

SIX KILLED IN EXPLOSION

Near Selma Saturday Morning

WHEN LARGE TRUCK LOADED WITH ARMY AMMUNITION EXPLODES

Blast Heard in Louisburg; Buildings Demolished; Highway Damaged, Caused by Wreck Causing Fire; Raleigh Woman Killed in Wreck Which Touched Off Johnston Blast

Thirty thousand pounds of munitions in a blazing truck and trailer exploded with a countess-shaking roar between Smithfield and Selma early Saturday morning. The blast killed three men, left two missing, injured more than 50 persons, 20 of them seriously, bowled over hundreds of spectators like so many ten-pins and levelled nearby buildings.

Hundreds of spectators had been drawn to the scene long before the hand grenades, black powder and other munitions were touched off by the blaze, started in a collision between the truck and a passenger car. The explosion occurred two hours later, at 2:57 a. m., after Smithfield and Selma firemen had attempted to extinguish the flames.

Mrs. Minnie Lewis, of Raleigh, driver of the automobile, died a few hours later from burns received in the collision.

Bones Found in Ruins

The nearby Talton Hotel was leveled to the ground and bones, believed to be from two different bodies, were found in the still-smoking debris late in the afternoon. This tallied with a report that two occupants of the hotel, one of them last seen "in a sheet of flames," are still missing.

Killed by the explosion were George Stroupe of Gastonia and Cecil E. Propst of Lenoir, who were driving by the truck when it blew up, and Claude (Buck) Mitchell of Dunn, a bystander. Stroupe was commander of a CCC camp at New Holland and Propst was a game and fish warden there.

Those missing are Willie Howell, 33-year-old Goldsboro taxi driver, and Jessie Holloway, 30, Goldsboro woman.

The munitions truck was strewn for one and a half miles. Only two gnarled gas pumps mark the site of nearby Luke Capp's Filling Station, Gurkin's Tavern, about 100 yards from the truck, and several residences within a 500-yard radius were littered with broken window panes, falling bricks and timbers, but were not completely destroyed.

Selma Windows Shattered

Virtually all the windows in Selma, one mile away, were shattered, including panes worth \$10,000 in the Methodist Church and 900 panes in the Selma Cotton Mill. A few windows were broken in Smithfield, three miles away.

An insurance adjuster who spent more than 12 hours investigating the destruction estimated total damage at \$500,000.

Hole Ripped in Road

The explosion ripped a hole 20 feet deep and as long as a railroad car in Highway 70. Convict workers had the crater filled by about 2 p. m.

Riding with Mrs. Lewis when the wreck occurred were her husband, Odie Lewis, a carpenter at New River Marine Barracks; two children, Bobbie Ray, 4, and Charlie Grey, 5; and two marines, Jimmie Backstrom and Bernard Rosenburg. All suffered cuts and bruises, and Backstrom a possible fracture. Mr. and Mrs. Lewis lived at 226 South Bloodworth Street, Raleigh, before he began work at New River.

Red Cross Aids

C. Leo Williams, Red Cross representative in eastern North Carolina, arrived at the scene Saturday to supervise work of that agency. Four nurses were called from Raleigh. In a special plane from Washington Saturday night came Dr. Albert McCown, medical director of the Red Cross; Miss Alice Dugger, nurse supervisor; W. W. Jefferson, assistant eastern manager; and three special case workers.

Facilities at the Johnston County Hospital were taxed to the limit as a steady stream of injured flowed in for first aid treatment. The county's newly organized civilian defense unit, operating as if the disaster had come from enemy bombs, quickly summoned Smithfield's six doctors and 12 nurses.

Many persons in nearby communities, waked by the explosion, called into Smithfield to ask whether there had been an air raid. Ambulances screaming through the streets led many persons to believe "the enemy is here."

Five of the injured were taken to Goldsboro and three to Raleigh when the Smithfield hospital, its halls and rooms overflowing, could not take any more.

Marine Is Hero

Of the many tales of heroism, one concerned Bernard Rosenburg, the marine in the Lewis

automobile. "That little marine ought to get a medal," said Durwood Creech, Smithfield undertaker.

"He was trapped in the back seat when the wreck occurred, and the car burst into flames. He climbed over to the front and escaped.

"Then he realized the other occupants were still inside.

"He went back into the blazing car and got the two children, who had been asleep on the back seat. He tossed them into a ditch.

"Then he went back again and helped Mrs. Lewis out. Again he went back and got Mr. Lewis out. He thought some Negroes who had come up had carried his buddy from the car and he started away. But he couldn't find his friend, (Backstrom), and went back into the burning automobile for the fifth time."

Highway Patrolman H. C. Bobbit was investigating the wreck when the truck exploded. He was about six feet from his car, parked 100 yards from the truck. "I looked up in the sky and saw great pieces of timber and steel flying around," he said. "I dove for my car and just as I got in the stuff came down all around. I am lucky to be alive to tell the story."

One of the miracles of the explosion was that no one was injured in a small tenant house just a few yards from the hotel. Parts of the walls and the roof of the frame house were blown to shambles, but Mr. and Mrs. Cook and their three children, sleeping inside, were not scratched.

Woman Critically Hurt

Mrs. R. L. Holloman, operator of the Talton Hotel, was in the lobby with two girl employes, helping some of those injured in the automobile-truck collision, when the blast occurred. As the hotel crumpled and burst into flames, she was mangled badly and last night was reported to be in very critical condition.

Miss Hazel Stuart, one of the girl employes at the Talton, escaped by climbing out of a window, but suffered a blow across her head.

Mr. and Mrs. Arthur Bone and Mr. and Mrs. Alvin Brown lived in a brick bungalow about 200 yards from the hotel. The inside of the house was littered with glass and other debris, but none of the occupants were hurt seriously.

Reports from Smithfield Saturday night said that houses of 17 families had been damaged sufficiently to render them homeless.

William I. Godwin, Selma attorney, estimated that the damage in that town was well above \$15,000. H. B. Marrow, Johnston county school superintendent, said almost \$750 damage had been wrought, mostly in broken window panes, at the Selma

YOUR SECTOR

Parked Cars Damaged

About five automobiles parked at the hotel were destroyed and a dozen others were damaged considerably.

Raymond O'Neil Avery, 41, of Charleston, S. C., was driver of the truck but received only slight injuries to the head and chest. Dell Carter, his companion, was unhurt.

Walter Bagwell, Raleigh insurance man, received a call to investigate the wreck. The explosion apparently occurred just as he reached the city's outskirts. Bagwell said he saw a great pillar of flame leap into the air.

Magistrate E. C. Jones, of Smithfield, who was helping detour traffic, said a driver of a produce truck told him, "I saw the flames as I left Fayetteville." That would have put him more than 50 miles from the explosion.

Firemen Rescue Victims

Bill Norton, who joined the Smithfield fire department only a few days ago, was another hero. He went into the burning hotel and rescued the two Lewis children, who had been brought there from the wrecked car, and then went back in with Fire Chief E. L. Woodall to bring out Mrs. Holloman.

Firemen, who worked over the burning vehicles for two hours before the blast, had warned everyone to evacuate the hotel and had cautioned spectators to keep away. The explosion occurred while one group of firemen had gone back for more chemicals.

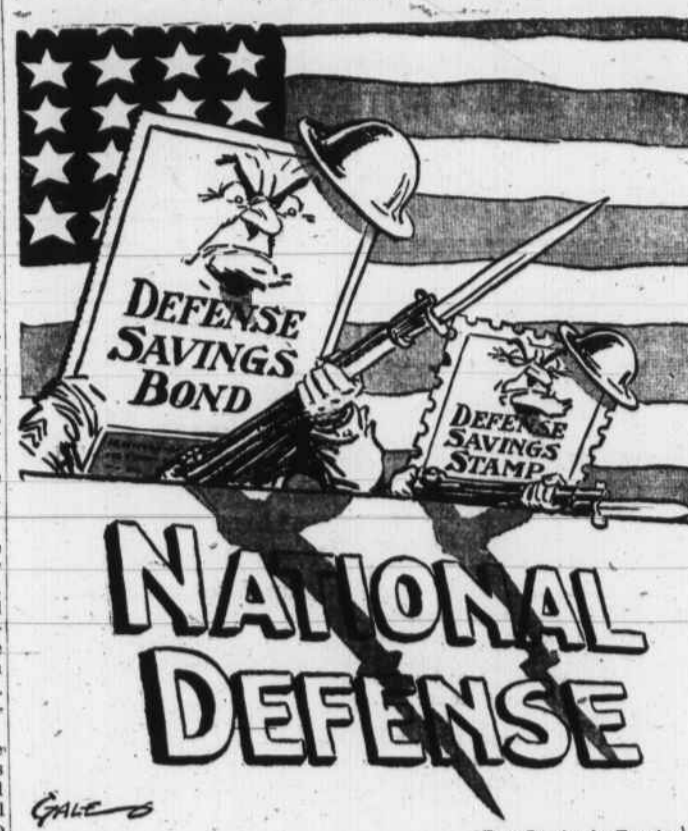
Mr. Lewis' body was taken to a Greenville funeral home, where it will remain until funeral services Sunday afternoon at 3 o'clock at Pleasant Hill Free Will Baptist Church, near Shermersville, Pitt County. Burial was in the Smith cemetery, near the church.

Mrs. Lewis was a native of Beaufort County and a former resident of Shermersville. She and her husband moved to Raleigh about three years ago. He is employed at Jacksonville.

Survivors, in addition to her husband and children, are her parents, Mr. and Mrs. W. L. Ormond of New Bern, and a brother, William B. Ormond of the United States Navy.

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From Los Angeles Examiner

Heard in Raleigh

H. Page Williams of 1015 Brooks Avenue, Raleigh, said he was awake on his sleeping porch when he heard the blast and thought that perhaps two trains had crashed. He said the explosion was followed by a rumbling, humming sound.

All day long Saturday thousands of persons went to witness the devastation. They noted the motor of the truck in an open field 150 yards from the site of the explosion. Other parts of the truck had been deposited 300 yards away, and unidentified debris fell as far as two and a half miles away.

Later information showed the two missing were burned in the hotel. Reports of the blast were heard as far away as Louisburg and Rocky Mount.

COLORED LEADERSHIP TRAINING COURSE

The public is cordially invited to attend the Leadership Training course which will be held at the First Baptist Church (Colored) Franklinton, beginning March 23, announces Rev. M. E. Neal, and

continuing the balance of the week. The speakers will be, March 23, Rev. C. E. Griffin, executive secretary of the Baptist State Convention. Tuesday night, Rev. F. B. Holt. Wednesday night, Mrs. Annie Filmore, of Durham. Thursday night, the pastor of the First Baptist Church (White) of Franklinton, Friday night, Dean John L. Tilley.

The members of the Sunday School, B. T. U. Convention, Missionary Groups, and all other

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