

Nitcherson

CIRCULAR

June 29/20

IN RE INVESTIGATION OF AN ACCIDENT WHICH OCCURRED
ON THE CHICAGO & NORTHWESTERN RAILROAD NEAR
LAMBERTON, MINN., ON APRIL 29, 1920.

June 22, 1920.

On April 29, 1920, there was a head-end collision between two passenger trains on the Chicago & Northwestern Railroad near Lambertson, Minn., which resulted in the death of 4 employees, 1 of whom was off duty, and 1 passenger, and the injury of 25 passengers, 2 employees, 1 of whom was off duty, and 3 express and mail clerks. After investigation of this accident the Chief of the Bureau of Safety reports as follows:

This accident occurred on that part of the Minnesota Division extending between Waseca, Minn., and Tracy, Minn., a single-track line 116 miles in length. Between Waseca and New Ulm, a distance of 54.9 miles, there is a manual block-signal system in use, while between New Ulm and Tracy, within which territory this accident occurred, trains are operated by timetable and train orders, no block signal system being in use. Approaching the point of accident from the east the track is straight for about 2,700 feet, followed by a 2-degree curve to the left nearly 2,000 feet in length. The accident occurred on the curve about 100 feet from its eastern end. Approaching this curve from the west the track is tangent for nearly 3,000 feet. The grade approaching from the east is .41 per cent descending; approaching from the west there is a long descending grade, followed by practically level track to a point near the western end of the curve, from which point it is ascending

to the point of accident, varying from .12 to .72 per cent. The range of vision of the engineman of an eastbound train and of the fireman of a westbound train is about 4,000 feet.

Eastbound passenger train No. 516 consisted of 1 wooden express car, 1 steel mail car, 1 steel baggage car, 1 wooden smoking car, 2 steel coaches, 1 wooden Pullman sleeping car and 1 steel-underframe Pullman sleeping car, in the order named, hauled by engine 1090, and was in charge of Conductor Clarke and Engineman Fuller. At Tracy the crew received copies of train orders Nos. 206 and 207, together with a clearance card. Train order No. 207 was not involved in this accident; train order No. 206 read as follows:

"No. 516 meet No. 517 at Lamberton."

Train No. 516 departed from Tracy at 2.14 a. m., and on its arrival at Lamberton the crew received a copy of train order No. 208, form 19, reading as follows:

"No. 516 meet No. 517 at West Wye instead of Lamberton."

West Wye is a non-telegraph station 5.9 miles east of Lamberton and 1.2 miles west of Sanborn. Train No. 516 departed from Lamberton at 2.48 a. m. and at a point about 2-1/2 miles east of Lamberton collided with train No. 517 while traveling at a speed estimated to have been about 35 or 40 miles an hour.

Westbound passenger train No. 517 consisted of 1 steel mail car, 1 wooden express car, 1 steel coach, 1 steel smoking car, 2 steel coaches, and 2 wooden Pullman sleeping cars, in the order named, hauled by engine 1086, and was in charge of Conductor Ryan and Engineman Curry. At New Ulm the crew received a copy of train

order No. 206, previously quoted. Train No. 517 departed from New Ulm at 1.45 a. m., left Sanborn at 2.45 a. m., with a clearance card advising that there were no orders for that train, passed West Wye without stopping and collided with train No. 516 while traveling at a speed estimated to have been about 25 miles an hour.

Both engines were thrown to one side of the track in a very badly damaged condition. The wooden express car in train No. 516 came to rest on the wreckage of the engines and was destroyed by fire. The steel mail and baggage cars in that train were not derailed and were only slightly damaged, while the wooden smoking car was telescoped about three-fourths of its length by the baggage car. The wooden express car in train No. 517 was telescoped and badly damaged by the steel mail car immediately ahead of it; with the exception of these two cars none of the other equipment in train No. 517 was derailed or damaged. The employees on duty killed were the engineman, fireman and conductor of train No. 516.

The statements of the baggage master and brakemen of train No. 516 indicated that the speed of the train was about 35 or 40 miles an hour when they felt an emergency application of the air brakes, followed immediately by the shock of the collision. Fireman Niessler of train No. 517 was the first to notice the approach of train No. 516. He had been putting in a fire and on getting on his seat and looking ahead he saw a light which at first he thought belonged to an automobile on the highway which parallels the track west of the point where the accident occurred; shortly afterward he saw the lights in the cars as the train rounded the

curve and notified Engineman Curry. The engineman, who was on the outside of the curve, leaned out of the cab window in order to see around the front of his engine, saw the headlight and made an emergency application of the air brakes. The evidence indicated that the electric headlights of both engines were burning properly.

Train order No. 208, on form 19, had been put out to train No. 517 at Sanborn. When that train arrived there the train-order board was in the stop position and Conductor Ryan went into the telegraph office and registered. According to his statement he then picked up the clearance card which the operator had laid on the register when on his way to the ticket window for the purpose of selling a ticket to a passenger, asked the operator if that was all he had, and then sent a copy of the clearance card to the engineman and gave a signal for the train to proceed. He had not seen any orders on the operator's table and did not know anything about train order No. 208.

Although train order No. 208 was intended to be issued at Sanborn to train No. 517, Operator Tauer made it out to train No. 516, the order being made complete at 2.33 a. m. A few minutes afterward he copied train order No. 209, which was addressed to train No. 516 and to the operator, this order being made complete at 2.39 a. m., and then placed it over train order No. 208 in such a manner that the headings and addresses showed. He said that after selling a ticket to a passenger he returned to the telegraph table, looked to see if he had any orders addressed to train No. 517, saw that the two orders were addressed to train No. 516, and

then filled out and gave to the conductor of train No. 517 a clearance card stating that he had no orders for that train. About 10 or 15 minutes after train No. 517 had departed he was getting the orders ready to deliver to the crew of train No. 516 on its arrival and noticed that train order No. 208 should have been delivered to the crew of train No. 517. He tried to communicate with the operator at Lamberton, but was unable to do so, and he then notified the dispatcher but train No. 516 had already passed Lamberton. Operator Tauer was unable to explain how he came to place the wrong address on the order and at the time of writing it did not notice that as addressed by him the eastbound train would have to pass the meeting point before getting the order. The different statements made by the operator were conflicting as to what address was actually transmitted to him by the dispatcher and repeated by him to the dispatcher, but he was positive that he did not write the body of the order and then fill in the address. He was not positive as to whether he or Operator Falker at Lamberton was the first to repeat the order.

According to Train Dispatcher Carroll, train order No. 208 as put out at Sanborn was addressed to train No. 517, was first repeated by the operator at that point, and in repeating the order the operator gave the number of the train addressed as "517." His statements were verified by Operator Falker.

Rule No. 208-D of the rules for the government of the operating department of this railroad reads as follows:

"When passenger trains are affected, in no instance must a meeting or waiting point be changed

until the signature of the conductor of the train made superior by train order has been obtained, or the order has been sent to station reached by the superior train before arriving at the meeting or waiting point also to the operator at the meeting or waiting point."

Dispatcher Carroll stated that this rule had never been explained to him, but that he thought the manner in which he had issued train order No. 208 was in accordance with the second part of the rule even though there was no operator at the meeting point; it was his opinion that he could either obtain the signature of the conductor of the superior train or put out the order at a point in advance of the meeting point, the second part of the rule only requiring the order to be put out at the meeting point in case there was an operator on duty at that point. After it had been explained to him that in case there was no operator at the meeting point he was prohibited from using the second part of the rule, he realized that the order in this instance was not issued in accordance with the rule and that the proper way of handling the order would have been to obtain the signature of the conductor of train No. 517, which under train order No. 207 had been made superior to train No. 516 as far as Lambertton, before making the order complete to train No. 516, and that had be done so the accident would not have occurred.

This accident was caused by the failure of Operator Tauer to address train order No. 208 correctly, resulting in his failure to deliver it to the crew of train No. 517, and by the failure of Dispatcher Carroll properly to issue the train order, as required by rule 208-D.

Operator Tauer was unable to explain how he came to place the wrong address on train order No. 208, and while in one of his statements he claimed to have used the wrong address when repeating the order to the dispatcher, this statement is not supported by the weight of evidence. Dispatcher Carroll, under rule 208-D, either should have obtained the signature of the conductor of train No. 517 before making the order complete to train No. 516, or he should have put out the order to train No. 517 at a point in advance of the meeting point and also put out a copy at the meeting point. Dispatcher Carroll's failure to obey the rule resulted from his misunderstanding of the requirement of the second part of the rule, as he did not think it was absolutely necessary to put out the order at the meeting point unless there was an operator on duty at that point and he was able to get in communication with the operator. In this particular case there was no operator at the meeting point and unless he desired to have the trains meet at an open office, to the operator of which a copy of the order could be sent, his only alternative was to comply with the first part of the rule and obtain the signature of the conductor of train No. 517 before making the order complete to train No. 516.

Operator Tauer was 19 years of age; he was employed as a station helper in August, 1917, and promoted to telegrapher in September of the same year. Dispatcher Carroll was employed as a station helper in 1903, promoted to telegrapher in 1905, to extra train dispatcher in 1910, and to regular train dispatcher in 1917. About 9 months of his service since that time had been as chief

train dispatcher. The records of both of these employees were clear.

At the time of the accident Operator Tauer and Dispatcher Carroll had been on duty nearly 3 hours, after 16 hours off duty. None of the employees of the trains involved had been on duty in violation of any of the provisions of the hours of service law.

Had there been an adequate block-signal system in use on this line, this accident no doubt would not have occurred.

This accident again directs attention to the dangers of making up trains with wooden cars placed between cars of steel construction. The first and fourth cars of train No. 516 were of wooden construction; the wreckage of the first was destroyed by fire while the other was telescoped and very badly damaged, 3 of the persons killed being in this car. In train No. 517 the second car was of wooden construction and was telescoped and badly damaged. No great damage was sustained by any of the steel equipment in either train, and with the exception of the mail car of train No. 517, the first car in the train, none was derailed.

In many previous accident investigations information has been developed indicating that employees and officials did not understand or were not fully acquainted with the rules under which they were operating, and in the case here under investigation Dispatcher Carroll did not understand an important rule governing the issuance of train orders and stated that the rule had never been explained to him. The fact that he had been employed as an extra train dispatcher for 7 years and as a regular train dispatcher for

3 years, during which time he had served 3 periods of duty as chief train dispatcher, without understanding the rule involved in this accident and without having had the rule explained to him indicates lax supervision on the part of higher operating officials. When men who do not understand the rules are placed in positions of responsibility, either as officials or as employees, the higher officials responsible for the existence of such a condition are not entirely free from blame for the occurrence of accidents which are likely to result. Immediate steps should be taken toward seeing that all persons employed in positions of responsibility have a thorough knowledge and understanding of the rules under which they are working in order that the operation of trains may be properly safeguarded.