

October 18, 1912.

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INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION

J. W. Watson,  
Chief Inspector,  
Interstate Commerce Commission,  
Washington, D. C.

Dear Sir:

Investigation of head on collision which occurred on the Burlington  
Railway, morning of May 29th at 7:08 A.M. about one half mile  
west of Indianola, Nebraska, resulting in the death of 18 persons  
and injury of 22 others, develops that west bound train No. 9  
left Oxford at 6:17 A.M. with order No. 19 to meet train No. 3  
at Cambridge and train No. 12 at Red Willow.

This order was put out at McCook at 5:40 A.M. at Indianola  
at 5:42 A.M. at Cambridge at 5:43 A.M. and at Oxford at 5:44  
A.M.

The offices of train dispatcher and telegraph operator at  
McCook, while in the same building are entirely separate.

East bound trains are superior to west bound trains of the  
same class and have absolute right of track.

Train No. 3 got this meet order at McCook at 5:40 a.m. and  
proceeded without incident and met No. 9 at Cambridge. The  
order was intended for both trains and shows in the dispatchers  
order book addressed to trains 3 and 12, and the dispatcher on  
duty at the time, Mr. D. N. Cobb, insists that the order was sent  
to each of the four stations as addressed in his order book. The  
operator at McCook, Mr. R. L. Lyon, claims order was addressed to  
train No. 3 only, and that he took but three copies of the order,  
one copy each for the conductor and engineer of Train No. 3 and

one for his office file, after these orders were delivered to conductor of No. 2 and office copy filed, it left his manifold slip clear and no meeting order in his possession to be delivered to train No. 12.

Notwithstanding he had just delivered order No. 19 to train No. 2 which plainly read "No. 9 will meet train No. 2 at Cambridge and No. 12 at Red Willow, No. 2 and No. 12 will take siding."

Operator Lyon knew that No. 12 could get the order only at McCook, as train No. 12 originates at McCook, and Red Willow is the first station east of McCook, and even if the order was not addressed to train No. 12 he had one hour after No. 2 received their orders before departure of No. 12 to have inquired of the dispatcher if the order was to be delivered to train No. 12, and even had the order not been addressed to No. 12 the fact that he did deliver the order to train No. 2, and train No. 12 was mentioned in the order, should have warned him that No. 12 must have the order before leaving McCook.

When F. W. Rank, conductor of train No. 12 went to the office for his orders he got orders No. 273-300-302 and No. 3, the missing order, No. 19, was not delivered to him. His clearance card showed there were but five orders for train No. 12 namely, order 273-300-302-2 and 31.

When a conductor calls at the telegraph office for his orders it is the custom and practice for the operator to call the dispatcher "and, as Operator Lyon informs us, he did in this case." Say 31 (which indicates the character of the orders.) No. 273, 300, 302 and 3 train 12 Signature - Rank.

When Dispatcher Cobb sent him order No. 31 which read "on receipt of orders No. 875, 300, 302, 3 and 19 No. 12 may go."

This is known as a "may go order" and must be given to all passenger trains before they can leave a terminal.

Operator Lyon signed Conductor Rank's name to this order.

Please note that order No. 19 is shown in this "May go order" while it does not appear in the information given to the dispatcher by Operator Lyon as he related it to us.

The appearance of an additional order number in the "may go order No. 31" should in itself have warned the operator that one order "and as it proved to be the all important one" had been over-looked by him. It is quite evident that the dispatcher had the "Meet order No. 19" in mind as he gave the number in the "may go order". Right here is where Conductor Rank of train No. 12 made a blunder in not checking his order numbers with the numbers given on order No. 31 or the "may go order" instead, he checked his orders against his clearance card, which did not show order No. 19, the order to meet No. 9 at Red Willow. Therefore, he did not discover that he was short order No. 19 and he informs us that he told his engineer when he handed him the orders that they had no meeting point with No. 9 and he further states that he spoke to Operator Lyon and asked him how No. 9 was.

Conductor Foley who was on hand to take train No. 9 west from McCook, states that there was inquiries made of Operator Lyon about No. 9 and that he informed them that No. 9 was ten or fifteen minutes late. It looks as if this should have reminded him that he had already taken and delivered one order wherein

No. 9 and No. 12 were to meet at Red Willow.

Operator Lyon is very emphatic in his declaration that he did not mention order No. 19 in asking for "may go order" for No. 12 while Dispatcher Cobb is equally positive in declaring that all five of the order numbers, including No. 19 were given him by Operator Lyon, when calling for orders for train No. 12.

There is no record of this transaction in either office other than that shown in the order book in the dispatchers office where it shows order No. 19 complete. "No. (Tel call for McCook) at 6:40 a. m."

This since has led to a question of veracity between the two men, one of whom is able to show a complete record of his work, while there is nothing to substantiate the claims of the other.

Rules 10 and 11 of the book of rules, require each operator receiving the order to observe whether other reports correctly.

So questioned the operators from Indianola, Cambridge and Oxford as to whether they complied with this rule.

All of these operators claim to have heard the dispatcher address the order No. 19 to train No. 2 and No. 12 when the order was put out to the operator at McCook while none of the three operators have any recollection of hearing the operator at McCook report the address, then repeating order No. 19 to the dispatcher.

Train Dispatcher D. H. Cobb is about 35 years of age; has been in the service of the company for 8 years as operator and dispatcher.

Operator R. L. Lyon is 24 years of age; has been in the service for six years as operator and extra dispatcher. Both are clean cut, intelligent men, with clean records and of good characters, as is also Conductor F. W. Rank.

For the reasons set forth in this report, we are compelled to place the responsibility for the accident equally with Operator R. L. Lyon for failure to deliver the order to Conductor of train No. 12, and with Conductor F. W. Rank for failure to check his "may go order" and ascertain before moving his train that he had in his possession all orders enumerated thereon.

Engineer Hader, who was equally responsible with Conductor Rank, was killed in the collision.

Notwithstanding the mistake in handling these train orders, the accident could, and doubtless would have been avoided if the road had been equipped with the automatic block signal system.

Copies of all orders mentioned in this report, together with clearance card and copy of page from dispatchers order book, enclosed herewith, all of which are

Respectfully submitted,