INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF THE BUREAU OF SAFETY CONCERNING AN ACCIDENT ON THE CENTRAL OF GEORGIA RAILWAY NEAR MARICOPA, ALA., ON AUGUST 18, 1932

November 9, 1932.

To the Commission

On August 18, 1932, there was a derailment of a mixed train on the Central of Georgia Railway near Maricopa, Ala., which resulted in the death of 1 passenger, and the injury of 7 passengers and 5 employees.

Location and method of operation

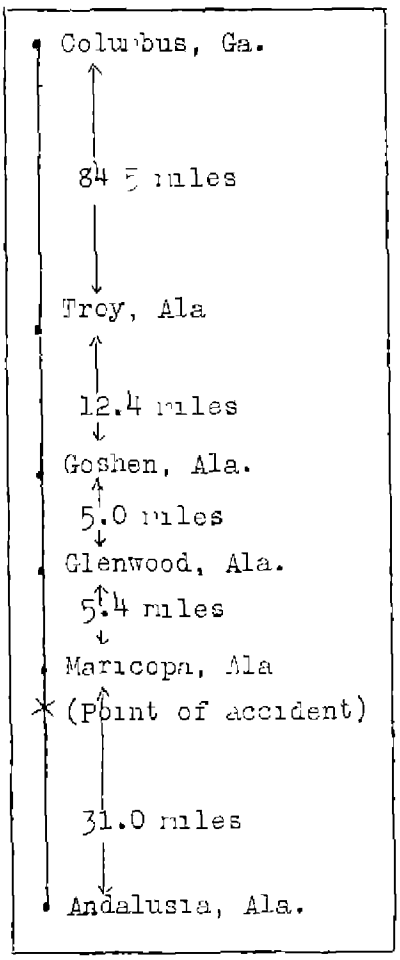
This accident occurred on the Andalusia District of the Columbus Division, extending between Columbus, Ga., and Andalusia, Ala., a distance of 138.3 miles, this is a single-track line over which trains are operated by time-table and train orders, no block-signal system being in use. The accident occurred 2,113 feet west of the siding at Maricopa, approaching from the east, there is a 4° curve to the right 1,015 feet in length, followed by 2,485 feet of tangent, the accident occurring on this tangent at a point 978 feet from its eastern end The grade for westbound trains is descending, varying from 0 39 to 1.04 per cent, to within 150 feet of the point of accident, and then it is level to and for a considerable distance beyond that point.

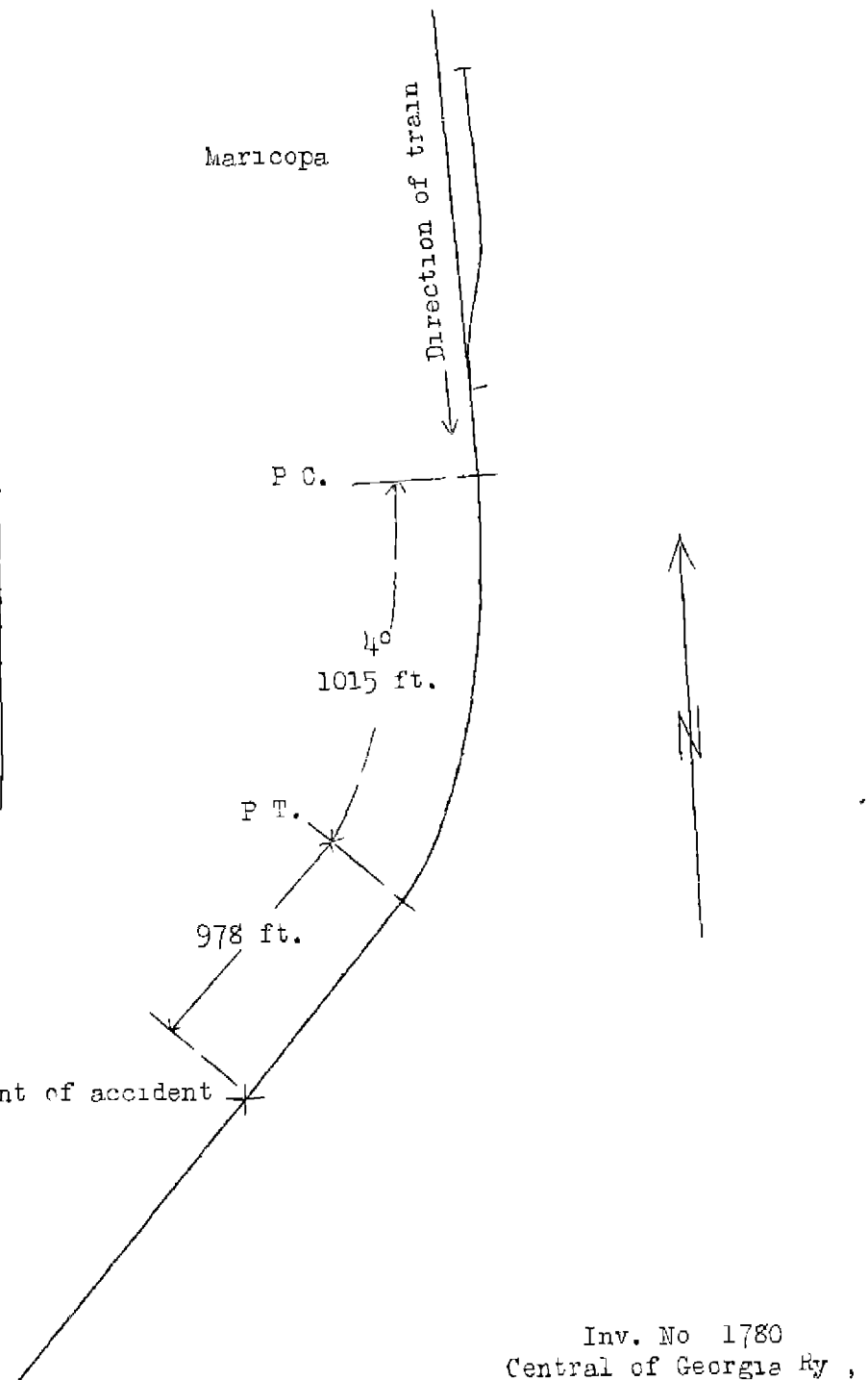
The track is laid with 63½-pound rails 30 feet in length, with 16 treated ties to the rail-length, partly tie-plated, and is single-spiked except that on curves the tie plates are double-spiked. The ballast is of cinders, 12 inches in depth, and the general maintenance of the track is good

The weather was clear at the time of the accident, which occurred about 11 45 a.m.

Description

Westbound first-class mixed train No. 15 consisted of 3 box cars, 1 tank car, 1 box car, 1 scale test car, 1 camp car, 1 box car, 1 steel partition coach and 1 wooden baggage and mail car, in the order named, hauled by engine 419, and was in charge of Conductor Hardy and Engineman Young. This train left Troy, the last open office, 22.8 miles east of Maricopa, at 10.50 a.m., according to the train sheet, five minutes late, made station stops at Goshen and Glenwood, 12.4 and 17.4 miles west of Troy, respectively, passed the siding at Maricopa, and was derailed while traveling at a speed estimated to have been between 30 and 35 miles





Inv. No 1780
Central of Georgia Ry ,
Maricopa, Ala.,
August 18, 1932

per hour.

Engine 419 and the first five cars were not derailed, the scale test car and the following four cars were derailed to the left or south and stopped parallel with the track. The scale test car was bottom up, with its front end 331 feet west of the first wheel mark of derailment, and the remaining four cars were behind it and on their left sides. The employees injured were the conductor, brakeman, baggage master, mail clerk and the scale tester.

Summary of evidence

Engineman Young stated that the train was drifting at a speed of between 30 and 35 miles per hour when the accident occurred, he had looked back along his train when rounding curves, but noticed nothing wrong or any rolling or swaying of the scale test car, which had been placed in the train at Troy, neither did he notice any rough spots in the track. Uniform speed had been maintained en route, and he was endeavoring to keep within the speed limit of 30 miles per hour and yet make the best time possible. In the vicinity of Maricopa he saw Section Foreman Etheredge and waved to him as the engine passed but he did not look back afterwards. Engineman Young had no idea what caused the accident, although he thought the scale test car was the first to be derailed. Fireman White stated that he was sitting on his seat box looking ahead and that his first knowledge of anything wrong was when the air brakes applied as a result of the derailment, on looking back he saw the rear cars in the train turning over. Statements of Flagman Jones and Brakeman Hodo brought out nothing additional of importance, no statement was obtained from Conductor Hardy, owing to his condition as a result of injuries.

Scale Tester Schelling, who was in the camp car accompanying the scale test car, stated that on the trip in question he became very much concerned about the manner in which the cars were riding. The speed of the train was at least 35 miles per hour, and he told the conductor they were running too fast and left the camp car and went back into the coach to ride, the conductor's reply was that he had lost his nerve. On reaching Glenwood his helper also expressed fear on account of the manner in which the car was riding, so he told his helper to come back into the coach and ride. While at Glenwood, Scale Tester Schelling looked over the scale test car, but found nothing wrong, all nuts and bolts that regulate the lateral being tight, and there was no excessive lateral.

Section Foreman Bowers, in charge of the section east of that upon which the accident occurred, stated that he was working in the vicinity of mile post 387, this point being about 11½ miles east of where the accident occurred, and that when train No. 15 passed him at a speed of about 35 miles per hour he noticed an unusual lateral motion of the scale test car, but not enough to cause undue alarm and he made no attempt to give a danger signal to any member of the crew. After receiving a message about the

accident, he returned to Troy and on his way back he noticed that the track was out of gauge as much as 1¼ inches between mile posts 383½ and 383¼, the track being spread first on one side and then on the other, with the spikes pushed out of the ties. The track also was spread considerably at mile post 383 and to a lesser degree at several other points. At the points where the track was spread the grade was descending for westbound trains and the track was straight. He had never before had open gauge on tangent track on his section, and said that it was not spread when he went over it in the morning on his westbound trip.

Section Foreman Etheredge, in charge of the section upon which the accident occurred, stated that he was working opposite the passenger landing at Maricopa when train No. 15 passed at a speed of about 30 or 35 miles per hour and he noticed the scale test car swinging from side to side, he endeavored to attract the engineman's attention to the unusual motion of the car, but to no avail, as the engineman did not look back after the train passed. Subsequent to the accident he inspected the track on his section and found it spread out of gauge at several places, first on one side of the track and then on the other, the maximum spread being 1½ inches, and the indications were that it was caused by an unusual lateral wheel thrust. These places were principally at points where the train was drifting down grade, on straight track, the worst places being right at the bottom of the grades.

Track Supervisor Howard stated that he rode over this track on a motor car on August 9, and that on August 15 he rode over it on an engine, on both of these occasions the track appeared to be in good condition.

In regard to the track being spread out of gauge in numerous places, first on one side and then on the other, apparently due to unusual lateral thrusts of the scale test car, it was found that this condition extended as far back as 19 miles east of where the accident occurred, almost to Troy, where the scale test car had been placed in the train, and these spreads measured from one-half to 1½ inches and ranged from 20 to 24 feet in length, shoving the spikes from the ties. All of these places where the track was spread out of gauge occurred on tangent track and were either on descending grades or on level track immediately following a descending grade, where the train was drifting or a light throttle only being used and the slack bunched in the train.

Central of Georgia scale test car No. 30131 was built in August, 1928. It has a weight of 80,000 pounds, a wheel-base of 7 feet, a total length of 15 feet 9½ inches, and a width of 9 feet, while its height, from top of rail to the running board, is 5 feet ¾ inch. It is equipped with four 36-inch rolled-steel wheels mounted on Hyatt roller bearings. The gauge of the wheels measured 53 1/8 inches, back to back of flanges, the lateral in the wheels on the front truck was 14/32 inch and on the rear truck 13/32 inch, after making deductions of 13/32 inch for slip. These

measurements were made subsequent to the accident after the scale test car had been rerailed and moved about 110 miles to Columbus, Ga., during which trip one of the Commission's inspector's rode this car and the train attained a speed of 20 to 25 miles per hour. No rocking or swaying of the car was noticed, although at that time the car had a broken pedestal and was partly blocked up, this pedestal was the right lead pedestal. Search was made by company officials on a motor car from Troy to the scene of the accident in an endeavor to find the broken parts, but to no avail

Conclusions

This accident is believed to have been primarily caused by excessive speed.

The evidence indicates that the maximum permissible speed for a passenger train handling freight cars, 30 miles per hour, was being exceeded to some extent, while Scale Tester Schelling said both he and his helper were so much concerned about the manner in which the scale test car was riding that it was called to the attention of Conductor Hardy and that they went back into the coach to ride, one of the section foremen noticed that the scale test car was swaying to such an extent that he tried to attract the engineman's attention The statements of these witnesses, coupled with the fact that the track was found to have been spread in numerous places en route from Troy to the point of accident, first on one side and then on the other, apparently as a result of the strain set up by the unusual lateral thrust of the short heavy scale test car, shoving the spikes from the ties, indicate that the scale test car was being moved at too high a rate of speed for the light track over which it was running.

Passenger trains handling freight cars are restricted to the permissible freight train speed of the district involved, and on the Andalusia District freight trains are limited to a speed of 30 miles per hour in the territory in question. There was no further restricting speed for the scale test car, nor were there any instructions as to where it should be placed in the train, although there was painted on the side of the car, in large letters, the words "MUST BE HAULED ON REAR OF TRAIN". This is a car of unusual type, and proper instructions should be issued to insure its safe handling when moving it around over the system

Respectfully submitted,

W P BORLAND,

Director.