

REPORTER ON SCENE

By DEXTER L. FREEMAN
(Smithfield Herald Staff Writer)

It was an amazing drama that I watched and took part in near Gurkin's Tavern early Saturday morning. A drama of waiting tensely and knowing that terror and disaster were edging in on the little junction community.

During that bewildering period between 1:30 and 3:00 a. m., I felt rather helpless and baffled as I watched a sputtering fire burn its way into a big cargo of high explosives.

It was just as though a huge time bomb had been planted and people were told to guess when it would go off.

Explosion Inevitable.

By quarter of two—some 30 minutes after the collision which had fired the transport van—I knew that an explosion was inevitable. Firemen had run out of water and chemicals. Now there was nothing to do but move away and wait.

Many Spectators

As the flames spurted and touched lightly at the base of the ammunition van, I wondered what the other people were thinking. Scores of persons had been drawn to the scene and there were many others inside Talton Hotel, Gurkin's Tavern and other nearby places.

Warned of Danger

I saw spectators standing in groups talking casually. Just talking. Apparently they couldn't comprehend the danger. Explosions were out of their line.

One man in the lobby of the hotel said to me sarcastically, "Don't be so consoling!" when I warned that "somebody is going to be killed."

I walked out and five minutes later I was moving out of the immediate danger zone.

That was shortly after two o'clock and flames were beginning to lick up the sides of the powder-laden van.

Flagged Cars

I stationed myself beside the highway some 300 yards east of the junction. For nearly an hour I flagged incoming cars to a stop; among them was a U. S. mail truck trying to meet a schedule.

Tremendous Blast

I saw the explosion a second or two before I could feel its impact. For a moment there was daylight brightness. A great swirling eruption of flame and smoke and sparks shot hundreds of feet into the air. It was sudden and terrifying—like a thousand bolts of lightning intertwined into a solid mass.

I made a dive, but I wasn't fast enough. The concussion wave caught me about shoulder and I went spinning to the ground. I fell flat on my stomach.

The thunderous blast was not sharp and deafening, but dull and ponderous and hard-hitting. It was over in two or three seconds; and by contrast the next few moments were deathly silent. The air seemed supercharged with shock.

Still lying on the ground, I looked up and saw a tremendous shower of sparks and earth and debris of all kinds. Pieces of metal, blocks of cement, wood splinters, glass—millions of fragments—jolted and peppered back to earth.

Then confusion broke. I heard terror-stricken screams and loud shouting and cries of pain. Somewhere—I couldn't see much at first—a woman was sobbing: "Oh my God! Oh, my God!"

I don't know how many seconds or minutes it was before the fires broke out. Everything around the junction seemed to collapse like a flattened balloon and flames darted up almost instantaneously.

I didn't know then how many people were dead or hurt. But I knew all too well that disaster, worse than anyone had expected, had swept across the community.

CASUALTY LIST

The known dead are:
George Stroup, Gastonia.
Cecil E. Propst, Belwood.
Mrs. Minnie Lewis, Raleigh.
Claude (Buck) Mitchell, Old Town, Maine.

Willie Howell, Goldsboro.

Miss Jessie Holloway, Goldsboro.
At least 60 persons were injured in the munitions truck disaster of early Saturday morning. Many of them required only first aid treatment which they received at hospitals or from local physicians. Others needed more than first aid and were placed in hospitals in Smithfield and neighboring towns and cities.

Close to 40 persons were given aid at the Johnston County Hospital in Smithfield. Of these only eight remained in the hospital Monday. The others either had been discharged after first aid treatment or had been transferred to other hospitals.

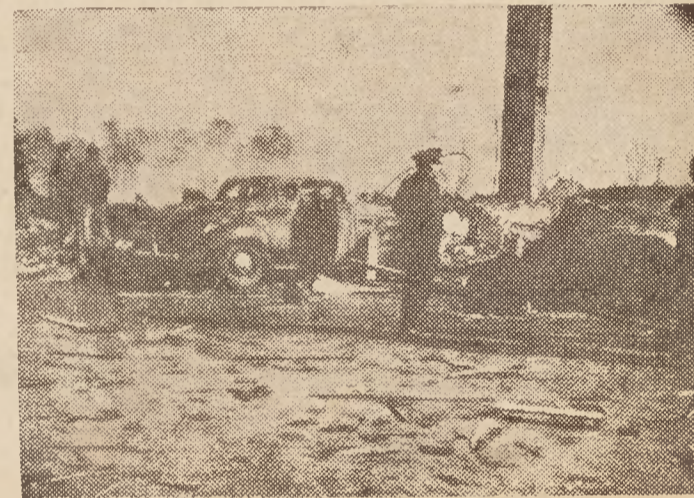
Those remaining in the Johnston County Hospital are listed below:
Mrs. R. L. Hollowman, manager of Hotel Talton, mangled left arm, lacerations and contusions all over body.

Scenes of Destruction Wrought by Explosion South of Selma

NOTE — Pictures shown here are the first Photo-Engravings to appear in The Johnstonian-Sun which were made by Alton Stencil. Better pictures are expected in the future as he gains experience and better knowledge of Photo-Engraving.



HOME OF MR. AND MRS. T. E. COOK—Immediately back of Hotel Talton. Mr. and Mrs. Cook and three children were asleep in this building at the time of the explosion. All received injuries.



SITE OF HOTEL TALTON—All that remained of the three-story brick building was the chimney seen to the right. Three persons lost their lives here.



GURKIN'S TAVERN—This building and those adjoining were totally demolished. Several of the employees and a number of guests in the building at the time of the blast were injured.



GURKIN'S FILLING STATION—Located south of the tavern. A number of persons in this building at the time of the explosion were injured. The station and cabins nearby were practically destroyed.



NEGRO SCHOOL BUILDING IN SELMA—Dozens of windows and 11 doors were blown from this building.

age.
But business and residential houses were not the only ones to be damaged by the blast. At the Edgerton Memorial Methodist church here, eight art windows shattered, entailing an estimated loss of approximately \$10,000. One of these windows was an imported piece from Italy, an Easter scene, a memorial to Mrs. W. M. Smith, 1828-1892, and Miss Annie Lola McAuley, 1831-1898. This window, valued alone at \$2,500, was transferred from former building to present structure built in 1910.

Several of the windows in the Selma Baptist church were broken, but it has been estimated that these can be replaced at a cost of about \$600.00.

The damage to the Selma white school building is believed to be near \$1,000, resulting from crashed windows.

At the Lizzie Cotton Mill the damage to broken windows is reported to be heavy. The workers in the mill left their looms and made tracks for home immediately following the explosion, believing that the enemy was within our gates.

The Selma Negro school building, which is nearer the scene of the blast is said to be even greater, and may reach \$2,000.

In Smithfield quite a number of residential windows were shattered and a few glass fronts in the business district are reported to have been broken.

Other towns reporting broken windows and a few glass fronts are Pine Level, Micro, Princeton and Kenly.

Automobile losses were also heavy as a result of the blast. Those losing cars or having them damaged by the explosion and fire were Hugh Talton, Patrolman H. C. Bobbitt, Mrs. R. L. Holloman, Wade Peterson. A dealer car, temporarily in the possession of Hugh Anderson, was among the cars destroyed.

A taxicab belonging to a Goldsboro company was burned completely.

From 15 to 20 cars and trucks parked in the vicinity of the blast were partially damaged or completely destroyed.

A large transport truck belonging to the A. & P. Stores, parked in front of Gurkin's garage, had its sides blown in.

These car losses are in addition to the munitions truck, the Odie Lewis car and the car occupied by George Stroupe and Cecil Propst, who died instantly in the explosion.

CALVES

Four-H Club members of Pasquotank county are aiding the milk program by purchasing purebred dairy heifers as club projects, reports Thomas S. Brown, assistant farm agent.

Her condition was described as critical.

Raymond O'Neal Avery, Charleston, S. C., driver of the munitions truck, chest injuries, bruises and lacerations.

Hugh B. Anderson, Smithfield tobacconist, who roomed at the destroyed hotel, back and leg injuries, lacerations and bruises over entire body.

Odie Lewis, Raleigh, burned right hand and injured foot.

Bobby Ray Lewis, 4 years old, Raleigh, fractured leg and lacerations.

Ira Rhodes, Smithfield, head lacerations.

Thelma Holloway, Goldsboro, lacerations of hip, arm and neck.

C. A. Creech, Jr., Smithfield fireman, lung injury and lacerations.

Three marines who remained in the Johnston County Hospital until Saturday night when they were transferred to the marine base hospital at New River were:

Bernard Rosenberg, Bethlehem, Pa.
L. E. Greenfield, Newburg, N. Y.
Jimmy Backstrom, Worcester, Massachusetts.

Those in the Goldsboro Hospital include:

Bruce G. Hopewell, 32, Goldsboro taxi driver, multiple lacerations of head and body, reported Sunday to be in critical condition.

F. H. Lee, garage superintendent of Sanders-Mims Company, injuries to kidney and left arm.

Mrs. L. Gurkin, Gurkin's Tavern, lacerations on face and arm.

Mrs. James E. Sanders, Gurkin's Tavern employee, lacerations over entire body.

W. T. Hardister, 24, Carthage, a marine stationed at New River, was released from the Goldsboro Hospital Sunday and carried to New River by ambulance.

Those in Rex Hospital, Raleigh, are:

Harold Selma, Winter Haven, Fla., serious head injuries.
Roy Robertson, Winter Haven, Fla., light head injuries.

Judson Strickland, Raleigh, stationed at New River marine barracks, light head injuries.

Those who received first aid treatment at the Johnston County Hospital included:

Joe Coates, Smithfield.
Delma Buffalo, colored, Gurkin's Tavern.
W. J. Baker, Princeton, Route 1.
Jimmy Sanders, Gurkin's Tavern.
James Hall, colored, Gurkin's Tavern.

PROPERTY DAMAGE

To estimate the property damage resulting from the ammunition truck blast Saturday morning is not an easy task, neither can it be accurately arrived at.

There have been estimates ranging from \$250,000 to \$500,000 and even larger amounts.

A few rough estimates have been made, however, which may have to be revised later.

Hotel Talton, brick structure of 35 rooms, owned by R. R. Talton of Smithfield, was completely destroyed by blast and fire.

Luke Capps' Service Station, formerly operated as Millard Stallings' service station, located by the side of Hotel Talton, was completely destroyed by blast and fire.

Rough estimates have placed the loss of the Talton properties at from

Beach, Fla.
Albert Handberger, Millis, Mass.
Edward McCarter, 97th Field Artillery, Fort Bragg.

Mrs. Minnie Portenoff, Irvington, N. J.
Others known to have received injuries are:

W. L. Hunt, 28, Rocky Mount, who received first aid treatment at a Rocky Mount hospital.

John Jeffreys, Selma fire chief, cuts on face and nose, attended by Selma physician.

Charley Straughan, Selma fire truck driver and night policeman, severely injured, treated by Selma physician and confined to home.

Ferrell Carter, 21, Selma, first aid.
Mr. and Mrs. Alvin Brown and 11-year old son, who lived in the vicinity of Gurkin's Tavern, first aid.

Mr. and Mrs. A. H. Bone and 8-year old son, who lived in the vicinity of the blast, first aid.

John Hardy Maynor, Dunn, colored, carried to Dunn Hospital, cut on hand and minor injuries.

William Woodall, Smithfield, first aid.

C. C. Hathaway, Selma, first aid, hurt by falling glass.

L. Gurkin, owner of Gurkin's Tavern, cuts and bruises about face and head.

Mr. and Mrs. Jack Dail, Mr. and Mrs. J. E. Peedin, Agnes Faye Peedin, 7, and Mary Jean Peedin, 3, who lived in vicinity of Gurkin's Tavern. All received slight injuries.

Mr. and Mrs. T. E. Cook and three children, Hazel, 10; Elwood, 4, and Peggie Jean, 14 months, who occupied dwelling totally destroyed immediately back of Hotel Talton. All received injuries.

\$50,000 to \$60,000.

Gurkin's Tavern, owned by L. Gurkin, wooden structure with restaurant, dance hall, and sleeping quarters, completely wrecked by blast.

Gurkin's garage-apartment building, brick structure, torn asunder by blast.

Gurkin's service station and auto shop, brick structure, was wrecked.

Gurkin's tourist camp and all eleven cabins, were completely wrecked or badly damaged by the blast.

The estimated loss to the Gurkin properties has been placed at upwards of \$40,000.

The home of Mr. and Mrs. A. A. Brown and of Mr. and Mrs. A. H. Bone, brick dwelling located near the hotel site, was almost totally wrecked by the blast. This property is owned by Henry Talton of Rocky Mount.

Mr. Bone's feed barn was burned after being wrecked by the blast. It contained much valuable feed.

The dwelling occupied by Mr. and Mrs. Jack Dail and the J. E. Peedin family, located within 100 yards of the blast, was badly damaged. It is owned by Mrs. W. P. Sellers of Selma. Some object thrown from the explosion went through the attic of this home crashing weatherboarding and splintering the rafters, leaving the roof in a swaying condition.

The dwelling immediately back of Hotel Talton, occupied by T. E. Cook family, was almost torn to shreds.

Mr. Gurkin's brick garage was almost demolished by the impact, and even trees were blown over in the woods adjacent to the scene of the blast.

Spreading out in all directions, the force of the blast was felt for many miles, and at all nearby points its force was so terrific that window panes were blown out, plastering fell from walls and even buildings were damaged. In Selma and vicinity the damage was heavy. Hardly a home escaped without some broken windows, broken plaster or damage of one kind or another.

In Selma's business district the damage to glass window fronts was almost unanimous, only a very few fronts escaping without damage. These were the Davis Department Store, A. L. Langley's jewelry store, Dr. Oliver's office, Vanity Fair Beauty Shop, Beauty Nook and perhaps one or two others. All the others were a total or partial loss—most of them were totally destroyed.

At the Selma Cotton Mill, one mile away, 900 window lights were shattered. About 55 mill village homes had windows broken, bursted plastering, upset chimneys and other minor damage. Following the blast early Saturday morning the mill closed down until Monday. No estimate of the financial loss has been given by the mill superintendent S. W. Armit-

Explosion of Prices!

Pure LARD	IN POUND PACKAGE	16c
Lge. Pullman BREAD	9 oz. BREAD	5c
FAT BACK	POUND	13c
PURE LARD	8 POUND BUCKET	\$1.25
CORN FLAKES	3 FOR	21c
EGGS	2 DOZEN	45c
EXTRA SPECIAL!		
Flour	12 LBS. 45c, 24 LBS.	85c

CRACKERS	1 POUND	10c
BLUE PLATE COFFEE	IN VACUUM PACKED TINS — POUND	25c
IRISH POTATOES	10 POUNDS	28c
EXTRA SPECIAL!		
CIGARETTES	2 PKGS.	25c

Dressed Chicken at All Times
Pay & Save Mkt.

COME IN AND SEE OUR—
BIRDS EYE BRAND FROSTED FOODS
PHONE 149 — We Deliver — SELMA, N. C.