

INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION

WASHINGTON

INVESTIGATION NO. 3259

LOUISVILLE AND NASHVILLE RAILROAD COMPANY

REPORT IN RE ACCIDENT

AT TAIT'S GAP, ALA., ON

JUNE 10, 1949

SUMMARY

Date: June 10, 1949

Railroad: Louisville and Nashville

Location: Tait's Gap, Ala.

Kind of accident: Collision

Equipment involved: Freight train : Motor-truck

Train number: 91 :

Engine number: 1204 :

Consist: 3 cars, caboose :

Estimated speeds: 30 m. p. h. : 12 m. p. h.

Operation: Timetable and train orders

Track: Single; tangent; 1 percent ascending grade southward

Highway: Tangent; crosses track at angle of 54°37'; level

Weather: Clear

Time: 1:45 p. m.

Casualties: 1 killed; 2 injured

Cause: Motor-truck occupying rail-highway grade-crossing immediately in front of approaching train

INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION

INVESTIGATION NO. 3259

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

LOUISVILLE AND NASHVILLE RAILROAD COMPANY

July 28, 1949

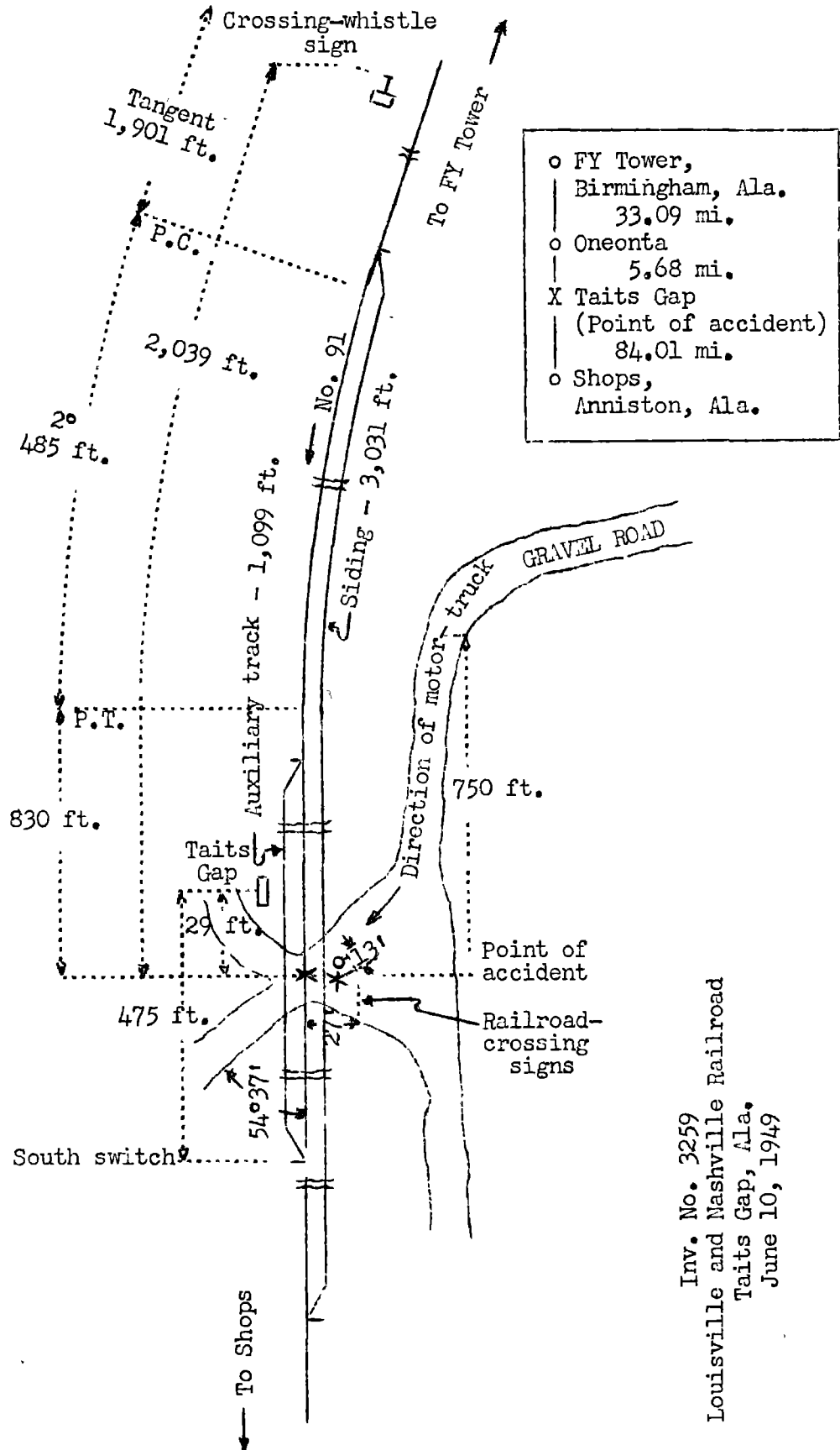
Accident at Tait's Gap, Ala., on June 10, 1949, caused by
a motor-truck occupying a rail-highway grade-crossing
immediately in front of an approaching train.

REPORT OF THE COMMISSION¹

PATTERSON, Commissioner:

On June 10, 1949, there was a collision between a freight train on the Louisville and Nashville Railroad and a motor-truck at a rail-highway grade-crossing at Tait's Gap, Ala., which resulted in the death of one occupant of the truck, and the injury of the truck driver and another occupant.

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



Inv. No. 3259
Louisville and Nashville Railroad
Taits Gap, Ala.
June 10, 1949

Location of Accident and Method of Operation

This accident occurred on that part of the Birmingham Division extending between FY Tower, Birmingham, and Shops, Anniston, Ala., 122.78 miles, a single-track line, over which trains are operated by timetable and train orders. There is no block system in use. At Taits Gap, 38.77 miles south of FY Tower, a siding 3,031 feet in length parallels the main track on the east, and an auxiliary track, 1,099 feet in length, parallels the main track on the west. The center-line of each of these tracks is 13 feet from the center-line of the main track. The south switch of the auxiliary track is 475 feet south of the station at Taits Gap. The accident occurred on the main track at a point 29 feet south of the station, where the tracks are crossed at grade by a gravel highway. From the north, on the railroad, there are, in succession, a tangent 1,901 feet in length, a 2° curve to the left 485 feet and a tangent 830 feet to the point of accident and a considerable distance southward. The grade is 1 percent ascending southward at the point of accident. From a point 750 feet north of the crossing to a point a considerable distance south of the crossing, a gravel highway parallels the railroad on the east. The center-line of this highway is about 55 feet distant from the center-line of the railroad. The surface of the highway is about 12 feet below the level of the tracks. At a point about 70 feet north of the point of accident a gravel highway diverges from the parallel highway and crosses the tracks at an angle of 54°37'. The grade for south-bound traffic on the parallel highway and thence westward over the crossing is practically level 635 feet, then it is 10 percent ascending 115 feet to the crossing, and is level over the crossing. The crossing is 17 feet 6 inches wide and is surfaced with asphaltum to the level of the tops of the rails. Flangeways 3 inches in width are provided for the main track and for the siding by planking laid parallel to the track rails. Planking is not provided for the auxiliary track.

A standard cross-buck railroad-crossing sign is located in the southeast angle of the intersection, 27 feet east of the center-line of the main track and 13 feet south of the center-line of the diverging highway. This sign is mounted on a mast 12 feet 4 inches above the level of the highway, and bears the words "RAILROAD CROSSING" in black letters on a white background. An octagon-shape sign, mounted on a mast 4 feet above the level of the highway, is located 2.2 feet north of the cross-buck sign, 26 feet east of the center-line of the main track and 11 feet south of the center-line of the diverging highway. This sign has a yellow background and a black border, and is divided into three sections by horizontal black lines 3/8-inch wide. The center section bears the word "STOP" in

black letters 6-1/8 inches high, and the top and bottom sections, respectively, bear the words "ALA" and "LAW" in black letters 4-1/8 inches high. There is no advance railroad-crossing warning sign. A crossing-whistle sign for south-bound trains is located 2,039 feet north of the crossing.

This carrier's 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
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(1) — — o —	Approaching public road crossings at grade. The last sound must end as engine enters crossing. * * *
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30 (a). The engine bell must be rung from whistling posts to public road crossings at grade. * * *

Title 36, Section 6, of the laws of the State of Alabama, governing the operation of motor vehicles, reads in part as follows:

Warning Signals at Grade Crossings Must Be Obeyed.

(a) The highway department is hereby authorized to designate particularly dangerous grade crossings of steam, or interurban railways by highways, and shall erect signs thereat notifying drivers of vehicles upon any such highway to come to a complete stop before crossing such railway tracks, and whenever such crossing is so designated and signposted, it shall be unlawful for the driver of any vehicle to fail to stop before traversing such crossing, and the violation hereof shall constitute a misdemeanor. Nothing contained in this chapter is intended to abrogate or modify the present Alabama doctrine of "Stop, Look and Listen," obtaining in the courts of Alabama.

* * *

The maximum authorized speed for the train involved was 35 miles per hour.

Description of Accident

No. 91, a south-bound second-class freight train, consisting of engine 1204, three cars and a caboose, departed from Oneonta, the last open office, 5.68 miles north of Tait's Gap, at 1:34 p. m., 4 hours 34 minutes late, and while moving at an estimated speed of 30 miles per hour it struck a motor-truck on a rail-highway grade-crossing at Tait's Gap, and was derailed.

The motor-truck involved was being operated by the owner, and there were two other occupants in the cab at the time of the accident. The driver held Alabama operator's license No. 1055789. The motor-truck was a 1939, D-30 International 6-cylinder model. It had a rated capacity of 1-1/2 tons, and bore Alabama license No. 31-H-2-1239. It weighed 4,590 pounds, exclusive of the cargo, and was equipped with dual wheels at the rear, hydraulic brakes on all wheels and was provided with an enclosed steel cab. The total length of the vehicle was 20 feet 8 inches. At the time of the accident it was loaded with 1-1/2 cords of pulp wood. This motor-truck was moving westward at an estimated speed of 12 miles per hour when it entered upon the crossing, and was struck by No. 91.

The motor-truck was practically demolished. Part of the pulp wood was thrown under the train and dragged to the south switch of the auxiliary track, where a piece became lodged and derailed all of the cars. The engine was not derailed. When the train stopped, the front end was 780 feet south of the point of accident. The first car stopped upright, on the roadbed and practically in line with the track. A separation occurred between the first and second cars. The second and the third cars and the caboose remained coupled. The second car stopped upright, across the siding and at an angle of about 15 degrees to the main track. The third car stopped on its left side, with the front end on the siding and the rear end on the main track. The caboose stopped between the siding and the main track, upright and parallel to the main track. The engine, the first car and the caboose were slightly damaged. The second and the third cars were considerably damaged.

The weather was clear at the time of the accident, which occurred about 1:45 p. m.

During the 30-day period preceding the day of the accident, the average daily movement over the crossing was 15.9 trains. During the 24-hour period beginning at 10 a. m., June 17, 1949, 70 automobiles, 37 trucks, 2 horse-drawn vehicles and 12 trains passed over the crossing.

Discussion

No. 91 was approaching the crossing at an estimated speed of 30 miles per hour in territory where the maximum authorized speed for this train was 35 miles per hour. The enginemen were maintaining a lookout ahead from their respective positions in the cab of the engine. The conductor and the trainmen were in the cupola of the caboose. The brakes of this train had been tested and had functioned properly en route. The engineer said that when the engine was in the vicinity of the crossing-whistle sign, he sounded the grade crossing-whistle signal and completed the last blast at the crossing, and that during that time the engine bell was ringing. The fireman said that he observed the motor-truck moving southward on the parallel highway, but saw no indication that the driver intended to cross the railroad. When the train was a short distance north of the crossing he temporarily lost sight of the truck, and when he next saw it the driver had diverted the truck from the parallel highway, and it was moving over the siding. He called a warning to the engineer, who immediately moved the brake valve to the emergency position, but the speed of the train had not been reduced when the collision occurred.

For several days the driver of the motor-truck had been engaged in hauling pulp wood for loading on the auxiliary track at Taits Gap. During this time, he had traversed the same route and was familiar with the crossing involved. He said that as he approached the crossing on the day of the accident there was no condition of the motor-truck which interfered with his view to the front or to either side. The pulp wood extended to the top of the cab and obscured his vision to the rear. When the truck rounded the curve to the left, about 750 feet north of the crossing, where he had a clear view of the track for a considerable distance northward, he looked through the window on the right side of the cab, but he did not see the approaching train. From that point to the foot of the ascending grade near the crossing, the surface of the road is about 12 feet below the level of the track, and the view of a south-bound train was obscured to the driver of the south-bound vehicle. Nevertheless, the driver of the motor-truck made no further effort to see the track, and he did not request information concerning trains from the other occupants in the cab, who were in a more advantageous position to see the track. The truck was heavily loaded. It was not equipped with a muffler, and the crossing-whistle signal or the sound of the approaching train could not be heard in the cab of the truck above the sound of the truck exhaust. At the foot of the ascending grade the driver reduced speed and shifted to a lower gear, but he did not stop the truck, as required by the laws of Alabama. At this time he looked southward to see if the track was clear in that direction, but he did not look again toward the north. The truck entered upon the crossing, and was

on the main track immediately in front of No. 91 before he saw or heard that train approaching the crossing. Realizing that a collision was imminent he increased the speed of the truck in an effort to clear the track, but this action was taken too late and No. 91 struck the truck near the rear wheel on the right side

Cause

It is found that 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-eighth day of July, 1949.

By the Commission, Commissioner Patterson.

(SEAL)

W. P. BARTEL,
Secretary.