

February 16, 1915

**IN RE INVESTIGATION OF ACCIDENT WHICH OCCURRED ON THE ERIE  
RAILROAD NEAR GLEN EYRE, PA., ON JANUARY 23, 1915.**

On January 23, 1915, there was a derailment of a freight train on the Erie Railroad near Glen Eyre, Pa., which resulted in the death of the engineer, fireman and head brakeman. After investigation of this accident the Chief of the Division of Safety reports as follows:

The train involved in this accident was westbound freight train extra 3131, en route from Port Jervis, N. Y., to Avoca, Pa. It consisted of 84 cars and a caboose, hauled by locomotive No. 3131 and was in charge of Conductor Kizer and Engineer Sammon. It left Port Jervis at 7.45 p.m., January 22, and at Lackawaxen, 27 miles from Port Jervis, the crew in charge received train order No. 50, reading as follows:

"Eng. 3131 will run extra XJ Tower to Avoca and will meet No. 62, Eng. 3122 at Brandon. No. 62 gets this at Brandon."

Extra 3131 left XJ Tower, 0.7 of a mile beyond Lackawaxen, at 11.24 p.m. Approaching Brandon the switches were found to be lined up for it to enter the westbound siding, while the train order board at the tower, which is opposite the switch leading to the eastern end of the siding, was in the stop position, indicating that there were orders or messages to be delivered to the crew of the train. The train, however, entered the siding without slowing down and no attempt was made by anyone on the engine to take the messages from the operator who was standing on the ground in readiness to hand them on. The train proceeded through the siding and was derailed by the derailing device at the clearance point at the western end of the siding. This derail was set against extra 3131, its normal position when the switch at the western end of the siding is lined up for main line movements. In running their train off this derail, the engine crew disregarded the purple indication of the dwarf signal directly opposite the derail, this signal indicating stop. After being derailed the locomotive ran on the ties a distance of about 110 feet before overturning and rolling down the embankment into the river on the right side of the track, a distance of 40 feet, the engineer, fireman and brakeman going down with the engine. The first car of the train was derailed but remained at the top of the embankment.

This part of the Erie Railroad is a single track line. Trains are operated by train orders and time-card rights, their movements being protected by the manual block signal system. The track east of Brandon tower, between the distant and home signals, a distance of 1,973 feet, is on a tangent, the home signal being located about 200 feet east of the tower. Immediately west of the tower is the beginning of a curve to the left varying in curvature from 1 degree to 6 degrees, approximately 2,500 feet in length. Then there is a tangent of 450 feet, followed by a curve to the left of 3 degrees about 400 feet in length. The accident occurred on a tangent about 150 feet beyond the western end of this second curve. The grade is about one-half of 1% ascending for westbound trains. The derail is located on the siding 186 feet east of the point of the main line switch, and the dwarf signal, indicating its position, is directly opposite on the right hand side of the track. This switch is hand thrown and is not operated from the tower at Brandon. It was snowing at the time of the accident.

Road Foreman of Engines Collins stated that when he examined the engine after his arrival with the wrecking train, he found that a part of the engineman's brake valve was broken off; the handle was in the full release position. The throttle quadrant was badly bent, while the throttle stem was also bent and a portion broken off; as it was, the throttle was partially opened.

Mrs. Acton, who lives across the river from the point of the accident, stated that she was awake at the time it occurred. She heard the exhaust of the locomotive and then the crash of the engine going down the embankment. She stated that the exhaust continued right up to the time of the derailment.

Brakeman Jackson stated that he rode in the caboose from IX Tower until the train was derailed. As he was not in the cupola he did not notice the position of any of the signals approaching Brandon tower. When the train stopped the conductor said that there must be something wrong and told him to go forward. When he saw that the engine had gone down the embankment, he told the conductor that he was going ahead with his white lantern to flag train No. 62. He thought the speed of the train was about 8 miles per hour at the time of the derailment.

Conductor Kizer stated that on January 22, on the previous trip, he was relieved from duty and his train tied up at Rosas (HJ Tower) at 3.55 a.m. in order to avoid being on duty more than 16 consecutive hours. After being relieved he was asked by the dispatcher if he and his crew wanted to deadhead to Port Jervis on another train and he told the dispatcher that he and the brakeman did not want to do so, but that he did not know what the engineman and fireman wanted to do. He went back to the caboose and at 4.15 a.m. Fireman Milner entered. Engineman Sammon also came into the caboose within a few minutes after the fireman, but went out shortly afterwards. He did not know when the fireman went out as he was asleep at that time. A relief crew was sent to bring in this train and it reached Port Jervis at 10.23 a.m., Conductor Kizer and his brakeman being in the caboose asleep. At about 11.00 a.m. a switch tender came into the caboose and told him that some one had telephoned for him to come to the Mitchell House. At about 11.30 A.M. he went to that hotel and found Engineman Sammon and Fireman Milner in a side room leading from the bar. They did not state to him how they had spent their time prior to his arrival; he himself had had about four hours' rest at this time. He remained with them until about 5.30 p.m., when he started back to his caboose. His statement of what occurred during this time is as follows:

"We stayed in the Mitchell House about one hour and a half. I took a short beer myself and I think I took a couple of drinks of buttermilk. Sammon took some beer and Milner took some beer and I am pretty sure that they both took a drink of buttermilk in there. We then went up to Mr. Reagan's place on Front Street. We went in there mostly to get a cheese sandwich. I had a drink of beer and a drink of buttermilk. Sammon took whiskey in there I think and Milner took a drink of beer. We were there about 25 or 30 minutes. We then went to Mr. Young's saloon and there we got some limburger cheese. We were there some time. I had a glass of buttermilk and then I had a glass of beer with my cheese and I think Milner had a couple of glasses of beer. I do not think Sammon took whiskey but he had a couple of glasses of beer. From there we went back down to Connolly's Hotel. It is a wholesale place and he also retails. I had a drink of beer and also a couple of drinks of buttermilk. I think Sammon took a couple of drinks of whiskey. Milner took buttermilk. It was about 5.00 p.m. when we came out of Connolly's. Milner and I started up to the caboose. We stopped on the side walk talking for about 20 or 25 minutes and in the meantime one of the

callers came down and told me I was ordered. I asked him what time and he said 7.15 p.m. Milner said that as we were ordered we would go and get something to eat. Then we got to the restaurant Sammon was in there. I took a cup of coffee and drank it and Milner some beans. Then I came out."

Conductor Kizer stated further that at Port Jervis he got on the engine at the water crane and rode with Enginemen Sammon to the west end of the yard and talked with him about their train and what they were to do. The engineman tested the air brakes before leaving this yard. Conductor Kizer stated that extra 3131 left Port Jervis at 7.45 p.m. and on its arrival at XJ Tower, near Lackawaxen, he went into the tower to get orders, at which time engineman Sammon was there. They received an order to meet train No. 62 at Brandon and both he and the engineman read the order aloud. Leaving XJ Tower, at about 11.20 p.m., he rode in the cupola of the caboose on the right side. Approaching Brandon tower he saw the distant signal in the caution position; he felt the train slow down a little and saw the train-order signal showing red. When the caboose passed the tower, the operator handed him two messages and said that he had been unable to deliver copies to the engine crew. Conductor Kizer then went inside the caboose and had just sat down to read them when the train suddenly stopped. He looked at the air gauge and it only showed about 20 pounds pressure and was rapidly going down. He told Brakeman Jackson that an air hose had probably broken, perhaps throwing a car on the main track and to run forward as fast as he could. Conductor Kizer also started for the head end of the train and when about 70 car lengths away from it the brakeman told him that the engine had gone down the embankment. He then told the brakeman to run ahead with his white lantern to flag train No. 62, while he himself took the lamp from the switch stand, and also ran forward giving stop signals to that train. Conductor Kizer further stated that he thought the speed of his train when the caboose passed Brandon tower was about 6 or 8 miles per hour and that it had not been reduced at any point until it came to a stop at the time of the accident at 12.10 a.m.

Conductor Kizer further stated that he did not take any intoxicants with him in a bottle leaving Port Jervis; he did not think the engineman or fireman did but could not say positively whether they had or not. When he saw Engineman Sammon at XJ Tower the condition of the engineman did not seem to be any different than when leaving Port Jervis.

Operator Engvaldson, on duty at Brandon tower, stated that when extra 1131 approached he went out with his lantern intending to hand copies of messages to the engine crew. When the engine passed him, however, he was surprised to see no one in readiness to take the messages and did not see either the engineman or fireman. He thought the speed of the train at the time was about 10 miles per hour.

Operator Christianson, on duty at II Tower, stated that when Engineman Sammon and Conductor Kizer were in the tower getting their orders he was standing close to the engineman and thought he smelled very strongly of intoxicating liquors; in fact he thought the engineman must have a bottle with him on the engine. He did not think, however, that Engineman Sammon was incapable of handling his train. He did not notice any odor of intoxicating liquors on Conductor Kizer. Operator Christianson further stated that he understood fully that if enginemen or conductors came into his tower and he would consider them to be either physically or mentally unfit for duty, he was to report their condition to his superiors.

Joseph Brown, Chief Caller at Port Jervis, stated that on his way home from work at about 6.30 p.m., he met Conductor Kizer and Fireman Milner about 2 blocks from the Mitchell House and told them that they were called for 7.15 p.m. and 7.00 p.m. respectively. He asked them where the engineman was and they said he was in a restaurant eating. He walked about a block with them and did not notice anything wrong with either of them.

Roundhouse Foreman Reddington, on duty at Port Jervis, stated that he was instructed to be acquainted with the physical and mental condition of enginemen before they left the roundhouse. He was seated in the office looking over some work slips when Engineman Sammon came to the window and signed the special order book for enginemen and walked out. He stated that Engineman Sammon was rather quiet in his manner at all times; at this particular time the engineman did not say anything to him and he did not know in what condition the engineman might have been. He further stated that he had never had occasion to report any engineman as being unfit for duty.

Postler Hathaway, on duty at Port Jervis, stated that he met Engineman Sammon near the roundhouse where he was preparing his engine for its trip and walked with him to the

office of the dispatcher. While Engineman Sammon was looking over the order book, he went to the engine to see about coaling it. When Engineman Sammon came out of the office he boarded the engine and rode with him to the water crane. Hostler Hathaway further stated that he was with Engineman Sammon 5 or 10 minutes altogether and did not notice any odor of intoxicating liquors, saying that he seemed to be in proper mental and physical condition for the performance of his duties.

Engineman Dispatcher Seales, on duty at Port Jervis, stated that it was his duty to know the condition of enginemen and firemen before they left the terminal. About seven minutes before Engineman Sammon was supposed to leave with his engine he went out and asked him how he was getting along and he said all right. A few seconds later the engineman sounded the whistle and started for the water crane. At this time the fireman was standing in the middle of the cab. Engine Dispatcher Seales did not notice anything wrong with either of them.

Superintendent Mantall stated that instructions had been issued relative to ascertaining the physical and mental fitness of all employees before going on duty. He stated that the master mechanics, road foremen of engines, train masters and chief dispatchers had been instructed to go over with their subordinates the matter of checking up and watching all men in train service before allowing them to leave terminals, the responsibility of knowing the condition of enginemen and firemen being centered in the engine dispatchers and for men in train service in the yard masters. These instructions, however, were extended to other employees who came in contact with men in engine and train service, such as operators, their instructions being to watch enginemen, conductors and other employees and if they noticed anything wrong with them, such as being under the influence of intoxicating liquors or otherwise not being in proper mental or physical condition, to report the same promptly to the superintendent's office.

M. J. Howley, Supervisor of Locomotive Operation, stated that the engine dispatchers were instructed to see all enginemen before they took out their engines, no engineman being allowed to leave the terminal unless mentally and physically competent. Mr. Howley also called attention to operating rule No. 257 reading as follows:

"The use of intoxicants while on duty is prohibited. Employees known to be addicted to their use at any time or to frequent saloons or

on places of low resort will not be retained in the service."

Mr. Rowley further stated that he made an investigation for the purpose of ascertaining whether or not Engineman Sammon obtained any rest while at Port Jervis between his arrival there at 7.50 a.m. on January 22 and 7.15 p.m., the hour he again went on duty. This investigation showed that Engineman Sammon always stayed at the Y.M.C.A., and that he had been there at about 8.00 a.m. When the caller went to the Y.M.C.A. to call Engineman Sammon for Duty his name was not on the register and they went to the engineman's room, thinking perhaps he had retired without registering, but found that his bed had not been occupied.

Train Master Nolan stated that he had cautioned all yard masters to see to it that all their subordinates watched the mental and physical condition of enginemen, firemen, conductors and trainmen before they went on duty and if they had the least suspicion that a man was not exactly right he was not to be allowed to go on duty. He thought the supervision in this particular, as exercised at Port Jervis, to be as strict as it could be.

Edward Roberts, telegraph operator on duty at R.J. Tower January 22, stated that Conductor Kizer and his train crew, together with Engineman Sammon, were relieved from duty at 3.55 a.m., Fireman Milner being relieved at 4.00 a.m. The conductor and brakemen deadheaded to Port Jervis with their caboose, while the engineman and fireman secured permission from the dispatcher to deadhead to that point on extra 3683, which left RJ Tower at 6.25 a.m.

This accident was caused by the failure of Engineman Sammon to bring his train to a stop before running off the deraill at the Western end of the passing track.

From the investigation of this accident it seems apparent that neither Engineman Sammon nor Fireman Milner had had any rest after being relieved from duty the day before the accident and before going on duty at 7.15 p.m., a great deal of their time having been spent in visiting various saloons and drinking intoxicating liquors, the result being that at the time of the accident, neither of them had had any rest for at least 36 consecutive hours. It further appears that they failed to observe the position of the train order board at Branson tower, no attempt being made by any one on the engine to take the messages from the operator who was



waiting to hand them on, and that they disregarded stop indication of the dwarf signal opposite the derail. These facts, together with the fact that the engine apparently was working steam until it was derailed, and that after the accident the throttle on the engine was found to be partially opened, lead strongly to the conclusion that the engineman was either asleep or so incapacitated as to be unable properly to perform his duty. If he was asleep, the fact that he had been drinking, coupled with his failure to take adequate rest, undoubtedly explains his condition.

Engineman Sammon was employed as a fireman in 1899 and promoted to engineman in 1905, while Fireman Milner was employed as such in 1907. At the time of the accident Engineman Sammon and Fireman Milner had been on duty about 5½ hours after a period off duty of about 15 hours.

While not on duty at Port Jervis, Engineman Sammon, Fireman Milner and Conductor Kizer violated general operating rule No. 257, prohibiting the frequenting of saloons. The facts disclosed by the investigation of this accident emphasize the statements made in the report covering the accident which occurred near Lockport, N. Y., on January 25, 1913, involving a somewhat similar situation. Concerning the condition of an employee at fault in that case it was said that:

"Railroad service requires steady, efficient and ever alert employees, with a full appreciation of their duties and responsibilities, held up to their work by proper methods of supervision and discipline, and it is bad practice for any person connected with the operation of a railroad to indulge in intoxicating liquors at any time, whether on duty or off duty, if the proper degree of safety and efficiency is to be maintained; in fact many railroads, by their rules, prohibit the drinking of intoxicating liquors at any time, under penalty of dismissal."