BATTLING FIVE-ALARM FIRE IN 18TH ST.

Streams of water are poured into nine-story loft building after arsonists touched off a violent explosion last night.

The New York Times (by Edward Hausner)

ARSON BLAST KILLS 2 IN LOFT OFF 5TH AVE. AS POLICE CLOSE IN

Explosion Comes as 3 Suspects Are Arrested — Prisoner, Detective Believed Lost

DOWNTOWN AREA SHAKEN

Mayor, Other Officials Speed to Scene—Bodies of Two Victims Found in Ruins

A violent explosion, touched off by arsonists, shattered a nine-story downtown loft building at 9:45 o'clock last night and caused a fierce five-alarm fire. Two men were killed in the blast. One of the victims was believed to have been one of the four criminals who set the blaze and the other one of four detectives who had been trailing the suspects.

Three hours later the fire, at 9 West Eighteenth Street, was brought under control.

The detonation, caused by the explosion of a fifty-gallon drum of gasoline, rocked the area near Eighteenth Street and Fifth Avenue and blew out windows for blocks around. It came as detectives of the safe and loft squad were arresting the arsonists and the man charged with employing them.

The fire swept through the building, which was filled with wool piece goods, and billowed forth thick black smoke that enveloped the area and made it difficult for fire apparatus to reach the blaze. Mayor Impellitteri, Police Commissioner George P. Monaghan and Fire Commissioner Jacob Grumet went to the scene of the fire, to which twenty-three engine companies and four hook and ladder companies had responded.

One of Arsonists Near Death

Detectives arrested three men charged with touching off the explosion. One of these men is in critical condition as a result of the blast and is not expected to live. One of the detectives was also seriously burned.

The details of the crime as outlined by the police were as follows:

At 7:30 P. M. Detectives James L. Daggett (believed to have been killed in the explosion), Howard J. Phelan and Francis Shannon saw Moe Shapiro, known as a safe-cracker, at Broadway and Eighth Street. They watched as he met three men at the corner.

These men later were identified as Al Keshner, 42 years old, of 2301 Benson Avenue, Brooklyn; Jake Mayron, 59, of 193 Osborne Street, Brooklyn, and Jacob Weiss, 67, of 241 East Fifty-second Street, Brooklyn.

The police had had these men under surveillance for several weeks, suspecting that they were plotting either an arson or a safe-cracking job.

The detectives trailed the men by automobile to the site of the building that later was set afire. They saw them enter the building at 8:15 P. M. carrying ten five-gallon drums of gasoline. At 9:30 P. M. the detectives saw Keshner and Mayron leave the scene.

Detectives Shannon and Phelan trailed the two by automobile to Broadway and Eighteenth Street, where they arrested them. Detective Daggett remained in front of the loft building.

Prisoners Taken to Building

Detectives Shannon and Phelan took the prisoners back to the loft building. When it was noticed that Detective Daggett was no longer posted in front of the building, Detective Phelan went in to search for him. Detective Shannon remained in the street, guarding the two prisoners.

Detective Phelan made his way up the stairs of the loft building. As he approached the fifth floor the explosion occurred. He was scorched by the blast, but recovered sufficiently to grab Weiss, who was struggling down the stairs, and they made their way down to the street.

Detective Daggett and Shapiro were not seen again, but later two bodies, one of which was tentatively identified as Detective Daggett's, were found on the fifth floor of the burning building.

Detective Phelan was taken to St. Vincent's Hospital suffering from burns. Weiss, suffering burns and shock, was in critical condition in the same hospital.

Keshner and Mayron were taken to the West Twentieth Street station for questioning. There Keshner was said to have made a confession.

He said that he was the proprietor of Keshner Sportswear,

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2 KILLED IN BLAST SET BY ARSONISTS

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which occupied the fifth floor of the burned building. His premises were insured for $20,000 and Keshner was quoted as saying he agreed to pay Weiss $1,350 to set the fire. Weiss, he said, agreed to the plan and hired Mayron and Shapiro to help him.

On two previous occasions, Keshner said, the men had started to set the fire—once in August and again on the Saturday before Labor Day. On both days they were frightened off because too many persons were in the area.

The police immediately booked Weiss on a charge of arson, because he was expected momentarily to die. The others were expected to be booked on charges of arson and homicide.

The police said that Keshner had not given Weiss the $1,350 promised for the arson job. It was to be paid after the fire was set.

They also said they had in their possession the ten five-gallon cans in which the arsonists carried the gasoline into the building. After the cans had been taken inside, their contents were poured into a fifty-five-gallon drum. The empty cans were taken to Keshner's auto outside when Keshner and Mayron left the building before the fire was set.

The area around the fire scene was barricaded so that if Shapiro had survived the blast he would be captured. Spectators who swarmed to the scene were kept at several blocks distance. Eighteenth Street was covered with broken glass.

At 1:45 A. M., Chief Fire Marshal Martin Scott said the damage to the building, its contents and property in the surrounding area would reach at least $500,000 and might exceed $1,000,000.

The six upper stories of the building were burned out and the fire had also spread to the basement when flaming wreckage dropped down the elevator shaft to kindle material stored below by a clothing firm.

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