

DEATH IN BLAST AT EXPLOSIVES PLANT

Small Building Wrecked; Damage Over Wide Area

MELBOURNE, Nov. 21: An immediate inquiry will be held into an explosion which wrecked the nitroglycerine section washing plant at the Maribyrnong explosives factory this afternoon and killed one man.

The man killed was Robert William Crago (62), charge hand, single, of Muldowney-street, Essendon. He was the only man in or near the plant when it blew up.

The operational safety committee of the Department of Supply was rushed to the plant minutes after the blast, and will begin the inquiry at once.

With a roar heard miles away the explosion shook Maribyrnong and Ascot Vale at 2.8 p.m., bringing scores of frightened people into the streets and shattering hundreds of win-

dows. It left a pall of smoke over the area. Twisted, shrapnel-like lumps of lead from the safety lining of the earth-mounded plant rained down over the 500-acre factory

ground and beyond, and spattered like hail in the Maribyrnong River

The blast and the falling lead smashed windows in most of the factory buildings, and caused fibrous-plaster walls near the nitro-glycerine section to cave in. Doors and windows of private houses across the river were blown in.

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Minor Injuries

Apart from Mr. Crago only two persons were hurt. They were factory hands who were walking through the area at the time. They suffered minor abrasions and were sent home after treatment. Dozens of persons rushed to the factory gates for news of relatives and friends inside.

Miss Nola Lock, who works in the general chemical section, said: "We knew what it was when we heard it. There was no panic. We stopped while the air was full of dust and we heard the lead falling on the roofs and smashing windows. One piece went through a roof in another block. Then we went back to work."

Mr. Tom Hartney, of McCracken-street, Essendon, with two new Australians—Janko Mlaka and Franz Richter—was burning off grass across the river and had a grandstand view of the explosion.

"Smoke and rubbish went about 300ft into the air," he said. "Then a hail of lead fell into the river, the road and the hillside like shrapnel pellets. We couldn't dodge because we couldn't see them. We were lucky not to be hit."

The front doors of the house nearest the explosion were blown in and most of the windows were broken.

"Cleaning-Up"

Cleaning-Up

An official of the Department of Supply said today that the damage had not been fully assessed.

The washing plant building, which was 10ft. high and measured only about 10ft. by 6ft., was destroyed. The blast damaged fibrous sheeting walls and roofs over a large section of the factory. Only a few persons were in the nitroglycerine section at the time.

The official said that the explosion had happened during "cleaning-up after the working of a charge of glycerine had been completed."

It was the factory's first casualty since the war. Only six or eight persons had been killed at the Maribyrnong factory in 40 years.