INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION

WASHINGTON

REPORT NO. 3345

CENTRAL OF GEORGIA RAILWAY COMPANY

IN RE ACCIDENT

AT SMITHVILLE, GA., ON

JULY 24, 1950

SUMMARY

Date:	July 24, 1950	
Railroad:	Central of Georgia	
Location:	Smithville, Ga.	
Kind of accident:	Rear-end collision	
Trains involved:	Freight	: Passenger
Train numbers:	85	: 17
Engine numbers:	658	: Diesel-electric units 809 and 802
Consists:	34 cars, caboose	: 9 cars
Speeds:	Standing	: 48 m. p. h.
Operation:	Timetable, train orders and automatic block-signal system	
Track:	Single; 2°45' curve; 0.83 percent ascending grade westward	
Weather:	Clear	
Time:	3:18 p. m.	
Casualties:	1 killed; 21 injured	
Cause:	Failure to operate following train in accordance with signal indications	

INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION

REPORT NO. 3345

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

CENTRAL OF GEORGIA RAILWAY COMPANY

September 12, 1950

Accident at Smithville, Ga., on July 24, 1950, caused by failure to operate the following train in accordance with signal indications.

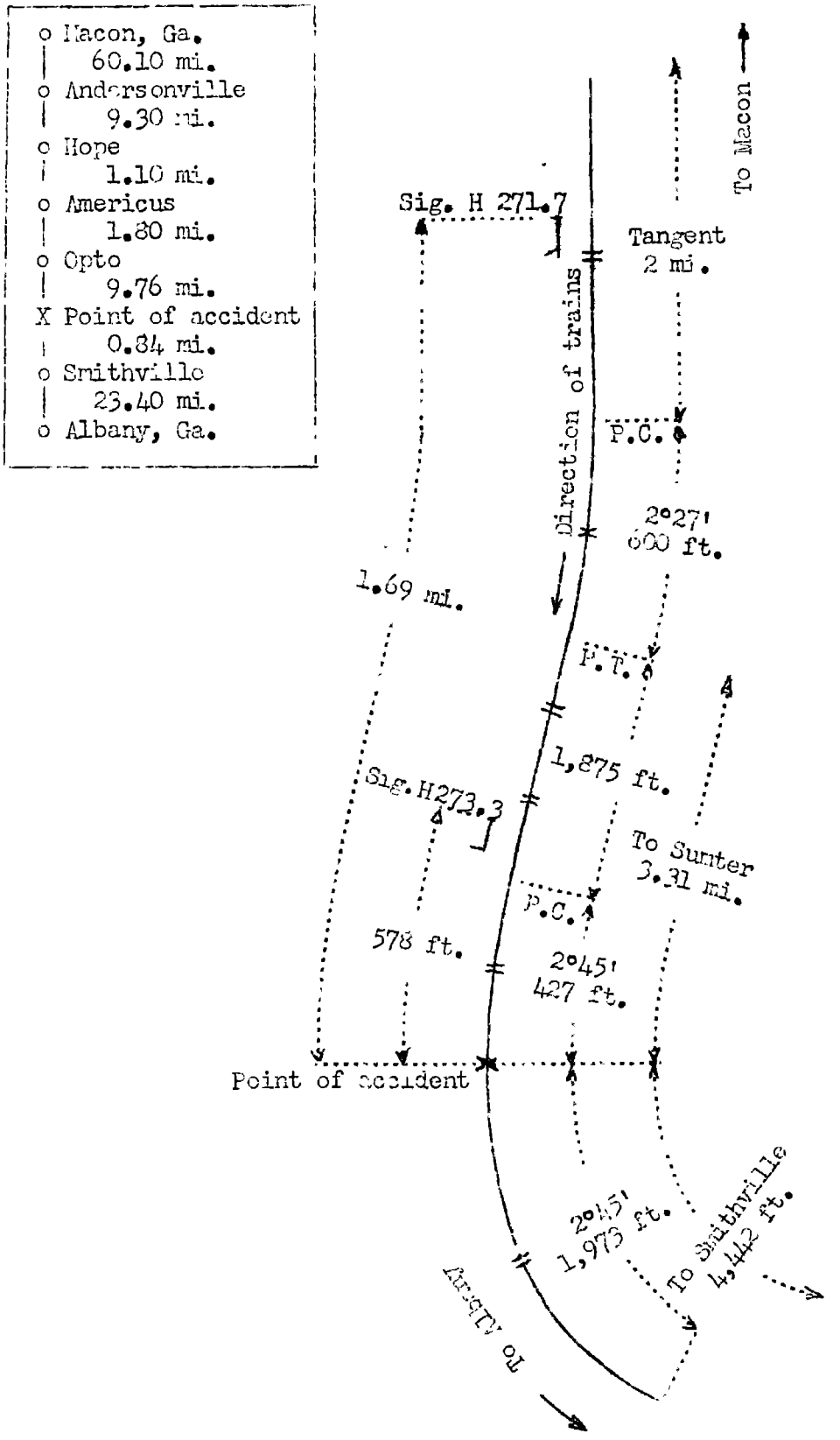
REPORT OF THE COMMISSION[1]

PATTERSON, Commissioner:

On July 24, 1950, there was a rear-end collision between a freight train and a passenger train on the Central of Georgia Railway at Smithville, Ga., which resulted in the death of 1 train-service employee, and the injury of 20 passengers and 1 train-service employee.

---

[1] 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.



Report No. 3345
Central of Georgia Railway
Smithville, Ga.
July 24, 1950

Location of Accident and Method of Operation

This accident occurred on that part of the Macon Division extending between Macon and Albany, Ga., 108.3 miles. In the vicinity of the point of accident this is a single-track line, over which trains are operated by timetable, train orders and an automatic block-signal system. The accident occurred on the main track at a point 82.06 miles west of Macon and 4,442 feet east of the station at Smithville. From the east there are, in succession, a tangent more than 2 miles in length, a 2°27' curve to the right 300 feet, a tangent 1,875 feet, and a 2°45' curve to the left 427 feet to the point of accident and 1,973 feet westward. The grade for west-bound trains is, successively, 0.72 percent descending 4,435 feet, level 800 feet, and 0.83 percent ascending 867 feet to the point of accident.

Automatic signals H271.7 and H273.3, governing west-bound movements, are located, respectively, 1.69 miles and 578 feet east of the point of accident. These signals are of the one-arm, upper-quadrant, semaphore type, and signal H271.7 has a color-light unit mounted below the semaphore arm. Signal H271.7 displays four aspects, and signal H273.3 displays three aspects. Aspects applicable to this investigation and the corresponding indications and names are as follows:

Signal	Aspect	Indication	Name
H271.7	Diagonal	Proceed, Preparing to Stop at Next Signal. Train Exceeding Medium Speed Must at Once Reduce to Not Exceeding Medium Speed.	Approach Signal.
H273.3	Horizontal	Stop; then Proceed at Restricted Speed.	Stop and Proceed Signal.

The controlling circuits are so arranged that, when the block of signal H273.3 is occupied, signal H271.7 indicates Approach and signal H273.3 indicates Stop and Proceed.

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

DEFINITIONS.

Reduced Speed.--Proceed prepared to stop short of train or obstruction.

Medium Speed.--A speed not exceeding thirty miles per hour.

Restricted Speed.--Proceed prepared to stop short of train, obstruction, or switch not properly lined and to look out for broken rail.

15. The explosion of two torpedoes is a signal to proceed at reduced speed. * * *

* * *

29. When a signal, except a fixed signal, is given to stop a train, it must, unless otherwise provided, be acknowledged * * *

34. All members of engine and train crews must, when practicable, communicate to each other by its name the indication of each signal affecting the movement of their train or engine.

35. The following signals will be used by flagmen:

Day signals (A red flag,
(Torpedoes and
(Fusees.

* * *

86. In automatic block system territory, unless otherwise provided, an inferior train must clear a first class train * * * in the same direction so as to avoid giving a restrictive indication to the following train.

* * *

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 fusees.

* * *

Block and interlocking signals do not relieve conductors, enginemen and trainmen from observance of this rule.

FORMS OF TRAIN ORDERS.

E.

(3.) No 1 Eng 911 and No 3 Eng 912 wait at
N until 959 a m
P 1030 a m
R 1055 a m, etc.

The train, or trains, named must not pass the designated points before the times given. Other trains receiving the order are required to run with respect to the time specified at the designated points, 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, or trains, named.

The maximum authorized speed for passenger trains was 65 miles per hour.

Description of Accident

No. 85, a west-bound second-class freight train, consisted of engine 658, 18 cars and a caboose. At Americus, the last open office, 12.4 miles east of Smithville, the crew received copies of train order No. 33 reading as follows:

No 17 Eng 809 wait at
Hope until 255 PM
Opto 305 PM.

Hope and Opto are located, respectively, 13.5 miles and 10.6 miles east of Smithville. This train departed from Americus at 2:29 p. m., 7 hours 29 minutes late, and stopped on the main track at Smithville at 2:53 p. m., with the caboose standing 578 feet west of signal H273.3 and 4,442 feet east of the station. About 25 minutes later the rear end was struck by No. 17.

No. 17, a west-bound first-class passenger train, consisted of Diesel-electric units 809 and 802, coupled in multiple-unit control, one baggage-express car, one baggage-mail car, one mail car, one baggage-express car, two baggage-mail cars, one baggage car, and two coaches, in the order named. All cars were of all-steel construction. At Andersonville, 22.8 miles east of Smithville, the crew received copies

of train order No. 33. This train departed from Andersonville at 2:46 p. m., 22 minutes late, departed from Americus at 3:05 p. m., 19 minutes late, passed signal H271.7, which indicated Approach, passed signal H273.3, which indicated Stop and Proceed, and while moving at a speed of 48 miles per hour it struck the rear end of No. 85.

Both Diesel-electric units and the front truck of the first car of No. 17 were derailed to the south. There were no separations between the units of the train. The first Diesel-electric unit stopped with the front end 208 feet west of the point of accident and 8 feet south of the center-line of the track. It leaned slightly to the south, and was somewhat damaged. The second Diesel-electric unit and the first car stopped upright and in line with the track. They were slightly damaged. The caboose and the rear three cars of No. 85 were destroyed. The fourth car from the caboose was slightly damaged.

The engineer of No. 17 was killed, and the fireman was injured.

The weather was clear at the time of the accident, which occurred at 3:18 p. m.

Discussion

No. 17 was due to leave Opto at 2:49 p. m., but the crew of No. 85 received copies of train order No. 33, which provided that No. 17 would wait at Opto until 3:05 p. m. Under the rules, No. 85 was required to be clear of the main track in time to avoid giving a restrictive signal indication to No. 17.

The crew of No. 85 performed switching at Sumter, 3.31 miles east of the station at Smithville. The flagman provided protection at that point, and before the train departed he placed two torpedoes on the rail. When No. 85 arrived at Smithville the rear portion of the train, consisting of 13 cars and the caboose, was left standing on the main track, with the caboose 678 feet west of signal H273.3. The engine moved westward to perform switching and to assemble cars, which were to be placed in the front portion of the train. The conductor and two brakemen accompanied the engine, and the flagman proceeded eastward to provide protection for the rear of the train. The flagman placed two torpedoes on the rail about 1,050 feet east of the rear of his train, and remained in that vicinity until he observed the approach of

No. 17. He then gave stop signals with a red flag, but he said that No. 17 was moving at high speed and he was not sure whether his signals were acknowledged. He said he thought that No. 17 would be moving at medium speed in compliance with the indication of signal H271.7 and that he had proceeded eastward a sufficient distance to provide full protection. Before the accident occurred, 21 additional cars had been assembled and coupled to the west end of the rear portion of No. 85. At the time the accident occurred the engine, with several cars, was moving eastward through an auxiliary track toward the rear portion of the train, the brakemen were in the vicinity of the engine, and the conductor was at the station. The conductor said he considered that the rules permitted his train to occupy the main track on the time of No. 17 if protection was provided in accordance with rule No. 99.

As No. 17 was approaching the point where the accident occurred the enginemen were maintaining a lookout ahead from their positions in the control compartment at the front of the first Diesel-electric unit, and the members of the train crew were in various locations throughout the cars of the train. The brakes of the train had been tested at Macon and had functioned properly when used en route. The torpedoes which had been placed at Sumter by the flagman of No. 85 were exploded, and were acknowledged by the engineer. Signal H271.7 indicated Approach, and the indication was called by the fireman and repeated by the engineer. The fireman said that as the train passed the signal the engineer initiated a service application of the brakes but the application was released soon afterward. Because of curvature of the track and vegetation north of the track, the view of signal H273.3 from the east is restricted to a distance of 2,136 feet. The fireman said that when the signal became visible to him he called the indication to the engineer. At that time the engineer was seated in his usual position. Immediately after the fireman observed the aspect of the signal, he saw the caboose of No. 85 on the main track west of the signal. He said he called a warning to the engineer, but he did not remember clearly the events which followed. He did not remember whether the engineer answered him or what action was taken by the engineer afterward. The fireman took no action to stop the train, other than calling the indications of the last two signals and warning the engineer of the presence of the caboose on the main track. Members of the train crew said that the brakes of the train were applied in emergency at a point about 1,100 feet east of the point where the accident occurred. According to the tape of the speed recording device, the speed of the train was 68 miles per hour when the brake application became effective and was reduced to 48 miles per

hour when the collision occurred. After the collision occurred, the throttle of the Diesel-electric unit was found to be in closed position and the brake valve was in emergency position. The engineer was killed in the accident, and it could not be determined why the train was not operated in accordance with the indications of signals H271.7 and H273.3. The conductor said that he had noticed nothing unusual in the handling of the train prior to the time the brakes were applied in emergency at Smithville.

Cause

It is found that this accident was caused by failure to operate the following train in accordance with signal indications.

Dated at Washington, D. C., this twelfth day of September, 1950.

By the Commission, Commissioner Patterson.

(SEAL)

W. P. BARTEL,

Secretary.