

Big Blaze Yesterday.

Empire Barracks and Hospital Wiped Out -- Soldier Patients Removed Safely -- Some Ammunition Exploded, But no One Injured -- Rifles and Machine Guns Destroyed--Store House Looted Last Night -- Cat Remained in Burning Building, and Lived.

The fine, large Empire Barracks and adjoining military hospital to-day stand a charred and blackened ruin, with all their former usefulness and comfort gone forever. Passing along that way up to two o'clock yesterday one would never suspect that within a few hours the fine structure—emblem of mercy and comfort as it was—would be but a blackened mass of ruin and desolation.

As a result of its catching fire yesterday thousands of dollars worth of damage has been done; invaluable soldiers have been taken unceremoniously from their beds and the splendid system and orderliness of a hospital and barracks lost.

The two institutions, one adjoining the other, were housed in the one building. The hospital was contained in the eastern section and the barracks in the western. Some forty eight soldiers were indoor patients, while about ninety others were visiting patients of the hospital. Electrical appliances valued at seven thousand dollars were kept in the eastern end, while an X-ray apparatus, of the newest and most modern make, which was installed the day preceding the fire, added greatly to the value.

In the barracks were kept four hundred Mafeld rifles and seven hundred German rifles. There were also about seventeen machine guns. Besides these there were a hundred and sixty nine thousand rounds of ammunition, stored in small boxes. Those were not affected by the fire, although the boxes, which were piled up, were scorched and even charred by the flames. Some boxes of machine gun cartridges, contained in gun-belts, fell down, and breaking open, enabled the fire to explode the cartridges. The reports of the explosion could be heard by the thousands of watching people, although the greater majority of them were not aware of their cause. The rifles, or most of them, were burned completely, although some had only the wooden stock destroyed. Others, which were in wooden cases, and well encased in oil and vaseline, were left intact and undamaged, although the boxes, in many cases, were charred and burned. The German rifles were left in a solid mass of steel barrels and locks.

The fire broke out at about two forty-five. One of the orderlies was the first to see it, and he acquainted Major Knight, who was down stairs, of the fact. Going upstairs, the latter saw a flame, "about the size of the palm of my hand," as he himself described it, in the ceiling, about twenty feet from the wall separating the barracks from the hospital. This was in a sick ward. He rushed to the phone and tried to get the fire hall. This was busy, however, and by the time he got back the ward was in a mass of flames. Meanwhile Mr. C. E. A. Jeffery, who was teaching a class of soldiers downstairs, called for ten volunteers to rescue the patients who were in bed, and heroic work was performed by them. The soldiers were taken to Grenfell Hall, at the Seamen's Institute, while some were taken to the Military Hospital on Military Road. None were injured, excepting one man, who got a slight burn on his face.

The East End Firemen, seeing the flames from the outside, rushed to assistance, and in a very short time had several streams of water playing on the burning building. The flames first broke through at the back, near the eastern corner, and the roof began to burn furiously, beginning at the East and working West. The two top flats were demolished, both roof and walls being razed. The bottom flat was not burned as much, although the water did a lot of damage to it. The end of the Hospital, separated from Lynch's Bakery by a lane, soon was weakened and fell against the latter building, adame and burning as it was. For a while it looked as if this, too, would go. A couple of hoses were turned on the fallen wall, however, and it was soon extinguished. Meanwhile the firemen had turned their attention to the Eastern section of the building, which has a brick frame. Water was poured in through the windows in inexhaustible torrents, and a lot was done to check the progress of the flames. The wind was high, unfortunately, and the building itself being high on a bluff, was exposed to the wind. Consequently the flames shot up to the heavens, and people outside the city limits for miles around could see them and the dense clouds of smoke that rolled blindingly through the air. Not many flankers were in evidence, and people stood near the building until well past six o'clock yesterday afternoon. It was feared that the front brick wall of the Barrack section, facing on Water Street, would give way and fall across the street. Especially as this wall was anything but strong and the plaster being not very adhesive, the possibility of the wall falling was great. This did not happen, fortunately.

A very pleasing feature of the fire was the splendid service rendered by the soldiers themselves. The convalescent patients who could work were there in numbers and their help to the firemen was of great value. As soon as word of the fire was received at the Militia Department, Lieut-Colonel W. F. Rendell despatched as many of the Record and Pay soldier-clerks as were available to the scene, so that they could render any aid that they could. Several of them had their clothing ruined by fire and water, and they presented rather comical sights as they rushed in and out of the burning building.

Men working on the Digby, just opposite, also rendered excellent service as soon as they saw the smoke and fire they rushed across the street and "dug right in," as one of the soldiers described it this morning to the Telegram reporter. The inevitable small boy was present, and the police had great difficulty in looking after him and keeping him clear of the burning building. One little fellow cried in great glee, "Gee! but this is the first real fire I've seen for months!" In truth the sight was a brilliant one, for the shooting, crackling flames and clouds of black smoke constituted a sight that the many beholders will not forget some time.

The origin of the fire is not definitely known. Major Knight, with whom we were in conversation this morning, would not make a dogmatic assertion. "I would not say what caused the fire," he said. "The fact is that I don't know. I do know that just where the fire first broke out two electric wires ran along near the ceiling. Perhaps they caused it." The general opinion is that the wires were the cause. Soon after the fire broke out men from the Electrical Department of the Reid Mfd. Co. were on the scene and severed all of the wires leading into the building.

A story of more than ordinary interest is told of the fire. A certain cat which was a general pet of the soldiers of the two institutions, was in the burning building all yesterday afternoon and last night, and when found this morning was quite intact and just as happy. The pussy must have crept under some box or other article and thus protected herself from the smoke and flames. Needless to say she was more than pleased to see some of her friends of the hospital this morning, and they were just as pleased to see her.

Several soldiers lost sums of money in the fire. Sergt. Richard Woods, one of the hospital staff, lost clothing amounting in value to two hundred dollars, and bank notes to the value of five hundred dollars—Masseur M. Walsh lost \$78. This money, which was in the care of the matron of the institution, was kept in a pocket book. When found, the book was burned considerably and some of the notes blackened and scorched by the flames. The Bank has agreed to pay the amount of \$28, however, notes of that amount being found with their numbers. The others must be counted as a loss. Nurse Fitzgerald, the matron of the hospital, lost all her belongings, and also a sum of money. Corporal Sydney Rendell also lost \$150 in notes. None of it was recovered.

Many papers of importance were lost in the fire. The records of the institution were kept in cabinets and in some cases cabinets and all were destroyed. Many other papers were found this morning, being damaged none, beyond a water-soaking. They will be dried and re-copied. In the office a sum of five or six dollars, which constituted the petty cash, was found in the search this morning.

Many freaks of unusual interest were in evidence after the fire. A deserter from a schooner, was ordered to go on board, or serve 30 days in H. M. Brig.

Coastal Boats.

GOVERNMENT.

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The S. S. Fortia arrived in port this morning at 7 o'clock.

F. H. ELLIS, & CO.

The S. S. Susu sailed for the usual ports at 7 a.m. to-day.

Novel Display.

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