

Inv-2086

INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION

WASHINGTON

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REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR

BUREAU OF SAFETY

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ACCIDENT ON THE  
CENTRAL OF GEORGIA RAILWAY

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OGELECHEE, GA.

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JULY 23, 1936

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INVESTIGATION NO. 2086

SUMMARY

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Railroad.	Central of Georgia
Date.	July 23, 1936
Location.	Ogeechee, Ga.
Kind of accident.	Head-end collision
Trains involved.	Passenger . Passenger
Train numbers	No. 6 : No. 1
Engine numbers.	419 425
Consist	3 cars . 5 cars
Speed.	50-55 m.p.h. . 50-55 m.p.h.
Track	1 <sup>o</sup> 30' curve, view materially restricted by trees
Weather.	Clear
Time	9.48 a.m.
Method of operation	Timetable and train order system
Casualties.	5 killed, 68 injured
Cause:	Failure to obey meet order

September 9, 1936

To the Commission

On July 23, 1936, there was a head-end collision between two passenger trains on the Central of Georgia Railway near Ogeechee, Ga., which resulted in the death of 4 employees and 1 railway mail clerk, and the injury of 54 passengers, 1 railway mail clerk, 5 express messengers, 1 steward, 2 porters and 7 other railroad employees, 3 of whom were off duty.

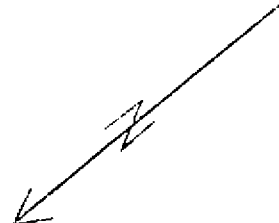
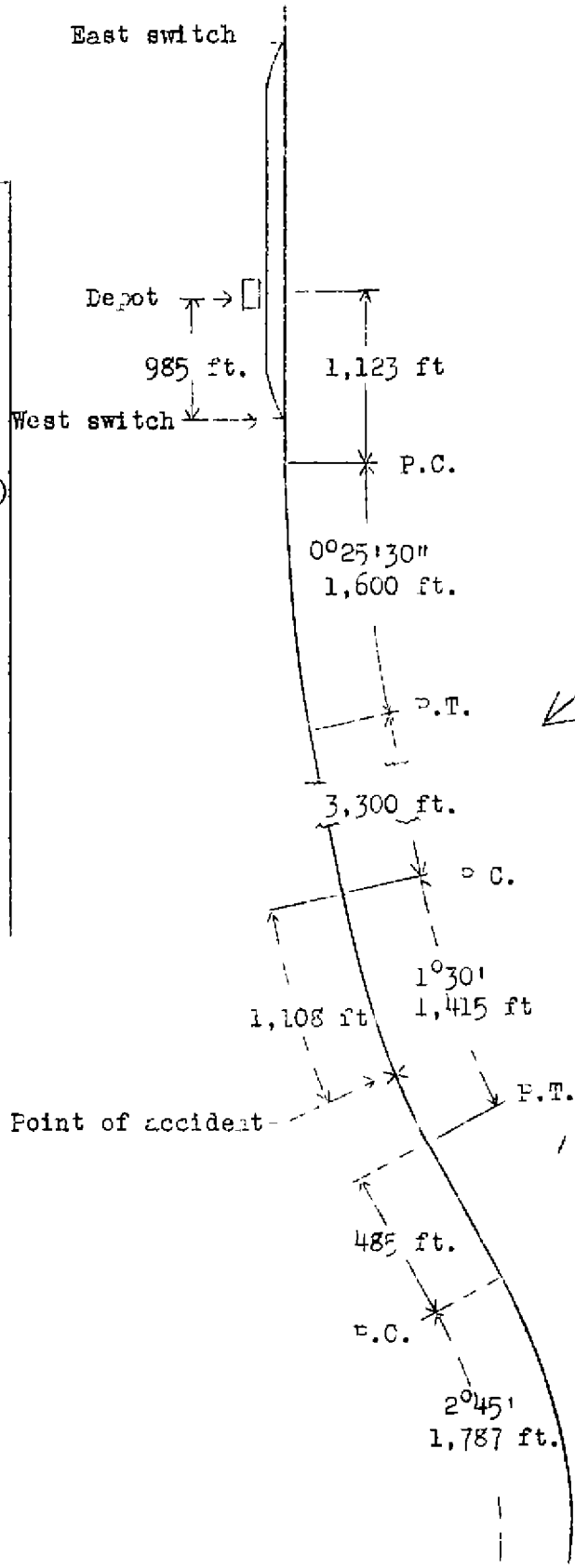
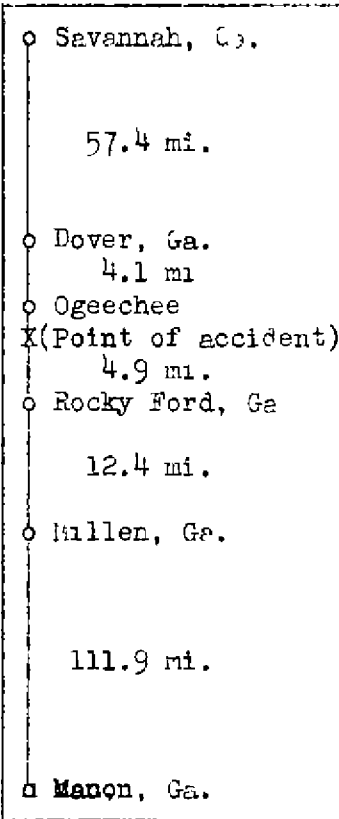
Location and method of operation

This accident occurred on the Savannah District of the Savannah Division, extending between Savannah and Macon, Ga., a distance of 190.7 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, no block-signal system being in use. The accident occurred at a point approximately 1.35 miles west of the depot at Ogeechee, approaching this point from the east, beginning at the depot, the track is tangent for a distance of 1,123 feet, then there is a  $0^{\circ}25'30''$  curve to the left 1,600 feet in length, 3,300 feet of tangent, followed by a  $1^{\circ}30'$  curve to the left 1,415 feet in length, the accident occurring on this last mentioned curve at a point 1,108 feet from its eastern end. Approaching from the west there is a  $2^{\circ}45'$  curve to the left 1,787 feet in length and then 485 feet of tangent, followed by the curve on which the accident occurred. The grade in this vicinity is ascending for west-bound trains, being 0.56 percent at the point of accident, at which point the track is on a fill between two cuts, the fill is about 250 feet in length and has a maximum depth of about 11 feet, while the cut west of the fill is about 600 feet in length with a maximum depth of about 6 feet, and the cut east of the fill is about 350 feet in length with a maximum depth of about 7 feet.

The passing track at Ogeechee is about 3,000 feet in length and parallels the main track on the north, the west switch being located 985 feet west of the depot, the depot is located north of the passing track. At the time the west-bound train involved in the accident made the station stop at Ogeechee the passing track was unoccupied.

Owing to the track curvature and trees along the right-of-way, the view of the point of accident is restricted to about 500 feet from the fireman's side of a west-bound engine, and to about the same distance from the engineman's side of an east-bound engine.

Inv. No. 2086  
Central of Georgia Ry.,  
Ogeechee, Ga.  
July 23, 1936



The weather was clear at the time of the accident, which occurred about 9:48 a.m.

#### Description

Train No. 1, a west-bound passenger train, consisted of 1 combination mail-baggage car, 1 combination baggage-coach, 1 coach, 1 buffet-lounge coach, and 1 lounge coach, in the order named, all of steel construction, hauled by engine 425, and was in charge of Conductor Tarver and Engineman Hoops. This train left Savannah at 7:40 a.m., according to the train sheet, on time, and on arrival at Dover, 57.4 miles beyond, the crew received copy of train order 41, Form 31, directing them to meet Train No. 6 at Ogeechee, Train No. 6 to take siding. Train No. 1 departed from Dover at 9:32 a.m., according to the train sheet, 12 minutes late, proceeded to Ogeechee, 4.1 miles beyond, and made the station stop, at which time the passing track was unoccupied, but instead of remaining at Ogeechee the train continued, and on reaching a point approximately 1.35 miles beyond, collided with Train No. 6 while traveling at a speed estimated to have been between 50 and 55 miles per hour.

Train No. 6, an east-bound passenger train, consisted of 1 combination mail-baggage car, 1 coach and 1 chair car, in the order named, all of steel construction, hauled by engine 419, and was in charge of Conductor Tolbert and Engineman Starr. At Millen, 17.3 miles west of Ogeechee, the crew received train order 41, above referred to, on form 31. Train No. 6 left Millen at 9:19 a.m., according to the train sheet, 7 minutes late, left Rocky Ford, 4.9 miles west of Ogeechee, the last open office and also the timetable scheduled meeting point with Train No. 1, at 9:38 a.m., according to the train sheet, 1 minute late, and while approaching Ogeechee, collided with Train No. 1 while traveling at a speed estimated to have been between 50 and 55 miles per hour.

The boilers of both engines were torn from their frames and thrown to the north of the track and the engines were damaged to such an extent that they were listed to be scrapped. Both tenders were derailed and their frames and cisterns were crushed and broken. The first car in each train was derailed and torn from the trucks and otherwise damaged, but remained upright. The employees killed were both engineman and firemen, while the employees injured were the conductor and brakeman of Train No. 6 and the baggage-man and brakeman of Train No. 1.

#### Summary of evidence

Conductor Tarver, of Train No. 1, stated that when his train arrived at Dover the train order signal was in stop position, after the train stopped, Operator Youmans delivered train

order 41, establishing a meeting point with Train No. 6 at Ogeechee, the conductor signed the order, read it to the operator, and then personally delivered a copy to Engineman Hoops. Conductor Tarver could not recall definitely whether the engineman read the order to him, or whether he read it to the engineman, but he was satisfied in his own mind that both of them understood that their train would meet Train No. 6 at Ogeechee. Before leaving Dover the conductor gave his copy of the order to Baggage men Hattrich, who read the order and shouted from the baggage car door the word, "Ogeechee". The order was then handed to the brakeman who later placed it in the conductor's train box. Train No. 1 departed from Dover and the conductor said he had to hurry to do his work between Dover and Ogeechee. Approaching Ogeechee the conductor was back in the train, and he said that if the required meeting point signal was sounded by the engineman he did not hear it, furthermore he said he was not listening for it because he had already forgotten the requirements of the train order and was under the impression that the trains were to meet at Rocky Ford, the timetable meeting point. On arrival at Ogeechee he was engaged in attending the passengers, he then opened the front vestibule door of the day coach and looked out, the stop at this point being of short duration, he saw Baggage man Hattrich deliver a letter to Agent Cooper from the baggage car door and saw Brakeman Hodges on the ground; the conductor gave a proceed signal and the train departed, following which he went inside; he did not see Brakeman Hodges giving the engineman a slow proceed signal from the steps of the car. After leaving Ogeechee the conductor started working on his ticket report and shortly afterwards, Brakeman Hodges came in and asked him whether he saw Train No. 6 in the siding at Ogeechee, the conductor informed the brakeman that their train was going to Rocky Ford to meet Train No. 6 and then, for the first time, it occurred to him that he might have made an error and he took the order from his train box and read it and discovered his mistake. Immediately after this the conductor felt the air brakes being applied in emergency, and the collision quickly followed, at which time he estimated the speed of the train was about 50 or 55 miles per hour. Conductor Tarver said that he compared time with the engineman at Savannah. The meet order received from the operator at Dover was handled in the proper manner, and was issued in regular form. The air brakes were tested and worked properly. When the conductor gave the proceed signal to the engineman at Ogeechee the engineman proceeded without acknowledging it in any way. Trains Nos. 1 and 6 seldom meet at Ogeechee, and Conductor Tarver did not recall having met Train No. 6 at that point during the month of July. He was not laboring under any unusual strain or worries and was feeling perfectly normal. After leaving Dover there was no doubt in his mind that his train was going to meet Train No. 6 at Rocky Ford, and the only explanation he could offer for his error was that he simply

overlooked the order.

Brakeman Hodges, of Train No. 1, stated that he did not have the train order in his hands, that he did not read it, the only time he saw it was when it was in the conductor's hand. When leaving Dover, however, the conductor informed him verbally that their train would meet Train No. 6 at Ogeechee. Approaching Ogeechee the brakeman was listening for the engineman to sound the meeting point signal, but he did not hear it sounded. After performing the station work at Ogeechee the train departed; Brakeman Hodges said he gave the engineman a slow proceed signal from the car steps for the purpose of having the train pull up and stop clear of the west switch, but as the train increased speed so rapidly there was a doubt created in his mind as to where the meet was to be made and as the speed continued to increase he went inside the train and asked the baggageman whether their train was not required to meet Train No. 6 at Ogeechee, the baggageman told him to go back and ask the conductor; the brakeman said that he then told the baggageman to sound the communicating whistle signal for the engineman to stop the train and immediately started back to consult the conductor. On his way back he heard the sound of escaping air from the communicating signal-line when the cord was pulled twice, but there was no immediate response from the engineman. On reaching the conductor, the brakeman asked him whether he saw Train No. 6 on the passing track at Ogeechee and also if that was not the place where the meet was established, but the conductor replied, "Rocky Ford", the accident occurred immediately afterwards. Brakeman Hodges said that he had worked with Conductor Tarver for about two years, and that sometimes the conductor showed him the orders and at other times he did not, and on some occasions the conductor would tell him where the meet was established. On several occasions he had to ask the conductor what orders had been received at certain stations, in this instance he had ample opportunity to ask the conductor for the train order when he saw it in his hand but he did not do so. Train No. 1 had recently been meeting Train No. 6 at Rocky Ford, the scheduled meeting point, practically all of the time. He said that had he read the meet order in this instance there would have been no doubt in his mind about the meet at Ogeechee and that upon seeing that Train No. 6 was not on the passing track he would have applied the air brakes from the rear by means of the emergency valve and would not have permitted the train to depart. Brakeman Hodges did not remember having had the meet order in his hands, and he did not think that he put it in the conductor's train box.

Baggageman Hattrich, of Train No. 1, stated that at Dover the conductor handed him the meet order which he read and understood, and then returned it to the conductor, the conductor then approached the brakeman, but the baggageman did not see

him deliver the order to the brakeman. As his train approached Ogeechee, Baggage man Hattrich was certain that he heard the engineman sound the meeting point whistle signal and while at Ogeechee he looked to see if Train No. 6 was on the passing track but did not see it. When the train departed from the depot he expected that it would proceed only as far as the west switch of the passing track but when it continued past the switch he thought that possibly he was mistaken and that Train No. 6 had pulled through the siding at Ogeechee without his having seen it, as he was busy during the time his train was standing at the depot. Baggage man Hattrich looked out of the baggage car door but did not see Train No. 6, he then ran through the train until he met Brakeman Hodges and each asked the other simultaneously whether Train No. 6 was on the passing track at Ogeechee and as neither had seen the train, the brakeman went back to consult the conductor and the baggage man pulled the communicating signal cord for the engineman to stop but the engineman did not immediately respond to the stop signal, although the air brakes were applied before the collision occurred. Previously Baggage man Hattrich had never had occasion to apply the air brakes by means of the emergency valve, he figured that in view of the doubt in his own mind as to whether Train No. 6 had gotten by at Ogeechee without his knowledge, it would be better to signal the engineman to stop, as the engineman was more familiar with handling the brakes and could make a better stop; however, had he felt sure that Train No. 6 had not been met at Ogeechee he would have pulled the emergency cord.

Agent Cooper, at Ogeechee, stated that as his office was not a telegraph station he had no information regarding the meeting point between Trains Nos. 1 and 6. When Train No. 1 departed from the depot he saw Brakeman Hodges standing on the car steps with a handkerchief in his hand giving a slow proceed signal to the engineman which is usually given when a train is to move ahead on the main track and stop at the west switch. Agent Cooper thought that this was the intended move but when Train No. 1 continued beyond the switch without stopping he felt uneasy, and commented upon the situation to another party in his office. Shortly afterwards he heard the sound of the impact and he immediately called the operator at Rocky Ford on the telephone and asked whether Train No. 6 was by that point and upon being told that it was, he realized that the sound was caused by the trains colliding and he reported the accident. Agent Cooper did not recall having heard Train No. 1 sound any whistle signal as it approached Ogeechee. He said that he thought Trains Nos. 1 and 6 met at this point on an average of about once a week.

None of the surviving members of the crew of Train No. 6 was aware of anything wrong until the accident occurred. Conductor Tolbert and Brakeman Walden were back in the train; the



conductor said that the air brakes were tested and worked properly. Copy of train order 41, form 31, establishing the meet at Ogeechee, was received at Millon, 17.3 miles west of Ogeechee, and it was fully understood by all concerned. They felt the air brakes being applied in emergency immediately prior to the accident, and estimated the speed to have been between 50 and 55 miles per hour when the collision occurred.

Dispatcher King stated that both Conductor Tarver and Engineman Hoops compared time with the standard clock in the dispatcher's office before leaving Savannah and at that time they appeared to be normal in every respect.

Dispatcher MacDonald stated that whenever Train No. 1 was late a meet order similar to the one involved was issued changing the meeting point between Trains Nos. 1 and 6 from Rocky Ford, the scheduled meeting point, and that while Train No. 6 was the superior train by direction, Train No. 1 was considered the more important train and was always the heavier train, consequently Train No. 6 was required to take siding for Train No. 1. He further stated that it was necessary to change the meeting point between these two trains on an average of about six times a month.

Car Inspector Edwards stated that he inspected the air brakes and the communicating signal line on Train No. 1 at Savannah and found them to be in proper working order.

Superintendent Baldwin stated that Engineman Hoops was last given a physical examination, as well as a rules examination, on August 18, 1935, and Fireman Johnson was given these examinations on August 21, 1935. The superintendent had been on this division 5 years, and during that time had observed and checked the handling of many train orders by train crews, and also had checked the manner in which the requirements as to sounding meeting point signals were observed, but he never had had occasion to call attention to the improper handling of any orders or failure to sound the proper meeting point signal.

#### Discussion

According to the evidence, the crew of Train No. 1 received an order to meet Train No. 6 at Ogeechee, and the conductor gave a copy of the order to the engineman and was satisfied that both he and the engineman had a correct understanding as to its contents; the baggage man also read the order, but there is a dispute as to whether the brakeman read it or was merely told of its contents. In any event, however, it appears very definitely that the brakeman was the only member of the train crew who was paying close attention when his train started to pull ahead at Ogeechee, and that he gave the engineman a slow signal from the steps of one of the cars. When the speed increased, however,

even the brakeman was not sufficiently sure of the contents of the order to feel justified in applying the brakes, but called the matter to the attention of the baggageman and then went back to see the conductor, who admitted having forgotten the fact that the meeting point was at Ogechee. The baggageman said he thought Train No. 6 might have pulled through the siding at that point without his seeing it, and even after the brakeman called the matter to his attention he merely gave the engine-man a stop signal by means of the communicating signal system, in view of the death of both members of the engine crew, no statement can be made as to why they proceeded beyond Ogechee. The order in question was simple and easily understood, and the employees involved were men with many years of experience; had any one of them properly performed his duties this accident could have been prevented.

On this line the average train movement for 30 days ending on the date of this accident was slightly less than 12 trains per day. In view of the serious nature of this accident, however, the officials in charge should give consideration to the need of installing some form of block-signal system in order to guard against the occurrence in future of similar accidents which might occur under the present train order and timetable method of operation.

#### Conclusion

This accident was caused by the failure of the crew of Train No. 1 to obey a meet order.

#### Recommendation

It is recommended that the officials of this railway give consideration to the need for the additional protection which would be afforded by a block-signal system.

Respectfully submitted,

W. J. PATTERSON,

Director.