

INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION

WASHINGTON

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INVESTIGATION NO. 2912

ATLANTA, BIRMINGHAM AND COAST RAILROAD COMPANY

REPORT IN RE ACCIDENT

NEAR TALBOTTON, GA., ON

JULY 4, 1945

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SUMMARY

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Railroad: Atlanta, Birmingham and Coast  
Date: July 4, 1945  
Location: Talbotton, Ga.  
Kind of accident: Head-end collision  
Trains involved: Passenger : Passenger  
Train numbers: First 4 : 11  
Engine numbers: 74 : 79  
Consist: 5 cars : 7 cars  
Estimated speed: 30 m. p. h. : 45 m. p. h.  
Operation: Timetable and train orders  
Track: Single; tangent; 1.0 percent  
descending grade northward  
Weather: Clear  
Time: 3:55 a. m.  
Casualties: 65 injured  
Cause: Error made in copying train order  
Recommendation: That the Atlanta, Birmingham and  
Coast Railroad Company install  
an adequate block system on the  
line on which this accident  
occurred

INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION

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- INVESTIGATION NO. 2912

IN THE MATTER OF MAKING ACCIDENT INVESTIGATION REPORTS  
UNDER THE ACCIDENT REPORTS ACT OF MAY 6, 1910.

ATLANTA, BIRMINGHAM AND COAST RAILROAD COMPANY

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August 30, 1945.

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Accident near Talbotton, Ga., on July 4, 1945, caused by  
an error made in copying a train order.

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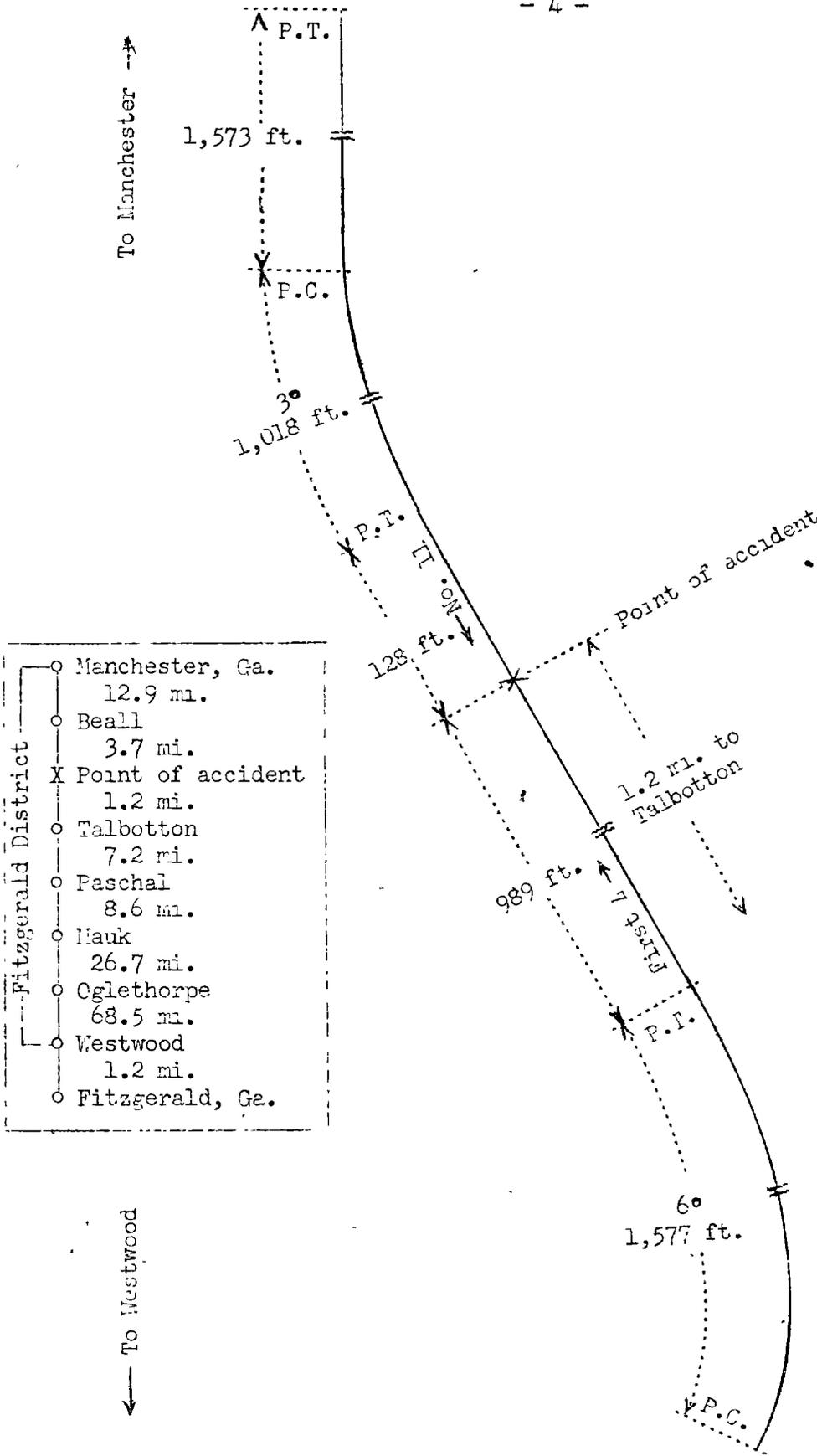
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REPORT OF THE COMMISSION

PATTERSON, Commissioner:

On July 4, 1945, there was a head-end collision between two passenger trains on the Atlanta, Birmingham and Coast Railroad near Talbotton, Ga., which resulted in the injury of 57 passengers, 1 railway-mail clerk, 1 express-messenger and 6 train-service employees.

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<sup>1</sup>Under authority of section 17 (2) of the Interstate Commerce Act the above-entitled proceeding was referred by the Commission to Commissioner Patterson for consideration and disposition.



Irv. No. 2912  
 Atlanta, Birmingham and Coast Railroad  
 Talbotton, Ga.  
 July 4, 1945

Location of Accident and Method of Operation

This accident occurred on that part of the railroad designated as the Fitzgerald District and extending northward from Westwood to Manchester, Ga., 128.8 miles, a single-track line over which trains are operated by timetable and train orders. There is no block system in use. The accident occurred on the main track 112.2 miles north of Westwood, at a point 1.2 miles north of the station at Talbotton. From the south there is a 6° curve to the left 1,577 feet in length, which is followed by a tangent 989 feet to the point of accident and 128 feet northward. From the north there are, in succession, a tangent 1,573 feet in length, a 3° curve to the left 1,018 feet and the tangent on which the accident occurred. The grade is 1.0 percent descending northward.

Operating rules read in part as follows:

71. A train is superior to another train by right, class or direction. Right is conferred by train order; class and direction by time-table. Right is superior to class or direction. Direction is superior as between trains of the same class.

72. \* \* \*

Trains in the direction specified by the time-table are superior to trains of the same class in the opposite direction.

203. Train orders must be numbered consecutively each day, beginning at midnight.

205. Each train order must be written in full in a book provided for the purpose at the office of the Chief Dispatcher; and with it recorded the names of those who have signed for the order; the time and the signals which show when and from what offices the order was repeated and the responses transmitted; and the train dispatcher's initials. These records must be made at once and never from memory or memoranda.

206. \* \* \*

\* \* \*

When train orders are transmitted by telegraph, the train dispatcher must underscore each word and figure at the time it is repeated. \* \* \*

\* \* \*

209. Operators receiving train orders must write \* \* \* them in manifold during transmission. If the requisite number of copies cannot be made at one writing, they must make others from the original copy and repeat to the train dispatcher from the new copies each time additional copies are made. \* \* \*

210. When a "31" train order has been transmitted, operators must, unless otherwise directed, repeat it at once from the manifold copy in the succession in which the several offices have been addressed, and then write the time of repetition on the order. Each operator receiving the order should observe whether the others repeat correctly.

The conductor or engineman and others addressed must read it to the operator and then sign it, and the operator will send their signatures preceded by the number of the order to the dispatcher. The response "complete," and the time, with the initials of the Chief Dispatcher, will then be given by the train dispatcher. Each operator receiving this response will then write on each copy the word "complete," the time, and his last name in full, and then deliver a copy to each person addressed, except that when the order is signed by the conductor, he must personally deliver a copy of it to each engineman; the engineman will then read the order to the conductor before proceeding.

211. When a "19" train order has been transmitted, operators must, unless otherwise directed, repeat it at once from the manifold copy, in the succession in which the several offices have been addressed. Each operator receiving the order should observe whether the others repeat correctly. When the order has been repeated correctly by an operator, the response "complete," and the time, with the initials of the Chief Dispatcher, will be given by the train dispatcher. The operator receiving this response will then write on each copy the word "complete," and the time, and his last name in full, and personally deliver a copy to each person addressed without taking his signature. \* \* \*

\* \* \*

220. Train orders once in effect continue so until fulfilled, superseded or annulled. \* \* \*

\* \* \*

FORMS OF TRAIN ORDERS

\* \* \*

Form A.

Fixing Meeting Points for Opposing Trains

(1) \* \* \*

No. 3 Engine 86 meet Second 4 Engine 226 at "P."

\* \* \*

Trains receiving these orders will run with respect to each other to the designated points and there meet in the manner prescribed by the rules.

\* \* \*

Form C.

Giving Right Over An Opposing Train.

(1) No. 1 Engine 72 has right over No. 2 Engine 123 "G" to "X."

If the second-named train reaches the point last named before the other arrives, it may proceed, keeping clear of the schedule of opposing train as required by rule.

\* \* \*

Form E.

Time Orders

(1) No. 1 Engine 75 run 50 Mins. late "A" to "G."

This makes the schedule time of the train named, between the stations designated, as much later as stated in the order, and any other train receiving the order is required to run with respect to this later time, as before required to run with respect to the regular schedule time. \* \* \*

\* \* \*

Form L.

Annuling an Order

Order No. 10 is annulled.

If an order which is to be annulled has not been delivered to a train, the annulling order will be addressed to the operator, who will destroy all copies of the order annulled but his own, and write on that:

Annulled by Order No. \_\_\_\_\_.

\* \* \*

Time-table special instructions provide that north-bound trains are superior to trains of the same class in the opposite direction.

The maximum authorized speed for passenger trains is 50 miles per hour.

Description of Accident

At Westwood, 110 miles south of Talbotton, the crew of First 4, a north-bound first-class passenger train, received copies of train order No. 54, Form 31, dated July 3, reading as follows:

No 11 Eng 79 nas right over First  
Second and Third 4 Engs unknown  
Manchester to Westwood

At Oglethorpe, 42.5 miles south of Talbotton, the crew of First 4 received copies of train order No. 6, Form 19, dated July 4, reading in part as follows:

No 11 Eng 79 Run Fifty 50 mins  
late Manchester to Mauk \* \* \*

At Mauk, 15.8 miles south of Talbotton, the crew of First 4 received copies of train order No. 11, Form 19, addressed to First 4, and copies of train order No. 12, Form 19, addressed to Extra 351 North at Paschal, a blind siding 7.2 miles south of Talbotton, in care of First 4. Train order No. 11 read as follows:

No 11 Eng 79 meet First 4 Eng  
74 at Beall

Train order No. 12 read in part as follows:

Order No 6 is annulled. No 11  
eng 79 run one 1 hour Late  
Manchester to Mauk \* \* \*

Beall is a blind siding 4.9 miles north of Talbotton and 12.9 miles south of Manchester. First 4 consisted of engine 74, one baggage-mail car, one express car, two coaches and one business car, in the order named. The first car was of all-steel construction, the second to fourth cars, inclusive, of wooden construction, and the fifth car of steel-underframe construction. This train departed from Mauk at 3:18 a. m., 10 minutes late, stopped at Paschal and delivered copies of order No. 12 to Extra 351, departed from Talbotton, the last open office, at 3:53 a. m., 19 minutes late, and while moving at an estimated speed of 30 miles per hour it collided with No. 11 at a point 1.2 miles north of Talbotton.

At Manchester, 17.8 miles north of Talbotton, the crew of No. 11, a south-bound first-class passenger train, received copies of train order No. 54, Form 19, and train order No. 11, Form 31, which read as previously quoted, and copies of train order No. 12, Form 31, which read in part as follows:

Order No 11 is Annulled  
No 11 Eng 79 run One 1 hour  
Late Manchester  
to Mauk \* \* \*

No. 11 consisted of engine 79, one passenger-baggage car, two coaches, one dining car and three coaches, in the order named. All cars were of steel construction. This train departed from Manchester, the last open office, at 3:30 a. m., 1 hour 6 minutes late, passed the clearance point of the south siding-switch at Beall, where it would have been required by order No. 11 to wait until First 4 was into clear on the siding if train order No. 12 had read correctly, and while moving at an estimated speed of 45 miles per hour it collided with First 4.

The force of the impact moved No. 11 northward 62 feet. The front end of the engine of each train was raised upward about 5 feet, and both engines were badly damaged. None of the cars of either train was derailed, but each car was considerably damaged.

The weather was clear at the time of the accident, which occurred about 3:55 a. m.

The fireman and the brakeman of First 4, and the engineer, the fireman, the conductor and the baggageman of No. 11 were injured.

During the 30-day period preceding the day of the accident, the average daily movement in the vicinity of the point of accident was 13.3 trains.

Discussion

Train order No. 54, dated July 3, which gave No. 11 right over First 4, Second 4 and Third 4 between Manchester and Westwood, was sent to No. 4 at Fitzgerald, 1.2 miles south of Westwood, for delivery to First 4 at Westwood and to Manchester for delivery to No. 11. These trains were first class. This order was made complete to the operator at Fitzgerald at 9:52 p. m. and to the operator at Manchester at 11:05 p. m. The crew of First 4 received copies of this order, and the train departed from Westwood at 12:10 a. m., July 4. Train order No. 6, dated July 4, which required No. 11 to run 50 minutes late on its schedule from Manchester to Mauk, was sent to No. 11 at Manchester and to First 4 at Oglethorpe. This order was made complete to the operator at Manchester at 1:59 a. m. and to the operator at Oglethorpe at 2:03 a. m., and copies of the order were delivered to the crew of First 4 by the operator at Oglethorpe about 2:25 a. m. Train order No. 11, which established Beall as the meeting point between No. 11 and First 4, was sent to Manchester for delivery to No. 11 and to Mauk for delivery to First 4. This order was made complete at 2:59 a. m. Train order No. 12, which annulled train order No. 6 and required No. 11 to run 1 hour late on its schedule from Manchester to Mauk, was sent to Manchester for delivery to No. 11 and to First 4 at Mauk for delivery by the crew of First 4 to the crew of a north-bound extra train at Paschal. This order was made complete to the operator at Manchester at 3:03 a. m. and to the operator at Mauk at 3:08 a. m. Copies of train orders Nos. 11 and 12 were delivered to the crew of First 4 by the operator at Mauk about 3:17 a. m. Copies of train orders Nos. 54, 11 and 12 were delivered to the conductor of No. 11 by the operator at Manchester about 3:25 a. m., but the operator had erroneously copied train order No. 12 by making the first sentence read "Order No. 11 is annulled", instead of "Order No. 6 is annulled." The orders were read to the operator by the conductor of No. 11, and No. 11 departed from Manchester at 3:30 a. m. The error in train order No. 12 held by the crew of No. 11 resulted in a lap of authority of the trains involved, as First 4 was authorized by train order No. 11 to proceed to Beall to meet No. 11, but the crew of No. 11 held no effective meet order with First 4, because the erroneous copies of order No. 12 delivered to the crew of No. 11 at Manchester annulled the meet order to this train. Since No. 11 was superior to First 4 by right, as conferred by order No. 54, No. 11 could proceed without regard to First 4. These trains collided at a point 3.7 miles south of the station at Beall. Because of embankments and vegetation on the inside of the curves in this territory, the members of the crew on the engine of each train were unable to see the other train more than a few hundred feet. The accident occurred before effective action could be taken to stop either train.

The train dispatcher and the operator at Mauk said that the operator at Manchester repeated order No. 12 correctly. The operator at Manchester left the office soon after the accident occurred and he was not available for questioning during the investigation. Therefore, it could not be definitely determined whether the operator made the error when he copied the order as it was being sent by the train dispatcher, or whether he recopied the order after he had repeated it to the dispatcher. The copies of order No. 6 on file in the office at Manchester bore the notation that this order was annulled by order No. 12, and copies of this order were not delivered to No. 11. This indicates that at the time the operator wrote the notation on order No. 6 he was aware that order No. 12 annulled order No. 6, and not order No. 11.

Trains are operated in this territory by timetable and train orders only. If an adequate block system had been in use, these opposing trains would not have been permitted to occupy the same block simultaneously, and this accident could have been prevented.

Cause

It is found that this accident was caused by an error made in copying a train order.

Recommendation

It is recommended that the Atlanta, Birmingham and Coast Railroad Company install an adequate block system on the line on which this accident occurred.

Dated at Washington, D. C., this thirtieth day of August, 1945.

By the Commission, Commissioner Patterson.

(SEAL)

W. P. BARTEL,  
Secretary.