



BLAST ROCKS SELMA

DESOLATION LEFT BY MUNITIONS TRUCK EXPLOSION



RUINS of Hotel Talton, three-story brick building, destroyed by fire in munitions truck explosion one mile South of Selma early Saturday morning. Charred bones of two persons were found in the ruins. Mrs. R. L. Holloman, who operated the hotel, died three days later of injuries. Hotel was owned by Ralph R. Talton, of Smithfield, who estimates his loss at \$50,000 to \$60,000 with no insurance.

Explosion Follows Fire Caused by Collision of Munitions Truck and Car

Night Policeman Charlie Straughan and Fire Chief John Jeffreys Painfully Injured — Mr. Straughan Tells of Receiving Telephone Call for Help to Extinguish Burning Truck — Very Few People There When He Arrived — Ambulance Carrying Injured Persons Involved in Wreck Prior to Explosion to Hospital Had Just Left — Water Supply Gave Out and Then All Warned Not To Go Near Truck.

Seven persons are known to be dead and nearly 100 injured as the result of a munitions truck explosion near Gurkin's Tavern about one mile southwest of Selma last Saturday morning at 3 o'clock, when 33,000 pounds of explosives went up in smoke, following an accident about an hour and a half before in which one person had been fatally injured when a Pontiac car driven by Mrs. Minnie Lewis, of Raleigh, ran into the munitions truck

bursting the gas tank on the car and setting fire to both the automobile and the truck.

The Lewis car ran into the munitions truck at the intersection of the two highways at that point. Someone telephoned to Selma for help, and Charlie Straughan, night policeman here, went to the scene immediately with the Selma fire truck. He did not turn in the fire alarm and it is fortunate that he didn't as this would probably have meant some of our men on the fire department would have been killed, besides many others who would have gone had the alarm been given.

Mr. Straughan says when he arrived at the scene the ambulance had just left with those injured in the wrecked and burned car, which was still burning. He immediately went to work with a few others present to extinguish the fire, using what water was in the emergency tank on the fire truck. He said the munitions truck itself did not appear to be burning very rapidly, although the blaze was lapping around the tires and chassis of the truck, but when the water supply had been exhausted he used some chemicals he had on the fire truck to prevent further spread of the flames, and although there was some traces of smoke, the flames had been extinguished and the fire was apparently extinguished. But as they had no further means of fighting any fire that might rekindle, all were asked to stay away from the scene until they were sure the fire was all out. There was soon some evidence that the fire was rekindling itself, and after the Smithfield firemen arrived they made an effort to extinguish the fire, but when they learned that the truck was loaded with explosives they fell back several hundred yards to see what might happen.

Mr. Straughan said that when he arrived on the scene there were very few people there, and for an hour and a half the situation was apparently calm, with only a few spectators on hand, some walking around, some in the lunch room at Gurkin's Tavern, calmly carrying on as though there was no danger. Mr. Straughan said he and Raymond Avery, driver of the truck carrying the deadly munitions, were walking along in front of the filling station near Hotel Talton when the explosion went off. The concussion was so great that he was thrown to the ground. Mr. Straughan said that had he had any idea that the truck was going to explode he would have had business elsewhere.

Mr. Straughan was almost rendered deaf by the explosion, and is still undergoing treatment for his ears which were badly ruptured by the blast.

John Jeffreys, Selma's fire chief, who arrived at the scene after Mr. Straughan, was also there when the explosion came. He, too, suffered some severe bruises and lacerations, but is able to be out again now.

There is no way of telling just what the damage in material losses has been to Selma and community as the result of the blast. In Selma alone the damage is high. In broken windows alone it will probably take \$75,000 to replace the loss, but this may be a small item as compared to (Continued on page eight).

Slayer Mrs. Bessie Brewer Is Given 30-Year Sentence

James Joseph Ellis Who Killed Salvation Army Worker At Smithfield Army Headquarters, Gets Second Degree Verdict.

The case of James Joseph Ellis, 23-year-old New Jersey youth, charged with the murder of Mrs. Bessie Brewer at Salvation Army Headquarters in Smithfield several weeks ago, was the outstanding case in Johnston County Superior Court last week. The case was taken up for trial Wednesday morning and consumed the entire week from then on.

Solicitor Claude Canaday worked hard to obtain a first degree verdict against the slayer, who admitted the killing of Mrs. Brewer at the Salvation Army home in Smithfield with a hammer.

Judge Clawson Williams began his charge to the jury at 8:15 p. m. Saturday night and at 10:35 he gave the case to the jurors. In his charge, Judge Williams allowed them four possible verdicts: first degree, second degree, manslaughter or not guilty. The jury then retired for consideration of the case, and after being out for one hour and 20 minutes the 12 men in whose hands lay the destiny of a human life, filed back to report that they had agreed on second degree murder. On first ballot the jurors stood 8 for second degree and 4 for first degree, but on the second ballot a full agreement was reached in favor of second degree murder.

Ellis, who had sat with head lowered throughout the trial, brightened and appeared greatly relieved when the verdict was announced. His mother, Mrs. Florence Ellis of Jersey City, N. J., who came down for the trial, was not in the courtroom when her son was sentenced. When told that the youth had escaped the gas chamber she appeared very happy.

Judge Williams pronounced a sentence of 30 years in the State prison.

Railroad Detective's Assailant Convicted

Robert Turner, Raleigh Negro, was convicted of assault with intent to kill on Police Officer R. Britt, of Selma, in Superior Court in Raleigh Tuesday and sentenced to the State penitentiary for a term of 10 to 15 years. The Negro assaulted Mr. Britt on April 29 on the railroad yards in Raleigh when he attempted to arrest him. The wounded man was taken to Rex hospital for treatment. He returned to Selma a few days later but is still under the care of a physician. H. W. Rose, of Greensboro, captain of police for the Southern railway, handled the case in Superior court.

Ritter-end, standing part, and bite of the line are Naval terms used in knot-tying.

Important Meeting!

There will be an important meeting of the Red Cross Emergency organization held at the Selma Woman's Club building tonight (Thursday) at 8 o'clock. Public urged to attend. We have are literally asleep as to the importance of the task before us. Let us bestir ourselves lest we find it too late. Don't let the Japs find us asleep when they arrive, and arrive they may if we don't get ready for them. Wake Up! Wake Up! Wake Up!

Seen and Heard Along THE MAINDRAG

By H. H. L.

The Maindrag presented a sad appearance Saturday morning—hundreds of big plate glass windows were strewn from one end of the main business section of the town to the other—hardly a place of business in the city left with a window in it—many thought an air raid was taking place—in fact we thought we heard an air plane over the town immediately following the blast—and dozens of others thought the same thing—truck load after truck load of broken windows were hauled from our streets Saturday—one man thought two big engines on the Coast Line railroad had collided—while another said he thought a cyclone had struck his home—many believed it was an earthquake—messages by the dozens began to pour in a few hours after the explosion from people in distant states to relatives here asking if they were safe—one mother from distant Illinois wired her son wanting to know if he was all right—a daughter in far-away Louisiana wired her mother asking if she was o. k.—big newspapers all over the country soon began calling for information—this writer answered several calls before 9 o'clock from papers in Atlanta, Baltimore, Washington City and other places—all wanting the facts—and we told them what we knew, and that wasn't much—more than five hundred long distance calls came through the Selma telephone office that day—two hundred and fifty thousand people here Sunday viewing the ruins—they came from many states—the 21 state patrolmen had a busy day—the chief-of-police of Selma, and his assistants were tired fellows when Old Sol went down behind the horizon—but we are getting back to normalcy—the store fronts, or most of them, are again filled with merchandise for display—it'll be a long time before we forget 3 o'clock, Saturday morning, February 7, 1942, just as it will be a long time before we forget December 7, 1941, if we ever do.

EXPLOSION TAKES SEVENTH VICTIM

Mrs. R. L. Holloman, Operator Hotel Talton, Dies In Johnston County Hospital of Injuries Sustained As Result of Blast—Governor Asks Army To Convey Munitions Trucks.

The munitions truck explosion near Selma Saturday, which counted its seventh victim Monday, "would not have occurred if ordinary precautions had been followed," Governor J. M. Broughton said Monday in a letter to the Army ordnance department.

Mrs. R. L. Holloman, 62, operator of Hotel Talton, died in the Johnston County Hospital Monday of injuries suffered when the Hotel Talton was demolished by the nearby explosion. She was the seventh victim.

Sheriff Kirby L. Rose said a search of the ashes of the building revealed no additional victims. Scores of persons were injured by the explosion.

Meanwhile, the board of directors of the Winston-Salem Chamber of Commerce passed a resolution asking the Governor to make a thorough investigation of the "negligence or laxity" behind the disaster.

Governor Broughton suggested that the Army either convey its munitions trucks through the state in the future or notify the State of their movement so that highway patrolmen can be assigned to the job.

YOUNG MAN DIES IN DUKE HOSPITAL

Jesse Lee Hamilton, 22, died in Duke Hospital Thursday (this) morning at 3:30 o'clock. Young Hamilton was stricken with pneumonia about ten days ago at his home on Selma, Route 1. He was taken to the hospital last Friday, where he continued to grow worse until his death.

Funeral services will be held Friday afternoon at 3 o'clock from the home. Burial will take place in the Batten cemetery near McCall's Cross Roads.

Surviving are his wife, Mrs. Viola Creech Hamilton, and two sons, Jesse A. and Larry W. Hamilton, of Selma, Route 1; his mother, Mrs. Lillie Hamilton; one sister, Miss Lottie Mae Hamilton; one brother, James Persson Hamilton, all of Selma, Route 1; two half-sisters, Mrs. Chester Wall, and Mrs. Roscoe Stallings, of Roanoke Rapids; and one half-brother, Fletcher Hamilton, of Selma, Rt. 1.

R. A. Jones To Be Honored At Dinner

There will be a supper given at the Selma American Legion Hut on Friday night, March 20, at 7:30, honoring Adjutant R. A. Jones, who has received a call to enter the Naval Service within a week or two. Mr. Jones has been one of Selma's most useful and beneficial citizens since coming to Selma, and this supper is being given in his honor to show in a small way the appreciation of the American Legion members for his unselfish service.

This dinner was to be held on Wednesday, March 18, but the date has been changed to Friday, March 20.

Estimated Property Damage In Selma Around \$100,000

Estimate of damage in Selma and the mill villages has been placed around \$100,000. A Johnstonian-Sun man interviewed several of our leading business men today and asked each as to what they thought the damage to business houses, churches, homes, school buildings, etc., in the town and mill villages would amount to. Below are a few we interviewed and the estimate placed by them: E. V. Woodard, \$100,000; Ed Creech, \$200,000; Hunter Price, \$150,000; A. L. Langley, \$175,000; Tam Corbett, \$75,000; W. R. Smith, \$100,000; Roy Smith, \$150,000; Ryland Gregory, \$100,000; C. E. Kornegay, \$200,000; Dr. E. N. Booker, \$75,000; Raleigh Griffin, \$50,000.

An estimate on the number of windows blown out in the town has been placed at 15,000. More than 100 large plate glass windows were broken in store fronts.

Many homes suffered heavy damage by falling plastering, chimneys, etc. Ed Creech, Hunter Price and Carl Worley, who have just built handsome new homes report plastering cracking in their homes since the explosion occurred.

On another page will be found an account of damage done to many of our business enterprises, churches, school buildings, homes, etc.

WHITLEY SENTENCED TO 15 TO 20 YEARS

Kent Whitley, 32-year-old Johnston County filling station operator, was sentenced by Judge W. C. Harris of Raleigh to from 15 to 20 years in State Prison after he had pleaded guilty to a charge of manslaughter in connection with the slaying of Willford Murphy on the night of December 14, 1941.

The plea was submitted at the conclusion of state's evidence, and in accepting the plea, Judge Harris stated that he was taking off five years of the sentence because the plea had been made.

The judge stated that he understood from the evidence that Whitley went out of a filling station "to whip Murphy" and when the latter "was getting the best of him, Whitley got mad and shot Murphy, but had not intended to kill."

The slaying took place at Mooneyham's filling station at Barnes Cross Roads in Upper Johnston county. The shooting occurred after the two men had engaged in a fight which followed an argument.

Needed - 20 Machine Shop inspectors in Central North Carolina plant. Learn the details at your nearest United States Employment Service office.

The Marine Corps rejoices that its everyday "greens" have been modernized with lapel roll collars instead of "chokers".

ARMY OFFICIALS TO PROBE EXPLOSION

Coroner E. N. Booker Impanels Jury To Aid In Investigation As To Any Liability For Recent Munitions Truck Disaster At Gurkin's Tavern.

Official investigations by Army authorities and by a Johnston county coroner's jury have been launched in connection with the explosion disaster at Gurkin's Tavern Saturday morning in which several persons were killed and numerous other persons were injured.

An official board of inquiry from the Charleston Ordinance Department has been assigned to look into the tragedy. On the board are Lieut.-Col. J. D. Polley, Capt. J. S. Jenkins, Lieut. J. W. Hunter and J. N. Pearre, explosives expert.

Coroner E. N. Booker said that as soon as the injured victims who are still in the hospital recover sufficiently to testify, his coroner's jury would begin a thorough study of the incident and try to ascertain whether there is any criminal negligence or responsibility.

The jury—made up of H. B. Morrow, Ira Ford, Jack Wooten, John Ellington, J. N. Wiggs, and M. L. Stancil—have already viewed the remains of the known dead up until Saturday afternoon, and a formal inquest is planned.

JUDGE WILLIAMS KIWANIS SPEAKER

Judge Clawson Williams was the guest speaker at the Selma Kiwanis club on last Thursday evening.

Judge Williams devoted most of his talk the spirit of true patriotism for the American cause. He said that we need to become conscious of the trials through which our forefathers had to go in order to establish our democratic form of government, and that the Bill of Rights and the Constitution of the United States are emblematic of the achievements bought with a price that no man can visualize. Judge Williams said that we need to bestir ourselves and face the task of 1942 with equal determination to win as did our forefathers who faced untold hardships and even death in order that we might be free.

Judge Williams was the guest of Kiwanian H. H. Lowry. He was introduced to the club by Dr. E. N. Booker. Kiwanian Jimmie Woodard was in charge of the program.

SOYBEANS

Preliminary reports from Wilson county farmers indicate a substantial increase in the soybean acreage this year, says J. C. Tomlinson, assistant farm agent.