

IN RE INVESTIGATION OF AN ACCIDENT WHICH OCCURRED ON THE  
CHICAGO & NORTHWESTERN RAILROAD NEAR CARSON, WIS.,  
NOVEMBER 14, 1918.

January 3, 1919.

On November 14, 1918, there was a head-on collision between two freight trains on the Chicago & North Western Railroad near Carson, Wis., which resulted in the injury of two employees and one passenger. After investigation, the Chief of the Bureau of Safety reports as follows:

This accident occurred on that portion of the second sub-division of the Ashland division which extends between Ashland and Monico, Wis., a distance of 127.4 miles. It is a single track line over which trains are operated by time table and train orders. No block signal system is in effect.

The track in the vicinity of the accident is a succession of curves averaging 4 degrees, and in several places runs through cuts, some of which are wooded and obstruct the view of opposing trains.

The trains involved were northbound extra 136 and southbound extra 2318. Extra 136 consisted of engine 136, three freight cars and caboose in charge of Conductor Merrill and Engineman Reitz and was en route from Mercer, Wis., to Ironwood, Mich. Extra 2318 consisted of engine 2318, 23 cars and caboose in charge of Conductor Gigure and Engineman Hermand and was en route from Hurley, Wis., to Monico, Wis.

Extra 136 left Mercer at 4.10 p.m., after receiving train order No. 44, reading as follows:

Engine 136 run extra Mercer to Ironwood.

Extra 2318 left Hurley at 3.21 p.m. after receiving train order No. 38, reading as follows:

Engine 2318 run extra Hurley to Monico;  
Meet No. 289 at Sand Rook.

No provision was made for a meeting point between these trains, and as a result they collided about one mile north of Carson, Wis., while both were moving at a speed of about 30 miles an hour. The damage to track and equipment was comparatively slight. The accident occurred on a 40° curve; the weather at the time was clear.

Conductor Merrill of extra 136 stated that he left Mercer at about 4.10 p.m. and arrived at Carson at about 4.26 p.m. When about a mile north of that point and while moving at a speed of about 15 miles an hour he was struck by south-bound extra 2318. He had no meet order or other instructions concerning that train, neither did he hear its whistle, and his attention was first drawn to it when the engineman applied the air. He stated that the headlight of No. 2318 was burning at the time and that his brakes had been tested en route and were in working condition.

Engineman Reitz of extra 136 stated that he had orders to run from Mercer to Ironwood, and after leaving Mercer the train proceeded to Carson where a stop of three or four minutes was made. He then proceeded north about one mile when he received a signal from fireman to stop, whereupon he shut off throttle and applied the emergency brake. As he stood up

and looked out of the side window he saw a headlight approaching and immediately jumped out of the side window. He stated that his speed at the time was about 18 or 20 miles an hour, and that he was within about two car lengths of the opposing train when he saw it approaching. His electric headlight was burning at the time and the weather was clear.

Conductor Gigure of extra 2318 stated that his train ran as second No. 78 from Ore Dock Yard, 1.6 miles east of Ashland, to Hurley, and at the latter point he received order to run as extra 2318 to Monico and meet No. 289 at Sand Rock. After meeting No. 289 and No. 117 at Sand Rock, his train left that point without any knowledge that extra 136 was on the road. As his train came into a curve about a mile north of Carson, it was struck by extra 136. His speed at the time was about 20 miles an hour. He stated that he heard the whistle of extra 136 a second or two before the collision, but he could not see the approaching train at a greater distance than a few car lengths.

Engineman Herman of extra 2318 stated that his train ran as second No. 78 from Ore Dock Yard to Hurley and at the latter point received order to run as extra from Hurley to Monico, with instructions to meet No. 289 at Sand Rock, but with no instructions concerning extra 136. After meeting 289 and No. 117 he proceeded and when about a mile north of Carson was struck by extra 136. He first saw this extra on entering a curve when only about ten car lengths away. He thereupon shut off the throttle, applied air in emergency, and made ready

to jump. His train at the time was moving at a speed of about 20 miles an hour. He heard the whistle of extra 136 as he was jumping, and he himself whistled about three times for the curves between Sand Rock and the point of accident. His headlight at the time was burning.

Train Dispatcher Dickinson, on duty at Ashland, Wis., between the hours of 7 a.m. and 3 p.m., stated that he was relieved at 3 p.m. by Dispatcher Wessels, to whom he turned over the transfer of trains. The latter began checking the transfer and when he reached extra 2318 south, Dickinson pointed it out to him on the train sheet.

Dispatcher Wessels stated that he came on duty at Ashland at 3 p.m., relieving Dispatcher Dickinson. On taking over the transfer his attention was called to extra 2318 south, and he checked order No. 38, instructing engine 2318 to run extra Hurley to Monico, as well as all other items in the presence of Dispatcher Dickinson. On examining the train sheet he noticed that this extra was in among the ore trains Ashland to Ironwood, and he thought at the time that this was the wrong place for it, as it should be where all trains between Ironwood and Monico were carried. He made no correction, however, but looked on the other side of the sheet and seeing nothing there except Nos. 289 and 117 for extra 2318 to meet, made no change, thinking it perfectly safe to leave things as they were. When extra 136 at Mercer at 4.08 p.m. asked for orders to Ironwood, he glanced across the right side of the train sheet for opposing entries and noticed one via Tomahawk Lake and another via Wood-

ruff, but entirely overlooked extra 2318, on account of it being entered in another place on the sheet. <sup>He</sup> accordingly gave extra 136 a straight running order without any directions concerning 2318. The last report he had on extra 2318 showed it out of Hurley Junction at 2.21 p.m. and the mark on the train sheet made by Dispatcher Dickinson indicated that it was to go to Monico.

At about 4.28 p.m. he realized that he had made an error in giving extra 136 a straight running order, and he immediately tried to correct the error by calling the operator at Carson. Receiving no answer he called the operator at Mercer. This station reported being busy, whereupon he had the operator at Ashland get Mercer for him. Mercer reported that extra 136 left there at 4.10, and he then called Carson again, and that station reported extra 136 as having passed at 4.30. He then inquired whether the operator could see this extra. The operator, without making any answer, ran out to flag, but the train was already too far away to see him. He then called the operator at Ironwood with a view to having extra 2318 stopped at Pine Lake by long distance telephone, but it was found that this extra had passed that point about ten minutes previously. He finally directed the chief dispatcher's attention to the trouble and both tried to stop 2318, without success. He stated that extra 136 was accustomed to getting the running order Ironwood to Mercer every day between three and five o'clock, and that there was nothing unusual on this occasion to take his mind from his work, though he had recently

been sick and off duty on that account and was still taking medicines, some of which he had before him in the office. He also stated that the work at the station had become light and admitted his sole responsibility for the accident.

This accident was caused by the failure of Train Dispatcher Wessels to make provision for a meeting point between the colliding trains.

Although on assuming his duties his attention was called to extra 2318, and on examining the train sheet he noticed that it was carried in the wrong place, Dispatcher Wessels failed to make any correction, with the result that when extra 136 asked for orders, he gave it a straight order without any meeting instructions.

Dispatcher Wessels was an experienced employee with a good record. He had been on duty one hour and thirty minutes at the time of the collision, after having been sixteen hours off duty.

At the time of the accident the crew of extra 136 had been on duty nine hours and forty-five minutes, and the crew of extra 2318 had been on duty seven hours and fifty minutes.

H.F.