

HOW EYEWITNESSES SURVIVED EXPLOSION

Police and Men on Craft Dodged Death on Land and Water to Save Themselves and Others.

STUNNED BY DETONATIONS

Tug's Captain Towed Four Barges Through a Hail of Fire, but All Were Destroyed.

The tremendous force of the first explosion paralyzed the comprehension of every person on Black Tom Island, and with the one thought of self-preservation none tarried to get details after the detonations had ceased.

Escapes of some of those on the island sounded miraculous when the stories were told. One man rescued his wife and two children and went back after others, when the second explosion occurred. Late last night he had not found his wife and children. Another ran the gauntlet of the inferno of flying

boat around so as to get out of danger. I then told my family to get what things they could and took them up to the grain elevator and told them to stay there while I went and got other people on the grain barges. I then went to barge 40 at Pier 4 and got them up and started for a barge at Pier 5, when the explosion came. I was knocked down. When I got up I found that my shoulder was injured. I started to look for my wife and boys, and so far I have been unable to locate them.

Patrolman Weinhold, stationed at the piers during the fire, said:

"I was standing near the roadway when the explosion came. I cannot remember anything much about it. I thought I was taken home in the patrol wagon, but when I became conscious my family told me I had been brought home in the Chief's car. I was made deaf in my left ear and my head seems to be a continuous whirr."

Patrolman Kachler was blown from the platform of the warehouse by the blast, but was uninjured.

John Kilfoyle, of the Lehigh Valley tug Geneva, did not believe a barge had caused the explosion.

"We were docked at Pier A in the gap about 12:30, when we received orders to go to Black Tom to the fire," said Kilfoyle. "We arrived at the grain docks, and, seeing we could be of no assistance there, we pulled around to Pier 7, where the fire was, and where the ammunition lighters were tied up. When we arrived there freight cars were on fire and we hooked on to two ammunition barges to tow out into the stream. When we were getting away from the pier sparks from the burning freight cars ignited the barges, and there was an explosion. One of our crew cut the tow lines and we left the barges and went up to the Standard Oil pier."

Kilfoyle was asked if he were sure sparks from the cars had caused the explosion.

"I am positive," he said, "that it

Liberty Island—we were only a little way from it, you see. I stopped there a minute, and then I started back. I swam a long time. Finally, I guess somebody pulled me out at the dock, and then the doctor took care of me at the hospital. I kept calling to the tug for a while, when I was in the water, but nobody heard me."

John Walsh, a Jersey Central trainman, was helping a locomotive crew pull out freight cars from the yards when the fire started. When the explosion came he was blown from the top of a freight car. His face was covered with bruises, but this was his only injury.

"I must have been unconscious for a time," he said, "because the first thing I remember was sitting in a pile of rubbish on the ground and hearing my brother call me. I couldn't see, as my eyes were swelled shut, but I wandered around for a while, and finally somebody got me out."

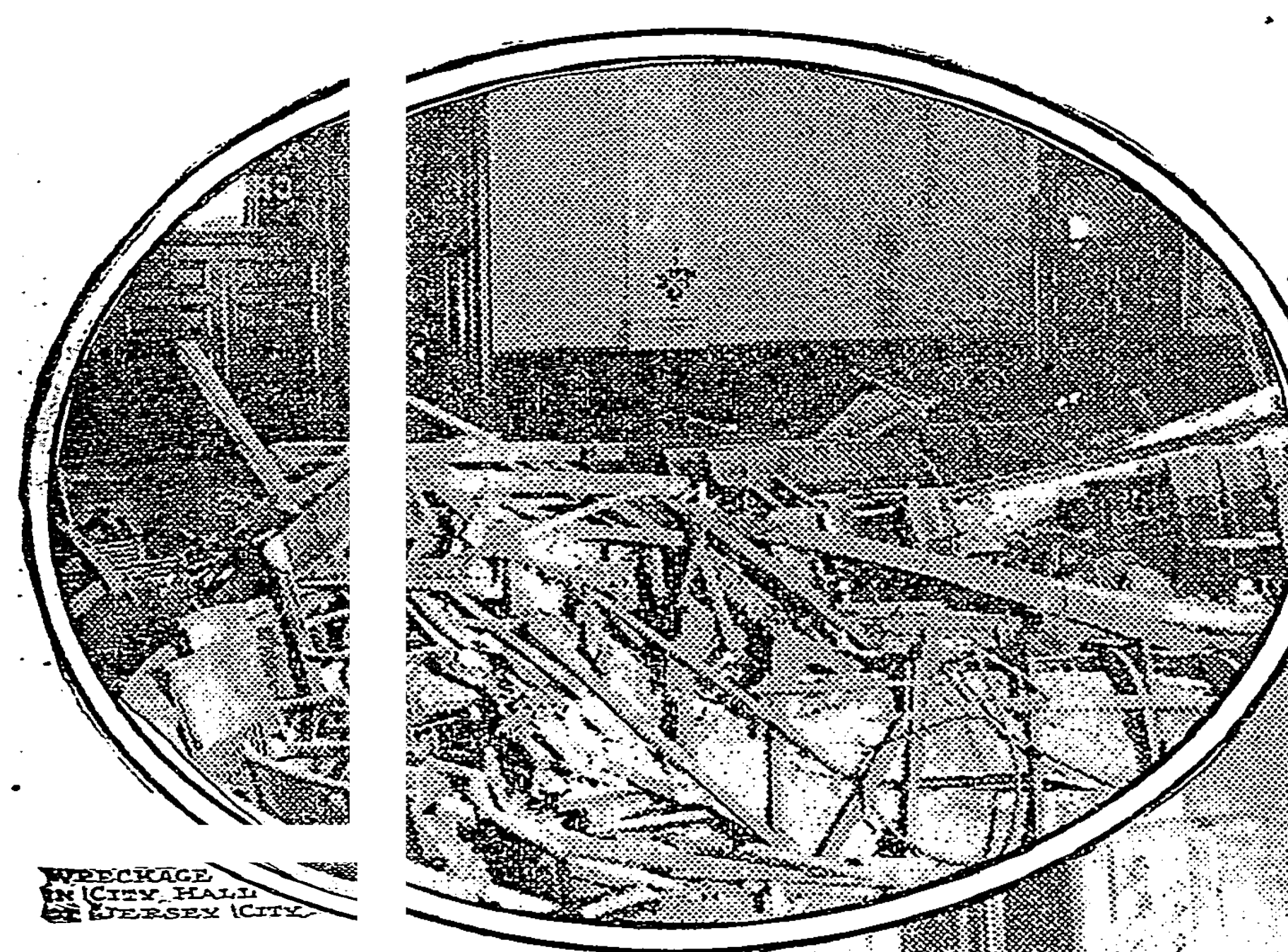
Panorama Like Battlefield.

Several thousand persons lined the Battery sea wall from Harbor A Police Station, past the Aquarium, to the Barge Office from 2:30 until 7 o'clock and acquired a real picture of what the firing line in the European war looks like.

From Black Tom Island, partly hidden by Bedlow's Island, to the Communipaw Ferry slips, the Jersey City water line of about two miles was one mass of red glare, clouded at intervals picturesquely by curling clouds of smoke.

One after another blazing lighters drifted down from the Black Tom pier toward Ellis Island and Communipaw, casting a red glow over the still waters of the bay. Tugs dashed up at top speed, with police launches and Government craft of various kinds, and endeavored to tow the burning lighters away from the immigration station toward the middle of the bay, where two of them sank after they had burned to the water's edge.

The most realistic part of the picture was the continuous rattle of rifle cartridges and shells as they exploded. At frequent intervals the loud reports of shrapnel could be heard as they exploded and scattered their hail of lead and iron in all directions. It rained on the roofs of the buildings at Ellis and Bedlow's Island and on the pilot houses



shells and raining debris. A policeman backed his patrol wagon half a mile with two women and six children, taken from barges. John Raceta, hurled from a boat, swam almost to the Statue of Liberty in a semi-delirious condition and when he came to himself had swum almost back to the pier whence he had been blown.

The Lehigh Valley tug Sledington was just returning to the docks for a new tow of barges laden with merchandise when the explosion occurred. The Sledington was lifted almost from the water. Practically all the crew suffered more or less from injuries. Debris and exploding shells fell all about them. Every window in the cabin and wheel house was shattered.

The wheelhouse likewise was pierced in a hundred places by shrapnel. Knowing the vast amount of explosives in and about the pier, Captain David Findley backed the tug there in the face of danger to tow out the barges of explosives. He got a line to four and towed them toward Bedlow's Island. They were afire. The explosives continued to rain about the tug, but although his engines had been actually shifted on their foundations by the force of the first explosion, he kept on going.

It was these barges that the thousands of persons congregated at the Battery saw; the same flaming barges frightened the immigrants at Ellis Island so that police reserves had to go there to help preserve order. The barges and their contents were destroyed.

Veritable Hail of Death Falls.

Chief Engineer John Gallo of the tug gave a graphic description of the explosion. According to Gallo, there must have been a dozen or more men lost from the four barges. He said there were four on each, and that only two succeeded in getting to safety aboard the Sledington.

"I never believed such a thing could be," he said. "It rained fire all about us. Cartridge cases went up in the air and fell red hot on the decks, and had to be knocked overboard to keep from setting fire to the tug."

Driver Schaeffer of the Patrol Wagon 5 of the Jersey City Police Department was injured in the explosion. He was taken to the City Hospital, unnerved by his experiences, after he had rescued six children and two women by backing the patrol wagon half a mile up a steep hill off the island.

"Soon after the alarm of fire came in from Black Tom," he said, "the Sergeant sent me out with the wagon. I picked up several policemen on the way. It was shortly before 2 o'clock when I got the wagon down to the end of the row of warehouses. There was a brisk fire burning about a hundred yards farther down. I started to turn around, but couldn't do it."

"I was standing about ten feet from Patrolman Daugherty, who is in a hospital now, and we were dodging cartridge cases. They shot from the fire in all directions, up in the air, and all about us. The things were red hot when they fell, and we had a lively time keeping out of their way."

"All at once everything turned black. I don't know how long I was unconscious. The last thing I knew, I was lifted up and thrown away. When I came to it was raining steel and bricks and shells and shrapnel. I started to walk and found I had only one shoe on. I got to the wagon and started to call for the other policemen, when I saw six children and two women who had escaped from burning grain barges running from the scene. I told them to climb in the wagon. Then I tried to turn around and found I would have to go a considerable distance toward the fire. I backed as well as I could for half a mile and up the hill with the women and children. I put them off in the road and went back after the policemen. I brought some away. I don't know how many."

Schaeffer was bruised by falling debris and shells.

Knocked Down by Blast.

Patrolman James Hammill, a policeman who was also injured, gave the following statement to the Jersey City police:

"About 2:15 this morning I was stationed at the roadway leading to the National Storage Docks at Black Tom, about 100 feet from the warehouses that later caved in from the explosion, watching the fire line, when the explosion came. I can only remember getting on my feet and being knocked down."

"I cannot remember how long I was knocked out, but when I got up I met Lieutenant Closterman and asked him where Patrolman Daugherty was; he said he was between two of the warehouses. We started down together, and while crossing between some railroad cars we heard some one groan. We found Harry Steinberger buried under debris. While we were trying to assist him the second explosion came, and we had to run away."

William Stiffe, in charge of Lehigh Valley barge 65, was in the barge alongside the pier.

"About half past twelve o'clock," he said, "my boy woke me up and said there was a fire. I got up and saw fire at the end of the dock. I pulled my



A VICTIM IN JERSEY CITY HOSPITAL.



was sparks from the freight cars on the pier that caused the explosion.

"How did you know the barges you were towing were ammunition barges?"

"They had red lights and red flags flying, which is the signal for boats carrying explosives."

Because of the peculiarities of detonation of high explosives some of the men around the piers did not realize that the explosion was so close. James Jennsen, employed on one of the barges, said he was knocked from his bed by the explosion, and when he got on deck searched the Brooklyn skyline for signs of the blast. It was several seconds before he realized that it had occurred close behind him.

John D. Duess, in charge of Lehigh Valley grain barge 212, said he was alone on the barge, which carried 1,000 bushels of barley and oats, when he was blown from his bunk by the explosion.

"The cabin flattened out like a pancake," he said, and all the hatch covers fell into the hold. I saw the blaze at the end of the pier. Then I realized that I was an old man and a poor swimmer and turned. The only way to safety was through that inferno. I shut my eyes and started. A ball hit me, but I ran on. Another struck me in the neck, but I did not stop. Finally I got out of the place."

"I went back later and my barge was gone, with everything I owned on

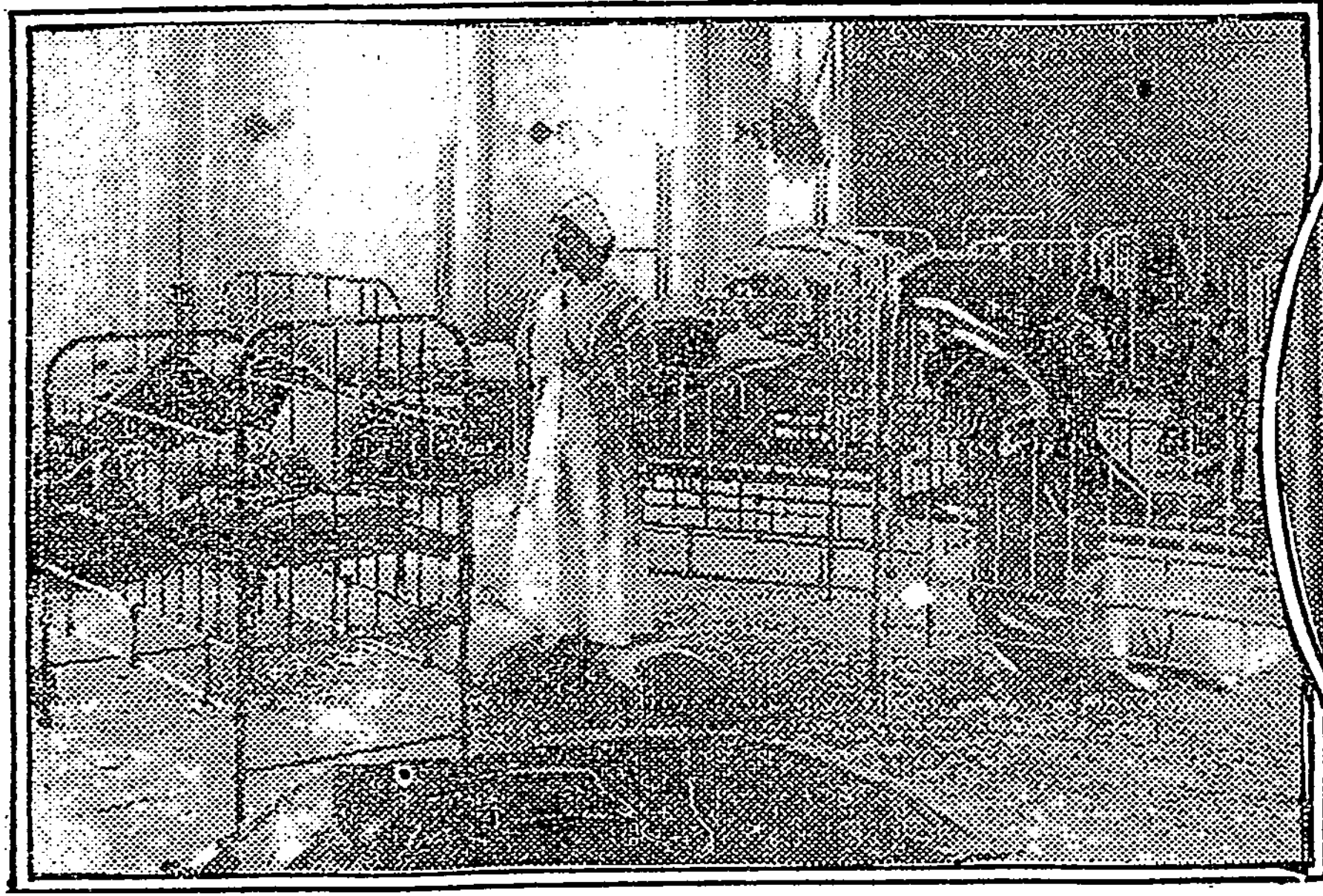
and decks of the vessels in the harbor. Some of the shells were found intact in front of the buildings, still full of shrapnel.

Ellis Island was partly obscured from the gazers at the Battery by the clouds of dense smoke which were dispersed at intervals when red columns of fire shot hundreds of feet into the air and illuminated the scene like day. Then the graceful Gothic outline of its main building could be seen dimly through the smoke as if it were a palace in some phantom city. The people did not shout as they looked at the blazing panorama before their eyes. The weird grandeur of the scene made them awestruck and the police had no trouble in keeping order.

Priest Hurlled from Bed.

Father A. J. Grogan of the Mission of Our Lady of the Rosary, which faces the Battery, was one of the first on the scene after the big explosion took place.

"The shock of the explosion," said Father Grogan, "not only woke me up but practically shook me out of bed. At first I thought it was an earthquake and when I realized it was another powder explosion similar to the one which occurred at Communipaw. When I looked out it seemed as if Ellis Island were on fire. Sparks were falling on the water in myriads in all directions like a



A DAMAGED WARE IN ELLIS ISLAND HOSPITAL.

the Aquarium, where the roof was damaged.

In the Dock Department building and at Harbor A Police Station, which is next door, several windows were broken at the side and also at the pier end facing on the North River.

Thousands of sightseers thronged the Battery yesterday afternoon, looking at the scene, and the small excursion steamboats made crowded trips past Ellis Island to Bedloe's Island, turning round by the Jersey flats to Communipaw.

WIFE AND BABIES MISSING.

Barge Captain Fears They Were Lost on Board Craft After Blast.

Captain Charles Wilson of barge 20, owned by the Moran Transportation & Towing Company, was seeking tidings up till a late hour last night, without success, of his wife Freda, his two children, Ranghild, 3 years old, and Ada, 1 year, whom he left on board when he went ashore on Saturday night to purchase supplies. The skipper said his barge was lying off Black Tom Island with a cargo of loaded shells, and he went to Jersey City about 11 o'clock and returned an hour later to go on board.

"When I knocked at the Lehigh Valley railroad gate the man on duty refused to allow me to go down the pier," said Wilson. "Other lightermen had been treated in the same manner and stood about trying to find out what was the matter. There was a smell of smoke, and it looked to me as if one of the big grain elevators was on fire about 600 feet from where the cars were standing, loaded with dynamite and shells. I spoke to the gatekeeper, but he would not give any satisfactory answer."

I went away to see if I could get down to the barge any other way, but everything was closed tight. When I returned at 1 o'clock the yard was in full blaze, and there was no way to get to the water through the Lehigh Valley yards."

Captain Wilson, with his brother-in-law, Frederick Nelson, of 533 Forty-third Street, Brooklyn, spent all yesterday making inquiries to find out what had become of the barge. The Fire Department informed him that barge 20, it was believed, had drifted away on fire with another barge and sunk 200 feet from Ellis Island. They only took off one man from the two barges, the firemen said, and did not remember seeing anything of a woman with two children.

Wilson had not been able to communicate with the Moran company, as its office was closed. The police informed him that barge 20 had been seen to founder near Ellis Island by one of their launches at about 4 o'clock.

WINDOWS BROKEN IN JERSEY.

Damage to Property Will Reach Thousands of Dollars.

Outside of New York the two explosions at Black Tom Island yesterday morning were felt almost everywhere in New Jersey within a radius of twenty-five miles or further. Falling glass from broken windows and displaced bric-a-



SHRUBS REARED UP BY AN ELLIS ISLAND INQUEST.

fiery rain. It seemed as if they came from the big red balls which shot up into the air and then burst with a muffled report, which added to the tenseness of the scene.

The explosion itself was really indescribable, in my opinion. It seemed like something which struck terror into the human heart. Directly I was dressed I went into the street and quieted a number of women and children who had rushed from their houses when the windows were knocked out by the force of the concussion. When I held mass at 6 o'clock the church was crowded to the doors, and I can assure you there were many praying on their knees who had not been inside a place of worship for a long time."

When dawn broke the red glow in the sky began to disappear and the lighters were nearly burned down to the water's edge, but the explosion of the ammunition continued and did not cease until after 9 o'clock. The air was full of ashes, which fell in small particles on the faces of the people. Several cases of powder drifted over to the Battery with a quantity of wreckage from the Black Tom Pier and the Jersey flats. With them came the body of a man which the police at Harbor A Station sent to the Morgue. Identification was almost impossible as the head had been crushed by the explosion and the right foot was blown off. There were no papers found in the pockets.

Sightseers in New York Bay.

As Patrolman Murphy, the policeman at the Battery landing, remarked, the only living things which did not come out to see the fire were the fishes in

it. All I saved was the clothing I wore. One thing I recall. While I was running the whole length of the pier I did not see a single person."

Blown into Water from Barge.

Peter Raceta, Captain of the Moran lighter No. 8, told in the Jersey City Hospital of his escape after he was blown from the deck of the lighter into New York Bay. The only visible sign of his adventure was a severe burn on the back of his head.

"I was in the cabin when the fire started," he said. "I ran up to the deck, and then the explosion occurred. I saw the cabin door blown off. I remember it flew down the length of the dock and into the water."

"When the explosion came, it seemed as if it was from above—zumpf!—like a Zeppelin bomb. There were five or six other lighters alongside mine at the dock, and a tug was just coming up to drag us away. It was close by when the crash came. I don't know what became of the tug or the other lighters. It looked as if they all went up in the air."

"There were two other men on the lighter with me. I didn't see where they went, but I think they must be dead. I didn't see them or anybody else. When the explosion struck me I felt myself going up in the air—like this," and he lifted his hands slowly from the bed, "and then I found myself in the water a long way from the boat. I couldn't see very well for a while, and the noises around me, but I just kept swimming around."

"Finally, I found myself landing on