

In re investigation of an accident which occurred
on the Great Northern Railway near Tweed,
Mont., November 11, 1917.

December 12, 1917.

On November 11, 1917, there was a head-end collision between two freight trains on the Great Northern Railway near Tweed, Mont., which resulted in the death of two employees and the injury of one employee. After investigation the Chief of the Bureau of Safety reports as follows:

The Second District of the Missoula Division upon which this accident occurred extends from Whitefish to Troy, Mont., a distance of 134.6 miles, and is a single track line over which trains are operated by time table and train orders, no block signal system being in use. Train orders are transmitted by telegraph and by telephone.

Eastbound extra 3063 consisted of 54 loaded cars, 1 coach and a c.oose, with a tonnage of 2,200 tons, hauled by locomotive 3063, and was in charge of Conductor Walker and Engineman Lortcher. This train left Troy at 1.00 p. m., passed Farland, 41 miles east of Troy, at 4.30 p. m., where the crew received train order No. 23, reading as follows:

Extra 3063 east meet Extra 1324 west at Ural. Upon arrival at Ural, 9.9 miles east of Farland, the engineman saw extra 1300 on the passing track there which he mistook for extra 1324, passed Ural without reducing speed at about 4.44 p. m., and collided with extra 1324 at a point about 41 miles east of there while running at a speed of 25 or 30 miles an hour.

Westbound extra 1324 consisted of 65 cars and a c.oose, having a tonnage of 1,850 tons, hauled by locomotive 1324, and was in charge of Conductor Benjamin and Engineman Gutenrohn. It left Whitefish at 5.55 a. m., and upon arrival at Stonehill, 5.6 miles west of Tweed, the crew received train order No. 239, above noted, left there at 4.36 p. m. and collided with extra 3063 at a point about 6 miles west of Stonehill and a short distance west of Tweed, at about 5.00 p. m., while running at a speed of about 25 miles an hour.

The engineman and fireman of extra 1324 were instantly killed. Locomotive 3063 was considerably damaged, its trucks torn off and driver derailed, and the cab and its fixtures destroyed; the tender cistern was torn loose from its frame and thrown to the right of the track; the tender frame was broken loose from the locomotive, badly bent and broken, and came to rest to the left of and about 20 feet from the locomotive; the first four cars behind the locomotive were destroyed with their

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contents. Locomotive 1324 was badly damaged, its trucks and drivers derailed, and the cab destroyed, while the tender cistern was torn from its frame. The first seven cars, which were of wooden construction, were destroyed; the eighth car, which was of steel construction, was thrown to the left of the track about 30 feet but not seriously damaged; the upper structures of the forty-second and forty-third cars, which had steel underframes, were destroyed, while the forty-fourth, forty-fifth, and forty-sixth cars, which were of wooden construction, were destroyed.

The track in this vicinity follows the Kootenai River and is made up of a series of curves and is practically level at point of accident. There are ranges of mountains covered with timber on both sides of the river, but the right of way is cleared of timber for a distance of about 60 feet on each side of the track. Approaching the point of accident from the west there is a tangent, 2,900 feet long, followed by a 56-minute curve to the right, 6,400 feet long, the collision occurring on about the center of this curve. On account of the curves and trees it is probable that approaching engineers could not see each other at a distance greater than 600 feet. The weather at the time was cloudy.

Engineer Lortcher stated that when he reached Ural he saw a train with a 1300 class engine standing there and he was trying to ascertain the number of the engine when the enginemen on extra 1300 called out something to him which he thought was 1324, and assumed that the train there was extra 1324. He stated that he passed through Ural at a speed of about 25 miles an hour and passed by the locomotive there within four or five feet of it. He said the engine number on extra 1300 was not distinct on account of being covered with dirt. He did not see extra 1324 until within about 15 car lengths of it, and then applied the air brakes in emergency and jumped.

Conductor Walker, of extra 3063, stated that he received a copy of train order No. 239 at Garland to meet extra 1324 at Ural, and as his train passed through Ural at a speed of about 25 miles an hour he was riding on the rear platform of the caboose and saw a train with a 1300 class engine on the passing track there, but could not see the number on the engine. When he passed the caboose of the train Conductor Ramey of that train called out something to him about "the 24" and he answered him with a hand signal indicating that the matter was all right, went back into the caboose thinking that the train he had passed was extra 1324, and did not know differently until the accident occurred. He said he did not notice the indicators on the caboose of the train standing at Ural, but felt a tified

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at the time that he had passed extra 1324, and on account of it being Sunday he had no idea there was any other train on the line. He said it was cloudy and dark when they passed through Ural and the engine number being almost obscured by dirt prevented him from properly identifying that train, but admitted he should have identified the train standing there before proceeding further.

Head Brakeman Kelley, of extra 3063, said he was standing in the gangway on the engineman's side when his train passed through Ural, saw a locomotive standing there with a figure 13 on it, heard the engineman on that locomotive call out something that sounded like 1324, and assumed that it was extra 1324.

Head Brakeman Chapman, of extra 3063, stated he was riding on the rear platform of the caboose of his train as it passed Ural, saw a train standing there with a figure 13 on the locomotive and assumed it was extra 1324. He said he could not see the number on the locomotive distinctly on account of escaping steam.

Fireman Payne, of extra 3063, stated that he did not see the number on the locomotive standing at Ural, but as they passed there Engineman Lortcher said "We are in the clear" and he assumed that the train there was extra 1324.

Conductor Hamey, of extra 1300, stated that his train was standing on the passing track at Ural when extra 3063 passed there, and knowing that that train was to meet extra 1324 there and thinking his train might be mistaken for extra 1324, he called to the conductor of extra 3063 that his train was extra 1300 and not extra 1324. When extra 3063 passed him the crew called to him they were not going to stop and when it did not stop he thought he had been mistaken about extra 3063 and extra 1324 meeting at Ural and made no effort to stop extra 3063.

This accident was caused by the failure of the crew of extra 3063 to obey a train order and meet extra 1324 at Ural.

The crew of extra 3063 received and understood train order No. 239 and expected to meet extra 1324 at Ural. Upon their arrival there they saw extra 1300 on the passing track and erroneously assumed that it was extra 1324 and passed through Ural at a speed of about 25 miles an hour without making sure of its identity. They all stated that the engine number on extra 1300 was not distinct, and taking that in connection with the speed at which they passed extra 1300, about 5 feet away from it and as it was nearly dark at the time, they were grossly careless in not positively identifying the train on the passing track at Ural before passing there.

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Such dereliction of duty on their part is inexcusable and was the direct cause of this accident.

Conductor Walker was employed as brakeman on September 30, 1914, and promoted to conductor on October 3, 1916. He had had about eight years' experience as a brakeman before entering the service of the Great Northern Railway. Enginemen Lortcher was employed as a fireman on May 11, 1910, and promoted to enginemen on September 28, 1916. Brakemen Chapman was employed as a brakeman on September 22, 1916. Brakemen Kelley was employed as a brakeman on August 1, 1917, after having had three years' experience on another railroad. Fireman Payne was employed as such on May 23, 1917, resigned on August 25, 1917, and re-employed on October 16, 1917. All of these employees had good records and at the time of the accident they had been on duty about six hours.

J. O. T.