

## INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF THE BUREAU OF SAFETY IN RE  
INVESTIGATION OF AN ACCIDENT WHICH OCCURRED ON  
THE MISSOURI PACIFIC RAILROAD NEAR MCGEEHEE, ARK.,  
ON SEPTEMBER 13, 1926.

October 28, 1926.

To the Commission:

On September 13, 1926, there was a derailment of a passenger train on the Missouri Pacific Railroad near McGehee, Ark., which resulted in the death of 2 employees and the injury of 20 passengers and 1 employee.

Location and method of operation

This accident occurred on the Pine Bluff District of the Little Rock Division, extending between McGehee and Little Rock, Ark., a distance of 101.93 miles, in the vicinity of the point of accident this is a single-track line over which trains are operated by time-table and train orders, no block-signal system being in use. The derailment occurred on a fill, about  $2\frac{1}{2}$  or 3 feet in height, at a point 3.2 miles north of McGehee, approaching this point from the south the track is tangent for a distance of 4,576 feet, this tangent extending beyond the point of derailment for more than 3 miles, while the grade is practically level. The track is laid with 100-pound rails, 33 feet in length, with about 20 treated ties to the rail-length, single-spiked, partly tie-plated, and ballasted with river gravel to a depth of about 10 inches.

The weather was clear at the time of the accident, which occurred at about 11.55 a.m.

Description

Northbound passenger train No. 102 consisted of one combination mail and baggage car, one baggage car, one day coach, one chair car, one Pullman sleeping car, one dining car, two Pullman sleeping cars, and one dining car, in the order named, all of steel construction, hauled by engine 6505, and was in charge of Conductor Holcorbe and Engineer Bushey. This train left McGehee, the last open office, at 11.45 p.m., 15 minutes late, and was derailed on reaching a point 3.2 miles north of McGehee while traveling at a speed estimated to have been between 35 and 45 miles an hour.

Engine 6505, its tender, the first four cars and the forward truck of the fifth car, were derailed to the right, the engine came to rest on its left side, almost at right angles to the track, with its head end 59 feet from the track and 331 feet north of the point of derailment. The first car was diagonally across the tracks, nearly upright, while the next three cars were in general line with the track. The employees killed were the engineer and fireman.

#### Summary of evidence

Conductor Holcombe stated that at McGehee he noticed that the headlight on the engine was burning properly, while on departing from this point a running test of the air brakes was made. He was collecting transportation in the third car in the train and the first intimation he had of anything wrong was on feeling the air brakes apply in emergency. At this time he was standing in the aisle, and realizing something unusual was happening, he warned the passengers to sit down, the derailment occurring a few seconds afterwards. After making arrangements to assist the injured the conductor went forward to find out what the trouble was, and he said that at this time Engineer Bushey was still alive and informed him that the derailment was caused by a rail being out. Conductor Holcombe made a brief examination of the track and saw where a rail had been disconnected, on the east side of the track. He estimated the speed of the train to have been about 40 miles an hour at the time of the derailment. The statements of Flagman Bly corroborated in substance those of Conductor Holcombe, except that he quoted the engineer as saying his engine had struck a broken rail and he said that on his way back toward the rear of the train he saw a broken rail. After going back to McGehee, making a report of the accident and summoning assistance, he returned to the point of derailment on the relief train. At this time he saw that a rail joint had been disconnected, the angle bars removed from both sides of the rail, the bolts and nuts taken out and left laying on the ground near the angle bars, and the spikes pulled from the ties for a distance of about a rail-length on the gauge side of the rail, while the receiving end of the rail was moved inward about 4 or 5 inches, this rail was on the east or right side of the track. He estimated the speed of the train to have been not more than 45 miles an hour at the time of the accident. The statements of Joint Baggage and Express Messenger Copton, Train Porter Johnson, and News Agent Sanderfur brought out nothing additional of importance, none of them made any examination of the track.

Several witnesses also testified that shortly after the accident they observed that the bolts had been removed from a rail joint on the east rail of the track and the spikes pulled for more than a rail-length on the gauge side of the rail. The angle bars from each side of the rail joint, and the bolts, nuts, and lock washers, were laying on the ground, while the receiving end of the rail was moved inward, apparently with malicious intent. The nuts distinctly showed that they had been removed with a wrench, as all four corners of the nuts were bright, and there were claw bar marks on the ties where the inside spikes had been pulled. One of the witnesses also said there was sand on the rails for a distance of two or three car-lengths south of where the rail had been moved from the track.

Measurements of the track taken at each rail joint for a distance of more than 1,400 feet south of the point of derailment disclosed the gauge, alignment, and elevation to be in good condition. The general maintenance of the track was good.

Careful and thorough inspection of engine 6505 disclosed that the front and back pedestals of the right forward engine truck box were broken. The breaks in the back pedestal were new, and apparently caused by the derailment, while the surfaces of the breaks in the front pedestal, the inside face of which was broken 11-7/8 inches and the outside face nearly 15 inches from the pedestal binder, were partly discolored by oil, and these discolored upper and lower surfaces of the same break corresponded sufficiently to suggest that part of the fracture might have been an old break, and that the pedestals were completely broken as a result of the derailment. Nothing else was found which it was thought could have caused the accident while the engineer's work report, made on arrival of engine 6505 at Gouldsboro on September 12, the day prior to the accident, the inspector's report of the same engine on the day of the accident, and also the inspector's report made at about 11.30 p.m., at McGehee, 25 minutes prior to the accident, indicated no defect that would have caused or contributed to the derailment.

Between 6 and 7 a.m., September 14, 1936, a claw bar and a long-handled track wrench, used mostly as a frog wrench, were found between two logs in the weeds about 10 feet west of the wire fence on the west side of the track, nearly opposite the point of derailment. About 9 a.m. the same day bloodhounds were taken to the spot where the track tools were found in the logs; they obtained the scent and followed the trail to a point about 150 or 200 yards distant, near a public highway, where

the trail was lost, apparently on account of the guilty person or persons having entered a vehicle of some kind.

The last train to pass the point of accident was southbound passenger train No. 143, which passed at a speed estimated to have been about 48 or 50 miles an hour, about 28 minutes prior to the derailment, at which time nothing wrong was noticed.

#### Conclusions

This accident was caused by malicious tampering with the track.

The investigation developed that a rail joint on the east side of the track had been disconnected, the angle bars, bolts, nuts, and lock washers removed, and the spikes pulled from the gauge side of the rail for its entire length, after which the receiving end of the rail was pried inward toward the center of the track, thus forming a derail. At the time of this investigation it had not been determined by whom this rail was moved.

At the time of the accident the employees involved had been on duty less than 3 hours and 45 minutes, prior to which they had been off duty 10 hours and 45 minutes or more.

Respectfully submitted,

J. P. Borland,

Director.