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Curiosities in Explosives

By Hudson Maxim

action of high explosives. One amusing fact is that no two witnesses of an explosion ever agree about what actually happened.

Whenever a disastrous explosion occurs there are as many different accounts of it as there are persons who witnessed it. The main reason for that strange psychological phenomenon is undoubtedly that the peculiar shock of the experience confounds the senses.

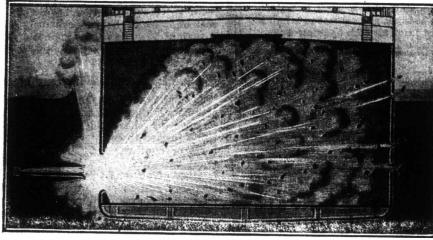
Action of Explosives

About ten years ago, while the government was preparing some fulminate compound for detonating fuses at the Washington Navy Yard, an explosion occurred that resulted in some into the cause of the explosion was a negro laborer who had been working just outside the building when the fulminate exploded.

HERE is no subject about be placed when detonated its action is which there is more popular mainly downward. The crater that an error than there is about the explosion makes in the earth has led action of high explosives. One to that belief. Nothing, however, could be more contrary to the truth.

When a mass of explosive is placed on the surface of the earth and detonated, its action is mainly upward. At the instant of detonation the ball of incandescent gases, under enormously high tension, expands outward in all directions, and as the gases strike the earth they rebound into the atmosphere, still expanding in the form of an inverted cone.

The explosion sends outward in all directions a wave of atmospheric compression that, in fact, is a huge sound wave, and that moves exactly at the speed of sound-about eleven hundred feet a second. Although the wave may fatalities. Among the witnesses who be so bass that we cannot hear it, it is were examined during the investigation nevertheless, in its nature, a sound wave, The expanding gases and the immediate atmosphere that they propel forward like a projectile can inflict serious damage in only a very circumscribed area-



What happens when a torpedo strikes the hull of a ship

conducting the investigation.

"Just outside the building, sah," said

"Was there one explosion or were there two?" "There were two explosions, sah—two

of 'em.' "How much time passed between the

two explosions?"

"I should think about half a second, sah-about half a second."

"You say you were just outside the building when the first explosion occur- glass. About a millon dollars' worth of red. Where were you when the second glass was broken in New York City explosion occurred?"

"I was going by Station B, sah, headed for the main gate."

As Station B was a quarter of a mile away from the scene of the explosion, the negro must have been going at a high rate of speed.

It is popularly believed that in whatever position a body of explosive may

"Where were you when the explosion not much more than a few hundred feet occurred?" asked the officer who was in any direction from the explosion. The great sound wave, however, may travel to a distance of many miles.

On July 30, 1916, several hundred tons of high explosive materials blew up in New York Harbor, not far from Ellis Island. A large quantity of shrapnel and other ammunition went up in the blast, and the fragments rained all over the surrounding water. There was very little loss of life, however, and the actual material damage to buildings in Jersey City, Manhattan and Brooklyn was astonishingly small, except for broken

You would naturally suppose that the fragments of window glass broken in that manner would fall inside a building, but they do not.

Almost always they fall outside into the street. The reason for this is that the wave of compression striking a pane of glass, forces it inward nearly to the breaking point. Then the wave of compression moves on and is followed by a partial vacuum; the glass, springing outward to fill the void, breaks, and falls into the street.

The terribly destructive action of a torpedo upon a vessel is a subject of great curiosity to most persons. The torpedo that struck the Sussex in the British Channel broke the ship clear in two, and the two parts separated and floated away; the forward part quickly

The illustration graphically shows the action of a torpedo against the hull of a ship. A torpedo carries about 400 pounds of the high explosive known as T. N. T. -trinitrotoluene. The explosion instantly develops 40,000 cubic feet of gases, which, finding the hull of the ship the line of least resistance, burst through it, breaking the hull wall and steel beams into fragments and hurling the fragments forward, often clear through the ship, as was the case with the Gunflight. The mass of water that surrounds the war head of the torpedo, being highly resistant, directs the explosive blast for-

Continued on page 25

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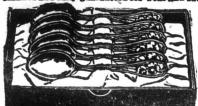
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