

**Report of the Chief Inspector of Safety Appliances  
covering his investigation of a collision  
on the New York, New Haven & Hartford R. R.  
at Stonington Junction, Conn., July 25, 1912.**

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September 23, 1912.

To the Commission:

On July 25, 1912, there was a rear-end collision on the New York, New Haven & Hartford Railroad at Stonington Junction, Conn., resulting in the death of two employees and the injury of two employees and three persons carried under contract.

This accident was reported by telegraph on the date of its occurrence. After investigation, I beg to submit the following report:

The trains involved in this collision were east-bound freight extra No. 400, running from Midway to Boston, and express train No. 32, running from Harlem River to Boston. The collision occurred on track No. 2 near the tower at Stonington Junction at 6:29 a.m.

Freight extra No. 395, running from Midway to Boston, arrived at Stonington Junction at 3:15 a.m. There the engine became disabled and this train was placed on the side track. Freight extra No. 400 consisted of engine No. 400, engine No. 307, which was being hauled to Stonington Junction to take the disabled train forward, and 38 loaded cars and a caboose. At 5:52 a.m. this train passed Mystic, the first block station west of Stonington Junction, 3.84 miles distant; there a hand signal was received, indicating that a first-class train was following. Extra No. 400 arrived at Stonington Junction at 6:12 a.m., and the towerman displayed signals directing the train to back into the yard on the south side of the main track at this point. Accordingly the train was moved eastward until its caboose was about 300 feet east of the tower, and it then was backed in on yard track No. 2, stopping with the caboose clearing Orchard Street crossing. As this track was not long enough to hold all of Extra No. 400 without blocking the crossing, the train was parted ahead of the 26th car from the rear end and the section consisting of the two engines and ten cars was backing in on track No. 1, at a speed of about 4 miles per hour; when about half of this section of the train was in the side track beyond the fouling point, the west end of the fourth car from engine No. 400 was struck by express train No. 32.

Express train No. 32 consisted of engine 1004 and thirteen baggage cars, all of the cars being of wooden construction and three of them having steel vestibules. This train arrived at New Haven, Conn., at 4:35 a.m. and there engines were changed and a terminal air brake test was made. It left New Haven at 4:57 a. m., three hours and twelve minutes late, and passed Mystic at 6:24 a.m., arriving at Stonington Junction and colliding with freight extra No. 400 at 6:29 a. m.

The main line of the New York, New Haven & Hartford Railroad is a four-track road from New York to New Haven, a double track road from New Haven to Readville Transfer, and a four-track road from Readville Transfer to Boston. This collision occurred on the double track road between New Haven and Readville Transfer. Approaching Stonington Junction from the west the track is straight and the distant signal can be seen about half a mile away. East of the passenger station there is a cut on the north side of the track about eight feet high, and a curve of three degrees and forty minutes leading toward the north; this curve extends beyond the tower at Stonington Junction but is not so sharp east of the tower. On the north side of the track near the tower there is a cut about fifteen feet high, and on the south side of the track at this point there is a slight fill. The tower is about half a mile east of the passenger station, and Elm Street crossing is between the passenger station and the eastbound distant signal. The grade is practically level.

The controlled manual block system is used on this portion of the New York, New Haven & Hartford Railroad. The signals are of the normal danger, lower quadrant, semaphore type, and the signals at Stonington Junction are wire connected. The east-bound home signal is located 290 feet west of the tower, and the east-bound distant signal is located 2150 feet farther west. On account of the curvature of the track the distant signal cannot be seen from the tower; and no repeater is used in connection with the distant signal in order that the towerman may know whether or not the signal is operating properly. There is a 24-lever interlocking plant at this point.

Towerman Wilbur stated that at 4:08 on the morning of the accident he found a broken chain in the connection to the east-bound distant signal. He reported this defect to the signal repair man and to the dispatcher, telling the dispatcher that trains would probably be delayed on account of it. The engineman and conductor of extra No. 395 came into the tower and with their assistance the broken chain was repaired with a piece of insulated wire. He then operated the signal levers as usual, observing the speed of the trains as they approached

the tower for the purpose of finding out whether or not the signal was operating properly. Believing that after the temporary repairs had been made the signal was either working properly or was continually displaying a caution indication, he took no extra precautions for the protection of train movement. But it appears that the signal indicated clear continually, regardless of the position of the levers.

At 6:12 a.m., after extra No. 400 had pulled by the tower the towerman released No. 32 at Mystic and placed the levers in his tower in position to display caution and stop signals against train No. 32. When extra No. 400 had stopped east of the tower he saw the flagman leave the caboose and start to walk back carrying a red flag. He called to the flagman that No. 32 was about at Mystic, but received no response. The flagman continued to walk back slowly until he was about half way between the east-bound home signal and Elm Street crossing, and then apparently realizing that No. 32 was near he quickened his pace.

Engineman Sartoria of extra No. 400 stated that at Midway and Mystic the signals were clear and white flags were displayed, indicating that his train was running ahead of a first-class train. At Stonington Junction signals were displayed directing his train to be side-tracked. Conductor Carroll of Extra No. 396 then came up and they started to back the train in on the siding.

Conductor Carroll of Extra No. 396 stated that when his train was placed on the siding he and the engineer of his train went up into the tower, and the towerman asked them to help him fix a chain in the connections with the distant signal. They did so and afterwards returned to the tower; the engineer operated the lever and found that it worked hard. The towerman told them that he had reported the defective signal to the dispatcher and the signal repair man. Four east-bound trains passed, and the towerman operated the levers controlling the distant signal as usual. Then extra No. 400 arrived, and Conductor Carroll went down to assist in backing the train in upon the yard track. He told the engineman what was to be done and then went up on top of the train and repeated signals of the trainmen to the engineman. As they were backing the engine and first ten cars in on yard track No. 1, the towerman called to him that No. 32 was coming and conductor Carroll gave violent back-up signals to the engineman; just before the collision he jumped from the train. Conductor Carroll stated that as they started to back the head end of the train in on the sidetrack he saw the flagman a short distance away and walking back not very fast. When No. 32 appeared he saw the flagman approximately half way between the east-bound home signal and Elm Street crossing.

Conductor Peterson of Extra No. 400 stated that at the last two towers passed before reaching Stonington Junction hand signals were given indicating that a first-class train was following. He had not said anything to the flagman about stopping at Stonington Junction, but after stopping east of the tower he told the flagman to go back to protect the train, and he saw him start back carrying a red flag. The conductor then helped to back the train in on the side track.

At the coroner's inquest on July 27, Flagman Simpson stated that he had been employed by the New York, New Haven & Hartford Railroad Company one week. He had had about five years' experience as a yard brakeman on the Pennsylvania Railroad, but he left the employ of that company in 1908 and subsequently had not been in railroad service until he was employed by the New York, New Haven & Hartford Railroad Company. At the time of his employment he was given an examination only on his hearing and eyesight and was questioned regarding his previous experience. He was given a book of rules but was not examined or instructed on these rules.

He stated that on the morning of the accident as extra No. 400 approached Stonington Junction he and the conductor were riding in the caboose. When the train had passed the tower the conductor said they were going to back off there and he then started back with the flag. He stated he did not know train No. 32 was following them but thought it had gone. He stated he had gone back about the distance between twelve telegraph poles, to a point around the curve where he could see straight track, and that the train was east of the passenger station when he flagged it. He first saw the train when it was about the distance between six or eight telegraph poles away from him.

Flagman Simpson stated that this was his first trip over this line. He was assigned to duty as a flagman on this run by the trainmaster's clerk; the only question asked was whether or not he had a watch. No instructions were issued to him and he received none from his conductor during the trip. He stated that he went out without any knowledge of the operating rules of the company and did not even have a timetable, and that he paid only half a dollar for his watch.

Trainmaster Collins who employs the brakemen on this part of the road stated that he hired Flagman Simpson on July 18 and he began work on July 19. He had not been given an official examination, merely being questioned about his railroad experience and his familiarity with the duties of railroad employes. He worked in the South Boston yard and on the Old Colony Division until he was assigned as a flagman on this run.

The flagman at Elm street crossing stated that as train No. 32 approached, the distant signal was in the clear position. Extra No. 400 had passed sometime before; it came to a stop first with its rear end only a short distance from Elm Street crossing, and at that time the flagman did not get off from the train; it then proceeded, and the flagman thought sufficient time had elapsed for this train to be placed on the siding and clear of the main track. As train No. 32 was approaching the crossing flagman stated that he saw the flagman of extra No. 400 come running around the curve and train No. 32 passed him when he was about the distance between four telegraph poles from the crossing, and just east of the distant signal.

Engineman Mansfield of train No. 32 stated that at New Haven a terminal test of the air brakes was made, and they were found in good condition. Approaching Stonington Junction the distant signal was in the clear position. After passing this signal the fireman called out "red flag", and then the home signal in the danger position was seen. The engineman applied the brakes in emergency, but too late to avert the collision.

Conductor Hillinckus of train No. 32 stated that the speed of that train as it approached Stonington Junction was about 45 miles per hour. Immediately after the collision, the conductor saw the engineman who stated that the distant signal was in the clear position. The flagman of this train stated that when the brakes were applied he was thrown to the floor of the car, and before he fully regained his feet the collision occurred. He immediately went back and found the distant signal in the clear position.

The primary cause of this collision was the failure of Flagman Simpson of the freight train properly to protect his train. Conductor Peterson of extra No. 400 was equally responsible, for not knowing that his train was properly protected and for not ascertaining whether or not the flagman was familiar with his duties and giving his proper instructions for protecting the train. A contributing cause was the false clear indication of the distant signal. For this the towerman was responsible as after making temporary repairs to the broken chain he should have made certain that the signal was working properly before depending upon it to insure the safety of approaching trains. And the operating officers of the railroad company are also at fault for placing a man in the responsible position of flagman with only a cursory examination and without instructions as to his duties. Furthermore, it is noted that two new brakemen, one of whom was totally inexperienced, were assigned to this crew, contrary to instructions issued by the General Superintendent requiring that only one new man be assigned to a crew at a time.

The investigation discloses the fact that the flagman of extra No. 400 had ample time properly to protect his train. Extra No. 400 approached Stonington Junction at low speed and stopped before reaching the tower; then it started up and stopped again about 300 feet east of the tower. The flagman did not start back until this second stop, and it appears that he then walked slowly for some distance. Had the flagman dropped off from the train as it approached Stonington Junction, or had he started back as soon as the train stopped the first time, he could easily have gone back far enough to have flagged train No. 32.

The conductor of extra No. 400 knew that a first-class train was following, and also that his train would stop at Stonington Junction for the purpose of setting out locomotive No. 307; but he had not said anything to the flagman about stopping at Stonington Junction and he did not tell the flagman to go back until the train had stopped or was coming to a stop east of the tower.

The towerman found that the distant signal connections were defective at 4:08 a.m., more than two hours before the collision occurred, and the crew of extra No. 305 was at the tower nearly all that time, but he did not take any steps to learn positively whether or not the signal was operating properly, or to secure the signal in normal position until repaired, as required by the rules. The towerman should have been governed by rule No. 913, which requires that the signal be secured and its use discontinued and that he notify the superintendent. The distant signal at Stonington Junction could not be seen from the tower. No signal repeater is used and the towerman had no means of ascertaining whether or not this distant signal was working properly when the temporary repairs had been made except to go back to a point where he could see the signal, and thus he said he did not have time to do. He operated the levers in the tower to allow four trains to pass, but in none of these movements was he sure of the position of the signal.

Recognizing the fact that it is a dangerous practice to send out two or more inexperienced men in charge of a train, the general superintendent had issued instructions that only one new man should be assigned to a crew at a time. In the crew on extra No. 400, however, there were two new men. The head brakeman had spent two weeks learning his duties, and this was his first trip over this road. Flagman Simpson had had some previous railroad experience, as stated, but he had been employed by the New York, New Haven & Hartford Railroad less than a week. During this time he had been employed three days in South Boston Yard, he had made one trip over the Old Colony Division, and this was his first trip between Midway and Boston.

The conductor, engineman and fireman of train No. 32 estimated the speed of that train to be about 40 miles per hour. The rules of the company restrict the speed of trains while running around the curve and passing over the switches at Stonington Junction to thirty miles per hour. While this excessive speed cannot be attributed in any way as a cause of the accident, the consequences of the collision would no doubt have been less disastrous if the speed restriction in effect had been observed.