

Statement of Conductor J. Turner, in charge of train No. 11
ex Nelson, October 28th, 1924.

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Train No. 11 left Nelson about 21.20k. Immediately after leaving I started to check train, commencing in the first class car. Train consisted of mail car, baggage car, first class, and sleeper. I do not recall how many passengers were in car when making this check, but there was nothing whatever to attract my attention especially, to any particular passenger or passengers. After completing this check I checked passengers as they got on at local points between Nelson and Castlegar. I cannot recollect picking up any passengers between Nelson and Castlegar except Brilliant, where two men and one young woman boarded train. I recognized one of the men as Peter Veregin, but I cannot recall having at any time seen the other man or the woman previously. I checked up the transportation of these three passengers immediately after leaving Brilliant and they were ticketed from Brilliant to Castlegar.

I again checked first class coach No. 1586 after leaving Robson West and punched out cash fare for Mr. Veregin and the lady that was with him, Castlegar to Grand Forks, and did not see the man that got on at Brilliant with Mr. Veregin, but as I saw Mr. Veregin and this man talking together in about the centre of the coach coming into Castlegar, I assumed the man remained at Castlegar as I saw nothing of him after leaving that point. There were only two women in the coach, one of which was the lady with Mr. Veregin, the other I did not know. The balance of the passengers were made up of three Hindoos, three Irishmen, Mr. Mackie, Harry Bishop, F.H. Gaskill, the others being strangers.

I cannot recall the number of passengers, but we let off one Swede sectionman at Coykendahl and picked up three doukhebor section men at Tunnel on a pass reading Tunnel to Grand Forks, their baggage consisted of bundles, and they sat in the rear of the coach. We arrived at Farron 24.35k, cleaned engine fire, took water, and picked up cafe car. I obtained one order providing rear end protection - it is customary to receive this order. Nothing unusual happened to attract my attention in any way at this point and I booked off at 24.55k, but we actually left about two minutes before this, as we were ready a little

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soon, than expected, but did not waste time going back to the office to change the books.

I got on the front end of the day coach leaving Farron, and walked through the day coach to the rear end. When walking through the day coach I observed in the usual manner and noticed no one in the coach that was not on arriving at Farron. All the passengers were in either a dosing or sleeping attitude except one woman towards the head end of the car who appeared to be quite wide awake, and one Hindoo at the rear end of the car. Mr. Veregin had his head bent over as if in a dosing position. The lady who was on the window side was leaning towards the window and also in a dosing attitude. He was sitting quite close to the centre of the car on the north side with lady leaving Farron, having occupied this seat, as I remember all the way from Castlebar.

It would have been possible for someone to have entered this car at Farron and get off again while we were there without my knowledge. The news agent, Mr. Fawcett was asleep in a double seat at the forward end of the car on the south side. I feel satisfied that he did not have an alarm clock, and to my knowledge none of the news agents carry them.

The lady I referred to as being in the forward end of the car, awake, was sitting in a seat immediately behind the news agent as I recall. She was occupying a seat with a man, and I took both of them to be Italians. Both were among the injured and sent to Grand Forks Hospital and were among the first that I assisted out.

On reaching the rear end of train, retainers were turned up and I saw that steam was working through train. Trainman Marquis joined me at the rear platform of the rear car very shortly. I spoke to him in regard to the steam heat as he was a new man. Then we walked through the two cars, the sleeper and day coach to the baggage car, and we had not any more than arrived at the baggage car, I would judge 35 to 40 seconds, before the explosion occurred in the day coach directly behind baggage car, blowing the end door of baggage car that we had just come through, off,

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and almost through the baggage car, and showering us with broken glass from the day coach windows. The train travelled about two coach lengths after explosion.

In looking around, we saw right through the end doorway of the baggage car at what was left of the day coach, and it was practically demolished. A great amount of debris was piled up against the end of baggage car. We observed fire in the body of the coach on the south side about the centre immediately after the explosion. It had a yellow tinge. We also observed a flame that was coming from somewhere under the coach on the outside, and on the same side, of a blue color. We noticed it almost directly after the explosion when we went out to the end of the car and looked along the side.

I immediately ordered the men to get the fire extinguishers and brakeman Marquis and myself started to dig away the debris from the end of the car as we could observe some injured people just inside. A fire extinguisher was procured and handled by the express messenger, Arthur Loomer who was in charge of the express. We also got a fire extinguisher from the sleeper.

Knowing that these were in operation I paid no further attention to the operators of these fire extinguishers but directed my attention to the aiding of the injured with the assistance of brakeman Marquis and baggageman Brennan. We tore away the broken pieces of the car at the west end and liberated three, two men and a woman and assisted them into the baggage car. We then continued to work on through the car and to the best of my knowledge, liberated three more at the east end. Brakeman Marquis and baggageman Brennan and I took them down outside.

By this time fire in coach was gaining headway, and burning towards the east end. We were satisfied that there were no more bodies west of this point in the car and were forced to get out by the fumes of gas escaping from the tanks. There was no further evidence of any life left in the car when we left it. I then went up on the bank on the south side of track to look down into car, and met a man who was one of the

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passengers from the sleeping car, and I said to him, "I believe there is somebody left in the car". I saw nobody, but I had a feeling that there must be, so I got on at the west end and proceeded through it but could not observe anyone. The smoke and fire at this time was very bad. There certainly was no sign of life left in the car. I told the brakeman and baggage man that we would set a brake on the sleeper, block it, and if possible, pull the burning car away, which we did, -- about a coach length -- cut off from the head end and pulled baggage car away. What was left of the day coach at this time was a mass of flames, but I observed very distinctly that the gas tanks were practically intact, showing no signs of having been disturbed in any way by the explosion.

We could do no more with the car and turned our attention to the injured along the side of track, and after organizing the passengers and crew to assist injured passengers to the sleeper, I proceeded to Farron for assistance. I do not recall what time it was that I arrived at Farron. I arranged for the pusher engine and pilot to follow me back to the scene of accident. The engine arrived there about as soon as I did, and there being no more injured to take care of, I advised conductor Eaton in charge of pusher to proceed east as fast as possible with the sleeping car containing injured passengers for Nelson Hospital. At this time there were two dead that we knew of, but did not disturb bodies, merely covering them over with blankets obtained from the sleeping car.

The centre of the car where Peter Veregin was sitting, or about where he was sitting, seemed to receive the full force of the shock, and also there was evidence of this underneath the car, as I remember, and engineer Harkness and myself both remarked on it, that the steam line running throughout the length of the car had been given a severe shock as it was bent sharply downward.

I noted on going back to Farron directly under the car by the track, just

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where the explosion occurred, the track was covered between the rails with very small splinters, evidently driven down through the bottom of the car. I figure it must have come from the floor of the car. I do not recall there being any hole in the floor of the car at this point, but it was quite possible for it to be covered by debris.

I might mention that Engineer Harkness and fireman Munro were with me when I examined the gas tanks after the explosion and found them intact.

Joseph Duran

Dated, Nelson, B.C. October 30th, 1924.