

November 4th, 1914. 221

**IN RE INVESTIGATION OF ACCIDENT WHICH OCCURRED ON THE ST. LOUIS,  
IRON MOUNTAIN & SOUTHERN RAILWAY NEAR WATSON, ARK.,  
ON SEPTEMBER 14, 1914.**

On September 14, 1914, there was a head-end collision on the St. Louis, Iron Mountain & Southern Railway near Watson, Ark., between a work train and an extra freight train, which resulted in the death of 1 employee and the injury of 3 employees. After investigation of this accident, the Chief of the Division of Safety reports as follows:

Northbound extra 541 consisted of 59 loaded cars, 5 empty cars and a caboose, hauled by locomotive No. 541, and was in charge of Conductor Collins and Engineman Ward. It left McGhee, Ark., at 5.30 p.m., and at a point about 17 miles north of McGhee and 4 miles south of Watson, collided head-on with southbound work extra 534.

Work extra 534 consisted of 31 empty dirt cars, 1 ledgerwood, 2 unloaders and a caboose, hauled by locomotive No. 534, and was in charge of Conductor Page and Engineman Cantrell. At the time of the accident, the dirt cars and the ledgerwood were being pushed ahead of the locomotive. Work extra 534 left Watson at 5.30 p.m., bound for Kelso Pit, nearly 8 miles south of Watson, and had traveled about half that distance when it collided with northbound extra 541.

Locomotive No. 541 was derailed and tipped over on its right side west of the track. The tender landed bottom-side up on the same side of the track. The first car in the train was demolished, while the forward trucks of the second car were derailed. The first five cars of the work extra were derailed, the first being demolished, while the second and third were turned over to the east side of the track. The fourth and fifth cars were practically undamaged. The work train had been brought nearly to a stop when the collision occurred, while the freight train was running at a speed of about 10 miles per hour.

The division on which this accident occurred is a single track line. Trains are operated by train orders and time-card rights, no block signal system being in use. The collision occurred near the middle of a curve of 2 degrees, about 1,650 feet in length. Approaching this curve the track is straight for several miles. On account of timber growing on land, on the inside of the curve, the view is limited to about 1,000 feet. The view had by the engineman of the northbound extra was restricted on account of being on the outside of the curve. The weather was clear.

Conductor Page, of work extra 541, stated that he was riding on the head end of the train on its arrival at Watson. He dropped off at the station, went into the telegraph office and received a copy of train order No. 135, reading as follows:

"Extra north 541 wait at Rehner until 6.30 p.m. and all other extras will wait at McGhee until 8.00 p.m. for all work extras."

After receiving this order, he boarded the locomotive as it came along, the train not being brought to a stop. He then gave the engineer his copy of the order. They decided to keep on going toward Kelso Pit, a distance of 8 miles. It was then 6.30 p.m. and they thought that by 6.30 p.m., the time until which extra 541 would wait at Rehner, they would be on the straight track south of the curve on which the accident occurred; if they should meet the extra before reaching this curve they would see it in time to stop and could return to Watson. If upon reaching the curve extra 541 was not in sight, however, they would proceed to Kelso Pit and protect their train with a flag while clearing the main track. This action was taken on the assumption that extra 541 would not leave Rehner, which is 1½ miles south of Kelso Pit, until 6.30 p.m., and therefore would not pass Kelso Pit before 6.30 p.m. or later. After delivering to the engineer his copy of train order 135, Conductor Page went into the caboose to complete a report and to secure his lantern. He had just left the caboose for the purpose of going to the head end of the train and was on the ledgerwood, ahead of the locomotive, when the collision occurred, at about 6.35 p.m. He saw the extra when it was about 15 car lengths away from his train and immediately gave his engineer stop signals.

Brakeman Gortney, who was riding on the head-end of the train at the time of the collision, stated that he saw extra 541 when it was about 20 car lengths away, and at once began to give stop signals with his red lantern. At this time the speed of his train was eight or nine miles per hour. No response to his stop signals was given, either by his own engine crew or by the crew of extra 541, and he jumped when the two trains were about 100 feet apart. At this time the work extra had been brought nearly to a stop. Brakeman Gortney further stated that the last train order seen by him was train order No. 135, which provided in part that all north-bound extras would wait at Kelso Pit until 6.15 p.m. He did not have a watch and consequently knew nothing about what time his train left Watson for Kelso Pit.

Engineer Cantrell stated that he saw extra 541 and the stop signals given by his own crew at about the same time, and at once applied the emergency air brakes and reversed the engine. The speed of his train had been from eight to ten miles per hour, and it had been brought nearly to a stop when the collision occurred. He thought his train would reach Kelso Pit at 6.38 p.m. or 6.40 p.m., and did not think that any northbound train would be able to reach that point before 6.37 p.m. or 6.36 p.m. Engineer Cantrell further stated that the speed of his train was so low on account of the fact that the steam pressure was only 85 or 90 pounds.

Head Brakeman Baker, of extra 541, who was occupying the fireman's seat-box, saw the brakeman on the forward end of the work extra giving stop signals, and at once called to Engineer Ward. At this time the speed of his train was about 10 or 12 miles per hour. The engineer at once leaned out of the window and Brakeman Baker again called to him, saying that they were running into a work train. The engineer at once shut off steam and applied the air brakes, while Brakeman Baker and Fireman Aymer, who had been standing on the deck of the engine jumped. Engineer Ward was killed in the collision.

While the crew of the work extra held a copy of train order No. 135 providing that extra 541 would wait at Rehner until 6.33 p.m., the crew of extra 541 held an order, also No. 135, directing them to wait at Rehner until 6.30 p.m. The order as received by the crew of extra 541 read as follows:

"Extra 541 run extra McGehee to Lema and wait at Rehner until 6.30 p.m. for all work extras."

While each of these trains had a copy of train order No. 135, the time shown on each order was different. When Dispatcher Backs issued train order No. 135 to extra 541 at McGehee, he was unable to get Operator Compton, located at Watson. A few minutes afterwards, having learned of the necessity of running a locomotive light from Kelso Pit to the shops at McGehee for repairs, he issued train order No. 137 at 6.25 p.m., three minutes after the departure of extra 541 from McGehee. Train order No. 137 was addressed to all northbound extras except extra 541, and read as follows:

"All extras north except extra 541 will wait at McGehee until 6.00 p.m. for all work extras."

Immediately after issuing this order, Dispatcher Backs was able to reach Operator Compton at Watson and Operator Garner, at Kelso Pit. Instead of giving them train orders Nos. 135 and 137 as issued, however, he combined them into one order.

This order, which was designated as train order No. 125, was the order given to the crew of the work extra at Wat-on. This order was issued and not shown in the dispatcher's train order book. The mention of the order as being to the crew of the work extra at Wat-on showed the time to be 6.30 p.m. instead of 6.20 p.m. resolves itself into a question of veracity between the operator at Wat-on and the dispatcher. The dispatcher claimed that Operator Compton repeated the order correctly and he understood the words as they were repeated. He further stated that Operator Gurner, at Kalso Pit, repeated the order after Operator Compton had finished, and also repeated the time as 6.20 p.m. Operator Compton, however, stated that the time given to him in the order was 6.30 p.m. and claimed that he repeated it as such. E. L. Parker, a workman at Wat-on at the time, did not hear Operator Compton receive the order but when it was repeated to the dispatcher, he was standing a short distance away and heard Operator Compton repeat the time as 6.30 p.m. Operator Compton further stated that he started to check the copy of the order when it was being repeated to the dispatcher by the operator at Kalso Pit, but after checking two or three lines of it got up to sit on a customer. Operator Gurner, at Kalso Pit, stated that he did not check the order when it was repeated by Operator Compton. He stated that he had not seen a rule book, and was not sure as to his duty in regard to checking orders when repeated by other operators.

The direct cause of this accident was the occupying of the main track by the work extra on the time of extra 341, a superior train, for which Conductor Page and Engineer Gurner were responsible. It was 6.30 p.m. when they received train order No. 125 at Wat-on and they supposed that extra 341 would wait at Robber until 6.30 p.m. so far as they knew, therefore, they had only 6 minutes in which to travel the distance of nearly 8 miles from Wat-on to Kalso Pit before extra 341 would leave Robber, 1 mile beyond Kalso Pit, yet, according to their own assessment, they attempted to go to Kalso Pit, pushing 3rd car ahead of the locomotive, knowing well that they would be occupying the main track on the time of the extra.

The contributing cause of this accident was the giving to the crew of the work extra of a copy of train order No. 125 providing that extra 341 could wait at Robber until 6.30 p.m., which order should have read 6.20 p.m. This order was sent dispatched by the dispatcher to Wat-on and to Kalso Pit. The time indicated in the order as it was issued and repeated back to

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the dispatcher by the operator at Kelso Pit was 8.30 p.m. and the dispatcher's records show that both the operator at Kelso Pit and the operator at Watson repeated back the time as 8.30 p.m. The operator at Watson, however, claimed that the time sent by the dispatcher was 8.30 p.m. and that he repeated it to the dispatcher as 8.30 p.m., this last statement being corroborated by a clerk who was standing nearby at the time. Inasmuch as the order was sent simultaneously, it is obvious that each operator received the same time. It is believed that the time sent by the dispatcher was 8.20 p.m., but that Operator Compton made a mistake in copying the order, and then when he repeated the order to the dispatcher the latter failed to detect the error.

In the handling of train orders Nos. 135 and 137, Dispatcher Backs was at fault, while Operators Compton and Gardner, located at Watson and Kelso Pit, respectively, were at fault in the handling of train order No. 135. When Dispatcher Backs issued train order No. 135, he could not get in communication with Operator Compton, although he stated that he tried for ten minutes to reach him. He therefore issued the order without further delay in order to save time. A few minutes afterwards he issued train order No. 137 and then getting in touch with Operator Compton at Watson, he sent an order both to him and to Operator Gardner which was a combination of train orders Nos. 135 and 137, stating that he did this to avoid the further delay which would result if he sent two orders, and he gave this combination order the number of the first order, i. e., No. 135. In combining these orders, Dispatcher Backs violated rule No. 202 which provides that:

"Each train order must be given in the same words to all persons or trains addressed."

He also violated rule No. 205, which provides in part that:

"Each train order must be written in full in a book provided for that purpose at the office of the train dispatcher."

Dispatcher Backs was also at fault for his failure to detect the error in the time when it was incorrectly repeated to him by Operator Compton.

Operator Compton is responsible for his error in not copying the order correctly and for not checking the order when it was repeated by Operator Gardner, as he was required

to be by rule No. 211, which provides in part as follows:

"Each operator receiving the order should observe whether the others repeat correctly."

Operator Gardner is at fault for his failure to obey rule No. 211 in not checking Operator Compton when the latter repeated the order to the dispatcher.

Had the dispatcher and the two operators, or any one of them, obeyed the rules governing the issuance and handling of train orders, it is reasonably certain that the error in the time would have been discovered, and that the order as received by the work extra would have shown that extra 341 would wait at Harper until 6.20 p.m.

Conductor Page was employed as a brakeman in 1906, and was promoted to Conductor in 1907. Engineman Centrell was employed as an engineman in 1908. The records of both of these employees were good. At the time of the accident they had been on duty 13 hours and 23 minutes, after a period off duty of more than 35 hours.

Dispatcher Backs was employed as a dispatcher in 1909 and had a good record. He had been on duty 6 hours and 35 minutes, after a period of 16 hours off duty.

Operator Compton was employed as an agent in August, 1911, and became an agent telegrapher in September, 1912. His record was good. He had been on duty 11 hours and 25 minutes, after a period off duty of 12 hours.

Operator Garner was employed as an operator in December, 1912, and had a good record. He was off duty at the time of the accident, but at the time he repeated train order No. 135, he had been on duty 11 hours and 41 minutes, after a period off duty of 12 hours.

Accidents of this kind will continue to occur as long as employees fail to equally with rules provided for the safe operation of trains.