

INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION

WASHINGTON

REPORT NO. 3713

ATLANTIC COAST LINE RAILROAD COMPANY

IN RE ACCIDENT

NEAR FLORAL CITY, FLA., ON

OCTOBER 18, 1956

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SUMMARY

Date: October 18, 1956

Railroad: Atlantic Coast Line

Location: Floral City, Fla.

Kind of accident: Head-end collision

Trains involved: Freight : Freight

Train numbers: Extra 317 North : 237

Locomotive numbers: Diesel-electric units 317-A and 419-A : Diesel-electric units 417-A and 858-A

Consists: 43 cars, cabooses : 38 cars, cabooses

Estimated speeds: Undetermined : 49 m. p. h.

Operation: Movements with the current of traffic by timetable and train orders; movements against the current of traffic by train orders

Tracks: Double; tangent; 1.36 percent ascending grade northward

Weather: Foggy

Time: 5:12 a. m.

Casualties: 4 killed; 3 injured

Cause: Train being authorized to move against the current of traffic on a track which was not clear of opposing trains.

INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION

REPORT NO. 3713

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

ATLANTIC COAST LINE RAILROAD COMPANY

December 5, 1956

Accident near Floral City, Fla., on October 18, 1956,
caused by a train being authorized to move against
the current of traffic on a track which was not
clear of opposing trains.

REPORT OF THE COMMISSION¹

CLARKE, Commissioner:

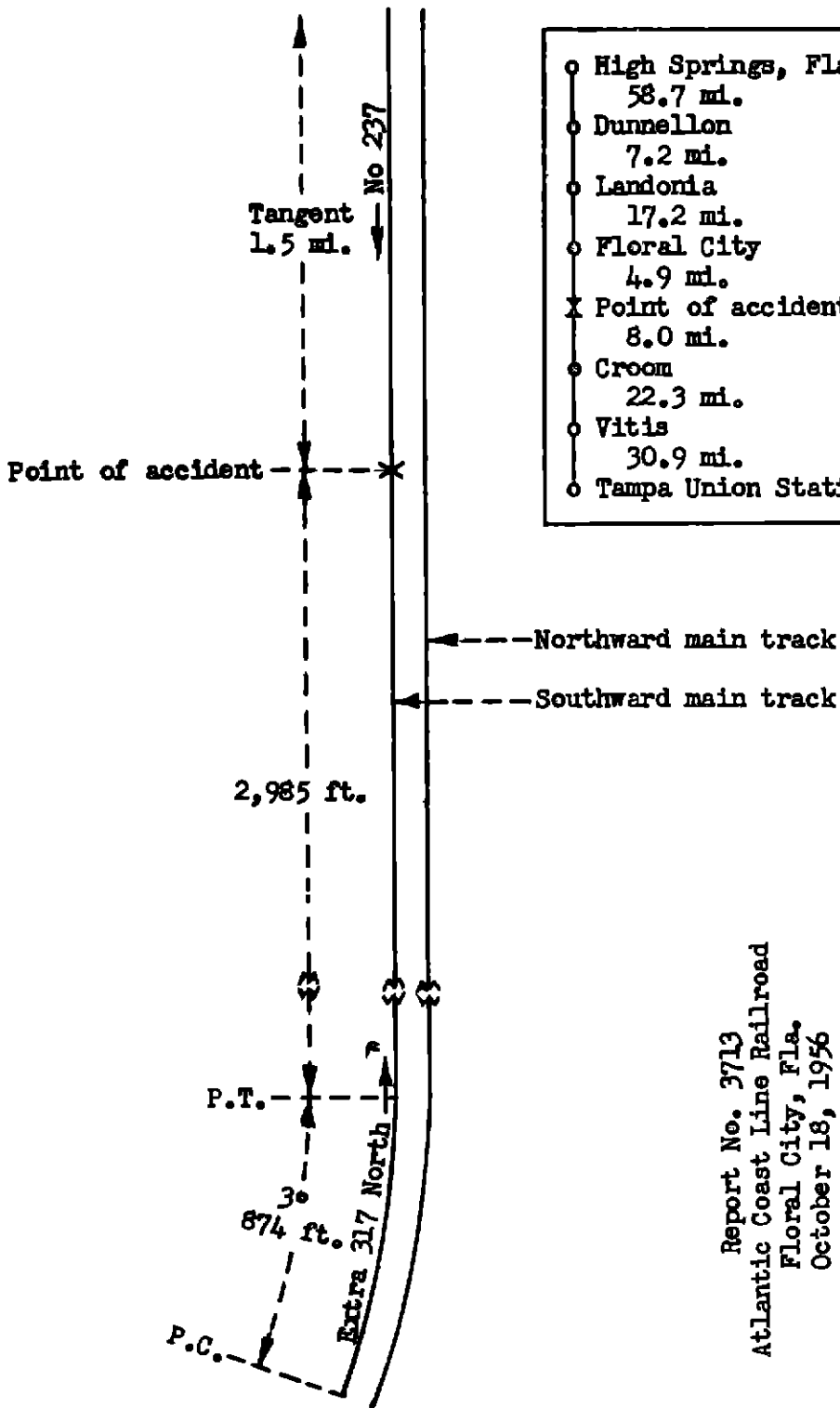
On October 18, 1956, there was a head-end collision
between two freight trains on the Atlantic Coast Line Rail-
road near Floral City, Fla., which resulted in the death of
four employees, and the injury of three employees.

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Under authority of section 17 (2) of the Interstate Com-
merce Act the above-entitled proceeding was referred by the
Commission to Commissioner Clarke for consideration and
disposition.

→ To High Springs ←

← To Tampa Union Station →



- High Springs, Fla. 58.7 mi.
- Dunnellon 7.2 mi.
- Landonia 17.2 mi.
- Floral City 4.9 mi.
- X Point of accident 8.0 mi.
- Croon 22.3 mi.
- Vitis 30.9 mi.
- Tampa Union Station, Fla.

Report No. 3713
 Atlantic Coast Line Railroad
 Floral City, Fla.
 October 18, 1956

Location of Accident and Method of Operation

This accident occurred on that part of the Southern Division extending between Tampa Union Station and High Springs, Fla., 149.6 miles. In the vicinity of the point of accident this is a double-track line, over which trains moving with the current of traffic are operated by timetable and train orders. Trains moving against the current of traffic are operated by train orders. There is no block system in use. The accident occurred on the southward main track at a point 61.2 miles north of Tampa Union Station and 4.9 miles south of Floral City. From the south there is a 3° curve to the left 874 feet in length and a tangent 2,985 feet to the point of accident and 1.5 miles northward. From the south the grade is, successively, an average of 0.83 percent descending 2,588 feet, 0.67 percent ascending 412 feet, and 1.36 percent ascending 147 feet to the point of accident. From the north the grade is, successively, 0.38 percent ascending 1,618 feet, 0.82 percent descending 394 feet, and 1.36 percent descending 653 feet to the point of accident.

This carrier's operating rules read in part as follows:

D-151. Where two main tracks are in service trains and engines must keep to the right unless otherwise provided.

FORMS OF TRAIN ORDERS.

D-R

Providing for a Movement Against the Current of Traffic

- (1.) No 1 Eng 500 has right over opposing trains on northward track C to F.

The designated train must use the track specified between the points named and has right over opposing trains on that track between those points. Opposing trains must not leave the point last named until the designated train arrives.

A train must not be moved against the current of traffic until the track on which it is to run has been cleared of opposing movements.

The maximum authorized speed for freight trains in the vicinity of the point of accident is 49 miles per hour.

Description of Accident

Second 118, a north-bound first-class freight train, consisted of Diesel-electric units 317-A and 419-A, coupled in multiple-unit control, 43 cars, and a caboose. It arrived at Croom, 57.2 miles north of Tampa Union Station, at 4:50 a. m. At Croom the members of the crew received copies of train order No. 320 reading as follows:

Second 118 due to leave Lakeland Jct Oct 17th
is annulled Croom to Dunnellon

and copies of train order No. 321 reading as follows:

Eng 317 run extra Croom to Dunnellon and has
right over opposing trains on Southward track
Croom to Dunnellon

Lakeland Jct. is 41.8 miles south of Croom on a line which converges with the Tampa Union Station-High Springs line at Vitis, 22.3 miles south of Croom. Dunnellon is 37.7 miles north of Croom. This train, operating as Extra 317 North, departed from Croom on the southward main track at 4:55 a. m. While moving at an undetermined speed it collided with No. 237 at a point 8.0 miles north of Croom and 4.9 miles south of Floral City.

No. 237, a south-bound third-class freight train, consisted, at the time of the accident, of Diesel-electric units 417-A and 858-A, coupled in multiple-unit control, 38 cars, and a caboose. This train arrived at Dunnellon at 3:55 a. m. and departed at 4:21 a. m., 51 minutes late. The crew did not receive copies of train order No. 321. While moving at an estimated speed of about 49 miles per hour it collided with Extra 317 North.

The locomotive and the first eight cars of Extra 317 North, and the locomotive, the first eight cars, and the fifteenth to the twenty-fourth cars, inclusive, of No. 237 were derailed. The first Diesel-electric unit of Extra 317 North stopped on its side, approximately 25 feet west of the track and at right angles to it, and 55 feet south of the point of collision. The second Diesel-electric unit stopped on its side immediately south of the first unit and parallel to the track. The first Diesel-electric unit of No. 237 turned end for end and stopped approximately 110 feet south of the point of collision. The front end was on the track

structure of the northward main track, and the rear end was east of the track. The second unit stopped against the side of the first unit. The derailed cars stopped in various positions on or near the tracks. The Diesel-electric units of both locomotives were badly damaged, nine cars were destroyed, eight cars were badly damaged, and nine cars were slightly damaged. Inflammable material in the wreckage became ignited, and the Diesel-electric units of both locomotives and cars of both trains, which had been damaged in the collision, were further damaged by fire.

The front brakeman of Extra 317 North, and the engineer, the fireman, and the front brakeman of No. 237 were killed. The engineer and the fireman of Extra 317 North, and the flagman of No. 237 were injured.

The weather was foggy and it was dark at the time of the accident, which occurred at 5:12 a. m.

Discussion

First 118, consisting of a four-unit Diesel-electric locomotive, 158 cars, and a caboose, passed Croom at 3:01 a. m., 4 hours 26 minutes late. It stopped at 4:10 a. m. at a point about 10 miles south of Dunnellon because of a broken coupler on one of the cars. The forward portion of the train proceeded to Ladonia, 7.2 miles south of Dunnellon, and the conductor called the train dispatcher and informed him that there would be a considerable delay before the train could proceed. The train dispatcher then decided to operate Second 118 against the current of traffic from Croom to Dunnellon so that that train could pass First 118 and a train behind First 118.

The train dispatcher issued train order No. 321, addressed to C & E Southward Trains at Dunnellon and to C & E Engine 317 at Croom, at 4:45 a. m., 24 minutes after No. 237 departed from Dunnellon. He said that at the time he issued this order he overlooked the fact that No. 237 had departed from Dunnellon and had not arrived at Croom. A short time after Extra 317 North departed from Croom the dispatcher realized that the southward main track was occupied by No. 237. He then attempted to call section foremen and other employees between Croom and Dunnellon in order to stop one or both of the trains. He was unable to reach any of these employees in time to avert the accident. At night there are no open train-order offices between Croom and Dunnellon.

As Extra 317 North was approaching the point where the accident occurred the enginemen and the front brakeman were maintaining a lookout ahead from the control compartment at the front of the locomotive. The conductor and the flagman were in the caboose. The headlight and the white oscillating headlight were lighted brightly. The engineer said that the train was moving at the maximum authorized speed of 49 miles per hour. He said that after the locomotive entered the tangent on which the accident occurred he saw a white light ahead which he thought might be a headlight. He said that the light appeared to be moving up and down similar to the headlight of an automobile moving on an undulating road. When he saw the light he placed the throttle in idle position and the brake valve in service position. He then saw that the light was the headlight of a locomotive, and he placed the brake valve in emergency position and turned on the red oscillating signal light. He did not notice whether this light became lighted. He said that the weather was somewhat foggy and he could not estimate the distance at which he first saw the headlight. The enginemen left the control compartment and entered the second unit before the collision occurred. They were unable to estimate the speed of the train at the time of the collision. The employees in the caboose thought that the train was stopped by the emergency application of the brakes. Until they alighted after the train stopped, they were unaware that a collision had occurred. The tapes of the speed-recording devices of both locomotives were destroyed in the accident.

As No. 237 was approaching the point where the accident occurred the enginemen and the front brakeman were at the front of the train, the conductor was in the cupola of the caboose, and the flagman was in the body of the caboose. The headlight and the white oscillating headlight were lighted. The train was moving at approximately the maximum authorized speed, as estimated by the employees in the caboose. The conductor said he saw the headlight of Extra 317 North at a distance which he thought was approximately 1 mile, and he assumed that the opposing train was moving on the northward main track. Soon afterward the brakes became applied in emergency, and the collision occurred several seconds later. The conductor said that the speed was not materially reduced before the collision occurred.

The rules of this carrier provide that a train must not be moved against the current of traffic until the track on which it is to run has been cleared of opposing movements. In the instant case the train dispatcher understood this requirement, but at the time he authorized Extra 317 North

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to move against the current of traffic he overlooked the fact that the southward main track was occupied by No. 237.

Cause

This accident was caused by a train being authorized to move against the current of traffic on a track which was not clear of opposing trains.

Dated at Washington, D. C., this fifth day of December, 1956.

By the Commission, Commissioner Clarke.

(SEAL)

HAROLD D. McCOY,

Secretary.