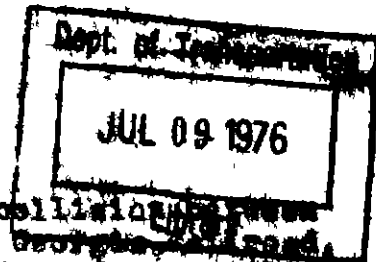


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U.S. Interstate Commerce Commission
✓ Railroad Accident Investigation Report No. 27
no. 51-100. 81
April 10, 1912.

IN RE INVESTIGATION OF ACCIDENT ON THE
GEORGIA RAILROAD, NEAR RUTLEDGE, GA.,
March 8, 1912.



On March 8, 1912, there was a head-end collision between a passenger train and a freight train on the Georgia Railroad, about three and one-half miles west of Rutledge, Ga., resulting in the death of four passengers, and the engineer of the passenger train, the injury of one passenger, three mail clerks, one express messenger, and four employees.

This accident was reported by telegraph by the Georgia Railroad Company on the date of the accident, and after investigation the Chief Inspector of Safety Appliances reports as follows:

This accident was caused by the failure of the conductor and engineer of the freight train to keep their train on the siding at Rutledge, where it should have remained until the arrival of the passenger train, which was a superior train both by class and direction.

The passenger train, known as train No. 4, in charge of Conductor Cosby, consisted of one express car, one mail and baggage car, two day coaches, and two Pullman sleepers, all of wooden construction. It was hauled by Georgia Railroad engine No. 64, in charge of Engineer Vaughn. This train is scheduled to leave Atlanta for Augusta, Ga., at 12:10 A. M. On the morning of the accident it left Atlanta on time, and arrived at Social Circle, Ga., 52 miles east of Atlanta, at 2:03 A. M., three minutes late. It left Social Circle at 2:08 A. M., and six minutes later, at 2:14 A. M., it collided with the freight train about midway between Social Circle and Rutledge, GA.

At the time of the collision train No. 4 was running 35 miles per hour. The freight train had been running 15 miles per hour, but had slowed down to some extent before the collision occurred. Both engines were badly damaged; the three head cars of the passenger train were telescoped and completely broken up. The remaining cars in the train were but slightly damaged. Several cars in the freight train were badly damaged.

The freight train involved was the first section of train No. 13. It consisted of 25 cars and a caboose, and was in charge of Conductor Fitzgerald. It was hauled by Georgia Railroad engine No. 14, in charge of Engineer Williford. This train left Augusta for Atlanta, Ga., at 1:25 P. M., March 7th. Upon arrival at Buckhead, 96 miles west of Augusta, the conductor and engineer received an order directing the 1st and 2nd section of train No. 13 to meet east-bound train No. 210

at Rutledge, a station 16 miles west of Buckhead. They also received an order that third class east-bound train No. 24 had right of track over their train to Lithonia, a station 60 miles west of Buckhead. These orders were made complete at 10:24 P. M. March 7th, and were the only orders held by train first No. 13.

The statements of Conductor Fitzgerald are very conflicting, but from the best evidence obtainable, first No. 13 arrived at Rutledge at 11:35 P. M. and went on the siding to meet No. 210. Rutledge is not a night telegraph office. The second section of No. 13, which was also to meet No. 210 at Rutledge, arrived there at 12:30 A. M. and pulled into the siding behind the first section. The siding was not long enough to hold both trains, and about half of the second section hung out onto the main track. No. 210 did not arrive at Rutledge until 1:30 A. M. The engineman of this train stated that after his arrival at Rutledge he took water and then pulled down to clear the east end of the siding to let the first section of No. 13 pull out. It was then 1:35 A. M. and at that time first No. 13 still had 25 minutes to run the seven miles to Social Circle and clear No. 4. Instead of pulling out at once, however, the engineman of first No. 13 ordered his brakeman to uncouple the engine, and then ran his engine out of the siding and backed down the main track behind No. 210 for the purpose of taking water, in the meantime holding No. 210 at the station on account of second No. 13's blocking the main track at the east switch.

After taking water the engineman of first No. 13 coupled onto his train and pulled up so as to let second No. 13 into the siding, and No. 210 proceeded on its way. It was then 1:55 A. M., and first No. 13 had but four minutes to make Social Circle clear of No. 4's time at that station. Instead of stopping, however, after the second train had gotten into clear, first No. 13 proceeded toward Social Circle until it collided with No. 4, as before stated.

The engineman on second No. 13 stated that when the first train pulled up enough to clear, "I blowed him down and he didn't stop."

After leaving Rutledge first No. 13 ascended a grade for a distance of 3 miles, up which it maintained a speed of about 15 miles per hour. The train had just turned the summit of this grade and began to increase speed when the engineman observed the headlight of No. 4 approaching. He shut off steam and applied the air brakes, and had reduced speed somewhat at the time the trains came together. The collision occurred in a four foot cut on a slight descending grade towards the west,

and on a curve of about 1-1/2°. From a point about 1000 feet east of where the collision occurred, in the direction from which first No. 13 was approaching, there is a clear view westward for nearly a mile across the open country to a point on the tangent beyond the curve.

Conductor Fitzgerald, of first No. 13, stated that his watch was wrong. He said, "When we cleared the switch I told the flagman I had 23-1/2 minutes to go to Social Circle. Captain Cosby said it was 14 when we hit. Then I went up there he asked me what time I had and it was 1:50 by my watch."

No statement was received from Engineman Williford of first No. 13, as at the time of the investigation he had not been located after he returned to Augusta subsequent to the accident. Conductor Fitzgerald stated, however, that he saw Engineman Williford shortly after the accident, and the engineman stated to him that his (the engineman's) watch was an hour and ten minutes wrong. The fireman on this train stated that when the train was leaving Rutledge he asked engineman Williford where they would meet No. 4, and he replied, "Alcovy", which is a station 6 miles west of Social Circle. This fireman had no watch and knew nothing about the time.

The head brakeman stated that he went to sleep while the train was in the siding at Rutledge and thought the engine crew also went to sleep. This brakeman had no watch. Both these men stated that after the accident Engineman Williford said he mis-read his watch.

The flagman on first No. 13 had been working for the Georgia Railroad Company but three days previous to the accident, and had had no previous railroad experience. His entire railroad experience comprised one trip, which he had made over another portion of the road. His statement on this point when questioned by Superintendent Brand of the Georgia Railroad is as follows:

- Q. How old are you?
A. Twenty-one.
Q. How long have you been working for the Georgia Railroad?
A. I went out Tuesday morning. I had made a trip to Union Point and back.
Q. Have you had any other railroad experience?
A. No, sir.

Contrary to the statement of Conductor Fitzgerald this flagman stated that no conversation took place between himself and the conductor regarding No. 4, as first No. 13 was leaving Rutledge. His statements on this point were as follows:

- Q. There was the conductor?
A. In the cab.
Q. In the cab leaving Rutledge too?
A. Yes, sir.
Q. And the brakeman on second 13 set up the switch for you after you went on the main line?
A. Yes, sir.
Q. What was said as to where you were going and for what trains?
A. He said nothing to me.
Q. Did you have a time card?
A. On the desk; yes, sir.
Q. Did you say anything to him about No. 4's schedule?
A. No, sir.
Q. Did you know No. 4's schedule?
A. No, sir.
Q. Did the conductor say anything at all to you while you were at Rutledge?
A. No, sir.
Q. There was he all that time?
A. In the cab, in the cupola.
Q. How many times did you go in the cupola?
A. Once. After we left the switch. I noticed the brakeman close the switch, then I went in the cupola.
Q. Was the conductor asleep any time at Rutledge?
A. I couldn't say. He didn't say anything to me and I didn't say anything to him. He had his head leaning against the window when I went up there after the train pulled off.

This flagman also stated that neither Conductor Fitzgerald nor he gave the engineer a signal to go ahead when their train left Rutledge.

The Georgia Railroad is a single track line, using the standard train order and dispatching system for the operation of trains. No block system is used. There are 17 east-bound and 18 west-bound daily trains on the schedule of the main line, where this accident occurred. Three sections of train No. 13 were being run on the date of the accident. Traffic of this density would seem to justify the use of a block signal system.

Engineman Milliford is 26 years old. He had been working for the Georgia Railroad Company since June 20, 1908, on which date he was employed as fireman. He was promoted to engineman on December 25, 1910. His record was good. At the time of the accident he had been on duty 13 hours and 44 minutes, following a period of 13 hours and 30 minutes off duty.

Conductor Fitzcerald is 38 years old. He had been working for the Georgia Railroad Company since October, 1897, at which time he was employed as flagman. He was promoted to Conductor on November 4, 1908. His record was good. He had been on duty 13 hours and 29 minutes at the time of the accident, and had not been working for several days previous to going out on this trip.

The fireman had been on duty the same time as the engineer, but he had had 22 hours and 30 minutes off duty before going on this trip. The flagman and brakeman had been on duty the same time as the conductor, and had been off duty previous to going out on this run 14 hours and 25 minutes and 23 hours and 15 minutes, respectively.