

INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION
WASHINGTON

: INVESTIGATION NO. 2841
THE GREAT WESTERN RAILWAY COMPANY
REPORT IN RE ACCIDENT
AT BIRDS, COLO., ON
NOVEMBER 7, 1944

SUMMARY

Railroad: Great Western
Date: November 7, 1944
Location: Birds, Colo.
Kind of accident: Collision
Equipment involved: Freight train : Motor-truck
Train number: Extra 90 West :
Engine number: 90 :
Consist: 12 cars, cabooses :
Estimated speed: 20 m. p. h. : 25 m. p. h.
Operation: Train orders
Track: Single; tangent; 0.83 percent
ascending grade westward
Highway: Tangent; crosses track at angle
of 89°48'; vertical curve
Weather: Clear
Time: 7:05 p. m.
Casualties: 1 killed; 3 injured
Cause: Motor-truck being driven upon
highway grade crossing immedi-
ately in front of approaching
train

INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION

INVESTIGATION NO. 2841

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

THE GREAT WESTERN RAILWAY COMPANY

December 29, 1944.

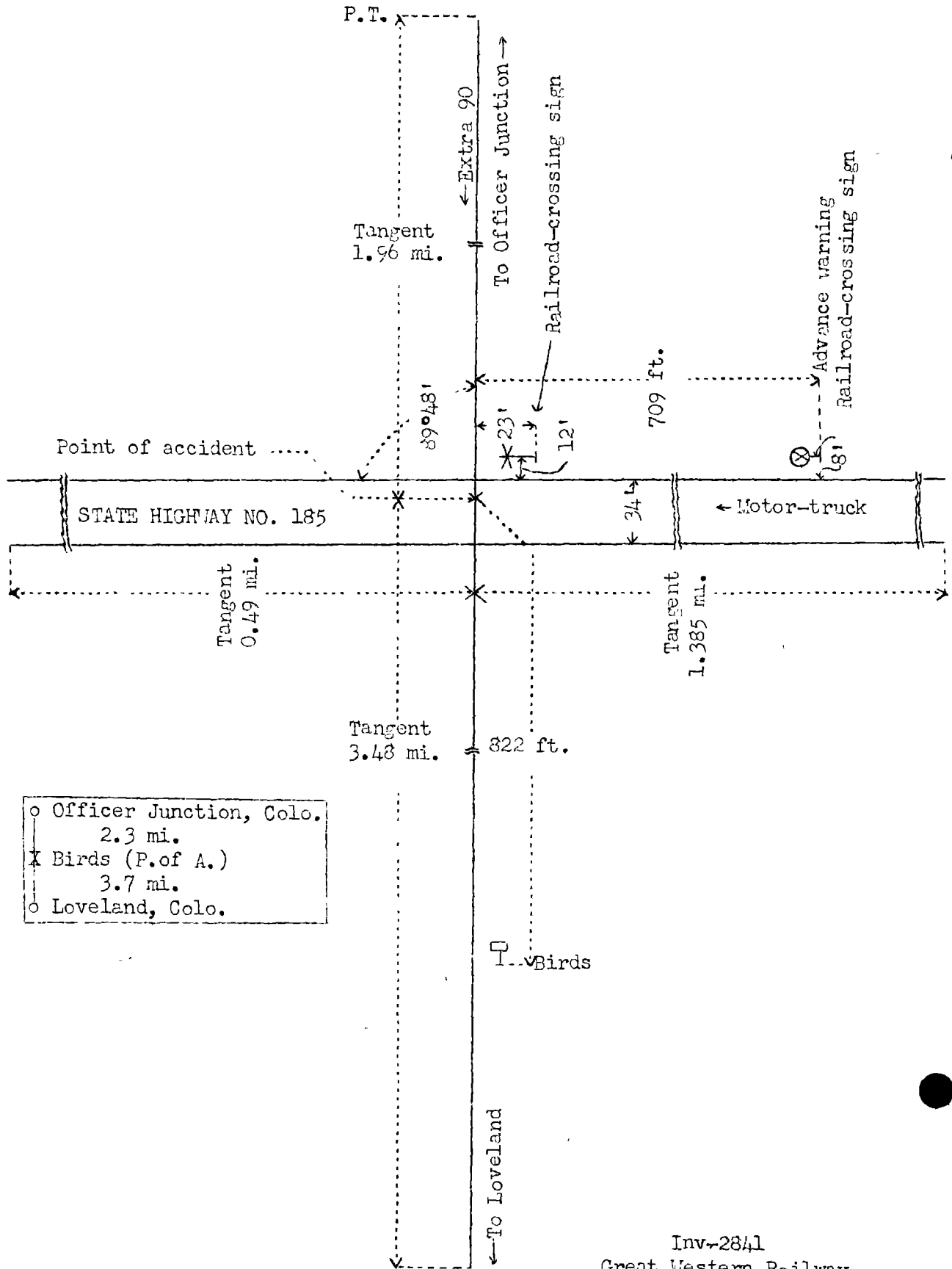
Accident at Birds, Colo., on November 7, 1944, caused by
a motor-truck being driven upon a highway grade
crossing immediately in front of an approaching
train.

REPORT OF THE COMMISSION¹

PATTERSON, Chairman:

On November 7, 1944, there was a collision between a freight train on the Great Western Railway and a motor-truck at a highway grade crossing at Birds, Colo., which resulted in the death of one train-service employee, and the injury of two train-service employees and the driver of the motor-truck.

¹Under authority of section 17 (2) of the Interstate Commerce Act the above-entitled proceeding was referred by the Commission to Chairman Patterson for consideration and disposition.



Location of Accident and Method of Operation

This accident occurred on that part of the railroad extending westward from Officer Junction to Loveland, Colo., 6 miles. This was a single-track line over which trains were operated by train orders only. There were no time-table schedules in effect, and there was no block system in use. The accident occurred 2.3 miles west of Officer Junction, at a point 822 feet east of the station at Birds, where the railroad was crossed at grade by state highway No. 185. The track was tangent throughout a distance of 1.96 miles east of this point and 3.48 miles westward. The grade for west-bound trains was 0.83 percent ascending.

State highway No. 185 intersected the railroad at an angle of 89°48'. The highway was tangent throughout a distance of 1.385 miles south of the crossing and 0.49 mile northward. The grade for north-bound vehicles was 5.80 percent ascending 75 feet, then there was a vertical curve 600 feet to the crossing and 600 feet northward. The highway was surfaced with oil-processed sand and was 34 feet wide. Steel guard rails were used on the crossing to provide flangeways. Between the guard rails the crossing was surfaced with oil-processed sand, and was 34 feet wide.

An advance warning railroad-crossing sign was located 709 feet south of the crossing and about 8 feet east of the highway. This sign was a disc 30 inches in diameter mounted on a mast. It bore two diagonal lines intersecting at right angles at its center, and bore the letters "R.R." in black and in colorless reflector buttons on a yellow background. A standard cross-buck railroad-crossing sign was located to the right of the direction of north-bound traffic 23 feet south of the track and 12 feet east of the highway. This sign was mounted on a mast, and bore the words "RAILROAD CROSSING" in black and in colorless reflector buttons on a white background.

Operating rules read in part as follows:

14. Engine Whistle Signals.

Note.--The signals prescribed are illustrated by "o" for short sounds; "___" for longer sounds.
* * *

SOUND.	INDICATION.
* * *	
(1) ___ ___ o ___	Approaching public crossings at grade. To be prolonged or repeated until crossing is reached.
* * *	

Operating instructions of the Interstate Motor Lines, Inc., read in part as follows:

RAILROAD CROSSINGS

5. Upon approaching a railroad grade crossing reduce speed to a rate that will enable a stop to be made before reaching the nearest rail of such crossing. The crossing must not be traversed until due caution has been taken to ascertain the course is clear. * * *

The maximum authorized speed for freight trains was 25 miles per hour.

Description of Accident

Extra 90 West, a west-bound freight train, consisting of engine 90, 12 cars and a caboose, departed from Officer Junction at 6:55 p. m., and while moving at an estimated speed of 20 miles per hour it struck a motor-truck on a highway grade crossing, and was derailed.

The motor-truck involved was a tractor and semi-trailer owned by the Interstate Motor Lines, Inc., of Salt Lake City, Utah. The driver, who was the sole occupant, held Colorado chauffeur's license No. 10-335. The tractor was a 1941 Peterbilt, 6-cylinder model, and bore Colorado license No. 1-5759, Wyoming license No. 4T-237, Utah license No. 61083, and I. C. C. vehicle identification No. 290-453. It weighed 13,380 pounds, and was equipped with dual tires on the rear wheels, air brakes on all wheels, a hand-operated brake on the drive shaft, and an enclosed steel cab. The semi-trailer was a 1939 Mono refrigerator model, and bore Colorado license No. 1-191, Wyoming license No. 4X142, Utah license No. 11221, and I. C. C. vehicle identification No. 207-689. It was equipped with two axles at the rear end, dual tires on the wheels of each axle, and air brakes on all wheels. The weight of the trailer when empty was 12,410 pounds. The overall length of the tractor and semi-trailer was 39 feet 4 inches. At the time of the accident the cargo with which the semi-trailer was loaded weighed 29,000 pounds. This vehicle, moving northward on state highway No. 185, en route from Denver, Colo., to San Francisco, Calif., proceeded upon the crossing at an estimated speed of 25 miles per hour, and was struck by Extra 90 West.

Because of buildings adjacent to the track and an embankment on the east side of the highway, a west-bound train approaching on the railroad could not be seen by the driver of a north-bound vehicle until the vehicle was within 30 feet south of the south rail of the main track, then an unobstructed

view could be had a distance of about 2 miles. There was no condition about the enclosed cab of the tractor that restricted the vision.

The tractor and semi-trailer were demolished. The engine and the first four cars were derailed. The engine and the first car were badly damaged, and the second and third cars were slightly damaged.

It was clear at the time of the accident, which occurred about 7:05 p. m.

The front brakeman was killed, and the engineer and the fireman were injured.

During the 31-day period preceding the day of the accident, the average daily movement of trains over the crossing was 9.06. During the 24-hour period beginning at 4 p. m., November 16, 1944, 281 automobiles, 180 trucks and 7 busses passed over the crossing.

Discussion

Extra 90 West was approaching the crossing at a speed of about 20 miles per hour in territory where the maximum authorized speed was 25 miles per hour. The headlight was lighted brightly, and the enginemen and the front brakeman were maintaining a lookout ahead. The whistle signal for the crossing was sounded in compliance with the rules. The fireman saw the motor-truck as it entered upon the crossing immediately in front of the engine, and he called a warning to the engineer. The engineer was in the act of moving the brake valve to emergency position when the collision occurred.

The crossing was protected by an advance warning railroad-crossing sign and a cross-buck sign. The driver of the motor-truck was an experienced driver, and was familiar with the route. The motor-truck was moving at a speed of about 25 miles per hour when it entered upon the crossing. The windows of the cab were closed. The driver said that he did not see or hear the approaching train until the accident occurred. Operating instructions governing the movement of motor vehicles operated by the Interstate Motor Lines, Inc., require the drivers of such vehicles to control the speed of a motor vehicle so that it can be stopped short of the nearest rail of a railroad grade crossing, and the vehicle must remain clear of the track until the driver has ascertained that it is safe for the vehicle to be moved over the crossing. If the movement of the motor-truck involved had been controlled in accordance with these requirements, this accident could have been averted.

Cause

It is found that this accident was caused by a motor-truck being driven upon a highway grade crossing immediately in front of an approaching train.

Dated at Washington, D. C., this twenty-ninth day of December, 1944.

By the Commission, Chairman Patterson.

(SEAL)

W. P. BARTEL,
Secretary.