

IN RE INVESTIGATION OF AN ACCIDENT WHICH OCCURRED ON THE  
NEW YORK, NEW HAVEN & HARTFORD RAILROAD, AT WEIR  
JUNCTION, MASS., ON JULY 19, 1918.

Sept. 3, 1918.

On July 19, 1918, there was a rear end collision between two freight trains on the New York, New Haven & Hartford Railroad, near Weir Junction, Mass., resulting in the death of one employee. After investigation, the Chief of the Bureau of Safety presents the following report:

The district of the Old Colony Division, New York, New Haven & Hartford Railroad, on which this accident occurred, is a double track line running from New Bedford, Mass., to Mansfield, Mass., a distance of 31 miles. On this line in day time, between 7:00 A. M. and 6:00 P. M., trains are operated by the manual block system, while at night the time interval and train order system is used. The track is tangent for a distance of approximately a mile in each direction from the point of accident, and for a distance of about half a mile in each direction it is located on a fill averaging about 15 feet in depth.

The trains involved in this accident were northbound freight train known as U M 1, en route from New Bedford to Midway, Conn., with Conductor Fielding and Engineman Winslow in charge; and northbound freight train known as U B 2, en route from New Bedford to Boston, with Conductor Silver and Engineman Fitzgerald in charge.

Train U M 1, consisting of locomotive 1349 and 61 cars, left New Bedford at 10:15 p.m., July 18, and stopped about half a mile south of Weir Junction at about 11:20 p.m. Conductor Fielding had been instructed by the dispatcher to keep clear of three troop trains which were to leave Newport between 10:00 and 11:30 p.m. When his train stopped near Weir Junction, Conductor Fielding told his flagman they would probably be there two hours, and he then went to the head end of the train; the locomotive was cut off and proceeded to the station at Weir Junction for the purpose of enabling the conductor to obtain information in regard to the troop trains and receive instructions relative to work which his train was required to do at Taunton, the next station, about a mile north. Conductor Fielding was instructed to return to his train, get three cars which were to be set off at Taunton, return to Weir Junction and await an opportunity to go to Taunton.

Train U B 2 left New Bedford at 11:05 p.m., and at about 12:35 a.m., July 19, collided with the rear end of train U M 1 on the main line at a point 2297 feet south of the yard limit board at Weir Junction. At the time of the accident train U B 2 consisted of locomotive 474 and 18 cars, and its speed was estimated to be about 15 miles per hour. On the night of the accident the weather was generally clear, but there were occasional fog banks and at the time and place of the accident there was a very heavy fog bank. The fireman of train U B 2 received fatal injuries in this accident.

Engineman Winslow of train U M 1 stated that when his train arrived at Weir Junction, the weather was clear, but while

there between 12:15 and 12:45 a.m., a dense fog came up. He stated that when his train stopped south of Weir Junction he sounded the whistle signal for the flagman to go out; then after the conductor had come up from the rear end, the locomotive was cut off and they proceeded to the station to secure instructions; they then returned to the train and got three cars to be set off at Taunton and again went to the station where they were when the accident occurred. Engineman Winalow stated that when his train stopped, the locomotive was practically opposite the yard limit board. He said that it was customary to stop at that point, cut the locomotive off and get water, which frequently required fifteen or twenty minutes, the water tank being about three quarters of a mile away; he always whistled for the flagman to go out when he stopped there.

Conductor Fielding of train U M 1 stated that before leaving New Bedford he received a telegram advising him that there were three special trains to leave Newport for Boston between 10:00 and 11:30 p.m., and directing him not to delay them. He showed this message to the flagman, and upon arrival at Weir Junction, he told the flagman they would probably be there two hours; he gave the flagman no specific instructions as he was a qualified flagman whom he had always considered trustworthy, and as he started for the head end, the flagman was on his feet and apparently getting ready to go out to flag. After he arrived at the station and received instructions to get the cars to be set out at Taunton, he sent the head brakeman back with the locomotive to the train; he remained at the station and was there when the accident occurred.

He stated that when the train first stopped at Weir Junction and he got off from the caboose the weather was clear and he could see to the head end of the train; but after the accident, when he was going down to the rear end of his train, the fog was so dense that he could <sup>see</sup> barely three car lengths. After the accident he went back to find out what damage had been done; there were 55 cars in his train that could be moved and the only damage to train U B 2 was at the head end. The head brakeman of train U B 2 told him that the flagman was found in the caboose immediately after the accident; he talked with the flagman shortly after the accident, and the flagman said he understood his train was within yard limits there, having been so informed by the regular conductor of that train. When Conductor Fielding was asked if he considered that he complied with the rule requiring the conductor to see "that the flagman goes back promptly when safety or the rules required it", he stated that he considered that he fully complied with that rule as the flagman was fully informed of the conditions and circumstances, was thoroughly wide awake, had everything ready and was apparently about to start out to flag when the conductor started toward the head end.

Conductor Fielding had been employed in train service about 13 years, and he had been employed as a conductor for about six years.

Flagman Saindon of train U M 1 stated that he had been running over the Old Colony Division about a month and had not been examined as to the physical characteristics of that line; he understood, however, that all the track between Middleboro Junction,

1.8 miles south of Weir Junction, and Attleboro Junction, 3.1 miles north of Weir Junction, was within yard limits, having been so informed by the regular conductor; he had not personally observed the location of the yard limit board, although his train on the return trip regularly passed that point in daylight hours. On each trip northbound, his train stopped in the vicinity of the scene of the accident and the engine cut off to take water, but he said he never went out to flag there. He said that on the night of the accident the conductor showed him the message regarding the three special trains, and upon arrival at Weir Junction said they might have to wait there an hour or more for those movements. Flagman Saindon stated that although his train arrived at the point of accident at about 11:30 and stood there approximately an hour and a quarter before the accident occurred, he did not go back to flag, as he thought the train was standing within yard limits and it was not necessary to flag. He stated that when the conductor started forward, he was walking around in the caboose, but he had no thought of going out to flag as he was not in the habit of flagging at that point. He spent the time before the accident in reading magazines and writing a letter; he was writing when the accident occurred and did not hear train U B 3 approaching.

Flagman Saindon had had about eight years' experience in train service, and he had been a flagman for about four years. He was last examined as a flagman in December, 1916. His record was good. At the time of the accident he had been on duty 4 hours after a period off duty of 8 hours and 35 minutes.

Engineman Fitzgerald of train U B 3 stated that his train was stopped twice between New Bedford and the point of accident and the brakes were in good operating condition. He said there were banks of fog along the way on this trip, and at the point of accident the fog was so dense that he could not see the markers on the rear end of train U M 1 until they were almost upon that train; he estimated the distance between the trains when he first saw the marker lights at about two car lengths, and he thought his train was running about 15 miles an hour. He made an emergency application of the brakes and sounded the whistle; the fireman and head brakemen both jumped, but the fireman was caught between the engine and tender when the collision occurred. Engineman Fitzgerald stated that he did not see any fuses between New Bedford and the point of accident, did not run over any torpedoes and did not see a flag out at any time. He stated that the accident occurred at 12:35 A.M.

He stated that before leaving New Bedford, which was the initial terminal of this train, he thought the brakemen looked over the air brakes in his train although a regular test was not made and he did not know whether or not he had the legal minimum requirement of 85% operative brakes.

Head Brakeman Denham of train U B 3 stated that the caboose of train U M 1 was only about two car lengths away when he saw the markers and jumped off, the speed being about 15 miles per hour. He went <sup>up</sup> to the caboose of the preceding train at once to see if anyone was hurt and found the flagman sitting down in the rear end of the caboose.

Conductor Silver of train U B 2 stated that the brakes operated properly at the two stops made between New Bedford and the point of accident, and when the emergency application was made immediately before the accident the brakes took hold properly. He was in the caboose when the collision occurred. He said the fog at the time of the collision was very dense and must have obscured the engineman's view of the rear end of train U M 1. The accident occurred thirty-five or forty car lengths outside of yard limits; the head brakeman told him the flagman was not out, but he did not have any conversation with either his engineman or the flagman of the preceding train regarding the cause of the accident.

This accident was caused by the failure of Flagman Saindon of train U M 1 to protect his train as required by the rules.

Rule No. 93 states that "yard limits will be designated on the time table and indicated by yard limit signs", and as defined in the current time table the southern boundary of Taunton yard limits was marked by the yard limit boards south of Weir Village and south of Weir Junction. In view of the fact that Flagman Saindon had been over this road a number of times, there can be no excuse for his failure to know definitely where yard limit signs were located, and his misunderstanding or misinformation which he claims was based upon a statement of a fellow-employee cannot, in any way, mitigate his direct responsibility for this accident. As his train was standing on main line outside of yard limits, it should have been protected as required by rule 99, which provides in part as follows:

**8.**

When a train stops or is delayed, under circumstances in which it may be overtaken by a following train, the flagman must go back immediately with stop signals a sufficient distance to insure full protection, and will there place two torpedoes on the rail two rail-lengths apart on the engineman's side. He will remain at this point until recalled.

Had the provisions of this rule been observed, the accident would undoubtedly have been averted.

Under the rules, Conductor Fielding should have made certain that proper flag protection was provided. While no doubt he was fully convinced in his own mind that the flagman, knowing the circumstances of the stop and delay at that point, realized the necessity for flag protection and was preparing to go out, in the exercise of proper precaution he should have instructed the flagman to that effect. The investigation disclosed that this train was regularly stopped at that point and the locomotive cut off to take water, the stop being made outside of yard limits to avoid blocking crossings nearer the water plug. That there had been continued laxness in the matter of instructing the flagman was indicated by the statement of the flagman that although he had been employed on that train regularly for about a month, he had never had occasion to go out to flag at that point.

The investigation disclosed that while there was a manual block system in effect on this line in day time, trains were operated by the time interval and train order system at night. All of the telegraph offices between New Bedford and Taunton were closed at night, including the office at New Bedford, which was closed at 10:00 p.m. Trains were spaced ten minutes apart by



switchmen at New Bedford and interlocking operators at Weir Junction which is about 18 miles north of New Bedford. During the night about 13 trains were regularly run between those two points. As has been frequently pointed out in previous accident reports, the time-interval and train order system possesses many inherent weaknesses; and it is considered to be a particularly bad practice to dispense for a part of the day or night with the

increased safety features afforded by the block system on lines where the block system is in effect at any time. To prevent a recurrence of accidents of this character, the block system should be operated continuously, day and night, on that line.

SNM.