

INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION  
WASHINGTON

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REPORT NO. 3659  
SEABOARD AIR LINE RAILROAD COMPANY  
IN RE ACCIDENT  
AT MATTHEWS, N. C., ON  
OCTOBER 23, 1955

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SUMMARY

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Date: October 23, 1955

Railroad Seaboard Air Line

Location: Matthews, N. C.

Kind of accident. Side collision

Trains involved: Freight : Freight

Train numbers: 72 : 89

Locomotive numbers: Diesel-electric unit 1770 : Diesel-electric units 1801, 1799, and 1771

Consists 23 cars, caboose : 42 cars, caboose

Estimated speeds: Undetermined : 20-50 m. p. h.

Operation: Timetable and train orders

Track: Single; 2° curve; 0.91 percent ascending grade eastward

Weather. Clear

Time: 1:40 p. m.

Casualties 2 killed, 1 injured

Cause Failure to obey a meet order

INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION

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REPORT NO. 3659

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

SEABOARD AIR LINE RAILWAY COMPANY

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November 23, 1955

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Accident at Matthews, N. C., on October 23, 1955, caused  
by failure to obey a meet order.

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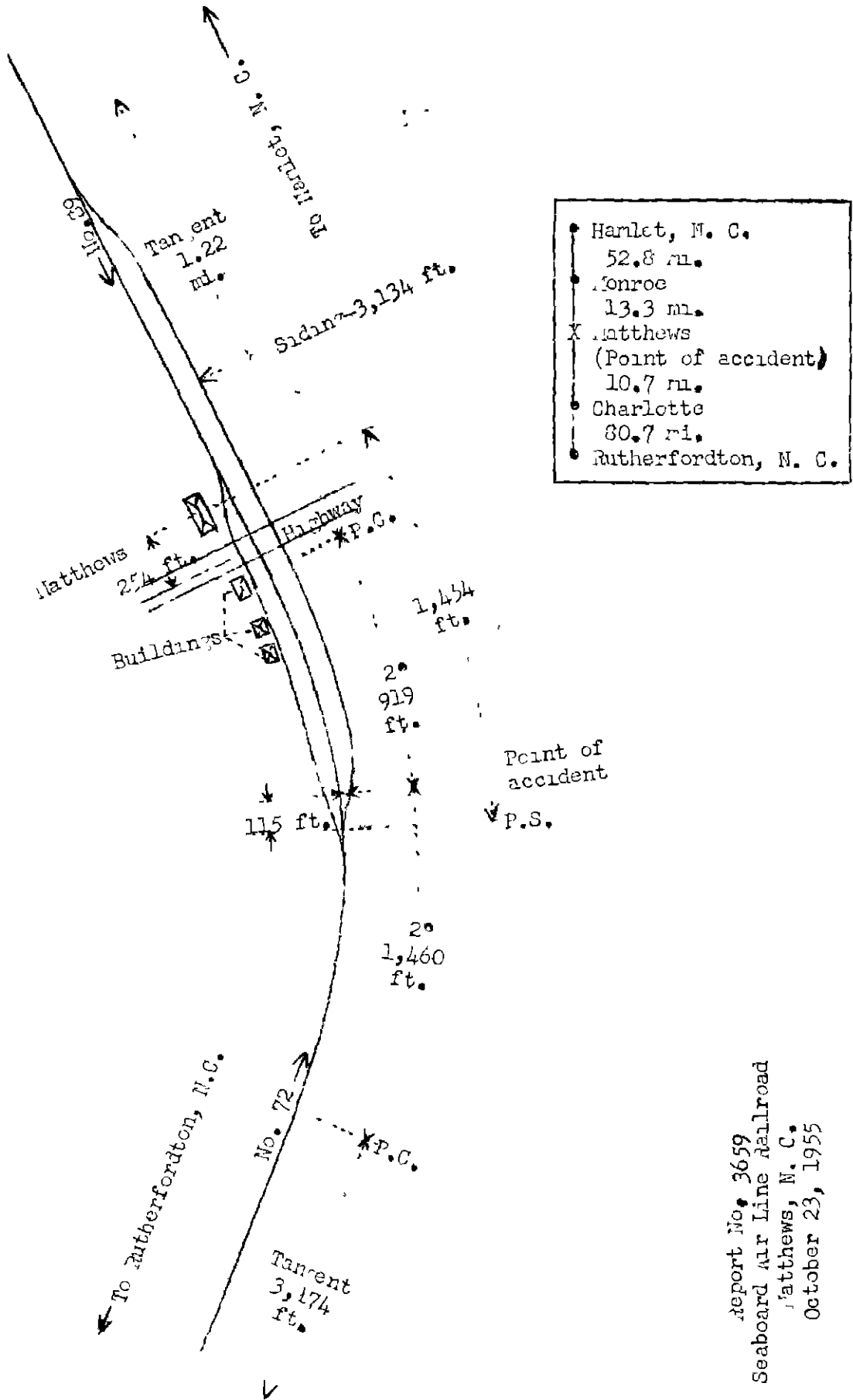
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REPORT OF THE COMMISSION

CLARKE, Commissioner:

On October 23, 1955, there was a side collision between two freight trains on the Seaboard Air Line Railroad at Matthews, N. C., which resulted in the death of two train-service employees, and the injury of one train-service employee.

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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 Clarke for consideration and disposition.



- Harlet, N. C. 52.8 mi.
- Monroe 13.3 mi.
- X Mathews (Point of accident) 10.7 mi.
- Charlotte 30.7 mi.
- Rutherfordton, N. C.

Report No. 3659  
Seaboard Air Line Railroad  
Mathews, N. C.  
October 23, 1955

Location of Accident and Method of Operation

This accident occurred on that part of the Georgia Division extending between Rutherfordton and Hamlet, N. C., 157.5 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. There is no block system in use. At Matthews, 91.4 miles east of Rutherfordton, a siding 3,134 feet in length parallels the main track on the south. The west siding-switch is 1,454 feet west of the station. The accident occurred 115 feet east of the west siding-switch, at the fouling point of the siding and the main track. From the west there is a tangent 3,174 feet in length and a 2° curve to the left 1,460 feet to the point of accident and 919 feet eastward. From the east there is a tangent 1.22 miles in length and the curve on which the accident occurred. The grade is 0.91 percent ascending eastward at the point of accident. The grade for west-bound trains averages 0.72 percent ascending throughout a considerable distance to a point approximately 900 feet west of the point of accident, and it averages 0.91 percent descending between that point and the point of accident.

This carrier's operating rules read in part as follows

14. ENGINE WHISTLE SIGNALS.

Note.--The signals proscribed are illustrated by "o" for short sounds, "—" for longer sounds. \* \* \*

Sound:	Indication:
* * *	
(n) — — o	Approaching meeting, waiting or passing points * * *. (See Rule 90-A.)
* * *	

17. The headlight will be displayed to the front of every train by day and by night. In non-signalled territory when a train turns out to meet another the headlight must be extinguished after it has stopped clear of the main track.

90. Conductors and enginemen must have a mutual understanding as to their meeting stations, where practicable.

A train holding main track at meeting point must stop before fouling the clearance point of the switch to be used by train in taking siding unless the train to be met has arrived and is in the clear and switch is set for main track movement \* \* \*

\* \* \*

90-A. On trains equipped with air communicating signal system \* \* \*

On other trains, the engineman will give Signal 14 (n) at least two miles before reaching meeting, waiting or passing point. When practicable, this signal will be acknowledged by the conductor by giving a "Slow Down" signal by holding out hand by day, or lantern at night, at arm's length on the engineman's side of the train. When the signal can be seen by the engineman he must acknowledge by giving Signal 14 (n).

On all trains approaching meeting, waiting or passing points, conductors must be in position to observe the movement of their trains and when it becomes known that the rules or train order instructions are not being complied with, they must take immediate action to stop their trains.

211-C. Enginemen must show train orders to firemen and, when practicable, to forward trainmen. Conductors must show train orders, when practicable, to trainmen. Firemen and trainmen are required to read them and, if necessary, remind enginemen and conductors of their contents, and take such other action as may be necessary for the safety of the train.

#### FORMS OF TRAIN ORDERS.

S-A.

Fixing Meeting Points for Opposing Trains.

#### EXAMPLES.

(1) NO 1 ENG 3012 MEET NO 2 ENG 3013 AT B

\* \* \*

\* \* \*

Trains receiving these orders will run with respect to each other to the designated points and there meet in the manner prescribed by the rules.

(3) When it is desired that the superior train take siding, examples above may be modified:

Under example (1), NO 2 TAKE SIDING

\* \* \*

The maximum authorized speed for freight trains in the vicinity of the point of accident is 49 miles per hour.

#### Description of Accident

No. 72, an east-bound second-class freight train, consisted of Diesel-electric unit 1770, 23 cars, and a caboose. At Charlotte, 10.7 miles west of Matthews and the last open office, the crew received copies of train order No. 25 reading in part as follows

\* \* \*

No 72 Eng 1770 meet No 89 Eng 1801 at Matthews  
No 72 take siding

This train departed from Charlotte at 1 15 p. m., 3 hours 15 minutes late, and while entering the siding at Matthews the sixth car was struck by No. 89 at the fouling point of the west end of the siding and the main track

No. 89, a west-bound second-class freight train, consisted of Diesel-electric units 1801, 1798, and 1771, coupled in multiple-unit control, 42 cars, and a caboose. At Monroe, 13.3 miles east of Matthews and the last open office, the crew received copies of train order No. 25. The train passed Monroe at 1:20 p. m., 1 hour 20 minutes late, and while moving at a speed variously estimated at from 20 to 50 miles per hour it struck No. 72

The fifth to the eleventh cars, inclusive, of No. 72, and the locomotive and the first 16 cars of No. 89 were derailed. The first Diesel-electric unit of No. 89 stopped on its right side at an angle of approximately 90 degrees to the track. The front end was toward the north, and the rear end was on the track structure at a point 180 feet west of the point of collision. The other two units remained upright. They stopped immediately east of the first unit and parallel to it. The derailed cars stopped in various positions on or near the tracks. The Diesel-electric units

were badly damaged, the eighth, ninth, and tenth cars of No. 72, and the first, fourth, seventh, and eighth cars of No. 89 were destroyed, and the other derailed cars were considerably damaged.

The engineer and the front brakeman of No. 89 were killed. The fireman of No. 89 was injured.

The weather was clear at the time of the accident, which occurred about 1 40 p. m.

The Diesel-electric units of No. 89 were of the road-switcher type. The sanding devices were arranged to function automatically when the brakes were applied in emergency. Both the first Diesel-electric unit and the caboose were equipped with radio equipment.

#### Discussion

When the accident occurred the crews of both trains held copies of train order No. 25. Under the provisions of this order, No. 72 was required to enter the siding at Matthews at the west switch, and No. 89 was required to stop short of the clearance point at the west end of the siding unless No. 72 had arrived and was clear of the main track and the switch was properly lined.

As No. 72 was approaching the point where the accident occurred the engineer and the front brakeman were on the locomotive. The conductor and the flagman were in the caboose. The headlight was lighted. The front brakeman alighted and opened the west siding-switch, and the train did not stop west of the switch. The engineer said that after the locomotive entered the siding he observed No. 89 approaching at a speed at which it could not be stopped short of the switch. He thought that at this time the locomotive of No. 89 was about 450 feet east of his locomotive and that it was moving at a speed of about 40 miles per hour. He immediately made an emergency application of the brakes and sounded a warning on the pneumatic horn. He thought that his train stopped before the collision occurred. The front brakeman estimated that No. 89 was moving at a speed of 40 or 50 miles per hour. He thought that No. 72 was still in motion when the collision occurred.

As No. 89 was approaching the point where the accident occurred the engineer and the front brakeman were on the locomotive. The conductor and the flagman were in the caboose.



The brakes of the train had been tested and had functioned properly when used. The fireman said that he and the engineer and the front brakeman had each read and understood train order No. 25. He said that about 10 minutes before the train reached Matthews he left the control compartment of the first Diesel-electric unit to patrol the units. He said that the engineer sounded the meeting-point whistle signal when the train was between 1 and 2 miles east of Matthews. He thought that there was an application of the brakes before the locomotive passed the east siding-switch and that the speed of the train was reduced from 45 or 50 miles per hour to 30 or 35 miles per hour in the vicinity of the switch. He said that the speed had been reduced to 25 or 30 miles per hour when the locomotive reached a grade crossing approximately 250 feet west of the station and that there was an emergency application of the brakes in the vicinity of this crossing. He could not estimate the speed at the time of the collision. A fireman not on duty who was in the control compartment of the second unit estimated that the speed was 35 or 40 miles per hour when the brakes were applied in emergency. He had not read the train orders and had not noticed whether a meeting-point whistle signal had been sounded or whether there had been a preceding application of the brakes. The conductor and the flagman said that they had each read and understood train order No. 25. They had not communicated with the employees on the locomotive after the order was received. Neither of these employees heard a meeting-point whistle signal sounded as the train approached Matthews. They said they thought it would be impossible to hear such a signal from the caboose while the train was in motion. As the train was approaching the east siding-switch the conductor stepped to the rear platform of the caboose to be in a position to identify No. 72. He said he thought there was an application of the brakes as the train was approaching the switch and that this application was later released. He estimated that the caboose passed the switch at a speed of about 20 miles per hour. He said that the brakes became applied in emergency when the caboose was in the vicinity of the switch. Because of curvature of the track, a train with few cars standing at the west end of the siding is not visible from the caboose of an approaching west-bound train. The flagman said that there was an application of the brakes as the train approached Matthews, and he thought that the speed had been reduced from about 40 miles per hour to 20 or 25 miles per hour when the brakes became applied in emergency. An employee who was watching

the train move over the grade crossing west of the station estimated that the train was moving at a speed of 20 or 25 miles per hour when the brakes became applied in emergency. He said that this occurred after the locomotive passed the crossing. He heard the grade-crossing whistle signals sounded for two crossings as the train approached Matthews, but he did not notice whether a meeting-point whistle signal was sounded.

After the accident occurred it was found that the automatic brake valve of the first Diesel-electric unit was in emergency position, the independent brake valve was in application position, and the sander valve was open. The double-heading cocks of the three units were in proper positions for control from the first unit. The brake valves of the three units were removed and tested in the shops of the carrier at Hamlet. No defective condition was found. The brakes of the undamaged cars of the train were tested after the accident occurred. A slack-adjuster key bolt was missing on one of the cars. The brakes of the other cars were found to be efficient.

Because of curvature of the track and buildings north of the track, the west siding-switch at Matthews is not visible from an approaching west-bound locomotive until the locomotive reaches a point approximately 925 feet east of the switch. After the accident occurred the rails were found to be sanded throughout a distance of 875 feet immediately east of the switch. From this it appears that the emergency application of the brakes was not made until the locomotive of No. 89 reached a point from which the front end of No. 72 was visible, and from the distance which the train moved after the brakes were applied and the amount of damage which resulted from the collision it appears that the speed of the train was considerably in excess of 20 miles per hour at the time the brakes were applied.

#### Cause

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

Dated at Washington, D. C., this twenty-third day of November, 1955.

By the Commission, Commissioner Clarke.

(SEAL)

HAROLD D. MCCOY,

Secretary.