

FLAMES LEAVE SMOLDERING REFINERY ASHES



DESTRUCTION—Picture shows ruins at Newhall refinery after \$500,000 blaze which took one life. Flames shot

nearly 2000 feet into sky in spectacular blaze fed by thousands of gallons of gasoline.

Times photo

Fatal Newhall Oil Blast Loss Set at \$500,000

Throwing flames almost 2000 feet into the sky above Little Santa Clara Valley, a series of explosions from storage tanks containing 500,000 gallons of crude oil and gasoline, early yesterday brought destruction to the Newhall Refining Co. refinery with a loss in excess of \$500,000 and death to one man and serious burns to another.

Dead was James Lawrence Breckenridge, 30, 459 MacNeil St., San Fernando.

William Taylor, 28, 11423 E! Dorado St., Pacoima, was seriously burned.

From behind a mask of bandages, Taylor, who made an heroic but vain attempt to save the life of Breckenridge, yesterday painfully tried to reconstruct the story of the inferno, while he lay on a bed at the Newhall Community Hospital where he is being treated for first, second and third-degree burns about the face and body.

Both men, skilled employees of the refinery which is located

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FATAL NEWHALL BLAZE CAUSES \$500,000 LOSS

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in a valley just to the right of the highway a short distance east of the site of the old Newhall Tunnel, were at their posts when the fire broke out in the center of the refinery.

Taylor said he was standing on the dock at the edge of the property, supervising the loading of a truck with distillate when he heard the cry of "Fire!" and turned to observe Breckenridge attempting to turn off a valve at a near-by retort.

"All at once there was a terrific explosion and I was swept off the loading platform by the force of it," whispered Taylor.



James Breckenridge

"Falling, I saw Breckenridge's clothing burst into flames. Then he disappeared from view.

"When I recovered I instinctively ran to my automobile, parked a short distance away, to save it from the wave of flames which engulfed oil trucks and automobiles parked near by. I drove it to a place of safety and then hurried back to look for Breckenridge."

Plunging into the black smoke and flames, Taylor crawled to the vicinity of the small office where he believed Breckenridge had retreated and found him lying on the ground.

"His clothing was burned completely away . . . but he was alive

and able to speak," said Taylor. "I told him to place his hands on my hips and together we crawled to safety . . . it must have been about 50 feet, but it seemed . . . miles."

Half dragging, half carrying Breckenridge while he beat out the flames which threatened to consume his own clothing, Taylor loaded the stricken man into his automobile and drove to the Newhall Hospital, where Breckenridge died a few hours later. Taylor was in another ward and yesterday attending physicians said he would recover. Taylor is the husband of Florence Taylor and the father of Donna, 9.

Fed by the hundreds of thousands of gallons of flaming oil which rolled down the slopes of the brush-covered valley in a torrent of flames the refinery blaze roared out of control until after dawn.

Avert Brush Fire

Pieces of flaming debris were hurled skyward by the tremendous heat waves and it was only through the combined efforts of the County Forestry Department under the direction of Chief Pierre Daries and the U.S. Forestry Department in charge of Fire Control Assistant Howard Evans and District Ranger Ray McCormick, both of Newhall, that a major brush fire was averted.

According to Evans a "friendly" wind confined damage to about 30 acres of the brush-covered mountain slopes. Several near-by families were evacuated from their homes but returned yesterday after the danger had passed.

Reports that an unidentified woman was missing in the fire were discounted yesterday by Sheriff's and highway patrolmen who searched the smoldering ruins.

Breckenridge, who leaves his widow Esther and daughter Judy Lee, 6, was a lieutenant in the California State Guard. He is the son of Mrs. Leta Breckenridge, Long Beach, widow of John C. Breckenridge, formerly an engineer with the Gulf Oil Co., Houston, Tex.