

*For*  
*June 22/20*

IN RE INVESTIGATION OF AN ACCIDENT WHICH OCCURRED  
ON THE MINNEAPOLIS, ST. PAUL & SAULT STE. MARIE  
RAILWAY, NEAR HONEY CREEK, WIS., MARCH 19, 1920.

June 4, 1920.

On March 19, 1920, there was a head-end collision between two freight trains on the Minneapolis, St. Paul & Sault Ste. Marie railway near Honey Creek, Wis., which resulted in the death of 2 employees and the injury of 4 employees. After investigation of this accident the Chief of the Bureau of Safety reports as follows:

That part of the Southern District of the Chicago Division on which the accident occurred, known as the First District, is a single-track line extending between Chicago, Ill., and Shops Yard, near Fox La Lac, Wis., a distance of 158.4 miles. Trains are operated by time-table, train orders transmitted by telephone, and a manual block-signal system.

Approaching the point of accident from the east the track is tangent for a distance of 4,600 feet: the grade is 1.04 per cent descending for 2,200 feet. Approaching from the west there is a tangent about 2,800 feet in length and a curve to the right varying from  $2^{\circ} 45'$  to  $3^{\circ} 30'$ , this curve being 833 feet in length. This is followed by 977 feet of tangent, a  $30'$  curve to the right 407 feet in length, and 174 feet of tangent to the point of accident. The grade is ascending from a point about 2,150 feet west, the maximum gradient being 1.04 per cent. The view is obscured until within 1,500 feet west of

the point of accident. The weather was foggy and sleet was falling at the time of the accident.

westbound three-class freight train No. 23 consisted of an engine, 41 cars and a caboose, and was en route from Chicago to Fond du Lac, in charge of Conductor Anderson and Engineer Fischer. At Lake Villa, 26.7 miles east of Honey Creek, the crew received train order No. 21, reading as follows:

"Engine 2448 run extra Waukesha to Wheeling has right over No. 23 Waukesha to Siding 74."

Siding 74 is 4.3 miles east of Honey Creek. At Burlington, 5 miles east of Honey Creek, the crew received train order No. 37, reading as follows:

"Extra 2448 east take siding meet No. 23 at Lake Beulah."

Lake Beulah is 5 miles west of Honey Creek. Train No. 23 left Burlington at about 8:30 a. m., passed Honey Creek at 8:40 a. m., and at about 8:45 a. m. collided with extra 2448 at a point about 1-1/2 miles west of Honey Creek.

westbound freight train extra 2448, consisting of an engine, 39 cars and a caboose, was en route from Shops Yard to Chicago, in charge of Conductor Utis and Engineer Alanson. At Rugby Junction, 40 miles west of Honey Creek, the crew received a copy of train order No. 21, previously quoted. At Vernon, 13.2 miles west of Honey Creek, the crew received a clearance card specifying that there were two train orders for this train, Nos. 23 and 284, but making no mention of train order No. 37, which fixed the meeting point with train No. 23 at Lake Beulah,

the next station beyond Vernon. The eastbound train-order board at Lake Benlah was displaying a clear indication and the train passed that point without stopping. While traveling at a speed of about 20 miles an hour extra 2448 was flagged by a section man who was in a position to see both trains approaching and the engineman had reduced the speed to about 20 miles an hour when the train collided with train no. 23.

Both engines were derailed, but remained upright on the roadbed in a badly damaged condition. Several cars were derailed and more or less badly damaged. The employees killed were the engineman and brakeman of train no. 23.

Train order no. 37 was made complete to train no. 23 at Burlington at 7.52 a. m. Dispatcher Foster stated that he called the operators at Burlington and Vernon at about 7.48 a. m. for the purpose of issuing the order, and then told them to wait a minute, something having developed which required him to issue a train order to other trains. He returned to the telephone at about 7.50 a. m., called to the operators over the telephone and understood both of them to answer; he then issued train order No. 37. At this time he was busy in making the transfer for the dispatcher who was to relieve him, and thinking that the operator at Vernon would repeat the order within a few seconds he went ahead with the transfer in an endeavor to complete it on time. At 8.00 a. m. Dispatcher Burger went on duty; at that time he had not checked the transfer, and as he was attending to this, Operator Lanetti, located at Vernon, called Dispatcher Burger to inquire if there were any other orders for the crew of extra 2448.

At this time Dispatcher Webster was looking over his shoulder and he asked Dispatcher Webster if train orders No. 23 and 234 were all the orders for that train, to which Dispatcher Webster replied in the affirmative, and Dispatcher Burger so informed Operator Panetti. Dispatcher Webster overlooked the fact that train order No. 37 had not been delivered to extra 2448 nor repeated by Operator Panetti, and Dispatcher Burger did not then have the situation clearly enough in mind to detect the error. Dispatcher Burger completed checking the transfer at about 8.10 a. m., at which time Dispatcher Webster left the office. About 20 or 25 minutes after Dispatcher Webster had departed, Dispatcher Burger, in going over the transfer in his mind, was under the impression that these two trains were to meet at Lake Beulah, but although the order which should have been issued to extra 2448 at Vernon was shown on the transfer, it was not until train No. 23 and extra 2448 had been reported simultaneously as passing Honey Creek and Lake Beulah, respectively, that he suspected something was wrong. He called the operator at Honey Creek to see if train No. 23 had stopped at the west switch and then called the operator at Lake Beulah to verify the report of the eastbound extra passing that point. He then realized that the trains were going to meet on single track and called the operator at Vernon to see if extra 2448 had received train order No. 37. After looking through the file Operator Lawyer, who had relieved Operator Panetti, told him that there was no record of the order.

According to the statement of Operator Panetti he was sweeping the office between 7.45 a. m. and 7.55 a. m., and during this time the telephone bell did not ring. He reported a train passing Vernon between 7.40 a. m. and 7.45 a. m., and did not

talk to the dispatcher again until about 7.55 a. m., when he inquired whether there were any further orders for extra 2448. The operator who was on duty at Burlington heard the dispatcher say "19 copy 3 for No. 23 you and Vernon," but did not hear the operator at Vernon answer, and did not remember whether or not that operator repeated the order, neither did he remember checking the order as it was repeated by the other operator, although on his copy of the order he had indicated that it had been checked with the operator at Vernon.

This accident was caused by the failure of dispatcher Webster to issue to the crew of extra 2448 the order which changed the meeting point of that train with train no. 23, resulting in a lap order.

Dispatcher Webster's error occurred shortly before the termination of his period of duty, at a time when he was making up the dispatcher's transfer preparator, to being relieved. Dispatcher Webster's statement, in which he acknowledges full responsibility in the matter, indicates that he was largely concerned at that time in completing the transfer record and going off duty promptly at the expiration of his trick. Instead of requiring the operator at Vernon to repeat the order to him immediately after it had been issued, he proceeded with his other work and evidently forgot all about that order, notwithstanding the operator's inquiry as to further orders for extra 2448, which was referred to dispatcher Webster by dispatcher Surper immediately after he was taken charge of the dispatching district. Dispatcher Webster has been employed as a train dispatcher since 1917, hav-

ing had previous experience as an operator since 1912.

It is evident from Dispatcher Burger's statement that he did not have the conditions on his dispatching district clearly in mind until a considerable time interval after he had relieved Dispatcher Webster. He had not checked the orders or Dispatcher Webster's transfer before beginning his trick, and he was not certain of the meeting point for extra 2448 and train No. 23 until extra 2448 had passed the meeting point and train No. 23 had passed the last station east of the meeting point, approximately 37 minutes after he had been on duty. Had Dispatcher Burger made a proper check of the transfer and orders before assuming charge of his dispatching district, he would no doubt have discovered the error in ample time to have averted the accident.

As there is a form of manual block-system in use on this line, it applies only to trains operating in the same direction, opposing movements being handled as in this case by means of train orders. The double train-order system is used. Lake Beulah is a day office; the accident probably would have been prevented if the middle-order system had been used and the meet order had been issued to the operator at the meeting point as well as to the trains involved.

The traffic on this division is believed to be of sufficient density to warrant the use of a block system affording protection for traffic in both directions; had an adequate block system been in use, applying to opposing as well as following trains, this accident no doubt would not have occurred.