

INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION

WASHINGTON

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REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR

BUREAU OF SAFETY

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ACCIDENT ON THE  
GEORGIA RAILROAD

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DEARING, GA.

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DECEMBER 12, 1935

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INVESTIGATION NO. 2024

SUMMARY

Railroad: Georgia

Date: December 12, 1935

Location: Dearing, Ga.

Kind of accident: Head-end collision

Trains involved: Passenger : Passenger

Train numbers: No. 3 \* No. 4

Engine numbers: 251 ; 252

Consist: 9 cars : 9 cars

Speed: 20-45 m.p.h. : Standing

Track: Single-track line; 3,818 feet tangent,  
followed by 3° curve to right for west-  
bound trains; accident occurred on curve,  
32 feet from eastern end.

Weather: Cloudy and dark

Time: 2:45 a.m.

Method of operation: Time table and train-order system.

Casualties: 3 killed; 11 injured

Cause: Failure to obey meet order

January 23, 1936.

To the Commission:

On December 12, 1935, there was a head-end collision between two passenger trains on the Georgia Railroad at Dearing, Ga., which resulted in the death of 3 employees, and the injury of 6 passengers, 2 persons carried under contract, and 3 employees.

#### Location and method of operation

This accident occurred on that part of the line extending between Augusta and Atlanta, Ga., a distance of 170.37 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 on the main line at a point 380 feet west of the east switch of the passing track at Dearing; approaching this point from the east, the track is tangent for a distance of 3,818 feet, followed by a 30° curve to the right, 1,465 feet in length, the accident occurring on this curve at a point 32 feet from its eastern end. The grade for west-bound trains is 0.2 per cent descending at the point of accident.

The passing track at Dearing is 4,222 feet in length and parallels the main track on the south; the switch stand of the east switch is of the Weir medium type, on which is mounted an A.G.A. reflector, the top being 7 feet 6 inches above the ties. This stand is located on the south side of the tracks; when the switch is lined for the main track a green indication is displayed and when lined for the passing track a red indication is displayed. The depot also is located on the south side of the tracks, at a point 1,949 feet west of the east switch, while the station board for west-bound trains is located, 2,695 feet east of the east switch of the passing track. The track is laid on a side-hill fill, approximately 5 feet in height on the north side of the tracks, and 8 feet in height on the south side.

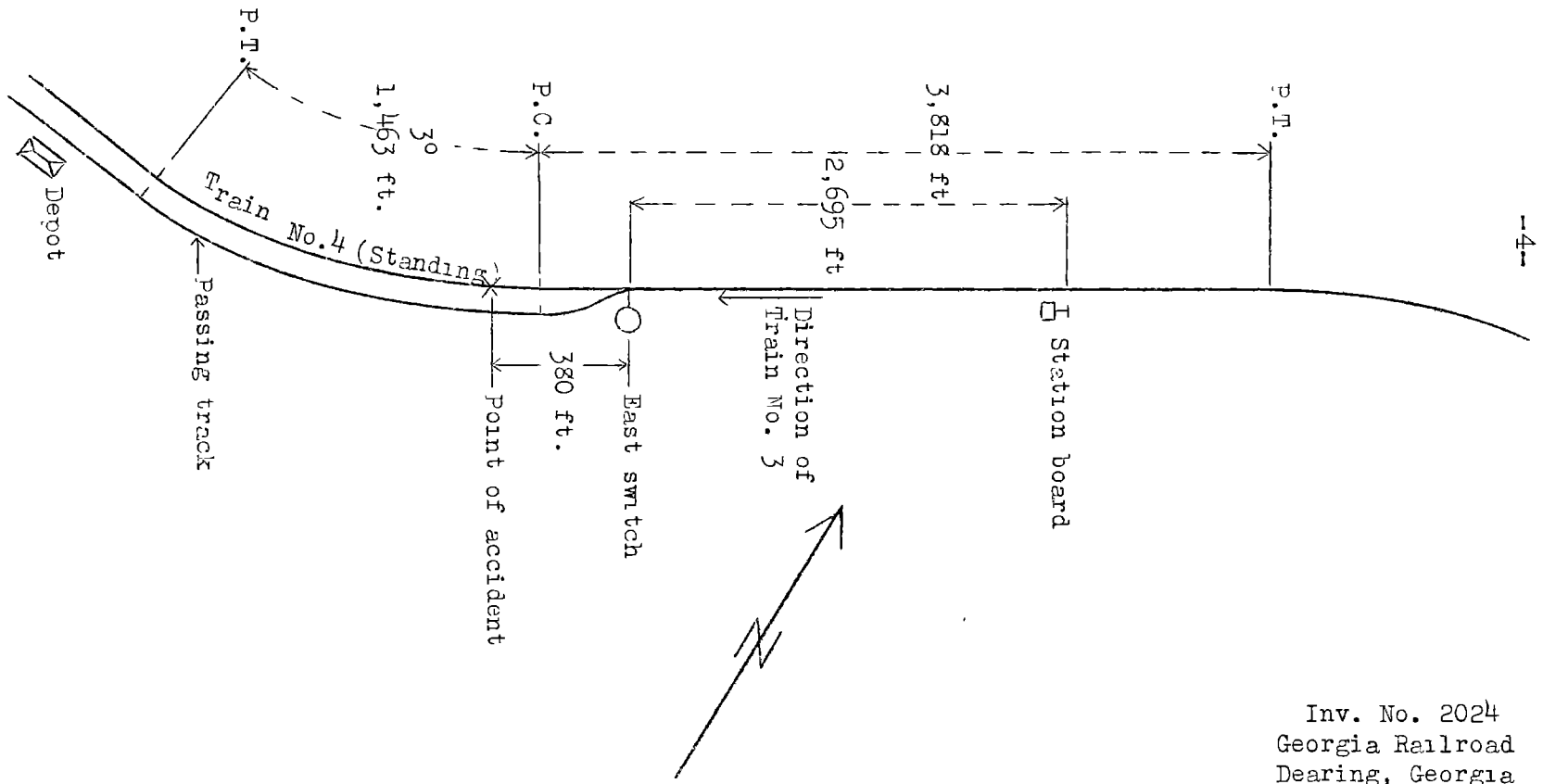
An unobstructed view of a train standing at the point of accident can be had from the cab of a west-bound engine for a distance of 3,850 feet.

The weather was cloudy at the time of the accident, which occurred about 2:45 a.m.

#### Description

Train No. 4, an east-bound passenger train, consisted of 2 baggage cars, 1 postal car, 1 baggage car, 1 combination

• Augusta, Ge.	
• Harrisonville	2.17 mi.
	22.38 mi.
• Harlem	
• (Point of accident)	4.32 mi.
• Dearing	
	47.23 mi.
• Union Point	
	94.77 mi.
• Atlanta, Ge.	



Inv. No. 2024  
 Georgia Railroad  
 Dearing, Georgia  
 Dec. 12, 1935

baggage-coach, 1 coach, and 3 Pullman sleeping cars, in the order named, hauled by engine 252, and was in charge of Conductor Jones and Engineman Wallace. The postal car and the Pullman cars were of all-steel construction, while the other cars were of steel underframe construction. At Union Point, 47.23 miles west of Dearing, the crew received copy of train order 2, form 31, directing them to meet Train No. 3 at Dearing, which was the time table meeting point for these two trains. Train No. 4, superior by direction, departed from Union Point at 1:23 a.m., according to the train sheet, 37 minutes late, stopped at Dearing, and then proceeded and stopped again on the main track, at 2:44 a.m., with the front end of the engine 380 feet west of the east switch, and it had been standing at this point about 1 minute when it was struck by Train No. 3.

Train No. 3, a west-bound passenger train, consisted of 3 baggage cars, 1 postal car, 1 combination baggage-coach, 1 coach, and 3 Pullman sleeping cars, in the order named, hauled by engine 251, and was in charge of Conductor Clary and Engineman Ewing. The postal car and the Pullman cars were of all-steel construction, while the other cars were of steel-underframe construction. At Harrisonville, 26.7 miles east of Dearing, the crew received copy of train order 2, above referred to, on form 19. Train No. 3 left Harrisonville at 2:03 a.m., according to the train sheet, 43 minutes late, and was approaching Dearing at a speed variously estimated to have been between 20 and 45 miles per hour when it collided with Train No. 4.

Both engines were derailed and badly damaged, but remained upright on the roadbed; the tenders also were derailed and badly damaged. The first four cars in Train No. 4 were derailed but remained upright on the roadbed, while the first six cars in Train No. 3 were derailed, the leading car being destroyed. The employees killed were both enginemen, also the fireman of Train No. 3, while the employees injured were both baggage-masters, and the fireman of Train No. 4.

#### Summary of evidence

Fireman Sheftall, of Train No. 4, said he saw the reflection from the headlight of Train No. 3 when it was some distance away, and shortly afterwards the station whistle signal was sounded. He then put some coal on the fire, and when he returned to his seat box he saw the approaching train for the first time and he said it was then on the tangent track and about  $\frac{1}{2}$  mile distant. Fireman Sheftall was unaware that a collision was imminent until Train No. 3 was within a few feet of his own engine, and said that he could not give any estimate as to its speed just prior to the impact. As a rule the train

porter handled the switch, and sometimes the train arriving first would throw the switch; on this occasion he did not see the train porter nor did he notice the indication of the switch stand reflector. Fireman Sheftall, who had been on this run about 3 years, said that sometimes the engineman would dim the headlight when the opposing train showed up and was within a distance of anywhere from 300 feet to about  $\frac{1}{4}$  mile; it was his understanding that the headlight should be dimmed and then be fully turned on again, and in this particular case he said that when he left his seat box, on arrival at Dearing, the headlight on his own engine was burning brightly, but he was positive that at the time he returned to his seat box it was not burning brightly, although he could not tell whether or not his headlight had been only dimmed or whether it had been extinguished.

Conductor Jones, of Train No. 4, stated that just before his train stopped he heard a road crossing signal sounded by the opposing train, at which time he was standing in the vestibule of the coach in order to see that his train porter started toward the switch so as to be in position to throw it for Train No. 3. On seeing the porter get down on the ground and start for the switch, the conductor walked through the combination car and was just going to the baggage car door to open it when the collision occurred; the porter did not have time to reach the switch. Conductor Jones had heard the station signal sounded by the approaching train, followed by the meeting point signal, but he did not know whether the headlight of his own engine was burning. However, it was the practice for the train standing on the main track to keep the headlight burning brightly until the opposing train approached to within 300 or 400 feet of the switch, and then the standing train would dim the headlight until the opposing engine entered the switch.

Train Porter Wilson, of Train No. 4, stated that on arrival at Dearing he was in the vestibule of the coach and could see the reflection from the headlight of Train No. 3. He got off and started for the switch, and about this time he heard the approaching train sound the meeting-point signal. He began to hurry and said he had reached a point about a car length or more in front of his own engine when the opposing engine passed him, traveling at a speed of about 45 miles per hour. Porter Wilson said that he was unaware of danger until about the time Train No. 3 passed the switch, at which time the reflector was displaying a green indication; he did not give any stop signals with his white lantern and was unable to say whether the brakes were applied on the approaching train or whether steam was being worked. Porter Wilson was of the opinion that it was the reflection from his own headlight that enabled him to see the green indication displayed by the switch stand reflector. State-

ments of Baggage-master Ivey and Flagman Sherrer, of Train No. 4, brought out nothing of additional importance.

Conductor Clary, of Train No. 3, received the order establishing the meet at Dearing between his train and Train No. 4, and he said that the engineman read the order and signed the clearance card, and that both the engineman and fireman understood the order. On reaching Harlem, 4.32 miles east of Dearing, the train slowed down to less than 5 miles per hour in order to put off mail. Approaching Dearing the speed was about 40 or 45 miles per hour and the conductor, who was in the fifth car in the train, heard the station signal sounded and at his instruction Baggage-master Birdsong pulled the communicating whistle cord to remind the engineman of the meet. The engineman answered immediately by sounding the meeting point whistle signal and then made a light air-brake application and immediately released. The conductor went back into the coach, feeling no apprehension as to the manner in which the train was being handled approaching the meeting point, but shortly thereafter the air brakes were applied in emergency and then the collision occurred, at which time he estimated the speed to have been between 20 and 25 miles per hour. Conductor Clary felt positive that when the communicating signal was answered, Engineman Ewing fully understood the requirements of the order establishing the meet at Dearing. The air brakes had been tested at Augusta and worked properly en route, and the emergency application which was made immediately prior to the accident took proper effect and caused the wheels to slide. The conductor also stated that while at Augusta he had talked with Engineman Ewing and Fireman Kirby, and both of them appeared normal in every respect. About 35 or 40 minutes after the occurrence of the accident he heard Engineman Ewing make a statement in the presence of several other persons, at which time the engineman was fully conscious, that he misread the train order and was under the erroneous impression that Train No. 4 was to take siding.

The statements of Baggage-master Birdsong, of Train No. 3, corroborated in substance those of Conductor Clary, except that the baggage-master did not pay any more attention to the operation of the train or air-brake applications after the engineman sounded the meeting-point signal and made a light application of the brakes. He estimated the maximum speed between Harlem and Dearing to have been 50 miles per hour; the train was operated in the usual manner prior to the accident. Flagman Clark was in the rear car and felt an application of the brakes at the usual point, heard the whistle sounded, including an acknowledgment of a meeting point signal, and then felt the air brakes apply in emergency, at which time he estimated the speed to have been about 35 or 40 miles per hour, and he thought it was reduced to about 25 or 30 miles

per hour before the collision occurred.

Statements of Enginemen Partee and Hogan, both of whom were deadheading on Train No. 3, as well as the statement of G. S. Emory, a passenger, were to the effect that they assisted Engineman Ewing after the accident, at which time he was badly injured, although fully conscious; Engineman Partee quoted Engineman Ewing as saying he "got balled up on the orders and thought No. 4 was in the side track"; Engineman Hogan asked him what was the matter with him and was told he misread his orders, while Mr. Emory asked him what was the trouble and was told twice that he overlooked his orders. Engineman Partee also stated that it was the general practice for the train holding the main track to keep the headlight burning brightly until the approaching train reached the switch, and then to cut off the headlight while the train headed in on the siding. He also said he had fired for Engineman Ewing and that the engineman was exceptionally efficient in manipulating the brake valve and that he considered him to be a careful engineman.

Master Mechanic Attridge arrived at the scene of the accident between 4 and 5 a.m., and on examining engine 251 he found that the throttle was closed, the reverse lever near the center of the quadrant, and the automatic brake valve in emergency position.

Night Engine Inspector Whitely inspected engine 251 prior to its departure on the trip involved and found it to be in proper working order, with the brake valve functioning properly in all positions. Engine Hostler Kitchens handled engine 251 from the roundhouse to the train at Augusta prior to the trip in question; he tried out the pumps, injectors, brakes, reverse lever, etc., and found them all to be in proper working order. He conversed with Engineman Ewing and Fireman Kirby before Train No. 3 departed and said they appeared normal in every respect. Car Inspector Smith tested the air brakes on Train No. 3 after it was entirely made up at Augusta and found them to be in proper condition.

Air Brake Inspector Maloney inspected and tested the air brakes and signal equipment on engine 251 on the morning of December 11, 1935, and found them to be in proper condition, the brake valve being tested in all positions.

Superintendent of Transportation Williams stated that the tape was removed from the recording speedometer with which engine 251 was equipped, and it showed that from Harlem, where the slowdown was made to put off mail, to the east switch at Dearing, a distance of about 4 miles, the speed was increased in the first mile from practically 0 to 32.5 miles per hour;



in the second mile from 32.5 to approximately 44.5 miles per hour; in the third mile from 44.5 to approximately 51.5 miles per hour; and in the fourth mile a speed of 51.5 miles per hour was shown for approximately 0.12 miles, where there was a slight reduction to approximately 50 miles per hour, continuing for approximately 0.60 mile to a point where the speed was very materially reduced for a distance of approximately 0.20 mile, at the end of which distance the recorder cut off.

Observations made from an engine with the aid of the headlight showed that the reflector on the switch stand at the east switch could be seen plainly from a point approximately  $\frac{1}{2}$  mile east of the switch.

#### Discussion

Orders had been issued for Trains Nos. 3 and 4 to meet at Dearing. Train No. 4, being superior by direction, held the main track and stopped short of the east switch to await the arrival of Train No. 3; the fireman said that the headlight was burning brightly when he heard Train No. 3 whistle, before it came within sight, but that the headlight either was dimmed or extinguished entirely when he returned to his seat box and saw Train No. 3 about  $\frac{1}{2}$  mile distant. Neither the fireman nor the train porter who was en route to the switch for the purpose of heading Train No. 3 in on the siding, realized that there was anything wrong until just before the accident occurred.

The engineman of Train No. 5 sounded the station whistle signal and a road-crossing whistle signal, and acknowledged a meeting-point signal, but failed to note that Train No. 4 was occupying the main track until just before the accident occurred, when he applied the brakes in emergency. Statements made by this engineman after the accident and before he had been removed from the scene, when coupled with the fact that the proper meeting-point signals were sounded, indicated that in some way he had become confused as to his orders and thought Train No. 4 would be on the siding. The conductor said both the engineman and the fireman read the orders when they were received and appeared to have a correct understanding as to their contents, while other evidence indicated that the engineman appeared to be in normal physical and mental condition prior to the accident; the reason for his failure to have a correct understanding as to his orders, however, could not be determined.

There was evidence to the effect that when occupying the main track at a meeting point an engineman usually would keep his headlight turned on full until the approaching train was

close to the switch, but that in this particular case the headlight on Train No. 4 was not turned on full when the approaching train was about  $\frac{1}{2}$  mile distant. If this were the case, the variation from usual practice might have aided in misleading the engineman of Train No. 3 and in causing him to think that Train No. 4 was on the siding. In this connection, the rule of this railroad reads as follows: "The headlight will be displayed to the front of every train by night."

It is worthy of note that after the meeting-point signal was acknowledged by the engineman, no member of the train crew took any action to observe whether the engineman had his train under proper control preparatory to heading in at the east switch. There is no positive assurance that such action on their part would have prevented the accident, but it might have enabled them to take action in time materially to reduce the speed of the train before the accident occurred.

#### Conclusion

This accident was caused by failure to obey a meet order.

#### Recommendation

As a means of preventing similar accidents in future, this carrier should give consideration to the need for the additional protection which would be furnished by the block system.

Respectfully submitted,

W. J. PATTERSON,

Director.