

1984

INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF THE BUREAU OF SAFETY CONCERNING AN
ACCIDENT ON THE CENTRAL OF GEORGIA RAILWAY NEAR
BATESVILLE, ALA., ON MAY 12, 1935.

June 28, 1935.

To the Commission:

On May 12, 1935, there was a derailment of a mixed train on the Central of Georgia Railway near Batesville, Ala., which resulted in the death of 2 employees and the injury of an express messenger.

Location and method of operation

This accident occurred on the Montgomery District of the Macon Division, which extends between Smithville, Ga., and Montgomery, Ala., a distance of 140.5 miles. In the vicinity of the point of accident this is a single-track line over which trains are operated by time table and train orders, no block-signal system being in use. The accident occurred at a point 2 miles east of the station at Batesville; approaching this point from the east there is a $2^{\circ}22'$ curve to the right 1,151 feet in length, tangent track for a distance of 786 feet, followed by a 1° curve to the left 1,037 feet in length, the accident occurring approximately at the center of the latter curve. The grade for west-bound trains is 0.83 percent descending at the point of accident.

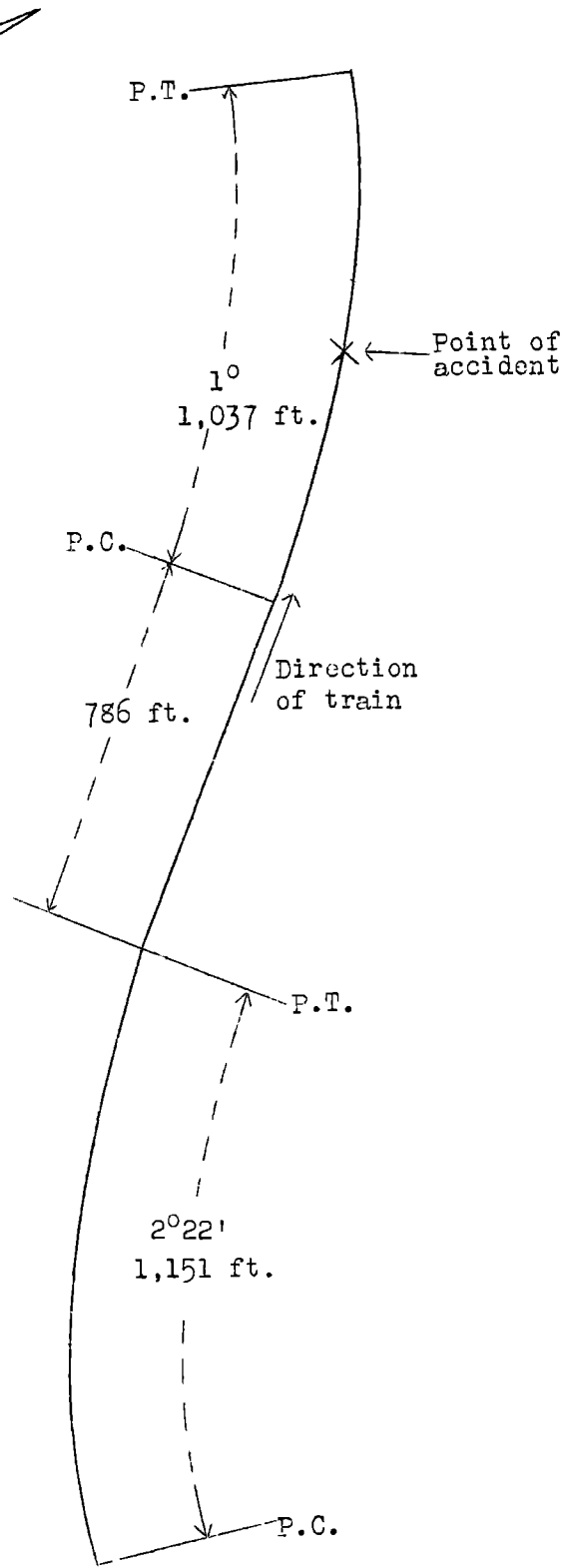
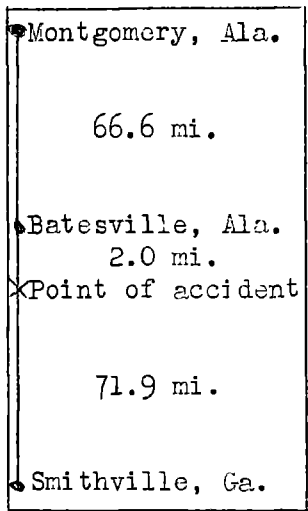
The track is laid with 80-pound rails, 33 feet in length, with 18 treated pine ties to the rail length, single spiked, fully tieplated and ballasted with gravel to a depth of 6 inches. Four-bolt angle bars are used with Abbott base plates. The track is laid on a fill about 4 feet high on the south side and 8 feet high on the north side.

Special instructions contained in the time table restrict the speed of mixed trains to 35 miles per hour in the territory in which this accident occurred.

The weather was clear at the time of the accident, which occurred at 8:07 a.m.

Description

Train No. 71, a west-bound first-class mixed train, consisted of 4 freight cars, 1 express car, and 2 coaches, the



Inv. No. 1984
 Central of Georgia Ry.
 Batesville, Ala.
 May 12, 1935.

express car and coaches being of all steel construction, in the order named, hauled by engine 628, and was in charge of Conductor Waters and Engineman Gates. This train departed from Eufaula, Ala., the last open office, 11.7 miles east of the point of accident, at 7:40 a.m., according to the train sheet, on time, and on approaching Batesville was derailed while traveling at a speed estimated to have been 30 miles per hour.

The engine, tender and first five cars were derailed to the south of the track; the engine and tender stopped on their left sides parallel to the track, with the front end of the engine 222 feet beyond the point of derailment. The first two cars were on their sides practically at right angles to the track; the third car remained upright with one end on the roadbed and the other end on top of the fourth car which was upright at an angle of 45° with and clear of the track. The front end of the fifth car was clear of the track, while the rear end remained on the roadbed. The employees killed were the engineman and fireman.

Summary of evidence

Conductor Waters stated that he was sitting on the left side in the rear of the sixth car beside an open window when he felt a heavy application of the air brakes and on looking out of the window he saw cars turning over and the train moved not more than 100 feet before it stopped. He estimated the speed of the train at the time of the accident to have been 30 miles per hour. Conductor Waters said the air brakes functioned properly en route but was unable to say whether the brakes had been applied in emergency by the engineman or as a result of the train line breaking. On examining the track with the section foreman about 1½ hours after the occurrence of the accident, they found a bolt, nut and nut lock lying in the middle of the track under the sixth car, and two angle bars were lying on the track, one on each side of a joint of the south rail. Examination of the bolt and nut showed that the threads had not been stripped. There was a flange mark on the outside base of the receiving rail. Conductor Waters was of the opinion that the rail had been pushed in at the joint and when the wheel left the rail, it dropped down with its flange riding on the base of the rail. The statements of Brakeman Lord, Flagman Stephens and Express Messenger Raines brought out nothing additional of importance, except that Brakeman Lord was of the opinion that the emergency application of the air brakes was due to the train line breaking.



Section Foreman Main, in charge of the section on which this accident occurred, stated that in addition to the two angle bars, which he found lying on the outside of the track at the ends of the ties at the joint, and the bolt, nut and nut lock found on the inside of the track, there were several spikes on the inside of the track indicating that they had been freshly pulled; there also were two nut locks on the outside of the track. The first wheel mark was on the west inside end of the base plate which was in place and the first wheel mark on outside of base of rail was 28 inches from the receiving end of the rail, showing that the rail had been shoved inside of the base plate as there were no wheel marks on the end or top of this rail. The leaving end of the rail at this joint appeared to be battered where the wheels had gone off the end of the rail. The angle bars were missing from the next joint westward and also on the second joint westward on the north rail; these angle bars were not found. He inspected the track east of the point of accident and found nothing wrong. Section Foreman Main further stated that he last inspected this track on the afternoon of May 10, at which time it was in good condition; he had not lost or missed a track wrench or claw bar during the last year, and said if any of his tools had disappeared he would have known it.

The statements of Section Foreman Harrison, in charge of the adjoining section east thereof, and Section Laborer Jones, employed on the section on which the accident occurred and who was on Train No. 71 at the time of the accident, corroborated those of Section Foreman Main as to the condition of the track after the accident. Section Foreman Harrison also stated that the mark on the base of the receiving rail extended a distance of 24 feet 8 inches. He had not missed any of his track tools during the past year. Section Foreman Moore, in charge of the section adjoining the west end of the section on which the accident occurred also stated that he had not missed any of his track tools.

Division Engineer Golsan and Supervisor LeSueur stated that examination of the track east of the point of derailment disclosed no evidence of equipment dragging or anything wrong with the track. The first mark was on the west inside lug of the Abbott base plate, which was still intact, on the low side of the curve, and indicated that the rail had been shoved inward and wedged against the inside edge of the base plate, with the ball of the rail about 5 inches out of line. This rail was found turned over on the inside with the ball north

about 10 feet ahead or west of the joint, and later was placed back in its original location; there were no surface or line defects on it. There were fresh claw bar marks on the spikes, and the spike holes indicated that the spikes had been pulled straight.

Master Mechanic McCafferty stated that he inspected the engine after it arrived at Columbus and found no defects; he also inspected the other equipment in this train and could find nothing that would cause the derailment. He had observed at the point of accident that there were also four spikes that had been pulled just west of the joint.

Master Mechanic Flowers, at Macon, Ga., stated that on his arrival at the scene of the accident he inspected the engine and found the throttle open to drifting position, the reverse lever in forward position and the brake valve in running position, but he did not know whether these had been interfered with before he made the examination. This engine had received its last monthly inspection at Macon on April 17, 1935.

Inspection of the track east of the point of derailment by the Commission's inspectors revealed no indication of anything having been dragging. The marks on the rails and parts of the disconnected rail joint were observed as previously described. At the time of this inspection the west rail had been replaced in its original location. Their examination of the engine and five derailed cars disclosed no defects that could have contributed to the cause of the derailment.

The last train to pass over this track prior to the occurrence of the accident was east-bound Train No. 72, which passed this point about 5:23 p.m. May 11.

Due to the curve and some scattered weeds the maximum distance this disconnected rail joint could have been seen by the fireman was about 375 feet, while the engineman's view was limited to 100 feet.

Discussion

The investigation disclosed that a rail joint had been disconnected on the south or inside rail on a curve, both angle bars removed, together with several spikes from the gauge side of the receiving rail; this rail then was moved inward

and wedged against the inside edge of the base plate, thus allowing the wheels to drop off the end of the leaving rail, as evidenced by the battered end of this rail and the flange mark on the outside base of the receiving rail.

No track tools had been missed on this or adjoining sections, and at the time of this investigation it had not been determined by whom this malicious tampering was done.

Conclusions

This accident was caused by malicious tampering with the track.

Respectfully submitted,

W. J. PATTERSON,

Director.