

In Re Investigation of Accident on the Minneapolis &  
St. Louis Railroad Near Olds, Iowa, On  
March 21, 1914.

On March 21, 1914, there was a head-end collision between a freight train and a light engine on the Minneapolis & St. Louis Railroad near Olds, Iowa, resulting in the death of 2 employees and the injury of 1 employee.

After investigation of this accident the Chief Inspector of Safety Appliances reports as follows:

Westbound train 97 was en route from Monmouth Yard, Ill., to Oskaloosa, Iowa. It consisted of 27 loaded and 3 empty cars, hauled by locomotives Nos. 334 and 422, and was in charge of Enginemen Law and Alders and Conductor Russell. On the day of the accident this train left Monmouth Yard at 4:15 p.m., left Winfield, Iowa, a station 8.9 miles east of Olds, Iowa, at 8:50 p.m., and at 9:06 p.m. collided with extra 329 at a point about one and one-fourth miles east of Olds, Iowa, while running at a speed of 7 or 8 miles per hour.

Extra 329 was a light engine en route from Oskaloosa, Iowa, to Elrick Junction, Iowa, for the purpose of assisting a westbound train from Elrick Junction to Oskaloosa, and was in charge of Engineman Spere and Fireman Peterson. On the day of the accident extra 329 left Oskaloosa at 5:45 p.m., left Olds at 8:58 p.m., and while running at a speed of 25 or 30 miles per hour collided with train 97 as above stated.

Both the enginemen and fireman of extra 329 were killed. Locomotives Nos. 329 and 334 were considerably damaged, while locomotive No. 422 and the roadway were slightly damaged.

The division upon which this accident occurred is a single-track line. There are no block signals in use upon this division, trains being operated by the train-order system. The weather at the time of the accident was cloudy.

Approaching Olds from the east there is a 3-degree curve toward the south 600 feet in length, followed by a tangent 2,200 feet long. This tangent is then followed by a 3-degree curve toward the north about 700 feet in length, followed by straight track for about one-half mile, or the remainder of the distance to Olds. Train 97 had reached the eastern end of the 3-degree curve immediately preceding the half mile of straight track east of Olds when it collided with extra 329. Approaching the point of accident from the east there is a 1½ ascending grade 3,500 feet in length, and train 97 had reached a point within 1,000 feet of the summit of this grade when the collision occurred. Approaching the point of accident

from the west there is a 1.5% ascending grade 1,700 feet in length, and it was at a point about 1,000 feet east of the apex of these two ascending grades that the accident occurred.

At the point of collision the track is laid in a cut six or eight feet deep, while at a point about 1,000 feet west of this point there is an orchard on the north side of the track. The banks of the cut and the trees of the orchard partially obstructed the view of engineers so that neither could see the approaching train until locomotive No. 329 had reached the apex of the two grades, or until within about 1,000 feet of each other.

Dispatcher Ebej stated that he issued an order at Oskaloosa for No. 329 to run extra to Kirick Junction, at the same time informing Engineman Spare of that train that trains 105 and 97 were on time.

Conductor Peacock of train 94 stated that on the day of the accident extra 329 immediately followed his train into Olds. Train 96 was already on the siding at that place and trains 94 and 329 pulled in on the siding immediately behind train 96 to meet train 105. Conductor Peacock asked Engineman Spare of extra 329 "what he had on No. 97", and Engineman Spare replied "Nothing." After train 105 passed Olds extra 329 moved out on the main track to the coal tipple, and after taking coal moved in an easterly direction. Conductor Peacock said he thought that when extra 329 left the coal tipple it was going in on the house track. He did not know it had left Olds until he heard of the collision.

Engineman Law of train 97 stated that as his train was approaching Olds he saw the reflection of a headlight but thought it was from some train at Olds. However, as his train proceeded further he saw it was a headlight on the main line approaching his train, and he had sufficient time only to apply the brakes and jump before the collision occurred.

This accident was caused by extra 329 occupying the main track on the time of a superior train. Train 97 is a regular scheduled train and was due to arrive at Olds at 8:45 p.m. Upon the arrival of extra 329 at that place at 8:40 p.m. it was placed on the passing track by Engineman Spare. It is impossible to advance any reason why Engineman Spare left the passing track and proceeded on the main track before the arrival of train 97.

As previously stated there were no block signals in use on this portion of the Minneapolis & St. Louis Railroad. The distance from Menomouth Yard to Oskaloosa is 122.4 miles with 32 stations intervening, and about 20 trains pass over this district during each 24-hour period. Traffic of this density would seem to warrant the installation of an adequate block-signal system, and had such a system been in operation it is

probable that Engineman Spere would have been reminded by the signal indication that the block was occupied and would not have left Oles until the arrival of train 97.

On many railroads it is the practice to require a conductor or pilot to accompany a light engine on a movement over the line, evidently as a check upon the engineman, and to insure its protection and proper operation. Had such a requirement been in force on this railroad it is not probable that train 97 would have been overlooked by both engineman and the pilot or conductor.

Engineman Spere entered the service of the Minneapolis & St. Louis Railroad as a laborer in 1896, and was made a fireman in 1898. He was promoted to be an engineman in 1905, and his record was good. Fireman Peterson entered the service of the Minneapolis & St. Louis Railroad as a fireman on February 15, 1914, and had made but a few trips over the road. The records of all the other employees involved in this accident were good, and none had been on duty in violation of the hours of service law.