

In re investigation of accident on the New York,
New Haven & Hartford Railroad, at Putnam,
Connecticut, on November 16, 1912.

December 26, 1912.

On November 16, 1912, there was a rear-end collision between two freight trains on the New York, New Haven & Hartford Railroad, at Putnam, Conn., resulting in the death of one employee and the injury of a care-taker of stock who was in the caboose of the leading train.

After investigation I beg to submit the following report:

The accident occurred about 4800 feet west of the passenger station at Putnam on the Midland Division of the New York, New Haven & Hartford Railroad, at about 11:52 p. m. At this point there were no block signals in use; trains were operated under the train order system, being spaced ten minutes apart at open telegraph stations. At a point near where the accident occurred, known as Modoc Ledge, a watchman was stationed to look out for rocks on the track. He operated a manual signal governing both east-bound and west-bound movements for a distance of about a quarter of a mile, and he also spaced trains ten minutes apart.

Where the accident occurred the railroad is a double track line running east and west. The collision occurred on the east-bound track, at the east end of a cut on a side hill. On the north side of the track the cut extends about 300 feet east of the point where the accident occurred; on the south side of the track there is a fill approximately 70 feet deep beginning near the point where the accident occurred. Looking west from this point the track is straight for about 240 feet; then it diverges toward the north in a two-degree curve approximately 720 feet long; following this curve the track is straight for approximately 2400 feet. There is a descending grade for east-bound trains of about 1.25 per cent.

On the date of the accident, east-bound freight train extra 410 H X S, in charge of Conductor Eucanning and Engineman Henry, and consisting of an engine and 41 cars, left East Hartford, Conn., at 3:25 p. m., bound for Worcester, Mass. This train stopped on the grade about three-quarters of a mile west of Putnam passenger station at about eleven o'clock, and the engine was cut off from the train for the purpose of getting coal, water and sand. The caboose stood just east of the cut on the fill; approaching from the west it could first be seen at a point about 300 feet away from it.

Conductor Buchanan stated that he and Engineman Nowry had agreed to stop at this place; that he had so informed Flagman Gallagher, and that he directed the flagman to go back beyond the curve near Madoo Ledge. When the flagman left the caboose, carrying a white and a red lantern, fuses and torpedoes, the conductor started toward the head end of his train; as he neared the engine he looked back, and the flagman had disappeared around the curve west of the caboose. The conductor rode on the engine as far as the tower at Putnam, the engineman, fireman and head brakeman remaining on the engine while it took on coal, water and sand.

Extra 412, an east-bound freight train en route to Worcester, in charge of Conductor Erickson and Engineman Forbes, left East Hartford at 4:35 p. m., the train consisting of an engine and 15 cars. At Hampton, about 13 miles west of Putnam, ten cars were added, making a total of 25 cars. At this place, after the train was coupled up, an air brake test was made and all the brakes in the train were found in good working order.

Extra 412 left Hampton at 11:26 p. m., and proceeded to the half-mile stretch of straight track west of the point where the accident occurred. Here the engineman and fireman saw a white light some distance ahead; before reaching this light the engine ran over two torpedoes. The engineman then saw a red light signaling him to stop. He answered this signal, and having previously made a light application of the brakes on the grade, he made a full service application of the brakes, and then saw the markers on the caboose around the curve. He called to the fireman and head brakeman, and all three of them jumped from the engine. The head brakeman was killed and a care-taker of stock who was in the caboose of Extra 410 was injured. The caboose and a number of cars in Extra 410 were destroyed. The speed of Extra 412 at the time of the collision was estimated at about 15 miles an hour. The collision occurred at about 11:52 p. m.

The investigation disclosed the fact that Flagman Gallagher had gone back only about 600 feet from the rear of extra 410. His train had been standing on the main track about 40 minutes, giving the flagman abundance of time to protect his train properly. The officers of the railroad company have failed to locate Flagman Gallagher since the accident. He was seen once by Engineman Nowry, but since that time he has disappeared.

None of the employees involved in this accident was on duty contrary to any of the provisions of the hours of service law. Flagman Gallagher was 24 years of age and had been employed about two years as brakeman and flagman. He had been in service between East Hartford and Putnam one year and nine

months. At the time of the accident he had been on duty 10 hours and 12 minutes after a period off duty of eight hours.

This accident was caused by failure of Flagman Gallagher properly to protect his train. There was no excuse for his dereliction of duty in this respect as he had ample time and definite instructions to protect the train. Had an adequate block signal system been in use at this point, the accident no doubt would not have occurred.