

**INVESTIGATION 800.**

**DECEMBER 23, 1915.**

**IN RE INVESTIGATION OF AN ACCIDENT WHICH OCCURRED ON  
THE CENTRAL OF GEORGIA RAILWAY NEAR MUSCOGEE, GA.,  
ON NOVEMBER 22, 1915.**

On November 22, 1915, there was a head-end collision between a passenger train and a circus train running as an extra, on the Central of Georgia Railway, near Muscogee, Ga., which resulted in the death of 7 circus employees and the injury of 27 circus employees, 3 passengers and 4 employees of the railroad. After investigation of this accident the Chief of the Division of Safety submits the following report:

Between Columbus and Macon, Ga., trains are operated over the Columbus district from Columbus to Fort Valley, and then over the Albany district from Fort Valley to Macon. The Columbus district is a double track line from Columbus to Muscogee, a distance of 2.5 miles, beyond which it is single-track. The accident occurred on the single-track portion of the district, at a point about 3-1/2 miles east of the end of the double track. No block signal system is in use, trains being operated by time-table and train orders, which are transmitted by telephone. Following movements are spaced 10 minutes apart. There is no telegraph station or register at Muscogee and the normal position of the switch at the end of the double track is for eastbound trains. Approaching the scene of the accident from the east there is 6,000 feet of tangent track, followed by a curve of 2 degrees to the left for a distance of 1,100 feet. The track is then tangent for a distance of about 3,500 feet. The collision occurred at a point about 115 feet east of the eastern end of the curve. The

grade is slightly descending for eastbound trains. The weather was clear.

Westbound extra 1716 consisted of 16 flat cars, carrying the wagons and other equipment of the circus, 3 stock cars and 9 sleeping cars, in the order named, hauled by locomotive 1716, and was in charge of Conductor Conley and Engineman Bittick. It left Macon at 7:40 a.m., and at Reynolds, the crew received a copy of train order No. 28, reading as follows:

"No. 2, engine 1610, will wait at Muscogee until one thirty-five 1:35 p.m. for No. 37, engine 1759 and extra 1716."

Extra 1716 left Reynolds at 11:20 a.m., passed Upatoi, the last open telegraph office, 10.7 miles from the point of collision, at 1:07 p.m., and at about 1:35 p.m. collided with eastbound passenger train No. 2 while running at a speed estimated to have been about 30 miles per hour.

Eastbound passenger train No. 2 consisted of 1 combination mail, baggage and express car and 2 coaches, hauled by locomotive 1610, and was in charge of Conductor Reichert and Engineman Pickling. At Columbus, Conductor Reichert received train order No. 28, reading as follows:

"No. 2, engine 1610, will wait at Muscogee until one thirty-five 1:35 p.m. for No. 37 and extra 1716."

Conductor Reichert also received a message reading as follows:

"No. 37 has engine No. 1759."

Train No. 2 left Columbus at 1:12 p.m., came to a stop at Muscogee and then proceeded eastward without waiting for extra 1716, colliding with the extra while running at a speed estimated to have been about 30 miles per hour.

As a result of the collision both locomotives were badly damaged. The first 9 cars of the extra were demolished and caught fire, being entirely consumed. All of the dead and injured were riding on these cars.

Baggage Master Frierson, of train No. 3, stated that before boarding the train at Columbus he read the order to wait at Muscogee for train No. 37 and extra 1716. Train No. 3 passed train No. 37 on the double-track section between Columbus and Muscogee. When the engineman sounded the station whistle for Muscogee he sounded three blasts on the air whistle signal, which signal was acknowledged by the engineman, who brought the train to a stop at Muscogee. Baggage Master Frierson stated that he then held up two fingers to the engineman and pulled down one of them, indicating to the engineman that there had been two trains to meet and that only one of the two had passed. Then engineman then started to pull out of Muscogee, at the same time saying that he had a message. Baggage Master Frierson then sounded the air whistle again and the engineman brought the train to a stop and then told him that he had a message and started the train on its way. Baggage Master Frierson stated that he then went back into the rear car, gave the orders to the conductor and told him that extra 1716 had not been met and that the engineman had said he had a message. The conductor told him that the engineman knew his business. Baggage Master Frierson then thought that he might have been mistaken and returned to the baggage car.

Engineman Fickling, of train No. 2, stated that when he went to the telegraph office at Columbus to check the train register and to register out on train No. 2, he asked the operator if

there were any orders and was told that there were. He then walked around the counter and looked at train order No. 28, and stated that as he remembered, the order read as follows:

"Train No. 2, engine 1810, will wait at Muscogee Junction until 1:25 p.m. for train No. 27, engine 1716."

He then told the operator that he would send the conductor to sign for the order. He went to his locomotive and after <sup>he</sup> had been there several minutes the train porter brought the order to him, together with a clearance and a message. He read the order to his fireman, who was on the running board wiping the locomotive, and stated that he read it at this time the same as he had read it in the telegraph office. He stated that he also read the message, which stated that locomotive 1759 was on train No. 37. Before his train reached Muscogee, locomotive 1759, hauling train No. 37, was passed on the double-track section. He stated that he thought he had passed the only train for which he was required to wait at Muscogee, and said that if there were two train numbers on the order, with the locomotive number omitted for train No. 37, he was misled and overlooked one train. He stated that after sounding the station whistle at Muscogee he received three blasts on the air whistle, the signal to stop at the next station, and he thought that there were passengers to be discharged, Muscogee being a flag stop for train No. 2. After bringing the train to a stop, the fireman told him the baggage master had an order and he crossed over to the fireman's side of the locomotive and saw the baggage master standing in the door of the baggage car holding in his hand what appeared to be a train order. He did not see him hold up his

fingers. There were then sounded two blasts on the air whistle signal, the signal to proceed. He then started the train, no further signal being sounded on the air whistle. When he saw extra 1716, he applied the air brakes in emergency, reversed the locomotive and jumped. He thought the speed of his train was about 30 miles per hour when he first saw extra 1716. Engineman Fickling further stated that he did not stop twice at Muscogee and that no stop signals were given to anyone in the train. If the baggage master said anything to him at Muscogee he did not hear him. He stated, however, that he thought that while the baggage master was standing in the door of the baggage car at Muscogee he told the baggage master that he had a message. He also stated that it was common practice for dispatchers to send message correcting a train order when the number of the locomotive had been given incorrectly, and that the rule requiring train orders to be delivered to the engineman personally by the conductor, was not observed when train order No. 1716 was given to him, and that in his opinion it was not observed in the case of any crew on the road and that everyone connected with the road knew that it was not being observed.

Engineman Fickling stated that when his attention was called to the order by the baggage master, he did not look at his own copy of the order to see if it was possible that he had made an error, as he was positive that the train hauled by locomotive 1759 was the only train he had to meet. He said that if the baggage master knew that there were two trains for which he had to wait at Muscogee, he would certainly have come forward to the loco-

motive with the order and have told him that there were two trains for which to wait, instead of one train.

Fireman Allison stated that he was working around the locomotive when the train porter brought the orders to Engineman Fickling and the latter called to him that he had an order to wait at Muscogee until 1:35 p.m. for train No. 37, locomotive 1716, and that he also had a message that locomotive 1759 was hauling train No. 37, instead of locomotive 1716. Fireman Allison also stated that immediately after the engineman sounded the station whistle approaching Muscogee the air whistle signal was sounded twice and he thought there were passengers to be discharged at Muscogee. The train was brought to a stop and remained there about one and one-half minutes. While the train was standing there, he looked back for a signal and saw the baggage master standing in the door of the baggage car holding up two fingers and saying something which he thought indicated that there were two sections of train No. 37 to be met. He then called to Engineman Fickling and asked him if he had any orders concerning second No. 37, and he said that he had not. Fireman Allison further stated that while standing at Muscogee, someone was standing on the engineman's side of the locomotive talking to him, and he heard the engineman say that they had already met train No. 37, locomotive 1759. Immediately after this the air whistle signal was sounded twice and the train proceeded. Approaching the point of accident, Fireman Allison was putting in a fire and on looking up saw the engineman pulling on the reverse lever and at once got down on the steps, jumping just before the collision occurred. He estimated the speed to have been

about 35 miles per hour at the time the brakes were applied and he thought it had been reduced to about 30 miles per hour when the collision occurred.

Conductor Reichert stated that at Columbus, Engineman Fickling told him there was an order at the telegraph office requiring them to wait at Muscogee until 1:35 p.m., and he supposed that the engineman had read it. He then went to the telegraph office and received the order to wait for the two trains, together with a message stating that locomotive 1750 was on train No. 37, and a clearance. He sent the engineman's copy of the order to him by the train porter and gave his own copy to the baggage master. When the baggage master sounded the air whistle signal for the engineman to stop at Muscogee, he supposed it was on account of extra 1716. He stated that the baggage master sounded the air whistle signal at two different times, but that he was in the rear of the train and thought that extra 1716 had gone, stating that he did not go out of the car to see what was happening. He stated that he met train No. 37 on the double-track section, but when asked how he knew it was train No. 37, he replied that he did not know that it was that particular train, but only that a train had passed. He further stated that no proceed signal was sounded leaving Muscogee and that it was customary for him to give a hand signal to the baggage master and for the latter to then sound the air whistle signal for the engineman to proceed. Conductor Reichert further stated that when the train left Muscogee, the baggage master came back through the train and told him that he thought there was another train coming and that he did not think the engineman understood the order. Conductor Reichert stated that he did not, however, signal

the engineman to stop and stated that he did not know why he did not do so. He also stated that he did not make any reply to the baggage master, but that he was satisfied that the extra had been met, on account of the engineman starting the train on its way. He then went forward into the second car of the train and was sitting in a rear seat in that car when the accident occurred. He stated that the rules required him to deliver a train order Form 31 personally to the engineman and to have the engineman read the order to him, and he admitted that if the rules had been observed the accident probably would have been averted. He supposed, however, that the engineman understood the order correctly, as he had sent a copy of it to him, together with a copy of the clearance. He further stated that sometimes he delivered orders personally to the engineman and sometimes gave them to the porter to be carried to the engineman.

Train Porter Lockett stated that he was standing in the train shed at Columbus when the conductor gave him a train order and a message and instructed him to take them to the engineman. He gave the order and message to the engineman and the latter called to the fireman that he had an order to wait until 1:30 p.m. for train No. 37, engine 1716, and a message that locomotive 1750 was hauling the train instead of locomotive 1716. Train Porter Lockett further stated that at Mascogee, three blasts were sounded on the air whistle signal, by whom he did not know, and the train stopped for three or four minutes. After leaving Mascogee, he saw the baggage master come back through the train, but did not say anything to him.



Train Porter Lee stated that before leaving Columbus, Conductor Reichert told him that he had an order to wait at Muscogee until 1:35 p.m. for train No. 37 and extra 1714. The train stopped at Muscogee when the baggage master sounded the air whistle signal, and then started ahead and a stop signal was again given on the air whistle. He thought the enginemen started ahead again without any signal to do so having been given. He stated that he knew there were two trains to be met and had intended speaking about it to the conductor, but did not do so when he saw the baggage master coming back through the train to talk with the conductor.

Train Dispatcher Mercer stated that in train order No. 28, as first issued by him, the number of the locomotive handling train No. 37 was omitted. This order was issued simultaneously to the operators at Columbus and Reynolds. The operator at Columbus called his attention to the fact that the number of the locomotive was omitted. The operator at Reynolds told him that he had sufficient room on the order, as written by him, to insert the number of the locomotive and was directed to do so. The dispatcher stated that he then gave the operator at Columbus a message to the crew of train No. 2, this message stating that locomotive 1758 was hauling train No. 37. Dispatcher Mercer further states that after satisfying himself that the operator at Columbus had two trains mentioned in the wait order, it did not occur to him that it would not be safe, and he then sent the message that locomotive 1758 was hauling train No. 37. He stated that he had no instructions authorizing him to violate rule No. 802, which reads as follows:

**"Each train order must be given in the same words to all persons or trains addressed."**

He stated, however, that at no time did it occur to him that the order was not entirely safe, the message merely being information to the crew of train No. 2, that the locomotive number of train No. 37 had been omitted on the order held by them.

Operator Wilkerson, at Columbus, stated that when Conductor Reichert came into the office he signed for order No. 28 and then read it back to him. He then asked the conductor if he noticed anything unusual about it and the conductor said that he did not. Operator Wilkerson then called his attention to the fact that the number of the locomotive on train No. 37 had been omitted and gave him the message saying that locomotive 1759 was hauling train No. 37. He further stated that Conductor Reichert twice read the order to him and each time distinctly read it as requiring his train to wait at Muscogee for train No. 37 and extra 1716.

This accident was caused by the failure of train No. 2 to wait at Muscogee until 1:35 p.m. for extra 1716, for which Conductor Reichert and Engineman Fickling are responsible.

The statements of the employees involved indicate that the baggage master called the attention of both Conductor Reichert and Engineman Fickling to the fact that order No. 28 had not been fulfilled, and that neither of them paid any attention whatever to him, Conductor Reichert apparently leaving with the engineman the entire responsibility for the safe movement of the train, while the engineman was so certain that he had not made a mistake that he even did not look at his copy of the order after the baggage master had called his attention to it.

Conductor Reichert had been employed as a conductor since 1886 and had a clear record. Engineman Fickling entered the service as a fireman in 1881 and was promoted to engineman in 1884. His record was also clear. The baggage master and fireman have been employed in train service for 10 and 16 years, respectively, and both had good records.

While the direct cause of this accident was the failure of the crew of train No. 2 to wait at Muscogee for extra 1716, it is believed that had Train Dispatcher Mercer issued train order No. 36 to the crew of train No. 2, in the same wording which it was issued to the crew of extra 1716, as required by rule No. 202, it is probable that this accident would not have occurred.