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Decision No. 89577 . OCT 31 1978

**ORIGINAL**

BEFORE THE PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMISSION OF THE STATE OF CALIFORNIA

RICHARD A. BARD,  
Complainant,

vs.

PACIFIC TELEPHONE AND  
TELEGRAPH COMPANY,  
Defendant.

Case No. 10416  
(Filed September 13, 1977)

Richard A. Bard, for himself, complainant.  
Duane G. Henry, Attorney at Law, for The Pacific  
Telephone and Telegraph Company, defendant.

O P I N I O N

Hearing on this matter was held by C. T. Coffey in Ukiah on April 28, 1978. It was submitted upon the receipt of the transcript.

Complainant alleges that the quality of telephone service provided by The Pacific Telephone and Telegraph Company (Pacific) in the Ukiah area is substandard and unacceptable as shown by the following instances.

On July 28, 1977, complainant initiated an operator-assisted, third-party billing call. After one minute of conversation, the call was interrupted by background operator noise, including laughing and audible conversation, before the line went dead. Complainant was unable to reach the original operator. A new call was initiated and a conversation with a supervisor was established after one operator refused to give her operator number. Complainant characterized the operators as arrogant, offensive, and snippy, and that the supervisor reluctantly established the offending operator's number.

On August 31, 1977, complainant was told by an operator that he would suffer a heart attack before he was 40 years old if he did not stop complaining about the poor service and other malfeasance of Pacific. Complainant interpreted the statement as a threat.

Complainant requests Pacific be required to investigate and explain the above incidents, that arrogant operator practices be stopped, that an apology be tendered complainant, that \$1.19 be credited to complainant's account for the call on July 28, 1977, and that operators be required to give an identification number at the initiation of each call.

Testimony by Pacific's responsible district manager of operator services confirms that an operator did refuse to identify herself on July 28, 1977, and that she was the individual who originally assisted in placing the call. Initially, the witness testified that the operator refused because she became frightened by complainant's tone and because she was in the process of referring him to her supervisor as requested. Ultimately, after questioning, the witness interpreted that operator fright could result from fear of job loss or reprimand if she had been rude or discourteous to customers. The operator was characterized by the witness as completely acceptable in all aspects of her job, being a very pleasant lady, having good service tone, and providing good technical service. During more than ten years of employment by Pacific, there are no known complaints by customers of the operator's service.

Pacific's witness confirmed that the operator admitted the incident on August 31, 1977, but maintained that it was made in a humorous and friendly manner. The operator is rated by management as one of the outstanding workers in the Ukiah force who is seen as a bright, alert, and an agreeable employee. Pacific's witness testified that the operators feel the complainant, over a period of several months, has been rude and abusive to them.

Several other incidents were recounted during the hearing in support of both sides of the issues herein. The elements of the

confrontations and individual reactions were generally typical of the situations reviewed and will not be detailed herein.

Three operators appeared and testified to the incidents being considered herein at the insistence of the hearing officer. All of the witnesses opposed identifying the operators by number.

Pacific's opposition to the request for operator identification is based on the results of a now discontinued study of having operators identify themselves by name and number because of the generation of a high volume of unnecessary and often personal questions by customers which increases operator work time substantially, because few customers remember names or numbers, because many operators fear name identification from a safety point of view, and because identification is not a positive solution to the objective of providing quality service. Pacific's practice provides for the operator to provide identification upon request. Exhibit No. 1 is Pacific's calculation that each year the statewide cost of operator handling of calls will be increased \$3,301,425 for each second added to the operator work time on each call. Pacific's Ukiah exchange is, of course, a minuscule portion of its total California operation.

Pacific's district manager for operator services testified that he had advised complainant that he had investigated this complaint and had apologized for the impression given by the operator concerning his health. Complainant has been invited to visit the operator office.

The total time of the interrupted conversation on July 28, 1977, was four minutes and one second. In accordance with Pacific's practice, to compensate for the interruption in service, one minute was deducted from the total conversation period. Complainant was billed \$1.19 for a three-minute call and tax.

#### Discussion

It appears that this complaint is the result of a number of accumulating incidents which are frustrating and irritating both to the complainant and to Pacific's operators. Complainant's request for an investigation and an apology have been substantially satisfied. The adjustment of the billing for the interrupted call on July 28, 1977, appears to be a reasonable compromise.

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We could require the use of voluntary operator identification by number in the Ukiah office for a trial period, but we doubt that the problem complained of is more than an isolated incident. It is also not certain that requiring operator identification would eliminate the problem be it a common or rare occurrence.

The parties to the incidents being considered here each appear to be reasonable and very human beings who have been subjected to a series of progressively accumulative, frustrating situations. We trust that understanding and tolerance by both parties, in the future, will prevent misunderstanding or disagreement.

#### Findings

1. On July 28, 1977, a third-party, operator-assisted telephone call was interrupted after one minute and six seconds of conversation and was reestablished for an additional two minutes and fifty-five seconds.
2. On July 28, 1978, an operator refused to give the complainant her identifying number.
3. On August 31, 1977, an operator made the personal health remarks alleged by complainant.
4. It is Pacific's policy that operators identify themselves by number upon customer's request.
5. It is not possible for Pacific in all circumstances to identify an operator who refuses to supply identification upon customer's request.
6. There is no evidence that operator discourtesy is other than a rare occurrence.
7. \$1.19 is a reasonable charge for service to complainant on July 28, 1977.
8. Complainant's request for an investigation and apology has been substantially satisfied.

Conclusion

We conclude that the request for a bill credit of \$1.19 should be denied. It is hoped that complainant will avail himself of Pacific's invitation to visit an operator's office to see and gain understanding of the work environment and problems of operators. Pacific is hereby requested to reissue the invitation to complainant to visit a typical operating office not necessarily in Ukiah.

O R D E R

IT IS ORDERED that the request that \$1.19 be credited to the account of Richard A. Bard by The Pacific Telephone and Telegraph Company is denied.

The effective date of this order shall be thirty days after the date hereof.

Dated at San Francisco, California, this 31st day of OCTOBER, 1978.

Robert Batemanich  
President  
William G. ...  
Veronica L. ...  
Clifford D. ...  
Clair T. ...  
Commissioners