

# The Boston Daily Globe

BOSTON, MONDAY MORNING, JANUARY 13, 1919

## FOUR-ALARM FIRE SWEEPS S. A. WOODS MUNITION PLANT IN SOUTH BOSTON

### More Than 250,000 Shells Damaged in \$500,000 Blaze— Lieut Sibley Injured by Fall Through Flooring



SOUTH BOSTON FIRE AT ITS HEIGHT.

Four alarms were sounded within 12 minutes shortly after noon yesterday for a fire which swept two buildings of the munition plant of the S. A. Woods Company, 27-41 Damrell st, South Boston, causing a damage estimated at \$500,000 by the company officials. The machinery in the two buildings was ruined and more than 250,000 shells, some finished and others in the process of making, damaged.

Lieut Mark N. Sibley, aged 50, of 11 Fairland st, Roxbury, of Engine 21, fell through a hole in the floor of one of the buildings, his back being seriously injured.

Several workers in the factory were trapped for a time by flames. Four who were trying to extinguish the blaze climbed through a window to safety and another made his escape from the second floor through a hole in the floor. The fire was the worst the city firemen have had to fight in months.

#### Start of the Blaze

Abraham Wolfe, a guard at the plant, while patrolling at the one-story brick building, 41 Damrell st, saw flames spreading from the vicinity of the furnace room, located in the center of the structure. He called the chief of the plant fire department and the alarm in the building was sounded. About 30 men were eating their lunch. One was sent to ring in an alarm from box 723 while the others fought the flames.

The oil soaked floors and oily boxes about the furnace room were soon burning and the flames spread rapidly. Soon the entire one-story brick structure was ablaze.

Acting Chief Richardson of South Boston, who arrived three minutes after the first alarm was sounded at 12:21, immediately ordered a second alarm, and then a third and fourth, the latter being sounded at 12:33.

Apparatus from all sections of the city responded, accompanied by Chief Peter McDonough, Deputy John Tabor and Junior Deputy Daniel F. Sennott. Chief McDonough directed the work of fighting the fire.

Continued on the Second Page.

Continued From the First Page.

The temperature was not far from zero and ice and cold impeded the firemen considerably.

When the plant alarm was sounded Supt Lawrence Blood was working in the office with the clerical force. He took charge of the plant fire fighters. Seeing that the efforts to save the smaller structure were futile he ran to the adjoining two-story structure, a cement building, and started the men at work taking out the valuables.

#### Flames Cut Off Workers

Henry Poro of 100 Brook av, Roxbury, was assigned to do his best to keep the flames from spreading into the cement building. This was partitioned from the smaller structure by a wall largely made of glass. The glass broke rapidly. Poro was in danger on the second floor, but escaped through a hole in the floor, through which Lieut Sibley fell later.

The clerical force and other employees saved practically all the valuable papers in the office. Supt Blood several times went into the office while the flames were on all sides of him and each time brought out something of value. Although wet through he remained on duty until the firemen had finished their work.

William Burnes, Wilbur McWilliams, Charles Sawyer and Samuel Davis, fighting the flames in the one-story brick building, were cut off from the doorways by flames. They made their escape through windows.

The brick building which took fire first extends along Damrell at about 25 feet and toward Old Colony av 150 feet. The cement structure has a frontage on Damrell st of about 60 feet and extends back toward Old Colony av 150 feet. Both buildings were filled with machines and finished or unfinished shells. A large number of finished shells were stored in the rear of the smaller building. The larger building was practically all occupied by machinery. Before the signing of the armistice 2000 workers were employed in the plant, but the force had been reduced to 200.

When the firemen of Engines 43 and 1 and Ladders 5 and 20 arrived the one-story structure was a furnace of fire. Ladder 5 and Ladder 20 augmented the engine companies and took lines of hose through an alleyway along the side of the building and checked the fire's progress in that direction.

Engine 15 was stationed in an alleyway on the other side of the building and while the fire was at its height a portion of the roof fell, endangering the firemen there. They continued at work and were helped by two deck guns, worked from the hose wagons of Engines 33 and 22. Firemen from Engines 2 and 21 carried lines of hose to their assistance.

A great crowd was attracted by the heavy smoke. A police detail, in charge of Sergt O'Rourke, included officers of Division 6 and details from Stations 4, 9 and 12.

Owing to the danger of the walls of the larger building collapsing, the crowd was kept a long distance from the blaze. While the fire was at its height, Chief Sennott noticed large cracks in the concrete wall near the roof and issued a warning to the firemen.

The firemen worked for two hours and a half before they had the fire under control.

#### Lieut Sibley Falls 20 Feet

Lieut Sibley slipped on the floor, which was coated with a layer of ice, and he fell through a hole into the basement, a distance of 20 feet. He was taken to the City Hospital.

The firemen worked all afternoon on the ruins. It was long after 5 o'clock when all out was sounded.

The fire was caused by sparks from the furnace falling into a vat of oil which was used in the process of oiling shells. Several times previously the vat had become ignited, but in each instance the flames were quickly subdued. Yesterday, before they were discovered, they had gained considerable headway.

The police reported the damage as \$250,000, but Supt Blood says that the two structures are a total loss, the machinery ruined and thousands of shells damaged. He says that a conservative estimate of the damage is \$500,000.

