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INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION,
WASHINGTON

REPORT NO. 3601
SOUTHERN RAILWAY COMPANY
IN RE ACCIDENT
NEAR MARION JCT., ALA., ON
NOVEMBER 24, 1954

SUMMARY

Date: November 24, 1954

Railroad: Southern

Location: Marion Jct., Ala.

Kind of accident: Collision

Equipment involved: Freight train · Motor-truck

Train number: 17

Engine number: Diesel-electric units
6105 and 2169

Consist: 34 cars, caboose

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

Operation Timetable and train orders

Track: Single, 3° curve; 0.81 percent
descending grade southward

Highway: Tangent; crosses track at angle of
58°45', 0.8 percent ascending grade
westward

Weather: Clear

Time: 10:30 a. m.

Casualties 1 killed; 2 injured

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

INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION

REPORT NO. 3601

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

SOUTHERN RAILWAY COMPANY

January 3, 1955

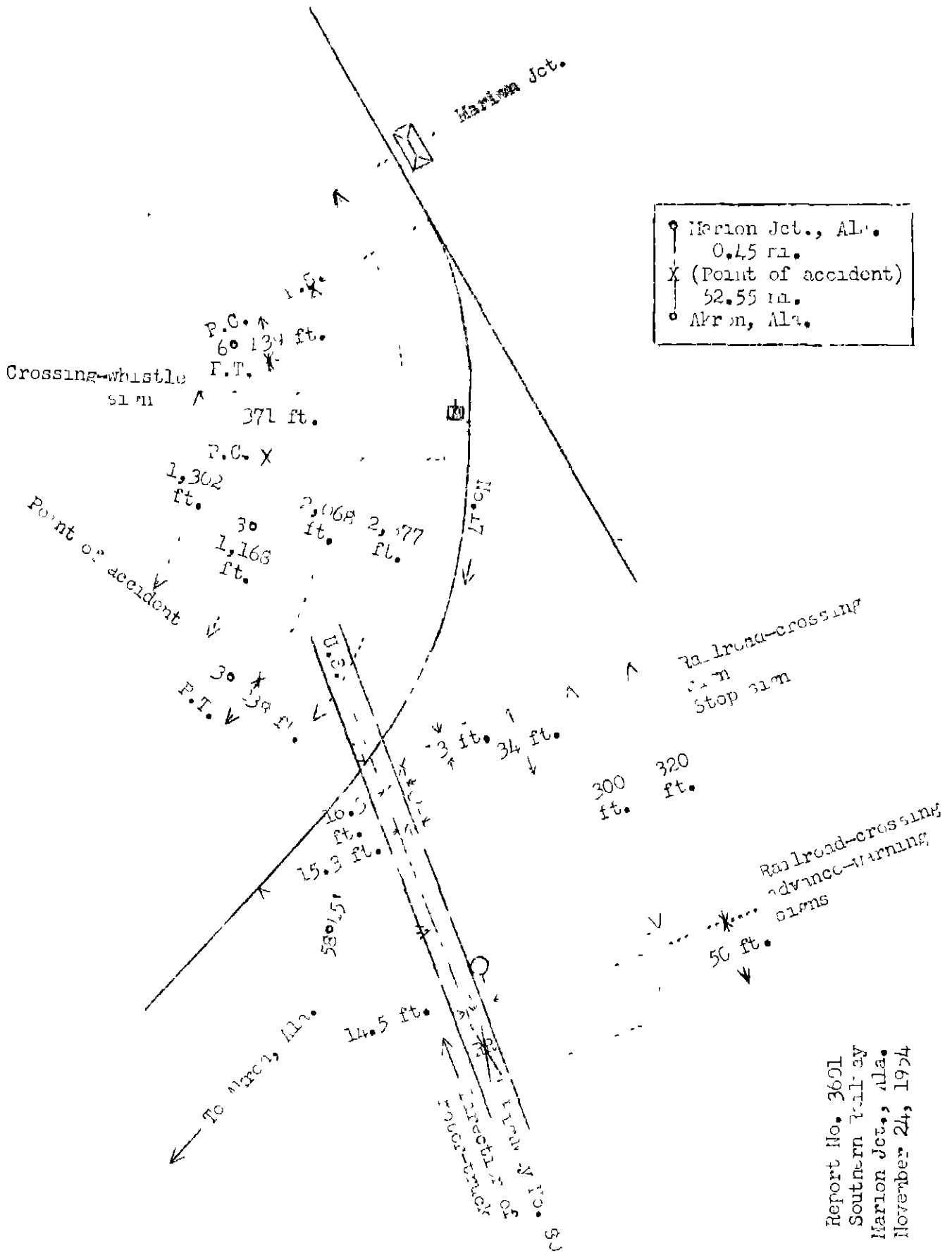
Accident near Marion Jct., Ala., on November 24, 1954,
caused by a motor-truck occupying a rail-highway
grade crossing immediately in front of an approach-
ing train.

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REPORT OF THE COMMISSION

CLARKE, Commissioner.

On November 24, 1954, there was a collision between a freight train on the Southern Railway and a motor-truck at a rail-highway grade crossing near Marion Jct., Ala., which resulted in the death of the driver of the motor-truck, and the injury of two train-service employes.

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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.



Report No. 3691
 Southern Railway
 Marion Jct., Ala.
 November 24, 1924

Location of Accident and Method of Operation

This accident occurred on that part of the Mobile Division extending between Marion Jct. and Akron, Ala., 53.0 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 2,377 feet south of the station at Marion Jct., where the railroad is crossed at grade by U. S. Highway No. 80. In the vicinity of the crossing a south-bound train by timetable direction moves northwest by compass direction. Timetable directions are used in this report. From the north there are, in succession, a 6° curve to the right 439 feet, a tangent 371 feet, and a 3° curve to the right 1,168 feet to the point of accident and 238 feet southward. The grade is 0.81 percent descending southward at the point of accident. At the point of accident the track is laid on an embankment approximately 10 feet in height.

In the immediate vicinity of the crossing U. S. Highway No. 80 is tangent and is surfaced with bituminous material. The southeast angle of the intersection of the highway and the railroad is 58°45'. The crossing is 24 feet in width. Planking is provided on each side of each rail, and the remaining area of the crossing is surfaced with bituminous material to the level of the tops of the rails. The grade for west-bound vehicles averages 3.1 percent ascending throughout a distance of 400 feet immediately east of the crossing, and it is 0.9 percent ascending at the crossing. A railroad-crossing advance-warning sign in the west-bound traffic lane extends between points 370 feet and 320 feet east of the crossing. This sign, which is painted with reflecting paint, consists of two diagonal stripes with the letter "R" in the angle at each side and a transverse stripe at each end. A circular railroad-crossing advance-warning sign 30 inches in diameter is located 14.5 feet north of the center-line of the highway and 500 feet east of the track. This sign is mounted on a mast and is 2 feet 8 inches above the level of the highway. It bears two diagonal lines intersecting at right angles and the letters "RP" in black on a yellow background. The lines and letters are equipped with reflector buttons. An octagonal sign is located 15.3 feet north of the center-line of the highway and 34 feet east of the track. This sign is mounted on a mast and is 5 feet 7 inches above the level of the highway. It bears the word

"STOP" in black letters on a yellow background with a black border. The letters are equipped with reflector buttons. A standard cross-buck railroad-crossing sign is located in the northeast angle of the intersection, 16.3 feet north of the center-line of the highway and 13 feet east of the center-line of the track. This sign is mounted on a mast and is 10 feet 2 inches above the surface of the highway. It bears the words "RAILROAD CROSSING" in black on a white background. A crossing-whistle sign for south-bound trains is located 1,302 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
* * *	
(1) -- -- o --	Approaching public crossings at grade. The signal to be repeated or the last sound prolonged until crossing is reached.

* * *

17. The headlight will be displayed to the front of every train by day and by night. * * *

* * *

30. The engine bell must be rung when an engine is * * * approaching and passing public crossings at grade, * * *

The maximum authorized speed for freight trains is 35 miles per hour.

Description of Accident
third-class

No. 17, a south-bound/freight train, consisted of Diesel-electric units 6105 and 2169, coupled in multiple-unit control, 34 cars, and a caboose. This train departed from Marion Jct. at 10:28 a. m., 2 hours 2 minutes late, and while it was moving at an estimated speed of 12 miles per hour it struck a motor-truck at a point 2,377 feet south of the station at Marion Jct., where the railroad is crossed at grade by U. S. Highway No. 80.

The vehicle involved was a tractor and semi-trailer owned by E. J. Reese, Baton Rouge, La. At the time of the accident it was being operated by the J. B. Beaird Co., Inc., Shreveport, La. The driver was the sole occupant. The tractor was a six-cylinder International model L-190 and bore 1954 Louisiana license No. 124-055. The weight of the tractor was 9,055 pounds. It was provided with an enclosed cab and was equipped with air-operated brakes on all wheels. Dual wheels and tires were provided at the rear. The semi-trailer was of the open-deck type and bore 1954 Louisiana license No. 4-10924. It was provided with tandem axles, spaced 48 inches between centers, each equipped with dual wheels and tires and air-operated brakes on all wheels. The total length of the tractor and semi-trailer was 43 feet 8 inches. At the time of the accident the cargo consisted of 25 empty steel tanks designed for the storage of liquified petroleum gases. The cargo weighed 17,338 pounds. It was loaded at Shreveport, La., and was destined to Albany, Ga. This vehicle was moving westward on U. S. Highway No. 80 at an undetermined rate of speed when it entered upon the crossing and was struck by No. 17.

Both Diesel-electric units, the first five cars, and the front truck of the sixth car of No. 17 were derailed. Both Diesel-electric units stopped on their right sides. The front end of the first unit was 238 feet south of the point of accident and 3 feet west of the center-line of the track, and the rear end of the second unit was 22 feet west of the track. The derailed cars stopped in various positions on or near the track. Both Diesel-electric units were somewhat damaged, the second to the fifth cars, inclusive, were destroyed, and the first and sixth cars were slightly damaged.

The tractor was struck at the rear of the right front wheel by the left side of the front of the first Diesel-electric unit. It stopped upright, at the bottom of the embankment, and approximately 90 feet south of the highway and 35 feet east of the track. The fuel tank located to the rear of the cab on the right side of the tractor was crushed in the accident, escaping gasoline became ignited, and the tractor

was badly damaged by fire. The semi-trailer stopped parallel to the track, with the front end toward the south and the rear wheels on the shoulder of the highway at the edge of the pavement. It was considerably damaged.

The conductor and the front brakeman of No. 17 were injured.

The weather was clear at the time of the accident, which occurred at 10.30 a. m.

During the 30-day period preceding the day of the accident the average daily movement over the crossing was 2.17 trains. During the 24-hour period beginning at 8:01 a. m., November 29, 1954, 978 automobiles, 475 trucks, and 27 buses passed over the crossing.

Discussion

After the rear end of No. 17 passed a switch located 2,056 feet north of the intersection of the railroad and U. S. Highway No. 80, the train was stopped to permit the flagman to restore the switch to normal position. It then proceeded southward, and as it approached the point where the accident occurred the enginemen were maintaining a lookout ahead from the control compartment at the front of the first Diesel-electric unit, the conductor and the front brakeman were in the control compartment of the second Diesel-electric unit, and the flagman was in the caboose. The headlight was lighted. The members of the crew said that the engineer began to sound the grade-crossing whistle signal soon after the train started and that he completed the last blast at the crossing. The bell was ringing during this time. The fireman said that as the locomotive approached the crossing he observed two motor-trucks moving westward on the highway. He said that the first truck crossed the crossing when the locomotive was about 150 feet distant from it and he assumed that the second truck would stop short of the crossing. The second truck was closely approaching the crossing before he realized that it would not stop, and he then called a warning to the engineer. The collision occurred immediately afterward. The engineer said that as the locomotive approached the crossing he was sounding the pneumatic horn and he did not hear the fireman. He did not see the truck before the collision occurred. The front brakeman said that there was an automobile following the first truck and he thought the two trucks were about 600 feet apart as they approached the crossing. He estimated that the first truck was moving at a speed of between 40 and 50 miles per hour and that the second truck was moving slightly

faster than the first. He said it appeared to him that the driver of the second truck applied the brakes at a distance of about 150 feet from the crossing and attempted to turn toward the south immediately before the accident occurred. He said the rear wheels of the tractor were sliding as the truck closely approached the crossing. Neither the conductor nor the flagman saw the truck before the accident occurred. The members of the crew estimated that the speed of the train was between 10 and 15 miles per hour when the accident occurred.

The driver of a bus, who witnessed the accident, said that his bus was following the second motor-truck at a distance of 250 to 300 feet and that the truck approached the crossing at a speed of about 50 miles per hour. He said that the driver of the truck applied the brakes when the truck reached a point between 100 and 150 feet west of the crossing and that he attempted to turn the truck toward the south immediately before the accident occurred. The driver of the bus thought that the speed of the truck had been reduced to about 10 miles per hour and that the speed of the train was less than 25 miles per hour when the collision occurred. He said that the headlight of the locomotive was lighted and the pneumatic horn was sounded as the train approached the crossing.

After the accident occurred, skid marks were found on the surface of the highway between points approximately 150 feet and 20 feet east of the crossing. These marks indicated that the truck had turned toward the left at a point approximately 30 feet east of the crossing. The accident occurred at a point 12 feet south of the center-line of the highway.

As a vehicle approaches the crossing from the east, the driver's view of an approaching south-bound train is somewhat restricted by two small houses located north of the highway and about 600 feet east of the crossing. After a vehicle passes these houses, the driver has an unobstructed view of an approaching south-bound train throughout a distance of several hundred 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 third day of January, 1955.

By the Commission, Commissioner Clarke.

(SEAL)

GEORGE W. LAIRD,
Secretary.