

# 31 BLOWN TO DEATH AS QUARRY BLAST JARS 2-STATE ZONE

Premature Explosion of 21  
Tons of Gelatinite Near Easton  
Is Felt Over 50-Mile Radius

ALL IN WORKING PARTY DIE

Children Hurlled From Seats in  
School a Mile Away—FBI  
Joins Investigators

By MEYER BERGER

Special to THE NEW YORK TIMES.

EASTON, Pa., March 26—Thirty-one men were killed outright at 9:18 A. M. today by the premature explosion of twenty-one tons of gelatinite at the Sandt's Eddy plant of the Lehigh Portland Cement Company quarry just west of the Delaware River about seven miles north of Easton.

Federal, local, county and State officials and agents are investigating the cause of the explosion, but it seemed the consensus tonight that the cause may never be established. Every human being within sight of the blast was blown to bits. The bodies were scattered over the landscape.

Cities, towns and hamlets forty to fifty miles away reported effects of the blast. Windows were blown out, doors swung open or shut, ceiling plaster rained down and bus drivers on the highways and farmers on their tractors ten to fifteen miles around were jarred or shaken.

Sixty-one children in the Lehigh consolidated school at Mud Run, about one mile southwest of the quarry, were thrown from their seats and showered with glass fragments. The concussion blew out every pane in the two large classroom windows, opened the plaster at all seams and even broke the window sashes.

#### Pupils Treated on School Lawn

The shattered panes flew twenty-five feet across the rooms in shards small as needles, some as large as dinner plates. The two teachers, Mrs. T. Frank Leh and Mrs. R. A. Halderman, both of Nazareth Township, were cut on the head, hands and face, but they got to their feet, unlimbered their first-aid kits and treated the pupils on the lawn.

Harold Greger of Mud Run, a pupil, was doing sums at his school desk when the explosion came. He saw dust rising from the floor, where ceiling fragments settled almost immediately. Glass flew past him and clinked and tinkled on desks all around him. He was jolted into the aisle with others. Girl pupils screeched and charged for the doors.

Francis Klein, 17 years old, son of Christian Klein who owns a Mud Run farm across the way from the little brick schoolhouse, was thrown from his couch by the explosion. He ran into the road, saw a great cloud of smoke and dust lift from the ridge along the top of the quarry and heard the school children screaming.

He and his father picked out two children who seemed the most badly hurt—Magdalene Borbas, 9 years old, and Orrin Stevens, 7, both of Mud Run, and both cut in the head by glass—and raced them in the Klein car to Easton Hospital. Eleven other school children were brought in by farmers.

Examination disclosed that none of the children had suffered more than shock and superficial cuts. None but the Borbas child and the Stevens boy were kept at the hospital and even their cases were not regarded as serious. School shut down for the day, possibly for a longer period.

#### Will Investigate Plane Rumor

Since no one was able to account for the blast, all manner of rumors were set afloat. One most widely circulated was that an airplane passed over the quarry at the moment of the explosion. Company officials seemed to give no credence to this story, although Easton Airport is less than three miles away and planes are constantly over the quarry.

Dr. David F. Bachman of Bethlehem, coroner for Northampton County, said he intended to include the airplane rumor in his investigation of the explosion. He said that it would have been possible for some one flying overhead to have discharged a rifle bullet into the explosive. Company officials, on the other hand, said it took a spark to touch off gelatinite.

The Lehigh Portland Cement

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Air view of the quarry taken shortly after the explosion, which occurred at 9:18 yesterday morning

Associated Press

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plant sets west of the Lackawanna Trail which runs along the west bank of the Delaware. Farther west, and high on a ridge, stands the quarry, a tremendous pocket of bluish-gray limestone facing the river. The blasting party was atop the quarry, looking down into the hole.

It had drilled about forty holes on the ridge, along a front of about 400 yards. The holes ran to a depth of from 90 to 100 feet. If all the holes had been filled with the twenty-one tons of explosive and if the entire charge had been touched off, it would have blown about 100,000 cubic yards of rock from the quarry face.

Dr. Bachman said that it looked as if the work party had put part of a charge in at least two of the drilled holes at the extreme northern end of the row. Around these holes the earth seemed freshly broken. The rest of the explosive, as nearly as could be figured out, was still in cases between the other holes.

The premature blast left no great scar in the ground where it exploded, but this, according to company officials, was characteristic of gelatinite when not confined. It spent most of its power first upward, then horizontally in a fan-wise direction, strongest to the southwest. It broke branches off the few trees near by.

### Death Believed Instantaneous

The working party on the ridge probably never knew what happened. Death must have been instantaneous for every man in it. Two hundred feet down in the quarry—"the hole" the men call it—another working party of about fifty men heard the terrific blast. They knew it was premature. The task of placing the charge was not scheduled for completion before noon. They all escaped injury.

Counted as most fortunate was Harry Dimittio, one of the men assigned to the blasting party. About two or three minutes before the explosion he had been sent down the hill to the plant to work on a piece of machinery. He was still within a hundred yards of his destination when the earth shook and the dark cloud rose against the sky.

Dr. Bachman tentatively fixed the time of the explosion at 9:18 A. M. A watch found in the pocket of one of the men supervising the placing of the charge, stopped at that moment. The two school house clocks stopped at different times—one at 9:24, the other at 9:17. Dr. Bachman was inclined to think the dead man's time piece told the tale.

Between the Lehigh Portland Cement Company plant and the river, some 200 feet down from the lime ridge, is a row of gray stucco company houses. These were undamaged. The path of the blast was high over them and beyond, into New Jersey's side of the Delaware. Windows were broken in Washington and in Phillipsburg, N. J.

### Bus, 15 Miles Away, Is Shaken

Windows were shattered in Allentown, Pa., eighteen miles to the southwest. Francis K. Bennett, driving a bus on William Penn Highway past Bethlehem, fifteen miles from Sandt's Eddy, felt the bus shake and shiver under him. The windows shivered and rattled. Paul Siegel, a farmer at Bushkill, ten miles away, was all but dislodged from his rubber-tired tractor in the field.

Towns and hamlets within fifteen to twenty miles of Sandt's Eddy showed gaping windows after the blast. At Mary Koch's Sandt's Eddy Hotel the plaster came down from the ceiling and every window was shattered. Buck Freeman's Mineral Springs Hotel, a half mile south on the Lackawanna Trail, lost twenty windows. The owner,



The Lehigh Consolidated School at Mud Run, about a mile southwest of the quarry, where sixty-one children were blown out of their seats. Note windows shattered by the force of the blast.

Associated Press Wirephoto

camp patrolled the area in jeeps. Investigating agents included representatives of the Federal Bureau of Investigation; the Army, Navy and United States Bureau of Mines.

None of the agents would discuss their findings.

The list of the dead included George E. Hadesty Jr., of Allentown, Pa., head of the Allentown office of the Hercules Powder Company and an expert on explosives; Ray E. Garnett of Wilmington, Del., employed by the Hercules Powder Company, and William L. Lanahan of New York City, a salesman for the Hercules Powder Company.

a former pugilist, was thrown clear of his bed.

A high school boy wandering through a meadow some 400 to 500 yards from the quarry came upon a five-dollar bank note, apparently torn from some victim's pocket. It was riddled as though with bird shot.

In Clinton, N. J., some twenty miles east, residents felt their homes shake.

"It was like some very heavy object was dropped on the earth from the sky," a road-house owner said.

The frightened and the curious, in spite of repeated warnings from local defense leaders, thronged the highway approaches to the quarry. They flooded local newspaper offices with telephone calls. Twelve physicians and six nurses who set out for the quarry were hampered in their run. As it turned out, speed would not have helped. The doctors found no one to treat.

In Easton, incidentally, the explosion did considerable damage. Easton lies about eight miles south of the quarry. Helen's Floral Shop in South Main Street lost its plate glass front. The Northampton County courthouse, perched on

solid rock in the town, lost a window, one in the Civilian Defense Council office.

Miss Kathryn Werkheiser, employed in the business office of the Easton Express, had the experience of hearing the explosion twice. She was talking on the telephone with her mother who lives on Richmond Road near the cement plant when she heard the muffled crack of the blast and of falling glass. A moment later the Express office shook under the concussion.

### Army and Navy Join in Inquiry

All through the day and late afternoon, relatives came to the main office of the cement plant to check with officials on their dead. In the row of company houses women sat red-eyed, surrounded by consoling neighbors. Several of the young men who died in the explosion, it turned out, were to have left the village tomorrow to report to their draft boards.

State police from various districts in Pennsylvania and from New Jersey were posted as guards around the plant to keep traffic flowing and to prevent the curious from crowding to the scene of the explosion. Soldiers from a near-by