

INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION  
WASHINGTON

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INVESTIGATION NO. 3241  
ATLANTIC COAST LINE RAILROAD COMPANY  
REPORT IN RE ACCIDENT  
NEAR JESUP, GA., ON  
MARCH 24, 1949

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SUMMARY

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Date: March 24, 1949

Railroad: Atlantic Coast Line

Location: Jesup, Ga.

Kind of accident: Head-end collision

Trains involved: Freight : Passenger

Train numbers: 231 : First 58

Engine numbers: 1720 : 1509

Consists: 80 cars, caboose : 6 cars

Estimated speeds: 15 m. p. h. : 59 m. p. h.

Operation: Timetable and train orders

Track: Single; tangent; 0.31 percent  
descending grade northward

Weather: Dense fog

Time: 7:27 a. m.

Casualties: 2 killed; 22 injured

Cause: Inferior train occupying main track  
on time of opposing superior train

INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION

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INVESTIGATION NO. 3241

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

ATLANTIC COAST LINE RAILROAD COMPANY

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May 2, 1949

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Accident near Jesup, Ga., on March 24, 1949, caused by  
an inferior train occupying the main track on the  
time of an opposing superior train.

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REPORT OF THE COMMISSION<sup>1</sup>

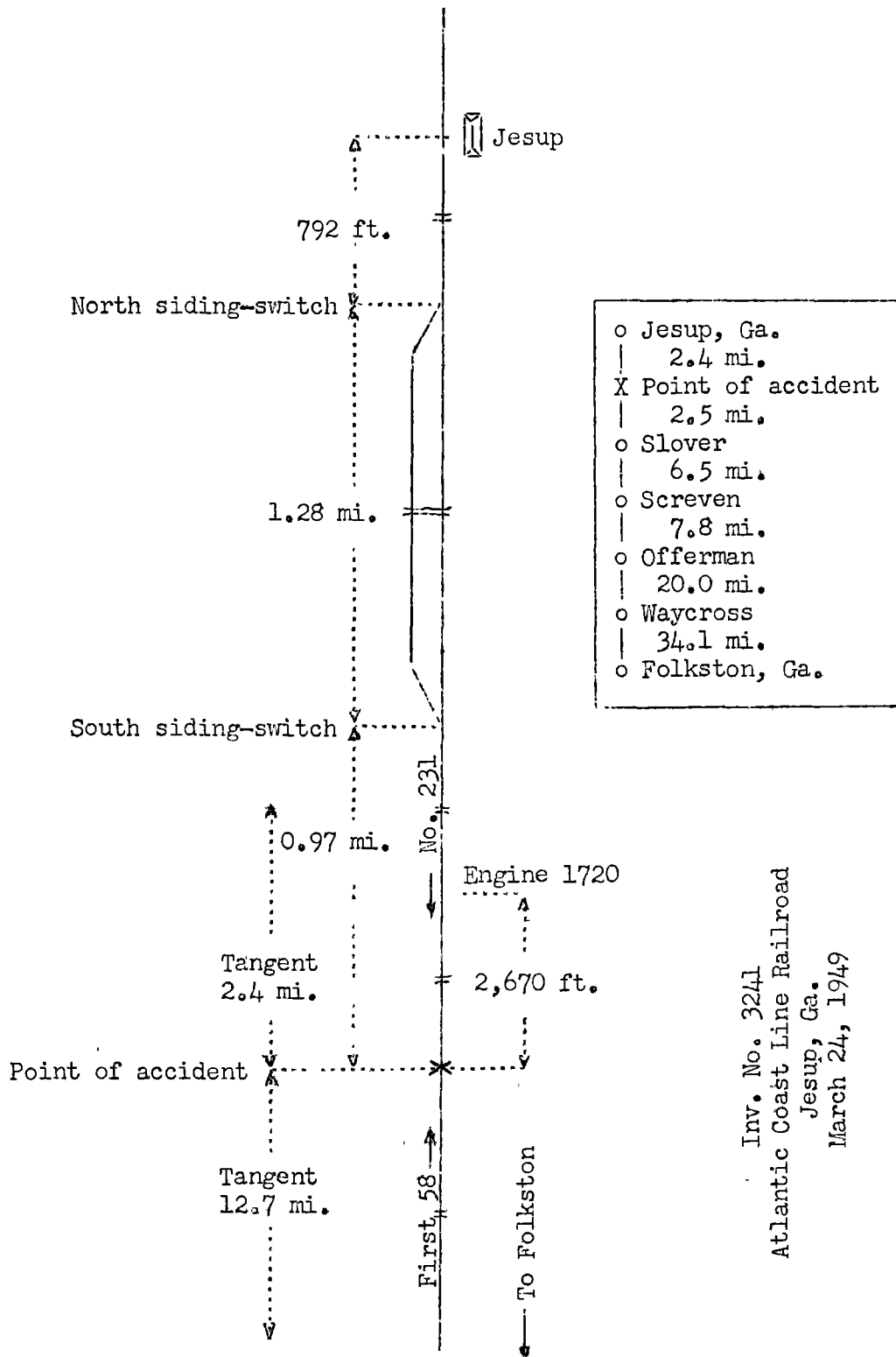
PATTERSON, Commissioner:

On March 24, 1949, there was a head-end collision between a freight train and a passenger train on the Atlantic Coast Line Railroad near Jesup, Ga., which resulted in the death of 2 train-service employees, and the injury of 19 passengers, 1 Pullman employee, 1 railway-mail clerk and 1 train-service employee.

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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.



Location of Accident and Method of Operation

This accident occurred on that part of the Southern Division extending between Folkston and Jesup, Ga., via Waycross, Ga., 73.3 miles, a single-track line in the vicinity of the point of accident, over which trains are operated by timetable and train orders. There is no block system in use. At Jesup a siding 1.28 miles in length parallels the main track on the west. The north and the south switches of this siding are, respectively, 792 feet and 1.43 miles south of the station. The accident occurred on the main track at a point 2.4 miles south of the station, 2.25 miles south of the north siding-switch, and 0.97 mile south of the south siding-switch. From the south the main track is tangent 12.7 miles to the point of accident and 2.4 miles northward. At the point of accident the grade is 0.31 percent descending northward.

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

5. \* \* \*

The time applies to the switch where an inferior train enters the siding; \* \* \*

\* \* \*

35. The following signals will be used by flagmen:

\* \* \*

Night signals--A red light,  
A white light,  
Torpedoes and  
Fusees.

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.

\* \* \*

72. Trains of the first class are superior to those of the second; trains of the second class are superior to those of the third; \* \* \*

\* \* \*

87. An inferior train must keep out of the way of opposing superior trains and failing to clear the main track by the time required by rule must be protected as prescribed by Rule 99.

\* \* \*

89. At meeting points between trains of different classes the inferior train must take the siding and clear the superior train at least five minutes, and must pull into the siding when practicable. \* \* \*

95. Two or more sections may be run on the same schedule.

\* \* \*

99. When a train stops under circumstances in which it may be overtaken by another train, the flagman must go back immediately with flagman's signals a sufficient distance to insure full protection, placing two torpedoes, and when necessary, in addition, displaying lighted fuses.

\* \* \*

The front of the train must be protected in the same way when necessary by the Fireman.

\* \* \*

206. In train orders regular trains will be designated by number as "No. 10," and sections as "Second 10," adding engine numbers if desired.

\* \* \*

\* \* \*

211. \* \* \*

\* \* \*

Enginemen must show train orders to firemen and when practicable to forward trainmen, who are required to read them. Conductors must show train orders to trainmen, who are required to read them.

FORMS OF TRAIN ORDERS

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TIME ORDERS

(3.) No 1 wait at H until 9 59 a m for No 2:

The train first named must not pass the designated point before the time given, unless the other train has arrived. The train last named is required to run with respect to the time specified, at the designated point or any intermediate station where schedule time is earlier than the time specified in the order, as before required to run with respect to the schedule time of the train first named.

The maximum authorized speed was 60 miles per hour for the passenger train, and 40 miles per hour for the freight train.

Description of Accident

At Jesup the crew of No. 231, a south-bound third-class freight train, received, among others, copies of train order No. 34, reading as follows:

Second 58 wait at  
Screven until 735 am  
Slover until 745 am  
for No 231

Slover and Screven are, respectively, 4.9 and 11.4 miles south of Jesup. No. 231, consisting of engine 1720, 93 cars and a caboose, passed the station at Jesup at 6:27 a. m., 7 hours 10 minutes late, passed the north siding-switch, and, about 6:30 a. m., it stopped on the main track, with the front end near the south siding-switch. About 7:23 a. m., the engine was detached and it departed southward. When the engine was about 1 mile south of the south siding-switch, the movement was reversed and the engine had attained a speed of about 15 miles per hour when it was struck by First 58.

First 58, a north-bound passenger train operating as a section of a first-class schedule, consisted of engine 1509, one express car, one mail-baggage car, one baggage car, two

coaches and one sleeping car, in the order named. All cars were of steel construction. This train departed from Offerman, the last open office, 19.2 miles south of Jesup, at 7:06 a. m., 27 minutes late, and while moving at an estimated speed of 59 miles per hour it collided with the engine of No. 231.

Engine 1720 continued northward and stopped 2,670 feet north of the point of collision. The engine truck was torn loose, the cylinder assembly was split apart, the cab was demolished and the engine was otherwise damaged. The engine of First 58 was derailed. It stopped upright, in line with the track, and at a point 252 feet north of the point of collision. The front end was badly damaged, and the cab was demolished. The tender stopped on its left side at the rear of the engine, about 10 feet west of the track and parallel to it, and was badly damaged. The first, second and third cars were derailed and stopped in line with each other, with the front end of the first car against the rear of the tender and 10 feet west of the track, and the rear end of the third car on the roadbed. The front of the first car was demolished, and the second and third cars were considerably damaged.

The engineer and the fireman of First 58 were killed, and the fireman of No. 231 was injured.

There was a dense fog at the time of the accident, which occurred about 7:27 a. m.

During the 30-day period preceding the day of the accident, the average daily movement in the territory involved was 12.4 trains.

#### Discussion

The rules governing operation on the line on which the accident occurred provide that an inferior train must keep out of the way of opposing superior trains, and, at a meeting point, the inferior train must enter the siding and be into clear not less than 5 minutes before the superior train is due to leave that point, or must provide full protection against the superior train.

No. 58, a north-bound first-class train, was due to leave Slover, a blind siding, 4.9 miles south of Jesup, at 7:02 a. m., and Jesup at 7:18 a. m. The north siding-switch at Jesup is 792 feet south of the station, and, under the rules, the schedule time of regular north-bound trains applies at this switch.



First 58, a section of a first-class schedule, departed from Offerman, the last open office, at 7:06 a. m., 27 minutes late, passed the north siding-switch at Slover, and it collided with the engine of No. 231 at a point 2.25 miles south of the north siding-switch at Jesup. As First 58 was approaching the point where the accident occurred, the speed was about 59 miles per hour, the headlight was lighted brightly because of dense fog, and the members of the train crew were in various locations throughout the train. The first any surviving member of this crew was aware of anything being wrong was when the brakes became applied in emergency just before the collision occurred. The brakes of this train had been tested, and had functioned properly en route. The engineer was killed and the fireman was fatally injured in the accident, therefore, it could not be determined when they first became aware that the engine of No. 231 was occupying the main track. No train order restricting the authority of First 58 to proceed with respect to No. 231 had been issued. Examination of the engine of First 58 after the accident disclosed that the throttle lever was latched open in the eleventh notch, the reverse lever was in position for 30-percent cut-off in forward motion, and the automatic brake valve was in emergency position.

The investigation disclosed that as No. 231, a south-bound third-class freight train, passed the station at Jesup, copies of train order No. 34, together with copies of another order and a clearance card, were delivered to the crew. Train order No. 34 directed Second 58, a section of a first-class schedule, to wait at Slover until 7:45 a. m. for No. 231. Without stopping, No. 231 proceeded southward on the main track and stopped within yard limits about 6:30 a. m. The front end was in the vicinity of the south siding-switch at Jesup. The engine was detached, and it proceeded northward on the siding to obtain coal and water. Later, it returned to the south siding-switch, entered the main track and was coupled to the train about 6:50 a. m. During the interval between 6:30 a. m. and 6:50 a. m., the yard engine at Jesup switched out the rear 13 cars, then recoupled the caboose to the rear of No. 231's train. At 6:56 a. m. the engineer of No. 231 applied and released the train-brake system in a road-test of the brakes, then sounded the engine-whistle signal to recall the flagman from the north. Since no train order had been issued to No. 231 restricting the authority of First 58 to proceed, No. 231 was required to be into clear on the siding at Slover not later than 6:57 a. m., if it proceeded to that station for First 58, and was required to be into clear at Jesup not later than 7:13 a. m., if it remained at that station, or to provide flag protection. The members of the crew of No. 231 understood these requirements. However, the members of the crew at the front of the train understood train order No. 34 to read that No. 58 would wait at

Slover until 7:45 a. m., and thought that sufficient time remained so that No. 231 could hold the main track at Jesup to perform all necessary switching movements, take coal and water, proceed to Slover and enter the siding at that point to clear No. 58 at 7:40 a. m., as required by the rules. Since No. 231 was occupying the main track south of the north, or inferior, siding-switch, it was required to clear the time of First 58 at Slover at 6:57 a. m. The engineer said that when train order No. 34 was handed to him by the front brakeman he apparently covered the word "Second" with his thumb, and thus misread the order as directing No. 58 to wait at Slover. He read the order aloud to the fireman and to the front brakeman, and commented to them that sufficient time remained to proceed to Slover for No. 58. The supply of water in the tender was practically exhausted and the fireman was busily occupied in manipulating the injector to supply the boiler with feedwater, and he did not read the order at the time it was delivered. Later, the fireman was engaged in cleaning the fire and did not ask the engineer for the order. The front brakeman said that he also misread train order No. 34 as directing No. 58 to wait at Slover. The conductor and the flagman understood the contents of the train order, but they had no opportunity of conferring with the other members of the crew as to their understanding. The conductor said that he remained at the rear until the switching movement was completed. The flagman said that he had proceeded northward to provide flag protection against following trains, and did not return when he was recalled at 6:56 a. m., as he expected his train to remain between the switches of the siding at Jesup. Both the conductor and the flagman thought that flag protection would be provided against First 58, and that the south siding-switch would be lined for First 58 to enter the siding and to meet No. 231 in that manner. About 7:20 a. m., since no signal to proceed was given in response to the whistle signal recalling the flagman, the engineer decided to detach the engine and to proceed southward a distance sufficient to provide adequate flag protection. He planned to leave the fireman at that point, then to return to his train to arrange the siding-switches for No. 58 to use the siding in meeting No. 231. Accordingly, the engine proceeded southward, manned by the engineer and the fireman only. When this movement reached a point 0.97 mile south of the south siding-switch, the engineer observed the reflection of a brightly lighted headlight rapidly approaching through the fog. He immediately reversed the movement of his engine, opened the throttle, and he and the fireman jumped a few seconds before the collision occurred. The fireman had flagging equipment in his possession, but was unable to use it because of insufficient time after he observed the approach

of First 58. Apparently, the engine crew of First 58 observed the lighted headlight of the engine of No. 231 a short interval before the collision occurred, as the brakes of First 58 were applied about the time of the collision. The engineer of No. 231 could assign no reason other than misreading train order No. 34 and failing to observe that it involved Second 58 only instead of No. 58, although he again read the order after recoupling the engine to the train. At the time of the accident, the front brakeman was in the vicinity of the south siding-switch, the conductor was about midway of the siding, and the flagman was to the rear of his train.

In this territory trains are operated 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.

Cause

It is found that this accident was caused by an inferior train occupying the main track on the time of an opposing superior train.

Dated at Washington, D. C., this second day of May, 1949.

By the Commission, Commissioner Patterson.

(SEAL)

W. P. BARTEL,

Secretary.