

DISTRICT GARAGE DESTROYED

An explosion that was heard and felt as far away as one mile from Lewisburg caused a fire in the District Nine Garage, Lewisburg, of the West Virginia Department of Highways, to spread to uncontrollable proportions that completely destroyed the garage and all contents and the old county jail building at the corner of US 219 and Randolph Street.

It is reported that the explosion was the result of two workmen using a heater to "thaw out" frozen paint in the highway striping machine. When the paint caught fire, the workmen attempted to put out the blaze with fire extinguishers but were unsuccessful. They had just got out of the building when the explosion occurred. A number of lesser explosions were heard and felt following the first major one.

Firemen from Lewisburg, Ronceverte, Fairlea, and White Sulphur Springs answered the 6:40 pm fire on Monday.

Some 12 pieces of highway equipment were in the garage at the time of the fire including a new striping machine.

Firemen did an outstanding job in retaining the fire to the garage proper and the old county jail building that was unoccupied at the time. Both buildings were owned by the county. Only through the supreme efforts of the firemen were the flames kept from an adjoining paint and tire storage building of the Department of Highways, the historic Greenbrier County Courthouse, and a supply of gasoline stored in the ground. Firemen fought the blaze during a snow storm, a steady wind, and temperatures hovering around 11 degrees.

This was probably the worst and most costly fire in Lewisburg's history. The old jail was built in about 1795. The total loss has not been arrived at but it is thought that the total will approach one-half million dollars. Telephone and electrical service was interrupted to some 425 customers in the immediate area. The electricity was off about three hours, while telephone service was restored the next day. The fire severed Virginia Electric & Power Company and C&P Telephone Company of West Virginia cables. Some three telephone cables were burned.

Lewisburg firemen were called back to the site several times Tuesday when the stubborn fire persisted to blaze up[. In fact on Wednesday morning a blaze broke out again in the jailers quarters of the jail, which contained quite an amount of huge timbers.

The firemen, VEPCO, and C&O workmen and law enforcement personnel are commended upon the excellent work they did in most unfavorable conditions.