

INTERSTATE ~~COMMERCE~~ COMMISSION

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF THE BUREAU OF SAFETY IN RE
INVESTIGATION OF AN ACCIDENT WHICH OCCURRED ON
THE CENTRAL OF GEORGIA RAILWAY NEAR ZELLOBEE,
GA , ON MARCH 7, 1930

March 28, 1930

To the Commission:

On March 7, 1930, there was a rear-end collision between two passenger trains on the Central of Georgia Railway near Zellobee, Ga , which resulted in the death of 1 employee, and the injury of 53 passengers, 5 employees, and 4 Pullman porters

Location and method of operation

This accident occurred on the Americus District of the Columbus Division, which extends between Americus and Columbus, Ga , a distance of 63 7 miles, and is a single-track line over which trains are operated by timetable and train orders, no block-signal system being in use. Trains in the same direction are required to keep at least 10 minutes apart, except in closing up at stations. The accident occurred at a point approximately 3,805 feet west of Zellobee, approaching this point from the east, the track is tangent for a distance of 3,440 feet, followed by a 40° curve to the left 756 3 feet in length and then tangent track for a distance of 1,902 7 feet, the accident occurring on this latter tangent at a point 1,048 7 feet from its eastern end. The grade for west-bound trains is practically level for about 4,000 feet.

Due to the curve and trees on the left side of the track, the range of vision for an engine crew approaching the point of accident from the east is restricted on the left side to 1,435 feet and on the right side to 1,018 feet

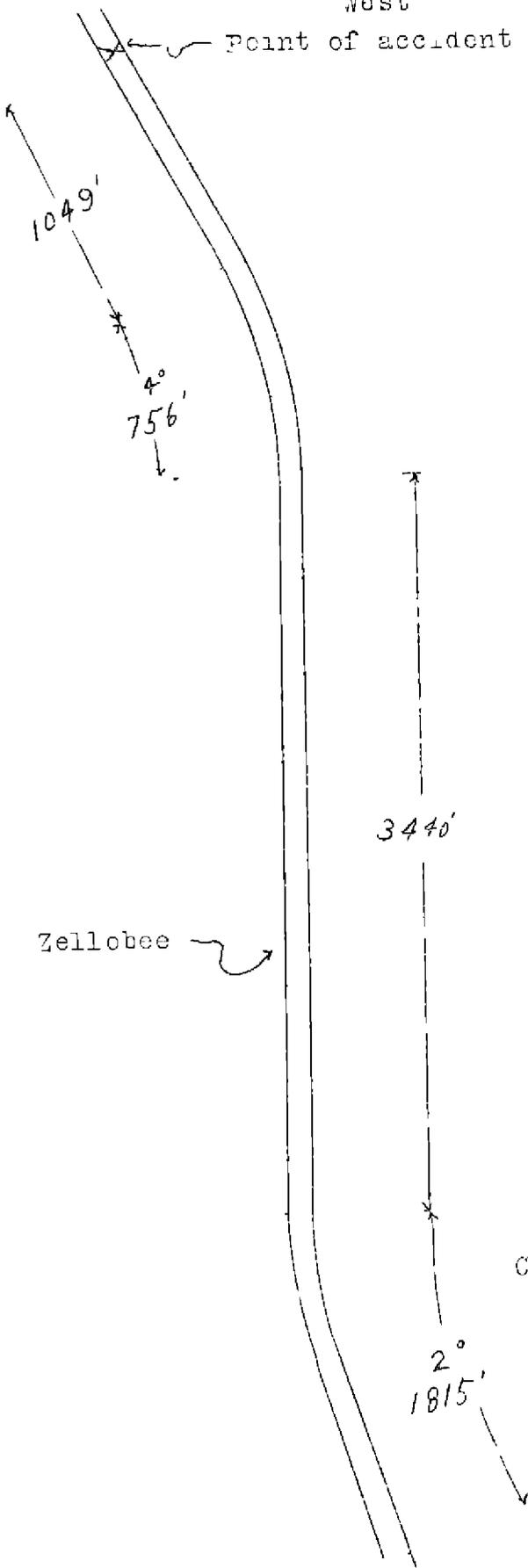
It was raining and very dark at the time of the accident, which occurred about 5.05 a m.

Description

The trains involved were two sections of train No. 9, known as the Seminole Limited, and during the winter tourist and perishable fruit and vegetable season, which obtained at the time of the accident, the express and passenger traffic handled by this train is very heavy, and two sections are made up at Albany, Ga , one consisting mostly of passenger cars, and the other of through express cars. Ordinarily the express section is run

West

Point of accident



Zellobee

No. 1626
Central of Georgia Ry.,
Zellobee, Ga.
March 7, 1930

East

first from Albany, due to its not having any stops to make, while the passenger section does the usual station work at a number of points en route, on this particular date, however, the express section was being operated as the second section

Westbound passenger train first No 9 consisted of two express cars, one baggage car, two coaches, seven Pullman sleeping cars, and one Pullman observation car, all of steel construction, hauled by engine 472, and was in charge of Conductor Grider and Engineman Temple. This train departed from Americus, 36 4 miles east of Zellobee, at 4 08 a. m., 28 minutes late, departed from Buena Vista, 8 2 miles east of Zellobee, at 4 52 a. m., 30 minutes late, was flagged a short distance beyond Zellobee, and was traveling at a speed estimated to have been about 10 miles per hour when it was struck by train second No 9.

Westbound passenger train second No. 9 consisted of seven express cars, of steel-underframe construction, and one coach, of wooden construction, hauled by engine 478, and was in charge of Conductor Cutcliff and Engineman Massey. This train departed from Americus at 4 18 a. m., 10 minutes after the departure of train first No 9 passed Buena Vista about 4 55 a. m., three minutes after the departure of the first section, and was traveling at a speed variously estimated to have been between 25 and 45 miles per hour when it collided with the first section

The rear end of the observation car of train first No 9 was demolished and the drawbar in the rear end of the fifth car was broken, parting the train, while all the cars sustained minor damage. Engine 478, of train second No 9, sustained considerable damage, but was only partly derailed. The tender telescoped the first car a distance of 30 feet, practically demolishing the car and considerably damaging the tender. The employee killed was the flagman of train first No. 9, while those injured were the fireman, conductor, brakeman, and four Pullman porters, of train first No 9, and the engineman and fireman of train second No. 9.

Summary of evidence

Section Foreman Evans, who has charge of the section on which the accident occurred, stated that on account of excessive rains during the night, he decided to patrol his section, as the track about 1 mile west of Zellobee had previously given trouble during wet weather. At about 4 a.m., January 7, he called the dispatcher from Elmview, his headquarters, located about 5 miles east of Zellobee, obtained a lineup of trains, and then proceeded westward on his motor car, accompanied by three section men. While rounding the curve west of Zellobee, he saw

the reflection of the headlight of train first No 9, threw off a lighted fusee, and a short distance farther west he removed the motor car from the track. The engine-man of train first No. 9 acknowledged the fusee with two short blasts of the whistle and was about to stop when he gave a signal with his white lantern for the engine-man to come ahead, and he thought the train was traveling at a speed between 6 and 10 miles per hour when the collision occurred. The section foreman had not seen or heard the second section as it approached, nor had he seen any fuses displayed at the rear end of the first section.

Engineman Temple, of train first No 9, stated that on rounding the curve west of Zellobee he saw a burning fusee. He was operating his train at a speed between 45 and 50 miles per hour and immediately reduced speed, intending to pick up the fusee, and had reduced to 3 or 4 miles per hour and had nearly reached the fusee, when he received a signal from the section foreman to come ahead, and he thought he had attained a speed of 10 miles per hour when the collision occurred. Engineman Temple stated that train second No 9 was standing at Americus when he left that point; he made two stops en route, consuming about two minutes at each place, Ellaville and Buena Vista. He further stated that he sounded the usual whistle signal acknowledging the fusee, but he did not sound the signal for the flagman to go out, as about the time he intended to stop, the section foreman signaled him to proceed. The statements of Fireman Stovall brought out nothing additional of importance, except that he did not think the speed of their train had been reduced below 7 or 8 miles per hour at the time they were flagged by the section foreman.

Conductor Grider, of train first No 9, stated that he was in the fifth car from the rear at the time his train was flagged, and as his train slowed down he went to the rear platform of that car and started to look ahead, and it was just about at that time that the collision occurred. He was in the rear of the observation car when they stopped at Ellaville, and saw the flagman place a lighted fusee on the platform, but he did not see the flagman throw it off on the track, as he went forward through the train before leaving the station. When the stop was made at Buena Vista, he was in the second car from the rear, adjusting some matters pertaining to properly locating some passengers in the Pullman cars, and did not know what protection was afforded his train. Conductor Grider said he had told the flagman on several occasions that when a section was following their own train he was to drop fuses and to note the time he dropped them, in order to make sure that he would keep the trains properly spaced, and in cases of this kind he had ridden in the observation car with the flagman and found that the flagman

carried out his instructions; he had also cautioned the flagman on the day of the accident, before they left Albany. Flagman White had been working with him since January 2, and he considered him to be a careful man, and had never had any occasion to criticize his flagging. Conductor Grider thought the speed of their train had been reduced to 5 or 6 miles per hour, but had increased to about 8 miles per hour at the time of the accident.

Brakeman Seaborn was riding in the first coach at the time of the accident and did not know if any fuses had been thrown off en route. He stated, however, that at Albany he filled the signal case with fuses and torpedoes, and Flagman White asked for five fuses in addition to what were in the signal case, as he felt uneasy.

Porter Ivey, who was the Pullman porter on the observation car, the rear car in train first No. 9, stated that he had been riding in the smoker and went to the observation end of the car just before the accident occurred, he saw the flagman go out on the platform and wave his white lantern just before the collision occurred, but he saw no fuses burning at any time after leaving Americus. He also stated that he did not see the headlight of the approaching train.

Engineman Massey, of train second No. 9, stated that he saw nothing of the first section at any time after leaving Americus until just before the accident occurred, and that at no place did he see a fuse. He was on the lookout for fuses at Ellaville and Buena Vista, flag stops for the first section, and reduced the speed of his train to about 20 miles per hour at Ellaville and between 35 and 40 miles per hour at Buena Vista. He was operating his train at about the usual speed of 50 miles per hour when he saw the rear end of train first No. 9 apparently about five car-lengths distant. The flagman was standing on the platform waving a white lantern very slowly - he appeared to be paralyzed and made no attempt to leave the car. Engineman Massey immediately applied the air brakes in emergency but did not think the speed had been reduced below 40 or 45 miles per hour before the accident occurred. He stated that the air brakes worked properly and had the flagman displayed a fuse he would have seen its reflection for a considerable distance around the curve and would have been able to stop his train before the collision occurred. The headlight on his own engine was burning brightly. Engineman Massey further stated that Flagman White came to him at Americus and told him to look out for their train and if he, the flagman, saw the second section at Zellobee he would throw off a fuse on the tangent track. The statements of Fireman Wilson, who had been working on the fire until he felt the engine round the curve to the left, practically corroborated those of Engineman Massey, but he added that when he saw the flagman of the

first section waving the white lantern it appeared to him that he also had a red light in his other hand, but he saw no fusees at any time.

Conductor Cutcliff, of train second No. 9, stated that he did not know why his section did not leave first, as was the usual practice, since the train was ready with the exception of the air-brake inspection, which took about three minutes. His statements as to the operation of the train from Americus to the point of accident brought out nothing additional to those of the engineman and fireman. He stated that it had been his custom when his train was the first section to require fusees to be thrown off at flag stops, and occasionally his train had been flagged when it was running as the second section.

Flagman Ferrell, of train second No. 9, stated that it was the practice on the first section, when making flag stops, for the flagman to throw off a fusee before the train reached the station.

Conductor Jennett, of train No. 54, which was waiting at Putnar, 15.2 miles east of Zellobee, for trains first and second No. 9, stated that he was on the rear platform of his caboose when both sections passed, the first section at 4:42 a. m. and the second section at 4:51 a. m., nine minutes apart. He later corrected this statement, however, and said that he was sure the first section passed at 4:42 a. m., but might have misread his watch when the second section passed. Both trains were traveling about the usual schedule speed, and he considered them to be far enough apart so that it was not necessary for him to space them. On occasions, when two sections were too close together, he had spaced them. Engineman Smith, of train No. 54, was busy with some work on his engine when the second section passed, and did not look at his watch at that time, although it was his impression there was ample time between them.

Conclusions

This accident was caused by the failure of Flagman White, of train first No. 9, properly to protect the rear of his train.

Under the rules, 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, lighted fusees must be thrown off at proper intervals. Flagman White was seen waving a white lantern just before the accident occurred, but at no time did he display a fusee. It is probable that not more than three minutes were consumed from the time the air-brake application was made, when flagged by the

section foreman, to the time of the collision. When this train was flagged, however, its rear end was still on the tangent track, where a fusee could have been seen for a considerable distance, and it is believed that if Flagman White had been alert and thrown off a fusee during that time, it would no doubt have been seen by the engineman of the approaching train in time to have averted the accident. Flagman White was familiar with the operation of the two sections of this train, was aware that the only means of spacing them was by means of fusees, and must have known that the second section^{probably} would close up on the first section, since the second section would have no stops en route. Under these circumstances, no explanation can be advanced for his failure to throw off a fusee as soon as the speed of his train was reduced, nor can any explanation be advanced for his failure to take any steps toward saving his own life, for at the low rate of speed at which his train was moving, it would have been a simple matter for him to have gotten off just before the accident occurred.

There are no open telegraph stations between 5 p. m. and 8 a. m. on this entire district, a distance of 63.7 miles, and under such circumstances, the spacing of trains must be accomplished by the use of fusees. The fusees used are of the 10-minute type and if dropped off at proper intervals, there is no reason why accidents of this character cannot be prevented. The traffic density on this line is not heavy, and at night, when the telegraph offices are closed, there are only one passenger and one freight train in each direction. The operation of the express car section as the first section, however, would provide an added factor of safety.

All of the employees involved were experienced men, and at the time of the accident none of them had been on duty in violation of any of the provisions of the hours of service law.

Respectfully submitted,

W. P. BORLAND,

Director.