

# Berrydale prison fire — four newspaper clippings

Full item transcription. Original wording retained; paragraph wrapping reflowed. Square brackets identify editorial descriptions or uncertain readings. This text copy is separate from the source images.

[Clipping 1. Newspaper title and issue date are outside the supplied crop.]

Says Berrydale Guard  
'They Panicked, There's No Doubt'  
By BILL DINGWALL  
News Staff Writer

BERRYDALE — "They panicked — there's no doubt about it!"

So explained Prison guard D. C. Nelson after a blazing inferno swept through the barracks-like prison compound and killed 37 inmates Sunday night.

Nelson was one of three guards on duty when the fire broke out minutes after a brawl erupted between a Negro and white prisoner.

Nelson said he believes the prisoners panicked when flames engulfed the compound.

"The door was open and we yelled for them to come out," said Nelson. "Some of them did, but most of them didn't."

Nelson said he heard a loud commotion in the compound around 9:30 p.m. as he was making his routine rounds.

He sprinted back to the compound and yelled for them to quiet down.

"But they kept raising cane and I guess they didn't hear me," he said.

Meanwhile guard A. O. Lovett was working the wicket (security enclosure) inside the compound.

"I knew he (Lovett) was having a tough time trying to calm them down," said Nelson, "So I walked back to the office and phoned for some help."

A short time later he emerged from the prison office and saw flames shooting from the windows of the compound.

"I ran back to the office and tried to phone for the fire department," said Nelson. "But the phone was dead, probably shorted out when the flames burned the electrical system around the barracks."

Nelson said a neighbor's phone was used to notify fire units at Whiting Field, Milton and nearby Jay.

Nelson, still shaken from the ordeal, said he watched as several prisoners poured out of the compound.

Some could walk; others couldn't.

Two inmates managed somehow to crawl out of the compound and later died a short distance away.

Nelson said he herded those who were able to move to a spot about 30 yards away and kept guard over them with a shotgun and pistol.

"That's my orders," he said. "Whenever there's a fire or anything, I'm supposed to march them down below the flag pole and put them in a circle."

[Clipping 2. Early newspaper casualty list. Names, classifications and historical racial wording are transcribed as printed; the list is a contemporary report, not a corrected or independently verified register. Faint readings are marked.]

[Three stars]

Death List

BERRYDALE — The 37 dead in the fire that swept State Road Camp 12 Sunday night included nine white men and 28 Negroes, the State Division of Corrections said this morning.

The Negro victims and the county from which they were committed were:

1. Charles Edward Delain, Orange.
2. Eddie B. Gibbs, Escambia
3. Earl Evans, Escambia
4. Johnnie Simmons, Escambia
5. Isaac Robinson, Escambia
6. [Drezil?] Rivers Jr., Escambia
7. Felix Randall, Escambia
8. Charles Palmer, Palm Beach
9. Jesse Osborn, Gadsden
10. Lee Andrew or Mitchell, Dade
11. Reginald Milton McGuire, Brevard
12. John Lee McFarlin, Escambia
13. Willie Nelson Leslie, Dade
14. Jesse Gray, Escambia
15. Bobby Lee Hall, Bay

16. Charles James Blossom, Pinellas
17. Archie Lee Cluister, Martin [surname uncertain in this small clipping]
18. Lester Cleves, Dade
19. James Cunningham, Levy
20. Eugene Hamilton, Pinellas
21. James Hill, Volusia
22. Albert Ivory, Osceola
23. Mack Lester, Dade
24. Johnny Lewis, Brevard
25. Tommy Day Smith, Gadsden [middle wording uncertain]
26. Albert Truluck, Jefferson
27. Ruben Williams, Gadsden
28. Joseph Wynters, Jackson-Calhoun

The nine victims identified as white were:

1. Vincent B. Dovico, Broward
2. Thomas Eugene Ard, Escambia
3. David Franklin Cole, Escambia
4. Donald Wayne Harper, Okaloosa
5. Ronnie Nichols, Escambia
6. Robert J. Henn, Jr., Escambia
7. Earl Frank Hoffman, Leon
8. [Harry?] Arthur Harp Jr., Dade
9. George Edward Hall Jr., Dade.

[Clipping 3. Photograph caption.]

Burned-Out Prison Barracks Near Milton

[Clipping 4. Photograph caption.]

Ashes Sifted for More Victims