

# EXPLOSION KILLS SERVICE MEN AT ALASKAN PLANT

## Magazine at Sitka Naval Base Blows Up; Board Calls Probe

(The Associated Press)

Sitka, Alaska, Oct. 12.—An unexplained explosion in an underground dynamite magazine at the Sitka naval air station shortly after noon today killed six service men, injured dozens of persons in the nearby fishing village and damaged defense and private construction.

The blast reverberated across quiet Baranof Island just as hundreds of civilians and army families were listening to the benediction in a Sitka church at 12:10 p. m. The concussion sent windows cascading into the streets in showers of broken glass, inflicting cuts on many women and children walking out of the church and along the narrow streets of this island town.

The list of dead, as provided by naval officials, included Captain Francis C. Allen of Kentfield, Cal., a former official of the Standard Oil Company of California at San Francisco and more recently provost marshal at the air station. Others were Private Ralph E. Kirkbridge, Los Gatos, Cal.; Hedley C. Easterbrooks, Private Frank E. Hayton, San Francisco, and Private Albert A. Spurling, Evertsville, W. Va.

Thomas A. Baskom, a marine, was the sixth fatality.

Many of the homes built recently for officers as part of the \$5,000,000 improvements on the air station were among the structures damaged.

(Although the station is being operated by the navy, an army detachment has also been assigned here, as well as a number of marines.)

Navy reluctance to give details made an immediate accurate check of property damage inside the station impossible. However, much of the construction there has been completed, including large hangars which may have been endangered. In Millerville, a tiny civilian settlement at the gates of the government property, windows were blown out of the station and houses. Sitka proper is some distance from Millerville.

A navy official said the dynamite which exploded had been stored in the magazine by contractors employed to build hangars and houses on the government property.

Commander J. R. Tate, commanding the air station, said 15 injured persons were being treated by naval physicians, all for minor hurts. In a message to Rear Admiral Charles S. Freeman, commanding the 13th Naval District at Seattle, he declared no medical assistance was needed. Admiral Freeman had previously ordered a destroyer and a heavy patrol bomber to stand by to rush aid, but he canceled the orders upon receiving Commander Tate's message.

The navy here officially reported that the dynamite magazine, located on a small island offshore from the naval station proper, was being used by the Siems-Drake Puget Sound Company, contracting firm.

Unofficial sources said that the explosion was caused by a grass fire which spread over the small island. The dead men, these sources said, were on a fire truck which approached the magazine just as more than 43,000 pounds of dynamite exploded from heat. The navy confirmed this in part by listing a fire truck as lost in the explosion.

A naval board of inquiry was called immediately.

The Sitka naval air base is one of five being constructed in Alaska by the army and navy at a total cost of \$25,000,000. Although the Sitka base is still under construction to some extent, hangars have been in use since last July. On February 12 of this year, President Roosevelt recommended an expenditure of \$5,396,000 for the Sitka base, located on Baranof Island in Southern Alaska. Previously, an appropriation of \$2,900,000 had been made.