

# EXPLOSION WRECKS

## BIG SUGAR PLANT

**Fifteen Men Taken to Hospitals**

**One Dead, Four Dying—**

**Many Still in Ruins.**

**PRODUCT WAS FOR ALLIES**

**Hints of Plot—Fireboats, All**

**Brooklyn Engines and a**

**Dozen More at Work.**

Twenty men—perhaps fifty—were buried in the débris of an eleven-story building of the American Sugar Refining Company's plant in Greenpoint, Brooklyn, last night when an explosion wrecked it.

At 1 o'clock this morning fifteen injured, one of whom died and four of whom are dying, had been taken out of the burning structure, and Fire Marshal Brophy said that at least a score of the 300 men who were at work in the building had not come out. At that time fire was raging, so that it was impossible to go into the place. Men who worked there were confident 100 men had been trapped in the building. At various hospitals between sixty and seventy men were treated for burns and other injuries.

### **The Dead.**

UNIDENTIFIED WORKMAN.

### **The Seriously Injured.**

BLETSKI, A., 281 Wythe Avenue, Brooklyn; Eastern District Hospital.

CEGAS, WILLIAM, 205 East Ninety-seventh Street, Manhattan; Eastern District Hospital.

DORETTE, SYLVESTER, 439 Monroe Street, Brooklyn; Williamsburg Hospital.

DICKSON, JOHN, 148 Tremont Street, the Bronx; Eastern District Hospital.

DISCOMB, ROBERT, 213 West Sixty-second Street, Manhattan; Eastern District Hospital.

HANZEL, SAMUEL, 230 Spencer Street, Brooklyn; Williamsburg Hospital.

LANE, JOSEPH, 38 West 137th Street, Manhattan; Williamsburg Hospital.

MILLER, WILLIAM, 71 North First Street, Brooklyn; Eastern District Hospital.

NALCHOWSKI, FRANK, 95 North Seventh Street, Brooklyn; Williamsburg Hospital.

PHILLIPS, A., 169 Allen Street, Manhattan; Eastern District Hospital.

PARMAN, LOUIS, 244 Boylan Street, Brooklyn; Williamsburg Hospital.

RIDDINGTON, CHARLES, 401 Broadway, Williamsburg; Williamsburg Hospital.

STENKOWIZ, JOHN, 227 Wythe Avenue, Brooklyn; Eastern District Hospital.

TENZA, GEORGE, 60 North Eighth Street, Brooklyn; Eastern District Hospital.

TERESCHIZ, C., 64 North Seventh Street, Brooklyn; Eastern District Hospital.

The company has large orders for sugar for our allies and the particular building in which the explosion occurred was the structure from which refined sugar was loaded for export to Europe. Fire Marshal Brophy has started an investigation of suspicious circumstances surrounding the explosion. One guess hazarded as to its cause early this morning was that an electric spark might have caused the explosion.

Chief Kenlon said at 2:30 o'clock that the fire was under control. "How many are caught in that building there is no telling until we search it," he said, "and that can't be done for some hours yet."

The building at that time was a tottering wreck. One side had fallen in and the walls left standing were staggering so that dynamiting them was considered by the firemen. The windows for blocks in every direction had been shattered by the force of the explosion.

Lieutenant Flinn at the Lee Avenue Police Station was just receiving the report of 100 Home Defense Guards when he heard the explosion. He held them, located the fire, and sent them to the scene, where they did good work holding back the crowds, in which were the wives and children of many men working in the building, as well as the relatives of 2,000 men who worked in other parts of the plant. The police got the service of 100 Naval Reserves to help handle the crowds.

The engineer at the plant said he believed the explosion had been caused through the combustion of "sugar dust" by a spark from some source. The building was used partly as a warehouse, and the loss was estimated at \$1,000,000.

With searchlights from boats in the harbor playing on the fire, which endangered the ten blocks of buildings of the great sugar plant, every piece of fire apparatus in Brooklyn, half a score of companies from Manhattan, and all the fireboats were pouring streams into the burning building at 1:30 o'clock to keep the flames from spreading.

The American Sugar Refining Company's plant in Williamsburg is its largest. It stretches from South Second Street, along Kent Avenue to Grand Street. At Third Street and Kent Avenue stood an eleven-story structure for the making of granulated sugar. It was in this building that the explosion occurred. A mixer reaches from the ground floor to the fifth floor. Just before midnight there was an explosion in this mixer which demolished the fifth, sixth, seventh, eighth, ninth, tenth, and eleventh stories, and took the roof off the structure.

### **300 Men in the Building.**

The 300 men at work on the night shift scurried to the fire escapes and across a bridge which led to the top floor of a seven-story structure across Kent Avenue. Most of those who got out went by this latter route. The débris from the explosion fell back upon the building, wrecking all but its walls, and a fiercely burning fire started in the highly inflammable sugar.

The first alarm was turned in from

**Continued on Page 4.**

*The New York Times*

Published: June 14, 1917

Copyright © The New York Times

# EXPLOSION WRECKS BIG SUGAR PLANT

Continued from Page 1.

Kent Avenue and South Fourth Street. This was followed in a few minutes by a second, and by the time firemen arrived they sent out a borough call summoning all the apparatus in Brooklyn, and a hurry call was sent to the Fire Department in Manhattan. The Manhattan apparatus made its way to the fire over the Williamsburg Bridge. The fireboats were on the scene in a few moments. Ambulances were called from every hospital in Brooklyn. The flames lit up the harbor for miles, and a great spiral of dense black smoke arose from the burning building.

From the first floor of the structure the firemen pulled fifteen men. Seven were sent to the Williamsburg Hospital, where one died a few minutes after admission. Eight were taken to the Eastern District Hospital, of whom it was said two could not live. Four other men taken out of the building were said to have no chance of recovery.

Fire Chief Kenlon reached the scene at 1 o'clock and took charge of the fire. He said he did not believe it would spread. More than 500 policemen, naval reserves and Home Defense League men were on guard to keep back a crowd estimated at from 15,000 to 20,000. There is a row of tenements opposite the plant and the tenants, in a frenzy of fear, dumped their belongings out of the windows and doors and dragged them away from the vicinity.

Deputy Police Commissioner Godley took charge of the police work.

Two ambulance surgeons from the Eastern District Hospital while taking a man from the building were struck by falling debris and painfully injured.

The Rev. William B. Farrell, pastor of St. Peter and St. Paul Church, South Second Street and Wythe Avenue, said he was in bed when the explosion occurred, and that it almost threw him to the floor. He went to the fire and administered the last rites of the Church to injured men.

John Bula of 18 North Ninth Street, Brooklyn, was working in the boiler room at the time of the explosion. He said he heard an awful roar and was thrown to his face, half covered with debris. He crawled through a window to a narrow courtyard with thirty other men. He said there were many men who did not get out of the building.

## Hints of a Plot.

Fire Marshal Brophy had his investigation of the fire under way soon after it started. He questioned scores of the men who got out of the building, in an effort to find out something about the explosion. None seemed to know anything except that the explosion occurred in the mixer. The possibility was suggested that some form of explosive might have been put into the raw sugar and fed into the mixer.

This recalled that many of the bombs found on sugar ships at the apex of the plotting of German spies were very simply made from placing in the bags of sugar chemicals which, with the sugar, formed a substance that would explode spontaneously. Even this simple bomb would not have been necessary to cause an explosion in the mixer.

In 1915 a long list of ships carrying sugar caught fire on the trip across the Atlantic. The first fires were supposed to be due to natural combustion or accident, but when they continued with frequency, there was no doubt that they were caused by incendiaries. After seven or eight plotters, barge-men, workmen in sugar factories, and German agents had been arrested early in 1916 the fires at sea ceased.

In the holds of some of the partially burned ships evidence was discovered that the sugar had been brought into contact with chlorate of potash to cause combustion. The losses from these fires in 1915 amounted to several millions of dollars. Nearly a dozen ships and barges with sugar on board were fired before the incendiaries were caught.