

INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION  
WASHINGTON

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INVESTIGATION NO. 2780  
THE SOUTHERN RAILWAY SYSTEM  
REPORT IN RE ACCIDENT  
AT SIDEBURN, VA., ON  
MARCH 2, 1944

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SUMMARY

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Railroad: Southern  
Date: March 2, 1944  
Location: Sideburn, Va.  
Kind of accident: Rear-end collision  
Trains involved: C. & O. freight : C. & O. freight  
Train numbers: Extra 2957 North : Extra 2952 North  
Engine numbers: 2957 : 2952  
Consist: 31 cars, caboose : 30 cars, caboose  
Estimated speed: 4 m. p. h. : 20 m. p. h.  
Operation: Timetable, train orders and  
automatic block-signal system  
Track: Double, tangent; 0.42 percent  
descending grade northward  
Weather: Clear  
Time: 11:05 a. m.  
Casualties: 5 killed  
Cause: Failure to enforce and to obey  
operating rules

INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION

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INVESTIGATION NO. 2780

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

THE SOUTHERN RAILWAY SYSTEM

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April 11, 1944.

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Accident at Sideburn, Va., on March 2, 1944, caused by  
failure to enforce and to obey operating rules.

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REPORT OF THE COMMISSION<sup>1</sup>

PATTERSON, Chairman:

On March 2, 1944, there was a rear-end collision between two Chesapeake & Ohio Railway freight trains on the line of the Southern Railway at Sideburn, Va., which resulted in the death of five Chesapeake & Ohio Railway employees.

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<sup>1</sup>Under authority of section 17 (2) of the Interstate Commerce Act the above-entitled proceeding was referred by the Commission to Chairman Patterson for consideration and disposition.



Location of Accident and Method of Operation

This accident occurred on that part of the Washington Division extending between Orange and A. F. Tower, Alexandria, Va., 75.6 miles. This was a double-track line over which trains were operated by timetable, train orders and an automatic block-signal system. Trains of the Chesapeake & Ohio Railway were regularly operated over this portion of the railroad. The accident occurred on the northward main track, 380 feet north of the station at Sideburn. From the south there were, in succession, a tangent 935 feet in length, a 3° curve to the right 930 feet, a tangent 1,481 feet, a 1° curve to the left 618 feet, a tangent 1,104 feet, a 2°18' curve to the right 1,255 feet and a tangent 255 feet to the point of accident and 1,416 feet beyond. The grade for north-bound trains varied between 1.40 percent and 0.04 percent ascending about 4 miles, then it varied between 1.04 percent and 0.42 percent descending about 4,500 feet to the point of accident, and was 0.42 percent descending at that point.

Automatic signals 25.2, 23.6 and 21.8, which governed north-bound movements on the northward main track, were, respectively, 17,134 feet and 9,008 feet south, and 1,416 feet north of the point of accident. These signals were of the three-indication, color-light type, and were continuously lighted. Signals 25.2 and 23.6 displayed the letter "G" in black on a yellow disc. The involved aspects and corresponding indications and names of these signals were as follows:

<u>Signal</u>	<u>Aspect</u>	<u>Indication</u>	<u>Name</u>
25.2)	Red light over	(For heavy passenger	GRADE SIGNAL
23.6)	letter "G" in black on yellow disc	and tonnage freight trains) PROCEED AT RESTRICTED SPEED	
21.8	Red	STOP; THEN PROCEED AT RESTRICTED SPEED	STOP AND PROCEED SIGNAL

DEFINITIONS

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Restricted Speed.--Proceed prepared to stop short of train, obstruction, or switch not properly lined and look out for broken rail.

Operating rules read in part as follows:

11. A train finding a fusee burning on or near its track must stop and extinguish the fusee, and then proceed with caution prepared to stop short of train or obstruction.

\* \* \*

34. The following signals will be used by flagmen:

Day signals (A red flag,  
(Torpedoes and  
(Fusees.

\* \* \*

99. When a train stops under circumstances in which it may be overtaken by another train, the flagman must go back immediately with flagman's signals a sufficient distance to insure full protection, placing two torpedoes, and when necessary, in addition, displaying lighted fusees. When recalled and safety to the train will permit, he may return. When conditions require, he will leave the torpedoes and a lighted fusee.

\* \* \*

When a train is moving under circumstances in which it may be overtaken by another train, the flagman must take such action as may be necessary to insure full protection. By night, or by day, when the view is obscured, lighted fusees must be thrown off at proper intervals.

\* \* \*

505. Automatic block signals, cab signals, or both, govern the use of blocks, but, unless otherwise provided, do not supersede the superiority of trains; nor dispense with the use or the observance of other signals whenever and wherever they may be required.

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

#### Description of Accident

Extra 2957 North, a north-bound Chesapeake & Ohio Railway freight train, consisting of engine 2957, 31 cars and a caboose, passed Manassas, 10.5 miles south of Sideburn and the last open office, at 10:28 a. m., and stopped about 11:03 a. m. at signal 21.8, which displayed stop-and-proceed. About 2 minutes later, after this train had moved about 40 feet northward, it was struck by Extra 2952 North.

Extra 2952 North, a north-bound Chesapeake & Ohio Railway freight train, consisting of engine 2952, 30 cars and a caboose, passed Manassas at 10:37 a. m., passed signals 25.2 and 23.6, which displayed proceed-at-restricted-speed, and while moving at an estimated speed of 20 miles per hour it struck Extra 2957 North at a point 9,008 feet north of signal 23.6.

The caboose and the rear 4 cars of Extra 2957, and the engine and the first 9 cars of Extra 2952 were derailed and damaged. Engine 2952 stopped on its right side, across the tracks, with the front end about 245 feet north of the point of collision.

From a north-bound engine the view of the point where the accident occurred was restricted to about 600 feet, because of vegetation and buildings adjacent to the track and track curvature.

The caboose and 4 cars of the following train had K-2-type brakes, and the other cars had AB-type brakes.

It was clear at the time of the accident, which occurred about 11:05 a. m.

The conductor and the flagman of Extra 2957 North, and the engineer, the fireman and the front brakeman of Extra 2952 North were killed.

#### Discussion

The rules governing operation on this line provide that when a train is moving under circumstances in which it may be overtaken by another train the flagman must take such action as may be necessary to insure full protection. During the day when the view is obscured lighted fuseses must be thrown off at proper intervals. When a train stops under circumstances in which it may be overtaken by another train the flagman must go back immediately a sufficient distance to insure full protection. Under the rules governing operation in automatic block-signal territory, a train may pass a grade signal without stopping, but the train must be operated in such manner that it can be stopped short of a train or an obstruction.

About 11:03 a. m. Extra 2957 North stopped at signal 21.8, which displayed stop-and-proceed. About 2 minutes later, after this train had started and moved northward about 40 feet, the rear end was struck by Extra 2952 North. These were full-tonnage trains, and they were permitted to pass grade signals without stopping. The front brakeman, who was on the engine,

and the enginemen of Extra 2957 said that when the engine was approaching signals 25.2 and 23.6, the signals displayed proceed-at-restricted-speed. Between signal 25.2 and the point where the train stopped, approximately 3 miles, the speed was not in excess of 10 or 12 miles per hour. It was stated by a retired railroad employee, who was in the vicinity, that the conductor and the flagman of Extra 2957 were in the cupola of the caboose when the collision occurred. From the point where he was standing he had an unrestricted view a distance of about 2,000 feet to the south, and he observed no lighted fusee and heard no torpedo explode prior to the occurrence of the accident.

As Extra 2952 was approaching signals 25.2 and 23.6 the speed was about 20 miles per hour. The conductor was maintaining a lookout ahead from the right side of the caboose, where he could observe the indications displayed by the signals before the engine passed them, and these signals displayed proceed-at-restricted-speed. He said that a speed of about 20 miles per hour was maintained until the train reached a point a short distance south of the point where the accident occurred, then a service brake-pipe reduction was made, which was followed almost immediately by an emergency application just prior to the collision. Buildings and vegetation adjacent to the track in the immediate vicinity of the point of accident materially restricted visibility.

Although the indications displayed by signals 25.2 and 23.6 required the following train to proceed in such manner that it could be stopped short of a preceding train, it was moving at a speed of about 20 miles per hour when it collided with the preceding train, in territory where visibility was materially restricted. The rules governing operation in automatic block-signal territory provide that block signals do not dispense with the use and the observance of other signals whenever and wherever they may be required. Under the flagging rule, protection was required for the preceding train when it was preparing to stop at signal 21.8. A lighted fusee displayed from a point 600 feet south of the point where the accident occurred could have been seen from the engine of the following train approximately 1,200 feet.

There was no direct evidence introduced as to why flag protection was not provided for the preceding train, nor why the following train was not operated in accordance with signal indications, as the conductor and the flagman of the preceding train and the engineer, the fireman and the front brakeman of the following train were killed in the accident; however, the investigation disclosed that in the territory in question it was common practice to operate trains at excessive speeds under



proceed-at-restricted-speed indications, and also common practice not to provide flag protection for trains either moving or stopped under circumstances in which they might be overtaken by another train. Observations made 13 days after the accident disclosed that these practices had not been corrected. The failure of employees to obey the rules is a result of a lack of proper supervision, for which operating officers are responsible. If the rules had been enforced and obeyed in this case, flag protection would have been provided for the preceding train, the following train would have been operated in accordance with signal indications, and this accident would have been averted.

Cause

It is found that this accident was caused by failure to enforce and to obey operating rules.

Dated at Washington, D. C., this eleventh day of April, 1944.

By the Commission, Chairman Patterson.

(SEAL)

W. P. BARTEL,  
Secretary.