

THE PERQUIMANS WEEKLY

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VISIBLE FOR MILES — This picture taken from the U.S. 17 by-pass bridge shows billowing black smoke coming from the downtown section of Hertford. The smoke, visible 15 and more miles away, was first spotted at the Winslow Oil Company fire around 7:50 a.m. when the first alarm was sounded. Firemen continued to battle the blaze all morning and into the afternoon. At press time, it was reported to be contained.

MANY DAMAGES REPORTED — A view from behind the offices of Winslow Oil Company shows flames engulfing the area, some of the many vehicles destroyed in the fire, and the top of one of many tanks that exploded in the worst fire ever in Hertford's history.



TOTAL LOSS — At press time, losses to buildings and property continued to grow as a result of the early morning fire. Shown here, firemen hose down the remains of Hertford Feed & Seed, a total loss. Also destroyed were the offices, several vehicles, and several oil tanks belonging to Winslow Oil Company, and a warehouse at Reed Oil Company. At press time, the fire had not reached oil tanks at the two oil companies located near Winslow's. (Staff photos by Kathy M. Newbern; processing by Don Buck)

Worst fire in history: Explosions Rock Hertford

By KATHY M. NEWBERN

HERTFORD — Tuesday morning marked what has been called the worst fire ever in this small community.

An explosion of an oil tank at Winslow Oil Company prompted the alarm at around 7:50 a.m. At press time, there was no definite information available on the cause of the fire. Hertford Police Chief Marshall Merritt and an employee with Winslow Oil Company explained that two transports were loading fuel at the facility. Merritt suggested a spark may have ignited the trucks, but added that was not definite.

The most immediate danger was the threat of fire reaching both the Reed and Hollowell Oil Companies where additional fuel could have added to the approaching flames. Although damages were reported to the buildings, no other tanks became involved. A spokesman for Reed Oil Company reported removing cash and records from the company's offices.

Billy Winslow, employee at Winslow Oil Company, explained that he was working in the office at the time of the explosion. He went outside and within five minutes, he said the entire area was engulfed in flames. Concerning damages, Winslow said, "We lost it all." Two other employees reportedly crawled from the building and plunged into the Perquimans River, but suffered no injuries.

Following the first alarm, Chief Charles Skinner of the Hertford Volunteer Fire Department, immediately put in a general alarm

for assistance. Volunteer firemen battled the blaze for an hour before the first report came in that it was contained. Firemen fought the cold, often causing the water to freeze upon impact. By 10 a.m., at least 125 firemen, most of them volunteers from the area, were reported on the scene representing assistance from fire departments in Bethel, Belvidere-Chappell Hill, Inter-County, Edenton, Elizabeth City, South Mills, Winfall and possibly others. Also on the scene were all available personnel from the Perquimans and Chowan Sheriff's Departments, the Hertford Police Department, Edenton Police Department and members of the N.C. Highway Patrol.

Immediately following the first explosion, homes in the immediate area were evacuated and all traffic was diverted away from the downtown section of Hertford.

Five explosions were heard throughout the morning and into the afternoon, audible from as far away as five miles. Smoke could be spotted from as far away as Elizabeth City and Edenton. The first explosion, signaling the start of the fire was reported around 7:50 a.m., a second occurred about 9 a.m., the third was reported at 1:45 p.m. with the fifth sounding out around 2:50 p.m. The third and fourth explosions were reported as the tops of oil tanks. At 11 a.m., it was reported that between 4 and 6 oil tanks were involved.

The fifth explosion, the last reported before press time, was the loudest of the day and resulted in an injury to at least one fireman. According to an eyewitness, another

oil tank ignited, the top blew off and over the Haste house, landed on the other side of Grubb St. The tank's top hit a pickup truck on the other side of the street, bounced off, and hit and injured fireman Fred White of the Edenton Fire Department.

Injuries were reported to at least six firemen at press time including a broken arm, back pains, and cuts resulting from the fourth explosion which knocked the men several feet. Some firemen were also treated for smoke inhalation and exhaustion. Members of the Perquimans County Rescue Squad and medics with the U.S. Coast Guard were standing by on the scene in case of additional injuries.

An employee at Winslow Oil Company reported losses as follows: all of the offices at the oil company, three service trucks, and the two transport trucks. All cash and records at the company's office were completely destroyed. Included in the records were accounts receivable estimated at about \$600,000. Also totally destroyed was the nearby Hertford Feed and Seed. Several vehicles parked in the area, some belonging to the oil companies, were also destroyed.

Another employee at Winslow Oil Company explained that there are a total of 11 tanks at the business which contained 100,000 gallons of fuel oil, 50,000 gallons in kerosene, and between 35,000 and 40,000 in gasoline. A tank measures 12 x 34.

Firemen battled the blaze for hours keeping houses hosed down to prevent loss. The home of T. Eric Haste Jr., the closest to the flames, was saved although the garage was lost.

Firemen used the Perquimans River as one source of water along with the street hydrants and water in the tanker trucks. Foam was used late in the morning by the fire fighters to try to blanket the flames.

Shortly after 10 a.m., oil began leaking into the Perquimans River with flames visible. The Atlantic Strike Team was then brought in from the Elizabeth City Coast Guard base to fight that, the newest development. One fireman reported that the fire was then "rolling on the river and it will be for awhile."

Lt. Cmmr. Barry Chambers, head of the Atlantic Strike Team

based in Elizabeth City, reported that they brought in seven men, a mobile command post, 400 feet of boom to serve as a barrier. The team set up around 10 a.m. to contain the blaze on the river. Chambers reported that about 100 gallons of fuel was collected from the leakage into the river and that the total area on the water involved in flames was an area about 20 by 40 yards.

Also called in was the Industrial Marine Service out of Norfolk, Va. to bring men and equipment to collect the oil spilled into the river. Chambers pointed out that the

Atlantic Strike Team surveyed the area for pollution and only serves in an environmental role, not as fire fighters. He estimated that men would be on the scene until sundown.

As of press time, firemen continued to fight the blaze keeping the additional oil tanks hosed down to prevent spreading. The fire was reported contained at that time.

News teams from all area newspapers, radio and television stations were present to report one of the worst fires in the Albemarle, and estimated to be the worst in Hertford's history.

Board receives CETA funds

The Perquimans County Board of Education has received \$34,000 from the Youth Act of the Comprehensive Employment Training Act (CETA) to initiate a remedial program in reading and math at Perquimans High School. That news came when the board met in regular session Jan. 3.

No action was taken at the meeting, but several matters were discussed.

Filling the agenda were several capital improvement projects for discussion. The board reviewed sewage drain fields at Perquimans Central Grammar and Perquimans Union Schools. Discussion on window replacement at Perquimans Central Grammar was also heard

and board members were informed that the Cdntal School kitchen has been tiled. The need for roofing at Central Grammar was also discussed; members were told that readvertisement for bids would be the next step on this project.

In other information, the board was told of an increase in the Social Security tax effective Jan. 1 and that, also effective that date, the local school district will be required to pay unemployment compensation for board employees. The local board will be given several options for payment which they will consider. This is a requirement from legislative action.

Board members were also informed that the Perquimans County

Board of Commissioners has agreed to locate fire hydrants, as requested, on the campuses of Perquimans Union and Perquimans Central Grammar Schools.

The board then discussed at length the need for improvements to facilities at Perquimans High School. A result of that discussion was the scheduling of a meeting with the board architect held Tuesday at 9 a.m.

In the area of announcements, the Board was reminded of the District I School Boards meeting set for Feb. 8 at Bertie Senior High School.

The Jan. 16 meeting of the board has been cancelled due to a conflict. Rescheduling of that meeting will be announced in the future.

Correction is noted

An error appeared in a story on the three vehicle accident reported on the front page of last week's *The Perquimans Weekly*.

A report from the N.C. Highway Patrol credited SBI Agent William Arden (Doc) Hoggard as the first on the scene.

Actually, the first on the scene was Melvin Jennings and his wife, Flora, of Rt. 2, Hertford. They removed Agnes Hare Hollowell and Dana Darnell from their car, one of those involved in the accident.

While the report cited both those passengers as seriously injured in last week's edition, it has since been learned that Dana Darnell, age 7, died as a result of the accident.

Primary includes six local offices

Six local offices will be decided on by Perquimans County voters in the upcoming May 2 primary.

Those seats include two on the Perquimans County Board of Commissioners, two on the Perquimans County Board of Education, the office of Perquimans County Sheriff, and Perquimans County Clerk of Court.

Candidate filing opened at 12 noon on Jan. 2. As of press time, no candidates had made their intentions officially known although several incumbents have announced their decision.

On the Board of Commissioners, the seats currently held by R.S. Monds and Guy H. (Tuck) Webb are up for election. When questioned on their intentions, both Monds and

Webb replied, "No comment."

On the Board of Education, the seats currently held by Ralph Harrell and Clifford Winslow are up for election. Harrell, who has served on the board 12 years, announced that he does not intend to seek reelection. Winslow, who currently serves as board chairman, said he does plan to file for reelection.

Perquimans County Sheriff Julian Broughton has also announced plans to run for reelection.

Perquimans County Clerk of Court Jarvis Ward is also planning to seek reelection.

Candidates wishing to file for the election have until noon on Feb. 6 and may do so on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays at the

Perquimans County Board of Elections office located at 104 Dobbs St. in Hertford.

Of interest to Perquimans voters is the fact that absentee ballots will be issued beginning on March 3 with the closing deadline 5 p.m. on April 26.

Registration books will close on April 3 at 5 p.m.

Persons who have moved since the last election should contact the Board of Elections and correct their voting records. This action is necessary for the voter to be eligible to vote in the primary. This should be done no later than April 3.

The Board of Election Office is located on Dobbs St. in the Agricultural Building. The telephone number is 426-5545.



NEW LEADERSHIP — New leadership was selected last week when the Alliance for Progress, Inc. held a board meeting at Angler's Cove in Perquimans County. Outgoing chairman is R.S. Monds of Hertford. New officers shown above are (l. to r.) L.M. Brinkley of Aboskie, vice-chairman, and Frank Rice of Sunbury, chairman, who will be working with AFP Director Richard Baker. A full report of the meeting will appear in next week's edition. (Staff photos by Kathy M. Newbern)