



Mining Accident News No.0935

7 to 11 December 2009

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Monday 7 December 2009

S.Africa: Two miners die, two still missing

Extract from the Times Live, Zambia

Two mineworkers are missing at a Gold Fields mine in Carletonville after an earth tremor, and two people died at an Aurora mine on the East Rand on Saturday morning, trade union Solidarity reported.

Aurora Empowerment Systems recently acquired the East Rand shafts from a failing Pamodzi Gold.

The union said the miners who died, including a shift foreman, were apparently overcome by gas at Aurora.

All mining activities at the shaft were halted and an investigation was being conducted.

The union's spokesman, Jaco Kleynhans, said: "The current level of mining fatalities is cause for concern". Solidarity warned last month that mining safety would have to be increased particularly in the silly season - the last two months of the year in which there are traditionally more mining accidents.

Gold Fields' Driefontein mine near Carletonville was hit by four earth tremors.

The union said two workers were missing and three others were slightly injured after the earthquakes started late last night.

"Two employees were trapped in the ensuing rock fall," said the union.

All mining activities have been stopped while an investigation into the accident and the search for the missing workers continues.



"Why did I have to give bad kids all that coal?"

Tuesday 8 December 2009

S.Africa: Missing Gold Fields mineworker found dead

Extract from Reuters, South Africa

JOHANNESBURG - Gold Fields, the world's No.4 gold producer, said on Tuesday one of the two miners missing after a series of earthquakes at its Driefontein mine in South Africa on Monday had been found dead.

The company stopped production at the mine on Monday following a series of earthquakes that

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led to a fall of ground at its No. 4 shaft, injuring three miners while two others went missing.

"Driefontein's rescue teams continue to work unabated in its search for the second employee," the company said in a statement.

Spokesman Julian Gwillim said all three of the injured workers had been discharged from hospital.

The first earthquake at Driefontein -- situated west of Johannesburg in the nearby town of Carletonville -- measured 3.4 on the Richter scale and hit on Sunday night.

Gold Fields said blasting and production activities at the mine remained suspended while rescue operations continued.

Gold production at the mine fell by 11 percent to 25,814 kilograms in the 2009 financial year, due to major interventions meant to improve safety.

South Africa, which has the world's deepest gold mines, has a dire safety record, and the fatalities have led to the temporary closure of mines by authorities, denting output.

Wednesday 9 December 2009

UK: Man killed in pit accident named

Extract from Yorkshire Post, UK

The circumstances of a miner's death in South Yorkshire were still a mystery last night.

The man who died at Maltby Colliery, Rotherham, on Monday evening, was named yesterday as Jackie Fisher, 52, of Edlington, near Doncaster.

Mine owners Hargreaves Services denied early reports suggesting Mr Fisher had fallen down a shaft from ground level but said they would not give details about what had happened while the police and Health and Safety Executive were investigating.

It appears Mr Fisher was involved in an accident 940 metres underground, which may have involved a fall from a working platform.

A specialist mines rescue team was among those called to the incident on Monday.

Early reports said another man was injured but a Hargreaves Services spokesman said the only other person involved was a witness to the accident who had been treated for shock.

Hargreaves is mainly in the mining support business and Maltby, which employs 500 people and produces about a million tonnes a year, is its only pit. Much of its coal goes to a coking plant at Barnsley, also run by Hargreaves.

Mr Fisher, who was married, had worked in mining for 27 years. A post-mortem examination is due to be carried out today.

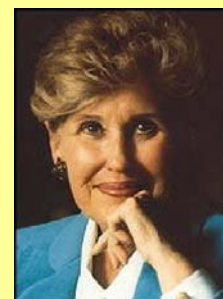
The National Union of Mineworkers said it would not comment until the full facts emerged. But Yorkshire NUM secretary Chris Kitchen said: "Eight miners having been killed in the past few years and this adverse trend must be reversed."

Quote of the Xmas week



"Never worry about the size of your Christmas tree. In the eyes of children, they are all 30 feet tall."

Larry Wilde,
(Humorist & author, USA)



"There's nothing sadder in this world than to awake Christmas morning and not be a child."

Erma Bombeck
(Novelist, USA 1927-1996)

This week in mining accident history

21 December 1951

Orient No.2 Coal Mine, Illinois, USA

Underground Coal Mine

Gas explosion

119 killed

Source: <http://members.evansville.net/boneyard/orient.htm>

December 21, 1951 began no more spectacularly than any other pre-Christmas day in the rural coal mining towns of Franklin County, southern Illinois. Surely there was the same pre-holiday feeling in the air that occurs each year, the palpable feeling created by everyone's combined anticipation for the approaching Christmas holiday. There was certainly no sense of foreboding or danger. The women packed their husbands' dinner pails and kissed them as they left for work just like any other day. It was supposed to be the last working shift at the West Frankfort Orient #2 Coal Mine before the miners' Christmas vacation was to begin.

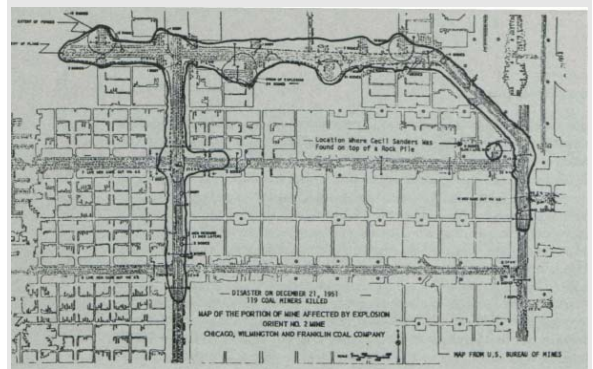
At 4:00 p.m. on Thursday evening December 21, 1951 two hundred eighteen men reported to work for the second shift at the mine. In 1951 the Orient #2 was the largest shaft mine in the country. Most of the men were proud to be working at the mine and providing a decent living for their families. Before descending into the earth each man retrieved his metal, fire-check tag punched with his specific number and his headlamp from a board in the lamp house. Next, the men went down into the mine, load after load, in a clanging, creaking, steel cage operated by mechanical pulleys until all two hundred eighteen of them were beneath the earth.

As the men waited for their turn in the cage the prevailing mood must have been particularly light and jovial. I imagine that there were many excited conversations about upcoming Christmas celebrations and family gatherings. As the cage landed each man departed to his

given work location in the mine to meet up with his particular crew. My grandfather was a face boss, who was working with a crew of sixteen men.

The miners were just a few hours away from the beginning of their Christmas vacations when at 7:40 p.m. a blast ripped through the tunnels. It occurred about two miles back from the shaft, and it shattered supporting timbers for three miles in the sprawling mine, which covered a twelve-mile area. Paul Donahue, a night dispatcher at the mine, told of trying to spread the alarm when the explosion struck. His station was about 350 feet from the main shaft. "There was a terrific sound, like a thud", Donahue reported to the Benton Evening News in 1951. "It numbed my ears; I yelled, 'Boys there's an explosion. We better get out'." He said he tried to spread the alarm through the mine but was unable to do so because the switchboard power had been cut off. Four or five minutes later, he said there was a terrific roaring wind, which filled the tunnel with dust. Swallowed in darkness and searching for a way out, he followed a railroad track to the elevator in the main shaft before he lost consciousness. He was later rescued.

The January 1, 1952 United Mine Workers Journal reported that normally 300 men worked on the second shift, but only 257 men were in the mine that night. Many, who were in areas remote from the blast area, about two miles northwest of the No. 4 shaft, were able to escape. Of these, a large number returned to help with the rescue work in which a total of 500 men were engaged at the height of the rescue mission.



After the explosion, the whistle blew at the portal alerting all within hearing distance that an accident had occurred at the mine. Rescue workers from all over southern Illinois converged on the scene. As word quickly spread throughout the county, family members desperate for news about their loved ones began arriving at the site. Many of them kept around the clock vigils until they received definite information on the fate of their men. They waited, they hoped, and they prayed. As the massiveness of the tragedy became evident more and more national reporters arrived, joining the already present local reporters to relay the details of the tragedy to the waiting public.

John L. Lewis, United Mine Workers of America President, John Forbes, Director of the U.S. Bureau of Mines, and Oscar Chapman, Secretary of the Interior, flew from Washington DC on 12-23-51 and went below the surface with rescue workers for a personal inspection of the damaged sections. Chapman ordered one dozen federal mine inspectors to open an investigation into the tragedy. Illinois Governor, Adlai Stevenson, and Walter Edie, Illinois Director of Mines, visited the mine in the days following the explosion as well.

It was discovered that the terrible force of the explosion knocked mine cars weighing several tons off their tracks and snapped 12 by 12 timbers like twigs. The maximum force of the explosion extended the full length of two passageways, or more than a mile, and was followed by clouds of dense smoke which permeated throughout the mine and its shafts and interfered with the work of rescuers. Asbestos-clad rescue workers, which included brothers, sons and fathers of the trapped men, worked feverishly to reach them. They first concentrated on the task of searching for men who had survived the blast, but as they advanced through the gas-filled tunnels along which the bodies of many miners were lying, they soon realized the futility of this effort. Twenty-eight bodies were recovered in the first

24 hours, and the estimates of the numbers of victims were increased from hour to hour. The rescue work began immediately after the explosion and proceeded slowly under extremely difficult conditions for three days. Equipped with gas masks, and with their miners' cap lamps providing the only illumination in the black, smoke-filled tunnels, the rescue teams bravely penetrated two to three miles through the underground passageways and carried out bodies one by one. They sometimes had to crawl on their hands and knees to carry the bodies as far as two miles before they could be loaded onto underground motorcars. They groped through dark, rock-strewn tunnels and quickly erected temporary barricades to act as air stops to protect them from the carbon monoxide filled air. Many of the rescue workers were temporarily overcome by gas and emerged gasping and coughing. Several cave-ins further added to the difficulties of their work, and yet these brave men determinedly returned time and time again with the hope of finding a brother miner still alive.

As the bodies were recovered from the mine, they were taken to the junior high school auditorium in West Frankfort, which had been converted into a temporary morgue to accommodate the rising number of dead. Terrified, grief-stricken family members walked between the rows of bodies covered by tarps from the feet up. The tarps were pulled back, one by one, until each body was recognized and identified. Almost all of the bodies bore marks indicating they had been hurled against the walls or machinery. Many were charred and their clothing seemed to have been burned, evidently by the flash of the blast. Expert observers said there could not have been enough oxygen left to support a fire after the explosion. Those not killed directly by the blast were killed by carbon monoxide after the blast consumed the healthy oxygen in the tunnels. Death by carbon monoxide poisoning was the fate of my grandfather.

Medical evidence indicated that most of the men died almost instantly, though one, Cecil Sanders, survived a 60-hour ordeal. He was the only survivor in the explosion-devastated area of the mine. When Sanders described his experience, he said, "We knew the only thing to do was find a fresh air course. There were eight or nine men in my bunch and we began to put up brattices. We tried to put up canvas curtains so the gas would go around us. But the gas current was so strong it caught us between two air courses. We knew the only thing to do was find a hole and hope the gas would go over us. We ran back into the rocks just as far as we could go. But it wasn't far enough. The gas seemed to cover us. Then a little while later - I don't know just when - I lost consciousness. When I came to, I was on a big pile of rocks. I tried to stand up but all I could do was sit up. How long I had been in that shape, I don't know but after a long time I saw a beam of light and there were men coming through the smoke." "Help me, boys, help me," I called. Somebody said, 'My God, there is a man alive.'"

Cecil Sander's family's prayers were answered after 60 terrifying hours; but for 119 other families hope turned to tears. Prayers for the safe return of their loved ones from beneath the earth turned to prayers for comfort a few days later as they returned the bodies of their men to the earth and released their souls to heaven. The heart-wrenching task of burying the dead began Christmas Eve when 18 funerals were held. 24 funerals, including my grandfather's, were scheduled for Christmas day, and the remainder for December 26th. The weather was cold and drizzly as funeral corteges shuttled back and forth for three days down West Frankfort and Benton's main streets. What were to have been joyful Christmas celebrations became mournful funeral processions and final farewells to 119 beloved men of Franklin County, Illinois.

The 1-15-52 edition of the United Mine Workers Journal reported that a team of six federal experts concluded that the caving of the roof in

the abandoned areas of the mine, plus the partial short-circuiting of the air current due to the opening of a ventilating door, caused a "large body of gas" to push out of the abandoned area into the active working section. The single ventilating door, which was open to allow cars and locomotives to move through, also allowed the body of gas to move through. Investigators said it was evident that a moving column of gas, rather than a standing body of gas, was ignited.

Two shuttle cars in non-permissible condition were the first ignition source this body of gas contacted, they reported. It was not known whether the cars were in operation. Two electric drills, also in non-permissible condition, were the second source the gas reached. The drills were reported to have been operating at the time of the explosion.

Further spread of the explosion was halted when it reached areas where it could expand into open workings and where enough rock dust had been applied to retard propagation of a flame. These conditions made it possible for 133 men in unaffected regions to make their way to the surface uninjured and unaided. Four other men were rescued, one of whom later died in the hospital.

Contrary to federal findings, Walter Edie, the Illinois Director of Mines, laid considerable stress on smoking as a possible source of ignition. He also mentioned in his state investigation report the possibility of "an electric spark from a moving electric locomotive" being a possible source of ignition. Federal investigators reported that cigarettes were found near the bodies of two men, but they stated definitely that there was no evidence that the men were smoking or lighting cigarettes at the instant of ignition. It is important to note that a thorough search failed to locate either matches or a lighter.

Federal inspectors had made recommendations at both Centralia and West Frankfort, which if they had been followed would have saved the

miners' lives. (On March 25, 1947 111 miners lost their lives in a similar explosion in Centralia, Illinois.) During the last inspection before the explosion at West Frankfort, twenty-one of the violations of the Federal Safety Code were still uncorrected from previous inspections. Representative Melvin Price (Democrat - Illinois) said shortly after the explosion, "Federal inspectors could only recommend that these safety violations be corrected. Had the Federal law the teeth it required and a bill which I have pending in this Congress, H.R. 268, will give to it, the mine operators would have been compelled to comply with the inspector's recommendation or be subject to strong penalty, and if the inspector found imminent danger the legislation provides authority to close the mine."

Reemphasizing the UMWA's persistent efforts to obtain more effective safety measures on a permanent national basis, John L. Lewis declared: "There should be more frequent federal inspections of our mines and the federal inspectors should be given the authority to enforce their safety recommendations. These inspections should be made regardless of cost. We do not believe the value of human lives can be measured in dollars." He added, "It is a sad commentary that our legislatures only focus on mining problems after they are shocked into shame. I hope they are ashamed now that they did not listen to the pleadings of the men in the mining industry after the Centralia disaster. I hope our legislators will consider the men who are doomed to die in future mine disasters unless action is taken."

In 1952, after John L. Lewis eloquently and passionately argued for improvements in mine safety standards, Congress amended and strengthened the 1941 Coal Mine Health and Safety Act. The amendment gave federal mine inspectors the power to close a mine if they deemed it unsafe. The deaths averted by this amendment are incalculable.

The one hundred nineteen men who were killed in the Orient No. 2 disaster left 301 dependents.

109 of them were widows, 175 were children under the age of 18, and 17 were other family dependents. The average age of the men who died was 40.9 years. The youngest man was 19; the oldest was 64. Added together, their total life expectancy was 3,438 years. These years represent the real time of children without fathers and grandfathers, wives without husbands, and parents without sons. Two generations later, the grandchildren and great grandchildren of these lost men weep. We weep to have never known our grandfathers' unconditional love, or to have never seen their benevolent smiles directed at us. We weep to have never heard their laughter or benefited from their years of life and wisdom.



Thursday 10 December 2009

S.Africa: Body of second Driefontein miner recovered

Extract from 94.2 jacaranda fm, Johannesburg, SA

Goldfields says the body the second miner involved in an accident at the Driefontein gold mine has been found.

The body of a second mineworker trapped underground at the Driefontein gold mine outside Carletonville has been found early this morning.

The body of the first mineworker was recovered on Monday after the fall of ground caused by a seismic event at the mine's number four shaft on Sunday. Three more employees were injured as

a result of four separate earthquakes that hit the mine between Sunday night and Monday morning.

Julian Gwillem of the mining company, Goldfields, says they have had five fatal incidents at the Driefontein mine since the beginning of the financial year.

"Gold Fields deeply regrets the accidents and offers its sincere condolences to the families of the deceased," he added.

There is an ongoing investigation into the causes of the accident and the mine has not operated since.

UK: 'Human error' behind pit death

Extract from The Star, UK

A FATHER-of-two who died at a South Yorkshire colliery in a tragic accident probably died as the result of "human error", his bosses said today.

Jackie Fisher, aged 52, from Doncaster, was found by a colleague underground in the pit shaft at Maltby Colliery around 5pm on Monday.

A spokesman for Hargreaves Services, which owns the pit, said: "An investigation was immediately launched by South Yorkshire Police and the Health and Safety Executive, with the full cooperation of the Maltby Colliery management team.

"The investigation continued throughout Tuesday and was concluded that evening.

"The Health & Safety Executive will file a report of the incident in due course. However, at this time it appears the most likely cause of this tragic accident is human error."

Mr Fisher, from Edlington, had worked in the mining industry since 1972.

He started at the Yorkshire Main pit in 1972, before moving to Maltby Colliery in 1985.

Gerry Huitson, Hargreaves Services Production Division Managing Director, paid tribute to Mr Fisher.

He said: "The loss of our colleague Jackie Fisher is deeply felt by all of us at Maltby Colliery. Jackie was liked and respected by his colleagues. He was a miner through and through and had been a part of our team for more than 20 years.

"On behalf of everyone at Maltby I want to convey our sincere condolences to his family at this very difficult time for them."

Maltby HR Manager Tony Wood added: "The management team want to offer our thanks to the local branch officials of NACODS and the NUM for their unstinting support and assistance throughout this difficult time for everybody at Maltby Colliery."

A South Yorkshire Police spokeswoman said a post mortem examination would take place today.

Mining dictionary

A guide to common mining terminology

S

smelting

A method of extracting metals, usually base metals, from ore in a furnace in the presence of a flux. Smelting reduces the gangue to slag and frees the metal component.



Merry Christmas to you and your families & the Safest of New Year's -Ed.