrived on the scene at an early hour and rendered

great assistance throughout the day.

#### *Heroic Efforts Made.*

To hundreds of men and women of Nashville, besides the doctors, nurses and others, are due unstinted praise for their labors in the work of rescue and alleviation of the suffering. Splints and bandages were in abundance, large quantities of ice were sent out from the city, and calls for assistance of any kind were promptly answered by those nearest at hand. Deputy sheriffs, du Pont police, special agents from the Department of Justice and members of the home guard afforded the police, valuable assistance in handling the immense crowd of souvenir collectors that crowded everywhere, but no thefts of valuables were reported, although suitcases and other baggage was strewn broadcast over the grounds.

Up to a late hour Tuesday night all streetcars leading to the scene of the wreck were packed with sight-seers, and taxicabs did an enormous business during the entire day and evening. It is estimated, by members of the police department that during the day fully 50,000 persons visited the site, and that no accidents occurred is largely due to those officers on whom the duty devolved of keeping the huge throng in order.

Late comers were disappointed, however, as the wrecking crews labored so effectively that the tracks were cleared and put in order in time for train No. 2 to leave the Union Station on time for its regular run at 10 o'clock Tuesday night.

This, it is stated, is the first passenger train wreck on the N., C. & St. L. in many years, although a disastrous rear-end freight collision occurred several months ago within a few hundred yards of the site of the present wreck, on which occasion three of the train men were killed and many heavily loaded cars smashed to bits.

#### *Negro Dead.*

Crowds of curious colored people visited the establishments of A. N. Johnson, Taylor & Co. and W. H. McGavock, undertakers, to view the dead of the wreck which occurred Tuesday morning. Each place was a beehive of activity. The morgues were filled to overflowing with the dead and the halls were used to accommodate the bodies in some instances. The dead were brought in every conceivable gruesome shape. A. N. Johnson had trucks to assist in transferring the bodies. These trucks were open, and the bodies laid crosswise piled high as possible not to roll off. One body was brought in a wash tub. Others had heads, hands and arms cut off, while some were split in two.

Several women were among the colored workers who were coming from Memphis and other stations en route to work at the Government powder plant. Colored doctors and nurses were rushed to the scene, and rendered all aid possible. Many who reside here and were expecting relatives today thronged the street and visited the undertakers' establishments. A large number of helpers were kept busy moving bodies from ambulances, while as many others were kept busy inside the establishments, which were filled to capacity. Extra embalmers were secured to prepare the bodies for identification, if possible. A number of women and children are among the dead.

George Hall, railroad porter on the train going out from Nashville, was among the dead. He was a resident of Nashville, and his body is at Taylor & Co.'s.

In speaking of their escape, several survivors at the "Y" said when the impact came between the two trains, they were miraculously thrown out of the windows clear of the wreck.

#### *At the City Hospital.*

The City Hospital was taxed to its utmost in caring for the injured. Almost every available cot and bed was pressed into service, and the staff of physicians 'was totally inadequate to give immediate attention to the victims. Realizing the urgency of the situation, a number of physicians volunteered their services, much to the relief of Dr. W. F. Fessey, the superintendent. Not only did the physicians volunteer their services, but a number of them went to the hospital accompanied by their nurses, who remained until every one of the sufferers had been attended and made as comfortable as circumstances would admit.

Among the physicians who voluntarily went to the hospital and did what they could in alleviating the suffering of the victims were : Dr. Otterson, Dr. Sharpel and two nurses. Dr. John W. Gaines, Dr. Henry Litterer, Dr. Whitfield, Dr. Buckner. Dr. Dake, Dr. Crockett and others. A number of nurses also called at the hospital in person or 'phoned to know if their services were needed, and if so, they would report any time the hospital physicians might designate.

In all the hospital received about seventy-eight of the injured. Thirty-one of these received first-aid treatment and were able to leave the institution, six of the number died during the day, and there still remains at the hospital about forty, many of whom it is thought will not survive their injuries.

Latest reports from the scene of the wreck are to the effect that eight more bodies have been

discovered in a portion of one of the coaches upon which the boiler of the engine of train No. 1 had fallen. They were burnt and mutilated beyond recognition. Six of them were men, the other two being a woman with a baby still clasped in her arms. The remains were so badly scalded and charred, however, that it was impossible to tell whether they were whites or negroes.

Orders given Engineer Dave Kennedy of the outgoing train are said to have stated that train No. 1 would meet train No. 7 (an accommodation from Waverly) at Harding station, and are also reported to have given the engine number of train No. 1. The conductor of No. 4 is also reported to have said he was busy taking up tickets after leaving the station, and did not notice that the train had run past the double tracks, which extend for three quarters of a mile beyond the new shops, until it was almost at the scene of the wreck.

Officials of the du Pont Company reported late Tuesday night that after a careful investigation it had been ascertained that of the negroes en route to this city to work at the powder plant, 11 were from Memphis and twenty from Little Rock and were accompanied by two bosses, both of whom escaped from the wreck uninjured.

From this number 78 are reported as uninjured, 16 slightly and 18 seriously hurt, 2 dead and identified, and 19 as yet unaccounted for. Relatives of all those identified have been notified by telegraph.

### Scenes at the Morgues.

The scenes at the morgues beggar description. At Dorris, Karsch & Co., a stream of spectators formed a line and all luring the day passed back into the morgue, searching for relatives and friends, or, drawn by an irresistible force of unknown origin, yielded to the impulse and gazed upon the most horrible sight that was ever witnessed in this city. Idle curiosity was lost, and even those without missing relatives or friends seemed as deeply affected as did the dazed relatives who mutely gazed at the mangled remains without word or outcry.

Few of the bodies were in a condition to meet the gaze of the friends that seemed so anxious to pay any tribute in their power. In some cases the bodies were completely severed in two, while in other the flesh was crushed into a pulp. In nearly every instance death must have been almost instantaneous. There were no marks of suffering.

### Narrow Escapes Recalled.

In some instances the escape of the more fortunate bordered on the miraculous. Noticeable among this number was the case of Milton Frank, a brother of John P. and James Frank, the Fourth avenue clothiers.

Young Frank was with his friend Milton Lowenstein, when the latter proposed that they go into the smoker and have a smoke. When they reached that car, Frank objected to the crowded condition and returned to his car, where he went into the smoking compartment and smoked alone. When the crash came he was thrown to the floor, but finding a convenient hammer, broke the glass and crawled to safety. Others were recovered from beneath the wreck practically unhurt.

The establishment of Dorris, Karsch & Co. was soon taxed to capacity and the bodies arriving later were sent to the other undertaking firms in the city, while several embalmers were called from neighboring towns to assist in caring for the remains.

### Scenes Most Pitiful.

While the scenes at the white morgues were heartrending, those at the establishments of A. N. Johnson and Taylor & Co. were most pitiful. At the former place there were twenty-four unidentified bodies of negroes and all day long a line passed in and out in the vain hope of identifying some absent relative or friend. At a late hour no identifications had been made.

Three identifications were made at Taylor & Co.'s by relatives or white friends. The color line was forgotten and the whites rushed to the aid of the brother in black, offering any and every assistance in their hour of trouble.

To the lot of W. H. McGavock fell the care of the bodies of the negroes from Pegram Station and Burns. He succeeded in getting the names of all but one of the bodies sent to his place.

Coffins were stacked on trucks as long as they could be piled and rushed to the several establishments where attendants worked until late into the night preparing the remains for shipment or burial. So anxious were the undertakers to do their full duty in the emergency that all bodies were prepared for burial without awaiting the arrival of relatives or the identification of the remains.

Never before have such scenes been witnessed in this city, and the horror of the day will long remain in the minds and memory of the thousands that viewed the greatest holocaust the South

*has witnessed in a generation.*

After relating information known at press time, the article then switches to the relief effort. Featured, most prominently, are stories about the Red Cross and its volunteers.

#### *Red Cross Chapter.*

*The first sad day's experience for the Nashville chapter of Red Cross in handling disaster relief was experienced Tuesday in caring for the needs of the victims of the railroad wreck. Mrs. Percy Maddin, chairman of the administrative board, was on the scene of distress by the time the alarm of fire had reached the city. The men working among the wreckage under the bridge, kept calling up to all to come down and help; all women present responded in every way they could, taking charge of driving the automobiles, and thus releasing the men drivers for the sturdier work of lifting and carrying the wounded to places of comparative ease.*

*The Emergency Canteen Committee was officially represented on the scene by Mrs. Garnet Morgan and Mrs. Louis Sperry, who have charge of the medical supplies. Mrs. Harry Evans, chairman of this most efficient standing committee of the chapter, was engaged most of the day identifying the soldiers who were killed. Identification papers must be officially prepared and sent immediately to the commanding officers; flags must be purchased for the sad service of enshrouding. The canteen uniform carried with it an easily read message of friendship; many were the calls upon these women; frantic relatives seeking some definite identification of loved ones; every undertaker's establishment, every hospital in Nashville was visited during the day by Mrs. Evans.*

#### *Committees Apportioned Tasks.*

*Called upon for immediate work, this committee assembled at the Canteen House in the Union station and were apportioned their respective tasks for the day. Continued service of every kind was given there at headquarters by Mrs. Jo Howell, Jr., Mrs. I. W. Miller, Mrs. Ridley Wills, Mrs. Leigh Thompson and Miss Kitty Berry.*

*The Marine Recruiting Office thanked the women for a list of names furnished to them; a mute testimonial to the tenderness of these practical workers, is a collection of a variety of little "keepsakes" rescued from the debris of wreck, and carefully filed. One lot is a towel, a wet tooth-brush, and other articles of toilet care, and a postcard saying that the writer is nearing Nashville and will go and freshen up, and so on; strains on the towel and articles indicate that death or serious hurt was met while the toilet was in operation. The women say they never before felt so deeply the sacredness of their work; not because of the work itself, but what their coming meant to the suffering people.*

*Mrs. Evans was handed two \$5 bills while she sat at luncheon today, by interested people whose line of work kept them from the actual service of relief.*

#### *Bodies Draped With Flags.*

*Wonderful flags were purchased. 2 1/2 x 3 3/4 yards. These flags were tenderly arranged about the bodies of the soldiers by one worker who claimed this privilege.*

*To the canteen workers the activity of military relief seemed to naturally gravitate, while the civilian relief department assisted in that of the disaster in its relation to the civilian.*

*Mrs. Maddin tendered the use of two automobiles the entire day; Miss Carrington, civilian relief; making the rounds of the hospitals several times, accompanied by Miss Nan Dorsey, public health and Red Cross Nursing Service.*

*It would be impossible at a time when all are stunned to recount the many acts of loving service rendered. Accompanying Miss Carrington's party of the afternoon, was Miss Mary Stahlman. 16 slightly injured men were most anxious to reach their home people and to get a full account off to them tonight: there was little time, and Miss Stahlman undertook the task, typewriting, addressing and mailing the letters, each with an encouraging personal message from the men to the dear ones at home; in forty-five minutes these letters were mailed in time to catch the first outgoing train which could carry them.*

*Addresses of certificate holders in the first aid and the home nursing classes were given the Nurses' Corps with telephone numbers; these class members are expected to hold themselves in readiness to fill the duties of assistant to any nurses' aid, who might call on them at any hour, through Miss Carrington or Miss Dorsey.*

*Tommy Little, Tennessean cartoonist, was around headquarters at noon, seeking opportunity to render service in any way that he might be called upon to act for the Red Cross workers. The civilian relief committee was especially attentive to any not requiring hospital accommodation. Immediate notice was given to the du Pont Company that the committee was at its call. Cots were sent to the negro Y. M. C. A. and excellent work done for the colored men.*

*This recounts the official service of the Red Cross chapter departments; all tendered help, and all yet await the call in any capacity. The relief train of the railroad and the professional medical and nursing workers of Nashville were so absolutely ready and prepared that the Red Cross workers, others than those who have already assisted in this first call, stand awaiting further commands or demands as desired by the medical or nursing corps of the city.*

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