

Birtle firefighters unharmed after close brush with blast

Birtle firefighters were lucky to escape serious injuries Wednesday morning when a large explosion came from a burning farmhouse, assistant fire commissioner Jack Carey says.

Two minor explosions came from the house before a large one, which may have been caused by dynamite stored on the premises, he said.

The house was nearly destroyed when the explosion startled 13 volunteer firefighters, Fire Chief Gerald Birch said. Some of the men fell "when they heard the bang. They just backed up so fast." The firefighters kept their distance after the explosion because it was un-

known what may have been stored in the house.

The one-storey wood frame house belonged to 80-year-old Reuben Newsham, who had operated a demolitions business. The house, valued at approximately \$25,000, was not insured. It was located about five kilometres east of Birtle on Highway 42.

The cause for the blaze has not been determined. The investigation will focus on an electric blanket which covered some potatoes to prevent them from freezing, Mr. Carey said. Mr. Newsham was staying in the Birtle Hotel.

Feb. 1983

Lost

Birtle firefighters were called out at 7:30 a.m. on Wednesday, February 10th to a fire at the home of Reuben Newsham, east of Birtle on Hwy. 42.

Mr. Newsham had moved to town several weeks ago and no one was in the house at the time of the fire. When firemen arrived the house was already engulfed in flames and could do little but to keep the fire from spreading. Water supplies at the farm were nil and water had to be hauled from Birtle.