

# MONKEYING WITH THE BUZZSAW

BY CORLISS BULGER



Standard Size of Electric Fuse.

THIS has always been a most diverting pastime, appealing specially to the young and curious. We dearly love to find out the exact point where the actual edge is on the hazy outline of the whirring circular saw; it is great fun to see how near we can come to being run over by an automobile; it affords us reasonable entertainment to see how white a motorman gets when he just misses us; feeling moving machinery is fascinating, and there is no time when skating is more enjoyable than when the ice is not quite strong enough to support us.

And we never know just what will happen when we investigate a blasting cap. When we ask the results of hitting it with a hammer we are frowned upon, and there is no way of being enlightened on the subject so fruitful of immediate and convincing results as by trying it ourselves. When we ask "What is fulminate of mercury?" with which blasting caps are filled, even the learned are apt to hedge. If we inquire what would happen if we dropped a cap into the kitchen stove, our desire for learning is not appeased. We are told we had better not try it; so we have either to abandon our search for exact knowledge or try the experiment. It was reported lately that—

Willie found some dynamite. Didn't understand it quite; Curiosity never pays— It rained Willie seven days.

The disintegration and distribution of this earnest investigator is much to be deprecated and lamented, of course, but Willie will probably be much better off as the result of his experiments with dynamite than he would have been going through life with one or two eyes and several fingers or a hand missing, which probably would have been the case if blasting caps had been the subject of his examination, instead of the beneficent and kindly dynamite.

Willie was undoubtedly an unusually resourceful child in making the dynamite go off at all. Modern powder makers are living awake nights thinking up ways of making dynamite safer and more insensitive. That is all very well; but, unfortunately, larger and stronger blasting caps must be made to explode this dynamite, and more and more of them. Then some miner carries home a few caps in his overall pockets, his wife finds them when she goes through his pockets, and puts the caps on the kitchen shelf—and the first thing you know Willie or Henrie or Dominick or little Angelo has one and is making off with it, and pretty soon there is trouble in that household.

THERE are lots of ways of getting crippled by exploding blasting caps besides hitting them with a hammer and putting them in the fire. Extracting the contents with a pin distributes untold fingers; holding a lighted match under them or thrusting the flaming end into the cap gets immediate action. In the mines and quarries, even, where the men who have to use blasting caps every day ought to know better, there are plenty of mangled hands and amputated limbs as the result of crimping caps on fuse with a jack-knife, pointed nail, or any tool that's handy. Many a miner has blown a hole through his face in lating the cap on the fuse, and others have killed themselves with copper or have been killed outright by the sparks from their hat lamps or pipes dropping in an open box of caps. Lots of blasters continue to bite the caps on the fuse, and think that because they have never exploded them they never will, but some day they will bite the business end and lose something besides teeth. It is much easier, and lots safer, to use the crimping, a tool made for the purpose. Accidently stepping on a cap will often spoil a perfectly good foot. Sparks, flame, heat, blows, friction—it's all the same to the cap to which they are applied.

Boys often play in and around quarries

on Sundays, and sometimes pick up stray caps and start to investigate them. It is the rarest thing that they ever do this without getting hurt. They perhaps know they are dangerous, and that a spark or a blow will explode them; but they do not realize how sensitive they are, how violent the explosion, or how the pieces of copper fly. Even the name is misleading in this respect. The word "caps" suggests the paper caps used with toy pistols, and because the blasting caps are called by this name it is natural to think that the two articles belong to the same family. They may; but they bear about the same resemblance to each other that a hungry, man-eating tiger does to the gentle pussycat.

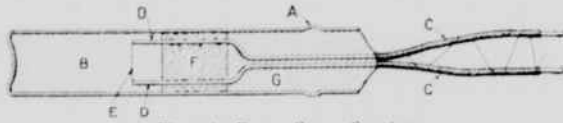
Over six hundred children have been hurt or perhaps crippled for life in the last five years from playing with blasting caps. If this had happened at one time, what a howl would have gone up all over the world! But because the accidents are spread all over the country and happen at the rate of only about ten a month, nothing is done by the authorities. Indeed, nothing can be done except to educate the whole population to realize how dangerous these exceedingly useful things are when they are out of their proper place, and what a dreadful thing it is going through life crippled or blinded for want of a little care and knowledge.

A BLASTING cap is a copper shell about a quarter of an inch in diameter and an inch or two long, half full of fulminate of mercury. This fulminate is the most sensitive and about the most impulsive explosive in common use. Blasting caps contain anywhere from fifteen to twenty grains of it; primers for firearms cartridges usually contain not more than one grain. That's what the hammer or firing pin of a gun or pistol hits to ignite the powder in the shell. A blasting cap is meant to work the other way. The powder from the fuse ignites the fulminate in the blasting cap, and it explodes with terrific force and detonates the dynamite. The explosion of the fulminate is so exceedingly quick that the flying particles of copper will imbed themselves in iron a foot away. They will blow a hole clean through a steel plate one-sixteenth of an inch thick. A box of caps will blow a beautiful square hole right through a two-inch oak plank. One cap will blow a child's hand off with the utmost certainty and despatch. Lings, one of the Chicago anarchists, committed suicide by biting a blasting cap between his teeth.

The point to be remembered is that when a blasting cap goes off it does great damage locally. There is no escaping its effects. Among all the six hundred or more accidents reported from playing with blasting caps, there are only two or three in which somebody was not hurt.

Electric blasting caps are just as strong as ordinary blasting caps, but as the capsule or shell is sealed up with a sulphur plug through which the wires are carried down to the fulminate, not so many accidents occur in playing with them. They are generally dipped in dark-colored wax, and are not such attractive playthings as the bright copper blasting caps; but "they get there just the same." Amateur electricians are earnestly advised to bury the electric cap a foot or two in the earth before trying to pass electric currents through the wires, and they had better not do it then. Don't open it up to see what's in it! Explosive manufacturers are not given to imparting trade secrets promiscuously; but they will gladly tell what's in the caps and how they are made rather than have you blow your hands off trying to find out for yourself.

Don't carry caps around in your pockets! Don't take them home with you! Don't leave them where children can get at them! Don't monkey with them!



Electric Fuse, Cross Section.

A, insulation on copper shell, so that it will be filling material; B, chamber containing explosive; C, fulminate; D, outer wire-carrying cap; E, sulphur; F, plug; G, filling material.

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