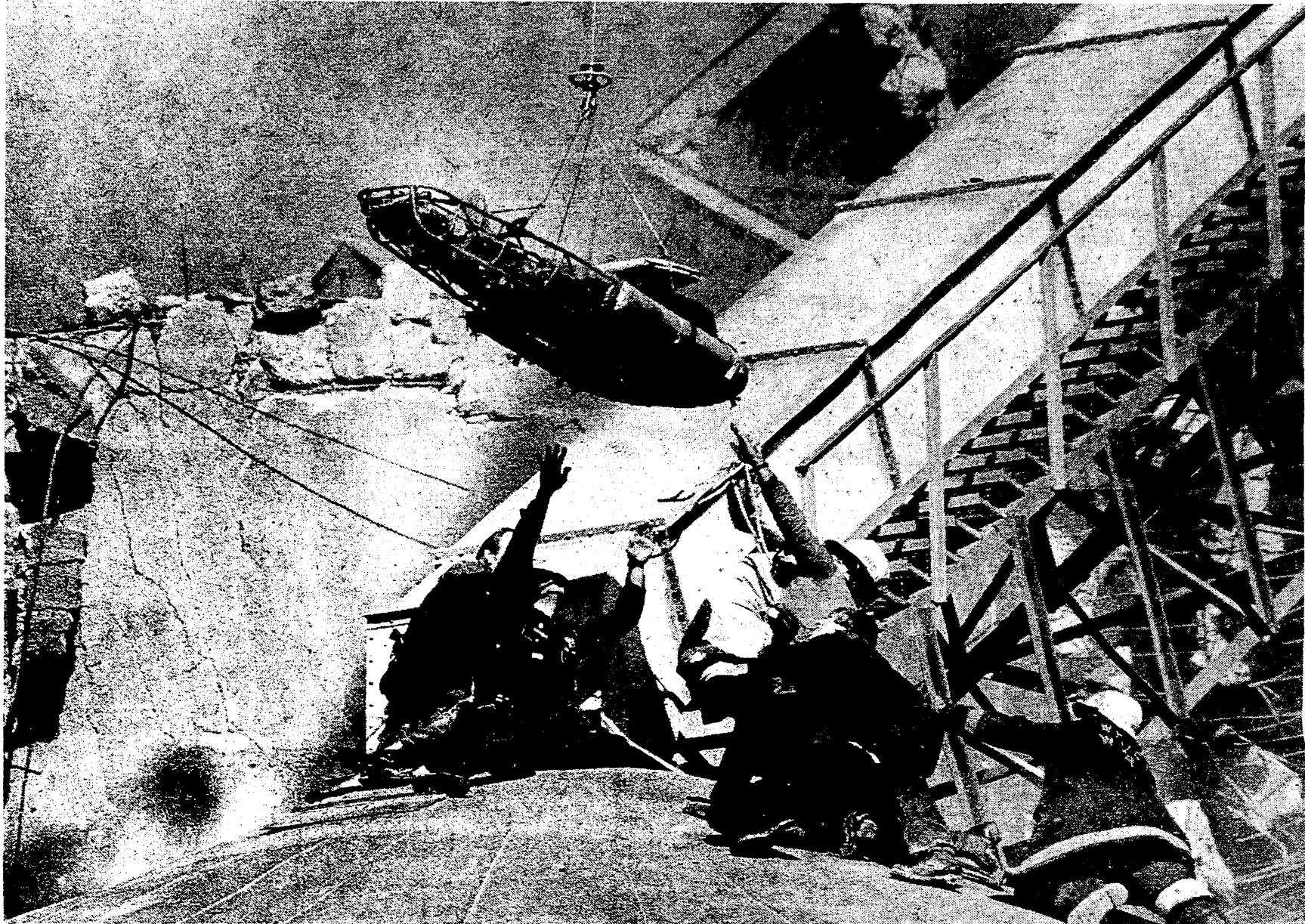


Blast rocks West Bank; 3 are dead, 20 missing



(States-Item photo by William F. Haber)

Additional photos, Page A-2, A-4

By WALT PHILBIN and JOHN POPE

A series of explosions ripped through the Continental Grain Co. elevator in Westwego today. Three deaths were confirmed and the plant manager said more than 20 persons are missing.

Two hours after the blast, 10 persons had been taken to West Jefferson General Hospital and to Ochsner Foundation Hospital. Some were listed in critical condition.

The blast sent a pall of black smoke towering into the sky and rained debris across the Mississippi River into Uptown New Orleans.

David Borchert, plant manager, said the explosions originated in an area called the "head house," which transports grain to and from various parts of the silos. It is about 250 feet high.

"All it needs is a spark, oxygen and dust in suspension to cause an explosion," he said. The blast caused the "head house" to fall off and it landed on a two-story cinder block office building, he said.

"The number of missing persons is in the 20s," Borchert said. He added that 125 persons work at the grain elevator and that between 50 and 60 persons were on duty when the blast occurred shortly after 9 a.m. There also were nine federal grain inspectors working when the disaster hit, he said.

A three-story office building which survived the explosions has been set up as a temporary morgue.

Huge piles of collapsed concrete rubble littered the scene, with fires burning in many places. Steel girders were twisted and torn.

Joseph Vincent was one of the witnesses of the blast. "I felt the concussion — or boom — in the kitchen of my brick home in Terrytown. I happened to remark there must have been an explosion or a sonic boom from some aircraft. Terrytown is several miles away from the site of the blast."

Another witness, Jeff Duvall, a construction worker who was using a bulldozer to try to reach casualties believed buried in the rubble, said, "It sounded like a big damn explosion. I was standing right next to it."

Paula Gassen said, "I live just a block away, and my whole house shook. The stereo went out for a little while and the lights went out, too."

"I was with her; I was scared," said Kim Sill.

Hundreds of people came to the Turn to Page A-4, Column 1

Deputies, firemen stretch for litter carrying victim of grain elevator explosion

'It looked like an atomic blast'

By SUSAN FINCH and PATRICIA GORMIN
Brian Sondes was taking an early morning jog through the Audubon Park batture area today when suddenly the chilly air rang with a "loud, thunderous explosion."
Across the Mississippi River at Westwego, he saw the Continental Grain Co.

elevator ablaze. "Flames came out of the top of the elevator for a little while. It looked like a gas burner," Sondes said.
"It seemed like it exploded outward and then everything fell inward," said Sondes. "It looked like your normal atomic explosion."
Chester Hebert, owner of a gas sta-

tion in Westwego was sitting at his dining room table about a mile from the blast site when the explosion came shortly after 9 a.m.
"The table was lifted off the floor and I was knocked out of my chair," said Hebert. "All the windows rattled and I thought there was an earthquake."

A crowd gathered on the levee in Westwego near the disaster site. Many of the onlookers were awaiting word of family members unaccounted for in the elevator area.
Rose Schrefel, standing by with relatives, was concerned about her husband Cedric. She said she heard of the blast "when one of my girl friends called up." Leaving two small sons at home, she went to the levee, where she stood in tears maintaining her vigil.

Three men who got off work at the elevator at 7 a.m. and went back briefly at 8 to pick up their Christmas turkeys termed themselves "very lucky" not to have been there when the blast came. They are Wallace Stevens, Edmond Collins and August Taylor.
Stevens said he heard the blast and headed back toward the scene, and saw one man carried out "barely breathing." He said he saw seven or eight

—Mitchell Navero, 41, of Marrero; treated for minor burns and abrasions; expected to be released from hospital emergency room.

—Eugene Leboeuf, 28; admitted to hospital in fair condition for treatment of facial burns.

—James L. Johnson, a Jefferson Parish deputy sheriff who suffered a broken ankle in the rescue operation.

Turn to Page A-4, Column 1

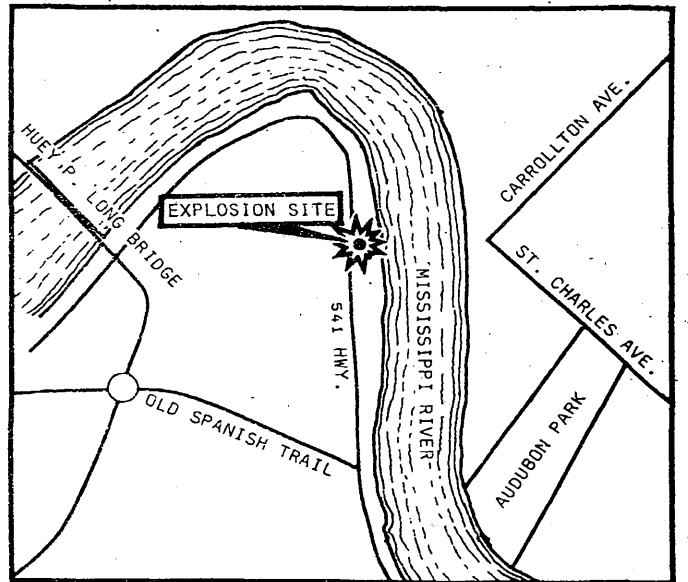
List of those injured in explosion

Here is a list of the injured from the Continental Grain Co. elevator explosion who had been brought to area hospitals up to shortly before noon:

- West Jefferson General Hospital
- Rickey Patterson
- Kenneth Porter
- Albert Nelson
- Harry Nelson
- Wilson Flowers, 37
- Robert Evans, 24

All are listed in critical condition from severe burns, for which the hospital has set up a special burn treatment unit. A mobile blood bank has been set up in the hospital parking lot to provide the huge quantities of blood needed for burn victims.

Ochsner Foundation Hospital
—Allus Foref, 52; good condition but admitted to hospital for treatment of burns.



(States-Item map)

News summary

New Orleans

Tourist officials here say President Carter has sent the city "a perfect Christmas present" by providing a direct route to Paris. National Airlines has declined to say when the order will be implemented, but it probably won't take advantage of the route immediately. Page A-2.

The city is trying to obtain state and federal money to subsidize transit for next year, a mayor's aide says. New Orleans Public Service Inc. has estimated it will cost \$11.9 million to subsidize the bus system, and the mayor's office says the money is not in the city budget. Page A-3.

At coach Woody Hayes' insistence, the Ohio State football team took

time out from practice this morning to visit King Tut. Some of the players strolled through the exhibit in 15 minutes while others almost had to be dragged away. Page A-3.

The three-martini lunch may not find favor with President Carter or Sen. Russell Long, but it's still popular with businessmen here. Some restaurateurs feel Carter's plan would affect the major part of their lunch-time business. Page A-2.

Jefferson

The U.S. Suzuki motorcycle company has been ordered to pay Salvador Pace Jr. \$1.5 million in damages for a motorcycle accident. Pace was blinded in one eye, and his legs were paralyzed in the accident. The judge's decision noted the bike's faulty rear hub assembly. Page A-4.

National

House and Senate conferees on the energy bill have abandoned ship, saying no new effort on the bill would be made until next year. Sen. J. Bennett Johnston, architect of the latest compromise attempt, asked for a vote on the plan, saying once it is defeated, the committee could find some other way to compromise. Page A-5.

President Carter's \$25 billion tax cut is expected to be acceptable to Congress mainly because it avoids broad attempts at changing tax policy and is designed to spur the economy. Page A-2.

World

The Vatican has averted a priests'

strike over a diocesan reorganization plan during Christmas. The priests staged a slowdown yesterday, refusing to say Mass or to ring the church bells and curtailed their visits to the sick. A cardinal appealed to the priests "to behave" and indicated the decision could be revised. Page A-6.

Sports

Already Saints coach Hank Stram has decided that Archie Manning is his No. 1 quarterback for 1978, that the offensive line is destined for a major overhaul, that the defense needs a facelift, and that the Saints need 12 to 13 new starters before they can go anywhere but home in the off-season. Page C-7.

Tomorrow

Allan Bakke, a white man denied admission to a California medical school, has gone before the U.S. Supreme Court to claim that he was not judged on his merits but rather was the victim of racial discrimination. States-Item writer Walter Isaacson discusses the question of school "merit" in tomorrow's States-Item.

Chuckle

Tired father, very late one Christmas Eve: "I'd like to see Old Ho! Ho! Ho! assemble one of these darn easy-to-assemble toys!"

Weather

Fair through tomorrow with a slow warming trend. High today in

mid-50s. Low in upper 30s. High tomorrow in mid-60s. Relative humidity at 5 a.m., 82 percent. Records: high, 80 in 1931; low, 29 in 1973. Map, details on Page D-15.

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