INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION

WASHINGTON

REPORT NO 3584

LOUISIANA & ARKANSAS RAILWAY COMPANY

IN RE ACCIDENT

NEAR PITTSBURG, TEX., ON

JULY 21, 1954

SUMMARY

Date:	July 21, 1954
Railroad:	Louisiana & Arkansas
Location:	Pittsburg, Tex.
Kind of accident:	Collision
Equipment involved	Freight train : Motor-truck
Train number:	Extra 162 South
Engine number:	Diesel-electric unit 162
Consist:	14 cars, caboose
Speeds:	15 m. p. h. : Undetermined
Operation	Timetable and train orders
Track:	Single, tangent; 1.10 percent ascending grade southward
Highway:	Tangent, crosses track at angle of 82°, 2.30 percent descending grade westward
Weather.	Clear
Time:	1.10 p. m.
Casualties.	3 killed, 1 injured
Cause:	Motor-truck occupying rail-highway grade crossing immediately in front of approaching train

INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION

REPORT NO. 3584

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

LOUISIANA & ARKANSAS RAILWAY COMPANY

August 27, 1954

Accident near Pittsburg, Tex., on July 21, 1954, caused by a motor-truck occupying a rail-highway grade crossing immediately in front of an approaching train.

REPORT OF THE COMMISSION[1]

CLARKE, Commissioner:

On July 21, 1954, there was a collision between a freight train on the Louisiana & Arkansas Railway and a motor-truck at a rail-highway grade crossing near Pittsburg, Tex., which resulted in the death of three train-service employees, and the injury of the driver of the motor-truck.

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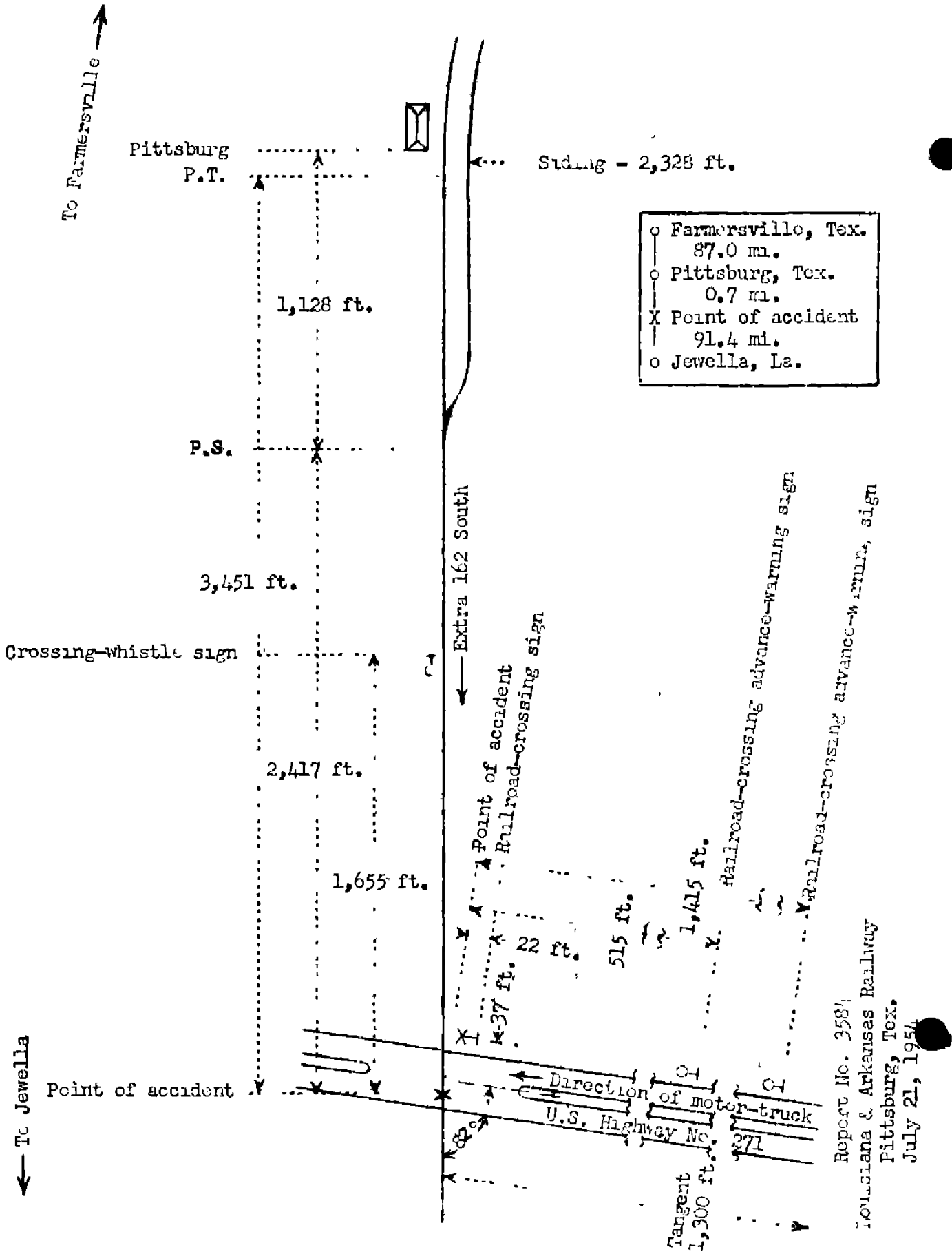
[1] Under authority of section 17 (2) of the Interstate Commerce Act the above-entitled proceeding was referred by the Commission to Commissioner Clarke for consideration and disposition.


To Farmersville
Pittsburg P.T.
Siding - 2,328 ft.
Farmersville, Tex. 87.0 mi.
Pittsburg, Tex. 0.7 mi.
Point of accident 91.4 mi.
Jewella, La.
1,128 ft.
P.S.
3,451 ft.
Crossing-whistle sign
Extra 162 South
2,417 ft.
Point of accident
Railroad-crossing sign
1,655 ft.
37 ft.
22 ft.
515 ft.
1,415 ft.
Railroad-crossing advance-warning sign
Railroad-crossing advance-warning sign
To Jewella
Point of accident
Direction of motor-truck
U.S. Highway No. 271
Tangent 1,300 ft.
Report No. 3581
Louisiana & Arkansas Railway
Pittsburg, Tex.
July 21, 1954

Location of Accident and Method of Operation

This accident occurred on that part of the railway extending between Farmersville, Tex., and Jewella, La., 179.1 miles. In the vicinity of the point of accident this is a single-track line, over which trains are operated by timetable and train orders. There is no block system in use. At Pittsburg, Tex., 87.0 miles south of Farmersville, a siding 2,328 feet in length parallels the main track on the east. The south switch of this siding is 1,128 feet south of the station. The accident occurred on the main track within the city limits of Pittsburg at a point 2,417 feet south of the south siding-switch, where the railroad is crossed at grade by U. S. Highway No. 271. In this vicinity the railroad extends from west to east, and the highway extends from north to south. Timetable directions on the railroad are north and south, and these directions are used in this report. The railroad is tangent throughout a distance of 3,451 feet immediately north of the point of accident and a considerable distance southward. The grade is 1.10 percent ascending southward at the point of accident. The northwest angle of the intersection of the railroad and U. S. Highway No. 271 is 82°. The highway consists of four 14-foot concrete traffic lanes. On each side of the crossing the eastward traffic lanes are separated from the westward lanes by a concrete island 4 feet in width. The highway is tangent throughout a distance of approximately 1,300 feet immediately east of the crossing and a short distance westward. From the east the grade is 1.13 percent descending throughout a distance of 800 feet, then 2.30 percent descending 500 feet to the crossing. An area 20 inches in width on the outside of each rail and the area between the rails at the crossing are surfaced with planking.

A circular railroad-crossing advance-warning sign 30 inches in diameter is located to the right of the direction of west-bound highway traffic at a point 1,415 feet east of the track. This sign is mounted on a mast 2 feet 9 inches above the level of the highway and bears two diagonal lines intersecting at right angles and the letters "RR" in black on a yellow background. A similar sign is located 515 feet east of the track. A standard cross-buck railroad-crossing sign is located to the right of the direction of west-bound highway traffic, 22 feet east of the center-line of the track and 37 feet north of the center-line of the highway. This sign

is mounted on a mast 11 feet 2 inches above the level of the highway and bears the words "RAILROAD CROSSING" in black on a white background. A crossing-whistle sign for south-bound trains is located 1,655 feet north of the crossing.

This carrier's operating rules read in part as follows:

14. Engine Horn or 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. (Standard sign will designate point at which signal must begin.) To be prolonged or repeated until crossing is occupied by engine or car.
* * *	

17. Headlights.--The standard white headlight must be displayed brightly to the front of every train by day and by night.

* * *

30. Ringing Bell.--* * * the engine bell must be rung when the engine is about to move, and while approaching and passing public crossings at grade * * *

Motor Vehicle Laws of the State of Texas read in part as follows:

SPECIAL STOPS AND RESTRICTED SPEEDS REQUIRED

Sec. 86. Obediance to signal indicating approach of train.-Whenever any person driving a vehicle approaches a railroad grade crossing, the driver of such vehicle shall stop within fifty (50) feet but not less than fifteen (15) feet from the nearest rail of such railroad and shall not proceed until he can do so safely when:

* * *

(c) A railroad engine approaching within approximately fifteen hundred (1500) feet of the highway crossing emits a signal audible from such distance and such engine by reason of its speed or nearness to such crossing is an immediate hazard;

* * *

Sec. 89. Certain vehicles must reduce speed at all railroad grade crossings. (a) The driver of any vehicle carrying * * * flammable liquids as its principal cargo before crossing at grade any track or tracks of a railroad, shall if travelling in excess of twenty (20) miles per hour, reduce the speed of such vehicle to twenty (20) miles per hour before approaching within two hundred (200) feet from the nearest rail of such railroad and shall listen and look in both directions along such track for any approaching train, and for signals indicating the approach of the train, * * * and shall not cross such track until he can do so safely. After reducing speed as required herein and when it is safe to do so the driver of any said vehicle shall cross in such gear of the vehicle that there will be no necessity for changing gears while traversing such and the driver shall not shift gears while crossing the track or tracks.

* * *

The maximum authorized speed for freight trains is 40 miles per hour. It is restricted to 20 miles per hour within the city limits of Pittsburg.

Description of Accident

Extra 162 South, a south-bound freight train, consisted of Diesel-electric unit 162, a road-switcher type, 14 cars, and a caboose. This train entered the main track at the south siding-switch at Pittsburg at 1:08 p. m., and while it was moving at an estimated speed of 15 miles per hour it struck a motor-truck at a rail-highway grade crossing 2,417 feet south of the switch.

The vehicle involved was a tractor and semi-trailer owned by Ora Derr, Houston, Tex. At the time of the accident it was being operated by the Bull Dog Transport Company of Houston. The driver was the sole occupant. The tractor was a White model WC-22 and bore Texas license J-8220. The semi-trailer was a Freuhauf Carter gasoline cargo tank. At the time of the accident the cargo consisted of 5,866 gallons of gasoline. This vehicle was moving westward on U. S. Highway No. 271 at an undetermined rate of speed when it entered upon the crossing and was struck by Extra 162 South.

The locomotive, the first three cars, and the front wheels of the front truck of the fourth car of Extra 162 South were derailed. The locomotive stopped on its left side, 107 feet south of the point of accident, across the track and at right angles to it. The derailed cars stopped in various positions on or near the track. The locomotive and the first three cars were somewhat damaged as a result of the derailment. Gasoline escaping from the semi-trailer immediately became ignited, and the locomotive and the second car were badly damaged and the other derailed cars were somewhat damaged by fire.

The tractor and the semi-trailer were separated as a result of the collision. The tractor stopped upright against a utility pole 48 feet south of the center-line of the highway and 331 feet west of the center-line of the track. The semi-trailer was struck by the locomotive at a point about 6 feet back of the front end. It stopped on the west side of the track and against the front end of the locomotive. It was destroyed.

The engineer, the fireman, and the front brakeman of Extra 162 South were killed.

The weather was clear at the time of the accident, which occurred about 1:10 p. m.

During the 30-day period preceding the day of the accident the average daily movement over the crossing was 4.1 trains. During the 24-hour period beginning at 9 a. m., July 27, 1954, 1,114 automobiles, 615 motor-trucks, and 9 other vehicles passed over the crossing.

Discussion

As Extra 162 South was approaching the point where the accident occurred the enginemen and the front brakeman were on the locomotive. The conductor and the flagman were in the caboose. The brakes of the train had been tested and had functioned properly when used en route. The conductor and the flagman said that the headlight was lighted when they last observed it at Pittsburg. The train was stopped immediately south of the south siding-switch at Pittsburg while the flagman restored the switch to normal position. The conductor and the flagman said that after the train departed from this point the engineer sounded the grade-crossing whistle signal for a rail-highway grade crossing located between the switch and U. S. Highway No. 271 and that he continued to sound the pneumatic horn as the train moved between that crossing and U. S. Highway No. 271. They did not know whether the locomotive bell was ringing. The conductor, who was seated on the left side of the caboose, said that he saw the motor-truck approaching the crossing before the collision occurred When he saw the truck it was between 60 and 100 feet east of the crossing and he estimated that it was moving at a speed of between 50 and 60 miles per hour. Both the conductor and the flagman said that the brakes of the train were applied in emergency before the collision occurred. The conductor estimated that the speed of the train was about 15 miles per hour at the time of the collision. The flagman estimated that the speed was about 10 miles per hour.

The driver of the motor-truck was not available for questioning during this investigation. The conductor of Extra 162 South said that after the accident occurred the driver told him that the truck was moving at a speed of about 30 miles per hour and that he neither heard nor saw the approaching train. After the accident occurred, skid marks were found on the surface of the highway throughout a distance of 276 feet immediately east of the crossing. From the length of these marks, it appears that the speed of the truck was considerably in excess of 30 miles per hour at the time the brakes were applied.

After a vehicle moving westward on U. S. Highway No. 271 reaches a point 900 feet east of the crossing, the driver can obtain a view of an approaching south-bound train throughout a distance of approximately 570 feet immediately north of the crossing.

Cause

This accident was caused by a motor-truck occupying a rail-highway grade crossing immediately in front of an approaching train.

Dated at Washington, D. C., this twenty-seventh day of August, 1954.

By the Commission, Commissioner Clarke.

(SEAL)

GEORGE W. LAIRD,

Secretary.