

BUREAU OF SAFETY

REPORT NO. 1937

Railroad:	Seaboard Air Line
Date:	February 17, 1935.
Location:	Cecil, Ala.
Kind of accident:	Derailment
Train involved:	Freight
Casualties:	3 killed and 4 injured
Cause:	Live stock on track.

1967

INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF THE BUREAU OF SAFETY CONCERNING AN
ACCIDENT ON THE SEABOARD AIR LINE RAILWAY NEAR CECIL,
ALA., ON FEBRUARY 17, 1935.

March 30, 1935.

To the Commission:

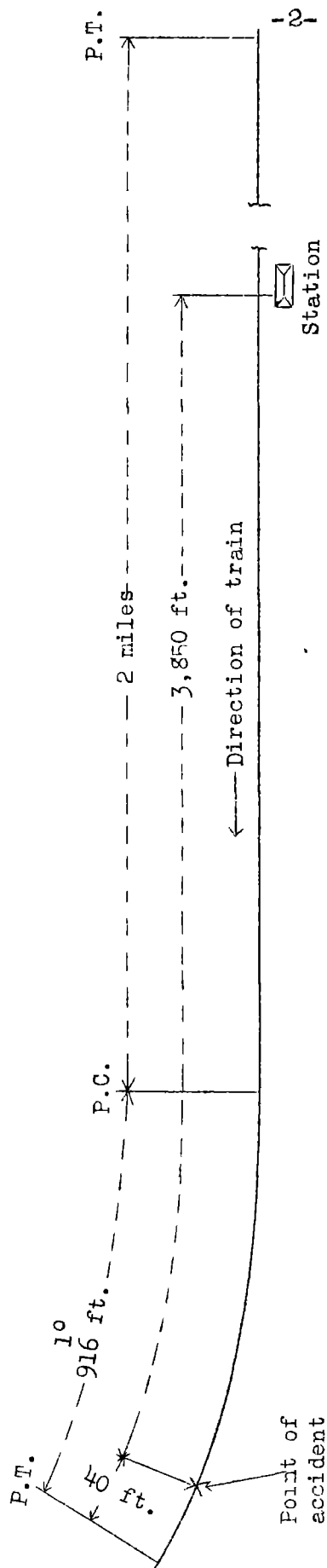
On February 17, 1935, there was a derailment of a freight train on the Seaboard Air Line Railway near Cecil, Ala., which resulted in the death of 2 employees and 1 trespasser, and the injury of 3 employees and 1 trespasser.

Location and Method of operation

This accident occurred on the Montgomery Sub-Division of the South Carolina Division, which extends between Shops, near Americus, Ga., and Montgomery, Ala., a distance of 140 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 at a point approximately 3,850 feet west of the station at Cecil; approaching this point from the east, the track is tangent for a distance of more than 2 miles, followed by a 1° curve to the right 916 feet in length, the accident occurring on this curve at a point about 40 feet from its western end. The grade for west-bound trains is 0.4 percent descending at the point of accident.

The track is laid with 68-pound rails, 30 feet in length, with an average of 18 ties to the rail length, fully tieplated on curves, single-spiked, and is ballasted with gravel to a depth of from 8 to 10 inches; the track is well maintained. In the vicinity of the point of accident there is a highway which parallels the track on the south. No fence is maintained by the railway; however, there are fences on the right of way on the north side of the track and on the south side of the highway, these fences extending between Cecil and a point a short distance west of the point of derailment; there is no fence between the track and highway. Montgomery County, within which county the accident occurred, is subject to a stock law which requires owners to fence their own cattle and not permit them to run at large.

• Shops, Ga.	
29.2 mi.	
• Richland, Ga.	
89.8 mi.	
X Cecil, Ala.	
21.0 mi.	
• Montgomery, Ala.	



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Inv. No. 1967
Seaboard Air Line Railway
Cecil, Alabama
Feb. 17, 1935

The weather was clear at the time of the accident, which occurred about 7:20 a.m.

Description

Train No. 35, a west-bound second-class freight train, consisted of 27 cars and a caboose, hauled by engine 531, and was in charge of Conductor Griffith and Engineman Cox. This train left Richland, 89.8 miles east of Cecil, at 4:40 a.m., according to the train sheet, 5 hours and 40 minutes late, and shortly after passing Cecil it was derailed while traveling at a speed estimated to have been between 30 and 45 miles per hour.

The engine, tender and first 11 cars were derailed; the engine stopped on the south side of the track, upright, with its forward end about 284 feet west of the point of accident and 50 feet from the track; the tender was across the track behind the engine and the derailed cars stopped in various positions across and adjacent to the track within a space of approximately 200 feet. The engine was considerably damaged, four of the cars were destroyed and the other derailed cars were more or less damaged. The employees killed were the engineman and fireman, and the employees injured were the conductor, brakeman and flagman.

Summary of evidence

Brakeman Dixon stated that he was in the tender handling coal when he heard the fireman shout to the engineman that there was a cow ahead, this being followed very shortly afterwards by the derailment of the train; he estimated the speed at the time of the accident at 40 or 45 miles per hour. Prior to the accident Brakeman Dixon did not see the animal on or near the track but was of the opinion that it approached the track from the fireman's side of the engine.

Conductor Griffith stated that the train was traveling about 30 miles per hour as it approached the point of accident and he was on the left side of the caboose cupola looking ahead; he received no warning of danger until the train came to a sudden stop, there being no application of the brakes just before the train stopped. He immediately went to the engine and while trying to release the engineman, who was pinned in the cab, the engineman told him that the train had run over a cow. He later went back to ascertain the cause of the accident and observed the carcass of a decapitated bull lying beside the track, and upon examining the track he found hoof prints in the ballast between the ties, followed by marks in the gravel

indicating that the bull had been knocked down and rolled on the track for a short distance. There was nothing about the condition of the track that could have contributed to the cause of the accident and it was his opinion that the derailment resulted from the train striking the bull and the carcass getting under the pilot of the engine.

Section Foreman Gloss, on whose section the accident occurred, stated that he inspected the track about noon and from his observations he formed the opinion that after the bull was struck its neck rested on the outside rail of the curve and when the engine truck came in contact with the obstruction the wheels were lifted over the rail. He further stated that it is the practice of stock owners in that neighborhood to permit their cattle to roam at large after crops had been harvested and during the past year there had been about 25 animals killed on his section. Section Foreman Dekle, in charge of the adjoining section toward the east, said that between 20 and 25 cattle had been killed in his territory since the crops were harvested. Roadmaster Holder stated that considerable trouble has been experienced by trains striking and killing stock at various points between Richland and Montgomery during the past 18 months, especially in the winter season. He estimated the weight of the bull that caused the accident at 1,300 or 1,400 pounds.

Assistant Division Engineer Roberts arrived at the scene of accident about 26 hours after its occurrence and on making an examination he found that 28 feet west of where the hoof marks had been located there was gore and hair on the south rail, indicating that the bull had been struck at that point. Fifty-six feet farther west the first marks of derailment appeared on the ties $9\frac{1}{2}$ inches inside the north rail; there were no flange marks on the rails. The alignment and elevation of the curve were checked between its eastern end and the point where the track was disturbed by the derailment, but only slight variations were found, and in his opinion the curve was well maintained and safe for the maximum allowable speed, which is 30 miles per hour for freight trains. There was nothing which could obstruct the view from a west-bound train for a considerable distance approaching the point of accident.

Locomotive Inspector McNair stated that he inspected engine 531 on February 16 at Bainbridge, Ga., and found it to be in good condition. The pilot was $4\frac{1}{2}$ inches above the tops of the rails, the flanges and tires were in good shape, and the lateral motion of the trucks did not exceed one-half inch.

Master Mechanic Weatherford inspected engine 531 at the scene of accident and found the pilot, which was of steel construction, bent downward about 4 inches and also slightly to the right. There was no excessive lateral or other mechanical defect that could have caused the accident. The left rear driver-brake hanger was broken off, but he thought that this was broken during the course of derailment.

An examination of the track made by the Commission's inspectors showed that it was in good condition, with no marks on the rails west of the point where it was disturbed by the derailment, while an inspection of the engine and cars disclosed nothing that could have contributed to the accident. At the time of the investigation the ownership of the bull had not been ascertained.

Discussion

It was daylight and the view was unrestricted for a considerable distance, but apparently the bull was not seen by either member of the engine crew until the fireman shouted a warning immediately before the train struck the animal, while the train crew felt no brake application prior to the accident. Subsequent inspection of the track and equipment did not disclose any defect that could have contributed to the cause of the accident, but there was ample evidence to indicate that the bull had been on the track and that it was struck and then run over, causing the engine truck to be derailed toward the outside of the curve and resulting in the derailment of the train.

The investigation disclosed that during recent months a considerable number of cattle had been killed on the tracks in this vicinity. Consideration should be given by both the railroad company and State or local authorities to measures for keeping cattle off the tracks.

Conclusions

This accident was caused by the train striking a bull which was on the track.

Respectfully submitted,

W. J. PATTERSON,

Director.