

April 10, 1918,

Five Killed, Three Injured in Pomfret CT, Train Wreck

Over a hundred years ago a rear end collision of two freight trains resulted in the deaths of five individuals in the early hours of April 10, 1918. The collision occurred approximately 1 mile east of the Pomfret CT, Station. The crash was reported at approximately 3:30 AM. The actual collision time was probably closer to 3:00 AM. The collision of the two trains happened on the Pomfret, CT, section of track known then as the "New Haven road" and now referred to as the Airline.

Four of those killed in the crash were railroad employees. The fifth person was part of the crew attempting to remove the wreck.

Three other employees were injured and survived their injuries.

The two trains involved in the crash were:

- **3200 Extra** originating from East Hartford, CT heading for Worcester, MA (**Lead Train**)
- **A.B. 4** from East Hartford, CT heading for Boston. (**Following Train**), the **A.B. 4** was a Double Header¹

The Extra 3200 left Willimantic about 1:00 AM and stopped 20 minutes into the run to repair an "Automatic Stoker". After making the repairs it stopped ten minutes later to perform further maintenance on the Automatic Stoker. After the second stop the equipment ran satisfactorily. Approximately one hour was lost to these maintenance activities.

The A. B. 4 left Willimantic about 2:05 AM and because of the delays experienced by the Extra would have been running fairly close behind. The A.B. 4 was aware that there was another train in the "Block" in the 25 miles between Willimantic and Putnam.

Both trains were headed east on the same track with very little time difference between them due to the hour lost for repairs made by the Extra 3200.

A.B. 4 was running at around 20-25 mph at the time of the collision. The 3200 was running a slower speed probably 15 mph.

Extra 3200 was climbing a steep grade when the "Double Header" A.B. 4 slammed into it. The A.B. 4 Engineer reported that he did not see the 3200 until it was 7 car lengths away and that was when he applied the brakes.

When the trains collided the two engines of the A.B. 4 tumbled over. The caboose of the Extra 3200 was destroyed instantly. The flagman and brakeman of the Extra 3200 were crushed. The

¹ A Double Header in 1918 railroad terminology meant that two locomotives are at the front of a train each operated independently by its own crew.

conductor and Fireman riding in the lead A.B,4 engine were scalded and crushed. One of the trains was carrying grain and it quickly ignited after the collision. The bodies of the two A.B. 4 trainmen were never recovered from the wreck and fire.

Those killed as result of the wreck were:

Freight Extra 3200

John O’Flaherty	New Haven, CT	Flagman
F.B. Johnson	Boston, MA	Brakeman

A.B. 4 (Double Header)

George Rockwood	East Hartford, CT	Conductor
Noah Sauve	East Hartford, CT	Fireman

The 5th person who died was **James Sullivan**. James was part of the crew that was clearing the wreck from the track. According to the Hartford Courant, Sullivan was crushed while placing cribbage for a coal car that was extracted from the wreck.

One of the primary causes for the collision was that 25 miles of the track from Willimantic to Putnam was “Unblocked” or uncontrolled during the overnight hours. During the daylight hours there were telegraph stations along the way that would have been used to communicate the status of each train. Up until January 18, 1918 the telegraphic stations along the route were manned in the overnight hours. However, this practice was eliminated for cost saving purposes. Both trains were aware of the other and their normal running times. The Extra 3200 lead train knew that the A.B. 4 would leave the Willimantic Station about hour after it departed. The Extra 3200 had lost an hour in repairs and should have considered that A.B. 4 could be right behind them. The April 16, 1918 preliminary Coroners Report indicated “with no other means of communication available the brakeman for the Extra 3200 should have thrown out signals to alert the following train.”

From a 21st Century perspective this was a major breakdown in the control of the Block system that was in place in 1918 to prevent such accidents. Proper controls should have been in place to identify a slower train or other impediments on the track ahead. The A.B. 4 would not have been allowed to proceed if it was known that the Extra 3200 was delayed for an hour with Engine maintenance issues.