

Liver and Bacon

Robert R. Bye and James R. Wilson

Literature has a number of genre; poetry and prose, fact and fiction, and on and on. One form often overlooked is the letter home from those in military service. These letters, typically from young people far from home in a time of great change in their lives paint vivid pictures. Following is a letter from Adelaide Francis McManus to her parents, written August 9, 1945 while on a train being transferred from the East Coast of the United States to a new assignment on the West Coast.

Thursday Morning

Dear Folks.

It shouldn't have happened to a dog but it happened to me. Woke up at six-thirty, dressed and stumbled out to the Diner and found it closed. They put a new one on at St. Paul which we won't hit for forty minutes, at 8:30, am a mite hungry.

They really fouled things up as usual. Pat [Jane] and Rosie are way up at one end of the ~~car~~ [sic] train & our boss and I are about five cars away.

Last night we pulled into Chicago about 5 PM (to late to shop for anything) took a double deck buss that brought us way out along Lake Michigan via the Lake Shore Drive. Got off at the Edgewater Beach Hotel where we had a marvelous dinner (Lake Superior whitefish for me, steak for Rosie). Wayne King played at dinner. You'd have liked that -waltz music.

Later

It's about 1:05 now. We've just had lunch (delicious liver & bacon). Pity the poor civilians. Because of food shortages no lunch served on the train except to service personnel. Will close this here so that I can mail it in Fargo, North Dakota when we stop there for a few minutes.

Love,

Adelaide

Typical of military service people it starts off with gentle griping about her current situation, proceeds to point out, as we in the military were wont to do, how “*they really fouled things up as usual.*” and goes on with a homey description of her activities of the night before with dinner at a fancy hotel, including the detail of meal choices and background music which her parents would have enjoyed. Later in the day she gives a description of her lunch on the train and gloats a bit at having better treatment than the “*poor civilians.*” She closes with the note that she intends to mail the letter when the train stops in Fargo, North Dakota. The letter has the typical military person’s griping about their situation, pointing out how “*they*” have fouled things up,

some homey personal news, and intent to mail the letter. A very thoughtful letter home sharing her life while away.

THE WAVES

With the pressure of mobilization during the World War II all branches of the military established divisions for women. The Army had WAC's (Women's Army Corps). In the Air Force they were Women Airforce Service Pilots (WASP) In the Navy they were WAVES, (Women Accepted for Volunteer Emergency Service).

Ens. Adelaide Francis McManus (Addie), Lt (jg), Adda Jane Patterson, (Jane, referred to as Pat in Addie's letter), and Ens. Rose Ellen Wilson (Rosie) and were assigned to the Naval Research Laboratory, Electronic Field Service Group, Project No. 10 in Washington D. C.¹ The exact nature of their responsibilities are not known, though Project No. 10 worked with firms developing radar. Addie's educational background is unclear, Jane held a masters degree in mathematics² and had completed a navy course in radar prior to being assigned to the Naval Research Laboratory. Rosie held a bachelors degree in Chemistry and Science.³ They would have been a good team for technical work.

The three women first worked together at Raytheon Corporation in Boston early in 1945, Jane having written of her experiences to her friend Mabel Klahr dated Boston January 19th. They were under the supervision of Lt (jg) H. C. Bailey who reported to Lt (jg) Louis S. Stuller Officer-in-Charge of Project No. 10. Bailey was to assume Stuller's position in Washington D.C. when Stuller was transferred to the West coast to establish a new office.¹

The three WAVES appear to have been transferred to New York City by early May 1945. The diary of Mary Patterson, Jane's mother, has entries for May 5th and May 6th "Jane arrived home", and "Jane left for New York"⁴. A yellowing newspaper clipping shows the trio arm-in-arm as they "sail through a sea of paper on Broadway at 37th St.", New York City on VE (Victory in Europe) Day, May 8, 1945



William C. Patterson II Collection
Rosie Wilson, left; Addie McManus and Jane Patterson

It is unclear just where in New York the WAVES were stationed or their duties or supervision, if any, as Bailey had been transferred to Washington D.C. in April in preparation to replace Louis Stuller as Officer-in-Charge of Field Service Group No. 10. Mary Patterson's diary shows entries for July 27th "Jane had gone to Washington, DC, then home for a 10 day leave" and August 5th "Jane left for Washington DC on 7:10 PM train."⁴ The Patterson's were living in Royalton, southeastern Pennsylvania, convenient to both New York City and Washington D. C.

Louis Stuller jr related "Louis [his father] had just been home on leave in Maryland in Aug. 1945."⁵ The whereabouts of Rosie Wilson and Addie McManus during this period are not recorded.

Mary Patterson's diary entry for August 7 is –"Jane called from Wash. DC – leaves for Seattle, Wash, tonight- excited about assignment."⁴ The three WAVES and their supervisor left Washington D. C. bound for Seattle with a train change in Chicago.

They arrived in Chicago on the evening of August 8th as Addie points out in her letter "*we pulled into Chicago about 5 PM (to late to shop for anything).*" The connecting train, *Empire Builder*, was scheduled to depart from Chicago at 11:15 PM⁶ giving them a few hours for adventure. Jane sent a telegram home, Addie and Rosie took a double decker bus along Lake Shore drive to the Edgewater Beach Hotel "*where we had a marvelous dinner (Lake Superior whitefish for me, steak for Rosie). Wayne King played at dinner.*"

The Edgewater was a Chicago landmark⁷ that stood on the lakefront at Sheridan Road near Foster Avenue. The structure, opened in 1916, was expanded in 1922. During the 1920s, 30s, and 40s, the Edgewater Beach was Chicago's place to see and be seen. On any given night Nat King Cole, Perry Como, or Babe Ruth might have been there. Big bands such as Tommy Dorsey, Xavier Cugat, and as Addie recorded, Wayne King played there. Lake Superior whitefish, steak, and Wayne King playing in the background paints the picture of two sophisticated young Naval Officers having quite a time between trains.

Beginning in 1942 to carry heavy war time traffic the *Empire Builder* ran from Chicago to Seattle in two sections. The first section of 11 cars with Pullman sleepers was reserved for those traveling more than 450 miles.⁸ The second section also of 11 cars had coaches for those traveling shorter distances. The *Empire Builder* was operated by two railroads, Chicago Burlington & Quincy from Chicago, Illinois to St. Paul, Minnesota and the Great Northern from St. Paul to Seattle, Washington. The CB & Q ran their own dining car over their tracks and had closed it approaching St. Paul readying for the exchange with a Great Northern diner. With a Chicago departure at 11:15 PM and awaking at 6:30 AM Addie had a short night and it's understandable that she was so ready for breakfast and a cup of coffee. At 7:50 AM Addie started the letter to her parents.

The first section arrived at St. Paul at 8:30 AM on August 9th and departed at 8:50 AM. The second section followed with the customary 20 minute separation. In addition to the diner a freshly serviced Great Northern locomotive and tender, built by Baldwin in 1930, a class S-2, Northern (4-8-4), were assigned to the train at St. Paul. The engine servicing, including repacking the tender wheel bearings, had been accomplished the day before.⁹ The trains ran without incident through the day. Addie continuing her letter at 1:05 PM, "*We've just had lunch (delicious liver & bacon). Pity the poor civilians*" with the intention of mailing it when they stopped in Fargo, North Dakota. For reasons unknown she did not get it into the mail.

The first section of the Empire Builder departed Grand Forks, North Dakota at 5:32 PM with the second section following 36 minutes later.¹⁰ The first section passed Niagara, North Dakota at

6:43 PM, the second section had closed the gap between trains to 24 minutes,¹¹ still comfortably outside the required 20 minutes separation. Block signals, lights indicating that the track ahead was clear were not installed on the 200 mile section between Grand Forks and Surrey Junction, North Dakota. Trains were operated by timetable and train orders only.¹² The standard technique of maintaining separation between trains was for the agent at stations to display a “stop” signal on the train order board¹³, a semaphore on a tower,¹⁴ and hold the following train for separation. However only four of the stations¹⁵ over this distance were open 24 hours per day. Other than that the rear flagman had fusees with a 10 minute burning time¹⁶ which he could place along the tracks, requiring a following train to stop extinguish the fusee and proceed at restricted speed.¹⁷ The last car in the train was the Pullman *Peoria*¹⁸ a combination of sleeper, lounge and observation. The four Project 10 members gathered for the evening in the lounge at the end of the last car of the train.

About four miles west of Niagara the brakeman noticed smoke coming from the one of the tender’s wheel bearings and signaled the engineer to stop.¹⁹ Testimony indicates the train was stopped from 6:40 PM until 7:00 PM during which time the hot bearing was repacked and lubricated.²⁰ The flagman proceeded one-half to three-quarters of a mile back²¹ of the train with flag and fusees to warn the oncoming second section. When the repairs were complete he was recalled to board the train. Section 99 of the railroad’s operating rule book states, in part:

*“When recalled and safety to the train will permit, he [the flagman] may return. When the conditions require, he will leave the torpedoes and a lighted fusee .”*²²

Torpedoes are small packets of black powder which are placed on the rail and explode when run over cautioning the crew to be alert for trouble ahead. The flagman left torpedoes and a freshly lighted fusee²³ when he departed his flagging post. It required six minutes for him to re-board and the train to depart.²⁴ The fusee at the flagging post would have had only four minutes burning time remaining when the train got under way. The portion of Operating Rules Section 99 which calls for leaving the fusees and torpedoes “*when conditions require*” and could be interpreted as leaving a freshly lighted fusee when he re-boarded the train. The stop consumed 20 of the 24 minutes of the separation between the two trains.²⁵ The engineer of the second section testified he reduced speed for about a mile after running over the torpedoes, however not seeing a danger resumed track speed, 60 miles per hour maximum.²⁶ Section 11 of the operating rules reads, “*A train finding a fusee burning red on or near its track must stop and extinguish the fusee. Train may then proceed at restricted speed.*”²⁷ The second section engineer makes no mention of coming upon a burning fusee.

The first section traveled two miles stopping at Petersburg, North Dakota to inspect the bearing. All appeared to be well. Approximately three minutes were lost in this stop. The flagman was only able to proceed one car length (about 80 feet) beyond the rear of the train before he was recalled; he did not leave torpedoes or a fusee. The engineer of the second section testified that in his opinion “it would have been good judgment for him to leave a fusee burning at that time, as well as the first time they had trouble”²⁸ The separation between the trains would have been only a minute or two after this stop. Section 99 of the rule book also states “*When a train is moving under circumstances in which it may be overtaken by another train, the flagman must take such action as may be necessary to insure full protection. By night, or day when the view is obscured, lighted fusees must be thrown off at proper intervals.*”²⁹

The train continued a further 6 miles. When approaching Michigan, North Dakota the engineer noticed smoke coming again from the tender bearing and stopped about 1,000 feet beyond the Michigan depot.³⁰ As the train slowed the flagman “hit the ground running” with flag and fusee in hand.³¹ As the train stopped the engineer climbed down from the locomotive to inspect the bearing. The conductor, who bore ultimate responsibility for the train’s safety, was on the ground and ordered the fireman, still in the cab, to “get the train moving.”³² As the second section rounded a gentle curve coming into Michigan the stopped first section came into view and the engineer made an emergency application of the brakes.

However it was too late, as Robert R. Bye & James H. Larson phrased it:

“At 7:22 PM Central War Time, second No. 1 struck the rear of the slowly moving train! What followed was a nightmare of escaping steam, twisted wreckage and death”³³

Colliding at 45 miles per hour the locomotive of the second section telescoped the length of the last car, Pullman *Peoria*, and drove the train forward 165 feet.³⁴ The shell of the *Peoria* ended up covering the second section locomotive like a shroud. Thirty four on board the first section died and 312 from both sections were injured³⁵ in the worst crash in the history of the Great Northern Railroad. Twenty in military service, including the three WAVES and their supervisor plus 14 civilians lost their lives. Olive Brennan, 45, traveling to her father’s funeral³⁶ was trapped with her upper body out of a window. She survived the impact only to die minutes after she was released from the wreckage six hours later. A 20 year old porter on his first trip with the railroad climbed a ladder to hold her head and comfort her throughout the ordeal. At one point military medics who were passengers climbed atop the car to support her body with knotted sheets so rescuers could work beneath her. A physician administered sedation and a priest delivered last rites from the ladder.

Myra Gertz Bauman, four years old at the time, was riding in the last car of the second section with her mother and two older sisters, returning from a visit with her mother’s sister in Minnesota.³⁷ She recalls; *“There were many soldiers riding in that car and needless to say, they were happy with the end of the war...”* It is doubtful that anyone on board either train knew that the second atomic bomb of the war had been dropped on Nagasaki that morning, 20 hours before the collision. Or that the war would end on August 14th, five days after the accident.

Ms Bauman continued with her memories: *“The speeding second section of the Empire Builder, which we were passengers on, telescoped the first train. Even though we were in the last car on the second train, we recall the collision as a terrific impact. Luggage and liquor bottles (the soldiers had had their supply replenished in Grand Forks) flew through the air and crashed around us. I remember several passengers around me with injuries, especially bad cuts; and particularly dramatic to me, as I was only four years old at the time, was a female passenger holding her knocked-out teeth in her hand. None of the four of us had injuries, although Mom remembers being stiff and aching for a few days following the accident.”*

Richard Desautels has written:³⁸ *“The day of the crash I was at the farthest west [grain] elevator, which was right alongside of the tracks. I was looking out the north sliding door to watch the express train [Empire Builder], which normally didn't stop in Michigan. There it came, but instead of flying by it stopped, still on the bypass tracks. The engine was directly opposite me, two tracks away. I could see the engineer and another man talking using strong motions and*

words. The other man, I think he was the brakeman, quickly went down the ladder from the cab to the ground and began running as fast as he could towards the end of the train to the east. The engineer stayed in the cab, then after sticking his head out of the window as far as he could so he could look back hurriedly began climbing down the ladder. Before he could reach the ground I heard another train coming from the east, brakes screeching. But it couldn't stop in time. It ran into the last car of the express, crushing everything into the front half of the car, the top of the car hanging open over the engine.

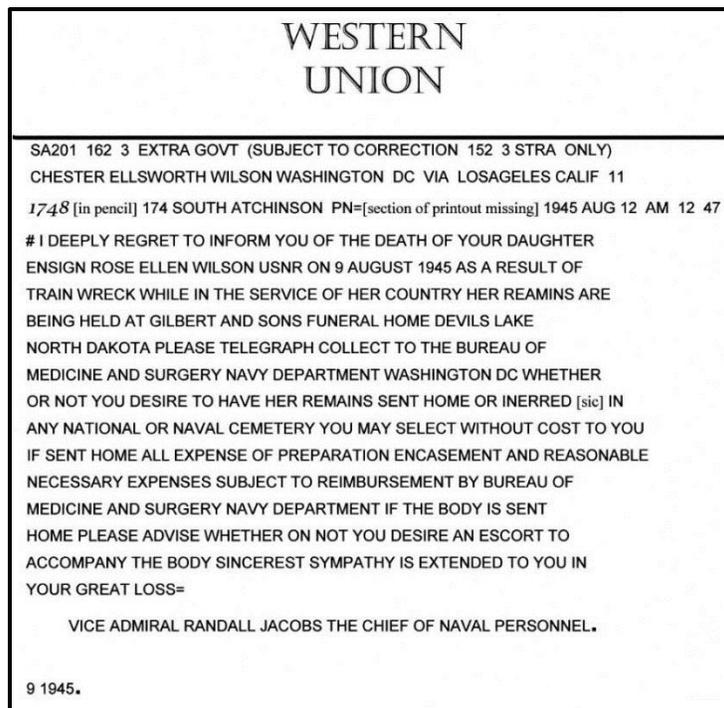
I ran to the crash scene at the end of the express. There was no noise, no shouting or crying. By the time I got there passengers were descending from other cars, milling about, not knowing where they were or what to do not knowing the depot and downtown Michigan was on the other side of the train. Soon people from Michigan began arriving and fire trucks from surrounding towns and ambulances from Grand Forks and Devils Lake arrived. Then began all night rescue efforts."

The local residents responded to the accident with ladders and all tools at hand. The pharmacy opened to dispense medical supplies, and as the sun set automobile headlights lit the scene until floodlights could be set up. Townspeople provided coffee and food for rescue workers and typewriters and space for reporters. At 50 minutes after midnight a consolidated train of 18 cars departed with those able to travel.³⁹

The navy sent notifications to the next of kin

WESTERN UNION			
NUMBER	RECEIVED BY	CHECK	
N12	XA6B	COK	SER
Dated	ST PAUL MINNOSOTA [sic]	AUGUST 10 1945	5:30 P
To	MRS ELIZABETH MCMANUS		
2500 WEBB AVENUE			
UNIDENTIFIED BODY FOUND IN WRECK WEARING SUMMER			
SEERSUCKER UNIFORM OF WAVE WEARING BRACELET WITH NAME			
ADELAIDE F MC MANUS ENGRAVED THERON NO CONFIRMATION YET			
WILL ADVISE FURTHER LATER			
T F O'CONNELL			
T:18P			

Michigan, North Dakota Community Club Collection



Jim Wilson Collection



Robert Bye Collection

Second section locomotive wearing the shell of *Peoria* like a shroud

Addie did not mail the letter, it was found on her body in a carefully addressed envelope without a stamp. If the soldiers had time to replenish their liquor supplies at Grand Forks Addie surely would have had time to mail the letter there, if not at Fargo. Perhaps she was unable to find a place to purchase a stamp. The letter was returned to her parents in New York City with her personal effects. The letter along with the McManus telegram were purchased by the Michigan, North Dakota Community Club from a collector and are on display at the Michigan Civic Center. The seller had acquired them in a “large Bundle of documents” at a flea market in Eastern Ohio. The history of their travels remains a tantalizing mystery. The Wilson telegram has been in the family bible since its receipt. Rose Ellen Wilson is buried next to her mother at Angelus-Rosedale Cemetery in Los Angeles, California; Adda Jane Patterson is buried at the Landisburg Cemetery, Perry County, Pennsylvania; Louis S. Stuller’s body was returned to his mother in Tacoma, Washington. His wife and son, living in Maryland were unable to attend his funeral,

however did receive the flag which draped his coffin. The burial place of Adelaide Francis McManus, who so eloquently described her last day is still being sought.

In the immediate aftermath of the accident Frank J. Gavin, President Great Northern Railway issued a telegram to Mr. C. O. Jenks reading, in part:

*“Arrange to put out instructions immediately that second or following section of the “Empire Builder” between Fargo and Surrey Jct. Shall be held a station apart until the first, or other section, clears the block, putting in any Operators necessary.”*⁴⁰

This in recognition that had there been a operator on duty when the first section stopped at Petersburg the second section would have been held insuring at least 20 minutes separation between the trains and that there would have been a “stop” signal displayed on the order board at Michigan..

On August 14, 1945 the Coroner of Nelson County, North Dakota held an inquest into the accident, taking 136 pages of testimony. The jury found the engineer, conductor, and flagman of the first section guilty of having caused the accident.⁴¹ This inquest had no legal standing, however it could have been sighted in subsequent litigation. The following day August 15th the Great Northern Railway held an investigation into the accident in which they determined the conductor and flagman of the first section were responsible for the accident and they were “dismissed from service.”⁴² The record of the Great Northern investigation has not been found, however, a four page letter from C. McDonough, General Manager to summarizing the investigation does exist.

A seven year fundraising project by the Michigan Civic Club under the leadership of Maria Vasichek resulted in the placement of a granite monument in the memory of those who died in the accident. The monument dedication on July 21, 2012 was attended by Myra Gertz Bauman who was a passenger on the second section and by family members representing several of those who were lost their lives.



Jim Wilson Collection

Monument, Veterans Park, Michigan, North Dakota



Jim Wilson Collection

**Looking West across First Street
Collision Occurred at Curve in the Distance**



Jim Wilson Collection

Cross Marking the Collision Site

Epilogue

What caused the accident? Mobilization for the war and the ensuing shortage of manpower delayed retirement for many, the train crews ranged in age from their late 50's to early 70's⁴³ each of them with years of experience. Perhaps this was part of the problem, lulled into a false sense of security by years of operation without accident. Block were not installed on the 200 mile section between Fargo and Surrey Junction, North Dakota. All stations in this section had order boards which would to stop a train holding it to insure separation, however only four stations over this distance were open 24 hours per day. The trains left Larimore, an open station, with 31 minutes separation. The next open station, Lakota, was 36 miles distant, between were three closed stations at Niagara, Petersburg, and Michigan. The collision occurred 1,000 feet beyond the Michigan station, 10 miles short of Lakota. Only the flagman with flag and fusee could warn oncoming trains. The flagman failed to insure the separation between the two sections of the train; the conductor, who bears ultimate responsibility for the safety of his train, failed to insure the flagman was posting warnings for the following section. The flagman seemed to have several misunderstandings of his duties to protect the train. At the first stop he left a freshly lighted fusee where he had been flagging, as required by the rule book. Having left another when re-boarding the train would have been in the interest of safety. While the flagman was "whistled out" by the engineer at the second stop he did not leave torpedoes or a fusee as they were stopped at a station and did not think it was required.⁴⁴ The station was not manned and a stop signal would not be displayed on the order board holding the second section. With the planned separation between trains having been consumed by the first stop the first section was in jeopardy of being overtaken by the second section and the flagman should have been regularly dropping fusees for the following train to stop extinguish, and proceed at restricted speed⁴⁵ until they came to an open station where the second section would have been held for 20 minutes. The rule book prohibited the flagman from riding in the rear of the observation car while occupied by passengers "*unless necessary for safety.*"⁴⁶ The flagman misjudged the jeopardy which they were in, rode in the vestibule between the last two cars and did not drop fusees from the moving train as he thought "*they would not remain lit.*"⁴⁷ The conductor, who by his action when they stopped for a third time immediately ordered the fireman, who was still in the cab, to "*get the train moving*" realized the danger of being overtaken, however he had not gone to the rear of the train to insure the flagman was dropping fusees to protect them.

About the Authors

Robert Bye is a retired locomotive engineer, railroad historian, and has researched and written about this accident.

James Wilson is a retired mechanical engineer, family historian, and is Rose Ellen Wilson's cousin.

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