

INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION
WASHINGTON

INVESTIGATION NO. 3253
CENTRAL OF GEORGIA RAILWAY COMPANY
REPORT IN RE ACCIDENT
NEAR STURDIVANT, ALA., CN
MAY 8, 1949

SUMMARY

Date: May 8, 1949
Railroad: Central of Georgia
Location: Sturdivant, Ala.
Kind of accident: Derailment
Train involved: Freight
Train number: First 46
Engine number: 710
Consist: 65 cars, cabooses
Estimated speed: 40 m. p. h.
Operation: Timetable, train orders, and
automatic block-signal
system
Track: Single; 3° curve; 0.38 percent
ascending grade eastward
Weather: Light fog
Time: 2:25 a. m.
Casualties: 1 killed; 1 injured
Cause: Land slide

INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION

INVESTIGATION NO. 3253

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

CENTRAL OF GEORGIA RAILWAY COMPANY

June 21, 1949

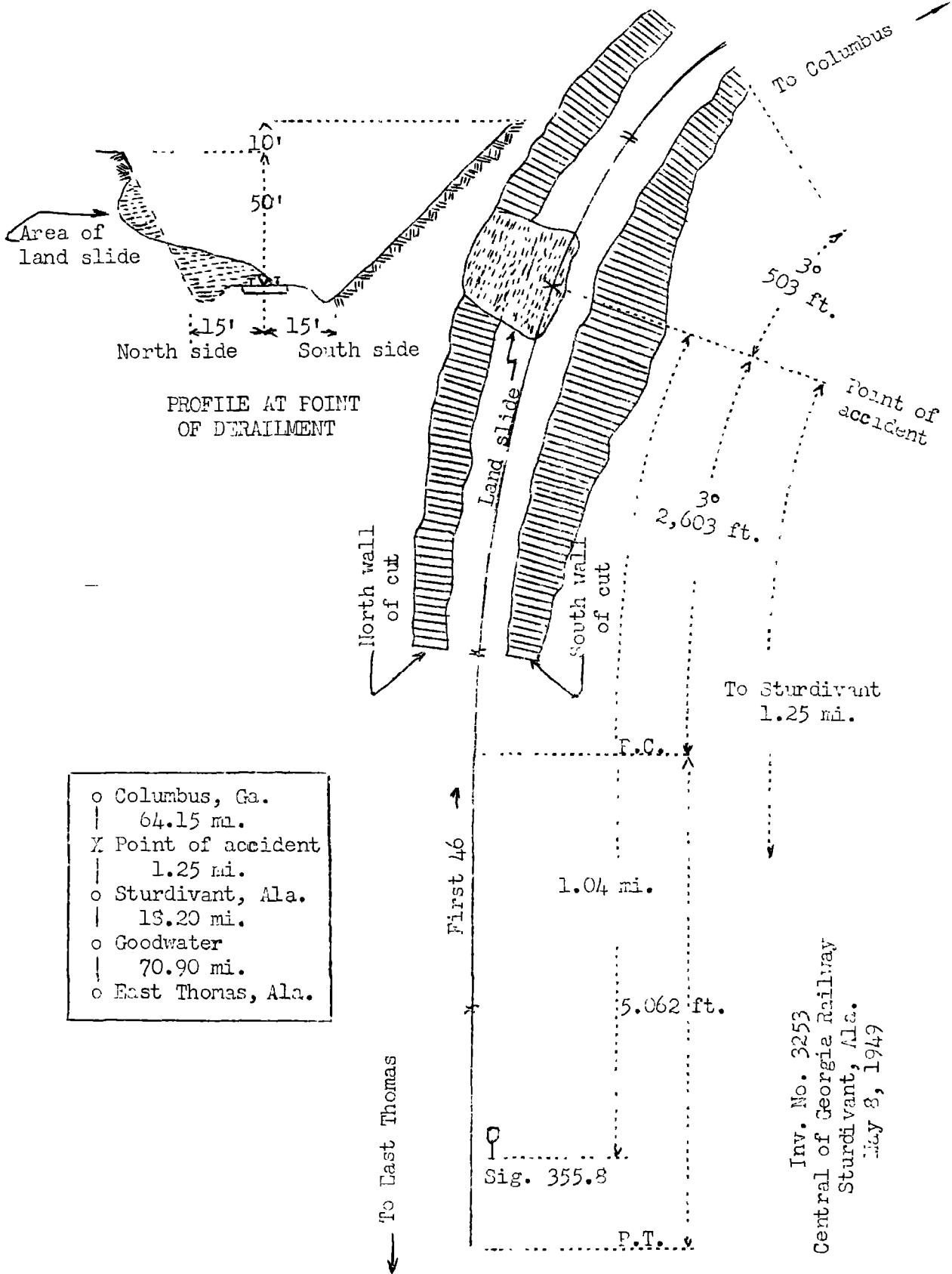
Accident near Sturdivant, Ala., on May 8, 1949, caused by
a land slide.

REPORT OF THE COMMISSION¹

PATTERSON, Commissioner:

On May 8, 1949, there was a derailment of a freight train on the Central of Georgia Railway near Sturdivant, Ala., which resulted in the death of one train-service employee and the injury of one 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.



PROFILE AT POINT OF DERAILMENT

- o Columbus, Ga.
- | 64.15 mi.
- X Point of accident
- | 1.25 mi.
- o Sturdivant, Ala.
- | 13.20 mi.
- o Goodwater
- | 70.90 mi.
- o East Thomas, Ala.

Inv. No. 3253
 Central of Georgia Railway
 Sturdivant, Ala.
 May 3, 1949

Location of Accident and Method of Operation

This accident occurred on that part of the Columbus Division extending between East Thomas, Ala., and Columbus, Ga., 154.5 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 90.35 miles east of East Thomas and 1.25 miles east of Sturdivant. From the west there is a tangent 5,062 feet in length, and then a 3° curve to the right 2,603 feet to the point of accident and 503 feet eastward. Throughout a distance of 1 mile immediately west of the point of accident the grade for east-bound trains varies between 0.5 percent and 0.38 percent ascending, and is 0.38 percent ascending at the point of accident.

The track structure consists of 112-pound rail, 39 feet in length, laid on 24 ties to the rail length. It is fully tie-plated with double-shoulder tie plates, spiked with 5 spikes per tie plate, and is provided with 4-hole 100-percent toeless joint bars, and an average of 12 rail anchors and 6 gage rods per rail length. The track is ballasted with slag to a depth of 24 inches, and is well maintained.

In the immediate vicinity of the point of accident the track is laid in a cut about 2,400 feet in length. At the point of derailment the toe of the north wall of the cut is approximately 15 feet from the center-line of the track. This wall rises to a height of about 50 feet above the level of the rails and slopes northward at a ratio of about 1 to 2. The toe of the south wall is approximately 15 feet from the center-line of the track. This wall rises to a height of about 60 feet above the level of the rails and slopes southward at a ratio of 1 to 1. The walls of the cut are composed of rock and disintegrated shale. A drainage ditch is provided on each side of the track.

Automatic block-signal 355.8, governing east-bound movements through the block in which the accident occurred, is located 1.04 miles west of the point of accident. This signal is of the color-light type, and displays three aspects.

The maximum authorized speed for freight trains is 45 miles per hour.

Description of Accident

First 46, an east-bound second-class freight train, consisted of engine 710, a 2-10-2 type, 65 cars and a caboose. This train passed Goodwater, the last open office, 70.9 miles east of East Thomas, at 1:52 a. m., 37 minutes late, passed signal 355.8, which indicated Proceed, and while it was moving at an estimated speed of 40 miles per hour the engine struck a land slide at a point 1.25 miles east of Sturdivant. The engine and the first 27 cars were derailed.

The engine was derailed to the right and stopped against the south wall of the cut, parallel to the track, and leaned to the south at an angle of 45 degrees. The front of the engine stopped 223 feet east of the point of derailment. The tender remained coupled to the engine and stopped upright, with the rear end against the north wall of the cut. Both the engine and the tender were badly damaged. The first 27 cars stopped in various positions across the track. Twenty of these cars were destroyed, and the other 7 cars were badly damaged.

The fireman was killed, and the engineer was injured.

There was a light fog at the time of the accident, which occurred at 2:25 a. m.

Discussion

As First 46 was approaching the point where the accident occurred, the speed was about 40 miles per hour. The brakes of this train had been tested and had functioned properly when used en route. The headlight was lighted brightly. The enginemen were in their respective positions on the engine, the front brakeman was in the brakeman's booth on the tender, and the conductor and the flagman were in the caboose. Because of track curvature, the view of the track ahead was restricted to about 560 feet from the right side of the cab of the engine, and to about 125 feet from the left side. As the engine passed over the curve, the attention of the enginemen was distracted momentarily, and they were not aware that the track was obstructed until the engine struck the slide and was derailed. The train crew was unaware of anything being wrong until the derailment occurred.

Examination after the accident disclosed that approximately 80 cubic yards of shale and rock had become dislodged from the north wall of the cut and had slid into the drainage ditch and upon the roadbed. Marks on the front of the engine indicated that this material had covered the north rail to a depth of at least 6 feet before the accident occurred. Evidently, as a result of the shock of the derailment, an additional 80 cubic yards of shale and rock became dislodged at the same point and slid down upon the roadbed and the derailed equipment.

The cut in which the accident occurred was completed during 1926. Prior to this accident, small quantities of material had fallen from the south wall of the cut to the track, but none had fallen from the north wall. The track supervisor made a detailed inspection of the walls of the cut on April 27, and did not observe any unusual condition. A heavy rainfall had occurred in this vicinity on May 5 and 6. The section foreman inspected the walls of the cut both during and after the rain. He had also passed through the cut on a track motor-car about 15 hours before the accident occurred, and did not observe any indication that a slide might occur. The last train prior to First 46 passed this point west-bound about 3-1/2 hours before the time the accident occurred. The members of the crew of that train did not observe any unusual condition while their train was passing through the cut.

Cause

It is found that this accident was caused by a land slide.

Dated at Washington, D. C., this twenty-first day of June, 1949.

By the Commission, Commissioner Patterson.

(SEAL)

W. P. BARTEL,
Secretary.