

INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION  
WASHINGTON

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REPORT NO. 3706  
MISSOURI PACIFIC RAILROAD COMPANY  
IN RE ACCIDENT  
NEAR ELTON, LA., ON  
SEPTEMBER 20, 1956

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## SUMMARY

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Date: September 20, 1956

Railroad: Missouri Pacific

Location: Elton, La.

Kind of accident: Collision

Equipment involved: Freight train : Motor-truck

Train number: 62 :

Locomotive number: Diesel-electric :  
units 4201 and  
4254

Consist: 42 cars, caboose :

Estimated speeds: 40-50 m. p. h. : Undetermined

Operation: Timetable and train orders

Track: Single; tangent; level

Highway: Tangent; crosses track at angle of  
88°36'; 3.12 percent ascending  
grade southward

Weather: Clear

Time: 9:16 a. m.

Casualties: 2 killed; 3 injured

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

INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION

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REPORT NO. 3705

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

MISSOURI PACIFIC RAILROAD COMPANY

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October 30, 1956

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Accident near Elton, La., on September 20, 1956, caused  
by a motor-truck occupying a rail-highway grade cross-  
ing immediately in front of an approaching train.

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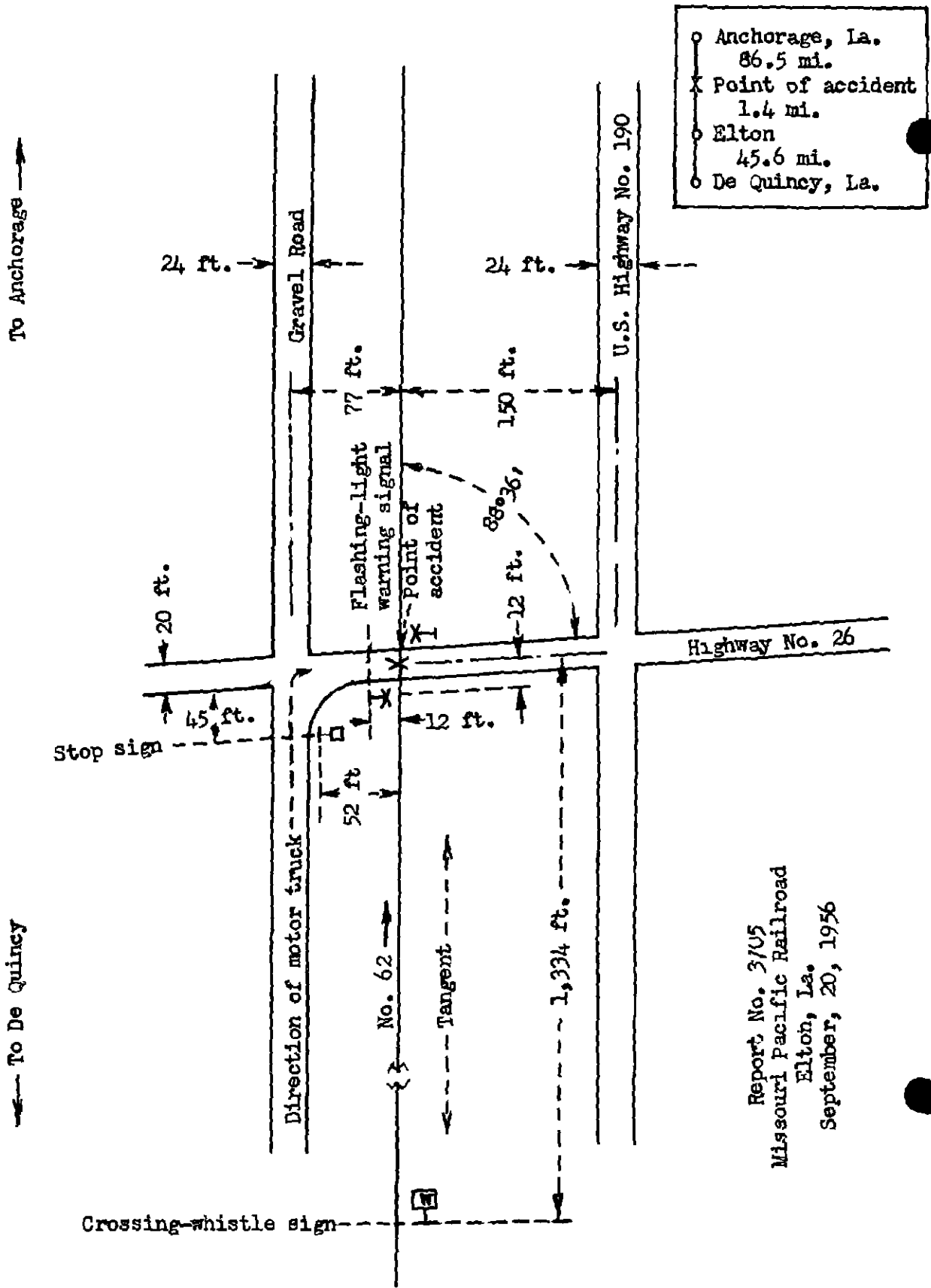
REPORT OF THE COMMISSION<sup>1</sup>

CLARKE, Commissioner:

On September 20, 1956, there was a collision between  
a freight train on the Missouri Pacific Railroad and a motor-  
truck at a rail-highway grade crossing near Elton, La., which  
resulted in the death of two train-service employees, and  
the injury of three train-service employees.

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<sup>1</sup>  
Under authority of Section 17 (2) of the Interstate Commerce  
Act the above-entitled proceeding was referred by the Commis-  
sion to Commissioner Clarke for consideration and disposition.



### Location of Accident and Method of Operation

This accident occurred on that part of the De Quincy Division extending between De Quincy and Anchorage, La., 133.5 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. The accident occurred on the main track at a point 47.0 miles east of De Quincy and 1.4 miles east of Elton, where the railroad is crossed at grade by Louisiana State Highway No. 26. The track is tangent throughout a distance of several miles immediately west of the point of accident and a considerable distance eastward. The grade is practically level.

In the vicinity of the point of accident a gravel road 24 feet in width parallels the railroad on the north, and U. S. Highway No. 190 parallels the railroad on the south. U. S. Highway No. 190 is surfaced with bituminous material to a width of 24 feet. The center-lines of the gravel road and U. S. Highway No. 190 are, respectively, 77 feet north and 150 feet south of the center-line of the track. Louisiana State Highway No. 26 intersects the gravel road, the railroad, and U. S. Highway No. 190 at an angle of  $88^{\circ}36'$ . North of U. S. Highway No. 190, Louisiana State Highway No. 26 is surfaced with gravel to a width of 20 feet. A 4-inch by 10-inch by 22-foot plank is laid on each side of each rail at the crossing. The remaining area of the crossing is surfaced with bituminous material to a distance of 4 feet outside each rail. From the north on Highway No. 26 the grade is, successively, 1.50 percent ascending a distance of 27 feet, 3.12 percent ascending 50 feet to the track, and 3.60 percent descending a distance of 50 feet southward.

A sign which bears the words "LOUISIANA LAW" above the word "STOP" in red on a white background is located 45 feet west of the center-line of Highway No. 26 and 52 feet north of the center-line of the track. A railroad-crossing signal of the flashing-light type is located 12 feet west of the center-line of the highway and 12 feet north of the center-line of the track. This signal consists of a standard cross buck mounted on a mast 11 feet above the level of the highway. The cross buck bears the words "RAILROAD CROSSING" in black on a white background. Two hooded red lamps are mounted back-to-back at each end of a horizontal bar which is attached to the mast 7 feet 6 inches above the level of the highway.

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A sign which bears the words "STOP ON RED SIGNAL" in white on a black background is mounted on the mast below the lamps. A similar signal is located in the southeast angle of the intersection. The latter signal is equipped with a warning bell. The warning aspect is displayed by the alternate illumination of the lamps when an east-bound train occupies any portion of the main track throughout a distance of 2,227 feet immediately west of the crossing. The warning bell rings during this time. A crossing-whistle sign for east-bound trains is located 1,334 feet west 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.

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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 \* \* \* while approaching and passing public crossings at grade \* \* \*

Laws of the State of Louisiana relating to motor vehicles and their operation read in part as follows:

Section 243. Railroad grade crossings

A. It shall be the duty of every person operating, or permitting to be operated, a vehicle, when approaching a grade crossing of a public highway with any railroad or tramway, to bring such vehicle to a complete stop in such a manner and for such time as to enable the operator to observe the approach of trains or cars, by looking up and down the track in both directions and by listening therefor, before proceeding. \* \* \*

\* \* \*

The maximum authorized speed for freight trains in the vicinity of the point of accident is 49 miles per hour.

#### Description of Accident

No. 62, an east-bound second-class freight train, consisted, at the time of the accident, of Diesel-electric units 4201 and 4254, coupled in multiple-unit control, 42 cars, and a caboose. This train departed from De Quincy at 6:45 a. m., 45 minutes late, and passed Elton at 9:14 a. m., 1 hour 28 minutes late. While it was moving at an estimated speed of from 40 to 50 miles per hour it struck a motor-truck at a point 1.4 miles east of Elton, where the railroad is crossed at grade by Louisiana State Highway No. 26.

The vehicle involved was a tractor and semi-trailer owned and operated by the Evangeline Refining Company, Inc., Jennings, La. The driver, who was the sole occupant, held Louisiana chauffeur's license No. 2083945. The tractor, which bore 1956 Louisiana license No. 147946, was a 1948 International Model K-11. It was powered by a six-cylinder gasoline engine and was equipped with both mechanical and air brakes. The semi-trailer, which bore 1956 Louisiana license No. 463814, consisted of a 6,000-gallon Frazier Payloader cargo tank mounted on tandem axles. It was equipped with air brakes. The total length of the vehicle was 44 feet 9-5/16 inches. At the time of the accident the cargo consisted of 5,625 gallons of gas distillate. The total weight of the vehicle and cargo was 48,830 pounds. The cargo was loaded at North Elton and was to be delivered to the plant of the owner of the vehicle at Jennings, La. This vehicle was moving southward on Louisiana State Highway No. 26 at a speed of about 4 miles per hour when it entered upon the crossing and was struck by No. 62.

No. 62 stopped with the front of the locomotive 1,561 feet east of the crossing, and the thirty-sixth car on the crossing. None of the units of the train was derailed. The front end of the first Diesel-electric unit was somewhat damaged in the collision. The cargo tank of the semi-trailer was ruptured, and escaping distillate and vapor became ignited. Both Diesel-electric units were considerably damaged by explosions which occurred in the engine compartments and by fire. Fourteen of the first 36 cars of the train were damaged by fire.

The tractor remained upright and stopped on the highway with the front end 28 feet south of the track. The cargo tank of the semi-trailer was broken in two. The front end stopped in the southeast angle of the intersection, and the rear end stopped on the opposite side of the track. Both the tractor and the semi-trailer were destroyed by the impact and subsequent explosion and fire.

The engineer and the fireman of No. 62 were killed. The front brakeman, the swing brakeman, and the flagman were injured.

The weather was clear at the time of the accident, which occurred about 9:16 a. m.

During the 30-day period preceding the day of the accident the average daily movement over the crossing was 9.9 trains. During the 24-hour period beginning at 12:01 p. m., September 26, 1956, 125 automobiles, 139 motor-trucks, 2 school buses, and 6 other vehicles passed over the crossing.

Diesel-electric units 4201 and 4254 are of the road-switcher type.

### Discussion

As No. 62 was approaching the point where the accident occurred the enginemen were in the control compartment of the first Diesel-electric unit, the front brakeman and the swing brakeman were in the control compartment of the second Diesel-electric unit, and the conductor and the flagman were in the caboose. The enginemen were fatally injured in the accident, and the front brakeman and the swing brakeman were so seriously injured that they could not be questioned during this investigation. The conductor said that the brakes of the train had been tested and apparently had functioned properly when used en route. He was seated in the caboose, and he said that from this location he could not



hear the sound of the horn of the locomotive while the train was in motion. He said that as the train was approaching the intersection of the railroad and Highway No. 26 the brakes became applied in emergency. About 15 or 20 seconds later he heard a series of two explosions and then a third and louder explosion. He thought the train was moving at a speed of 45 or 50 miles per hour when the brakes became applied. The flagman, who was seated on the left side of the cupola of the caboose, said that the grade-crossing whistle signal was sounded as the train approached the crossing. He saw the motor-truck moving eastward on the gravel road which parallels the railroad on the north. He said that the truck appeared to be a short distance ahead of the locomotive and that when the truck reached Highway No. 26 it turned toward the south and entered the crossing ahead of the train. He said that the brakes of the train were applied in emergency before the collision occurred. He thought the train was moving at a speed of 40 or 45 miles per hour when the brakes became applied.

The driver of the truck said that he was driving eastward on the gravel road north of the track and approached the intersection of that road and Highway No. 26 at a speed of about 35 miles per hour. He said that he reduced the speed to about 4 miles per hour as he turned toward the south at the intersection. He did not see the flashing-light warning signals in operation and did not see or hear the approaching train as he approached the track. He said that as he was crossing the track he shifted from third to second gear and when he did this the gears of the two-speed axle disengaged. At this time he saw No. 62 approaching, but there was insufficient time for him to clear the track before the locomotive reached the crossing. The driver had been employed in this occupation during a period of approximately 10 years.

When the track was examined after the accident occurred it was found that the rails had been sanded throughout a distance of about 180 feet immediately west of the west edge of the crossing.

The instrument case and the flashing-light warning signal in the southeast angle of the intersection were demolished in the accident. The warning signals at this crossing had been inspected by the signal maintainer about noon on the day before the accident occurred, and they had functioned properly at that time.

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As a vehicle moves southward on Highway No. 26 between the intersection of the highway and the gravel road and the intersection of the highway and the railroad, the driver's view of an approaching east-bound train is unobstructed.

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 thirtieth day of October, 1956.

By the Commission, Commissioner Clarke.

(SEAL)

HAROLD D. McCOY,  
Secretary.