

**IN RE INVESTIGATION OF AN ACCIDENT WHICH OCCURRED
ON THE NEW YORK, NEW HAVEN & HARTFORD RAILROAD
NEAR POMFRET, CONN., ON APRIL 10, 1918.**

May 20, 1918.

On April 10, 1918, there was a rear-end collision on the New York, New Haven & Hartford Railroad between two freight trains near Pomfret, Conn., which resulted in the death of 4 employees and the injury of 3 employees. This accident was investigated jointly by the Public Utilities Commission of Connecticut and the Interstate Commerce Commission. The Chief of the Bureau of Safety makes the following report:

That part of the Midland Division extending between Willimantic and Walpole, Conn., a distance of 66.6 miles, upon which this accident occurred, is a double-track line over which trains are operated by time-table, train orders, and a manual block system. On this line there are at night five block sections, the block in which this accident occurred being 24.5 miles long.

The trains involved in this accident were east-bound freight trains, extra 3200, and eastbound train AB-4.

Extra 3200, consisting of 34 cars and a caboose, hauled by locomotive 3200, left Cedar Hill, Conn., at 12.35 p.m., April 9th, and upon arriving at Willimantic, Conductor Rockwood and Enginemen Daniels were placed in charge. It left Willimantic at 1 a. m., April 10th, en route to Putnam, passed Pomfret, 19.8 miles east of Willimantic, and was struck by train AB-4 at a point about 3,100 feet east of Pomfret station at about 3.25 a. m., while running at a speed of about 15 miles an hour.

Train AB-4, consisting of 29 cars and a caboose, hauled by locomotives 330 and 327, in charge of Conductor Pritchard and Enginemen Cook and Corcoran, left East Hartford at 10 p. m., April 9. At Willimantic the conductor and enginemen of this train received copies of form B caution card, which stated in part as follows:

Block is not clear. You may proceed at 1.40 a. m., with caution, expecting to find track obstructed.

Conductors and enginemen receiving this card properly filled out and signed by the signalman, may proceed with the train under control prepared to stop short of any obstruction in the block.

This train left Willimantic at 2.05 a. m., 1 hour and 5 minutes after the departure of extra 3200, and collided with the rear of that train while running at a speed of 25 or 30 miles an hour.

Locomotives 330 and 327 ran approximately 260 feet after colliding with the caboose of extra 3200 and then turned over on their sides, locomotive 330 turning around and facing the rear end of train AB-4, while locomotive 327 was thrown to the right of the track and between the tenders of both locomotives. Both locomotives were seriously damaged. The first four cars on the head end of train AB-4 were derailed and practically destroyed, the following eight cars were not derailed, the next five cars were derailed, and the remaining of the train was not damaged. The caboose and the car immediately ahead of it on extra 3200 were destroyed. The conductor and flagman of extra 3200, who were riding in the caboose of that train, and the fireman and brakeman of train AB-4, who were on the leading locomotive of that train, were killed.

Approaching the point of accident from the west there is a tangent 3,700 feet in length, beginning at a point 1,800 feet west of and extending 1,900 feet east of Pomfret station; then there is a 1-degree curve to the right, 1,780 feet in length; the collision occurred on this curve, 1,200 feet from the west end. When eastbound trains reach the tangent which passes through Pomfret, engineers have an unobstructed view ahead for a distance of 3,700 feet to the beginning of the 1-degree curve, and when trains reach that curve, engineers have an unobstructed view of the track ahead for a distance of approximately 1,100 feet. Beginning at a point about three miles west of point of collision there is a descending grade of about 1% which continues to within about 1,750 feet of point of collision. Then there is an ascending grade of 0.9% which continues to a point about 550 feet beyond the point of collision. The weather at the time was cloudy.

Locomotive 3200 used on extra 3200 involved in this accident is one of several new engines recently secured by the New York, New Haven & Hartford Railroad Company; because of their weight and wheel base, bulletin No. 14, issued April 3, 1918, restricted speed of locomotives of this type to 15 miles per hour.

Engineer Daniels of extra 3200 stated that his train left Willimantic at 1 a. m. and stopped twice after leaving there on account of the mechanical stoker not operating. The first stop, which consumed about 20 minutes, was made at a point about two and one-half miles from Willimantic. The crew were unable to get the stoker to operate, but the fireman said he would fire by hand and the

train proceeded; however, it had gone about a mile further when the fireman said it was impossible to fire by hand and suggested that the train be again stopped. It was therefore stopped and upon examining the stoker a loose bolt was found wedged in it. Upon removing the bolt the stoker operated properly and the train again proceeded, the second stop having consumed about 10 minutes. Enginemen Daniels said that the rails were slippery and the train lost some time in ascending the grades, but the train passed through Pomfret at a speed of about 15 miles an hour and was ascending the grade east of that station when it was struck by train AB-4. He said he read bulletin No. 14 at Willimantic, restricting the speed of the 3200-class engines to 15 miles an hour, and that at the time of the accident the train was running at that speed.

Engineman Cook, in charge of the leading engine of train AB-4, stated that at Willimantic he received a caution card, form B; approaching Pomfret he asked the fireman if the track was clear and was informed that it was. When he reached the tangent extending through Pomfret he released the air brakes in order to attain speed sufficient to avoid stalling on the hill east of Pomfret; when he reached the end of the tangent and started around the curve he saw a marker on the left hand side of the caboose of extra 3200 and then applied the air brakes in emergency. He did not know how far away extra 3200 was when he first saw it, although it was but a short distance, and he thought it was not moving when the collision occurred. The only speed restrictions he knew of was a restriction of 30 miles an hour for freight trains. He stated further that he did not know of any special speed restrictions for engines of the 3200 class on the Midland division but understood there were speed restrictions for these engines on the Western section.

Engineman Corsair, in charge of the second engine on train AB-4, stated that when his train arrived at Willimantic he received a caution card, form B, stating that there was a train in the block that had left Willimantic 1 hour and 5 minutes previously but he did not know what train it was, what class of engine was on it, or that its speed was restricted to 15 miles an hour. He said he left Willimantic at 2.05 a. m. without consulting the train register; he did not know at what speed his train passed Pomfret, but thought at the time of the collision its speed was not in excess of 15 miles an hour. He said the train was under control when it passed Pomfret and thought it could have been stopped within a distance of 500 feet. It was his understanding that when a caution card, form B, is given a train crew they are expected to run their

train under control expecting to find the track obstructed. He said he had seen a bulletin restricting the speed of 3200 class engines to 15 miles an hour, and had he known that an engine of that class was on the preceding train he would have known that the speed of that train was restricted to 15 miles an hour and would have been governed accordingly. He did not think the engineer on the leading engine was working steam at the time of the collision and he was about to open the throttle on the second engine when he saw the caboose of extra 3200 a short distance away.

Conductor Pritchard of train AB-4 stated that before leaving Willimantic he read a bulletin which stated that engines of the 3200 class would not exceed a speed of 15 miles an hour, and the operator informed Enginemen Cook and himself that extra 3200 had left Willimantic at 1 a. m. and was in the block ahead of them. He said he knew extra 3200 was being hauled by an engine of the 3200 class and thought that Engineman Cook secured the same information from the operator at Willimantic. When his train reached a point a little west of Abington it passed a westbound freight train and he saw some one on the caboose wave a lantern but thought it was the usual salutation exchanged between train crews, and he replied to it by waving a lighted match he had in his hand. He said he did not hear any blasts of the whistle from that train. He thought his train passed through Pomfret about 30 miles an hour, and felt the application of the air brakes shortly before the accident occurred.

Engineman Forbes of westbound train RA-3 stated that he passed extra 3200 a short distance west of Abington and in a short time passed train AB-4 and estimated that the two trains were about one mile apart. By a series of short blasts of the engine whistle he endeavored to call the attention of the enginemen of train AB-4 to the fact that his train was closely following another train and could not say with certainty whether his signal was answered but he heard one blast of the whistle from that train.

Conductor McLeod of train RA-3 stated that his train passed extra 3200 and AB-4 near Abington and noted that they were only about one mile apart. He said he went out on the rear of the caboose with a white light and gave the man on the rear of AB-4 a stop signal and he thought they answered his signal for he saw a flash of light from the caboose cupola. He thought train AB-4 passed him at a speed of 25 or 30 miles an hour.

Operator Kelly stated that extra 3200 left Wil-

limantic at 1 a. m. and upon the arrival there of AB-4 he gave the crew a caution card, form B, on account of extra 3200 still being in the block; train AB-4 left at 2:45 a. m., at which time extra 3200 should have been nearly at the other end of the block. He said he knew extra 3200 was being hauled by one of the 3200 class engines and that its speed was restricted to 15 miles an hour, and said there was a bulletin posted at Willimantic stating that the speed of engines of that class would be restricted to 15 miles an hour; but he did not say anything to the crew of AB-4 about the speed of extra 3200, although he overheard the conductor and engineman of AB-4 talking about extra 3200 and while they did not mention the speed at which this class of locomotive could run, he was sure they knew the class of engine that was on that train, and that should have indicated to them its speed restrictions. He said that all telegraph offices between Willimantic and Putnam were closed from 7 p. m. to 7 a. m. since about January 14, 1918.

Superintendent Astley stated that during the daytime there are twelve open telegraph offices between Willimantic and Walpole, a distance of 66.6 miles, and that eight of these offices are closed at night time. He said that the longest block on this section of track is between Willimantic and Putnam, a distance of 24.3 miles, the intermediate offices being closed at night. When a train is admitted to an occupied block the crew is given a caution card and they are expected to run their train carefully, expecting to find the track occupied.

Engine Dispatcher Jackson stated that he posted all bulletins received between 7 a. m. and 6 p. m. on the board at East Hartford and while he could not recall posting bulletin No. 14, he did recall receiving a bulletin restricting the speed of class 3200 engines and was sure he had posted it.

Herman White, a night clerk in the engine dispatcher's office at East Hartford, stated that Engineman Cook read the bulletin board in his presence between 9:00 and 9:10 p. m., April 9, but he could not say whether or not bulletin No. 14 was posted on the board then.

General Superintendent Woodward stated that the

traffic between Willimantic and Putnam since the discontinuance of certain passenger trains had been confined almost entirely to freight traffic and there were no passenger trains in that block at night time when the offices are closed. However, as some of the freight traffic from the Shore Line Route is to be diverted to the Midland Division, in order to avoid delay to those trains and in order to run them closer together with safety, he said they expected to put on additional operators between Willimantic and Putnam and also east of Putnam.

The direct cause of this accident was the failure of Enginemen Cook and Corssair and Conductor Pritchard to operate their train under control after receiving a caution card stating that the block was not clear.

Under the rules governing train operation, a train receiving a caution card is required to proceed under full control prepared to stop short of any obstruction in the block, irrespective of the length of block or any speed restrictions prescribed by bulletin or otherwise, and regardless of the period of time that had elapsed since the departure of a preceding train; the imperative duty placed upon a crew of a following train is to proceed only at such speed as the track is seen or known to be clear.

Under the rules, both enginemen and the conductor of train AB-4 were equally responsible for the operation of their train. When their train left Willimantic all of them all of them knew that the block ahead was occupied by a preceding train, having received a caution card apprising them of that fact. While the requirement of the rules that the train be operated through the block under control was mandatory upon both enginemen and the conductor, the speed of the train was at all times directly under the control of Enginemen Cook of the leading engine, and he was also in the best position to judge whether or not the train was under control as required and could be stopped within range of vision. While Enginemen Cook claimed that the speed of his train was only about 15 miles an hour when passing through Pomfret, the evidence indicates that it must have been running at a much higher

rate of speed. The speed at that time was estimated by the conductor to have been about 30 miles per hour. Furthermore, after passing Pomfret station there was a one per cent descending grade for a distance of 1,450 feet and then an ascending grade of .9 per cent for a distance of 1,750 feet to the point where AB-4 struck extra 3200, which was then running in the same direction at the rate of about 15 miles per hour; and the force of the collision was sufficient to cause material damage to both trains. In addition, the view was limited by a curve. Under these

circumstances it can not be considered that train AB-4 was being operated under control and Enginemen Cook was particularly at fault for his failure to properly control the speed of his train.

There is no conclusive evidence that the engineman of train AB-4 knew what train was in the block ahead or that it was being hauled by a type of locomotive which was restricted to 15 miles an hour. Had either of them by any chance learned from the train register, or the conductor, operator or dispatcher, that the speed of the preceding train was so restricted, they might have proceeded through the block at reduced speed or they might have been more alert to discover any obstruction on the track ahead. But even if such information had been supplied them, it could not have made more binding or affected in any way the absolute requirement that a train being operated under a caution card must "proceed with the train under control prepared to stop short of any obstruction in the block."

A circumstance which beyond question contributed to this accident was the length of the block in which it occurred. The investigation disclosed that extra 3200 entered this block at Willimantic at 1:00 a. m., and that train AB-4 entered the block at 2:05 a. m., or 1 hour and 5 minutes later, under a caution card, and the collision occurred approximately 20 miles east of Willimantic at about 3:25 a. m. Under such circumstances the advantages of the block system as a method of operating trains are practically nullified, and it is obviously impossible to operate trains with safety and dispatch. Under any circumstances, rules provided to insure the safety of train operation should of course be rigidly enforced and obeyed; and in order to provide against the recurrence of similar accidents the operating officers of the New Haven Railroad should establish a sufficient number of open block offices on this section of track to provide blocks of reasonable length and render available the advantages of the block system which was nominally in effect.

All of the employees involved were experienced men with good records. At the time of the accident the crew of train AB-4 had been on duty about 6 hours.

J. O. T.