

INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION  
WASHINGTON

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REPORT NO. 3657  
SOUTHERN RAILWAY COMPANY  
IN RE ACCIDENT  
NEAR HAZLEBURST, GA., ON  
OCTOBER 8, 1955

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SUMMARY

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Date	October 8, 1955
Railroad	Southern
Location:	Hazlehurst, Ga.
Kind of accident	Head-end collision
Trains involved:	Passenger                      · Freight
Train numbers:	27                                      , 66
Locomotive numbers:	Diesel-electric              : Diesel-electric unit 4132                                      unit 2106
Consists:	3 cars                                      · 8 cars, caboose
Estimated speeds:	45-50 m. p. h.                      · 40-45 m. p. h.
Operation	Timetable and train orders
Track	Single; 1130' curve, 0.75 percent ascending grade southward
Weather:	Clear
Time:	3:50 p. m.
Casualties:	5 killed, 26 injured
Cause	Improper handling of train order

INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION

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REPORT NO. 3657

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

SOUTHERN RAILWAY COMPANY

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November 17, 1955

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Accident near Hazlehurst, Ga., on October 8, 1955,  
caused by the improper handling of a train  
order.

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

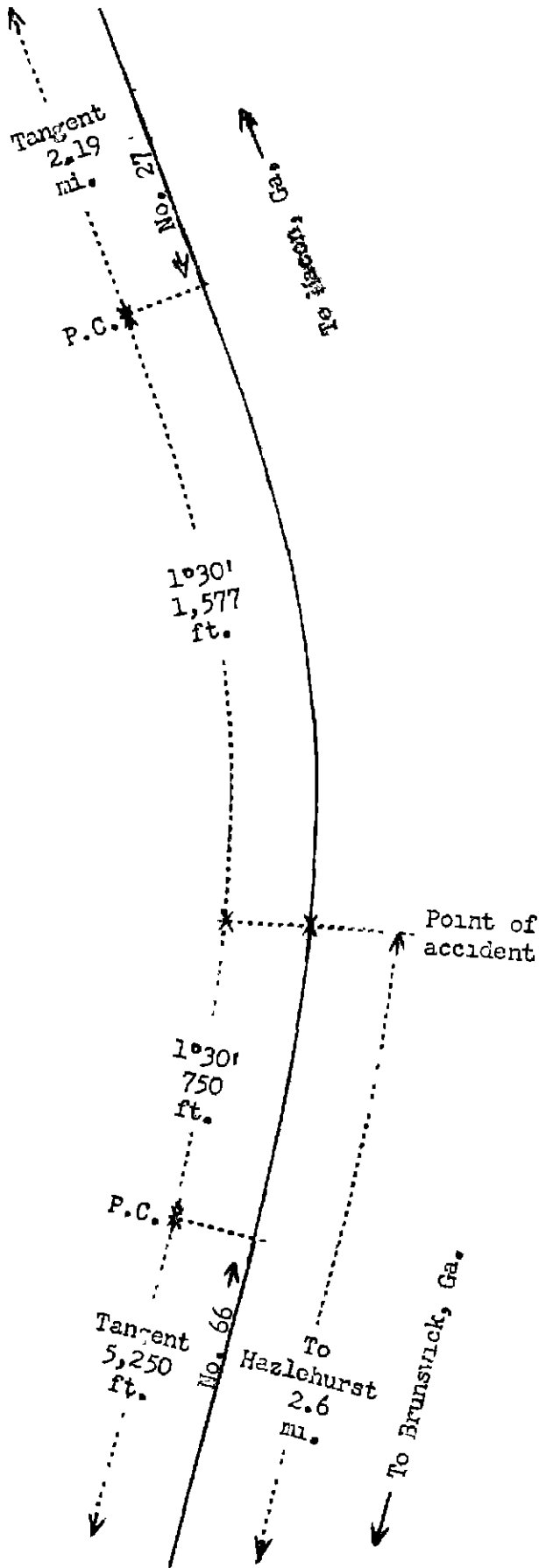
CLARKE, Commissioner:

On October 8, 1955, there was a head-end collision between a passenger train and a freight train on the Southern Railway near Hazlehurst, Ga., which resulted in the death of 5 train-service employees, and the injury of 13 passengers, 1 railway express messenger, 1 railway mail clerk, 6 train-service employees, and 5 train-service employees not on duty.

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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.



•	Macon, Ga.	2.8 mi.
•	Stratton	35.9 mi.
•	Cochran	37.7 mi.
•	Helena	17.7 mi.
•	Lumber City	4.7 mi.
X	Point of accident	2.6 mi.
•	Hazlehurst	15.9 mi.
•	Baxley	20.4 mi.
•	Odum	9.6 mi.
•	Jesup	39.7 mi.
•	Brunswick, Ga.	

Report No. 3657  
Southern Railway  
Near Hazlehurst, Ga.  
October 8, 1955

Location of Accident and Method of Operation

This accident occurred on that part of the Atlanta Division extending between Macon and Brunswick, Ga., 187.0 miles, a single-track line, over which trains are operated by timetable and train orders. There is no block system in use. The accident occurred on the main track at a point 98.8 miles south of Macon and 2.6 miles north of the station at Hazlehurst. From the north there is a tangent 2.19 miles in length and a  $1^{\circ}30'$  curve to the right 1,577 feet to the point of accident and 750 feet southward. From the south there is a tangent 5,250 feet in length and the curve on which the accident occurred. The grade is 0.75 percent ascending southward at the point of accident. In the immediate vicinity of the point of accident the track is laid in a cut. The walls of the cut rise to a height of approximately 12 feet above the level of the tops of the rails.

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

72. Trains of the first class are superior to those of the second, trains of the second class are superior to those of the third, and so on.

\* \* \*

87. An inferior train must keep out of the way of opposing superior trains and failing to clear the main track by the time required by rule must be protected

\* \* \*

88(a). At meeting points, the inferior train must take the siding and clear the time of the superior train not less than five minutes \* \* \*

\* \* \*

204 Train orders must be addressed to those who are to execute them \* \* \*

\* \* \*

205. Each train order must be written in full in a book provided for the purpose at the office of the chief dispatcher and with it recorded the names of those who have signed for the order, the time and the signals which show when and from what offices the order was repeated and the responses transmitted, \* \* \*

206. \* \* \*

When train orders are transmitted by telegraph, the train dispatcher must write and check the order from the first repetition and underscore each word and figure at the time of each succeeding repetition. When transmitted by telephone, he must write the order as he transmits it and underscore each word and figure at the time of each repetition.

\* \* \*

207. To transmit a train order, the signal "31" or the signal "19", followed by the direction must be given to each office addressed, the number of copies being stated, thus "31, West, copy 5," or "19, East, copy 3."

210. When a "31" train order has been transmitted, operators must, unless otherwise directed, repeat it at once from the manifold copy \* \* \*

The conductor and others addressed (except enginemen) must read it to the operator and then sign it, and the operator will send their signatures preceded by the number of the order to the train dispatcher. The response "complete", and the time, with the initials of the chief dispatcher, will then be given by the train dispatcher. \* \* \*

211. When a "19" train order has been transmitted, operators must, unless otherwise directed, repeat it at once from the manifold copy \* \* \*. When the order has been repeated correctly the response "complete", and the time, with the initials of the chief dispatcher, will be given by the train dispatcher. The operator receiving this response will then write on each copy the word "complete", the time, and his last name in full and personally deliver a copy to each person addressed without taking his signature. \* \* \*

A "19" train order must not be used to restrict the superiority of a train \* \* \*

\* \* \*

217. A train order to be delivered to a train at a point not a train order office, or at one at which the office is closed, must be addressed to

"C and E. \_\_\_\_\_ at \_\_\_\_\_, care of \_\_\_\_\_," and forwarded and delivered by the conductor or other person in whose care it is addressed. When Form "31" is used, "complete" will be given upon the signature of the person by whom the order is to be delivered \* \* \*

\* \* \*

219. An operator must not repeat \* \* \* a train order for a train which has been cleared or of which the engine has passed his train-order signal until he has obtained the signatures of the conductor and engineman to the order.

221. Unless otherwise provided, a fixed signal must be used at each train order office, which shall indicate "stop" where there is an operator on duty, except when changed to "proceed" in view of the enginemen to allow a train to pass for which there are no train orders \* \* \*

\* \* \*

## FORMS OF TRAIN ORDERS

### E.

#### Time Orders.

(1.) No 1 engine 1860 run 50 fifty mins late A to G.

\* \* \*

This makes the schedule time of the train named, between the stations designated, as much later as stated in the order, and any other train receiving the order is required to run with respect to this later time as before required to run with respect to the regular schedule time. \* \* \*

\* \* \*

Bulletin special instructions dated April 16, 1952, read in part as follows:

Commencing at once, when an operator holds orders addressed to a train, he must properly fill out Form 603 before clearing the train, showing thereon, without erasure or alteration, the total number of orders, and the number of each order addressed to the train. He will then call-off the order numbers from Form 603 to the train dispatcher and the train dispatcher will enter the station name, train number and order numbers as transmitted by the operator on a line in the train order book, with time and date and, if correct, will reply: "clear" and repeat the train number and order numbers and give the time and chief dispatcher's initials. \* \* \*

\* \* \*

The maximum authorized speeds are 55 miles per hour for passenger trains and 45 miles per hour for freight trains.

#### Description of Accident

On the day of the accident train order No. 51 was transmitted by the train dispatcher to the operator at Helena, 76.4 miles south of Macon, and was repeated by the operator. This order read as follows:

No 27 twenty seven run 1 one hour 30 thirty mins  
late Helena to Baxley.

Baxley is 40.9 miles south of Helena. According to the record in the dispatcher's train-order book, this train order was issued on Form 31 and was addressed to C & E No. 27, No. 67, and No. 66 Care No. 7. The record indicates that it was repeated at 1:47 p. m., signed by the conductor of No. 67 and made complete at 1:57 p. m., and signed by the conductor of No. 27 and made complete at 3:25 p. m. The order as received by the operator was on Form 19 and was addressed to C & E No. 26, No. 67, and No. 66 Care Engr No. 7. It was made complete at 1:57 p. m. It bore no signature other than that of the operator.



No. 27, a south-bound first-class passenger train, consisted of Diesel-electric unit 4132, one baggage-mail car, one combination baggage-coach, one coach, and one box express car, in the order named. At Macon the crew received copies of train order No. 45 reading in part as follows:

\* \* \*

No 27 twenty seven Eng 4132 run 1 one hour 10 ten mins late Stratton to Cochran 1 one hour late Cochran to Helena 45 forty five mins late Helena to Jesup.

Stratton, Cochran, and Jesup are located, respectively, 2.8 miles, 38.7 miles, and 147.3 miles south of Macon. This train departed from Macon at 1:23 p. m., 1 hour 33 minutes late. The rear car was set off at Cochran. The train departed from Helena between 3.17 p. m. and 3.27 p. m., according to the statements of the surviving members of the crew. At 3 27 p. m. the train was 1 hour 20 minutes late at that station. Copies of train order No. 51 were not delivered to the crew. The train departed from Lumber City, 17.7 miles south of Helena and the last siding north of the point of accident, about 3:45 p. m., 58 minutes late, and while moving at an estimated speed of from 45 to 50 miles per hour it collided with No. 66 at a point 4.7 miles south of Lumber City and 2.6 miles north of the station at Hazlehurst.

No. 66, a north-bound third-class freight train, originated at Jesup and departed from that point at 9:15 a. m., 3 hours 50 minutes late. At Odum, 9.6 miles north of Jesup, the crew received copies of train order No. 45. This train met No. 7, a south-bound first-class train, at Baxley, 30.0 miles north of Jesup, and copies of train order No. 51 were delivered to the crew at this point by the engineer of No. 7. On Saturdays there is no open office at Baxley or at any point between Baxley and Helena. After leaving Baxley the crew of No. 66 performed switching service at Hazlehurst, and when the train was assembled at this point it consisted of Diesel-electric unit 2106, eight cars, and a cabooco. The train departed from Hazlehurst about 3:45 p. m., 3 hours 40 minutes late, and while moving at an estimated speed of from 40 to 45 miles per hour it collided with No. 27.

Both locomotives, the front truck of the first car of No. 27, and the first six cars of No. 66 were derailed and stopped within a distance of about 150 feet. The locomotive of No. 27 stopped on its right side, about 7 feet west of the track and parallel to it, with the front end about 80 feet south of the point of accident. The first car stopped

upright and in line with the track. The locomotive and the first car were destroyed, the second car was considerably damaged, and the third car was somewhat damaged. The locomotive of No. 66 stopped on its left side with the front end on top of the front end of the locomotive of No. 27. The rear end was on the track structure. The derailed cars stopped in various positions on or near the track. The locomotive and the first, second, and sixth cars were destroyed, the third and fourth cars were badly damaged, and the fifth car was somewhat damaged.

The engineer and the fireman of No. 27, and the engineer, the conductor, and the swing brakeman of No. 66 were killed. The conductor, the train baggageman, and the flagman of No. 27, the fireman, the front brakeman, and the flagman of No. 66, and five train-service employees not on duty who were on No. 27 were injured.

The weather was clear at the time of the accident, which occurred about 3:50 p. m.

### Discussion

According to the station record of train movements at Helena, No. 26, a north-bound first-class train, arrived at 1.07 p. m. and departed at 1.42 p. m.; No. 7 arrived at 1:40 p. m. and departed at 1:50 p. m.; No. 67, a south-bound third-class train, arrived at 11:40 a. m. and departed at 2.05 p. m.; and No. 27 arrived at 3:20 p. m. and departed at 3.38 p. m.

The operator at Helena said that as No. 7 approached the station he changed the indication of the train-order signal from Stop to Proceed. After the train stopped, the operator loaded and unloaded mail at the mail car and then returned to the station. At this time the train dispatcher was calling him. When he answered, the dispatcher informed him that he wished to send a train order to No. 66 in care of the engineer of No. 7. The dispatcher then transmitted order No. 51. The operator said afterward that he could not remember his exact conversation with the dispatcher before the order was transmitted and that he was not certain of the details of the transmission and repetition of the order. He wrote the order on Form 19 and received it as being addressed to C & E No. 26, No. 67, and No. 66 care Engr. No.

7. At this time the crew of No. 26 had received copies of a clearance and the train had departed, or was about to depart, from the station. After the order was made complete the operator delivered two copies to the conductor of No. 7. He then cleared No. 67 with the order and gave two copies to the conductor of that train. He said that the dispatcher asked him for the name of the conductor, but he did not tell the dispatcher that the conductor had signed the order. The operator said he told the dispatcher that he would be unable to deliver the order to No. 26, and he said the dispatcher replied that the crew had an order fixing a meeting point with No. 27 and would not need order No. 51. The operator then filed the remaining copies of order No. 51. As No. 27 approached Helena the operator changed the indication of the train-order signal from Stop to Proceed, and after the train stopped he unloaded mail from the mail car. He said that when he returned to the office the train dispatcher asked him if he did not have Form 31 train order No. 51 for No. 27. He understood from this that the order should be on Form 31 and addressed to C & E No. 27. At this time the conductor of No. 27 was standing on the platform near the window of the office, and the operator said he called to the conductor and told him to wait a few minutes and he, the operator, would have a train order for him. The operator said the conductor replied that if the dispatcher wished to give him a train order he should have issued it before the train arrived at Helena and that he would not wait for an order to be issued. The operator thought that the conductor would not leave without the order, and he gave the train dispatcher the conductor's signature to order No. 51. He did not place the train-order signal in Stop position. He began to copy the order on a Form 31, but No. 27 departed from the station before he had finished. The operator said that he had told the conductor the contents of the order, and when the train departed without the order he assumed that the crew must have received copies before reaching Helena. He did not tell the train dispatcher that the order was not delivered. He said that the times of arrival and departure of Nos. 7 and 27 were entered on the station record of train movements from memory and that these times may not have been accurate. The operator was employed as a student in 1952 and worked his first day as an operator on February 24, 1953. He had been assigned as agent-operator-leverman at Helena since September 8, 1955.

The train dispatcher said that he instructed the operator to copy train order No. 51 on Form 31. He detected no error in the repetition of the order, and he said that after it was repeated he instructed the operator to endorse two copies "complete" and give them to the conductor of No. 7 without obtaining the signature of the engineer. He said that he then asked the operator for the signature of the conductor of No. 67 to the order and that the operator gave him the signature. He then made the order complete to that train. He said the operator told him that he would be unable to deliver the order to the crew of No. 26, but it did not occur to him that the operator might have the order addressed to that train. He assumed the operator thought that since No. 26 had not met No. 27 the crew should have copies of any order requiring No. 27 to run late. He told the operator that a meeting point had been fixed between No. 26 and No. 27 and that No. 26 did not need order No. 51. This dispatcher went off duty at 2 p. m. The train dispatcher who relieved him said that he called the operator at Helena at the time he thought No. 27 should be approaching that point. When the operator answered he told him that No. 27 was then at the station. The dispatcher instructed the operator to obtain the conductor's signature to order No. 51, and after some hesitation the operator gave him the signature and he made the order complete. Until after the accident occurred the dispatcher was not aware that the crew of No. 27 had not received copies of the order.

A brakeman who was listening on the train dispatcher's telephone at Cochran said that he heard the dispatcher issue the train order requiring No. 27 to run 1 hour 30 minutes late Helena to Baxley. He said that he did not hear the number of the order or the complete address, but he did hear the dispatcher address the order to C & E No. 26 and No. 67. He said that the dispatcher first instructed the operator to copy the order on Form 31 and then changed those instructions and directed the operator to copy it on Form 19. He did not hear the operator's repetition of the order. He said that after the order was issued he heard the operator questioning the dispatcher regarding the delivery of the order to the crew of No. 26.

The conductor and the firemen of No. 27 said that the train-order signal at Helena indicated Proceed when their train arrived at that station. The conductor said that while the train was standing at the station he met the operator on the platform. He said the operator asked

him whether he had a train order requiring the train to run 1 hour 30 minutes late and he replied that he did not. He said that the operator then entered the station and that there was no more conversation concerning the train order. The flagman said that when the operator entered the station he was standing near the office window. He said that after entering the office the operator asked the conductor whether he had the train order requiring the train to run 1 hour 30 minutes late. The flagman said that the conductor replied that he did not. He said that the operator then told the conductor that the dispatcher wanted to give the order to him. The flagman said that the conductor replied that he did not want the order and that if the dispatcher wanted him to have it he should have issued it earlier. The flagman said that he was somewhat concerned when the train departed without the train order, but he then decided that the dispatcher could not have issued an order restricting the train without obtaining the signature of the conductor and that there was no hazard involved.

As No. 27 was approaching the point where the accident occurred the enginemen were on the locomotive. The members of the train crew were in the cars of the train. The surviving employees estimated that the speed was between 45 and 50 miles per hour. These employees said that there was an application of the brakes before the collision occurred, but the collision occurred almost immediately afterward and before the speed of the train was materially reduced.

As No. 66 was approaching the point where the accident occurred the enginemen, the conductor, the front brakeman, and the swing brakeman were in the control compartment of the locomotive. The flagman was in the caboose. Under the provisions of train order No. 51, No. 27 was due to leave Lumber City at 4 17 p. m. The surviving members of the crew of No. 66 said that they intended to meet No. 27 at that point. The locomotives of both No. 27 and No. 66 were equipped with radio equipment. The fireman of No. 66 said that as his train was closely approaching the point where the accident occurred a person who he thought was the fireman of No. 27 called on the radio and inquired as to his location. As this conversation was taking place the locomotive of No. 66 struck two torpedoes which had been placed by the flagman of a south-bound freight train. When the torpedoes were exploded the engineer initiated a service application of the brakes. Almost immediately

afterward the fireman and the front brakeman saw No. 27 approaching. They called a warning, and the engineer then made an emergency application of the brakes. The collision occurred before the speed of the train had been materially reduced.

Because of curvature of the track and the west wall of the cut in which the accident occurred, the range of vision between opposing movements in the immediate vicinity of the point of accident is materially restricted. After the accident occurred it was found that a locomotive approaching the point of accident from either direction is not visible from the control compartment of an opposing locomotive until the locomotives reach points 942 feet apart.

The operator and the train dispatcher were not in agreement as to the conversations which took place concerning the issuance and delivery of train order No. 51, but the statements of these employees indicate that, in addition to the error in the address, there were a number of other irregularities in the handling of this order. The rules of this carrier provide that an operator must not repeat a train order for a train which has been cleared or of which the engine has passed his train-order signal until he has obtained the signatures of the conductor and the engineman to the order. A Form 31 order must be signed by the conductors and others addressed (except enginemen), and the rules prescribe the manner in which the operator will transmit the signatures to the train dispatcher and the order will be made complete. When a Form 31 train order is to be delivered to a train at a point not a train-order office, the rules provide that "complete" will be given upon the signature of the person by whom the order is to be delivered. If these rules had been observed, the facts that the order as received by the operator was addressed to No. 26 instead of No. 27 and that it was written on Form 19 would have been detected.

#### Cause

This accident was caused by the improper handling of a train order.

Dated at Washington, D. C., this seventeenth day of November, 1955.

By the Commission, Commissioner Clarke.

(SEAL)

HAROLD D. MCCOY,

Secretary.