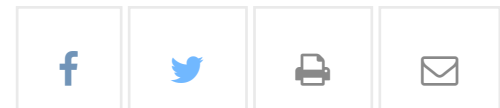


UPI ARCHIVES APRIL 7, 1982

The collision of a city bus and a gasoline-laden...



OAKLAND, Calif. -- The collision of a city bus and a gasoline-laden tanker turned a highway tunnel into blast furnace today in which vehicles were incinerated in seconds and at least seven people were killed.

'It looked like a bomb had gone off,' said California Highway Patrolman Jim Mattos. 'It looks like something out of World War II,' he said.

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The first rescuers inside the 3,600-foot-long Caldecott tunnel after the spectacular 12:16 a.m. crash described a scene of horror, with people burned beyond recognition trapped in their still-smoldering vehicles. The tunnel under the Berkeley Hills connects Oakland and its suburbs in Contra Costa County.

The fire storm reached 1,000 degrees Fahrenheit, instantly charring bodies, exploding fire extinguishers inside the tube and melting brass fittings from the tunnel walls.

CHP officer Fred Bowe described the scene as 'total devastation.'

Mattos said an AC Transit bus driven by John Dykes, 54, an employee of the city bus company from 1977, and a gasoline tanker from Armour Oil Co. collided in the tunnel. The cause of that collision is still under investigation.

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Paul Petroeljo, Alameda, was one of three people that had time to run out of the tunnel before the explosion. He was treated for smoke inhalation and released from Merritt Hospital in Oakland.

'First I tried to back (my car) out,' he said. 'I make a quick decision, I had to get out. I found the wall and followed it out. There was just so much smoke,' he said.

The first rescuers inside the Caldecott tunnel after the spectacular 12:16 a.m. crash described a scene of horror, with people burned beyond recognition trapped in their still-smoldering vehicles. The tunnel connects Oakland and its suburbs in Contra Costa County.

The National Transportation Safety Board in Washington, D.C., today ordered a seven-member investigating team, including board chairman James Burnett, to head for Oakland to check the cause of the accident, said Brad Dunbar a NTSB spokesman.

'Due to the extent of the structural damage, it could be months before repairs make it safe' to resume using the tunnel, Bowe said. He said a special accident reconstruction team of state officials was on the scene.

Witnesses said six to eight cars were caught inside the westbound lanes of the tunnel on the east side of San Francisco Bay when the truck exploded.

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Two survivors were taken to Merritt Hospital in Oakland, where they were reported in good condition. Hospital officials refused to disclose their identities.

Seven people were known dead, but emergency workers said each car would have to be checked to make certain there weren't more victims.

Fire teams and rescue workers, who were kept out of the tunnel by the heat and heavy black smoke billowing out the east end, brought the fire under control nearly three hours after the explosion, although it was still smoldering shortly before dawn.

Minor explosions could be heard deep inside the tunnel hours after the accident. The scorching heat of the blaze popped loose thousands of tiles lining the tunnel and scarred the ceiling and walls.

The truck, carrying gasoline from a Richmond, Calif., refinery, was traveling alongside an Alameda-Contra Costra County transit bus when the bus ran into a stalled car and careened into the truck, the CHP said.

The tanker swerved, hit the side of the tunnel, flipped over and exploded.

The bus, nearly split in half, continued on out of control and without its driver and slammed into a pole outside the west end of the tunnel.

David Williams, heading to his Concord, Calif., home, said he saw the bus 'coming out of the tunnel out of control' and hit the pillar.

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'I could hear the tanker-truck exploding inside the tunnel,' he said.

Police quoted a hospitalized young man whose mother was burned to death in the tunnel. He said he was driving west through the tunnel when traffic came to a stop. He said motorists couldn't see what had happened around a curve in the middle of the tunnel, so he got out of his car and began hiking out of the passageway to alert officials to what he believed was a minor accident.

As he neared the end of the tunnel, police said, he turned to see the highway erupt into flames as gasoline exploded and engulfed the stalled traffic, including the car in which his mother was waiting for him to return.

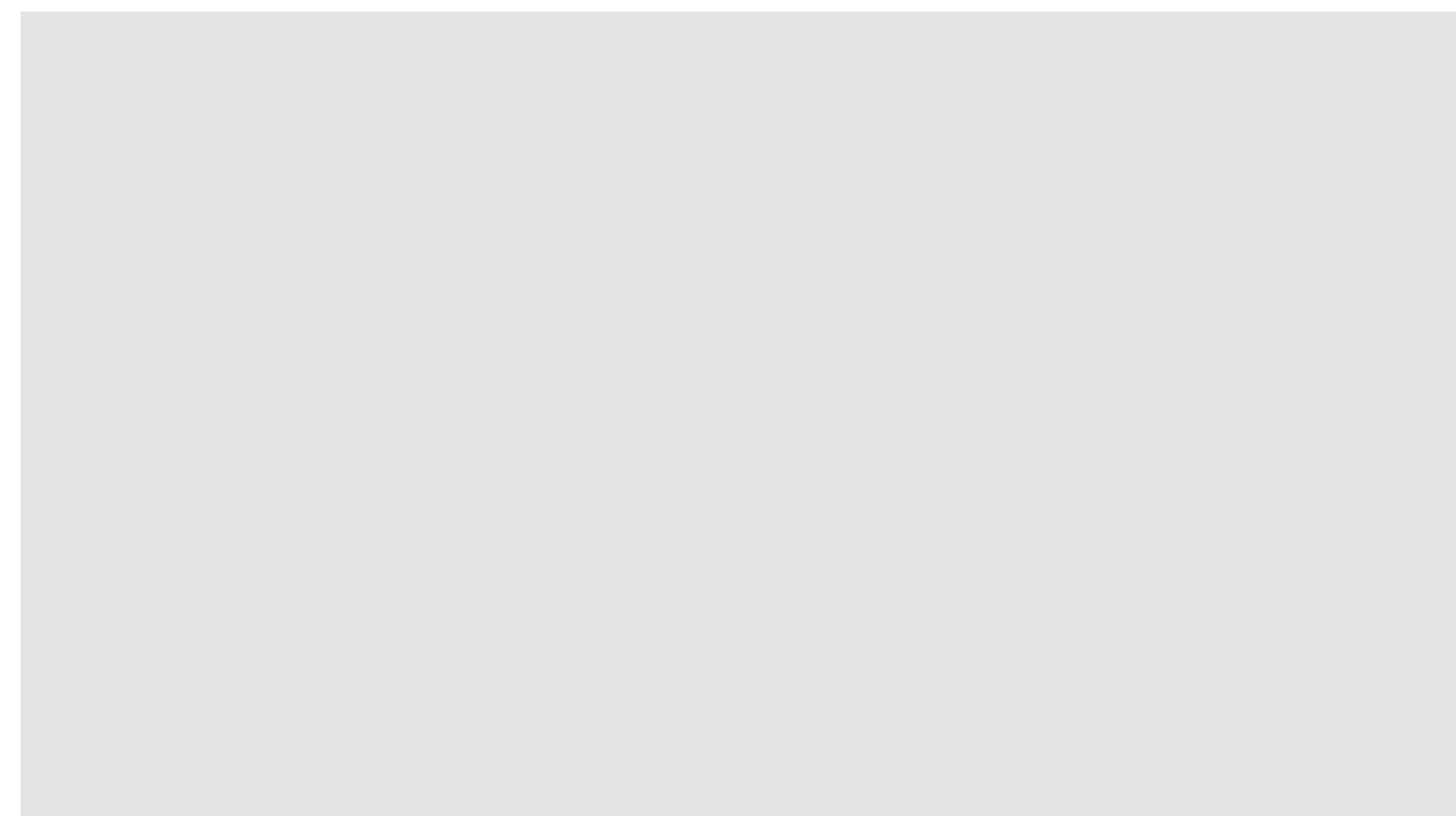
The route through the Oakland hills consists of three separate tunnels, which were each shut down to allow rescue workers to get to the scene.

Fire officials, who did not know when the accident would be cleared away, predicted a massive traffic jam as commuters try to get into Oakland and San Francisco. The CHP said one of the three tunnels would be opened for morning traffic.

State transportation officials said it would take at least three weeks before the gutted tunnel could be reopened.

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Highway patrol officers, waiting for the last of the flames to die down shortly before dawn, said they would walk through the tunnel and videotape the twisted wreckage.



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Dec. 13 (UPI) -- A South Carolina man stopped to buy some snacks for a football game and bought a Powerball ticket that earned him a \$1 million prize.

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Dec. 13 (UPI) -- The Idaho man who holds the most concurrent Guinness World Records added another title to his name by donning a blindfold and performing 41 pickleball serves in one minute.

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Dec. 13 (UPI) -- An Australian zoo shared video from a surprise animal escape drill featuring the zoo's director playing the part of a fugitive cassowary.

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Dec. 12 (UPI) -- Wildlife officials in Mississippi said researchers trapped and tagged a 510-pound bear that is officially the largest ever documented in the state.

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Dec. 12 (UPI) -- A Maryland woman bought her first-ever lottery ticket and her beginner's luck earned her a \$100,000 top prize.

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Trapped hiker hoisted from 'quicksand' mud at West Virginia Lake

Dec. 12 (UPI) -- Firefighters and rescue teams conducted an unusual operation when a hiker ended up stuck in waist-deep mud that was described as "essentially quicksand."

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Dec. 12 (UPI) -- A pair of British brothers earned a Guinness World Record for their collection of 48,339 different Pokémon cards.

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Dec. 12 (UPI) -- A sheep rescued from a cliff in England attempted to run off afterwards with half of its body still inside the rescue bag.

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Dec. 11 (UPI) -- A renowned speller known as the "Tiger Woods of Scrabble" took the top spot at the Spanish World Scrabble Championships in Spain, despite not speaking Spanish.

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