

**State of Florida
Department of Financial Services
Division of State Fire Marshal
Bureau of Fire and Arson Investigations
*Investigative Report (PRELIMINARY)***

CASE NUMBER: SFM 14-1259

SYNOPSIS:

On **April 30, 2014** Escambia County Fire and Rescue, Escambia County Sheriff's Office, Florida Department of Law Enforcement (FDLE), and Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms (ATF) responded to 1700 West Leonard Street in Pensacola, FL regarding a reported explosion that occurred at the Central Booking facility of the Escambia County Jail. The SFM /BFAI was requested to respond and identify the origin and cause of this explosion. I arrived on scene at approximately 0157 hours on 5/1/14.

INITIAL INTERVIEWS:

Upon arriving on scene I was met by ATF Special Agent George Bruno. Agent Bruno and I conducted field interviews with witnesses on scene.

Upon my arrival, ATF Agent Bruno and I met with Escambia County Battalion Chief Steve Boothe. Chief Boothe stated that at approximately 11:30 PM on 4/30/14, there was an explosion in the Central Booking Facility at the Escambia County Jail. Chief Boothe states that when fire department personnel arrived on scene there was no active fire observed. Chief Boothe advised that fire department personnel conducted a search for injured personnel in and around the building. Boothe states that numerous inmates and correctional officers were transported to various area hospitals for treatment of their injuries. Boothe states that the uninjured inmates were transported to alternate detention facilities. Boothe identified two correctional officers that were in the building at the time of the explosion who remained on scene. These two officers were identified as Lieutenant Joseph Ryals and Officer Ashley Conrad. Lieutenant Ryals was injured as a result of this incident.

I then conducted a brief preliminary interview with Ryals and Conrad while at the scene.

LIEUTENANT RYALS

Lt. Ryals stated that he was in his office at the time of the explosion. At approximately 11:00 PM he heard what he described as a loud "boom". He advised that ceiling tiles and pieces of concrete fell from the ceiling onto his desk where he was seated. He then heard "fire in H1" being broadcast over his handheld radio. He provided instructions over the radio to his correctional officer personnel. He told his personnel to get the inmates and themselves out of the jail in any way possible. Ryals stated that the basement was flooded and the jail was operating on diesel generators at the time of the explosion. End of statement.

OFFICER CONRAD

Officer Conrad stated that she arrived to work at approximately 6:20 PM on 4/30/14. Officer Conrad provided the following information: She heard a loud "boom" at approximately 11:30 PM. She relieved day shift Officer Fairly who told her that she smelled gas throughout the day. Officer Fairly reportedly had opened doors and used fans to ventilate the area in an attempt to alleviate the gas smell. End of statement.

PRELIMINARY SCENE ASSESSMENT:

Agent Bruno and I then began to conduct a preliminary assessment of the exterior portions of the damaged building. We started at the entrance of the building which is located on the south side of the building. We then began moving in a counterclockwise manner while photographing the exterior portions of the building.

Heavy structural damage was observed to the south wall of the building near the entrance doors. The heaviest structural damage was observed to the center of the structure. Extensive structural damage was also observed to the north side of the building near the center.

Captain Fiedor (SFM), Lieutenant David O'Dell (SFM), and I then accompanied fire department personnel into the building to take preliminary photographs of the interior portions of the building. We made entry into two different points from the south side of the building. From these points we ultimately progressed to the approximate center of the facility on the first floor. A large hole in the floor at the first floor level was noted from both of these entry points. This large hole was completely through the first floor and provided an unimpeded visual of the flooded basement below.

We then entered the building from a location on the north side. From this location we entered into a small room which was later identified as a holding cell. Heavy concrete debris was scattered on the floor in this area. This access ultimately led to a large opening in the floor. From this location two bodies were visible lying on a concrete ledge near the large opening in the floor. These bodies were clothed in the green "jump suits" commonly worn by inmates at the jail.

Search and Rescue personnel conducted a search of the structure in an attempt to locate any additional victims and/ or survivors. The search and rescue team was unable to locate any remaining individuals within the building. Supervisor Emily Speed of the Medical Examiner's Office responded to the scene and was present when the bodies were removed from the building. The victims were taken to the morgue at Sacred Heart Hospital where an autopsy was conducted the following day.

Personnel from the State Fire Marshal's "FIST" Team and ATF's NRT were activated and responded to the scene. A perimeter was placed around the scene and the scene was secured by members of the Escambia County Sheriff's Department.

04/1/14