

INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION
WASHINGTON

INVESTIGATION NO. 2920
SOUTHERN PACIFIC COMPANY
REPORT IN RE ACCIDENT
NEAR FRENCH, N. MEX., ON
AUGUST 8, 1945

SUMMARY

Railroad: Southern Pacific
Date: August 8, 1945
Location: French, N. Mex.
Kind of accident: Collision
Equipment involved: Engine : Motor-truck
Train number: Extra 5315 West :
Engine number: 5315 :
Consist: Engine :
Estimated speed: 30 m. p. h. : 40 m. p. h.
Operation: Timetable and train orders
Track: Single; tangent; 0.1 percent
ascending grade eastward
Highway: Tangent; crosses track at angle
of 75°34'; vertical curve
Weather: Clear
Time: 1:10 p. m.
Casualties: 3 killed; 1 injured
Cause: Failure to operate a motor-truck
approaching railroad crossing
at grade in accordance with
requirements of law

INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION

INVESTIGATION NO. 2920

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

SOUTHERN PACIFIC COMPANY

September 26, 1945.

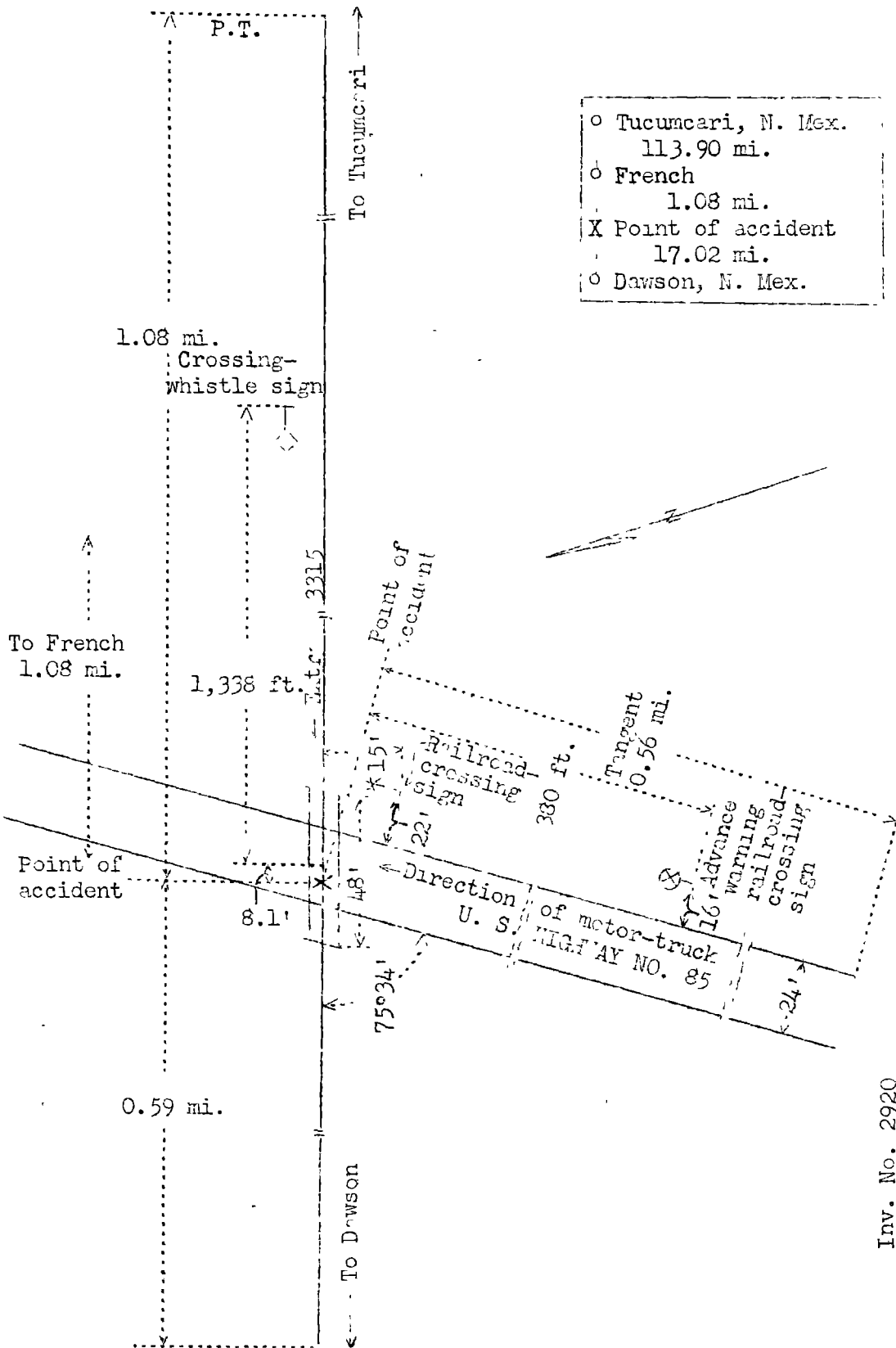
Accident near French, N. Mex., on August 8, 1945, caused by failure to operate a motor-truck approaching a railroad crossing at grade in accordance with requirements of law.

REPORT OF THE COMMISSION¹

PATTERSON, Commissioner:

On August 8, 1945, there was a collision between an engine of the Southern Pacific Company and a motor-truck at a grade crossing near French, N. Mex., which resulted in the death of two truck drivers and one train-service employee, and the injury of one train-service employee.

¹Under 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.



- o Tucumcari, N. Mex. 113.90 mi.
- o French 1.08 mi.
- X Point of accident 17.02 mi.
- o Dawson, N. Mex.

Inv. No. 2920
 Southern Pacific Company
 French, N. Mex.
 August 8, 1945

Location of Accident and Method of Operation

This accident occurred on the Santa Rosa Subdivision, extending between Tucumcari and Dawson, N. Mex., 132 miles, a single-track line over which trains are operated by timetable and train orders. There is no block system in use. The accident occurred 114.98 miles northwest of Tucumcari, at a point 1.08 miles west of the station at French, where the railroad is crossed at grade by U. S. Highway No. 85. The track is tangent throughout a distance of 1.08 miles east of this point and 0.59 mile westward. The grade is 0.1 percent ascending westward.

U. S. Highway No. 85 intersects the railroad at an angle of $75^{\circ}34'$. The highway is tangent throughout a distance of about 0.56 mile south of the crossing and a considerable distance northward. The grade for north-bound vehicles is 2.0 percent ascending 900 feet, then there is a vertical curve 100 feet to the crossing and 300 feet northward. South of the crossing the highway is surfaced with asphaltum to a width of 24 feet. The crossing is 48 feet wide. Two planks 10 inches wide and one plank 10 inches wide are provided, respectively, outside and inside the rails of the track. The remainder of the surface of the crossing is paved with asphaltum.

An advance warning railroad-crossing sign is located 380 feet south of the crossing and 16 feet east of the highway. This sign is a disc 2.47 feet in diameter mounted on a mast 4 feet 3 inches above the level of the highway. It bears two diagonal lines intersecting at right angles at its center, and bears the letters "R.R." in black and in colorless reflector buttons on a yellow background. A standard cross-buck railroad-crossing sign is located to the right of the direction of northward traffic 15 feet south of the track and 22 feet east of the highway. This sign is mounted on a mast 10 feet above the level of the highway, and bears the words "RAILROAD CROSSING" in black letters on a white background. A crossing-whistle sign for west-bound trains is located 1,338 feet east of the crossing.

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 commenced sufficiently in advance to afford ample warning, but not less than one-fourth mile before reaching a crossing, and prolonged or repeated until engine has passed over the crossing.

* * *

Laws of the State of New Mexico governing transportation by motor vehicles for hire over the public highways read in part as follows:

* * * motor vehicle shall upon approaching a railroad grade crossing, reduce speed to a rate that shall enable a stop to be made before reaching a point that will clear an oncoming train, such point being not less than seven (7) feet from the nearest rail of such crossing, and shall proceed to cross only after due caution has been taken to ascertain that the course is clear. In all cases, crossing shall be made only in such gear that there shall be no necessity for changing gears while traversing such crossing. Nothing contained in this paragraph shall be so construed as to relieve the driver of the responsibility in any case of exercising due caution to ascertain that the course is clear before proceeding over such crossing.

The maximum authorized speed for the train involved was 30 miles per hour.

Description of Accident

Extra 3315 East, moving eastward according to time-table direction but westward according to compass direction, consisting of engine 3315, a 2-8-2 type, passed French about 1:08 p. m., and, while moving over a highway grade crossing 1.08 miles west of French at an estimated speed of 30 miles per hour, it was struck by a north-bound motor-truck.

The motor-truck involved was a tractor and semi-trailer, owned and operated by the Denver Chicago Trucking Co., Inc., of Denver, Colo., a motor carrier engaged in interstate

commerce. The occupants of the motor-truck were two drivers, who held Colorado chauffeurs' licenses Nos. 1-2797 and 1-5439. The tractor was a 1945 C70TS Autocar model, and bore New Mexico license No. 13660, Colorado license No. 1T4890, and Arizona license No. 11-605A. It weighed 11,745 pounds, and was equipped with dual tires on the rear wheels, air brakes on all wheels, and an enclosed steel cab. The semi-trailer was a 1939 Fruehauf LT 2226 closed top model, and bore New Mexico license No. 1536, Colorado license No. 1TRL281, Arizona license No. 9-63A3, and Nebraska license No. 29X381. 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 8,200 pounds. The overall length of the tractor and semi-trailer was 37 feet 8 inches. At the time of the accident the cargo with which the semi-trailer was loaded weighed 29,469 pounds. This vehicle, en route from Los Angeles, Calif., to Denver, Colo., was moving northward on U. S. Highway No. 85 at an estimated speed of 40 miles per hour when it struck Extra 3315 West.

A west-bound train approaching on the railroad could be seen by the driver of a north-bound vehicle throughout a distance of approximately 1 mile.

The motor-truck struck the left side of engine 3315 between the pilot beam and the cylinder. The engine and tender were derailed and stopped on their right sides 119 feet west of the crossing and 15 feet north of the track, and were badly damaged. The fuel tank of the tractor was punctured, escaping gasoline became ignited, and the tractor, the trailer and the cargo were destroyed in the collision and by fire.

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

The fireman of Extra 3315 was killed, and the engineer was injured.

During the 30-day period preceding the day of the accident, the average daily movement over the crossing was 1.6 trains. During the 24-hour period beginning at 1:15 p. m., August 12, 1945, 105 motor-trucks, 20 buses, 366 automobiles and 5 other vehicles passed over the crossing.

Discussion

Extra 3315 West was approaching the crossing at a speed of about 30 miles per hour in territory where the maximum authorized speed was 30 miles per hour. The enginemen were maintaining a lookout ahead. The air brakes had functioned properly en route. The whistle signal for the crossing was sounded in compliance with the rules. The first the engineer

knew of anything being wrong was when the fireman called a warning when the engine was a short distance east of the crossing. However, the accident occurred before the engineer could take effective action to stop the train. The fireman was killed

The investigation disclosed that two employees of the Denver Chicago Trucking Company were occupying the motor-truck when the accident occurred. These employees were experienced drivers and had made several trips over the route prior to the accident. A foreman of the maintenance of way department of the railroad, who was in the vicinity of the crossing when the accident occurred, said that the motor-truck was moving at a speed of about 40 miles per hour when it struck Extra 3315.

The laws of the State of New Mexico require motor vehicles engaged in transportation for hire to stop not less than 7 feet from the nearest railroad track and not to proceed until it is safe to do so. It could not be determined why the driver failed to take action to stop the motor-truck short of the crossing in accordance with this provision of the law, as both occupants of the motor-truck were killed in the accident.

Cause

It is found that this accident was caused by failure to operate a motor-truck approaching a railroad crossing at grade in accordance with requirements of law.

Dated at Washington, D. C., this twenty-sixth day of September, 1945.

By the Commission, Commissioner Patterson.

(SEAL)

W. P. BARTEL,
Secretary.