History of Church Fires

A bomb that exploded during services at the 16th Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, Ala., killed four young girls in September 1963.

Six Dead After Church Bombing

*Blast Kills Four Children; Riots Follow
Two Youths Slain; State Reinforces Birmingham Police*

United Press International
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Birmingham, Sept. 15 -- A bomb hurled from a passing car blasted a crowded Negro church today, killing four girls in their Sunday school classes and triggering outbreaks of violence that left two more persons dead in the streets.

Two Negro youths were killed in outbreaks of shooting seven hours after the 16th Street Baptist Church was bombed, and a third was wounded.

As darkness closed over the city hours later, shots crackled sporadically in the Negro sections. Stones smashed into cars driven by whites.

**Five Fires Reported**
Police reported at least five fires in Negro business establishments tonight. An official said some are being set, including one at a mop factory touched off by gasoline thrown on the building. The fires were brought under control and there were no injuries.

Meanwhile, NAACP Executive Secretary Roy Wilkins wired President Kennedy that unless the Federal Government offers more than "picayune and piecemeal aid against this type of bestiality" Negroes will "employ such methods as our desperation may dictate in defense of the lives of our people."

Reinforced police units patrolled the city and 500 battle-dressed National Guardsmen stood by at an armory.

City police shot a 16-year-old Negro to death when he refused to heed their commands to halt after they caught him stoning cars. A 13-year-old Negro boy was shot and killed as he rode his bicycle in a suburban area north of the city.

**Police Battle Crowd**

Downtown streets were deserted after dark and police urged white and Negro parents to keep their children off the streets.

Thousands of hysterical Negroes poured into the area around the church this morning and police fought for two hours, firing rifles into the air to control them.

When the crowd broke up, scattered shootings and stonings erupted through the city during the afternoon and tonight.

The Negro youth killed by police was Johnny Robinson, 16. They said he fled down an alley when they caught him stoning cars. They shot him when he refused to halt.

The 13-year-old boy killed outside the city was Virgil Ware. He was shot at about the same time as Robinson.

Shortly after the bombing police broke up a rally of white students protesting the desegregation of three Birmingham schools last week. A motorcade of militant adult segregationists apparently en route to the student rally was disbanded.

Police patrols, augmented by 300 State troopers sent into the city by Gov. George C. Wallace, quickly broke up all gatherings of white and Negroes. Wallace sent the troopers and ordered 500 National Guard units to stand by at Birmingham armories.

King arrived in the city tonight and went into a conference with Rev. Fred Shuttlesworth, a leader in the civil rights fight in Birmingham.

The City Council held an emergency meeting to discuss safety measures for the city, but rejected proposals for a curfew.

Dozens of persons were injured when the bomb went off in the church, which held 400 Negroes at the time, including 80 children. It was Young Day at the church.
A few hours later, police picked up two white men, questioned them about the bombing and released them.

The Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. wired President Kennedy from Atlanta that he was going to Birmingham to plead with Negroes to "remain non-violent."

But he said that unless "immediate Federal steps are taken" there will be "in Birmingham and Alabama the worst racial holocaust this Nation has ever seen."

Dozens of survivors, their faces dripping blood from the glass that flew out of the church's stained glass windows, staggered around the building in a cloud of white dust raised by the explosion. The blast crushed two nearby cars like toys and blew out windows blocks away.

Negroes stoned cars in other sections of Birmingham and police exchanged shots with a Negro firing wild shotgun blasts two blocks from the church. It took officers two hours to disperse the screaming, surging crowd of 2,000 Negroes who ran to the church at the sound of the blast.

At least 20 persons were hurt badly enough by the blast to be treated at hospitals. Many more, cut and bruised by flying debris, were treated privately.

(The Associated Press reported that among the injured in subsequent shooting were a white man injured by a Negro. Another white man was wounded by a Negro who attempted to rob him, according to police.)

Mayor Albert Boutwell, tears streaming down his cheeks, announced the city had asked for help.

"It is a tragic event," Boutwell said. "It is just sickening that a few individuals could commit such a horrible atrocity. The occurrence of such a thing has so gravely concerned the public..." His voice broke and he could not go on.

Boutwell and Police Chief Jamie Moore requested the State assistance in a telegram to Wallace.

"While the situation appears to be well under control of federal law enforcement officers at this time, the possibility of further trouble exists," Boutwell and Moore said in their telegram.

President Kennedy, yachting off Newport, R.I., was notified by radio-telephone and Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy ordered his chief civil rights troubleshooter, Burke Marshall, to Birmingham. At least 25 FBI agents, including bomb experts from Washington, were being rushed in.

City Police Inspector W.J. Haley said as many as 15 sticks of dynamite must have been used.
"We have talked to witnesses who say they saw a car drive by and then speed away just before the bomb hit," he said.

In Montgomery, Wallace said he had a similar report and said the descriptions of the car's occupants did not make clear their race. But he served notice "on those responsible that every law enforcement agency of this State will be used to apprehend them."

The bombing was the 21st in Birmingham in eight years, and the first to kill. None of the bombings have been solved.

As police struggled to hold back the crowd, the blasted church's pastor, the Rev. John H. Cross, grabbed a megaphone and walked back and forth, telling the crowd: "The police are doing everything they can. Please go home."

"The Lord is our shepherd," he sobbed. "We shall not want."

The only stained glass window in the church that remained in its frame showed Christ leading a group of little children. The face of Christ was blown out.

After the police dispersed the hysterical crowds, workmen with pickaxes went into the wrecked basement of the church. Parts of brightly painted children's furniture were strewn about in one Sunday School room, and blood stained the floors. Chunks of concrete the size of footballs littered the basement.

The bomb apparently went off in an unoccupied basement room and blew down the wall, sending stone and debris flying like shrapnel into a room where children were assembling for closing prayers following Sunday School. Bibles and song books lay shredded and scattered through the church.

In the main sanctuary upstairs, which holds about 500 persons, the pulpit and Bible were covered with pieces of stained glass.

One of the dead girls was decapitated. The coroner's office identified the dead as Denise McNair, 11; Carol Robertson, 14; Cynthia Wesley, 14, and Addie Mae Collins, 10.

As the crowd came outside watched the victims being carried out, one youth broke away and tried to touch one of the blanket-covered forms.

"This is my sister," he cried. "My God, she's dead." Police took the hysterical boy away.

Mamie Grier, superintendent of the Sunday School, said when the bomb went off "people began screaming, almost stampeding" to get outside. The wounded walked around in a daze, she said.

One of the injured taken to a hospital was a white man. Many others cut by flying glass and other debris were not treated at hospitals.

**Fourth in Four Weeks**
It was the fourth bombing in four weeks in Birmingham, and the third since the current school desegregation crisis came to a boil Sept. 4.

Desegregation of schools in Birmingham, Mobile, and Tuskegee was finally brought about last Wednesday when President Kennedy federalized the National Guard. Some of the Guardsmen in Birmingham are still under Federal orders. Wallace said the ones he alerted today were units of the Guard "not now federalized."

The City of Birmingham has offered a $52,000 reward for the arrest of the bombers, and Wallace today offered another $5,000.

**Dr. King Berates Wallace**

But Dr. King wired Wallace that "the blood of four little children ... is on your hands. Your irresponsible and misguided actions have created in Birmingham and Alabama the atmosphere that has induced continued violence and now murder."

*Return to our Special Report on Church Burning*

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*Back to the top*