

INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION
WASHINGTON

INVESTIGATION NO. 2647
THE SEABOARD AIR LINE RAILWAY COMPANY
REPORT IN RE ACCIDENT
NEAR HEARDMONT, GA., ON
NOVEMBER 4, 1942

SUMMARY

Railroad: Seaboard Air Line
Date: November 4, 1942
Location: Heardmont, Ga.
Kind of accident: Head-end collision
Trains involved: Freight : Freight
Train numbers: Second 82 : Second 85
Engine numbers: 334-357 : 361
Consist: 64 cars, caboose : 54 cars, caboose
Speed: 10 m. p. h. : 10 m. p. h.
Operation: Timetable and train orders, and
manual-block system for follow-
ing passenger trains only
Track: Single; 0°44' curve; 1.16 percent
descending grade northward
Weather: Clear
Time: About 3:48 a. m.
Casualties: 3 injured
Cause: Accident caused by failure to
obey meet order
Recommendation: That the Seaboard Air Line Railway
Company establish an adequate
block-signal system on the line
involved in this accident

INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION

INVESTIGATION NO. 2647

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

THE SEABOARD AIR LINE RAILWAY COMPANY

December 22, 1942.

Accident near Heardmont, Ga., on November 4, 1942, caused
by failure to obey a meet order.

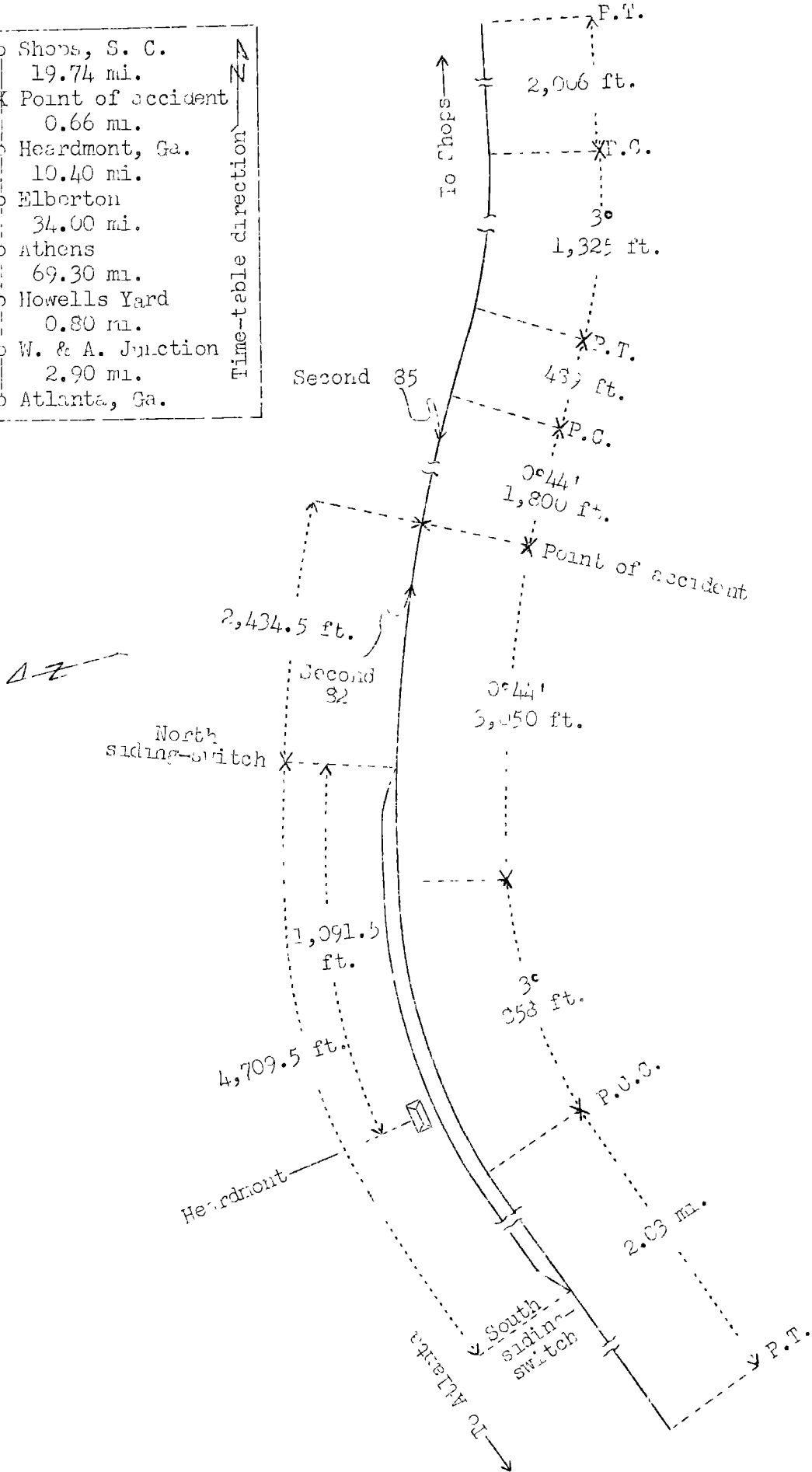
REPORT OF THE COMMISSION¹

PATTERSON, Commissioner:

On November 4, 1942, there was a head-end collision between two freight trains on the Seaboard Air Line Railway near Heardmont, Ga., which resulted in the injury of three employees.

¹Under 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.

| | | |
|---|-------------------|--|
| o | Shops, S. C. | |
| | 19.74 mi. | |
| x | Point of accident | |
| | 0.66 mi. | |
| o | Heardmont, Ga. | |
| | 10.40 mi. | |
| o | Elberton | |
| | 34.00 mi. | |
| o | Athens | |
| | 69.30 mi. | |
| o | Howells Yard | |
| | 0.80 mi. | |
| o | W. & A. Junction | |
| | 2.90 mi. | |
| o | Atlanta, Ga. | |



Inv. No. 2647
 Seaboard Air Line Railway
 Heardmont, Ga.
 November 7, 1942

Location of Accident and Method of Operation

This accident occurred on that part of the Georgia Division designated as the Atlanta Sub-division and extending between Shops, S. C., and W. & A. Junction, near Atlanta, Ga., a distance of 134.9 miles. In the vicinity of the point of accident this is a single-track line over which trains are operated by timetable and train orders, and a manual-block system for following passenger trains only. At Heardmont a siding 4,709.5 feet in length parallels the main track on the west. The north switch of this siding is 1,091.5 feet north of the station. The accident occurred on the main track at a point 2,434.5 feet north of the north siding-switch. Approaching from the south there is a tangent 2.03 miles in length, which is followed by a compound curve to the right 5,708 feet in length, the maximum curvature of which is 3°. The accident occurred on this curve at a point 1,800 feet from its northern end, at which point the curvature is 0°44'. Approaching from the north there are, in succession, a tangent 2,006 feet in length, a 3° curve to the right 1,325 feet, a tangent 489 feet and the curve on which the accident occurred. The grade for north-bound trains is, successively, 0.25 percent ascending 2,200 feet, 1.05 percent ascending 1,000 feet, level 200 feet and 1.16 percent descending 1,350 feet to the point of accident. The grade for south-bound trains is, successively, 1.05 percent descending 1,200 feet, level 800 feet and 1.16 percent ascending 1,450 feet to the point of accident.

Operating rules read in part as follows:

14. Engine and Motor Whistle Signals.

* * *

Sound:

Indication:

* * *

(n) _____ o

Approaching meeting
or waiting points.
See Rule 90.

90. * * *

Trains must stop clear of switch used by the train to be met in going in on the siding. The engineman of each train will give signal 14-N immediately after passing last station before the meeting or waiting point is reached and in no case less than two miles from the meeting or waiting point. * * *

Should the engineman fail to give signal 14-N, as herein provided, conductors and trainmen will take immediate action to stop the train. Failure to give these signals will not relieve conductors or enginemen of responsibility.

211-A. When more than one engine is used on a train, each engineman must have a copy of all orders, and each will be responsible for the observance of the rules, except that the leading engine, only, will sound whistle signals.

Time-table special instructions read in part as follows:

All northward trains are superior to trains of the same class in opposite direction.

The maximum authorized speed for the trains involved is 40 miles per hour.

Description of Accident

Second 82, a north-bound second-class freight train, departed from Howells Yard, 113.7 miles south of Heardmont, at 11:05 p. m., November 3, according to the dispatcher's record of movement of trains, 4 hours 3 minutes late. After some cars were set off and others added this train, consisting of engines 334 and 357, coupled, 62 loaded and 2 empty cars and a caboose, departed from Athens, 44.4 miles south of Heardmont, at 2:05 a. m., November 4, 3 hours 45 minutes late. At Elberton, 10.4 miles south of Heardmont, the crew received a clearance card and copies of two train orders, of which one was train order No. 28, Form 19, reading in part as follows:

Second 85 Eng 361 meet Second
82 Engs 334-357 coupled at
Heardmont * * *

This train departed from Elberton at 3:29 a. m., 3 hours 32 minutes late, passed the fouling point of the north siding-switch at Heardmont, where it was required to wait unless Second 85 was on the siding, and while moving at an estimated speed of 10 miles per hour it collided with Second 85 at a point 2,454.5 feet north of the north siding-switch.

Second 85, a south-bound second-class freight train, consisted of engine 361, 7 loaded and 47 empty cars and a caboose. At Shop, 20.4 miles north of Heardmont, the crew received a clearance card and six train orders, of which one was train

order No. 28, Form 19, previously quoted. This train departed from Shops at 3:02 a. m., according to the dispatcher's record of movement of trains, 4 hours 22 minutes late, and while moving at an estimated speed of 10 miles per hour it collided with Second 82.

The air brakes of both trains had been tested and had functioned properly at all points where used en route. There was no condition of the engineer that distracted the attention or obscured the vision of the members of the crews who were on the engines.

From an engine approaching in either direction the view of an engine approaching from the opposite direction is restricted to a distance of about 1,000 feet, because of a cut, vegetation adjacent to the track and track curvature.

The front end of engine 361, of Second 85, was badly damaged. The engine truck was driven backward and the Nos. 1 and 2 pairs of driving wheels were derailed. The rear truck of the second car was derailed. The third to sixth cars, inclusive, were derailed and stopped in various positions across the track. Of these cars, one was destroyed and the others were badly damaged. Engine 334, the first engine of Second 82, was derailed and stopped, badly damaged, upright and parallel to the track. The tender was derailed and stopped, badly damaged, at an angle of about 25 degrees to the track. Engine 357, the second engine of Second 82, was derailed and stopped, badly damaged, at an angle of 30 degrees to the track. The tender of engine 357 was derailed.

It was clear at the time of the accident, which occurred about 3:48 a. m.

The employees injured were the engineer, the fireman and the front brakeman of Second 85.

Data

During the 30-day period preceding the day of the accident, the average daily movement in the vicinity of the point of accident was 18.56 trains.

Discussion

The rules governing operation on the line involved provide that at a meeting point the superior train must stop clear of the switch to be used by the train entering the siding. The engineer must sound the meeting-point whistle signal not less than 2 miles before the train reaches a meeting point. If an

engineer fails to sound the proper signal, the conductor and trainmen must take action to stop the train.

The crews of both trains involved held copies of train order No. 28, which established Heardmont as the meeting point between Second 82, a north-bound second-class train, and Second 85, a south-bound second-class train. Second 82 was superior by direction and was required to stop short of the fouling point of the north siding-switch at Heardmont unless Second 85 was into clear on the siding.

As Second 85 was approaching the point where the accident occurred the speed was about 25 miles per hour. The enginemen and the front brakeman were maintaining a lookout ahead. At a point about 1 mile north of Heardmont the engineer sounded the meeting-point whistle signal, moved the throttle to drifting position and made a 10-pound brake-pipe reduction to reduce speed in preparation for his train to enter the siding at the north siding-switch. The enginemen's view of the track ahead was restricted because of a cut, vegetation and track curvature. They saw the reflection of a headlight in the vicinity of the north siding-switch, but did not become alarmed until their engine reached a point about 1,000 feet north of the point where the accident occurred when they saw Second 82 approaching. The engineer immediately moved the brake valve to emergency position. The speed of Second 85 was about 10 miles per hour when the collision occurred.

About 30 minutes before the accident occurred the members of the crew of Second 82 received copies of train order No. 28 at Elberton, 10.4 miles south of Heardmont, and they understood that their train was required to stop clear of the fouling point of the north siding-switch unless Second 85 was into clear on the siding. As Second 82 was approaching Heardmont the speed was about 35 miles per hour. The train air-brake system was in the charge of the engineer of the first engine. At a point about 2.5 miles south of Heardmont the engineer of the first engine sounded the meeting-point whistle signal. No action was taken to reduce the speed of the train until the engines reached the vicinity of the north siding-switch where the front brakeman, who was on the first engine, and the fireman saw the reflection of a headlight and called a warning to the engineer. The engineer of the first engine moved the brake valve to emergency position and the speed was reduced to about 10 miles per hour when the collision occurred. The engineer of the first engine said that after he sounded the meeting-point whistle signal he forgot his train was to meet Second 85 at Heardmont. The fireman of the first engine and the front brakeman said they were expecting the engineer to control the speed of their train to enable it to be stopped short of the fouling point of the north siding-switch, but they did not warn the engineer until it was too late to avert the accident. The engineer of the second engine said he was attempting to open the double-heading

cock of his engine to enable him to make a brake application, but the brakes were applied before he completed his action. The conductor said he opened the air valve on the rear of the caboose and the flagman said he opened the air valve in the caboose cupola, but this action was not taken soon enough to avert the accident.

The manual-block system is used on the line involved for following movements of first-class trains and passenger trains only. The book of operating rules of this railroad contains manual-block rules which provide for the blocking of opposing movements as well as following movements but these rules are not in effect on the territory involved. During a 9-month period immediately preceding the day of the accident, four other accidents, resulting in the death of 6 persons and the injury of 131 persons, occurred on the line of this carrier in territory where trains were operated under the same system as that involved in the accident at Heardmont. The Commission's reports covering the investigations of these accidents stated that if an adequate block-signal system had been in use, the accidents would not have occurred. In the instant case, if an adequate block system had been in use on the line involved, the accident would not have occurred.

Cause

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

Recommendation

It is recommended that the Seaboard Air Line Railway Company establish an adequate block-signal system on the line involved in this accident.

Dated at Washington, D. C., this twenty-second day of December, 1942.

By the Commission, Commissioner Patterson.

(SEAL)

W. P. BARTEL,
Secretary.