

Blast Kills 500 In Texas School Disaster; Said To Be Worst In U. S. History

Search Debris For Mangled Bodies Of Children Dead, Dying

HEARING IS HELD

Accumulation Of Gas In Cellar Believed To Be Cause

New London, Tex.—Workers are still searching the wreckage of the London Consolidated school for more bodies to be added to the toll of the worst school disaster in the world's history.

Hundreds of students were literally blown to bits in a gas explosion which demolished the richest rural school in America ten minutes before the boys and girls would have been dismissed for the day. Estimates placed the total dead at about 500.

Gov. James V. Allred immediately declared martial law, and sent all state highway patrolmen to the scene, which is 12 miles north of here. National Guard troops were ordered out as the entire populace of the neighborhood thronged about the school hysterically waiting for the bodies of their loved ones to be dragged forth. President Roosevelt promised every aid from the federal government.

At the time of the mighty blast fifty or more mothers were attending a Parent-Teacher association meeting in the school gymnasium, a separate building several hundred feet away from the main structure. Hearing the rumble of the blast, they rushed to the windows in time to see a hail of debris flying through the air and the big building collapsing upon their children.

Mothers Race to Aid.

Screaming hysterically, the mothers raced across the campus and with their bare hands clawed at the debris trying desperately to reach the children whose cries could be heard from beneath the crumbled structure. Nearby oil fields, some of which could be seen from the school grounds, shut down and frantic workers rushed in to try to rescue those who still remained alive.

The terrible force of the eruption sent the mangled bodies of boys and girls flying through the air like they were rag dolls. The brick walls were blasted out. The roof raised in the air and then fell back on to the mass of crying and struggling humanity. Bricks were hurled more than a quarter of a mile.

Dismembered bodies lay all around on the school lawn. Some were decapitated. Others had limbs missing. Some of the children still were alive.

The scene quickly became one of extreme confusion. Hysterical women fainted, shrieked, and prayed, kneeling on the grass.

Many parents, the women either screaming hysterically or silently sobbing, ran frantically from one body to another, seeking their loved ones. There were gasps of horror and occasionally a woman slumping to the ground in a faint, indicating she had found what she had fearfully hoped she wouldn't.

Mutilation of the bodies made their tragic task increasingly difficult. One couple hovered over the form of a little boy, his face and body so mangled and bloody they couldn't be certain if he were their son.

"Must Be Jim," Mother Cries.

"O, it's Jim, it must be Jim," sobbed the woman. Picking up one of the little victim's feet, she argued hysterically with her husband. "See, it's his tennis shoes," she cried. "I remember he asked to wear them to school this morning."

"No, no," her husband replied, almost happily. "Jim changed into his other shoes when he came home for lunch."

"O, merciful God, he may still be alive then," the mother cried as they got up and hurried away to scan other little bodies.

For a few minutes after the roof caved in, leaving jagged remnants of wall standing like the ruins of a medieval castle, flames shot out above the wreckage. But the building was of fireproof construction and the blaze, having almost nothing to feed upon, soon died out. It was well that it did, for nearby communities have only small fire fighting forces.

The narrow roads to the school, situated between the oil field communities of London and New London, unincorporated hamlets, soon were clogged with a stream of ve-

hicles.

More than 15,000 persons assembled at the scene in the next few hours, either anxious over the fate of their relatives, to help in the rescue work, or sightseeing.

Call Doctors and Nurses.

Every available ambulance, doctor, and nurse in all surrounding towns were summoned by telephone and radio. As far away as from Shreveport, La., came doctors and nurses by airplane, sent by the American Red Cross.

Thirty doctors and seventy-two nurses, twelve of them from the Red Cross, came from Dallas. Accompanying them were twelve ambulances, twenty-five embalmers, and five hearses.

All sorts of vehicles—laundry trucks, private cars, ambulances, and what not—speed to the scene, and were used to carry the bodies away. But, with no one in authority and hundreds of persons wrought up to a frenzy, many of the cars soon were entangled in a hopeless snarl.

Because of this situation, Governor Allred ordered all state highway patrolmen on duty in the district to hurry here and take command.

All available Texas Rangers and highway policemen also were being rushed there from Dallas, Houston, Austin and Tyler. Fingerprint experts were sent from Austin on the possibility they might assist in identifying the bodies, many Texas school children having been fingerprinted.

Find Few Survivors.

Five hundred workers from the oil fields arrived at the wrecked building soon after the explosion and leaped into the ruins. But there were few survivors for them to rescue, and their main work was carrying out bodies.

Later an additional 1,000 men went to work on the debris. In the early stages they passed up the bodies of those obviously dead in the hope of finding those in whom there might be life.

Three hundred and sixty bodies were taken by ambulance, truck, and every possible conveyance to Henderson. Dozens of other bodies were taken to Kilgore, Overton, Ark., Troup, Longview, and Tyler.

While waiting for the arrival of sufficient vehicles to move the great number of dead the bodies were carried from the wreckage and laid in long rows on the lawn.

Mothers and fathers dragged the bodies of still more victims into the school gymnasium until the vehicles came back for more loads. There the children and their teachers lay, side by side, many of them unidentified.

Stricken School Was Richest In United States

Henderson, Tex.—The London Consolidated school, wrecked in the horrible explosion which blotted out the lives of hundreds of children instantly, is believed to have been the finest rural school of its type in the United States. In the heart of the East Texas oil fields, it is located in one of the wealthiest sections of the world.

The blast itself is believed to have been caused by explosion of natural gas from the seven oil wells on the school campus.

The school district encompasses some thirty square miles with an assessed valuation of 16 million dollars. The community sprang up almost overnight following the discovery of one of the most productive oil fields known.

Quickly Paid For.

With "black gold" flowing from its own wells, the school plant had no difficulty in raising the several hundred thousand dollars spent in its construction. It is not only debt free but its original value has multiplied many times.

In 1931, when wealth gushed out of the ground for the communities of London and New London, the schools serving the two villages were merged and the present district set up.

The school lies midway between the two communities.

The site of the disaster scene can readily be located by drawing a line from Tyler, a city of 35,000, largest in the district, to Henderson.

1,500 in Eight Grades

The wrecked school had an enrollment of 1,500 students, from the

fifth grade to the third year of high school.

The building had been constructed in units, the first of which was built in 1934. The completed structure contained 30 classrooms and an auditorium large enough to accommodate half of the total enrollment.

Equipped to teach stenography, music, manual training, and sewing, as well as academic subjects, it was the proud boast of the community that its institution was as fine as could be found in any rural section of the country.

At one side of the main building stood the gymnasium, and at the other stood a grade school for children from the kindergarten to the fifth grade. The home of the superintendent also stood on the school grounds.

All Are Fireproof.

All of the buildings were of fireproof construction and ample size. The grade, or grammar school, was a two story brick building about 100 by 125 feet.

VIOLET NEWS

Our school term ended here, March 19. The teacher, Lucile Mateson, has returned to her home in Andrews. The ones that received presents for going everyday to school were: Zada Murphy, Lottie Taylor, Nola Davis, Winston Taylor, Clayton Davis, Wayne Taylor and Hule Davis. Miss Monda Payne spent last Fri-

The main building had a two story unit in the center, about 50 feet wide and 60 feet deep, which housed the auditorium and various laboratories, and wings on either side. These wings, each 30 feet deep and 65 feet long, gave the building a frontage of 180 feet.

From a high window of the school one could look out across a plain dotted almost solidly as far as the eye could reach by oil derricks. Thousands of these rear their smut-covered skeletons from 50 to 100 feet in the air.

day night with her cousin, Miss Edna Rose.

Miss Estal Graham was the Sunday dinner guest of Miss Lottie Taylor.

Miss Hollice Murphy and Mrs. Vesta Beaver visited Alene Taylor Saturday evening.

Mrs. Walter Graham spent Saturday with her sister, Mrs. Janie Davis. Mrs. Vandora Taylor and Miss Monda Payne were visitors at Mrs. Clara Taylor's Saturday evening.

Mrs. Parthenta Graham spent a few days last week with her daughter, Mrs. Nora Martin.

Mr. Lester Taylor spent Saturday afternoon with Mr. Marion Morrow. Mrs. Mary Beaver is on the sick list at this writing. Her many friends wish her a speedy recovery.

HATTIE PALMER
NOTARY PUBLIC
SCOUT OFFICE

After Death Struck School in Texas



Amid crumbling masonry and steel, rescue workers and frantic parents hunt for bodies of children killed and mangled by explosion.

Many Times This Scene Was Repeated



Volunteer rescue workers bringing out the body of one of the victims of the school disaster.

Spectator Tells of Awful Blast

One spectator thus described the scene of the Texas school disaster:

"In the middle of a ring of about 5,000 persons lay the remnants of the huge structure. The center portion had only a bare split wall at the rear still standing. The brick and stones were piled about 15 feet high in a quarry-like effect. From the ponderous oil trucks to the mass

of debris covering the children were stretched stout cables. Sweating oil field 'roughnecks' turned errands of mercy—many seeking their own sons and daughters.

"In the manner of stevedores, they lined up on the rock and passed debris hand-to-hand to a clearing.

"Blood smeared an upturned brick. With a shout, the workers gathered available shovels and lights and stretchers were called. An arm, a head appeared—terribly crushed. In a few minutes it was

on the stretcher, carried to a waiting ambulance and speeded to the nearest temporary morgue.

"The scene was repeated over and over. Finally the worst of the shock was over and the men and families settled down to a quiet, organized effort to get out the bodies as quickly as possible—not actually in the hopes of life but to spare certain relatives would be spared the anguish of ignorance of their children's fate—which the rescuers knew too well."

Dig and Cut Away Their Path to Dead



Rescue workers at scene soon after Texas school was blown up, engaged in hazardous task of bringing out the dead.