



Mining Accident News No.1025

27 August to 3 September 2010

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Friday 27 August 2010

Vic: Bond over Ballarat teen's mining death

Extract from thecourier.com.au

A BALLARAT magistrate said the driver of a truck that crushed his 17-year-old co-worker has accepted his actions resulted in the death of the young man.

Magistrate Kay Robertson convicted Robert Strucell, 37, over the death and sentenced him to a 12-month good behaviour bond, ordered he pay \$2000 to the court fund and complete an occupational health and safety course.

She said Strucell's life would never be the same as a result of the accident.

"He must live with this for the rest of his life," Ms Robertson said.

Strucell pleaded guilty to a charge of failing to take reasonable care of others in relation to the accident during an earlier hearing of the Ballarat Magistrates Court this week.

The accident occurred in December 2008 at Ballarat Goldfields when the 40-tonne dump truck driven by Strucell rolled over Damien Tuddenham, who jumped from the truck and fell over after getting a lift.

Earlier this week, Worksafe prosecutor Karen Argiropoulos said Strucell, who was employed with Porter Excavations at the time of the death, did not take all reasonable precautions to ensure Mr Tuddenham was clear of the truck.

In sentencing Strucell, Ms Robertson said he was a truck driver and his culpability was not that of management or a supervisor.

"He was not in a position to implement a safe system across the worksite," Ms Robertson said.

"Mr Strucell committed an offence but general deterrence takes a lesser role than that of the employer."

NOTE: Views expressed in this newsletter are those of the individual sender, and are not necessarily the views of Industry & Investment NSW.

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She also noted since the incident Strucell had been made redundant by Porter Excavations.

Ms Robertson said references she had been given indicated Strucell was a compassionate, caring, honest man and a committed employee.

Charges have been laid against Ballarat Goldfields, Midwest Civil Pty Ltd and Porter Excavations in relation to the accident and will be heard in the Ballarat Magistrates Court on September 20.

Saturday 28 August 2010

Chile: Underground Dreams - Beer, Hugs and Weddings

Extract from The Wall Street Journal

SAN JOSÉ MINE, Chile—Claudio Yáñez wants beer and a hot dog. Esteban Rojas wants to finally have a real church wedding with his wife of 25 years. Raúl Bustos wants to hug his five-year-old daughter.

For Chileans, these men and their colleagues are known simply as "Los 33"—the 33 miners who have been trapped half a mile below ground since the Aug. 5 collapse of the San José mine. The men have captured the attention of the world by surviving longer underground than all but a handful of mine accident victims.



An image of one of the miners from video (Zuma Press)

Ranging in age from 19 to 63, they include a former professional soccer player, a Bolivian immigrant in his first week at the mine, a salty former seaman who had premonitions about an accident and a man in his 50s who is still waiting

to see the grandson born just before the cave-in occurred.

What Chileans are calling the "Miracle of the San José Mine" is the tale of how unthinkable adversity turned this motley collection of miners into a doggedly disciplined unit, how a recently elected billionaire president risked his reputation in spearheading their rescue and how family members never lost hope.

The story isn't by any means over. It will take three to four months for a 30-ton drill to gouge a 2,200-foot tunnel down to the chamber where the men are holed up. The plan is to hoist the men out one-by-one, a journey that could take about 40 minutes for each miner.

In the meantime, rescuers send food, water and letters to the miners in tubes that whoosh down the four-inch shaft that serves as the miners' umbilical cord. Doctors are gradually ratcheting up the caloric intake of the men who each lost an average 20 pounds on rations, according to health workers. On Thursday the miners got their closest thing to a full meal in weeks: stewed apples and bread with quince jelly.

In a video released Thursday, the men—shirtless, scrawny, with scraggly beards, but big smiles—showed the world their temporary home. "This is the famous shelter," said one of the men. They pointed to a makeshift "casino," where they played dominoes, and demonstrated how they had divided tasks needed to keep the refuge running. One miner was keeping a journal on all that had happened. "Get us out of here soon," said another, in the spectral lantern-light of the mine.

The men can walk a distance through some unblocked tunnels, but spend most of their time in a couple of shelters that are relatively well ventilated and protected from cave-ins.

Physiologically and psychologically, the miners have entered seldom-explored territory, says Jeff Dyché, a James Madison University psychologist, who studied submariners when he served in the U.S. Navy.

Without sunlight serving as a regulator, the human body clock runs about 24 and a half hours, Mr. Dyche says, which means the miners are "going to be completely disengaged from what time it is in the outside world." To make sure the miners are alert on the day of the rescue, he says, doctors will have to try and re-sync the men's body rhythms by putting them on the same sleeping and waking schedule as people above ground.

Rescue planners at the state copper company, Corporacion Nacional del Cobre, have been discussing whether it would be necessary to blindfold the miners during the extraction or to conduct the operation at night, so they aren't overwhelmed by the light when they come out.

More immediately, government rescuers are grappling with the question of how much control to place on the miners' communication with loved ones. Earlier this week, family members said government psychologists had asked to review the letters they send down to the miners to make sure they avoided potentially upsetting issues, such as the fact the men may not be getting out of the ground until Christmas. Luciano Reygada, whose father is in the mine, said a psychologist told him, "Don't say that we hope you come out soon. Just say that we'll be waiting for you when you come out." Rescuers have since said they gently told the 33 of their estimated time of departure, and the miners seemed to take it in stride.

Sergio Donoso, the uncle of Raúl Bustos, feels responsible for his nephew's predicament. Six months ago, after one of the biggest earthquakes in a century along with a roiling tsunami smashed the southern shipyard where Mr. Bustos worked, Mr. Donoso suggested he travel north, to the mines. "He was worried about future catastrophes, so I told him there were stable jobs in mining," said Mr. Donoso, who has been keeping vigil above the mine.

Mr. Bustos' mother, Rosa Ibañez, came to the mine right away from her home in far-off southern Chile. It was the first time she'd flown

on a plane. In Mr. Bustos' first letter to his family this week, he said that he'd come up with a nickname for the diamond-tipped drill that rescuers had used to locate the men's underground shelter: He called it "María Paz," in honor of his five-year-old daughter, who relatives say is a handful.

Gregory Belenky, director of the Sleep and Performance Research Center at Washington State University, says the Israeli military found during the 1973 Yom Kippur war that the wrong kind of communication with family could add to stress. But Mr. Belenky, who served 29 years in the U.S. Army working on combat stress and other issues, thinks he would level with the miners about the rescue strategy "so they can plan, adjust expectations and so everyone is on the same page."

The plight of the 33 men has been an eye opener for many Chileans. One of Latin America's most advanced economies, Chile has been a darling on Wall Street for its free-market ethos. Its capital, Santiago, is clean and modern, with a scaled-down version of the Chrysler Building. But despite the emergence of other industries, including finance and construction, mining remains the bedrock of the economy, accounting for the biggest share of exports and output. The accident and rescue have allowed Chileans to get acquainted with people who are responsible for much of the country's prosperity, but remain largely hidden from view due to the very nature of their work.

When the miners broke out into a ragged chorus of the national anthem after the first telephone contact was made with them on Monday, it was as "as though we couldn't believe that some countrymen are still that way, of that caliber and that timber," wrote Daniel Mansuy, a professor of political philosophy, in the Santiago newspaper La Tercera. Family members holding vigil above the mine said it more simply on a message emblazoned in marker on a Chilean flag: "Chile without miners isn't Chile."

The miners had no way of knowing what was in store for them when they showed up for their shift that fateful Thursday, Aug. 5. Like many of the miners, Mr. Yañez, who had worked eight months in the mine after leaving a low-paying construction job, "was just desperate for a paycheck" says his half-brother Pablo Lagos.

Twenty-four-year-old Bolivian Carlos Mamani, who emigrated to Chile to find work, was only in his first week at the mine, his brother Cesar Mamani told Chilean television.

While Chile on the whole has a good mining safety record, smaller to mid-sized mines like San José often escaped scrutiny by the understaffed mine regulator, according to unions and workplace-safety experts. After the accident, Chile President Sebastián Piñera cleaned house at the regulatory agency and announced the government would take a tougher line in the future.



Footage released showing trapped Chilean miners in good spirits, as they come to terms with their months long wait to be freed.

The 121-year-old mine, operated by Chile's Compañía Minera San Esteban Primera, had been shut down for about a year by regulators in 2007 after an explosion killed a miner. Mario Gomez, a former sailor who at 63 is the oldest of the trapped San José miners, had a nephew who lost a leg in an accident at the mine several years before that. Mr. Gomez's wife, Lilian Ramirez, said her husband told her he was afraid of going to work not long before the collapse.

The collapse occurred at around at around 2 p.m., sending up a massive dust cloud. "We felt like the mountain was coming down on top of us and without knowing what was happening," Luis

Urzua, one of the leaders of the trapped men, would later say in a phone hookup with Mr. Piñera. "Then came the dust cloud, like four or five hours in which we couldn't see anything." The men lost a chance to escape through a ventilation duct in the first days of the crisis because mine managers hadn't installed an emergency ladder, as required by law, Chile's mining minister, Laurence Golborne said.

Firemen weren't alerted of the accident by the mine managers until about six hours after it had occurred. The delay in reporting the collapse is part of a wide-ranging investigation into the mine by regulators and Chile's Congress. Minera San Esteban Primera's owners have said they tried to run a safe operation. They didn't respond to requests for comment for this story.

The day after the cave-in, civil defense officials had mustered a 40-man rescue crew to go in after the missing miners. But the mission nearly wrought another tragedy, as the rescuers confronted a cascade of falling rock and buckling walls. "Rocks, dust, darkness, heat," said fire captain Rafael Gonzalez Perez. "It was impossible."

The mine collapse presented a challenge for President Piñera, a billionaire airline and television mogul, who took office in March. Chile's first conservative president in two decades, Mr. Piñera has promised to run Chile as efficiently as he had his businesses. In a gamble that might have backfired if the rescue had failed, he cut short a trip to Colombia to go to the mine and has made three follow-up trips since. "It was a big bet but also a very important one at the core of his political message" of competence, said political scientist Patricio Navia.

Unable to send in rescuers to fetch the miners, the government shifted to Plan B: Drilling down from the surface after the trapped men.

But after a couple of days, the effort was looking like a geological shot in the dark. Engineers were finding the maps of mine weren't accurate.

"The situation is very complex," President Piñera said at the time. "The mine continues collapsing. It has a geologic fault. The mine is alive and that enormously obstructs rescue work."

Families at the site started hunkering down for a long haul, putting up tents or crude lean-tos made of garbage bags stretched above poles. Dubbed Campamento Esperanza, Camp Hope, the place took on a somewhat surreal air.

The government started trucking in water and food, as well as sending counselors, cooks and kindergarten teachers. Shrines with votive candles and statues of baby-faced Saint Lorenzo, the patron saint of miners who is often decked out in a hard hat, sprang up alongside television satellite trucks and portalets. Other iconic figures were called on for luck.



Relatives of the trapped miners have been camping out above the mine, where a makeshift tent city has sprung up alongside television satellites (Associated Press)

Relatives of 34-year old Edison Pena put the miner's picture on a placard along with Elvis Presley, assuring him that "you will be bigger than Elvis" after emerging from the mine.

Below ground the 33 miners were also getting organized. Mr. Urzúa, a soccer coach in his spare time, was one of the leaders. He oversaw the rationing of their food stores, so that miners could have a couple of mouthfuls of tuna, along with a canned peach and some milk every 48 hours. But after two weeks the miners had almost exhausted their provisions, Mr. Urzúa said.

Worry also spread through the camp full of families. Ana Funes, a social worker from a nearby town, organized art classes for children

as a diversion. But some kids' anxieties consumed them, says Ms. Funes. On a bulletin board, along with crayon drawings of Spiderman and a fairy princess, was a self-portrait of a pig-tailed girl with tears streaming down her cheeks. "I love you, cousin," was the caption.

By the end of last week, a number of the families were losing faith in the government drilling strategy. They pressed Mr. Piñera's rescue team to let 10 volunteers into the bowels of the mine to bring out their loved ones. Government officials said that was foolhardy.

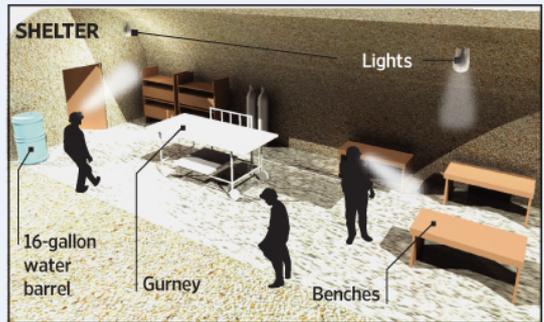
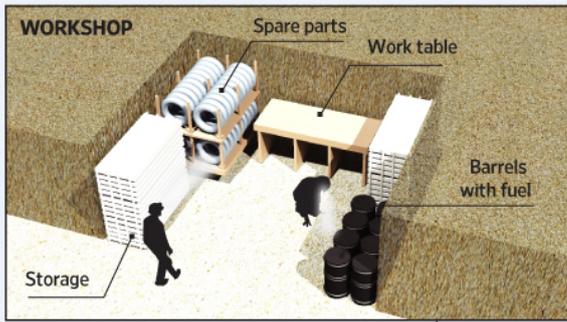
"We have done and will continue doing what's humanly possible," President Piñera said. "But not everything is in the hands of our engineers and technicians. It's also in the hands of God."

A little after 6 a.m. last Sunday the probe broke through an underground chamber, a short distance from the miners' main shelter. The 28-year-old drill operator, Eduardo Guerra, thought he felt some vibrations coming from below. Some engineers came over with stethoscopes and said they heard something, too. When Mr. Guerra pulled the probe out of the ground, a plastic bag had been attached to the drill tip with cable and rubber bands.

Inside the bag was a note painted in red: "We are well in the shelter the 33."

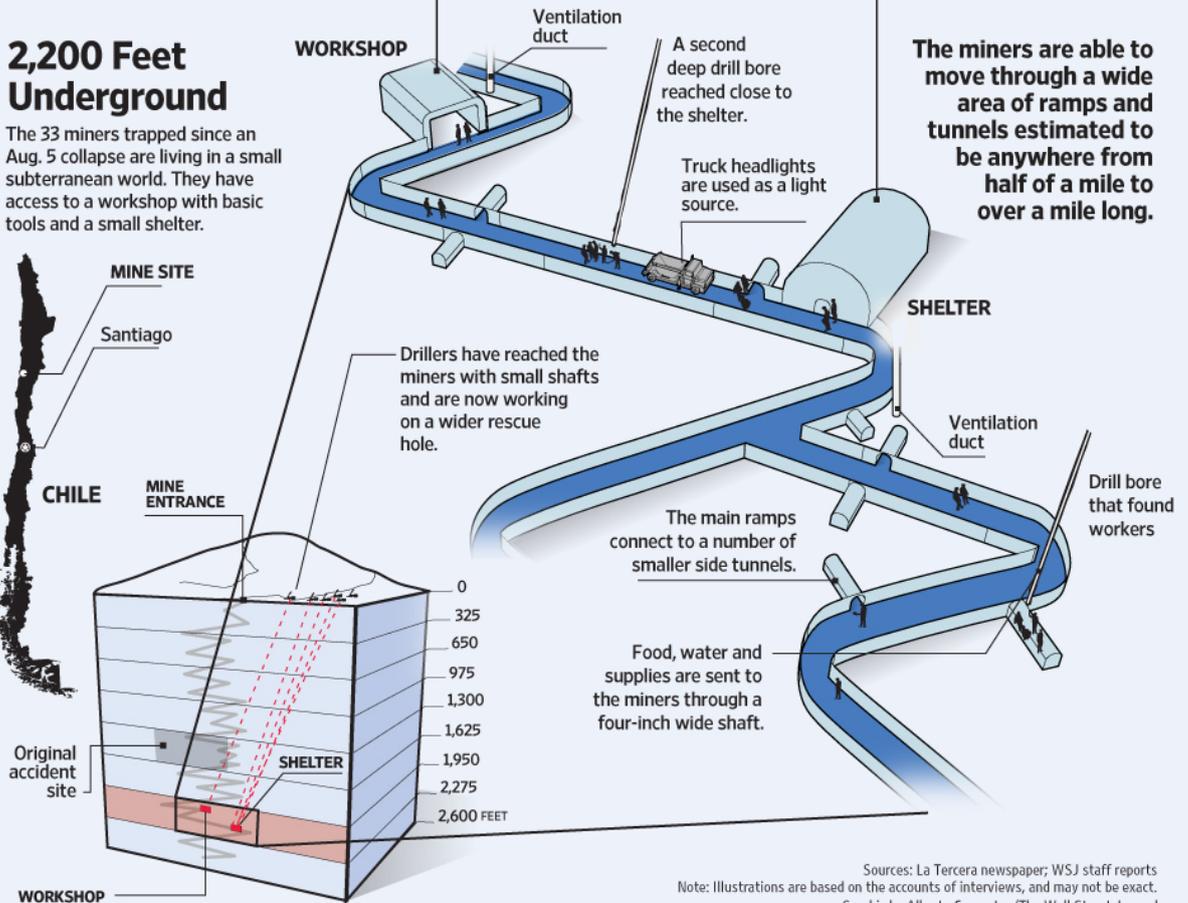


Miners trapped underground for three weeks in Chile are offered unusual help from the space agency NASA as they prepare to endure further weeks below ground (Photo courtesy of Reuters)



2,200 Feet Underground

The 33 miners trapped since an Aug. 5 collapse are living in a small subterranean world. They have access to a workshop with basic tools and a small shelter.



Sources: La Tercera newspaper; WSJ staff reports
Note: Illustrations are based on the accounts of interviews, and may not be exact.
Graphic by Alberto Cervantes/The Wall Street Journal



Work to rescue the trapped miners continues on Aug. 30 at the mine, which is located 450 miles north of Santiago. (Ivan Alvarado/Reuters)

India: Five feared trapped in mudslide in gemstone mine

Extract from The Times of India

JAIPUR: In the second such incident within a week, a mudslide at an illegal gemstone mine in Tonk district left five labourers trapped in a 50-feet-deep mine on Friday.

On August 24, three labourers working in a marble mine in Nagaur were killed in a mudslide.

Rescue operations could not begin till late evening as the administration failed to find experts to run the two earthmovers at the accident site. A case of negligence and illegal mining will be registered against the mine owner, said the police.

The mishap took place around 10.30 am near Devi Kheda village when two labourers were trying to fix a support for the mud collected outside the mine. Suddenly, the mudslide occurred and the victims were left trapped inside the mine, said Tonk ASP Bhanwar Singh Meena. Eight labourers were working in the mine at the time of the accident and five are still said to be still trapped inside.

Three of the victims are from a nearby village Sitarampura, one from Devi Kheda and another from Jaipur. Experts said the chances of their survival were slim as the miners were trapped in the mine for a long time.

Rescue work was delayed as one of the earthmovers that was brought to the site was old and could not function properly. At 3 pm, another machine was called but the rescue efforts started only after 8 pm in the absence of any expert.

"We will register an FIR against MK Lali, who is believed to be the mine owner," said Meena.

The incident, once again puts the spotlight on the practise of illegal mining in the state, despite the tall claims of the government to curb it. The gemstone mine was neither

following any safety measures nor had any one to supervise the work done by the labourers.

Georgia: Methane blast at Georgian coal mine leaves 3 killed, 7 wounded

Extract from Associated Press

TBILISI, Ga. — Officials say a methane explosion at a coal mine has killed three and wounded seven people in western Georgia.

Interior Ministry spokesman Zurab Gvenetadze said an explosion occurred at the mine some 300 kilometres (185 miles) west of the capital Tbilisi late Friday.

State-owned Georgian television quoted hospital officials saying that all the wounded are in a critical condition.

The Interior Ministry said the cause of the accident was not known.

This is a second explosion at the same mine this year. In March, a sudden build-up of methane gas caused the blast that killed four miners.

Quote of the week



"Stupidity's the deliberate cultivation of ignorance."

William Gaddis
(American novelist, 1922-1998)

Monday 30 August 2010

USA: 2 Die In Homemade Eastern Arizona Mine

Extract from WMIcentral.com, White Mountain, USA

SHOW LOW PINES- Show Low Fire Department Public Information Officer Eric Neitzel said the bodies of 25-year-old Jeremy Baker and 72-year-old Harold "Bud" Robinson were removed from the Blueberry Mine about 8 p.m. Sunday night. Crews waited for the mine to be sufficiently ventilated to allow multi-agency rescue workers to enter safely. The mine is located in Show Low Pines, 13 miles up Sanford Road from Highway 61.

Authorities are calling the accident the "Blueberry Mine Incident."

Baker was married to Harold and Patricia Robinson's daughter June Robinson Baker, who had remained in California. Navajo County authorities were able to locate and notify June of the incident Sunday morning.

Recovery crews couldn't remove the bodies from the mine until Sunday evening due to safety concerns for recovery crews.



Show Low Fire Captain Chris Francis sets an air monitoring device at the entrance to the mine shaft. Jeremy Joseph Baker, 25, and his father-in-law Harold Elmore Robinson, 72, are believed to have been overcome by carbon monoxide. Recovery work was halted Sunday until Federal mine safety officials arrived. The site was 13 miles off State Highway 61, in Navajo County.

"We used ventilation tubes and ducts and blew fresh air into the shaft while also sucking out the bad air. It took quite a few hours to get that done," said Neitzel.

According to Neitzel it was the use of black powder by Robinson that caused the high

carbon monoxide levels in the mine. He said the two men apparently did not wait long enough for the mine to ventilate before reentering and then succumbing to the gases.

He said recovery efforts required cycling about 10 rescue workers who spent about four hours total in the mine before both bodies were removed.

At a press briefing Saturday afternoon in Show Low, Navajo County Sheriff K.C. Clark said the incident was a "tragedy." He said it was the safety of his officers that was his top priority at that time since it was apparent Robinson and Baker were already dead. By then it was a recovery effort as opposed to a rescue operation.

Neitzel said the configuration of the mine was a little different than anticipated based on Patricia's knowledge of it, but recovery personnel were able to quickly work past that and get the job done.

The two men had blasted around 5 p.m. Friday evening, and reentered the mine at about 9:30 the next morning, according to Sheriff's Det. Nathan Christensen. At approximately 12:20 that afternoon Patricia, Harold's wife, went to check on them at the mine.

Patricia apparently went a little ways into the mine when she saw the body of Baker. Christensen says she, too, began to feel the effects of the carbon monoxide and backed out.

Clark said Patricia's sister also went into the mine, but feeling the effects of the gas also backed out. It was at about 12:50 that Patricia called 9-1-1 and reported it to police.

The Show Low, Lakeside and Pinetop Fire Departments all responded with hazardous materials and rescue teams, as did the Sheriff's Dept., Department of Public Safety (DPS) Explosive Ordnance Detail (EOD) and state mine inspectors.

State Mine Inspector Jerry Tyra said the mine was unregistered and he was personally at a

loss as to what the two men were looking for given that in his words, "There is nothing to mine."

Tyra said he found out about the incident Saturday morning, and immediately checked his records. When he looked in the state's data base of registered mines the "Blueberry Mine" did not come up.

"I don't think it is a mine," he said.

Tyra said he was unsure if the mine was even in the federal Mine Safety and Health Administration's (MSHA) database.

Clark told The Independent that some years ago, Robinson had drilled a well near there, and in the process hit a cavern. According to the family, said Clark, the pair were trying to locate that cavern again. Mining for minerals may never have been their intention.

There is still some black powder left in the mine, but it has been sealed with a locked, metal cover.

The DPS explosives team will be coming back to pick up what is left of the powder at the residence and will dispose of it. Clark has gotten permission from the family to do whatever is necessary to seal the mine. He is checking with county attorney Brad Carlyon to see what the legalities are, and will proceed from there.

Neitzel said one of the key factors in recovering the bodies of Robinson and Baker as quickly as possible after the incident was the cooperation between responding agencies.

"This is an example of the mountain fire departments coming together to get something done," said Neitzel. "If this had happened 10 years ago it might have been a different outcome."

Clark agreed with Neitzel, saying he was struck by the dedication and work ethic of the three fire departments who came together selflessly to help their neighbours.

"It was incredible for me to watch them work together. They have my heartfelt thanks. We are truly blessed to have them protecting our citizens," said Clark.

Clark said it was due in no small part to the efforts of all of the responders that there were not more casualties in the "Blueberry Mine Incident."

Corruption allegations overshadow work to rescue trapped Chilean miners

Extract from New York Post, USA

As Chilean rescuers prepared Monday to begin drilling a tunnel to free 33 miners trapped underground, local officials spoke out about allegations of corruption surrounding the reopening of the San Jose mine in 2008.

An Australian-made hydraulic bore will be used to drill a 26-inch-wide (66-centimeter-wide) hole down to the miners, who have been trapped underground since the accident Aug. 5. But despite their efforts, rescue teams warned it could take until Christmas to reach the emergency shelter where the miners are stuck 765 yards (700 meters) below the surface.

Local officials and miners told The (London) Times that the men should not have been working in the mine, because it had not passed necessary safety inspections.

Alejandro Garcia-Huidobro, the chairman of a parliamentary committee investigating the mine collapse, lent his support to the allegations.

Mining company San Esteban Primera lost its license to operate the mine in 2007 following a series of accidents. Just one year later, the company was cleared to reopen the mine, according to Alejandro Vio, the former head of the National Geology and Mining Service, a Chilean government agency.

Brunilda Gonzalez, the mayor of Caldera, said the reopening of the mine was the result of corruption. "There has been a bribe. There has been influence-peddling and negligence on

the part of the state and public officials," she said.

Former workers at the mine told the newspaper that the owners knew the facility was unsafe.

"It is one of the worst mines in the area. It has always been dangerous. There are accidents all the time, and when you are hurt, you had better not complain or you will be sacked -- there is a culture of silence," said Philippe Sanchez, 51, who worked at the mine between 1987 and 1999.

This week in mining accident history

27 August 1922

Argonaut Mine

Jackson, California, USA

Underground gold mine

47 dead, gas from fire

Source: www.3.gendisasters.com

FORTY FIVE GOLD MINERS BURIED ALIVE IN CALIFORNIA

LITTLE HOPE IS HELD OUT FOR RESCUE.

FIVE HUNDRED FEET OF RUINS BETWEEN THEM AND FRANTIC COMRADES.

Jackson, Calif., Aug. 28 -- Scores of anxious relatives cheered when word was brought to the surface today that the 48 miners entombed in the Argonaut mine had a chance for their life. Word of cheer came from the rescue crew said that at least some of the men had made their way to the 2,700 foot level where they found good air. Until this time all word which had come out from the mine had indicated there was little chance of saving the entombed men.

The disaster occurred at 11 o'clock last night. CLARENCE BARDSHAW, foreman, with two men were coming to the surface from one of the lowest levels of the mine. At the 3,400 foot level they encountered dense smoke. Rescue crews were immediately organized and sent underground equipped with oxygen masks. They found fire burning at the 2,800 foot level,

while a cave-in in the shaft also had cut off all means of communications with exists below that level.

Jackson, Cal., Aug. 28 -- The fate of approximately 45 miners entombed by fire and a cave-in on the 2,800 foot level of the Argonaut gold mine here remained unknown at 9 a. m. today. At that hour a voluntary Red Cross crew, headed by Superintendent DOWNING of the mine, had been under the ground for an hour in an attempt to check the number and identity of the miners entombed and arrange for first aid. All available men in Jackson were sent into the mine in a frantic effort at rescue.

The cave-in, which occurred just after the midnight shift entered the mine, closed the main workings for a distance of about 500 feet. All communication with the entombed men was broken off. Indications were that either tunneling in from one of the open shafts of the mine, or digging away through 500 feet of debris were the only possible means of rescue. Although mine officials refused to make any statement, it was known they doubted seriously the chances to bring the entombed miners out alive.

Fire Breaks Out

It was understood fire had broken out on a 2,800 foot level of the mine, calls for aid were sent to the United States bureau of miners at Berkeley, Cal., and a mine rescue car was being rushed to the scene. Mine officials went into the workings early today to conduct an investigation and call a roll of employees in order to determine how many men may be imprisoned. Shortly after midnight the foremen went into the workings taking with them all available men to start rescue work.

May Force Food Through

Nothing was learned to indicate the condition of the imprisoned miners. Lines through which air can be pumped were being installed and arrangements made for driving other lines

through the wall of earth, through which food would be sent, should such procedure prove necessary.

Stevens Point Daily Journal Wisconsin 1922-08-30

RESCUERS GO INTO ARGONAUT.

SEARCH FOR FORTY-SEVEN MINERS ENTOMBED SINCE AUGUST 27 IS BEGUN AFTER WORKERS BREAK THROUGH LAST BARRIER TODAY -- ENTRANCE FOUND UNSAFE.

FEW OF ENTOMBED MAY BE ALIVE.

At the Argonaut Gold Mine, Jackson, Cal., Sept. 18 -- Mine rescue crews which entered the Argonaut mine today in search for the 47 miners imprisoned there for three weeks, were expected to begin actual search for the imprisoned men this afternoon.

The first party, which entered following word that the tunnel driven from the Kennedy into the Argonaut mine had broken through, was unable to proceed with its work, the opening being found unsafe. Work of timbering was started immediately and the exploration party remained at hand, ready to resume its search.

Break Through Barrier

At the Argonaut Gold Mine, Jackson, Cal., Sept. 18 -- Rescue crews broke through into the Argonaut mine shortly before 7 a.m. today.

Exploration parties immediately entered to take up the search for the 47 miners who have been imprisoned there for 21 days.

A strong air draft rushing through the Argonaut mine proved that it was clear of cave-ins and gave hopes of speedy progress of the search.

When the flash came that the last rock had been cleared away, the work of the miners was finished.

They were replaced at once by BRYON O. PICKARD, of the government mine rescue bureau.

The rescue men had been at the surface, ready to go as soon as the word came. Four teams, each containing four men headed by a captain, entered the Argonaut. Each man wore oxygen respirating apparatus.

RODNEY D. HECOX, United States bureau of mines, headed the first team to crawl through the narrow opening into the Argonaut mine.

R. J. JOHNSON, headed the second team which followed close behind. The rescue workers went forward into the Argonaut carrying canary birds and lighted candles.

The birds acted as detectors of the carbon monoxide and the candles tested the amount of oxygen in the air.

To light their way, the men carried electric flashlights in addition to the regular carbide lanterns on their helmets.

While the first two teams, known as group A, went into the burning mine, Group B, waited at the 3,600 foot level of the Kennedy, ready to relieve the first men at the end of two hours when the oxygen tanks would be exhausted.

A third group waited at the collar of the shaft to relieve group B.

Orders to the rescue crews called for them in advance slowly close together and look for living men. Each company carried oxygen tanks to use for resuscitation, a vial of spirits of ammonia and a stretcher.

Explore Lower Levels

The first levels to be explored were the 4,200 and 4,300 in the Argonaut. Water is believed to have risen in the 4,400 foot level.

All drifts and cross cuts, slopes and main ways on each of these levels, were to be thoroughly searched.

The second duty of the rescue crew was to establish ventilation in the mine.

These crews were to handle the actual work of removing the dead. If the men were dead and to adjust and inspect the ventilation system.

At the same time, searching of the drifts was to progress.

Work was started to build a bulkhead across the Argonaut shaft below the fire.

Also, at the 3,600 foot station were DR. C. E. KENDALL and DR. C. E. ENDICOTT, surgeons. Hospital equipment, sufficient to care for the entire 47 men was there ready in case of a miracle -- that they should be alive.

An information service resembling that of an army was functioning on the surface. Step by step, progress underground was telephoned to FRED L. LOWELL, engineer of the state industrial accident commission. As LOWELL received the information he dictated it to a stenographer. A representative, chosen by the press committee, heard all that transpired.

As the stenographer finished her work, she handed a carbon copy of the official report to a courier, which he delivered at once to the press.

The News Sentinel Fort Wayne Indiana 1922-09-18

LOSING BATTLE AGAINST DEATH IS BARED WHEN MINERS ARE FOUND.

MUTE EVIDENCE IN ARGONAUT PIT.

Bulkheads Built in Vain Fight to Check Poison Gas.

CLOTHES USED IN WALLS.

TOLL DEMANDED OF GOLD SEEKERS PAID IN 47 LIVES.

Jackson, Calif. -- (Associated Press) -- Jackson, mining town in the Mother Lode country, has paid the toll demanded of those who delve in the earth for gold and stands unafraid but not dry-eyed today.

Forty-seven of her men died in the Argonaut mine early on the morning of August 28, she learned last night and today she awaits the bringing of their bodies from the rock tunnel that has been their tomb for three weeks.

It was California's worst mine disaster, in one of California's greatest gold producers, and it was the hardest blow Jackson ever has had to suffer.

Three weeks ago last Sunday night men deep in the Argonaut believed they smelled smoke. A shift boss took two men and went to investigate. They found the shaft afire at the 3,600 foot level. Then began the work of fire fighting which merged into one of rescue. Men came from all over the west to offer their services. The Kennedy Mining Company, operators of an adjoining shaft, sunk the bitterness of a lawsuit in its willingness to be of service and loaned all its property and facilities to the work of rescue.

Drill Driven Thru

For many weary days rescue crews drove thru the choked tunnel that once had connected the two mines, or battered at the rock separating one of the Kennedy's drifts from the Argonaut's 4,200 foot level. Early yesterday a drill was driven thru the last barrier of rock into the Argonaut.

Sweating shoulders and unbreakable wills drove steel picks at the rock until this hole was enlarged so that a rescue crew could pass and all day exploration went on without any result.

The levels were clear, there was no sign of any miner left in them, either dead or alive. The rescue men turned their attention to exploring the cross cuts and drifts leading from the tunnels already traversed. In one they found a bulkhead that had not been there when the miners went below three weeks ago.

The rescuers pressed on. They found another bulkhead, not built of planks and timbers and stuffed with torn clothing like the first, but erected of earth, rock and debris.

Bodies Found

And then came word that rescuers had broken thru the bulkhead and that the bodies of 42 men had been found and counted.

Not long afterward word came up that the other five also had been found dead.

Jackson took the blow calmly and found comfort in the knowledge, gained from notes left by two of the men from the reports of rescuers regarding the men's work before they died, that a quick, merciful death had come to them instead of agonies of starvation. Records scrawled on paper by one man and scratched on a timber by another showed they had lived but little more than three hours after erecting their pitiful barricades.

Two notes were found. One, scrawled by WILLIAM F. FESSEL, said:

"Three o'clock. Gas coming in strong."

"Gas too strong. We will have to go."

An effort had been made to scrawl a third but the figure "4" rudely scribbled, was all the man had been able to accomplish before death numbed his fingers.

Identification Difficult

Identification will be difficult. The length of time since they died, the temperature of their casual tomb, the lack of the clothing they had torn off to stuff into cracks in their first bulkhead, combined to remove from most of the bodies any distinguishing characteristic.

The Red Cross has received a fund of \$8,000 for the miners' dependents and it is estimated that the California state compensation insurance fund will pay an average of approximately \$4,200 to dependents.

Red Cross officials said \$10,000 was provided by the Argonaut for temporary relief.

A revision in California mining safety laws will be urged in the next legislature, according to FLETCHER HAMILTON, state mineralogist. He said he thought it would be feasible to have independent exits and to have underground safety stations with a separate source of supply of air and supplies of food and water.

The Lima News Ohio 1922-09-19

Tuesday 31 August 2010

Qld: Man dies in accident at Curragh coal mine

Extract from ABC Online, Aus & Sydney Morning Herald

An investigation is underway into the death of a mine worker in central Queensland.

The 55-year-old man was one of four people travelling in a light vehicle along a haul road at Blackwater's Curragh Mine when it crashed shortly before 11am (AEST).



The car was travelling along a haul road at Blackwater's Curragh Mine when it crashed. (RACQ Capricornia)

The Capricorn Helicopter Rescue Service says the contract worker was trapped under the vehicle and suffered head injuries, internal bleeding and multiple fractures.

They say he was taken by ambulance to Blackwater Hospital but died a short time later.

It is believed the other three workers were not seriously injured.

The four civil engineering contractors were working at Wesfarmers' Curragh mine, near Blackwater, when the four-wheel drive crashed at 10.50am (AEST) on Tuesday, RACQ Capricorn Rescue says.

Crewman Matthew Brandon said the man was trapped in the vehicle before being taken to Blackwater Hospital suffering head, pelvic and internal injuries.

The man suffered a cardiac arrest at the hospital and efforts to resuscitate him failed.

The three other contractors aged 23, 30 and 51 were treated at the scene for minor injuries.

Curragh executive general manager Rod Bridges said the men - who had been employed for the past 18 months to work on construction of water storage dams - were driving along a flat haul road when the vehicle rolled.

"It was a very good open flat area with extremely good road conditions on a main haul road," he told AAP.

"It's the first fatality that people can remember. We are very proud of our safety performance on site."

Aerial photos taken by the rescue helicopter show circular tyre marks at the accident site but Mr Bridges denies the contractors were doing "donuts" in the vehicle prior to the accident.

"I can confirm they were not skylarking," Mr Bridges said.

"I visited the scene. There are no donuts on the scene."

Three investigations will be carried out by police, the Department of Mines and Curragh Mine.

Police say mine inspectors are assisting the forensic crash unit with investigations and police are preparing a report for the coroner.

The mine, which has been operating for 26 years, closed from 3pm (AEST) on Tuesday to 6pm (AEST) Wednesday as a sign of respect to the man's family.

'Unprecedented' challenge to save Chilean miners

Extract from Associated Press

SAN JOSE MINE, Chile -- The effort to save 33 men trapped deep in a Chilean mine is an unprecedented challenge, mining safety experts said Tuesday. It means months of drilling, then a harrowing three-hour trip in a cage up a narrow hole carved through solid rock.

If all of that is successful, the freed men will emerge from the earth and "feel born again," said an American miner who was part of a

group dramatically rescued in 2002 with similar techniques. But that rescue pulled men from a spot only one-tenth as deep.

"They're facing the most unusual rescue that has ever been dealt with," said Dave Feickert, director of KiaOra, a mine safety consulting firm in New Zealand that has worked to improve China's dangerous mines. "Every one of these rescues presents challenging issues. But this one is unique."

First, engineers must use a 31-ton drill to create a "pilot" hole from the floor of the Atacama Desert down 2,200 feet (700 meters) to the area in the San Jose mine where the men wait.

Then, the drill must be fitted with a larger bit to carve out a rescue chimney that will be about 26 inches (66 centimeters) wide - a task that means guiding the drill through solid rock while keeping the drill rod from snapping or getting bogged down as it nears its target.

Finally, the men must be brought up one at a time inside a specially built cage - a trip that will take three hours each. Just hauling the men up will itself take more than four days - if there are no problems.

"Nothing of this magnitude has happened before; **it's absolutely unheard of**," said Alex Gryska, a mine rescue manager with the Canadian government.

Gryska said he is confident Chile's state-run Codelco mining company, with its vast expertise in the world's top copper-producing nation, would successfully drill the hole out. But he said he is worried about the three to four months officials say it will take to do so - and the key role the miners themselves will play in their own rescue.

Chilean officials said the miners will have to remove upward of 3,000 tons of rock as it falls into the area where they are trapped. There is little danger to the men - the area includes a shelter and about 500 meters (yards) of a shaft outside that. But as the rock starts to fall a month from now, the men will work in nonstop

shifts to remove it with wheelbarrows and industrial sweepers.

"The thing that concerns me is welfare of workers, their mental state. That will be real tough," said Gryska. "From a health perspective, it's hot down there. They're talking about working 24/7 in 85 degrees for two months. Their mental state for that work will be critical."

Early on, Chile's Health Minister Jaime Manalich said at least five of the men showed signs of depression. But spirits have improved with a supply of water, food, special clothes to keep them dry in damp conditions and the first verbal communication with loved ones this week.

Chilean officials met with four "life sciences" specialists from NASA on Tuesday in Santiago.

Michael Duncan, NASA's deputy chief medical officer who is leading the team in Chile, said his group had been asked to provide help in nutrition and behavioral health.

Duncan, speaking at a news conference in Santiago, said his team viewed two videos the miners made of themselves and their surroundings - and they clearly raised some concern about weight loss.

He said a priority was increasing the miners' caloric intake, getting them on a regular sleep schedule and ensuring they remain optimistic.

"These miners showed us tremendous strength in surviving as long as they did without any contact with the surface," he said. "What we want to try to avoid is any kind of situation of hopelessness on the part of the miners."

That could mean increasing their contact with the outside world - including bringing in celebrities or even astronauts who have survived long periods of isolation in space, Duncan said.

If the miners remain healthy during their long period underground and if the drilling goes as planned, they will then face the ordeal of being

stuffed into a tubular, metal cage for three hours as they are slowly pulled up.

Experts say one of the few times such a technique was used was when nine U.S. miners were hauled out of the flooded Quecreek Mine near Somerset, Pennsylvania, in 2002. But those men were trapped for just three days 73 meters (240 feet) underground.

Quecreek survivor Mark Popernack noted the Chilean miners "already went through more than what we went through," but the Somerset, Pennsylvania, resident said no matter the method, "to come up is the best thing in the world."

"If they make it, if they get that hole drilled, when they come out of there, they'll feel like they're being born again," said Popernack.

"Enjoy the ride, that's my advice to them," he said. "It'll be a long ride, but they'll enjoy it. Because when they see the light of day, they're going to feel pretty good."

Wednesday 1 September 2010

USA: Man dies in mining accident

Extract from WTHITV.com

FREELANDVILLE, Ind. (WTHI) - A Linton, Indiana man is dead after an accident at the Triad Mine in northern Knox County.

The Freelandville Fire Department says it was called to the mine at around 5:15 Tuesday night.

Brian Mason, 25, was driving a large surface mine truck when the truck went off a high wall and fell around 100 feet to the ground.

Emergency crews had to cut Mason out of the truck.

Then he was loaded into a helicopter and taken to a hospital where he later died.

NASA delivers coping tips for miners trapped in Chile

Extract from USA Today

As 33 trapped Chilean miners face boredom, fear and depression while waiting two to four months to be rescued, NASA experts and space travel psychiatrists are trying to help them with the same coping mechanisms that astronauts use to deal with isolation during months of space travel.

Being honest about rescue progress and providing news and sports updates, communication with the miners' families and meaningful activities are among the most important considerations that those on ground level should do for miners, says Jack Stuster, vice president and principal scientist of Anacapa Sciences Inc. He has worked with NASA for more than 20 years on such isolation studies.

Stuster recently sent his list of recommendations to NASA, which is working with Chilean officials. Stuster has reminded the rescuers to expect exacerbation of minor problems, withdrawal, territorial behavior and possible hostility toward their rescuers or the mining company.

Nick Kanas, a psychiatry professor at the University of California-San Francisco and chairman of a major report on space travel psychology, says that studies of submariners during the 1950s show that a person's re-entry into home life after months of absence may be stressful and that post-traumatic stress disorder can occur.

Stuster says he believes that perhaps not all but most of the miners will emerge from their captivity with a more positive outlook on life.

"Usually it changes them for the better — astronauts generally return from their six months in orbit happy to return, and also with a different perspective. Especially when it's life-threatening and they emerge from their confinement ... they will want to live every day

as if it were the last and squeeze every bit of enjoyment out of every moment."

Chile mine owners beg forgiveness

Extract from ABC Online, Aus

The owners of a Chilean mine which collapsed early this month, trapping 33 men underground, have asked forgiveness for the accident, as a giant Australian drill slowly bored through the earth to rescue the miners.



Families have been able to speak to their trapped loved ones (AFP: Ariel Marinkovic)

"The pain caused by this unwanted and unforeseen situation means we must ask forgiveness for the anguish being felt at this time," Alejandro Bohn, co-chief of mining group San Esteban, told a parliamentary mining committee looking into the drama.

"This is a terrible situation and we hope that it will soon come to a happy end," he added in televised remarks.

Thursday 2 September 2010

Chile: Miners' morale leaps as rescue drill inches closer

Extract from ABC Online, Aus

The morale of 33 miners trapped in Chile soared after music and hot meals were supplied, while NASA advisers praised their courage as a rescue drill inched closer.

A new video shot by the miners and broadcast on state television showed the men shaven, wearing clean clothes and listening to music.

The figures in the images were a far cry from the haggard, mud-caked, bare-chested miners shown in a first video last week, days after they were located by a probe drill.

The miners have now spent 27 days in the San Jose mine in northern Chile, which collapsed on August 5 - a feat of subterranean survival unprecedented in modern memory.

The only other miners to have spent almost as long trapped underground were three Chinese men rescued in July last year after spending 25 days in a flooded shaft, chewing on coal and surrounded by their 13 dead colleagues.

A team of NASA experts, who arrived at the mine to convey the US space agency's experience in keeping men sane and healthy during prolonged isolation, hailed the Chilean miners' resilience.

"We are very impressed with the courage and the organisation the miners provided for themselves in these very difficult circumstances," NASA's deputy chief medical officer James Michael Duncan said.

A giant Australian-designed drill has been boring slowly down to the miners in an operation estimated to take three to four months to complete.



The giant Australian-made excavator has started drilling the rescue shaft. (AFP: Ariel Marinkovic)

The miners are stuck 700 metres below the surface waiting for the initial shaft to be drilled and then doubled in diameter to permit each one to be pulled up.



Morale boost: Some of the trapped miners in their refuge chamber (Reuters: Chilean Mining Ministry)

The ambitious task, codenamed Operation San Lorenzo after a martyred Christian saint, is going on in parallel with a program of careful medical and psychological care for the miners.

Water, food and other supplies were being dropped through three fist-sized shafts drilled to the men.

President Sebastian Pinera said his government "will continue to do everything humanly possible" to rescue the miners.

He has ordered a back-up drill to the mine to start work in case the main one encounters problems.

Authorities have started vaccinating the trapped men against tetanus, diphtheria, flu and pneumonia to prevent outbreaks of disease.

A medical report said five miners are still having difficulties digesting and psychologically "there are a few cases of sleeping problems".

They have been able to shave and get a change of clothes. Smokers have been denied cigarettes, but given nicotine patches to help them cope with withdrawal symptoms.

Georgia: Death Toll in Coal Mine Blast Rises to 4

Extract from Civil Georgia

Death toll from underground explosion at a Georgian coal mine last week rose to four, after a 43-year-old injured miner has succumbed to burns in hospital.

Three miners were killed immediately and seven other badly injured as a result of explosion in the mine located in Tkibuli of Imereti region in western Georgia on August 27. Six injured miners now remain in hospital in Tbilisi.

Explosion 850 meters below ground in the same coal mine killed four miners and injured one on March 3, 2010.

One miner was killed and three others injured when a protective barrier reportedly collapsed in the same mine on December 4, 2009.

Mine in Tkibuli is operated by Saknakhshiri, a daughter company of Georgian Industrial Group, a conglomerate founded by lawmaker from the ruling party, Davit Bezhuashvili - a brother of Gela Bezhuashvili, chief of the Georgian intelligence service.

Investigation is ongoing into the reasons of the August 27 explosion.

Official investigation into the March, 2010 explosion blamed violation of safety rules by miners themselves resulting into explosion of methane gas.

Georgian Trade Unions Confederation, however, cast doubt on official investigation results saying that safety norms are not observed by the operator company and the reason of explosion apparently was due to faulty ventilation systems, which failed to vent hazardous gases. The allegation was denied by the operator company.

When President Saakashvili visited Tkibuli next morning after the August 27 explosion, he told the miners that ventilation systems were installed in the mine, but the problem was with absence of "discipline".

"Vano [Merabishvili, the interior minister, who was also in Tkibuli] found out that instructions on safety rules are not given to miners prior to entry into the mine," Saakashvili said. "Each miner should be asked before going into the

mine: 'what are the safety rules?' and [miners] should repeat these rules like a mantra."

Georgian Trade Unions Confederation plans a rally outside the Parliament on September 2 to honor memory of died miners and also to protest against, what they call, absence of safety standards in coal mines.

USA: Massey Officials Underground For Hours After Blast

Extract from NPR

NPR has learned that two officials of Massey Energy were underground unsupervised for as much as four hours after the explosion at the Upper Big Branch coal mine in April. They reached the longwall area that is believed to be one possible source of the explosion.

Massey Energy says its officials were searching for survivors, but some investigators and mine experts are concerned they could have tampered with evidence.

Qld: Wesfarmers boss describes 'worst call'

Extract from ABC Online, Aus

The head of Wesfarmers has described the phone call alerting him to a death at one of the company's mines as the worst call a chief executive can get.

A 55-year-old contractor died when the light vehicle he was travelling in rolled and crashed at the Curragh Mine near Blackwater, 200 kilometres west of Rockhampton in central Queensland on Tuesday.

Wesfarmer's managing director Richard Goyder says it was a hard phone call to receive.

"That's the worst phone call you can get as a CEO, so if you get a phone call from someone, which I did on Tuesday morning, saying we've had a fatality, that's as bad as it gets," he said.

"It's the first time it's happened in my career, and I don't want it to happen again."

Mr Goyder says the company is now focusing on how to support the man's family.

"It has a personal impact, it has a really significant impact at the business, at Curragh," he explained.

"And what will be important now is how deal with the person's employer and family in the coming months."

Friday 3 September 2010

'Cheating' Chilean miner set for chastening homecoming

Extract from Daily Telegraph, Sydney, Aus

ONE of the trapped Chilean miners is dreading his rescue after his wife met his secret mistress at the entrance to the San Jose mine.

Yonni Barrios' wife, Marta Salinas, and his lover, Susana Valenzuela, were both holding vigils for him outside the mine.

Ms Salinas, 56, was stunned and horrified when she heard Ms Valenzuela shouting his name amid a crowd of miners' loved ones.

However, she is determined not to give up her man to her love rival.



Susana Valenzuela, lover of trapped miner Yonni Barrio, holds his photograph and a statue of the Virgin Mary outside the collapsed San Jose mine in Copiapo, Chile. Picture: AP Photo/Roberto Candia Source: AP

She told friends: "Barrios is my husband. He loves me and I am his devoted wife. This woman has no legitimacy."

But Ms Valenzuela said the 50-year-old miner, who she met on a training course five years

ago, was planning to leave his wife for her. "We are in love. I'll wait for him," she said.

Mr Barrios has been one of the heroes of the landslide drama - using his first-aid training to treat sick colleagues.

He also vaccinated all 33 men, including himself, against flu and pneumonia.

Meanwhile, the captives have been hit with an alcohol and tobacco ban by NASA experts helping the rescue.

NASA doctor James Michael Duncan said: "We need to get their nutrition up before we consider drinking."

Two of the smokers have been dropped nicotine patches and gum to deal with their cravings.

The miners, who may not be drilled out until Christmas, have started eating proper meals of 2000 calories a day.

Their rations include yogurt and cereal for breakfast, chicken sandwiches for lunch and jam sandwiches for dinner. They each have tea and five litres of water daily.

Mining dictionary

A guide to common mining terminology

W

windlass

A wooden roller with a crank handle at one or both ends, placed across the top of a shallow shaft, and used to raise a kibble.



Miner working a windlass, Lightning Ridge, 1962 (Photo: Bob Pelchen)

-Ed