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THREE HALFPENCE

MANY KILLED AND BURIED BY EXPLOSION Ammunition Dump Disaster Traps Men Underground: Countryside Blitzed

MANY people are believed to have been killed and injured, and others buried, when an explosion, which rocked the West Midlands, occurred at an ammunition dump near Burton today. Those killed at the dump are estimated at about 20, and others were injured.

The worst results of the explosion appear to have been felt at a nearby works, where more than 40 people, who were working underground, are unaccounted for.

Offices at the works above ground were "blown into the air," and, according to eye-witnesses, simply vanished. This afternoon it was stated that there was no trace of the staff.

"The countryside in the area looks as if it has been blitzed," states an eye-witness.

"Buildings are completely wrecked and the entire area is pitted with gigantic craters."

Rescue squads were rushed to the scene from Derby, Euston and all the surrounding areas.

Civil Defence workers, R.A.F. personnel and Americans are feverishly at work to release the 40 persons believed still to be trapped underground.

Teams Of Firemen

Casualties were still being removed this afternoon from both places. At the dump, teams of firemen are working with gas apparatus in the fumes below ground, looking for people who are believed to be still trapped there. Convoys of ambulances are attending to casualties.

The blast of the explosion did damage to property several miles away. Many of the workers were blown into the air. One told a "Telegraph" representative that he was carried 50 feet by blast. He went back underground to look for his companions.

Apparently there was one large explosion followed by another later.

"It Was Hell"

One man said to a "Telegraph" representative: "It was indescribable. It was hell. The man next to me was killed and then the water came. I managed to get out."

Farm Vanished

At the rear of the works there is a colossal crater where formerly stood a farm and two cottages. The only person who was found among the wreckage is an elderly lady who was trapped by her legs. There is no trace of any other person.

Hundreds of cows and horses in the area have been killed by falling debris, and at one farm an entire herd was wiped out except for two cows.

Pumping Works

Workers are pumping the water from underground, and it is hoped that they will soon be able to rescue the men.

It was stated last afternoon that a good percentage of the men below ground are known to be safe. Workers are still fighting desperately to contact them through an air shaft.

Houses Rocked

One of the towns to feel the shock of the explosion was Tutbury. Houses were also rocked in the adjoining villages of Hatton, Egginton and Sudbury. Etwell and other villages nearer Derby were affected.

Flash Of Fire

Tremors were felt in Derby, and nearer the scene of the explosion residents dashed into the streets expecting their houses to collapse.

A woman living several miles from the dump told a "Telegraph" representative that she saw a "flash of fire in the sky, followed by a tremendous pillar of smoke."

Convoys of ambulances were later seen travelling towards the area of the dump.

Post Office "Jerked"

In another village one resident said: "I was in the Post Office. All at once the place gave two distinct jerks, then there was a slight pause and then it rocked again."

"When I got home I found that all our cupboards had been burst open."

Coventry Heard It

The explosion was also heard and felt at Coventry, Daventry and Northampton, where doors were blown open

by the blast, windows rattled, and many buildings shook.

The steeple of Horninglow Church, Burton, was made unsafe and people were warned to keep out of the churchyard in case it fell.

The sound of the explosion was freakish. An assistant in a sub-Post Office at Burton said that the ground shook as if there had been an earth quake. He had not heard any explosion, and the supplies of current had not been interrupted in the Tutbury area.

An eye-witness said: "Great clouds of smoke went up and enormous boulders were thrown in the air. A farm and a public house were wrecked by blast."



BURTON MAIL
28-11-44



On this day...

The daily column looking at the local news from five, 10, 25, and 50 years ago.

From the Burton Mail archives 1994

THE Government had laid £1 million on the table in a bid to realise its National Forest dream. The cash was being offered to anyone — from farmers to voluntary groups — who was prepared to plant trees, but they would first have to submit a competitive tender to win the money. The investment, intended to kick-start the project, which was three years old, was announced by Government ministers John Gummer and Earl Howe at a National Forest forum held in Burton.

Up until then only 500,000 trees had been planted in the National Forest area, despite the target being of 20 million over the following 10 years. Speaking to the forum's 300-strong audience, Mr Gummer stressed the importance of long-term planning. He said that he was irritated by people who criticised the time it had taken for the first national forest since the Normans to get off the ground.

"We are not about instant gardening. We are about changing the face of an important part of the United Kingdom and giving it a permanently different look for generations to come," said Mr Gummer. "Time will wait for any of us."

From the Burton Mail archives 1979

DETECTIVES were investigating the possibility of arson following a £15,000 blaze at Church Crookham, The Lee Memorial Buildings on the morning, fire officials said the cause of the blaze was a mystery and that the CID was investigating. By the time the Swadincote fire brigade arrived at the park the fire had a firm hold on the building. OXYGEN had to be given to two men who fought a kitchen fire which had been caused by an unattended chip pan at a Horninglow home. Fire broke out when a 54-year-old resident of Rowton Street, Horninglow, went into his front room, leaving chips cooking in the kitchen. When he returned the kitchen was in flames.

His neighbour, who had seen the smoke, rushed over to help, pausing only to shout for someone to call the fire brigade. The two of them were inside trying to put out the flames but the smoke was overpowering them when the firemen arrived. The firemen quickly extinguished the blaze and administered oxygen to the men, who were then taken to Burton District Hospital Centre for treatment.

From the Burton Mail archives 1954

"I AM ONE who believes that butchers should slaughter in their own slaughter-houses because that ensures cleaner meat," said Mr F T Emery at a meeting of Repton Rural District Council, when the question for the approval of the erection of a slaughter house at Willington was referred to. Mr Emery said that when the matter was discussed in committee there was a feeling that the application should not be supported. However, when it was pointed out the cattle would have to be transported four miles the feeling was reversed.

Expressing his belief of butchers slaughtering on their own premises, he added: "When we get conveyances, the floors of which are made of white slabs, then is the time to tell the butchers to go farther afield for slaughtering purposes. In addition there is much cruelty when cattle have to be driven along the roads."

"I believe that now we are getting much better meat than ever before, and if farmers keep up the standard, we shall not have much to grumble about. We have 17 slaughter-houses in the area and another one will not make the number too many."

DAY 3: FAULD EXPLOSION 60th ANNIVERSARY

LEWIS LOST HIS LIFE AT JUST 15

TOMORROW a couple will be remembering the youngest person to lose their life in the Fauld explosion. Lewis Frow was only 15 when he was working as a lamp boy at RAF Fauld. Only the teenager's belt, coat and lunchbox were ever found. By a strange twist of fate, one of the last people to see Lewis alive was the man who was to marry his elder sister. **KIM BRISCOE** looks at their story.

KEN McLeod was a young Scotsman posted to RAF Fauld 18 months before the explosion.

He was inspecting ammunition in an underground cavern in the old area of the mine on November 27, 1944.

While he was working he heard an anxious voice calling for the lamp boy. He saw Lewis answer the call and walk to his death.

Ken, now 81, was one of the lucky few who was trapped in the mine but who managed to escape with his life.

Along with two other airmen, Ken managed to find his way out of the mine by following the railway line that was used to transport the huge flow of bombs and ammunition into the caverns.

He was among the last people to get out alive, escaping with just scraps of his hand and bones, unchanged from the last because of the trauma they had experienced.

Ken says: "We heard this crump (an explosion of bombs) then there was a terrific rush of air."

"This was all happening more or less together and then the whole lot went up. It was terrible."

"I'm convinced they found something seriously wrong in the new area of the mine."

"Just before the explosion I heard a very anxious voice shouting for the lamp boy. It was a very agitated voice."

"I would say they were inspecting the bombs and found something unusual. They could not see what it was so they sent for the lamp lad. They were poking about and boom," he says.

Ken, who now lives in Tutbury Road, Burton, was working only 100 yards away from where Lewis had been dispatched, which was down a slope in another cavern.

He was working with four Italian prisoners of



IMAGERY... LEWIS FROW WAS ONLY 15 WHEN HE WAS KILLED IN THE FAULD EXPLOSION

war and two other airmen in an alabaster cavern packed with small arms ammunition.

He said: "The Italians were doing the donkey work, feeding us boxes of ammunition down a conveyor belt while we inspected it to see if it could be used again."

"With the 'big bang' they felt the rush of air trying to pull them out of this cavern into the main railway line."

"We were pulled down by the force of this air. We still didn't realise what had happened. I never saw the Italians again."

"It was pitch darkness, nothing, just a void."

Ken was cut by alabaster grit but nothing worse and he managed to recover himself and realise he had to escape.

"I felt the railway lines and said let's join hands

and get out."

It was dark and they were so disorientated that they realised for while they had been holding hands in a circle and getting nowhere, so they set off again.

"We started walking the wrong way, I tripped over a lever for changing the points. I realised we were going the wrong way so we turned around."

"After about three quarters of an hour to a hour we saw this pinhole of daylight in the distance. It was the main entrance."

"When we got to the entrance all hell let loose. Bits of incendiary bombs were raining down. There was mud, water and bodies here and there."

One of the airmen with Ken was taken straight to hospital with severe shock and Ken believes he only stayed sane by helping the rescue operation.

"The smell of the explosives was overwhelming. That night they asked for volunteers to help the mine rescue people. I was up all night. For me that was the worst part." A couple of weeks after, Ken went to the mine to get his tunic. It was still hanging exactly where he had left it, but the blue cloth had been turned green, probably because of the gas from the bombs.

A camel skin wallet had become black with patches of green and several pound notes had also turned green.

The caverns where Lewis has been sent were something he believes may have protected from the force of the blast.

It was not until six months later that he discovered that the boy he had seen disappearing down the tunnel to meet his fate was the brother of his future wife, Joyce.

The couple met a dance on VE night May 8, 1945, at RAF Fauld.

She worked at Fauld after the explosion as an 18-year-old, checking small arms ammunition.

On the day of the tragedy, Mrs McLeod was working in Burton and remembers how she heard a loud noise and a thud and then felt the earth trembling.

"I went outside and could see a huge mushroom shape in the sky," she says.

"At first I thought it was bombs being dropped by the enemy. Some time later I was told it was an explosion at the dump."

"I realised what I had seen was earth and boulders being thrown into the air by the explosion."

When she did get the dump, Joyce was told that her brother was safe and helping out with the rescue operation.

Several days later he had still not come home and the family received a telegram from the Ministry of Defence saying Lewis was missing, presumed dead.

Joyce's mother refused to accept the news and threw the telegram into the fire.

Thereafter she steadfastly refused to accept her son's death.

For the rest of the family the worst part was waiting to see if Lewis' body would be recovered.

Mrs McLeod says her father used to spend hours searching around the crater for sign of him.

She says: "To me it doesn't make any difference what the cause was. It won't bring back the dead. All I'm interested in is that at last there has been a memorial particularly near to the area where 18 bodies were never recovered."

"When we got to the entrance all hell let loose with bits of incendiary bombs raining down."



DAMAGE... another victim of the blast was a house in Hanbury which had its roof smashed by falling debris

TOMORROW: Lucky escape as worker changes his shift