

Flaming Jet Fuel Destroys Tanker

Oil Continues to Burn in Hold; Coast Guard to Let Fire Burn Itself Out



Cdr. George Philbrick, USCG, in charge of fire-fighting operations at Morehead City port, said yesterday that no effort will be made to extinguish present flames. They will be allowed to burn out.

This is the safest thing to do, the commander said. If the fire were extinguished there would be a possibility that gasses would collect which could cause explosions.

No prediction was made on how long the fire would continue to burn. The ship, broken in two, was pretty well awash yesterday. By yesterday one crewman was still unaccounted for, Peter Salopek, radio operator. D. C. Newton, purser, said 10 minutes before the fire he stopped by the radio shack and asked Salopek to go ashore with him.

Salopek declined. Newton said that Salopek was on the upper part of the ship where he should have had no trouble getting off. Dead is a crewman, Clyde V. Leonard. The other 42 aboard survived.

Arthur Lewis, petty boatman who runs the Bunny II, picked up seven survivors shortly after the ship started to burn. He ran the Bunny under the stern of the tanker; put out two lines and seven men went off the stern of the Potomac, grabbed the lines.

Lewis towed them away from

See FIRE CONTINUES, Page 8

Potomac's Purser Was One Of Few Who Walked Away

D. C. Newton, purser aboard the Potomac, Navy tanker which was destroyed by fire in Morehead City harbor, was one of three men who got off the ship by way of the gang plank Tuesday at 20 minutes before 7.

Mr. Newton, interviewed Tuesday night at Morehead City hospital, said, "I was dressing to go ashore when I heard the third mate say, 'Something's afire somewhere.'"

"I looked out and saw all the back of the ship lit up and a wall of fire coming at us from the bridge (Morehead City highway bridge).

"It's quite a stretch from the bridge around the shoreline to the ship. When I saw that sheet of flame coming, I knew nothing could help us. Three seconds later, the fire was under the dock."

Newton said he and Tom Lee, seaman, and a colored crewman ran down the gang plank. About that time the first explosion occurred (aviation gas blowing up in the hold) and Newton was knocked to the ground, hurting his left knee.

But he got up and the three ran until a man from Aviation Fuel Terminals, where the ship was discharging fuel, put them in a pickup truck to take them off the island.

"A locomotive was trying to pull tank cars out of the terminal and the man in the truck wanted to lock the gate," the purser said. "I told him to let the gate alone and let's get out of there, but he went back and locked the gate."

The Potomac was at the dock, bow headed north to the highway bridge and had started discharging jet fuel at 4:30 p.m. The ship, baby super tank class, was commissioned Jan. 30, 1957.

She came to Morehead City from Savannah, Ga., where she had discharged 99,000 barrels of jet fuel. She was scheduled to put ashore 101,000 barrels at Aviation Fuel Terminal here. It is estimated that about 10,000 barrels had been pumped out when the fire occurred.

After discharging fuel here, the Potomac was scheduled to return to Houston, Texas. The Potomac's previous visit to Morehead City was on July 23.

Port City JC's Back Port Bonds

Wilmington and Morehead City Jaycees met at Jacksonville Wednesday night to form a committee to promote votes in favor of the forthcoming port bond issue.

The bond referendum will go before the people Tuesday, Nov. 7. It will be the only issue to be voted on at the polls that day. The referendum involves a total of \$61,065,000, and provides funds for numerous capital improvements throughout the state as well as ports.

Each issue will be voted on separately. A detailed explanation appears on page 4 section 3 of today's paper.

The cooperative committee of Wilmington and Morehead City Jaycees will promote the port issue by personal contact, by mail and by contacting all civic organizations throughout the state, including 139 Jaycee clubs.

County Board to Meet
County commissioners will meet at 10 o'clock Monday morning at the courthouse, Beaufort.

Cherry Point Rushes Help To Fire Scene

- Men, Equipment Pour into Port Area
- Survivors Transferred To Air Base

(Special to THE NEWS-TIMES)

Cherry Point — More than 250 Cherry Point Marines, seven pieces of heavy fire-fighting and other mobile equipment were rushed to Morehead City Tuesday night to help fight the fire aboard the tanker USNS Potomac.

Casualties reported from the fire are one known dead and 22 injured. Nineteen of the injured were treated at the Station Hospital here.

News of the disaster first reached Cherry Point at 7:10 p.m., and approximately 50 Marines and a foam crash truck were immediately dispatched to the fire. Also sent was a force of military police to keep the highways to Morehead City open and to control the flow of traffic.

At the disaster site, Cherry Point Marines were joined by four fire-fighting crews and their equipment from Camp Lejeune. Helicopters and crews were also alerted at Cherry Point and New River for the fire-fighting battle that was to last all night.

By 9 p.m., the ship, with approximately four million gallons of fuel aboard, was completely ablaze and the fire threatened to spread to a 10-million gallon fuel farm located approximately 500 feet away.

Flames carried by the rising tide also threatened portions of Morehead City bordering the harbor.

In the meantime, state police, National Guardsmen, Army and Navy tugs, some as far away as Wilmington, were dispatched to the disaster scene. Coast Guardsmen were also on hand.

Here at Cherry Point, the Station Disaster Control center was activated to coordinate the sending of additional men and equipment to the Morehead City area.

At the station hospital, all doctors, corpsmen, and other hospital personnel were alerted to take care of the casualties.

The mess hall was busily preparing meals for the fire-fighters and rescue workers. Additional men here were put on a standby basis for working parties.

At the station hospital, 18 members of the Potomac's crew and one relative of a crew member were treated for injuries and burns. Of this group, 10 were treated for minor burns and released from the hospital at 11:25 p.m., just a few hours following the outbreak of the fire.

Five of the not too seriously injured remained overnight at the hospital and were released Wednesday. Three fishermen in the vicinity of the blaze were held for treatment here overnight and Wednesday were transferred to the Johnson County hospital.

The remaining casualty, a member of the Air Force on leave and visiting his father at the time of the fire, was treated for second degree burns. He was transferred to the Seymour Johnson hospital, Goldsboro, for further treatment.

Week Proclaimed
Morehead City mayor George Dill and Beaufort mayor W. H. Potter have proclaimed next week as National Employ the Physically Handicapped Week, according to Mrs. Julia Tenney, manager of the Morehead City Employment Security office.

The Military Sea Transport Service tanker, USNS Potomac, still blazes brightly almost 14 hours after it exploded and started burning at 6:45 Tuesday night. The tanker was loaded with four-and-a-half million gallons of aviation fuel. At the time of the fire, the fuel was being pumped from the ship into fuel storage tanks, also containing aviation fuel, located about 550 feet from the ship. While the ship continues to burn, firemen keep a spray of water going on the two forward storage tanks to keep them cool. In the background is Beaufort.



The Potomac blaze silhouettes two harbor tugs which have just helped berth the Pallium, Shell tanker, left. Barely discernible in the right foreground is a Coast Guard boat.

Agencies Discuss caution Disaster Plan

A county disaster plan was discussed Monday night when representatives of agencies involved in disasters met at the home agent's office in Beaufort. The meeting was called by Garland Scruggs, chairman of the Red Cross chapter.

Present were personnel from the Red Cross, civil defense, rescue squads, medical association and the welfare department. The group talked about the possibility of formulating a county disaster plan, learning what supplies, equipment and personnel are available and where to get them if they are needed.

Mr. Scruggs reported that activities during the hurricane alert were discussed as well as ways of improving them. He said the organizations will have meetings to discuss the plans made at the joint meeting, after which another joint session will be called.

Dr. John Gainey, Morehead City, was one of the speakers, and mentioned the danger that could be created if there were an oil fire at the port. The next night the Potomac blew up.

Oil is floating away from the Potomac and will continue to do so for some time. Walter Friedrichs, state port operations manager, warns people that the tide will carry this oil into all inlets and streams and against all shorelines in the area, creating a fire hazard. Persons, for their own safety, should be extremely careful with matches, cigarettes and flames of any sort around waterfronts for the next few weeks.

Morehead City Hospital Staff Chief Says Thanks

Letters of thanks have been written by Dr. John Gainey, chief of staff of the Morehead City hospital, to hospital personnel and the chief medical officer at Cherry Point air base.

They express appreciation for the help given during Tuesday night's emergency when the tanker, Potomac, burned in Morehead City harbor.

If space permits, both letters will be published in Tuesday's paper.

Tide Table

Tides at the Beaufort Bar

HIGH	Friday, Sept. 29	LOW
12:06 a.m.	5:32 a.m.	6:18 p.m.
	Saturday, Sept. 30	
12:34 a.m.	6:27 a.m.	7:22 p.m.
12:58 p.m.		
	Sunday, Oct. 1	
1:27 a.m.	7:35 a.m.	
1:51 p.m.	8:29 p.m.	
	Monday, Oct. 2	
2:23 a.m.	8:44 a.m.	
2:46 p.m.	9:29 p.m.	
	Tuesday, Oct. 3	
3:22 a.m.	9:45 a.m.	
3:49 p.m.	10:31 p.m.	

Congressman to Visit Carteret Next Week

Congressman David N. Henderson of Wallace will be in the county Tuesday and Wednesday of next week, according to a telegram received from him this week by THE NEWS-TIMES.

The congressman said, "I plan to be in the courthouse at 1 p.m. Wednesday at which time I will be delighted to talk with any constituent having a particular matter he wishes to bring to my attention."

Chief Mate Says Fire Worst He Has Ever Seen

"This isn't the first tanker I've seen go up but I've never seen one afire as bad as this." This is how chief mate W. L. Maholland, Runnymede, Va., summed up the disastrous explosion and fire that rocked the Navy tanker Potomac Tuesday night in the Morehead City harbor.

Maholland was aboard the tanker when it was first ripped by explosion at 6:50 p.m. Following the blast, he went over the stern and swam to safety on Radio island.

Seaman Robert Bradford, Atlanta, Ga., was also aboard when the tragedy struck. "We saw the fire coming and were trying to get the ship away from the dock but we didn't have time to get the lines free before she blew. The fire came up the gangplank and the first explosion was right at midship," said Bradford Wednesday.

Bradford said that the explosion knocked him flat and then he got out of there, going over the stern of the ship. Bradford said that there was fire in the water near the gang plank and on the other side of the ship but none where he went in.

Not all of the ship's crew were on board at the time of the explosion. Second mate B. Forman of Brooklyn was at the movies in Morehead City and seaman Francis Lydon was downtown having a prescription filled.

Lydon said Wednesday that he and another seaman had been sprayed with fuel Sunday night when a gasket blew on the ship while it was docked at Savannah, Ga. The pair had been sent to the Morehead City hospital for examination as soon as the Potomac docked Tuesday afternoon.

Living quarters on the Potomac are divided into two sections. One section is located at approximately midship, below the pilot house and the other is near the stern on the first two decks. Approximately 11 men were in the forward quarters at the time of disaster and all have now been accounted for with the exception of a radio operator.

The first concern Wednesday morning of seaman Willie Thomas was to telephone his wife and family in Portsmouth, Va. Thomas was aboard the ship when it exploded. His wife said that she had heard of the disaster over television Tuesday night but was unable to learn the name of the ship until Wednesday morning.

Thomas and the other crew members of the Potomac had nothing but words of praise for the women on duty at the emergency clinic set up at the Morehead City hospital Tuesday night. "These ladies were really on the ball and should be given credit for the tremendous job they did," said Thomas.



Bert Forman, Brooklyn, N. Y., left, second mate aboard the Potomac, was at the movies in Morehead City when the fire broke out. W. F. Craig, Augusta, Tex., second engineer, escaped from the ship. They are chatting in the lobby of the Hotel Fort Macon, Morehead City.

Port Reopens To Traffic

- Coast Guard Keeps Close Watch
- Precautions Prevail As Long as Fire Burns

At 6:30 yesterday morning, 36 hours after the tanker Potomac blazed up, the Morehead City port area was reopened to traffic by the Coast Guard.

The Shell tanker, Pallium, which had just docked Tuesday night as the fire broke out, was not permitted to pump asphalt to Trumbull until yesterday morning. This was one of many precautions taken to prevent the fire from spreading.

Standing offshore Wednesday morning, barred from docking because of the fire, were Navy vessels and the Holland-America ship, Kamperdyk. The ships started moving into the port yesterday. Navy ships were reportedly on routine maneuvers in cooperation with the Marine Corps.

The Navy vessels sent in numerous fire and rescue parties to assist Cdr. George Philbrick, commanding officer of the Coast Guard cutter, Chilula, in controlling the fire. Commander Philbrick was in charge of port fire-fighting operations as soon as the Chilula returned from a logistics run.

The Chilula had been to Frying Pan lightship to carry supplies and was en route to Lookout shoals lightship when it got word of the fire. The ship was 70 miles from Morehead City at the time.

A Coast Guardsman said the glow from the fire could be seen from the Chilula when it got to within 30 miles of Morehead City.

Until commander Philbrick arrived, port security was in charge of Lt. John Riddell, commanding officer of Fort Macon group. The Chilula moved in on the fire, using foam to fight fires above the Potomac's fuel compartments, but after four hours withdrew from an obviously hopeless task.

It was decided to let the fire burn out since it was not creating further danger. Fire companies on shore were protecting nearby fuel tanks.

The Chilula is equipped with fire and salvage pumps that provide a hundred to a hundred and fifty pounds pressure on 2½-inch hoses. Nine hoses are aboard.

The Chilula had aboard sufficient foam to start fighting the fire. Lt. Cdr. H. A. Cretella says a three-gallon foam can is consumed in about 5 minutes. Cans of foam were rushed here from military bases by the van-load and were shuttled to the Chilula.

Assisting the Chilula were two Navy tugs, the Masopeia, Accomack, the Navy landing ships Terrebonne Parish and Waukiakum County, and fire and rescue parties from the aircraft carrier Valley Forge, and the assault transport, Oglethorpe. Both were lying offshore.

Three LCM's were standing by yesterday morning and will continue standing by until the fire burns out. The Coast Guard was not relinquishing its watch, because as long as there is flame, there is danger, commander Philbrick said.

Motel Owner Phones Alarm; Island, Causeway Residents Told to Get Out

Mrs. Julia Holt, owner and manager of the Bridgeview motel, Radio island, turned in the alarm on the little blaze that ended in the devastating fire at Aviation Fuel Terminal dock Tuesday night.

Mrs. Holt said she saw the flames under Bunch's fishing pier by the bridge. She phoned the Morehead City fire department and said, "There's a fire at Bunch's pier," and before she had hung up, she said the flames were zooming toward the state port, then working south toward the tanker.

She described the flame as "purplish gold" that lit up the entire bow of the Potomac. She said when the tanker started blowing its whistle to abandon ship, flames were leaping high and she took one of three fire extinguishers she had at the motel and thought she would lay protective fire repellent around her yard.

"I laughed at myself when I suddenly realized how hopeless that would be, so I put my colored girl in my car and took her to Merrimon. By the time I got back,

they wouldn't let me on the causeway," she related.

Everyone on the island and the causeway got out. They went to Beaufort and watched the blaze from there.

A man who reportedly was happily drunk refused to leave one of the places on the island and was carried out bodily by servicemen stationed on the island.

All who realized the danger left See EVACUEES, Page 3