

# BLAZING

## Were Bodies of Men

### Hurled Into Street By Terrific Gas Explosion.

#### Victims Were Captain Conway and Members of His Crew,

#### Who Had Just Entered Burning Plant of Prest-O-Lite Co.

#### Spark Started Fire in Which Many Were Injured -- Relatives of Two Men Witnessed Accident.

**THE INJURED.**

Captain John Conway, 55, burns of chest, back, head, face and arms. May die. Resides at 2629 Melrose avenue.

Richard Miller, 27, burns of face, hands and back. Serious. Resides at 719 Steiner avenue.

Edward Light, 23, burns of chest, back and arms. Serious, but not dangerous. Resides at 1017 East Court street.

Michael Mullen, 33, burned on face. Not serious. Resides on Ninth avenue, near Main street.

Harry Barlage, 36, burns of head, face, arms and hands. Serious, but not dangerous. Resides at 551 Dandridge street.

Edward Ader, 35, burned on body and face. Not seriously. Resides at 113 East Ninth avenue. Taken home.

Harry Lowry, of Engine Company No. 17; slight scalp wound.

Subpatrolman Harry Miller, bruised. Taken home.

A. F. Shane, Munro Hotel, bruised, not seriously. Taken to hotel.

Caught in a blast of fire that shot out of the burning building of the Prest-O-Lite Company's plant at 118 East Ninth avenue late yesterday afternoon, Chief Jack Conway, head of the Salvage Corps system in Cincinnati, was probably fatally burned and five members of the crew of Salvage Corps No. 1 also sustained burns. Four, it is said, were seriously injured.

A fireman, a patrolman and a citizen also sustained bruises when they were hurled many feet by the explosion. They were not seriously injured. Three small boys whose names were not learned were knocked down and slightly bruised.

Captain Conway and his men were lifted off their feet and hurled into the middle of the street. When the Chief's body, blazing like the flaming shaft of a skyrocket, shot out of the building and landed a fiery heap, there were shrieks of horror from hundreds of people who were watching the fire and an immense crowd soon collected.

Hurled in all directions, Conway's men closely followed him, the clothing of each victim a mass of flames. Hundreds of persons stood looking on, too paralyzed from terror to aid the tortured men until finally other members of the crew and the police rushed to their assistance, doffing coats as they ran and with the garments tried to extinguish the flames.

As the explosion was caused by the bursting of acetylene gas tanks, the deadly fumes, moist and highly inflammable, had saturated the clothing of the victims so that the task was not an easy one. Captain Conway seemed to have been in the center of the flames, for he was a living column of fire, his face and body entirely covered by blue flames.

#### Rushed to City Hospital.

Without a cry of pain, the hero of many fires tried to fight the enemy he had so often conquered. His arms worked like flails, as he ran blindly and when succor reached him he dropped to the street and rolled in the dirt. Coats were thrown about him, but as fast as the fire was smothered it sprang to life again from the heat of his charred clothing.

Even after he had been placed in an automobile, to be rushed to the City Hospital, the fire, seemingly reluctant to release its prey, blazed up time and again on the trip, despite the work of the men in the machine with him. Throughout the trip and when he was carried into the receiving ward, Captain Conway was conscious.

With the exception of Substitute Richard Miller, 17, of 719 Steiner avenue, the fire in the clothing of the other victims was soon extinguished. While not so badly burned as his chief, the gas had also penetrated all of his clothing and it was a difficult task to finally smother it. He was hurried to the hospital in the auto of the corps and may die. As soon as possible the other men of the crew who were burned seriously, Edward Light, 23, of 1017 East Court street, and Harry Barlage, of 551 Dandridge street, were sent to the hospital in patrol wagons. Salvagemen Edward J. Ader, 35, of 113 East Ninth avenue, and Michael Mullen, 33, of Ninth avenue, near Main street, were taken to their homes, only a few doors from the scene. Their relatives had been horrified witnesses of the terrible scene.

Receiving Physician Dr. Charles J. Jones and a number of internes were waiting to receive the injured men.

#### Captain Conway's Condition.

Although suffering excruciating agony from his fearful injuries, Captain Conway was cool and collected and asked the doctor to watch over his men and attend to their injuries first. When he reached the ward the terrible extent of his burns was revealed. The hair of his head and his eyebrows were burned away, and the eyes themselves looked scorched. From the nape of the neck almost to the hips the flesh of his back was literally cooked, while the skin of his face, arms and hands showed deep and painful burns.

Owing to the burns of the back Captain Conway was unable to lie down and was compelled to sit in a chair. Safety Director Cash, who accompanied the injured men to the hospital, recalling the gravity of Conway's condition, dispatched his automobile to St. Edward's Church, which brought Mgr. Murray, pastor of the church, to the scene, and he administered extreme unction to the brave fire fighter. Mrs. Conway had arrived in the interval, and, although nearly prostrated with grief, bore up well under the ordeal of watching

her husband's heroically suppressed agony, which only now and then was given vent by a groan. Fire Chief Bunker was also at the side of his injured comrade, and the occasional twitching of his lips and a suspicious moisture of the eyes told how deeply he felt poor Conway's plight.

Richard Miller, who, next to Captain Conway, is the most seriously injured, showed the same gameness as his chief. He has sustained secondary burns of the back, face and hands, which may terminate fatally.

Harry Barlage, who was taken to the hospital in Patrol No. 2, has painful and severe burns of the face, head, arms and hands. He bore himself equally courageously, and Edward Light, burned about the chest, back and arms, who occupies a cot beside him, smiled throughout the ordeal of the dressing of his wounds. Although neither Barlage nor Light are in a dangerous condition, their convalescence will take some weeks.

Harry Lowry, a member of Engine Company No. 17, who was passing the scene of the fire, rushed toward the building just as the explosion occurred. He was hurled to the street, and a piece of glass struck him on the head. He took a street car for the hospital. The glass had cut a three-inch gash in his scalp, which Dr. Jones sewed up.

#### Spark Started Fire.

The fire which caused the explosion started in the two-story brick building occupied by the Prest-O-Lite Company, dealers in gas used on automobiles. A tiny spark, caused by the contact of a gas tank, supposedly empty, fell into the open cock of the tank and set fire to what remained of the gas in it. Harry S. Schmeer, an employee of the place, had just trundled to the tank into the building. The flame coming from the tank communicated to other tanks containing small quantities of gas, but the slight explosion that followed did no damage.

Meanwhile, D. C. Coughlin, manager of the J. Assur, of a printing company in the adjoining building, telephoned to the Salvage Corps. There was another explosion just as Chief Conway arrived with his crew. Manning chemical fire extinguishers the Chief took his station at the entrance of the place and shouted to Captain Wm. Curran to send in an alarm from Box 279. Just as Curran pulled the box, which is at Eighth avenue and Walnut street, there was a third explosion, the most terrific of all, and a sheet of flame enveloped the crew and hurling them outward.

A fire-proof iron ceiling in the first floor and the office adjoining curved up like sheet lead under the heat of the burning gas, and was blown in shreds to the street. Bits of iron, almost white hot, scattered like bullets and rained against the buildings on the opposite side of the street. Several of the tanks in the front part of the building were also hurled into the street. In a moment almost the interior of the building had been stripped to the laths, even in places where the fire had not approached and most of the furniture was wrecked by the blast. The plastering on the walls powdered like so much flour.

R. A. Kramer, of 811 Clark street, a stenographer in the offices had a narrow escape as he had just rushed out of the building when the explosion occurred. Following the third explosion there were two more in rapid succession, and the crowd outside became panic stricken. The employees in the place, who had remained in fighting the first almost to the last minute, fled also, knowing that 1,000 full tanks of the gas were stored in the rear. However the doors leading into this storeroom were tightly closed and the flames did not reach them.

The concern was also fortunate in having just shipped a carload of tanks away, otherwise a more terrible accident might have resulted. The building which belongs to the Assur Printing Company adjoining is also occupied by the Johnson School of Business and the explosion caused pupils to rush from the building. A number of windows in this place were shattered.

Every door and window in the Prest-O-Lite concern was entirely blown out. A. F. Shane, a guest at the Munro Hotel, was just bringing his machine to a stop in front of the place when the third explosion occurred. He was hurled out of his auto a distance of 20 feet, and the machine was

partly turned over. He was bruised and was taken to his hotel.

Subpatrolman Harry Miller, of the Second District, was also knocked several feet by the force of the explosion, and received bruises which necessitated his removal to his home.

Salvageman Richard Miller, who may die of his injuries, had been with the corps just a day. Up to recently he had been acting Captain of the fire company in Home City, having been detailed there by Chief Bunker to instruct the men.

Michael Mullen, of the crew, stated that he saw the flash before the explosion and was standing at the side of Chief Conway at the time. He dropped to the floor and saved himself from serious injury. Captain Conway half turned and threw his coat over his face to ward off the flames.

When the still alarm was received by the Salvage Corps, Safety Director Cash was seated in front of the headquarters of the crew. He accompanied the crew to the scene. Chief Bunker, Captain Conway and Director Cash were to have made an inspection tour last night, and were awaiting Chief Bunker, who was due in a few minutes.

#### Mrs. Conway Notified.

Peter J. McCarthy, well known Democratic politician and member of the Board of Review, saw Captain Conway hurled from the building, and he at once telephoned to Mrs. Conway at her residence, 2629 Melrose avenue, Walnut Hills, and she hurried to the hospital.

Chief Conway has had many thrilling experiences, and was known as a fearless officer. He entered the City Fire Department in 1884 and was assigned to the Giff's Company. Shortly after that he was made Lieutenant and later Captain. He was in line to be appointed Fire Marshal when the Unions' Association, recognizing his ability, offered him the Superintendency of the Salvage Corps. At the disastrous Onken fire, November 9, 1891, Conway, with the late Fire Marshal, Phil Hurley, and Firemen Anderson and Booklage, was standing on top of a high ladder when it broke. Booklage and Anderson were killed, and Hurley and Conway sustained injuries which kept them in the hospital for months.

The Prest-O-Lite Company, suffered a loss of about \$2,000. The building is owned by the Children's Home, having been a donation from the estate of Briggs Swift. It was used by the Salvage Corps for its wagons until the West End house was established.

The Salvage Corps is a private institution belonging to the fire insurance companies, which pay a certain percentage of their gross premium income toward its maintenance. It is governed by local insurance men.

The Salvage Corps organization maintains accident insurance on the life of each member of the fire fighting crews to the amount of \$2,500, the premium of which is paid out of the funds of the Corps. There is no distinction made as to position occupied, the insurance being the same for all employees.

Two sisters of Captain Conway and Rev. William C. Conway, of the Church of Assumption, who is no relative of the injured man, but his pastor, called at the hospital later. By that time Mrs. Conway had somewhat recovered from her prostration and became the guest of Superintendent Fehrenbach for supper. Captain Conway is very anxious to go home, and if possible his wish will be gratified this evening, conditions permitting.

Dr. John C. Oliver made a thorough examination late last night, and stated that Chief Conway may recover. The physician found that the burns had not gone as deep as was at first supposed, and as the Salvage Chief has a wonderful constitution, this may pull him through.