

## The life and death of fireman Bob Smith

Graham Boon Reports

FIREMAN Bob Smith's job was saving other people's lives and property.

His proudest possessions were a medal from the Queen, and a commendation for bravery signed by the late Winston Churchill.

For 23 years he was a well-liked and hard working member of Sheffield Fire Brigade. Then eight days ago Bob and his colleagues at Darnall fire station answered a routine call to a works in the city's east end.



**Bob Smith ... 'A good fireman and a brave one.'**

It was destined to be his last.

The job was one which the Darnall Crews - based in the heart of the city's ; steel industry - tackle dozens of times each year. Molten ore was seeping from a pot and flowing over the shop floor.

But this time was different. There was an explosion and minutes after their arrival 11 firemen were on their way to two Sheffield hospitals. They had taken the full force of a blast described by an eye-witness as being like "a volcano erupting"

### Fighting

Bob, aged 47, of Cartmell Road, Woodseats, was burned from head to foot. For three days he was fighting for his life in the Northern General Hospital. When he died he was the first Sheffield fireman to lose his life in the line of duty for six years.

But Bob was no stranger to danger. He had known Frank Mallinson, fatally injured in a blast at the Mermaid Cafe in Norfolk Street, Sheffield, in 1968.

But Bob was never put off by the risks he took.

Bob had been near to death in 1954 when he had been in the brigade just two-and-a-half years.

He was lowered to rescue two 15-year-old boys from disused mine workings at Loxley and was nearly overcome by poisonous fumes.

The rescue did not go unnoticed. It earned Bob and his colleagues an award for bravery. His commendation was signed by the then Prime Minister Winston Churchill and Bob I proudly framed it.

## Busier

His rise through the ranks was slow and 12 months ago, one year after receiving his 20-year long service medal, Bob was promoted to sub-officer.

It meant moving from Lowedges, where he served as leading fireman, to the busy Darnall station.

Bob's last day on duty began at 9 a.m., and the day had been reasonably quiet.

The Darnall crews were the first to arrive at British Steel's Tinsley Park Works in Shepcote Lane.

There was no warning - just a deafening bang. Of the 11 firemen, five were badly injured.

Mrs. Smith knows that if Bob had survived, the explosion would have made no difference. He would have gone back to Darnall and faced more oil fires and molten ore leaks. "Bob had been in the fire brigade for nearly half his life. He was a good fireman and a brave one," said Mrs. Smith.

A long service medal from the Queen and a framed letter with a famous signature underneath is a permanent reminder of that.

Still detained in the Northern General Hospital are Fireman Paul Parkin of Bramley Drive, Handsworth, Sheffield; Fireman Peter Childe, of Smalldale Road, Frecheville, Sheffield; and Fireman Robert Codman, of Greenwood Road, Darnall.

Sub-officer Brian Ellis, of Foxwood Avenue, Intake, Sheffield, is in Wharncliffe Hospital.