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Local Section – Page 21

**Truck Wreck Crushes Man to Death  
2<sup>nd</sup> Man Critically Hurt; Driver Jailed**

The resounding roar of truck traffic halted only momentarily on Highway 99 last night as one man was crushed to death and another critically injured at Fourth Street and Highway 99.

Today, the driver of one of the behemoth trucks involved in the tragic accident is being held in the Kern County jail. He is booked to face a possible charge of involuntary manslaughter.

Pronounced dead upon arrival at Kern General Hospital was Lester L. Rife, 38, 3747 West 110<sup>th</sup> Street, Inglewood, driver of an automobile transport truck, and in critical condition is Walter Leming, 45, 822½ West Ninety-Second Street, Los Angeles.

Ironically, the Fourth Street-Union Avenue intersection was the scene of another truck-ramming fatality less than three months ago. A driver was killed when his truck crashed into the rear of another on April 17.

Ambulance attendants said the accident, which was reported at 10:20 last night, occurred when Rife and Leming had stopped their automobile transport trucks to check the oil systems.

A third truck, driven by James Elbert Mason, 28, of Oakview, was traveling north on the highway when it suddenly swerved to the right and crashed into the rear of one of the trucks, crushing the two men. California Highway Patrol officials said today that Mason may be charged with manslaughter.

Leming, who suffered multiple fractures in both legs, was thrown to the sidewalk next to which his truck was parked and Rife was thrown directly under the axle of his own truck.

Mason, an employee of the Oil Trucking Company, was driving a heavy semi-truck and trailer. Rife was employed by the Automobile Transport Company of Los Angeles. Rife's death was the sixty-third on county roads this year, investigating officers said.

Caption under front page photos: Death Strikes in the Night – Two auto-carrier trucks parked last night on the east side of Union Avenue near Fourth Street. The two drivers met at the rear of the leader truck to check a fuel line. Moments later death had come to Lester L. Rife (foreground), and critical injuries to Harvey Walter Leming (on sidewalk). Jailed to face possible charges of manslaughter was James Elbert Mason. Highway patrolmen said Mason's truck (bottom photo) crashed into the rear of the parked auto-carrier. The impact hurled it forward to crush the two drivers between the huge bumpers of the trucks. (Story on Page 21.)