INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION

WASHINGTON

INVESTIGATION NO. 3247

GULF, MOBILE AND OHIO RAILROAD COMPANY

REPORT IN RE ACCIDENT

NEAR COTTON PLANT, MISS., ON

APRIL 13, 1949

SUMMARY

Date:	April 13, 1949	
Railroad:	Gulf, Mobile and Ohio	
Location:	Cotton Plant, Miss.	
Kind of accident:	Head-end collision	
Trains involved:	Freight	: Passenger
Train numbers:	32	: 1
Engine numbers:	Diesel-electric units 747, B17 and 725	: Diesel-electric rail motor-car 354
Consists:	108 cars, caboose	: 3 cars
Estimated speeds:	Standing	: 30 m. p. h.
Operation:	Timetable and train orders	
Track:	Single; tangent; 0.1 percent descending grade southward	
Weather:	Clear	
Time:	10:52 p. m.	
Casualties:	1 killed; 24 injured	
Cause:	Failure to obey meet order	

INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION

INVESTIGATION NO. 3247

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

GULF, MOBILE AND OHIO RAILROAD COMPANY

June 10, 1949

Accident near Cotton Plant, Miss., on April 13, 1949, caused by failure to obey a meet order.

REPORT OF THE COMMISSION[1]

PATTERSON, Commissioner:

On April 13, 1949, there was a head-end collision between a passenger train and a freight train on the Gulf, Mobile and Ohio Railroad near Cotton Plant, Miss., which resulted in the death of 1 railway-mail clerk, and the injury of 17 passengers, 1 railway-mail clerk, 1 express-baggageman, 1 train porter, 1 sleeping-car porter, 1 dining-car employee and 2 train-service employees.

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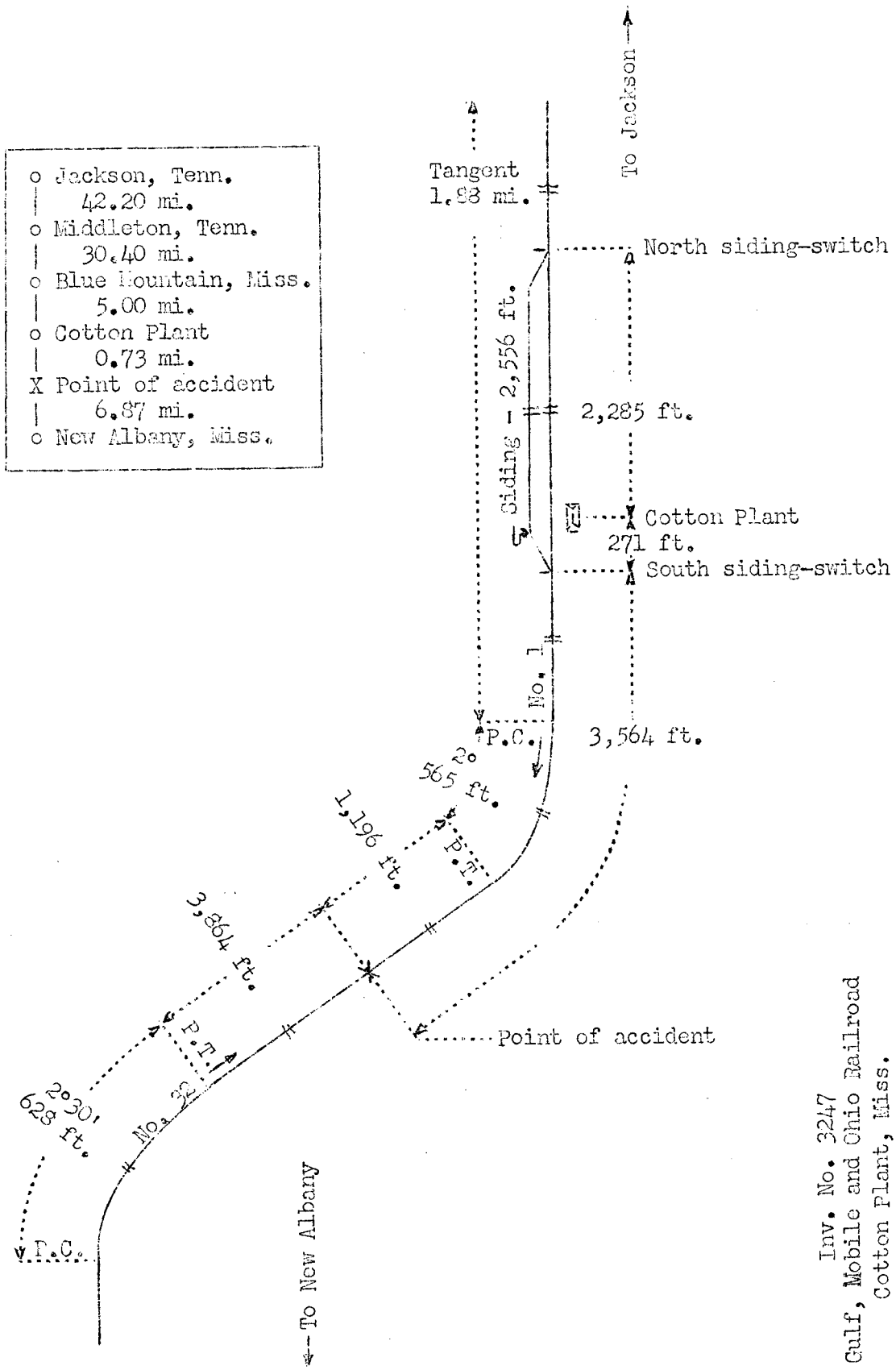
[1] Under authority of section 17 (2) of the Interstate Commerce Act the above-entitled proceeding was referred by the Commission to Commissioner Patterson for consideration and disposition.



Inv. No. 3247
Gulf, Mobile and Ohio Railroad
Cotton Plant, Miss.
April 13, 1949

Location of Accident and Method of Operation

This accident occurred on that part of the Tennessee Division extending between Jackson, Tenn., and New Albany, Miss., 85.2 miles, a single-track line over which trains are operated by timetable and train orders. There is no block system in use. At Cotton Plant, 77.6 miles south of Jackson, a siding 2,556 feet in length parallels the main track on the west. The north and the south switches of this siding are, respectively, 2,285 feet north and 271 feet south of the station. Both switch stands are located on the west side of the main track and are equipped with reflector type lenses. The accident occurred on the main track 3,564 feet south of the south siding-switch. From the north there are, in succession, a tangent 1.88 miles in length, a 2° curve to the right 565 feet, and a tangent 1,196 feet to the point of accident and 3,864 feet southward. From the south there is a 2°30' curve to the right 628 feet in length, and then the tangent on which the accident occurred. From the north the grade is level 2,429 feet, 0.8 percent descending 2,200 feet, and 0.1 percent descending 1,491 feet to the point of accident and 909 feet beyond.

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

DEFINITIONS.

Fixed Signal.--A signal of fixed location indicating a condition affecting the movement of a train or engine.

NOTE.--The defintion of a "Fixed Signal" covers such signals as switch * * *.

14. Engine Whistle Signals.

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

Sound.	Indication.
* * *	
(n) __ __ o	Approaching meeting or waiting points. See Rule S-90.
* * *	

16. Communicating Signals.

NOTE.—The signals prescribed are illustrated by "o" for short sounds; "__" for longer sounds.

Sound.	Indication.
* * *	
(1) __ __ o	Approaching meeting or waiting points. See Rule S-90.
* * *	

S-88. * * *

Trains must pull into the siding when practicable; * * *

S-90. On trains equipped with communicating signal system, the conductor must give signal 16 (1) to the engineman after passing the last station, but not less than one mile preceding * * * a point where by train order it is to meet, or wait for, an opposing train. The engineman will immediately reply with signal 14 (n). If the engineman fails to answer by signal 14 (n), the conductor must take immediate action to stop the train.

* * *

204. * * *

* * *

* * * Conductors and, when practicable, trainmen must read train orders, check with each other and have a definite and proper understanding of their requirements. Should there be occasion to do so, trainmen * * * must remind conductors or enginemen of the contents of train orders.

FORMS OF TRAIN ORDERS.

S-A.

Fixing Meeting Points for Opposing Trains.

* * *

(3) The following form of train order must be used where a superior train is to take siding at a meeting point:

No 2 eng 113 take siding and meet No 1 eng 114 at C.

Enginemen.

1053. During foggy * * * weather, they must take extraordinary precautions at all places where authority to proceed depends upon fixed signals.

If fixed signals affecting their movement are obscured, they must approach them at such a rate of speed as to be able to stop within the distance at which their indication can be distinguished. Should they be unable to see the indication of a signal without encroaching upon the danger point protected by it, they must stop and ascertain its indication before proceeding.

The maximum authorized speeds were 60 miles per hour for the passenger train and 40 miles per hour for the freight train.

Description of Accident

At New Albany, the last open office, 7.6 miles south of Cotton Plant, the crew of No. 32, a north-bound second-class freight train, received copies of train order No. 31 reading as follows:

No 1 Eng 354 take Siding
and meet No 32 Eng 747
at Cotton Plant.

The crew also received a message containing the information that No. 1 would be about 25 minutes late at Cotton Plant. No. 32, consisting of Diesel-electric units 747, B17, and 725, coupled in multiple-unit control, 108 cars and a caboose, departed from New Albany at 10:35 p. m., 3 hours 30 minutes late, and at 10:52 p. m. stopped on the main track, with the engine 6,120 feet south of the north siding-switch at Cotton Plant. Immediately afterward it was struck by No. 1.

No. 1, a south-bound first-class passenger train, consisted of Diesel-electric rail motor-car 354, one coach, and one observation-sleeping car, in the order named. All units were of lightweight high-tensile steel construction. Motor-car 354 was a three-compartment-type unit, arranged with a control compartment at the front, a mail compartment in the middle, and a baggage-express compartment at the rear. At Middleton, 35.4 miles north of Cotton Plant, the crew received copies of train order No. 31. This train departed from Middleton, the last open office, at 9:54 p. m., 26 minutes late, passed the north siding-switch at Cotton Plant, where it was required to enter the siding to meet No. 32, and while moving at an estimated speed of 30 miles per hour it collided with No. 32 at a point 6,120 feet south of the north siding-switch.

The Diesel-electric rail motor-car of No. 1 stopped upright and in line with the track. The front truck was derailed, and the control and mail compartments were demolished. The first car of this train was badly damaged, and the second car was somewhat damaged. The front end of the first Diesel-electric unit of No. 32 was considerably damaged.

The conductor and the flagman of No. 1 were injured.

The weather was clear at the time of the accident, which occurred at 10:52 p. m.

During the 30-day period preceding the day of the accident, the average daily movement in this territory was 4.87 trains.

Discussion

The crews of both trains held copies of train order No. 31, which established Cotton Plant as the meeting point between No. 1, a south-bound first-class passenger train, and No. 32, a north-bound second-class freight train. The order included the instruction for No. 1 to take siding at the meeting point. Under the rules No. 1 was required to enter the siding at the north siding-switch, and all the members of the crews of both trains so understood.

As No. 32 was approaching Cotton Plant the speed was about 10 miles per hour. The headlight was lighted brightly. The enginemen and the front brakeman were maintaining a lookout ahead from their respective positions in the control compartment at the front of the first Diesel-electric unit. The conductor and the flagman were in the caboose. The brakes of this train

had been tested and had functioned properly where used en route. The crew also had received a message informing them that No. 1 would be about 25 minutes late at Cotton Plant. In order to avoid stopping his train on the ascending grade, the engineer of No. 32 was regulating the speed so that No. 1 would have sufficient time to enter the siding at Cotton Plant before No. 32 arrived at the north siding-switch. The enginemen and the front brakeman said that when their train was about 1-1/2 miles south of the north siding-switch they observed the reflection of an approaching headlight. Their view was restricted by track curvature and vegetation adjacent to the track, and they could not immediately determine the exact location of the headlight nor the speed at which it was approaching. When No. 1 was in the vicinity of the south siding-switch, they realized that the opposing train was occupying the main track south of the meeting point, and that it was approaching at a rate of speed apparently too high to be stopped short of No. 32. The engineer immediately placed the brake valve in emergency position, and No. 32 had just stopped when the collision occurred. The members of the crew on the engine estimated that the speed of No. 1 was about 30 miles per hour at the time of the collision. The conductor and the flagman were not aware of anything being wrong until the brakes were applied in emergency.

The crew of No. 1 received copies of train order No. 31 at Middleton about 1 hour 10 minutes prior to the time the accident occurred. This train made several station stops after it departed from Middleton, and the last stop prior to the occurrence of the accident was made at Blue Mountain, 5 miles north of Cotton Plant. After No. 1 departed from Blue Mountain, and before it had attained the maximum authorized speed, the flagman, as instructed by the conductor, sounded the meeting-point signal on the communicating signal system. This signal was acknowledged by the engineer. As No. 1 was approaching Cotton Plant the speed was about 60 miles per hour. The headlight was lighted brightly. The brakes of this train had been tested before leaving Jackson, and had functioned properly where used en route. A fireman was not assigned to the crew of this train, and the engineer was alone in the control compartment of the motor-car. The flagman was in the second car and the conductor was in the rear car. The conductor said that after the train left Blue Mountain he went into the rear car to collect fare from a passenger who had boarded the train at that station. He stopped to write a receipt for the fare, and was just starting toward the rear door when the collision occurred. He was not aware until after the collision occurred that the train had passed Cotton Plant. The flagman, who was required to operate

the switch for No. 1 to enter the siding at Cotton Plant, said that after the train departed from Blue Mountain he proceeded into the second car, from which point he was unable to determine the location of the train by looking through the windows. After remaining in the car for several minutes, he walked toward the vestibule and was in the act of opening the door to the vestibule when the collision occurred. The engineer said that he encountered heavy fog soon after No. 1 left Blue Mountain, and became confused as to the location of the train. He was not aware that his train had passed the north siding-switch at Cotton Plant until the train was in the vicinity of the curve south of the south siding-switch. At this time he observed the headlight of No. 32 and immediately placed the brake valve in emergency position. He estimated that the speed of the train had been reduced to about 25 miles per hour at the time of the collision.

In this territory trains are operated by timetable and train orders only. If an adequate block system had been in use, these opposing trains would not have been permitted to occupy the same block simultaneously.

Cause

It is found that this accident was caused by failure to obey a meet order.

Dated at Washington, D. C., this tenth day of June, 1949.

By the Commission, Commissioner Patterson.

(SEAL)

W. P. BARTEL,

Secretary.