

INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION
WASHINGTON

INVESTIGATION NO. 2663
THE CENTRAL OF GEORGIA RAILWAY COMPANY
REPORT IN RE ACCIDENT
AT BUTLER, GA., ON
DECEMBER 21, 1942

SUMMARY

Railroad: Central of Georgia
Date: December 21, 1942
Location: Butler, Ga.
Kind of accident: Collision with motor truck
and derailment of train
Equipment involved: Freight train : Motor truck
Train number: 34 :
Engine number: 777 :
Consist: 37 cars, caboose :
Speed: 25 m. p. h. : 20-25 m. p. h.
Operation: Timetable and train orders
Track: Single; tangent; 0.82 percent
descending grade eastward
Highway: 5⁰ right curve; crosses track at
angle of 39⁰; 0.36 percent
ascending grade southward
Weather: Cloudy
Time: 7:05 p. m.
Casualties: 3 killed; 2 injured
Cause: Accident caused by motor truck
being driven upon highway grade
crossing immediately in front
of approaching train

INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION

INVESTIGATION NO. 2663

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

THE CENTRAL OF GEORGIA RAILWAY COMPANY

February 10, 1943.

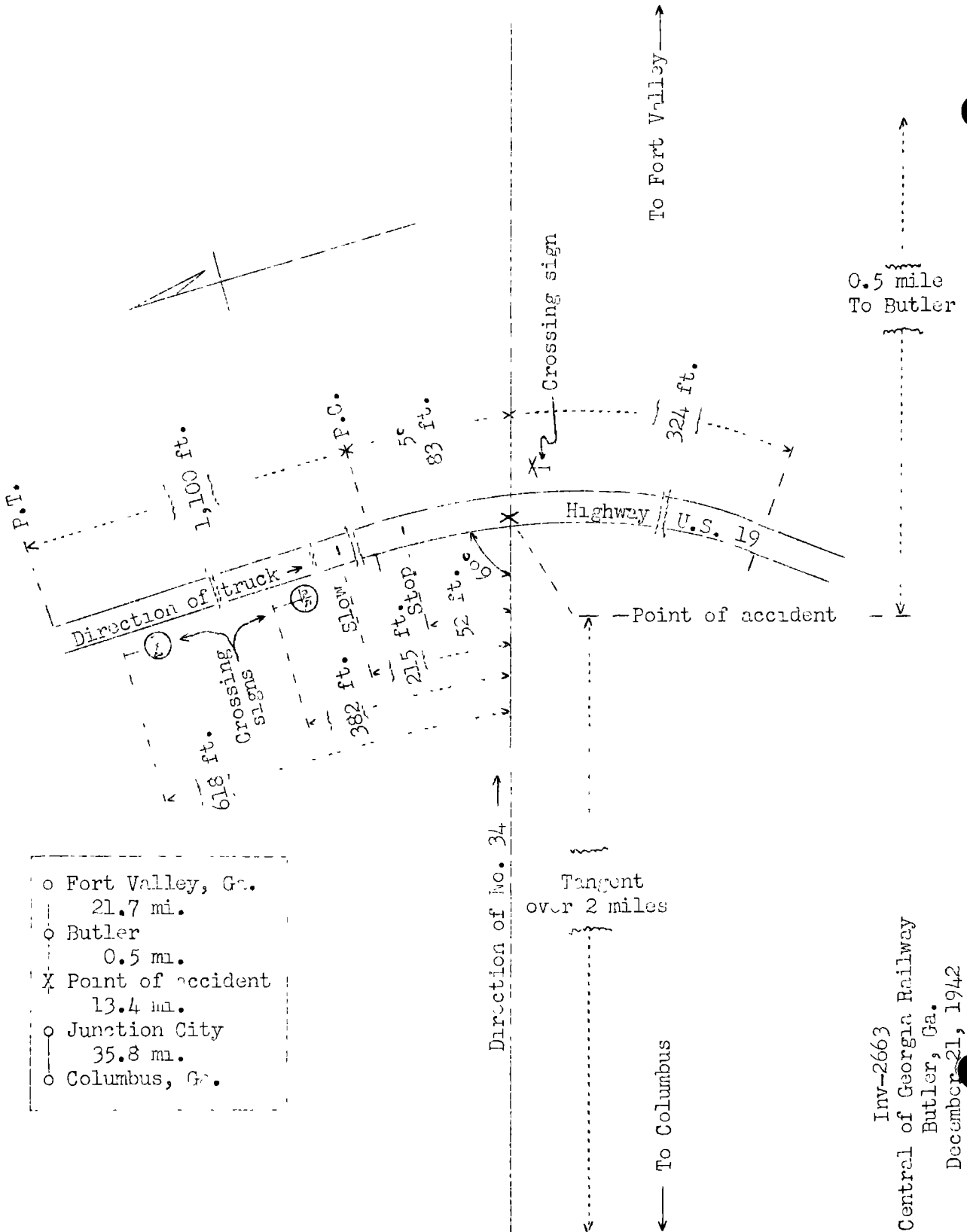
Accident at Butler, Ga., on December 21, 1942, caused by
a motor truck being driven upon a highway grade
crossing immediately in front of an approaching train.

REPORT OF THE COMMISSION¹

PATTERSON, Commissioner:

On December 21, 1942, there was a derailment of a
Central of Georgia Railway freight train after it had
struck a motor truck at a highway grade crossing at Butler,
Ga. The accident resulted in the death of three train-
service employees, and the injury of the truck driver and
an assistant truck driver.

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



Inv-2663
Central of Georgia Railway
Butler, Ga.
December 21, 1942

Location of Accident and Method of Operation

This accident occurred on that part of the Macon Division designated as the Columbus District and extending between Columbus and Fort Valley, Ga., a distance of 71.4 miles. In the vicinity of the point of accident this is a single-track line over which trains are operated by timetable and train orders. There is no block system in use. The accident occurred at a point 0.5 mile west of the station at Butler where the railroad is crossed at grade by Highway U. S. 19. Approaching from the west on the railroad the track is tangent more than 2 miles to the crossing and a considerable distance beyond. At the point of accident the grade for east-bound trains is 0.32 percent descending.

In the vicinity of the crossing involved, Highway U. S. 19 extends north and south and crosses the track at an angle of 69°. Approaching from the north on the highway there is a tangent 1,100 feet in length, which is followed by a 50° curve to the right 83 feet to the crossing and 324 feet beyond. The grade for south-bound vehicles is level 35 feet, 0.6 percent descending 135 feet and then 0.56 percent ascending to the crossing. The highway and the crossing are 22 feet wide and are surfaced with macadam. Flange ways about 2 inches wide are provided inside each rail. The crossing is well maintained.

Advance warning highway-crossing signs, which are disks mounted on posts and 4 feet 10 inches above the surface of the highway, are located 313 and 332 feet north of the crossing and 6 feet west of the highway, and bear the letters "X.P." in black on a yellow background. On the sign nearer to the track the letters are displayed by reflector buttons. Cast-iron markers 14 inches long and 5 inches high are located in the center of the highway at points 215 and 52 feet north of the crossing. The first bears the word "SLOW," and the other, "STOP." A standard cross-buck highway-crossing sign was located to the left of the direction of south-bound traffic and in the southeast angle of the crossing at a point 15 feet south of the center-line of the track and 12 feet east of the highway. This sign bore the words "RAILROAD CROSSING" in black letters on a white background. A crossing-whistle sign for east-bound trains is located 1,200 feet west of the crossing.

Operating rules read in part as follows:

14. ENGINE AND MOTOR WHISTLE SIGNALS.

Note.--The signals prescribed are illustrated by "o" for short sounds; "___" for longer sounds. * * *

SOUND.

INDICATION.

* * *

(1) — — o o Approaching public
 crossings at grade.

* * *

17. The headlight will be displayed to the front of every train by night, * * *.

30. The engine-bell must be rung * * * while passing public crossings at grade, or to prevent accident.

31. The whistle must be sounded at all places where required by rule or by law, or to prevent accident.

Bulletin Order No. 31-262, issued June 25, 1931, reads in part as follows:

ALL ENGINEERS:

* * *

2. Disregard Rule 14-L, blowing road crossing whistle signal, and be governed by the following:

"Two long Blasts - One Short Blast
- One Long Blast, to continue up to the crossing."

* * *

PART II of the Georgia Public Service Commission Rules and Regulations on Safety for Motor Carriers, issued October 1, 1940, reads in part as follows:

DRIVING OF MOTOR VEHICLES

Rule 8. RECKLESS DRIVING FORBIDDEN.--No motor vehicle shall be driven recklessly, or so as to endanger life, limb, or property.

Rule 18. PRECAUTIONS AT RAILROAD CROSSINGS AND DRAWBRIDGES.--Every motor vehicle transporting * * * property for hire shall, upon approaching any railroad crossing, be brought to a full stop within 50 feet but not less than 10 feet from the nearest rail of such railroad grade crossing, * * *, the driver shall ascertain that the course is clear, and nothing contained in this rule shall be so construed as to relieve the driver of the responsibility in any case of exercising due caution to ascertain that the course is clear * * *.

Within the corporate limits of Butler, Ga., the maximum authorized speed for all trains is 25 miles per hour, and for motor vehicles, 25 miles per hour.

Description of Accident

No. 34, an east-bound second-class freight train, departed from Columbus, 49.7 miles west of Butler, at 5:05 p. m., according to the dispatcher's record of movement of trains, 2 hours 50 minutes late. At Junction City, 13.9 miles west of Butler, 4 cars were added and this train, consisting of engine 777, 37 loaded cars and a caboose, departed at 6:35 p. m., according to the statement of the conductor, and while moving at an estimated speed of 25 miles per hour it collided with a motor truck on a highway grade crossing 0.5 mile west of the station at Butler. The brakes of No. 34 had been tested and had functioned properly en route.

The motor truck involved was a tractor and semi-trailer leased to the Fleming Truck Lines, Inc., Jacksonville, Fla., which operates under the jurisdiction of the Interstate Commerce Commission by authority of certificate MC-19190. The driver held Florida chauffeur's license No. 872032. The tractor was a 1941, 8-cylinder, 1-1/2 ton Ford model, and bore Florida license No. 5GL-579 for 1942. Its weight was 6,000 pounds. It was equipped with hydraulic brakes, a vacuum booster, dual tires on the rear wheels, and a hand-operated brake, and was provided with an enclosed steel cab having a sleeping berth. It was hauling a 1941 Kingham semi-trailer, 4 tons capacity, Model R-60, equipped with a vacuum brake, which could be operated by either a hand-operated valve located on the steering-wheel column or a foot pedal. The weight of the trailer when empty was 7,950 pounds. The tractor and the semi-trailer had an over-all length of 33 feet 2 inches. At the time of the accident the cargo with which the semi-trailer was loaded weighed 21,338 pounds. An assistant truck driver who was off duty was on the seat with the driver, and the assigned assistant truck driver was in the sleeping berth. The vehicle, moving

southward on Highway U. S. 19, en route from Atlanta, Ga., to Tampa, Fla., proceeded upon the crossing involved at an estimated speed of 20 to 25 miles per hour, and the semi-trailer was struck by No. 34.

There was no unusual condition about the enclosed cab. at a point on the highway 52 feet north of the crossing involved, the driver of a south-bound vehicle can have an unobstructed view of a train approaching from the west at a distance of 1,443 feet.

The semi-trailer was torn loose from the tractor and demolished. The tractor was overturned and stopped on its right side, badly damaged, 40 feet east of the point of collision and 15 feet south of the track. Wreckage lodged under the engine-truck wheels, and the engine was derailed to the south and stopped on its right side, badly damaged, about 75 feet south of the track and parallel to it, with its front end 250 feet beyond the point of collision. The cab was demolished, most of the steam pipes were broken, and the engine was otherwise damaged. The tender stopped 5 feet west of the engine, across the track and at right angles to it. The first 12 cars and the front truck of the thirteenth car were derailed. The tender and these cars were badly damaged.

It was cloudy at the time of the accident, which occurred about 7:05 p. m.

The employees killed were the engineer, the fireman and the front brakeman.

Data

During the 30-day period preceding the day of the accident, there was a daily average of 14 trains over the crossing involved. During the 24-hour period beginning at 7:01 a. m., January 2, 1943, 693 automobiles, 273 trucks and 17 buses passed over this crossing.

Discussion

As No. 34 was approaching Butler, the speed was about 35 miles per hour. According to the statements of the conductor and the flagman, who were in the cupola of the caboose, the gauge in the caboose indicated that a brake-pipe pressure of 70 pounds was being maintained. They were able to see the reflection of the headlight of their engine. About 1 mile west of Butler, a 10-pound brake-pipe reduction was made, which reduced the speed to 25 miles per hour, and then the brakes were released. The conductor said that about 15 seconds later the

brake-pipe pressure became fully depleted and the train stopped abruptly. He said that because of the short interval between the brake applications he was of the opinion that the brake system was not sufficiently recharged to obtain the full benefit of an emergency application. The occupant of another truck which was near the crossing said that as No. 34 approached the crossing the headlight was lighted, the bell was ringing, and the engine whistle sounded the road-crossing signal. It is not known when the members of the crew on the engine first became aware of the approaching vehicle, as they were killed in the accident. The engine struck the semi-trailer, and, as a result of wreckage becoming lodged under the engine-truck wheels, the engine and thirteen cars were derailed. The tractor was overturned to the south of the highway and near the crossing.

The driver of the motor truck involved was an experienced driver and had been driving the truck involved about 3 months. He was not familiar with the route over which he was driving. At the time of the accident the driver had been on duty about 4 hours 30 minutes. During the preceding 15-1/2 hours he had been on duty 1 hour. There was no condition of the truck which distracted his attention or obscured his vision. He said that as the motor truck was approaching the point where the accident occurred, the speed was about 20 or 25 miles per hour. Because another truck passed his truck on the left and then turned off to the right of the highway at a point about 100 feet north of the railroad track, his attention was distracted and he failed to see any warning sign indicating the presence of a railroad. The first he was aware of anything being wrong was when his truck was about 5 feet north of the track, and the assistant driver, who was off duty, warned him of the approaching train. The driver depressed the accelerator fully, but the truck failed to clear the crossing in time to avert the accident. He said that the motor-truck brakes functioned properly, but if he had applied them when he was warned the tractor would have stopped on the track. The assistant driver said that he failed to observe any warning signs because his attention also was distracted by the truck that passed them. The laws of the state of Georgia require that vehicles must not proceed in a reckless manner, and this vehicle was required to stop within 50 feet but not less than 10 feet from the crossing. There were four warning signs on the highway immediately north of the crossing. Since the driver was not familiar with the route he should have proceeded in such manner that he could have observed all signs affecting the movement of his truck. If the driver had observed the warning signs

he could have taken precautions to make certain that conditions were safe before his truck proceeded upon the railroad track, and this accident could have been avoided.

Cause

It is found that this accident was caused by a motor truck being driven upon a highway grade crossing immediately in front of an approaching train.

Dated at Washington, D. C., this tenth day of February, 1943.

By the Commission, Commissioner Patterson.

(SEAL)

W. P. BARTEL,
Secretary.