

# 11 KILLED, 27 HURT IN BLAZING BLIMP'S FALL IN CHICAGO

## Airship Plunges Through Glass Roof of Illinois Trust and Savings Bank.

### TANKS BURST IN ROTUNDA

#### Employes Enveloped in Fiery Mass—Four Occupants of the Balloon Jump.

### PANIC IN THE LOOP DISTRICT

#### Exhibition Flight Was Being Given —Cause of Fire Unknown— Inquiry Started.

*Special to The New York Times.*

CHICAGO, July 21.—Eleven persons were killed outright and twenty-seven were injured late this afternoon when the dirigible balloon, "Wing Fool," assembled for test and exhibition purposes, caught fire while flying above the Loop business district and plunged 1,200 feet in a blazing mass through the glass roof of the Illinois Trust and Savings Bank, at the corner of La Salle Street and Jackson Boulevard.

The dead are:

JAMES CARPENTER, 10 years old, messenger, Illinois Trust and Savings Bank.

EARL H. DAVENPORT, White City publicity agent, former sporting writer.

MARIE FLORENCE, bank employe.

IRENE MILES, bank stenographer.

CARL OTTO, bank telegrapher.

HENRY WEAVER, mechanic of the balloon.

JOSEPH SCANLAN, 14 years old, bank messenger.

EDWARD MUNZNER, bank correspondence clerk.

EVELYN MEYER, bank stenographer.

Two unidentified women.

Most of the dead were employes of the bank, who were trapped in the building and perished in a rain of fire caused by the explosion of the balloon's gasoline tanks as they hit the floor of the rotunda, where more than 200 bookkeepers and clerks, nearly all women, were working.

#### Four Jumped with Parachute.

The "blimp," which was owned by the Goodyear Tire and Rubber Company of Akron, Ohio, had been flying above the loop for several hours when the accident occurred. Thousands witnessed the disaster.

When above the bank a spurt of flame was seen to shoot from the top of the gas bag near the centre. The crowds gathered on the streets to watch the flight saw the great mass quiver as it began its plunge.

Four of the balloon's five occupants jumped with parachutes. Two of these landed safely in the streets as the "blimp" struck the roof of the bank with a crash audible throughout the Loop district.

It seemed, according to the survivors, that the entire bank was instantly on fire. Breaking through the iron supports holding the glass overhead, the fuselage of the balloon, with two heavy rotary engines and several gasoline tanks, smashed to the floor.

The tanks exploded, scattering a wave of flaming gasoline over the workers within a radius of fifty feet. A panic ensued.

There were only two exits through which the employes could leave the wire cage which surrounded the rotunda. Men and girls, with clothing flaming, fought their way through these. Girls on the second floor ran screaming to the windows and several jumped to the street.

Soon the marble rotunda was cleared except for the dead, whose bodies were buried under the flaming mass, and some who crawled feebly away from the fire, their clothes slowly burning off.

#### Intense Heat Delayed Rescues.

The intense heat made rescue work impossible until after the Fire Department arrived. It was thirty minutes before the bodies under the fuselage could be dragged out. They were burned almost beyond recognition.

Meanwhile ambulances from every hospital and undertaking establishment near the centre of the city arrived and the police threw a cordon about the place. Dozens of persons were found to have been more or less severely cut by the shower of glass which preceded the explosion. The rescue work was watched by a crowd of 20,000 on La Salle Street and Jackson Boulevard, while more thousands took places of vantage on the buildings nearby.

None of the survivors of the balloon's crew could ascribe a definite cause for the fire. Two theories were offered. One was that a spark from the rotary motors set the gas afire. The other was that the balloon was overcharged and that the sun's rays caused it to expand and burst, the fire following the

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contact of the gas with sparks in the motors.

It was intended to charge the bag with pure hydrogen gas, which is not explosive. It was conjectured, however, that a quantity of oxygen became mixed in the charging process.

## Pilot Shouted a Warning.

When Jack Boettner, an employe of the Goodyear Tire and Rubber Company and pilot of the craft, saw the first flames he shouted warnings to the others in the gondola and jumped. All were protected by parachutes attached to their bodies by belts. Henry Weaver and Harry Wacker, mechanics, soon jumped also. E. H. Horton, a photographer for a morning newspaper, was the next to leave.

The fifth man, Earl H. Davenport, publicity agent for the White City Amusement Park, where the "blimp" had its hangar, did not get out. His body struck the roof of the bank and was burned to a crisp.

Weaver's parachute caught fire, and he was overtaken by the flaming balloon and carried down to death.

Boettner and Wacker landed practically unhurt—Boettner on the roof of the bank and Wacker in the street. Norton suffered broken legs and severe internal injuries. His recovery is doubtful.

The other dead were crushed and burned in the rotunda of the bank. The body of one was caught under one of the heavy rotary engines and could not be dislodged until the fire was put out.

Where the gas bag lit and burned, the roof caught fire and it was nearly an hour before firemen on the roof could quench the flames there.

## \$50,000 in Bonds Burned.

The extent of the damage to the bank through the burning of its records is not known. It was said by an official that a package of \$50,000 in Government bonds was burned. Cashiers and tellers returned with the firemen later to lock up hundreds of thousands of dollars in currency in the huge vaults, which were untouched by the blaze.

Miss Harriet Messinger, the telephone operator, who sat at her switchboard on

the balcony above the rotunda, told the story of the disaster.

"There was a shadow," she said, "and I looked up to the roof. Instantly a crash sent the glass flying on the heads of those below. The girls hesitated, many of them stunned by glass or too frightened to run.

"Then the huge machine came through. It seemed to fill the bank with flames that searched out every corner. The heaviest part, the engines and tanks, fell to the floor and exploded.

"I ran to a window and called for help. Then I started to jump but no one made a move to catch me, so I ran to the street safely."

## Pilot Tells of His Fall.

Boettner, pilot of the dirigible, showing no excitement after his 1,200 feet jump for life, gave his description of the accident in the office of the chief of police, whither he had been rushed by detectives, who had placed him in custody while he was wandering through the crowds looking for his fellow passengers.

"We were at least 1,200 feet above the ground when I first felt the heat of the flames," he said. "Looking back, I saw fire on both sides of the bag.

"I watched the flames for a couple of seconds before I said anything to the other fellows. Knowing that the ship was finished, I shouted 'over the top, everybody!' As I yelled, I felt the frame buckle, but by this time they were beginning to slide over the sides. I think I was the last to jump, as I saw all the parachutes in the air when I was hanging on ready to drop. I saw that one of the parachutes was on fire.

"I must have had about a fraction of a second start of the ship, as it passed me when it fell. My parachute opened perfectly.

"I fell about seventy-five feet when it spread out. I began to drift a bit when the flaming ship fell by me.

"The worst sensation I experienced was after my parachute opened. I began sliding down rapidly, and looking up, I saw that it was beginning to burn. In an instant I began to whirl, and I went so fast that I could not see around where I was falling. I kept whirling in the air until I struck the ground.

"I must have been a little dazed when I landed, as I didn't know where I was until I rolled over and discovered that I was looking down into a street. Realizing that I had fallen on top of a building, I began to explore, finding a fire escape, I started down. It must have been a high building, as it seemed a long way down the ladders.

"I started toward the lake, when I saw the crowd about the building where the ship had fallen. I was trying to find some of the other fellows, when the detectives picked me up.

## May Have Caught from Sparks.

"I don't know how the fire started. Perhaps it caught from sparks going out of the exhaust are covered with a hood,

and I never heard of any of these machines catching fire in that way.

"The only other way it could have started was from the static in the air. We were unusually high, and atmospheric conditions over the lake were not very good when we started. The La Rhone rotary tractor type of motor, which was used in this machine, was working perfectly on the two other flights we made after dinner. It was running well when I discovered the fire, although the mixture might have been a little too lean. I have never seen an engine of this type backfire through the hood strong enough to carry any sparks. It was hell about the other fellows. I guess my guardian angel pulled me through."

The pilot told Chief of Police Garrity that he had been a civilian dirigible pilot instructor for the Aviation Department during the war. He had had about three years' experience and had been stationed along the Atlantic Coast in 1918.

Earlier in the afternoon Boettner had piloted two flights, one of which was the maiden voyage of the airship. The passengers on the first trip were pilots and mechanics of the Goodyear Company. At this time the balloon was inflated to capacity.

In the next flight, Colonel Joseph Morrow, and Major Clarence Moranville, both of the United States Army, were taken up for a fifteen minute flight. During both these flights considerable gas had been valved out, according to the pilot. On its last flight the dirigible was only capable of carrying five passengers.

Major Moranville had been sent to Chicago, according to the pilot, to purchase the dirigible for the Government.

After the accident the Major said that he had made a flight in the balloon and knew the cause of the fire.

"I know what caused the fire, but I will not say at this time," he said. "I was going to pilot the machine on its last trip, but I changed my mind."

## Making Tests for Passenger Service.

E. E. Helm, publicity agent for the Goodyear Company, said that the machine was a sister ship of the A-4, which is in the service of the army. It was 186 feet long, about fifty wide, and carried a gondola capable of holding ten persons, including a crew of two and eight passengers.

"It was the intention of the company to establish later a passenger service," said he. "Our hangars at Akron are still in the hands of the army, and to make test flights we decided to use the hangars at White City, which are the best in the Middle West available for our use.

"We shipped the balloon three weeks ago. The craft was not considered safe

until it had been thoroughly tested, and that was the purpose of today's flight.

"We left White City this morning and flew around until noon, when we landed at Grant Park. There had been some army officers as passengers in the morning, and it was our intention not to take any one with us on the later flight, but the photographer and Mr. Davenport pleaded to go, against our warnings, and we allowed them to do so."

## Parachutes Caught Fire.

R. R. Renisch, an architect whose offices are on the top floor of the Insurance Exchange Building, 175 West Jackson Boulevard, was standing at his window watching the big dirigible when it caught fire.

"I saw five men leap out," said Mr. Renisch. "The craft was about 200 feet higher than the point at which I stood. A man, who I presume was the pilot, suddenly stood up, waved his hands to his companions and leaped over the side of the car. He dropped about seventy-five feet, when his parachute opened and he went calmly sailing down.

"Other occupants of the airship followed the first man in his leap for life. However, their momentary delay in comprehending their peril lessened their chances of saving their lives. A second after the first man had made his descent, flames enveloped the entire bag.

"Three of the parachutes caught fire

as they became detached from the car. They seemed to burn rapidly in the air, the men attached to them whirling round and round and descending faster and faster.

"One of the burning parachutes was completely consumed after it had only partly opened, and the unfortunate man holding its rope went down like a rocket and fell right through the roof of the Illinois Trust and Savings Bank.

"I saw another man, who was holding to the second blazing parachute, strike the ledge of our building, narrowly miss making a footing and go swinging on.

"The third man with a burning parachute crashed against a window of the Western Union Building, smashed it, and swung back out again. I don't know where he landed.

"The last of the parachutes only slightly caught fire, and I saw the man hanging to it make a safe landing in the street.

"As the airship fell through the skylight of the bank I distinctly saw in the midst of the smoke and fire, the terror-stricken face of a man. A gust of smoke blotted out his face, and then the mass disappeared from view into the interior of the bank."

## Sheets of Flame in the Bank.

C. C. Hayford, of the credit department of the Illinois Trust and Savings Bank, who escaped injury, said that a sudden terrific crash, accompanied immediately afterward by a heavy ex-

plosion and a chorus of screams, interrupted him at his work.

"My office is at the extreme south section of the bank floor," said Mr. Hayford. "I ran out and an explosion followed by flames hurled me over. I got up and some one ran into screaming, 'Oh, it's raining hell!'"

"A series of explosions came, great sheets of fire rising before me. Between the flashes I saw the struggling of persons in the midst of the flames.

"I turned sick. A man—I don't know his name—staggered out of a cage, carrying the body of a girl. His own face was covered with blood. I saw both men and women making a rush for the door, so I followed."

Soon after the accident the police, Coroner Hoffman, and the State Attorney's office began conducting an investigation to determine who was responsible for sending the balloon on a trial flight over the loop.

## Guard Treasure in Vault.

The Illinois Trust and Savings Bank will open for business tomorrow at the usual hour, James Hutchinson, Vice President, announced tonight.

Four hours after the explosion firemen had cleared away the debris and carpenters were building benches and desks.

Six policemen stood guard over the vault during the night. More than \$100,000 was said to be inside of it.

The destroyed balloon was valued at \$100,000.