

U. S. DEPT. OF TRANSPORTATION  
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INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF THE BUREAU OF SAFETY IN RE  
INVESTIGATION OF AN ACCIDENT WHICH OCCURRED ON  
THE ST. JOSEPH & GRAND ISLAND RAILWAY, UNION  
PACIFIC SYSTEM, AT SUMMIT, KAN., APRIL 30, 1925.

Dept. of Transportation

August 29, 1925.

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To the Commission:

On April 30, 1925, there was a derailment of a passenger train on the St. Joseph & Grand Island Railway, Union Pacific System, at Summit, Kan., resulting in the death of one employee, and the injury of one passenger and one employee.

Location and method of operation.

This accident occurred on the First Subdivision of the Central Division, extending between St. Joseph, Mo., and Marysville, Kan., a distance of 113.1 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 accident occurred at the east passing-track switch at Summit; approaching this point from the east the track is tangent for 2,430 feet, followed by a compound curve to the left 7,606 feet in length, the curvature varying from  $0^{\circ}30'$  to  $1^{\circ}30'$ , the accident occurring on this curve at a point 2,601.4 feet from its eastern end, where the curvature is at its minimum. The grade in this vicinity is undulating, being 0.848 per cent ascending for westbound trains at the point of accident.

The switch involved is a facing-point switch for westbound trains, with the switch-stand located on the engineman's side of a westbound train, night indications are green when the switch is closed, and red when it is open. Owing to the curve the view of the switch from the engineman's side of the cab is considerably restricted. The weather was clear at the time of the accident, which occurred at about 9.48 p.m.

Description.

Westbound passenger train No. 1 consisted of one combination mail and baggage car, one combination smoker and chair car, and one Pullman sleeping car, in the order named, hauled by engine 30, and was in charge of Conductor Morgan and Engineman

O'Dowd. The first and third cars were of all-steel construction, while the second car was of wooden construction. This train left Seneca, the last open office and 16.9 miles from Summit, at 9.07 p. m., 3 minutes late, and was derailed at the east passing-track switch at Summit while traveling at a speed estimated to have been between 20 and 35 miles an hour.

Engine 30 came to rest diagonally across the passing track, on its right side, its rear end fouling the main track and its head end 222 feet from the switch; the tender came to rest just behind the engine, also on its right side, mostly north of and practically at a right angle with the passing track. The first two cars and the forward truck of the last car were also derailed, but remained practically upright. The employee killed was the engineman.

#### Summary of evidence.

The first intimation members of the crew had of anything wrong was when the air brakes were applied in emergency just prior to the accident. Fireman Shum stated that the air brakes were tested and worked properly en route and that the headlight was burning brightly. He was busy working on the fire approaching Summit, and did not attempt to observe the indication displayed by the switch target as he did not definitely realize his location; furthermore, he said that after working on the fire his vision is temporarily impaired. Conductor Morgan and Flagman Adams were riding in the first car at the time of the accident; shortly after its occurrence Conductor Morgan proceeded to the engine, while Flagman Adams immediately went back to flag. When Conductor Morgan arrived at the head end of the train, Engineman O'Dowd, who was still alive, was being assisted from the engine; Conductor Morgan and Fireman Shum stated that at this time the engineman said the switch was partly opened, both a green and red indication being displayed, and although he took immediate action upon definitely determining this condition while rounding the curve it was too late to avert the accident.

An examination of the switch shortly after the accident disclosed that the switch lock had been broken open, the broken parts lying on the ground, the switch light was burning, and the lever was thrown about half way around.

An eastbound train passed this point less than two hours prior to the accident, and at that time the crew in charge noticed nothing unusual.

Emmet Pethoud, aged 25, of Beatrice, Nebr , upon being questioned, confessed that he tampered with the switch with malicious intent, and he is now in the custody of the authorities

Conclusions.

This accident was caused by malicious tampering with a switch.

Had an adequate block-signal system been in use on this line this accident probably would not have occurred; an adequate automatic train stop or train control device would have prevented it.

The employees involved were experienced men. At the time of the accident none of them had been on duty in violation of any of the provisions of the hours of service laws.

Respectfully submitted,

W. P. BORLAND,

Director