Two die in Mounds View blast

Diane Balk

It was 4:44 a.m. Tuesday and the only person moving on Long Lake Rd. in Mounds View was Diane Balk, making the rounds on her newspaper route.

She stopped at the first house on the left, grabbed a copy of the paper and opened the door of her ’77 Chevette. An explosion split the stillness and the world turned to flame.

"The whole street was lit up," she said. "There was fire all up and down Long Lake Rd." Desperate, she thought, "I’ve got to get out of here." Still clutching the newspaper, she ran through a wall of fire.

The flames burned her face, arms, legs back and singed her clothes, but she made it through. Balk, 47, is in serious condition at Hennepin County Medical Center.

Beverly and Jennifer Spano

When the explosion shook their house on Woodcrest Dr., in Mounds View Tuesday morning, Bev and Don Spano’s first thought was to get the kids out. Don grabbed Allison, 8, and ran to safety out the back door toward the pond behind their house.

Bev got Jenny, 7, and darted out the front door.

They got as far as the driveway when the wall of fire came racing around the corner from Long Lake Rd.

It flashed down the street and the air exploded in flames, enveloping them in a fireball of vaporized gasoline that burned over 98 percent of their bodies. Bev Spano, 35, died at 10:07 a.m. St. Paul-Ramsey Medical Center. Jenny died there exactly an hour later.

Fire was ‘like a flamethrower’

The explosion some 20 feet from the street in Mounds View, Thursday, is being identified as the work of a man who lives next door. A man who is also a co-worker of the two girls who perished.

"It was like a flamethrower," said one of the girls’ friends, Diane Balk.

The explosion was so powerful that it blew the windows out of the Spanos’ home and shook the walls of houses across the neighborhood.

"Everything was on fire," said Balk. "There was no time to think. We just ran out the door.""}

Report urges reconsideration of five utilities cases

By Joe Regan and Kirk Mullin

The Minnesota Department of Public Utilities last week closed five investigation cases involving violations of public utilities rules.

Three of the cases involved violations of the Public Utilities Act, one involved violation of the Public Utilities Bill of Rights and another involved violation of the Public Utilities Code.

Naval pioneer Hyman Rickover dies

New York Times

Washington, D.C.

Vice Adm. Hyman Rickover, 86, the father of the nuclear-powered submarine, died here Wednesday. He was the founder of the U.S. Navy’s nuclear power program.

He is survived by his wife of 61 years, Helen, and two sons.

Rickover was born in 1902 in Russia. He came to the United States as a boy and became a naturalized citizen.

Rickover continued on page 11A

Inside today’s newspaper/

Severe quake shakes California/3A

Stock index slides 18.27 points/3M

FDA bans some sulfite use/8A

Jacobs wants to raise brewery/1B

Scruggs denies role in slaying/1B

Almanac

Wednesday, July 9, 1986

Today’s weather/ What more could you ask? It’s not raining and there’s not even a wind, until a crip in the air.

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Inferno in Mounds View

The break in the pipeline caused this hole in the pavement on Long Lake Rd. in Mounds View. Firefighters used sand to contain the fire.

Star Tribune (Minneapolis, Minnesota) · Wed, Jul 9, 1986 · Page 10
Inferno in Mounds View

Site of gas leak and explosion

News carrier's car

Spano home at 2617 Woodcrest Dr.

Center caused by explosion

Star Tribune (Minneapolis, Minnesota) · Wed, Jul 9, 1986 · Page 11

2 who died devoted, popular in community

By: Sheryl Fane · Star Tribune

Pioneers, family members and co-

workers remembered former fighter pilot and Minnesota National Guard

Colonel James Spano, 55, who had served more than 30 years in the military, as

a dedicated leader, a loving father and a friend to many.

James Spano, 55, died in a house explosion

that also claimed the life of his wife, Doris, 53, on July 1. The couple lived at 2617

Woodcrest Drive in Mounds View and had two children: daughter Eileen, 26, and son

James Jr., 22. Approxiately 150 firefighters fought the house blaze that killed the

Spanos and destroyed the home.

Mr. Spano was a retired colonel in the Minnesota National Guard's

140th Field Artillery, where he served as operations officer. He was a

member of the American Legion Post 46.

According to the family, Mr. Spano was also a former state senator in

the Wisconsin State Assembly and a member of the Wisconsin State Senate.

He was born in 1970 in Wisconsin and graduated from the University of

Wisconsin-Whitewater with a degree in business administration.

His son, James Jr., is a pilot in the U.S. Air Force and has been

posted to a base in Europe.

Spano's family described him as an active person who

enjoyed fishing, hunting and sailing.

Mrs. Spano was a homemaker and

mother of two children: daughter Eileen, 26, and son James Jr., 22.

She was also a member of the American Legion Post 46.

Mr. Spano's father, James Sr., is a retired colonel in the

Minnesota National Guard and a member of the American Legion Post 46.

Mr. Spano's mother, Doris, is a homemaker and

mother of two children: daughter Eileen, 26, and son James Jr., 22.

She was also a member of the American Legion Post 46.

Mr. Spano's sisters, Eileen and James Jr., are both

married and have children of their own.

Mr. Spano's children have described him as a loving father who

loved spending time with his family.

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