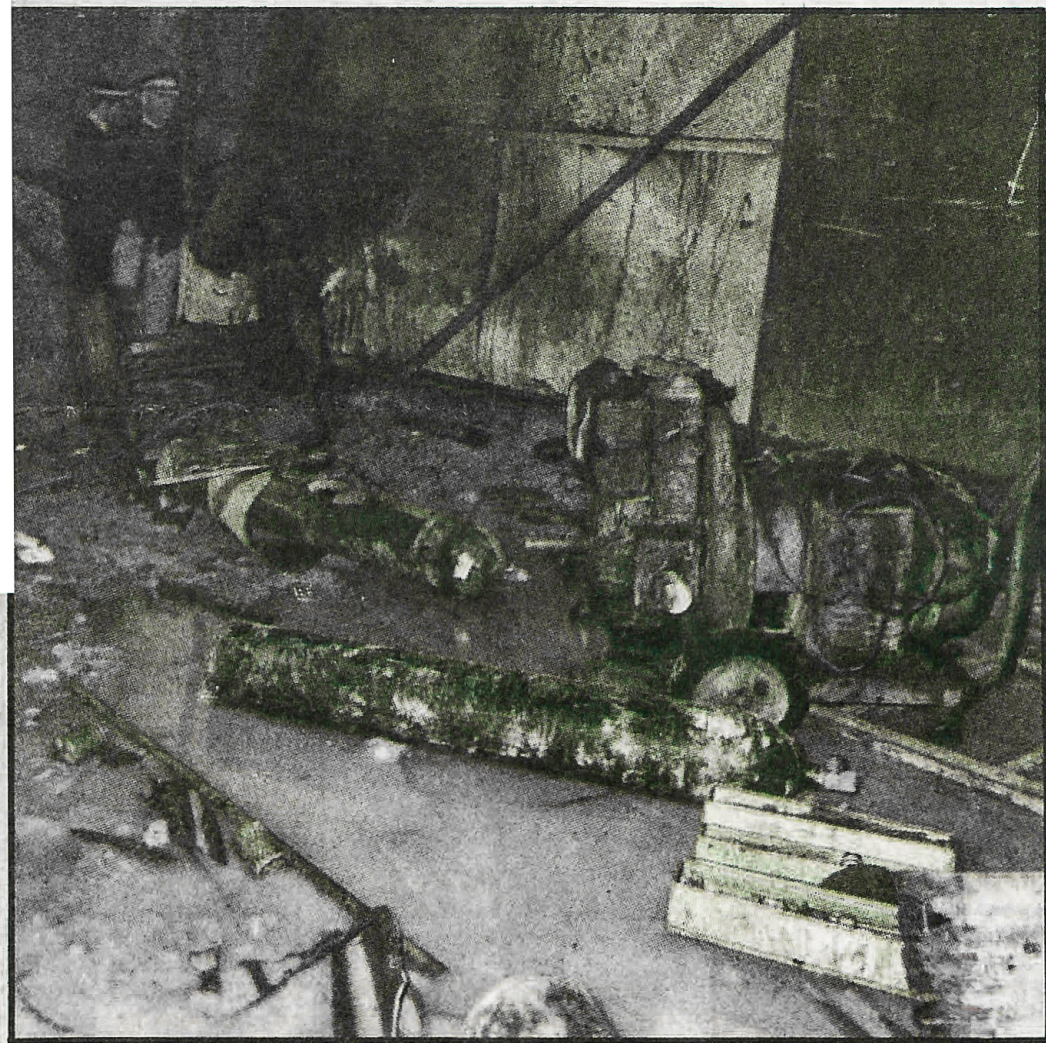




Inquiry launched after gas canister explodes

FIREMAN DIES IN BLAST TRAGEDY



●ABOVE: Firemen survey the damage inside the shed where their colleague was killed

●LEFT: The blast tore off roof panels and blew out the shed windows.

A FULL-SCALE inquiry began today into an explosion which killed an Oxfordshire volunteer fireman and injured six of his colleagues.

Mr John Wixey, 46, had gone into a workshop at Charlbury where oxygen and oxy-acetylene gas bottles were stored when there was a huge explosion.

He was flown to the John Radcliffe Hospital, Oxford, by helicopter but died from serious injuries soon after he arrived.

Firemen were called to a fire at the stone quarry in Ditchley Road, Charlbury just before 4pm yesterday.

Workmen at the stone quarry had seen smoke coming from a shed where equipment was stored.

Shocked

Mr Wixey was sub-officer in charge of the part-time Charlbury crew.

Site manager Mr Ken Fawdrey said: "It was not a big blaze. The Charlbury brigade arrived and I told them it could be dangerous because there were oxygen and oxy-acetylene gas bottles in there.

"There were hardly any flames or smoke and they appeared to have got it under control.

"Just then one of them went into the shed. Everything seemed all right. A few minutes later the place blew up."

Most of the roof of the workshop was blown off, and windows and part of the metal structure were blown out.

By DAVID HORNE,
PETER McINTYRE and
JACKIE DAY



JOHN WIXEY . . . killed by canister blast

A fire brigade spokesman said the crew started by fighting the fire from behind a mechanical excavator parked close to the shed, because they knew that the gas bottles were stored inside.

"They knocked out the immediate fire and then ventured into the building with two hoses, to cool the cylinders and knock out any hot spots and small remaining fires.

"They had been in the building for a period when the explosion occurred."

The spokesman said that all the injured firemen were in the building, but that Mr Wixey had caught the full force of the blast.

Recover

He was still conscious when ambulance crews arrived.

Three ambulance crews battled to keep Mr Wixey, of Hixet Wood, Charlbury, alive with an emergency drip line.

Mr Wixey's colleagues, though badly shocked themselves, helped as they waited for the police helicopter to arrive.

A senior doctor from the accident service at the John Radcliffe and Mr Mike Ward, the anaesthetist adviser for ambulance crews, arrived with the helicopter and supervised the flight back to the John Radcliffe.

But Mr Wixey died within minutes of arrival, from massive injuries.

The six other firemen were taken to hospital by ambulance but were re-

Chief dedicated to the service

COLLEAGUES of John Wixey, the man who gave his life for the fire service, were standing by to go back on duty today less than 24 hours after the tragedy which killed him.

The retained firemen who live in Charlbury were stood down from duty last night as the shock of their chief's death sank in.

Mike Mahony, a newsagent in Charlbury, who had worked as a retained fireman for six

years, said: "They call us retained firemen and it is supposed to be a part-time job, but for somebody like John it was a 24-hour commitment all the year round.

"He was a very dedicated man who worked hard for the Oxfordshire Fire Service, his family and his business."

Mr Wixey had joined the retained fire service more than 25 years ago and had risen to be the officer in charge — responsible for ensuring that

his team of volunteers would always respond to a call.

He was planning to retire soon, but had given his life to the work.

Partner

Station Officer Cyril Godfrey, of Witney, said all his men were stunned by the death. "It really hits you when one of your own men goes down."

Mr Wixey was a partner in his family garage business with brothers-

in-law Bill and David Parsons.

Mr Bill Parsons said today: "All of us here and the family are just very shocked. We still can't believe what has happened.

"He loved being a fireman and was very dedicated to the job, but I think he wanted to retire fairly soon after all his years of service."

Mr Wixey lived in Hixet Wood with his wife Janet and son Mathew.

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