

TRAPPED UNDER BLAZING LORRY

Marine Commando Dies of Burns

23 INJURED

Twenty-three Royal Marine Commandos were injured, and another died from burns, when a lorry in which they were returning from Horsham to their camp at Slinfold, overturned at Broadbridge Heath on Sunday night.

The vehicle was passing a stationary lorry which had another lorry in tow, when it crashed into an overhead cable pole, overturned and burst into flames. Two men were trapped under the lorry, but despite the intense heat one of them was dragged clear.

The dead man was Sidney William Wilson (21), of 10, Priory-road, Cambridge.

THE INQUEST

At the inquest at Horsham Town Hall yesterday, the Horsham Coroner (Mr. F. W. Butler), had the assistance of a jury of which Mr. W. J. Huntley was foreman.

Evidence of identification was given by Marine Commando George Frederick Leonard Ewin, who was also on the lorry. He said it was very foggy at the time.

He felt the vehicle swing out to the right. The lorry nearly toppled over, then righted itself but eventually overturned.

R.Q.M.S. Oswald Bernard Falconer said about 20 men got on to the lorry at West-street, Horsham. He was sitting next to the driver.

DENSE FOG

The speed of the lorry just before the accident was 20-25 m.p.h. It was possible to see only a few yards ahead because of the fog. Just beyond the fork at Broadbridge Heath the headlights picked up a man in the road waving to them. Immediately afterwards there was a collision and the lorry toppled over and burst into flames. He and the driver kicked through the windscreen and got out.

P.-c. Bateman said the lorry driver, Maurice Sidney Cutting, was still in hospital suffering from

severe shock. In a statement Cutting said his speed was 25 m.p.h. On reaching Broadbridge Heath he saw a vehicle without lights on the near side and a man behind it waving his arm. He pulled out to avoid the man and then hit the kerb. The lorry ran along on two wheels and then overturned after hitting something. He switched off the engine, and was almost choked with petrol fumes, but he managed to scramble out.

Replying to the Coroner P.-c. Bateman said there were 23 men taken to hospital but only seven were detained.

Sgt. Major H. Bennett said after the impact he called out, "Don't get into a panic; take your time." He described how they pulled one man from under the lorry but could not save Wilson because the heat was too fierce. Wilson was unconscious.

"40-45 M.P.H."

The driver of the stationary lorry, Marine Lealie Jones, stationed at Parham Park, Stourington, said he had taken a wrong turning and was discussing with Sergeant Foreman, who was steering the towed vehicle, which direction to take, when they heard the lorry approaching. He ran about 10 yards as far as the fork and waved to the lorry-driver. The lorry swerved and just caught the rear offside corner of the wagon in tow. The next thing he knew was that the lorry was on its side and on fire. He 'phoned for the fire brigade and ambulance.

Replying to the Coroner, he said there was a red rear light on his lorry and on the one in tow. He thought the power cable falling on the overturned lorry caused sparks which ignited the petrol. He estimated the speed of the lorry at 40-45 m.p.h. Visibility was 10-15 feet.

The Coroner said he could not imagine an experienced driver travelling at 40-45 m.p.h. on a foggy night and he thought the estimate was an exaggeration. He was inclined to accept the evidence that the speed was 25 m.p.h.

"I cannot suggest there is any criminal responsibility on the part of the driver; I am more inclined to criticise the action of the driver of the stationary lorry in not going farther up the road," added the Coroner.

A verdict of "Accidental Death" was recorded, and the jury exonerated both drivers from blame.