

**THE DEVASTATION AND  
RESTORATION  
OF NEW ENGLAND'S  
VITAL  
LIFE-LINE**

**THE NEW HAVEN R. R.**



**O**N SEPTEMBER 21, 1938, with flood waters already threatening major washouts at important points along the New Haven Railroad, where tracks paralleled or crossed the swollen torrents of New England's rivers . . . suddenly, just before dark, in the teeth of a howling southwest gale which increased momentarily into hurricane proportions, a steadily rising tide which in some places rose twenty feet in as many minutes, swept inland along the New England coast-line, across the Shore Line Route of The New Haven Railroad . . . carrying on its crest hundreds of boats, ships, cottages, buildings and wreckage. Communications by rail, wire and telephone with many devastated areas was completely cut off. No one realized as yet what a staggering blow had been dealt by this combined hurricane—tidal wave—flood throughout the length and breadth of New England. But next morning revealed a grim picture of death and desolation. Where yesterday fast freights and through passenger trains, including the crack Shore Line Limiteds sped in rapid succession between New York and New England points carrying passengers, mail, express and the vital necessities of life . . . now miles of silent track hung at crazy angles over yawning chasms, in a hopeless jumble of power lines, signal towers, houses, boats, and thousands of tons of debris. Further inland at Hartford, Springfield, Norwich, Willimantic and Putnam the hurricane left its toll of felled trees and communication systems, crumbled freight sheds and roofless factories . . . and to add to the chaos, the raging rivers from the north broke through dams and temporary dykes, washing out railroad bridges and miles of track . . . rendering useless the strategic points through which Shore Line trains might have been re-routed. The vital life-line between New England and points south and west had been effectually severed. It must be restored without delay. Thousands of men were needed for the Herculean task of rebuilding a railroad. The summoning of trackmen, engineers, skilled repair crews and laborers must be carried out without the help of modern communication systems. In an incredibly short time an army of 5000 men were at work . . . toiling 24 hours a day in 3 shifts . . . many of them eating and sleeping in work trains and pullman cars on the job. The pictures in the following pages tell the story of devastation and restoration far more graphically than either pen or tongue could describe it . . .



PROVIDENCE . . . Tidal wave surged over New Haven Railroad tracks, wrecking freight sheds . . . scattering



freight cars and tank cars over a wide area.



WAREHAM . . . Here the tidal wave wiped out tracks and bridges, effectually cutting off all service to Cape Cod.

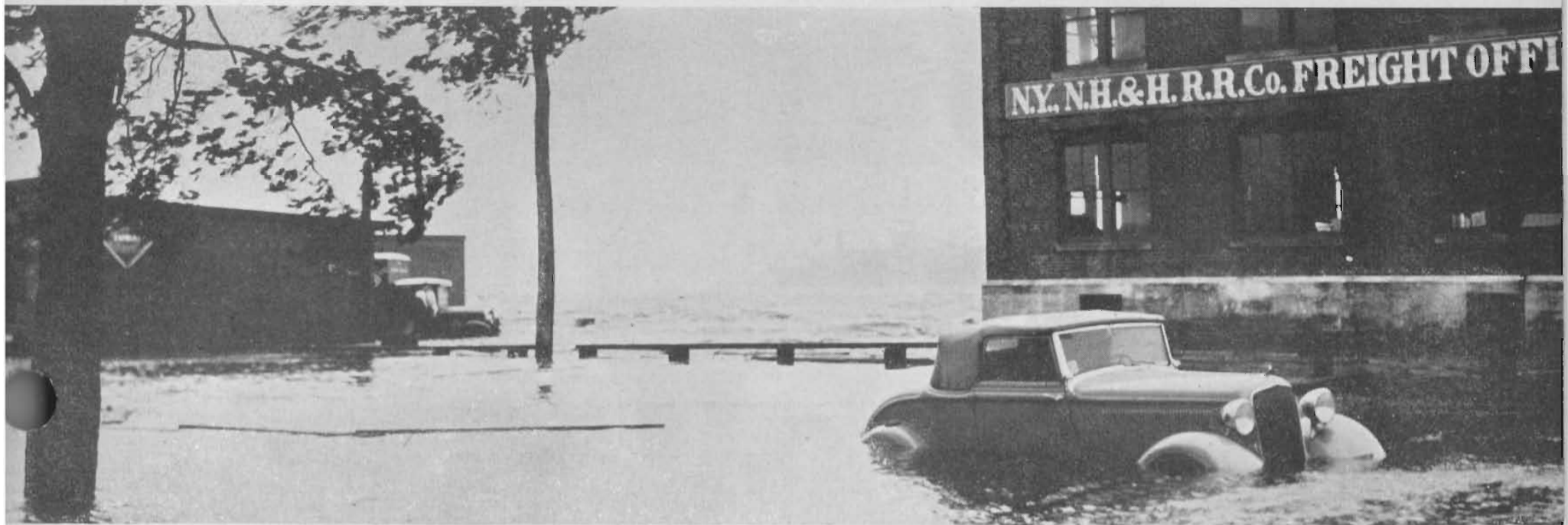


BUZZARDS BAY presented a similar picture of destruction.

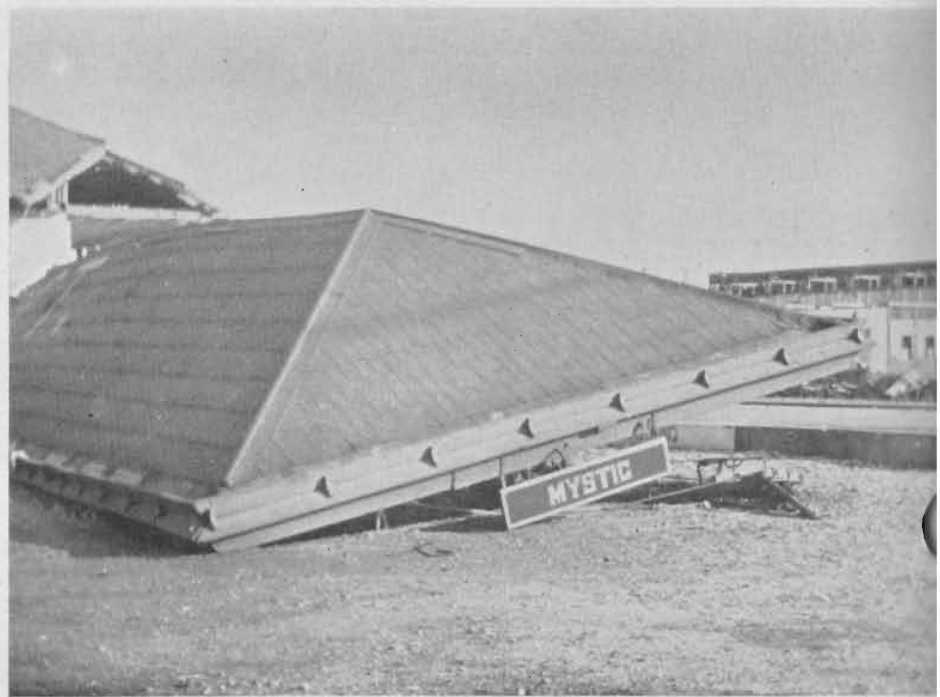


WOODS HOLE branch from Bourne to Falmouth was under sand and water with bridges and culverts out.

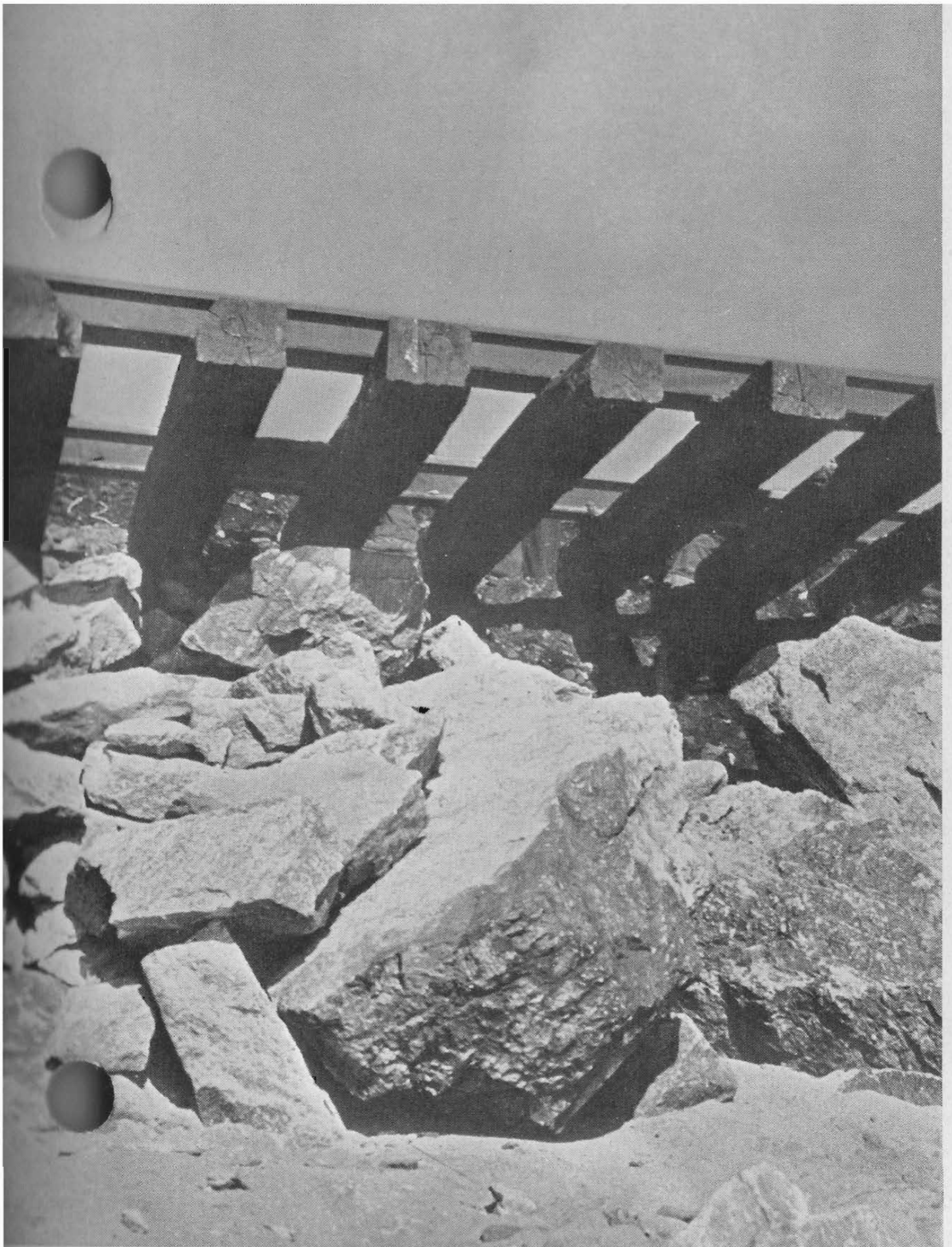




THE FAIRHAVEN BRANCH from Wareham to New Bedford suffered washouts of tracks and bridges . . . in New Bedford the freight station and adjacent railroad property were under water.



MYSTIC . . . Wreckage strewn for miles along the main Shore Line tracks in both directions . . .



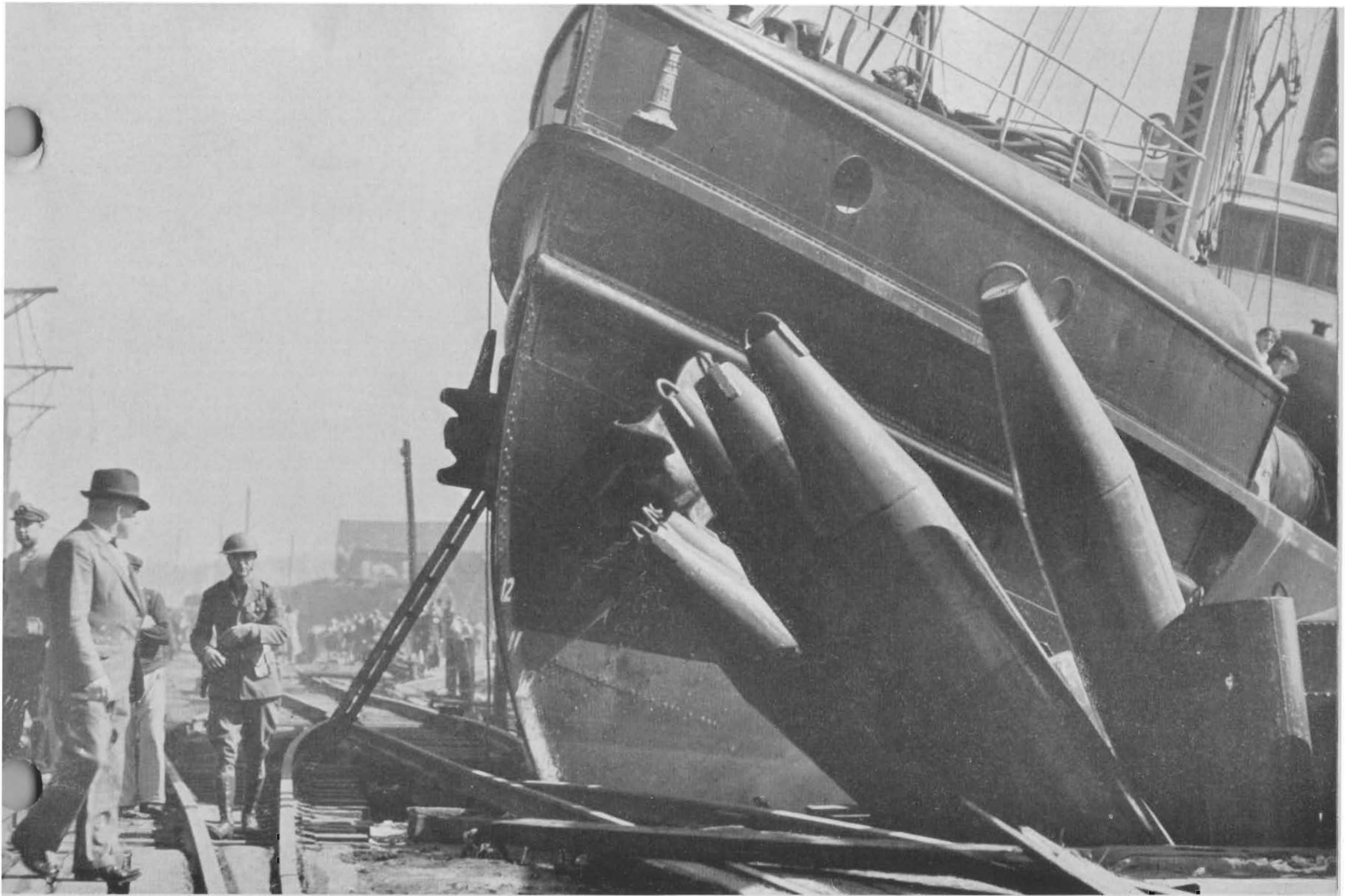
STONINGTON . . . roadbed undermined and washed out



. . . tracks and platform lifted completely off bridge.



NEW LONDON . . . Tidal wave swept across main line tracks carrying on its crest yachts, fishing boats,



the huge lighthouse tender "Tulip" . . . demolishing railroad piers and freight sheds and flooding the station.



NEW LONDON . . . A heavy pall of smoke covered the downtown area as fire, combined with hurricane and tidal wave, devastated New London's waterfront.



NIANTIC . . . Thirty foot embankment completely washed out . . . all telegraph poles and wires down.



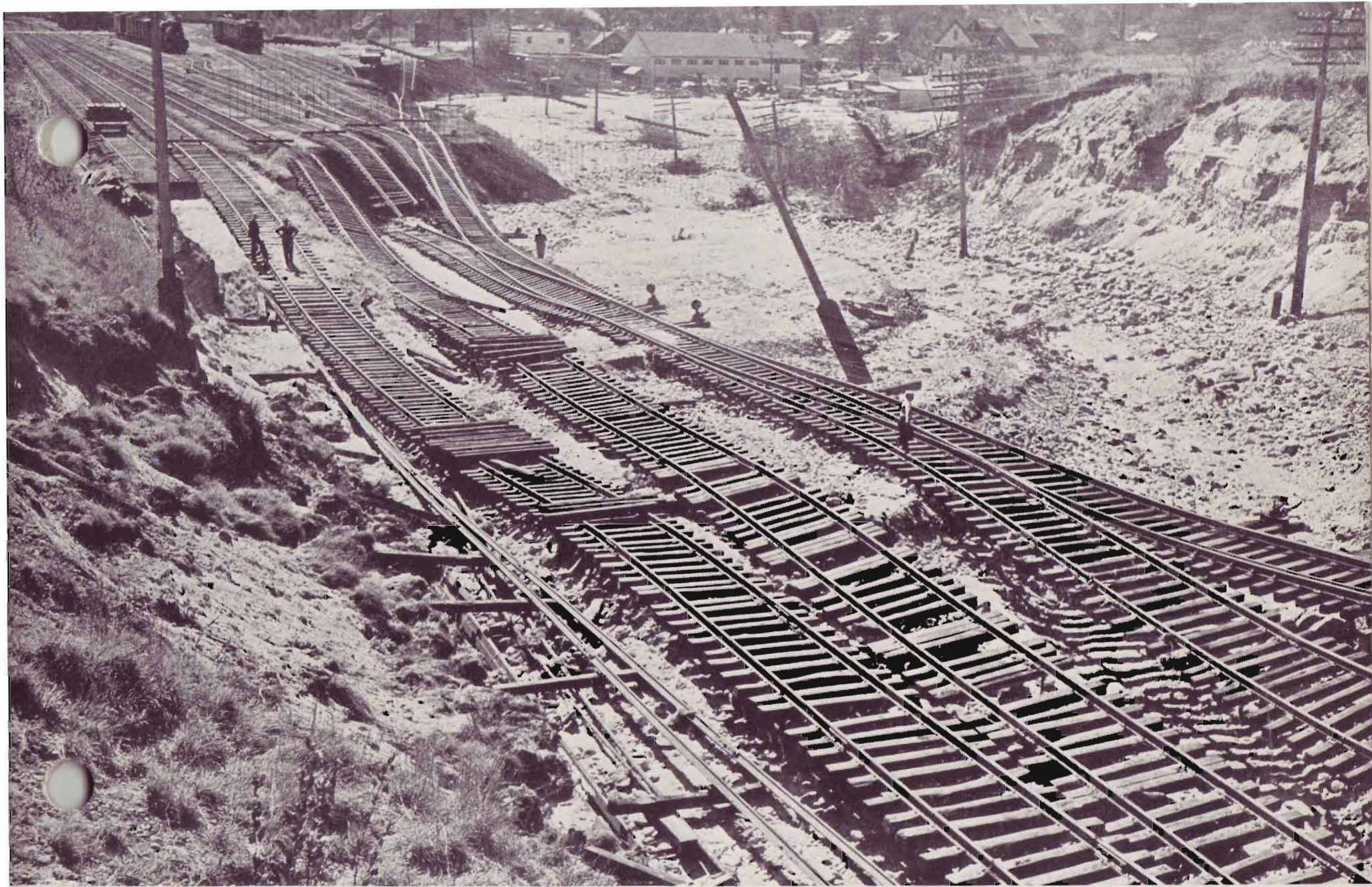








WILLIMANTIC Station . . . at the height of the flood that washed out an important New Haven junction.



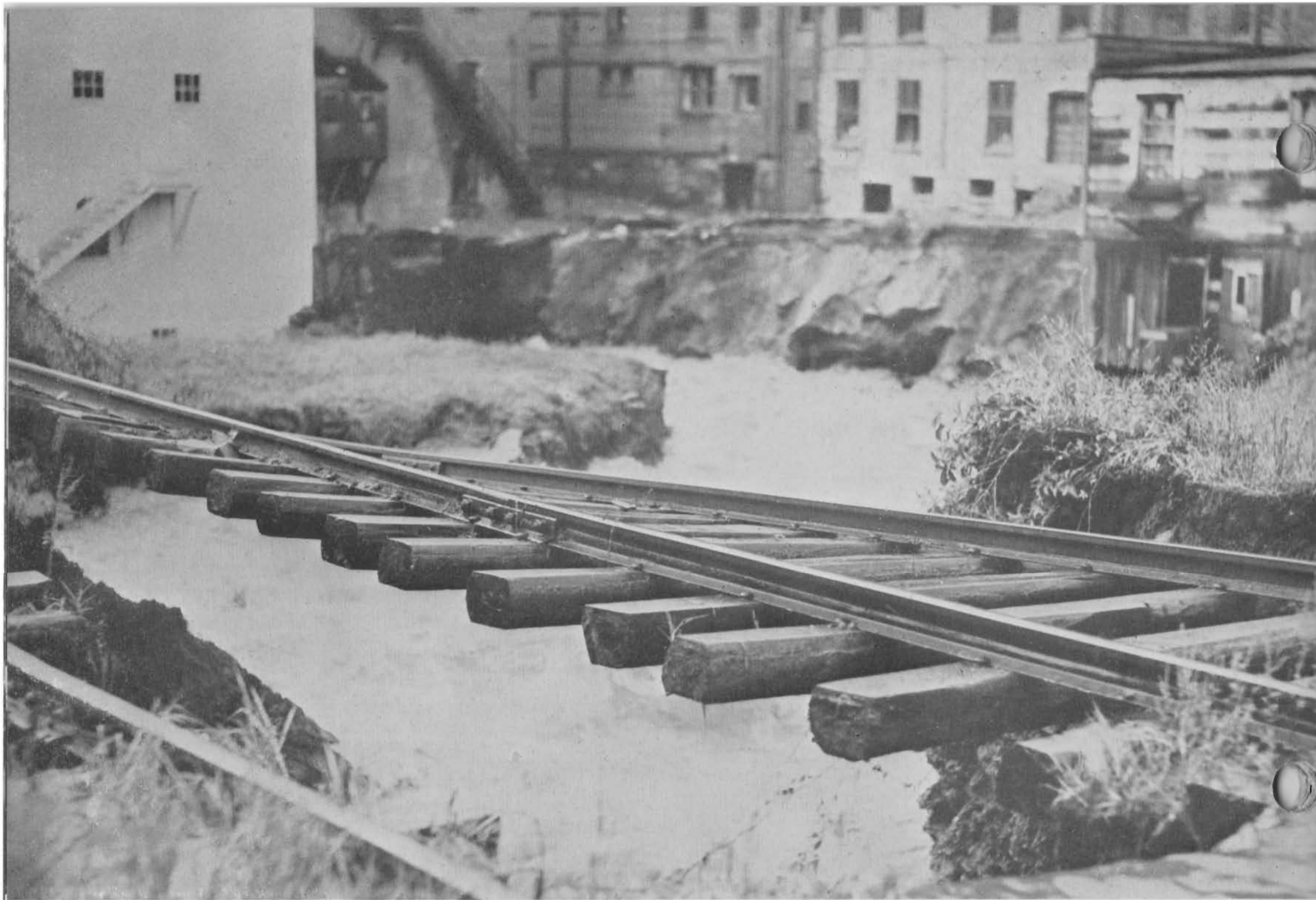
PUTNAM . . . Another strategic junction yields to the might of the raging Quinebaug River.



STOCKBRIDGE . . . From the railroad station, as far as the eye can see, the Berkshire division is under water.



GREAT BARRINGTON . . . Washouts and twisted rails at the junction of the flooded Housatonic and Green rivers.



ROCKVILLE . . . Rails hanging in mid-air bear mute testimony to the fury of the flood in the Hartford area.





BOSTON - HARTFORD service cut by washouts at several vital points . . . inset of bridge at North Haven is typical of many similar washouts on branch freight lines throughout the territory.

Thousands of cars, many carrying perishables and the vital necessities of life, were completely stopped all over the New Haven system.

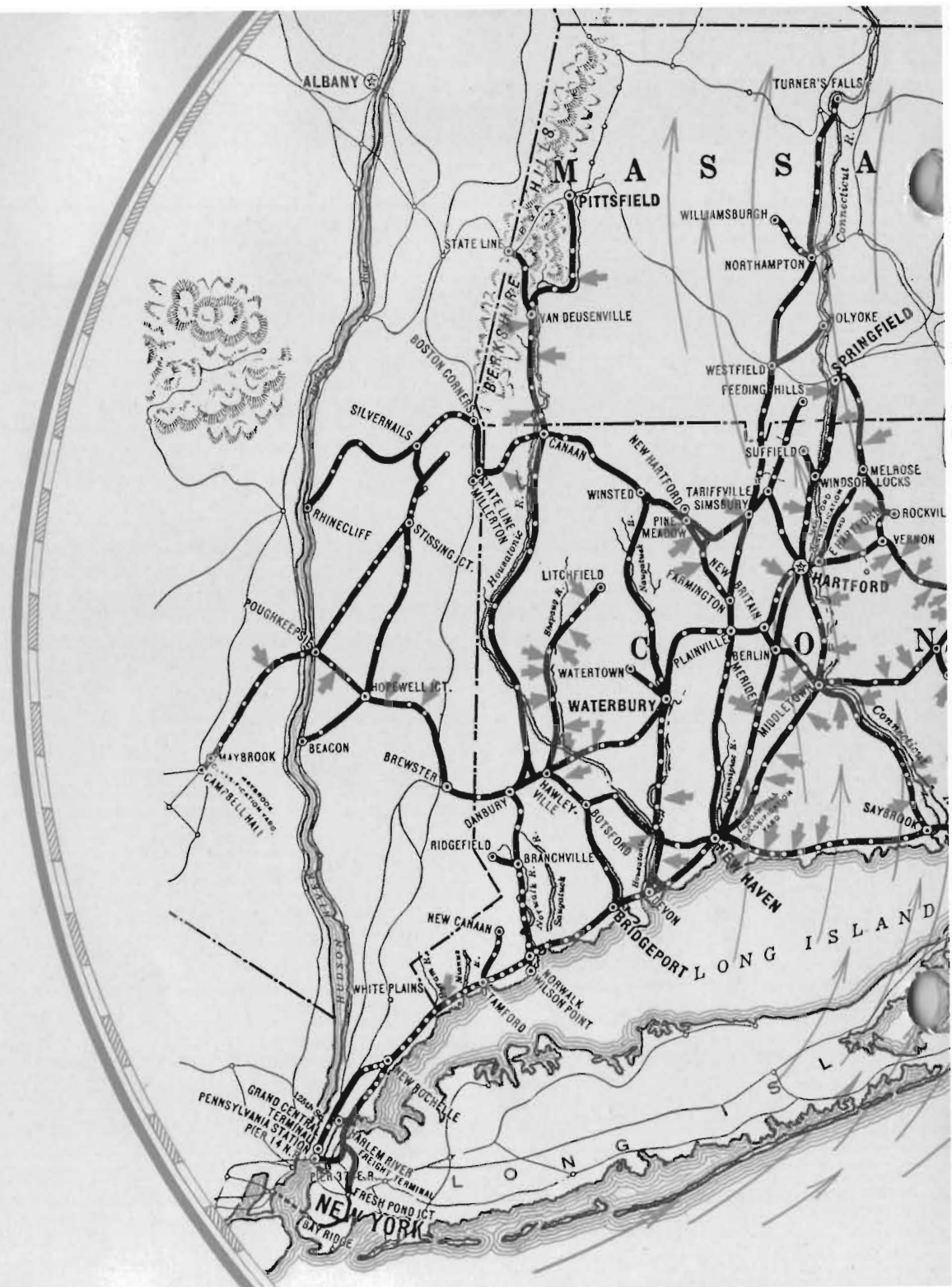
75 miles of track was lifted from the roadbed, twisted, washed out, undermined or covered with thousands of tons of sand, stone and other debris.

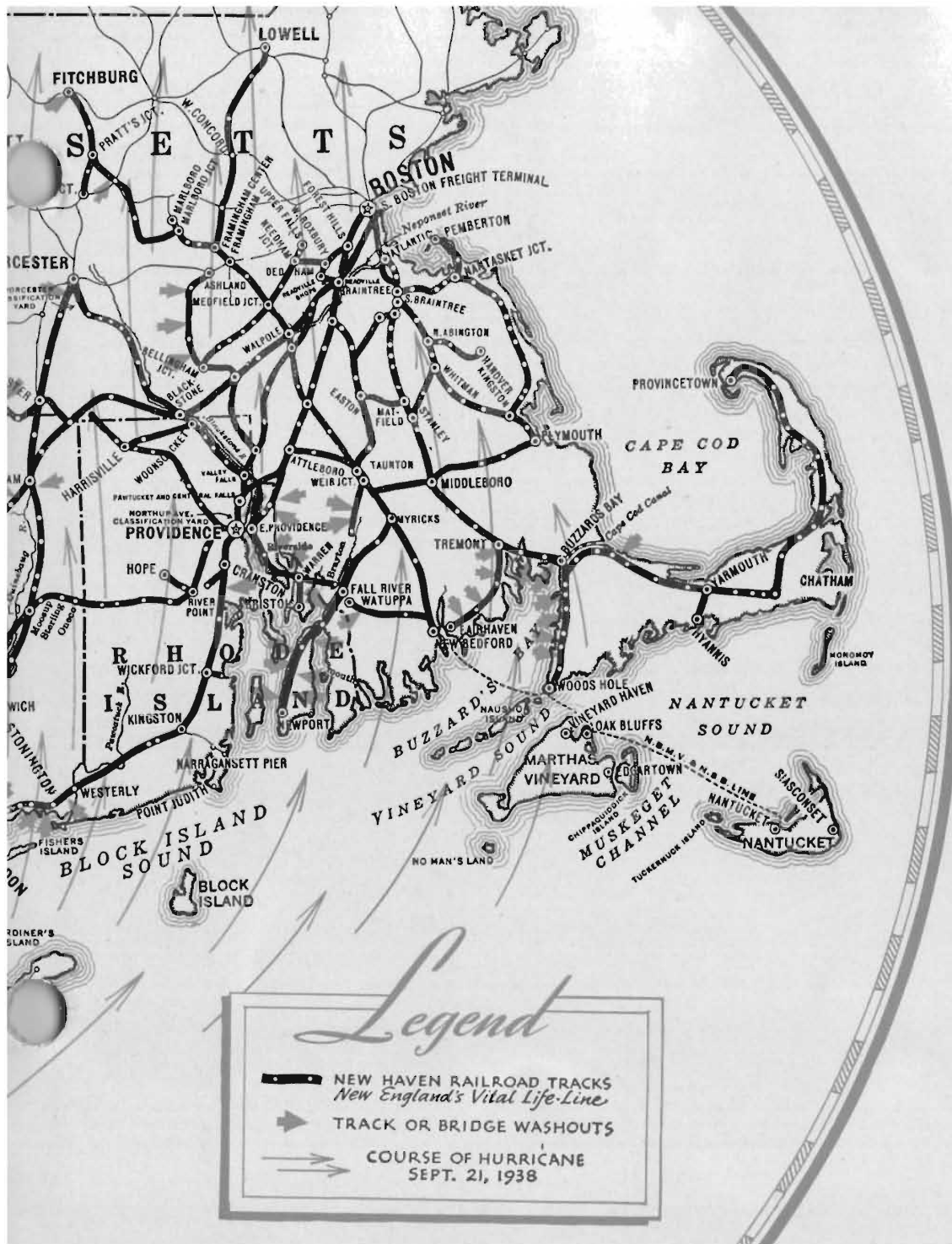
31 bridges and 200 culverts were washed out, moved from their abutments or completely demolished . . . necessitating repairs or rebuilding.

Thousands of trees were blown down across tracks and communication lines . .

Hundreds of telephone poles . . . over 5,000,000 feet of telephone and signal wires were down in a jumbled mass of wreckage.

Many freight sheds and stations were unroofed, flooded, or demolished by the force of hurricane, tidal wave and flood.





Over 5,000 men, including engineers, line-men, trackmen, pile drivers, divers, skilled and unskilled laborers, toiled night and day in 3 shifts to restore in record time the vital life-line between New England and points south and west.

Over 5,000 carloads of gravel, stone and rip-rap were required to fill the yawning cavities left by tidal wave and flood.

In 2 days partial passenger service had been restored between Boston and New York, with bus detour around flood-devastated areas.

In 6 days through freight service had been restored between New York and important New England points.

In 13 days through rail passenger service was restored on the Shore Line between New York and Boston.



RECONSTRUCTION begins . . . communications must first be established . . . wires untangled . . .



water-logged signal boxes retrieved and rebuilt . . . telegraph poles and signal posts replaced.



5000 men with but a single purpose . . . to restore freight and passenger service in record time.



In several areas complete road beds must be replaced and miles of track re-laid.



Taking out the kinks in the tracks is a matter of mass cooperation . . . after which the tracks are jacked up to their





former level and filled in with crushed stone.



MAN-POWER ALONE can right these twisted rails . . . foot by foot they must be jacked up and underpinned



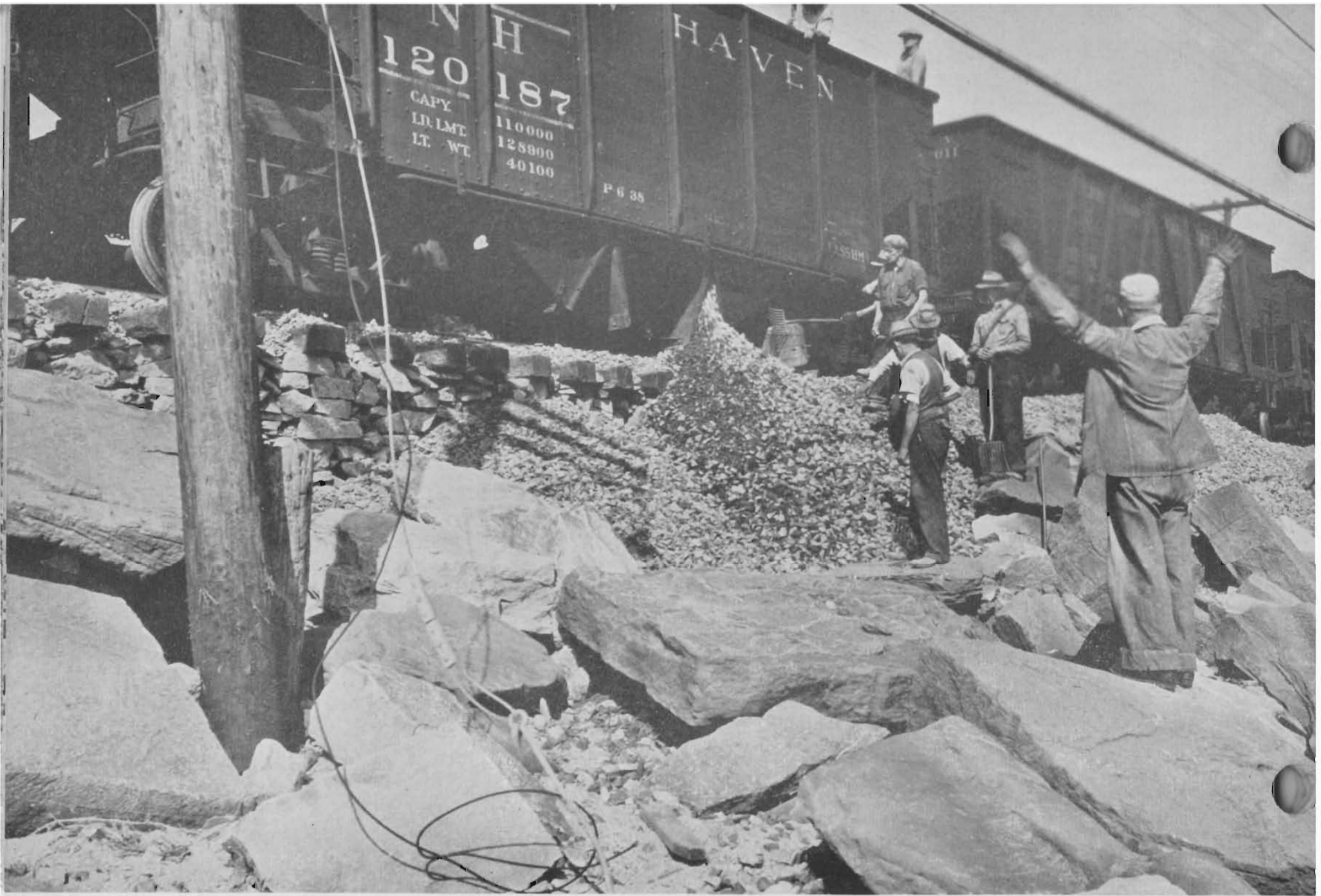
with rip-rap . . . followed by tons of fill . . . a procedure more difficult than laying new track.



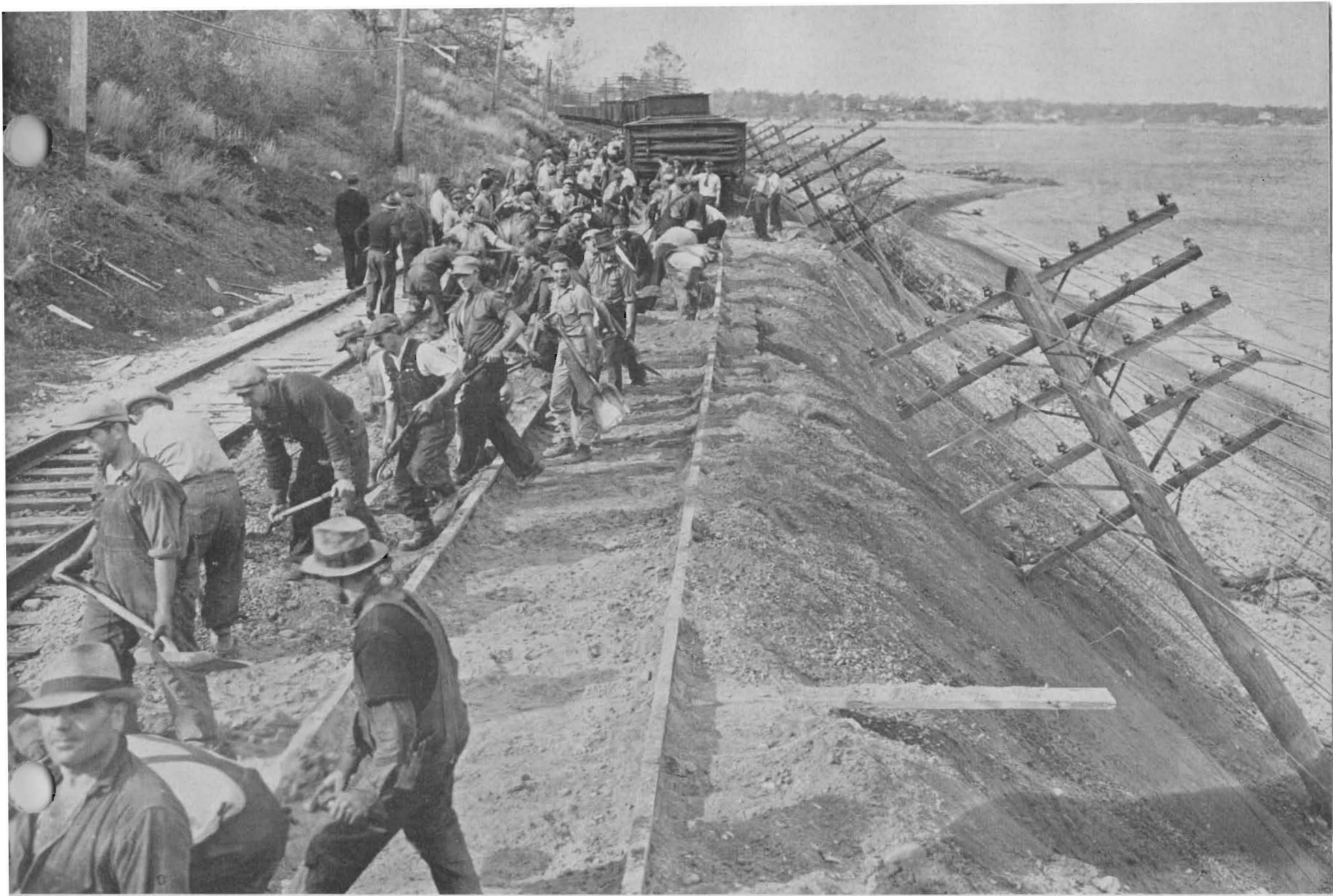
EASTBOUND TRACK must still be built up some 6 feet to meet the level of the westbound track.



WELDERS and grinders restore the reset Shore Line rails to their original smoothness and finish.



HUNDREDS OF CARLOADS of fill and crushed stone are required to restore the westbound track to

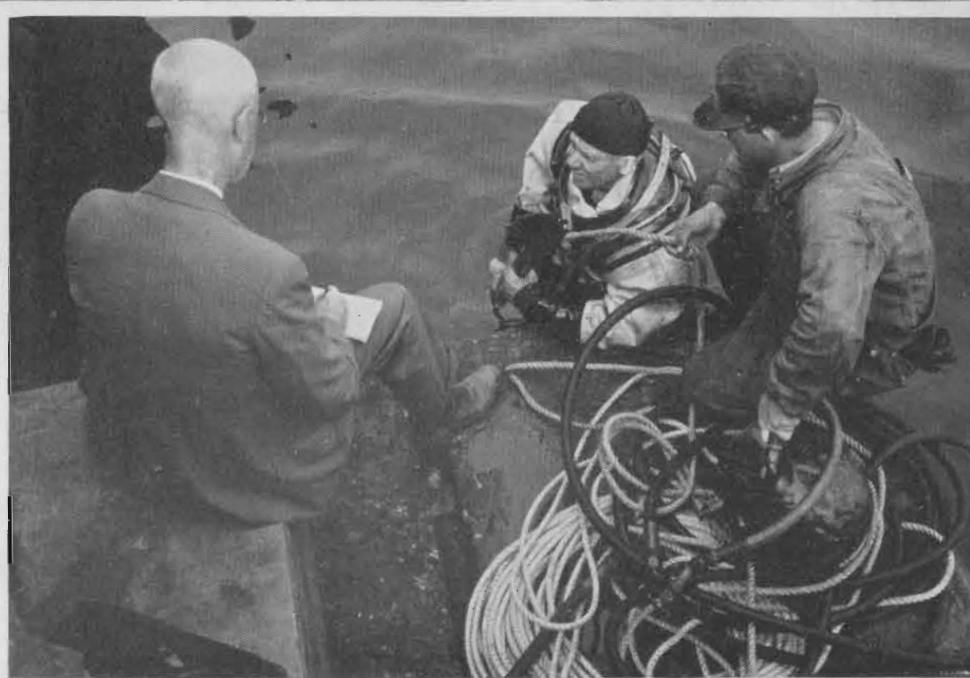


its former level . . . the tremendous road-rebuilding task along the Shore Line is near completion.



ONE OF THE 31 washed-out bridges is temporarily held in position by a giant crane while engineers figure out ways





and means of lifting it . . . **DIVERS** examine under-water abutments of every Shore Line bridge.



TONS OF RIP-RAP are required to hold cribbing support for bridge while piles are being driven.



Men toil day and night against seemingly insurmountable obstacles to complete the final link in New England's life-line.



In the meantime the government lighthouse tender "Tulip" evaded every effort of man and machine to move her



from the main line tracks . . . yielding finally after days spent in dredging a channel deep enough to float her off.



Restored rails were tested by work trains . . . followed first by freight trains carrying emergency supplies and vital necessities . . . then by passenger trains in partial single track service along the Shore Line.

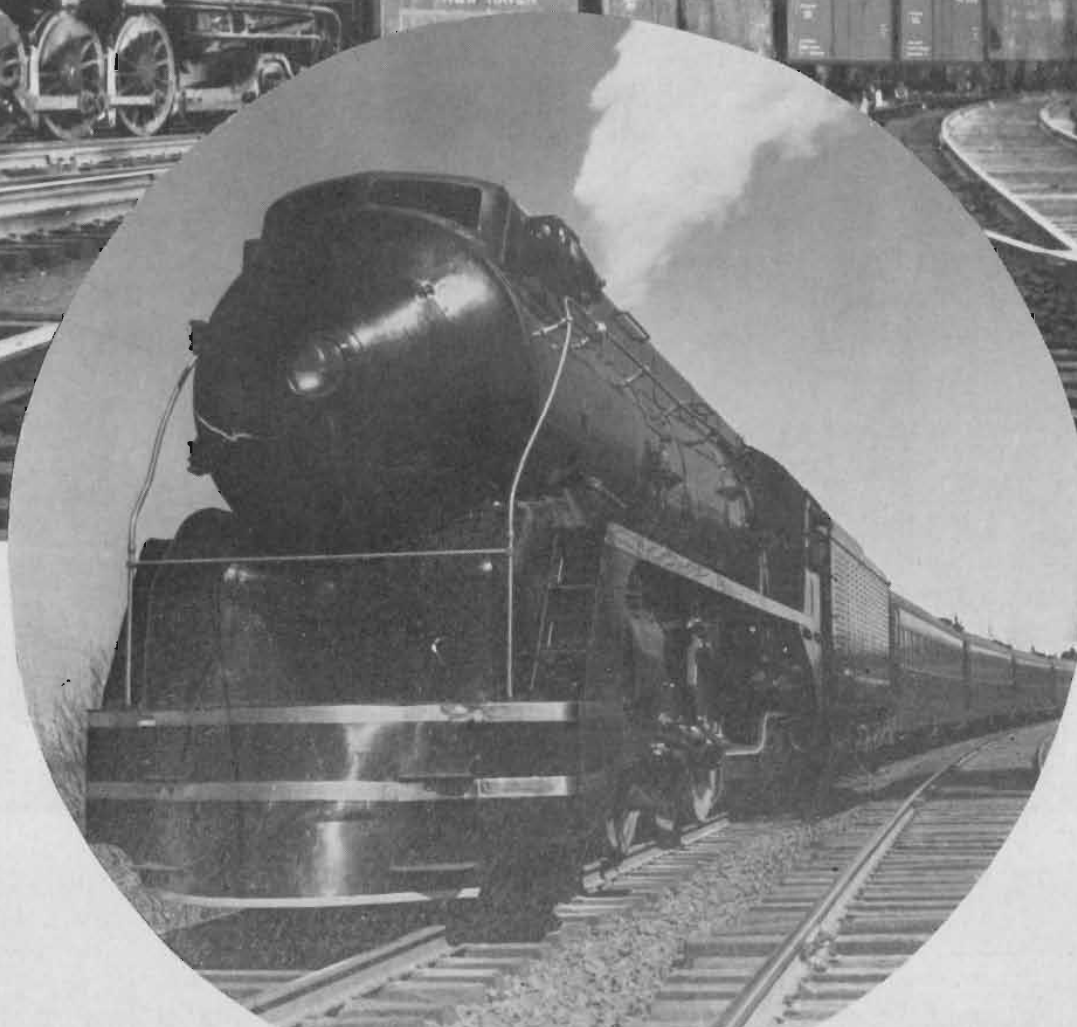


Time out for dinner . . . at the roadside . . . or if you're assigned to a work train, to the comparative luxury of a hot meal and warm fire.



In the meantime freight yards at both ends pile up with carloads awaiting the word that would send them rolling.





In 13 days through freight service was established via Willimantic — In 13 days through passenger train service was being operated on the Shore Line between New York and Boston . . . and NEW ENGLAND'S VITAL LIFE-LINE was restored.

PICTURE CREDITS

Cover picture taken by Hans Radan during height of hurricane at Lloyd Estate, Potomaska, Dartmouth, Mass., mouth of Buzzards Bay.

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VITAL LIFE-LINE

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record time!*

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