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INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF THE BUREAU OF SAFETY IN RE  
INVESTIGATION OF AN ACCIDENT WHICH OCCURRED ON  
THE NEW YORK, NEW HAVEN & HARTFORD RAILROAD AT  
NEW HAVEN, CONN., ON MARCH 19, 1925

August 10, 1925.

To the Commission

On March 19, 1925, there was a rear-end collision between two freight trains on the New York, New Haven & Hartford Railroad at New Haven, Conn., which resulted in the death of two employees. This accident was investigated in conjunction with a representative of the Public Utilities Commission of Connecticut

Location and method operation.

This accident occurred at a point 3,665 feet west of the station at New Haven, within yard limits and in a territory designated by a time-table rule as the New Haven Terminal, a unit of the New Haven Division; in the vicinity of the point of accident this is a four-track line over which trains are operated by time-table, train orders, and an automatic block-signal system. Approaching the point of accident from the west the tracks are tangent and practically level for a distance of more than 3,000 feet.

The automatic block signals are of the three-position, upper-quadrant, semaphore type, and are mounted on signal bridges spanning the tracks. The accident occurred on track 2, and the signals involved were signals 70.32 and 71.22, located 5,536 and 1,250 feet, respectively, west of the point of accident.

Although the point of accident was within yard limits, flag protection is required under a time-table rule except in the case of light engines moving between certain specified points.

~~Many~~ symbol trains are run on this railroad, these trains being scheduled in a symbol book and having designated leaving times. Symbol trains are not shown in the time-table and their movements are governed by the operating rules prescribed for extra trains. One of the trains involved was a symbol train and both were being hauled by electric motors.

At the time of the accident, which occurred at 2.30 a.m., it was dark and there was a light fog, which did not however obscure the signal indications.

#### Description

Eastbound freight train symbol HN-2, consisting of motor 080, 45 cars and a caboose, in charge of Conductor Rabenold and Engineman Schwager, departed from Harlem River, N.Y., at 11.20 p.m., March 18, 20 minutes late on its scheduled leaving time. At Devon, Conn., 11.63 miles from New Haven, it entered upon track 2, continued eastward on that track and at 2.20 a.m., March 19, was brought to a stop at New Haven with the caboose 1,250 feet east of signal 71.22. The train was parted for the purpose of pulling a portion of it into Water Street Yard, but before the movement could be made the rear of the train was struck by extra 0110.

Eastbound freight train extra 0110, consisting of motor 0110, 57 cars and a caboose, in charge of Conductor McAllister and Engineman Moore, departed from Harlem River, N.Y., at 11.56 p.m., March 18, entered upon track 2 at Devon, passed Woodmont, Conn., approximately 5 miles west of the point of accident, at 2.19 a.m., March 19, passed signal 70.32 which was displaying a caution indication, disregarded a torpedo and the stop signals given by the flagman of train HN-2, passed signal 71.22 which was displaying a stop indication, and collided with the caboose of train HN-2 while traveling at a speed of at least 25 miles an hour.

Motor 0110 came to rest in a badly damaged condition at a point about 350 feet east of where it first struck the caboose. The caboose and seven rear cars were demolished, while one other car in train HN-2 and four cars in the train of extra 0110 were destroyed by fire which broke out in the wreckage. In addition, one car in train HN-2 and 11 cars in extra 0110 were slightly damaged. The employees killed were the engine-man and fireman of extra 0110.

### Summary of evidence

Engineman Schwager, of train HN-2, said the weather was misty and slightly foggy as his train arrived at New Haven but that it was not such as to interfere with his view of signals 70.32 and 71.22 as his train approached them, and he was able to discern their indications from a distance of from one-half to three-fourths of a mile. He also said there was no change in the weather conditions up to the time of the accident. Fireman Boyhan thought it was quite foggy, but Head Brakeman Metlowski said that while the weather was slightly foggy it did not interfere with the view and that he was able clearly to see and understand lantern signals given by the conductor from a position 21 cars back of the motor. Brakeman Metlowski also said he had been able to see the marker lights on the caboose very distinctly when he looked in that direction as his train approached New Haven.

The statements of Flagman O'Connor, of train HN-2, indicated that he got off the caboose just before his train was brought to a stop and started back to protect, taking with him red and white lanterns, two torpedoes, and a fusee. He said that although the fog was so thick he could not see more than 10 car lengths, yet he walked back slowly. According to his statements he had reached a point about one-fourth of the way across West River bridge, the east abutment of which is 176 feet west of signal 71.22, when he saw extra O110 approaching about 10 car lengths distant. He said he then returned to the eastern end of the bridge, placed one torpedo on the rail, and began to give stop signals with his lanterns from the engineman's side of the track, not having time to light a fusee. His signals were not answered and the train passed him moving at a speed which he thought might have been as high as 30 miles an hour, colliding with his own train without the brakes having been applied, or the speed, as far as he was able to judge, having been reduced. The motor was closed up when it passed him and he said he did not see any one in it. When asked why he did not go back a greater distance from his train he replied that he walked "nice and slow," and when he was then asked if he should walk slowly when required to protect his train, he said he "didn't have the time". Later the statement was made to him that he could have gone back twice as far if he had walked with any degree of rapidity and he said that if he had known he was required to he would have done it.

Conductor McAllister, of extra 0110, said the car inspectors at Harlem River yard made the usual terminal air-brake test and reported the brakes in his train as being 100 per cent operative. Shortly after leaving the yard an air hose broke on the car next to the caboose, and after a short delay it was replaced, the brakes were released and the gauge in the caboose registered nearly 70 pounds pressure when the train started again. As his train approached the point of accident he and the flagman were expecting a brake application and had gotten out of the cupola and were near the air gauge where they could observe the pressure registered. His train passed signals 70 32 and 71.22 without the speed having been reduced and no reduction in the brake-pipe pressure was shown on the gauge up to the time of the collision, the pressure being maintained at nearly 70 pounds, the only thing he noticed was a slight jar, as if power had been shut off, a few seconds before the collision occurred. He was not certain as to the speed, but estimated that at the time of the accident it was about 25 miles an hour. Conductor McAllister said he had talked with Engineman Moore a short time before their train departed from Hunts Point, near Harlem River, at 12.15 a.m., and at that time the engineman appeared normal in all respects. Conductor McAllister also said it was foggy, he did not know how far signals could be seen, but said that when looking along the side of his train as it rounded curves he could not see more than 10 or 12 car lengths. It also appeared from his statements that when on his way back to flag, after the occurrence of the accident, he looked back toward the rear of his train when about 10 car lengths from the caboose and was able clearly to see the indication of signal 71.22; about 12 car lengths east of where the caboose was standing.

Brakeman O'Brien, of extra 0110, said he went to the front end of the motor just after his train left the terminal and called the attention of the fireman to the fact that the rear headlight was burning, this being the only time he was in the front part of the motor on the trip. After stopping just outside the terminal at Harlem River on account of a broken air hose on the rear car, no stops were made until the collision occurred. Brakeman O'Brien was riding in the rear end of the motor, eating his lunch, as his train approached New Haven and did not see the signals and knew nothing of their indications. When he had gotten out of the motor after the accident he noticed the marker lights on the caboose of his train,

adding that as far as the weather conditions were concerned he could have seen these markers for even a greater distance. He was quite positive that the brakes were not applied prior to the collision. He also was of the opinion that the power was not shut off and that the collision occurred without the speed having been reduced in any manner. Brakeman O'Brien also stated that he heard a torpedo explode a short time prior to the collision.

Car Inspector Ryan, on duty at Harlem River at the time extra OllO departed from that point, said he made a terminal test of the air brakes, that he personally examined the cylinders and piston travel on each car in the train and found all of the brakes working and in good order. Car Inspector Sullivan said he assisted Car Inspector Ryan in testing the air brakes and heard Inspector Ryan say that the air was all right and that all of the brakes were working.

Signal Maintainer Willett, on duty from 11 p.m. until 7 a.m., was at the place of accident 10 minutes after the collision occurred and at that time it was raining lightly and there was a slight fog, but the fog was not of sufficient density to interfere materially with the view of the signals. He said he noticed the signals displayed for tracks 3 and 1 and that they could easily be seen from a distance of about 2,500 feet. All the signals he observed were displaying their proper indications.

Signal Supervisor Warren inspected signals 70.32 and 71.22 shortly after the occurrence of the accident and found nothing to indicate that they were not functioning properly, the only irregularities he discovered being those caused by the wreckage. He said he could see the indication displayed by signal 71.22 from a point about 4,000 feet distant.

Assistant Shop Foreman Bennett stated that motor OllO was inspected and examined by employees under his direction before it left the terminal and at that time all air-brake mechanism and other appurtenances were in good condition. Mr. Bennett said he had conversed with Engineman Moore before the engineman left the terminal and that he appeared perfectly normal in every respect.

Terminal Trainmaster Doolan, who arrived at the scene of the accident about 25 minutes after it occurred, said there was no perceptible fog at that time, as a matter of fact he was able to see an employee of the signal department, who was carrying a large flash light at the time, as he was leaving signal station 75, which is approximately 2,700 feet distant from the point of accident

### Conclusions

This accident was caused by failure to obey signal indications and by failure to enter yard limits under control, for which Engineman Loore is responsible.

Notwithstanding the fact that both flag and signal protection were provided, the evidence indicated that extra 0110 approached the point of accident at a high rate of speed, passed over and exploded a torpedo placed on the rail by the flagman, passed the flagman, passed the stop indication of signal 71 22 without reducing speed, and after traveling an additional distance of about 1,250 feet crashed into the caboose of train HN-2 without any application of the air brakes having been made. The investigation developed nothing to indicate that there was anything wrong either with signal system or the air-brake apparatus and as the engineman and fireman were killed in the collision any attempt to explain why neither of them applied the air brakes for the purpose of bringing the train to a stop would be mere conjecture.

The statements of Flagman O'Connor indicate that he made little effort to provide proper protection for his train, while his statement that he was part way across West River bridge when he saw extra 0110 approaching about 10 car lengths distant, moving at a speed of nearly 30 miles an hour, and then was able to return to the eastern end of the bridge and put down a torpedo, is incredible. The evidence indicates that he had 10 minutes in which to protect his train, and it seems more than probable that all he did was to go back as far as the bridge and remain at that point. While under the circumstances there is no definite assurance that proper action on his part would have prevented the occurrence of the accident, yet he is open to severe censure for the lax method in which he performed his duties.

Had an adequate automatic train stop or train control device been in use on this line this accident would have been prevented

All of the employees involved, with the exception of Brakeman O'Brien, were experienced men, and at the time of the accident none had been on duty in violation of any of the provisions of the hours of service law.

Respectfully submitted,

W. P. BORLAND

Director, Bureau of  
Safety