



Mining Accident News No.1302

1 to 28 February 2013

In this issue:

USA: MSHA 2012 mine death totals are 2nd lowest ever	1
One still missing in China mine flood	1
Report claims coal mine deaths in China fell by one third in 2012	2
Qld: Serious mining accident figures shelved ..	2
USA: A man is dead after an accident at a mine in Kanawha County.....	3
USA: Man Killed in Kanawha County Mine Accident; Name Released	4
USA: Miner crushed in fatal accident at Affinity Mine.....	4
Quote of the week	5
USA: Pair of Local Mining Accidents under Investigation.....	5
USA: Royalton man dies in mining accident.....	5
Philippines: Five miners killed, five missing as Semirara coal mine collapses.....	6
Aquino orders probe on Antique mining accident	7
2012 a Fatality Free Year in WA Mines	8
Six trapped in N China mine flood.....	8
3 dead in blast at Chinese coal mine	8
7 confirmed dead in Shanxi mine flood	9
USA: Gov. Calls for Safety Stand-Down at W.Va. Mines.....	9
China to halt approvals for small coal mines	9
This week in mining accident history	10
UK: Daw Mill coal mining may end after 'ferocious' fire	12
Mining dictionary	13

Friday 1 February 2013

USA: MSHA 2012 mine death totals are 2nd lowest ever

Extract from Lexington Herald, USA

Fatality rates in U.S. mines hit an all-time low last year, while the number of those killed is the second-lowest ever.

The Mine Safety and Health Administration says 36 miners died in 2012 - 19 in coal mines and 17 in metal and non-metal operations.

West Virginia lost the most with seven, while Kentucky lost five.

The safest year was 2009, when fatalities hit a low of 35.

But MSHA Chief Joe Main says more needs to be done to prevent injuries, illnesses and deaths.

In all, eight of those killed had less than one year of experience in their mines, and 13 had less than five years' experience in their particular job.

Main says that underscores the need for better training, especially on a new task.

Sunday 3 February 2013

One still missing in China mine flood

Extract from Xinhua, China

Rescuers have pulled most of the miners trapped in a flooded coal mine in east China's Anhui Province to safety and are searching for the last missing worker, said a mine manager late Sunday.

The flooding occurred at 0:20 a.m. Sunday, when 444 miners were working underground at the Taoyuan Mine in Suzhou City. As of 10 p.m, 443 of them have been rescued.

"The 443 people who have been pulled out of the mine have no serious health problems and have returned home for rest," said Xu Huali, the mine's boss.

The mine's work data showed a total of 444 miners were working underground when the flooding occurred, said Zhang Xianyi, another mine official. He added rescuers were searching for the last missing person.

NOTE: Views expressed in this newsletter are those of the individual sender, and are not associated with ANY organisation, individual or publication

The mine has suspended production.

Report claims coal mine deaths in China fell by one third in 2012

Extract from China Labour Bulletin

Citing a State Administration of Work Safety circular, a Chinese media report yesterday claimed that the death rate in China's coal mines fell by one third in 2012 to stand at 0.374 deaths per million tons of coal production, the first time the rate had fallen below 0.5 deaths per million tons.

However, China's coal mine death rate is still more than ten times higher than the rate for developed countries of around 0.02 deaths per million tons of coal production on average.

International Coal Net reported that, based on a national coal production figure of 3.65 billion tons last year, the actual number of coal mine deaths in China in 2012 would be around 1,300, the lowest number since records began 60 years ago. The official figure for the number coal mine deaths in 2011 was 1,973.

Although the official number of coal mine deaths has declined dramatically from the appalling highs of nearly 7,000 fatalities per year a decade ago, deadly accidents remain all too common, especially in the less-well regulated regions of southwest China.

Moreover, a new study in the Harvard Business Review of 276 Chinese enterprises operating in dangerous industries such as mining found a startling correlation between worker fatality rates and the political "connections" of enterprise managers. The study revealed that "connected" companies had five times as many worker deaths on average as unconnected companies.

As China Labour Bulletin pointed out in our 2008 research report on the coal mining industry in China, one the key reasons why local government officials fail to enforce coal mine safety standards is the intricate and almost impenetrable web of collusion that exists between the mine owners and those

government officials. In many cases, local government officials have a direct economic interest in the mine and are far more interested in profit than safety.

Wednesday 6 February 2013

Qld: Serious mining accident figures shelved

Extract from The Daily Examiner, Qld Aus

FIGURES showing a month-by-month breakdown of serious incidents on Queensland mine sites have been shelved for months as the government keeps the information within the industry.

These "serious accident and high potential incident reports" were published for each month since the start of 2010, chronicling how many injuries or near misses were caused on sites, whether by fire, explosions, vehicle, human error or other factors.

The Department of Mines website stated the summaries were released "in good faith to help improve safety and health in our industries".

Since August, monthly summaries have stopped being published with the Department of Mines suggesting investigators - who would compile these reports - had priorities ahead of their publication.

A spokesman for the department said the 88 government investigators in the mines, explosives, gas and petroleum areas prepared reports of every incident, which were then circulated throughout the industry.

These were not widely available to the public.

Bulletins warning of specific safety hazards are still regularly published online for industry and public consumption.

Bi-annual and publicly available safety reports would still be put online, but the department would make no comment on if or why these month-to-month statistics were discontinued.

It also did not comment on whether the level of staffing was an issue.

"Industry relies on the investigation reports and safety alerts, bulletins they receive which are about specific incidents or hazards in the industry, not monthly (statistic) summaries," he said.

The August report - the last one published publicly - covered 215 serious incidents or near-misses including a break-down of the biggest threats.

For that month, it included 34 fire-related incidents, 64 incidents to do with vehicles colliding or losing control and 15 related to explosions.

USA: A man is dead after an accident at a mine in Kanawha County

Extract from WSAZ3, WVa USA

KANAWHA COUNTY, W.Va. (WSAZ) - Dispatchers say the accident involved a hydraulic pump at Blue Creek Prep Plant Midland Trail Energy LLC on Five Mile Road in Malden, about 4:15 p.m. Wednesday.

According to an official, a hydraulic cylinder blew and killed one person.

We have a crew headed to the scene.

OMHS&T inspectors are at the mine right now.

UPDATE 1

KANAWHA COUNTY, W.Va. (WSAZ) - U.S. Mine Safety and Health Administration spokeswoman Amy Louviere says the miner died Wednesday at Midland Trail Energy's Blue Creek preparation plant in Malden when a hydraulic jack exploded on a belt press. Louviere says a second miner was injured.

The names of the miners involved weren't immediately available. Louviere says an order was issued closing the plant, and a federal investigator was en route to West Virginia.

Midland Trail is owned by Patriot Coal.

UPDATE 2

KANAWHA COUNTY, W.Va. (WSAZ) -- Kelly Elswick was just 8-years-old when her dad was hurt in a mining accident.

Still, her brother and her son went into the business, as well.

"I got a call just in November about my son in an explosion, and it worries you to death," Elswick said.

So, when she heard on Tuesday about a deadly accident at the mine near her house, it hit home.

"I've seen several cars go in here, and they've turned right around and sent them back out," Elswick said. "I think that that guard shack they should have somebody there at least telling each family member there that 'No, it is not your family member. Everything is going to be OK.'"

The miner died when a hydraulic pump blew about 4:30 p.m. at the Blue Creek Prep Plant near Malden. Another worker with minor injuries was taken to the hospital.

Tabitha Hinzman and Whitney Carrow know several people who work in the mine, and they immediately got on the phone to make sure they were all safe.

"They're happy but I worry about it a lot. It's a stressful job," Hinzman said.

"It just worries me with everything that's happened recently and people still getting hurt in the mines -- it's a dangerous job," Carrow said.

And it's because of that danger that has Elswick saying prayers for the family of the victim, whose name hasn't been released.

"They're all very young, and I just can't imagine what's going through their families' minds right now wondering if it's them in there or not," Elswick said.

Thursday 7 February 2013

USA: Man Killed in Kanawha County Mine Accident; Name Released

Extract from WSAZ3, WVa USA

KANAWHA COUNTY, W.Va. (WSAZ) -- The name of the man killed in a Kanawha County mine accident has been released.

According to Public Information Specialist Leslie Fitzwater, Brandon Townsend, 34, of Delbarton, W.Va., was killed in the accident.

U.S. Mine Safety and Health Administration spokeswoman Amy Louviere says the Townsend died Wednesday at Midland Trail Energy's Blue Creek preparation plant in Malden when a hydraulic jack exploded on a belt press. Louviere says a second miner was injured.

The accident happened about 4:15 p.m. Wednesday.

Friday 8 February 2013

USA: Miner crushed in fatal accident at Affinity Mine

Extract from WVNS, USA

59News has confirmed with the Mine Safety and Health Administration that a miner was killed at the Affinity Mine in Raleigh County at 9:20 p.m. on Thursday, Feb. 7.

According to the release from MSHA, a miner was pushing a scoop bucket that was full of trash onto a hoist. The hoist moved unexpectedly and picked up the scoop. The victim was trapped under the scoop and crushed.

The name of the victim has not been released at this time. MSHA is on the scene and has started and accident investigation.

59News has a crew on the scene.

Tuesday 12 February 2013

Russian: Miners Killed In Blast

Extract from Radio Free Europe Radio Liberty

According to Russia's Interior Ministry, 18 miners have been killed in a coal-mine blast in the northern Komi region.

The ministry said the bodies were retrieved after the explosion on the morning of February 11 at the Vorkutinskaya mine.

[The blast occurred at the Vorkutinskaya mine in Russia's northern region. \(file photo\)](#)

Rescuers are searching for miners who may remain trapped under rubble.

Emergency Situations Minister Vladimir Puchkov, who was leading the rescue effort, said the families of the victims will be given 2 million rubles (\$67,000).

Petr Lobanov, chief spokesman of the Komi Republic division of the Russian Emergencies Ministry, described the accident to Russian news television Rossia 24.

"According to preliminary information, a methane gas explosion took place at a depth of 800 meters," he said. "A shift of miners comprising 259 people was present at the time of the incident. Twenty-three of them were working in the area of the accident."

The Emergency Situations Ministry said four miners were able to get out of the mine on their own and two were rescued.

Three men were injured as a result of the explosion, and two of them were hospitalized.

Russian Investigation Committee spokesman Vladimir Markin announced that a criminal case has been opened over the accident for the possible violation of safety rules during mining operations.

The Vorkutinskaya coal mine is located outside the city of Vorkuta in the Russian Arctic.

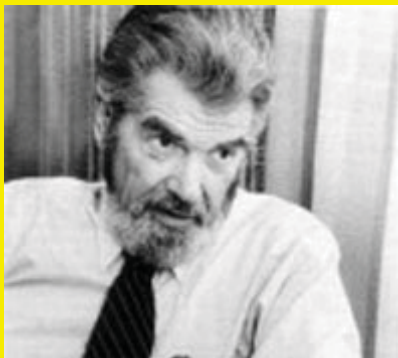
It belongs to a division of Severstal, one of the leading steel and steel-related mining companies in Russia.

Deadly accidents at Russian coal mines are frequent because of negligence and lax safety regulations.

In January, nine people died in two such accidents.

One of the country's worst recent mine disasters killed 110 people in 2007.

Quote of the week



"If you don't know where you are going, you will probably end up somewhere else."

Laurence J. Peter
Canadian, author of *The Peter Principle*,
(1919-1988)

Thursday 14 February 2013

USA: Pair of Local Mining Accidents under Investigation

Extract from WDTV.com, USA

5 News has received confirmation of two accidents at local mines Tuesday night. Both are considered to be in Monongalia County.

The first accident happened around 9:30 p.m. at the Miracle Run end of the Loveridge Mine near Fairview. The mine is owned by CONSOL. 51-year-old Glen Clutter Jr. was hit in the head with a slate bar during the rerailing of a car. He was unconscious when he was transported by HealthNet to an area hospital. He is in critical condition and on life support. Clutter was attempting to put a loaded supply car back on

the track when a slate bar kicked out striking him in the head.

The second accident happened around 10:07 p.m. at the Prime Mine No. 1 mine in Madsville, outside of Star City. The mine is owned by Dana Mining. A miner received an electrical shock with resulting burns. The miner was conscious and alert when transported to Ruby Memorial Hospital.

This information was provided by a report filed by the Office of Miners' Health, Safety & Training.

USA: Royalton man dies in mining accident

Extract from thesouthern.com, USA

PERRY COUNTY - A Royalton man killed Wednesday night at a Cutler underground mine marked the first fatality there since current management began operations there in late 2008, according to federal data.

Timothy K. Chamness, 28, was pronounced dead at 9:08 p.m. about a half hour after an accident at the Prairie Eagle South Mine by Perry County Coroner Paul Searby. The mine is at 7290 County Line Rd.

Chamness was killed after being pinned between the tail of a continuous mining machine he was operating and a coal rib, said U.S. Mine Safety and Health Administration spokeswoman Amy Louviere. Chamness was using a remote control device at the time.

The mine, Louviere said, has been evacuated while inspectors from MSHA, the Illinois Department of Mines and Minerals and the coroner's office investigate.

The mine is operated by Knight Hawk Coal LLC., which according to MSHA records began as operators of Prairie Eagle in October 2008 with an average of 55 employees a year. Knight Hawk's website says the underground mine opened in 2006 with 90 employees, but it is

unclear whether the company owned the mine at the time.

According to MSHA data, no fatalities have occurred at the mine since records for Knight Hawk as operator started to be collected in 2009. There have been 18 injuries reported since 2009.

"We grieve the loss of one our own and extend our deepest sympathies to his family. At this time, an investigation is being conducted ... and we are prohibited from making further comments. The safety of our employees is paramount and this accident affects all of us profoundly," the company said in a written statement.

On its website, the company stresses safety to its employees, having launched a safety awareness campaign in 2009 consisting of monthly briefings, reminders attached to paychecks, newsletter articles and posters. The campaign was launched under the banner: "Keep barriers between you and danger."

Philippines: Five miners killed, five missing as Semirara coal mine collapses

Extract from www.gmanetwork.com,

Five miners have been confirmed dead, three others were rescued while five remain missing after a large-scale commercial coal mine on Semirara Island in Antique collapsed late Wednesday night, the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management (NDRRMC) said Thursday night.

In a statement, resident manager George San Pedro of the Semirara Mining Corporation confirmed the developments, saying a section of the west wall of the Panian pit in the mine gave way at 11:55 p.m. Wednesday.

Semirara is the nation's only large-scale coal producer. On the company website, there is no mention of mine safety or workplace safeguards, except for a line about an ISO certification for its "Safety Management System."

The statement said the corporation has stopped its operations while it is in the process of determining the accident's cause in coordination with authorities.

It is the deadliest large-scale mining accident in recent memory. There have been at least eight fatal incidents inside small-scale, mostly illegal mines in the Philippines since 2008, according to GMA News Research, including two tragedies in Paracale, Camarines Norte in 2012, a gold-rush community in Bicol.

But large companies like Semirara are supposed to have safeguards that smaller operations do not have.

San Pedro said the company is extending "full support" to the families of the affected personnel.

In a separate statement, the Department of the Interior and Local Government identified the survivors as Marjun Catoto, Adrian Celmar and Leonardo Sojor.

DILG Sec. Mar Roxas II has directed local government officials in Antique and Caluya town, as well as the Philippine National Police in Region 6, to lead the search and rescue operations for the trapped miners, the statement said.

Large-scale coal producer

The Semirara Mining Corporation describes itself as the only large-scale coal producer in the Philippines. It is engaged in surface open cut mining of thermal coal in its Panian mine on Semirara Island, where the mine collapse occurred.

In 2009, the company was accused of polluting Semirara's coastal resources with wastes from its coal washing plant. The company denied the allegation.

Earlier on Thursday, Western Visayas police head Chief Superintendent Agrimero Cruz Jr. said search-and-rescue operations were ongoing for the trapped miners as of 9 a.m.

Citing initial reports, he said three miners were rescued from the collapsed mine site. One of the victims was flown to Manila while two only had minor injuries.

Meanwhile, Caluya vice mayor Diosdado Egina told GMA News TV's "Balitanghali" that Semirara Mining Corporation's personnel, together with the local police, are conducting search and retrieval operations.

Egina also said representatives from various agencies including the Department of Labor and Employment, the office of the governor of Antique, and the Antique Provincial Disaster Risk Reduction Management Council are set to conduct an investigation on the incident.

Mining victims

Data compiled by GMA News Research since 2008 on fatalities from mining-related operations show that most victims were working in small-scale mining areas.

DATE	LOCATION	DETAILS
Sep 22, 2008	Itoyon, Benguet	Six small-scale miners died when they were trapped inside a flooded mine tunnel at the Antamok Gold Field. Ten others were rescued, most of them after nine days in the tunnel.
May 18, 2009	Brgy. Napnapan, Pantukan, Compostela Valley	Heavy rain for two days caused a landslide that buried the bunk houses of gold miners at the foot of a mountain, killing 24 small-scale miners.
Apr 3, 2011	Tampakan, South Cotabato	Four people were killed and two survived when a section of an illegal mine collapsed due to heavy rains.
Apr 22, 2011	Sitio Panganason, Brgy. Kingking, Pantukan, Compostela Valley	At least 14 people were killed in a landslide at an illegal mine site that the MGB had declared a "dangerous" area.
Jan 29, 2012	Brgy. Palanas, Paracale, Camarines Norte	Two miners drowned when the water rose suddenly inside an illegal small-scale mining area.
Aug 3-10, 2012	Brgy. Bila, Bokod, Benguet	A small-scale miner trapped in a tunnel that collapsed was rescued after a week.
Nov 20, 2012	Brgy. Palanas, Paracale, Camarines Norte	Three miners were killed when a small-scale mining pit collapsed in the area.

Aquino orders probe on Antique mining accident

Extract from philSTAR.com

MANILA, Philippines (Xinhua) - President Benigno Aquino III today ordered the National Disaster Risk Reduction Management Council (NDRRMC) to determine the cause of Wednesday's mining accident in of Antique which has caused at least four dead and six missing.

The west wall of the open mine pit operated by Semirara Mining Corporation collapsed around 11:55 p.m. local time Wednesday after a landslide hit Antique. Latest report showed that out of the thirteen people trapped in the mine, four people were confirmed dead, three were rescued and six remain missing.

Presidential Spokesman Edwin Lacierda said today the president also instructed the NDRRMC to update him on the results of the investigations. Aquino also instructed he Department of Social Welfare and Development to extend immediate assistance to the victims and their families.

The three workers rescued are Marjun Catoto, Adrian Celmar and Leonardo Sojour, according to Rosario Cabrera, director for Western Visayas at the Office of Civil Defense. She added the bodies of four workers Leovigildo Porras, Abnir Lim, Efren Esquiza - have been already retrieved.

Cabrera said they're searching for the six persons namely Georgie Bragat, Jan Riel Planca, Randy Tamparong, Richard Padernilla, Anthony Sibley, and Junjie Gomez.

Cabrera said they're still determining the cause of the landslide.

Sunday 17 February 2013

2012 a Fatality Free Year in WA Mines

Industry and government bodies in Western Australia have confirmed that there were no fatalities on the state's mines last year, which is the first time in over a century.

Norman Moore the WA Mines and Petroleum Minister said that this result was because of the efforts of the mining industry and government reforms but also cautioned that efforts should not be relaxed.

He said that mining is a dangerous business and that zero fatalities was the aim and he was very pleased that it had been achieved.

He said that everyone needs to remain focused on OHS in WA mines and ensure that it remains the top priority.

Nicole Roocke, the Chamber of Minerals and Energy director, said that she was pleased with this result and also cautioned against complacency and reminded the industry to stay on guard so that everyone returns home safe and well.

Chamber of Minerals and Energy director Nicole Roocke said it was a pleasing result, but the sector would remain on guard. "The resource sector will remain vigilant and work hard to ensure everyone gets home safe and well," she said.

This result is released as both Queensland and Western Australia are still debating with the Federal Government about adopting national OHS laws for mines.

Tuesday 19 February 2013

Six trapped in N China mine flood

Extract from Xinhua, China

SIX men are still trapped underground hours after a coal mine in north China's Shanxi Province flooded, the local government said.

The accident happened at about 4 am today in the city of Yangquan, where 12 people were carrying out illegal mining operations, the municipal government said.

Six of them managed to escape.

The miners had illegally dug a pit in a small room in a residential home. Although water levels in the pit have dropped following rescuers' efforts to pump water out, the rescuers said their work has been difficult because of a lack of geological data.

Rescue efforts and a further investigation into the accident are under way.

Wednesday 20 February 2013

3 dead in blast at Chinese coal mine

Extract from UPI

An explosion occurred when police and mine workers were trying to destroy expired explosives at a China coal mine, killing three people, officials said.

The explosion Tuesday at a coal mine in Jinsha County in southwest Guizhou province also injured four others, three of them seriously, Xinhua News Agency.

Local sources told Xinhua the blast occurred when policemen from a local station and coal mine workers were destroying expired explosives.

Other details about the incident were not available. The report said the cause of the explosion was being investigated.

The injured were taken to a local hospital.

Thursday 21 February 2013

7 confirmed dead in Shanxi mine flood

Extract from Xinhua, China

Seven men have been confirmed dead after being trapped underground for more than 40 hours in a coal mine flood in north China's Shanxi Province, the local government said on Thursday.

The accident happened at about 4 a.m. on Tuesday in Yangquan, where 12 people illegally dug a mine pit in a residential building. Six of the 12 managed to escape the flood.

A preliminary investigation showed another six people were excavating coal in a connected pit nearby when the flood occurred. One man from this group was trapped underground.

Rescuers had pumped more than 12,000 cubic meters of water out of the pits by the time they wrapped up their work.

Liu Xianyun, a production safety official in the city of Yangquan, said the pits' owner tried to escape instead of reporting the accident immediately to the local government.

He said police have detained the main suspects in the illegal mining operations.

Related government departments are making a geological survey of the area and looking for hidden dangers in order to avoid secondary disasters, said Liu.

The mine pits are located in residential areas and are close to a special railway for coal transportation.

The government of Yangquan has initiated a campaign to discourage illegal mining. The government is investigating related cases and encouraging local residents to report illegal mining operations.

USA: Gov. Calls for Safety Stand-Down at W.Va. Mines

Extract from Associated Press

West Virginia Gov. Earl Ray Tomblin is asking coal companies to halt production for an hour to review safety procedures following the state's fourth mining fatality in two weeks and the sixth since November.

Tomblin signed an executive order urging mine operators to hold safety talks with employees over the next 24 hours, starting Wednesday afternoon. Inspectors and mine safety officials plan to visit about 500 mines.

In April 2010, an explosion at Massey Energy's Upper Big Branch mine killed 29 men and former Gov. Joe Manchin ordered a similar temporary stop in production. He also ordered one in 2006.

The request came after a worker was struck by a scoop Tuesday night and died of his injuries. The death at Pocahontas Coal Co.'s Affinity mine near Sophia was its second this month. The mine faces several safety violations.

Tuesday 26 February 2013

China to halt approvals for small coal mines

Extract from Xinhua

China's safety watchdog said Monday it will no longer approve new coal mines that do not meet production capacity requirements in 2013 in order to ensure work safety.

High-gas coal mines with an annual production of less than 300,000 tonnes, as well as coal and gas outburst mines with an annual production of less than 450,000 tonnes, will not be approved, the State Administration of Work Safety said.

Last month, the administration put rules into effect that hold coal mine managers accountable for protecting their workers' lives. Managers are required to have proper operation licenses and provide better ventilation.

In 2012, 1,384 people were killed in coal mine accidents, declining from 1,973 in 2011. Most of the accidents occurred in small coal mines.

This week in mining accident history

27 February 1943
Smith Mine
Bearcreek, Montana, USA
Underground coal mine
Methane explosion
75 killed

Smith Mine disaster was 70 years ago Wednesday

Extract from Billings Gazette

By Lorna Thackeray

Saturday paid time-and-a-half at the Montana Coal and Iron Co.'s Smith Mine between Bearcreek and Washoe.

Miners who had just emerged from the Great Depression of the 1930s eagerly worked the overtime weekend shift. They had the added incentive of doing their part to keep the World War II war machine running.

Although many were immigrants, they were a patriotic lot, according to Matt Stump, a senior in history at Montana State University Billings. Most had the cost of war bonds deducted from their wages, he said.

As 1942 drew to a close, Frank Mourich, a native of Austria, had increased his purchase of war bonds to \$75 of his \$132 biweekly paycheck, Stump found while researching his senior thesis.

Daylight was about an hour old when Mourich and 76 other coal miners entered the mouth of the Smith Mine on Feb. 27, 1943. On that bright winter morning, they descended about 7,000 feet into the No. 3 vein and went to work.

It was mostly a seasoned, middle-aged crew, but there were many on both ends of the age spectrum. Andrew Jorden, 21, of Red Lodge,

and Adam Lee Wakenshaw, 72, an immigrant from England, toiled deep underground, as did Wakenshaw's 39-year-old son, Robert.

No one knows whether any of these men intent on their work noticed an unusual buildup of methane gas or coal dust, and there are only theories about what ignited an explosion so powerful that it blew a 20-ton locomotive off its tracks.

But an hour and 37 minutes after their shift began, all but three of the miners were dead or dying in the worst mine disaster in Montana history. They were survived by 58 widows and 125 children.

Accounts from that day 70 years ago say the explosion was so deep in the mine that it was not felt at the surface.

The Billings Gazette reported the next day that Art Lantana, who was working above ground, saw smoke pouring from the opening. An emergency siren began to wail, summoning off-duty miners and relatives to the mine mouth.

Management got its first notification of the disaster below from hoisting engineer Alex Hawthorne, 55, who telephoned the surface and said: "There's something wrong down here. I'm getting out."

Before he got far, Hawthorne was overcome by fumes. Two others, Willard Reid and Eli Houtonen, were blown down by the force of a wind from below. A rescue force braving the deadly gas brought all three unconscious men to the surface along with two bodies. The Gazette said that they had been working in Vein No. 2.

All three survivors, who were described in the newspaper as "very sick," were rushed to a hospital in Red Lodge, five miles away. Also hospitalized early that day were eight volunteers who were searching for survivors.

Hawthorne later said that he and the other survivors were working 4,800 feet inside the mine "when the power failed and I sensed serious trouble. I grabbed the telephone and

rang desperately. At that time a cyclone of wind ascended from the mine, carrying sticks and everything that was loose. Then came the worst smell that I have ever sensed and I knew there was an explosion.”

Another miner called to him, he said, and they started out with a loaded coal car.

“That’s the last I remember until I came to here in the hospital,” Hawthorne said.



Miners from Montana Coal and Iron’s nearby Foster Mine joined rescue parties, as did crews from Klein and Roundup. An Army paratroop transport based in Helena picked up a special 14-man rescue squad from the copper mines in Butte and flew the men to Billings. The squad was ferried to the mine in screaming Montana Highway Patrol cars.

A telephone line was strung so rescue parties could keep in touch with the surface. William Romek, Smith Mine assistant manager, told The Gazette that the men were trapped behind a rock fall, but the fall wasn’t the problem. The real threat was methane gas.

“We’re hoping that they were able to get away from the danger area after the explosion and go to a safer place in the mine,” he said the day of the explosion.

Above ground, miners’ families kept a calm, hopeful watch, The Gazette reported.

“They chatted softly among themselves with their eyes seemingly glued on the mine entrance across the gulch,” a story said. “Many remained for a nightlong vigil.”

Mine employees toiled throughout the day trying to repair and secure the workings. “The workmen formed chains, keeping contact in case they were overcome in the gas-filled tunnel, which was described as ‘very bad,’” The Gazette reported.

Meanwhile, the Red Cross, already in a high state of preparedness because of the war, quickly established a canteen to feed the crowd gathering at the mine. Within an hour of the first call for help, the organization had set up a 50-bed emergency hospital in Red Lodge, with the assistance of local high school students.

Gov. Sam Ford arrived the next day, offering state support. A detail of state troopers was headquartered at the scene to transport workers to and from hotels and rooming houses. They also raced rescuers overcome by fumes to the emergency hospital in Red Lodge. On Sunday, doctors there told The Gazette that 62 rescuers had been treated. By Monday, the number was 118.

On Sunday, Feb. 28, experienced miners told reporters that they believed that there was just a “thousand to one chance” trapped miners were still alive. The Butte specialists, who were equipped with oxygen masks, could stay underground as long as six hours at a time, but they were unfamiliar with the mine. Regular mine employees with only filter masks could not go as deep into the tunnel.

“Without the guidance of regular coal miners, they have been unable to find their way through the maze of approximately 700 passageways,” The Gazette reported.

Desperate to save family members and friends, local miners stayed down as long as they could.

“You can work in there about five minutes and then your head gets light and your legs sag,” a rescuer worker told a reporter. “But we’re doing all right. We’re making progress and we’ll reach some of them soon.”

The rescue effort was grim.

"When exhausted rescuers come out of the mine, most of them are dazed and groggy from the effects of the gas for hours afterward," The Gazette reported. "They are taken to the Red Lodge emergency hospital and put to bed. Drugs are administered to quiet their nerves, but many grow hysterical."

Six bodies had been recovered by Sunday. But miners' wives kept the faith.

"Calm and steadfast, unalterable in belief that their men will come out all right, they waited side by side on benches in the improvised canteen set up in the machine shop," Gazette reporter Kathryn Wright wrote. "Many have been there since the disaster to meet the boys 'when they come out.' "

A cocker spaniel nosed among the men day after day looking in vain for his master, Bill Shepard, 69. Brownie had come to the mine entrance daily for the previous five years to walk his master home.

Robert Wakenshaw's wife, awaiting word of her husband and her father-in-law, held her head high and her shoulders erect as she told Wright: "I know they're coming out. I have all the confidence in the world."

Seventeen-year-old Martha Barovich knew her widowed father, Sam, would emerge safely.

"Just doesn't seem like it could happen to Dad," she said. "I know they must be all right. We're all praying for them. God will hear us. I know."

"Joe can't be dead," a trapped miner's wife said. "He's an old hand at mining. He knows what to do. He's way at the back. There might be fresh air."

But there wasn't.

In agonizing slowness over the next week, the number of bodies began to mount. The last — that of mine foreman Elmer Price, 53 — came out on March 7. He left a wife and five children.

Funeral announcements for victims of the disaster ran in The Gazette's pages until March 19.

The final casualty of the disaster, Matt Woodward, a rescue worker suffering the effects of his efforts, died April 9. His death brought the total to 75.

It was later determined that about 30 of the men died from injuries caused by force of the explosion. Carbon monoxide and lack of oxygen killed the rest.

At least five of the doomed miners survived for an hour and a half — long enough to scrawl a few last words for their families. Three messages were found. According a wire service report, the miners wrote with chalk on rough boards.

One found near Walter Joki, 30, and John Sundar, 28, read, "Goodbye wives and daughters. We died an easy death. Love from us both. Be good."

Another note listed Frank Pajnich, 53; Fred Rasborschek, 61; Sundar; and Joki. They wrote "We try to do our best but couldn't get out."

Emil Anderson, 40, left this final message: "It's five minutes past 11 o'clock. Dear Agnes and children I am sorry we had to go this way — God bless you all."

On the Net:

<http://www.usmra.com/saxsewell/bearcreekmtn.htm>

Thursday 28 February 2013

UK: Daw Mill coal mining may end after 'ferocious' fire

Extract from BBC News

Mining is unlikely to resume after a ferocious underground fire at Warwickshire's last pit, UK Coal says.

More than 100 miners were evacuated from Daw Mill Colliery after the blaze broke out 1,770 ft (540m) below the surface on Friday afternoon.

Kevin McCullough of UK Coal said: "This fire is on a scale not seen for decades - the industry has seen nothing like it for between 30 and 50 years."

Daw Mill was due to close next year and its future is now in doubt.

UK Coal said it would take anything from three to six months to resume mining at Daw Mill because of the fire.

"Given it will now be closed for a number of months, the reality of us ever getting in there to mine commercially again is very very slim," said Mr McCullough.

The fire was caused by spontaneous combustion at an old coalface where salvage work was being carried out, said UK Coal.

'Unprecedented in scale'

Mr McCullough, the company's chief executive, said 96 miners were initially evacuated.

A team of 14 remained underground to try to bring the fire under control.

He said: "We deal with these fires regularly but this one was unprecedented in its scale and it became clear to keep the men underground was not the right thing to do and they were safely evacuated.

"The suddenness of the fire and its ferocity is something we train for and hope never to see, so the safe evacuation of over 100 miners is something the whole team can be proud of."

Mr McCullough said the fire was still burning on Monday morning, although it was showing signs of subsiding.

He said staff were able to work on the surface of the mine at Arley, near Coventry, but management teams were assessing the future of the site.

'Just speculation'

The Health and Safety Executive has begun an investigation into the incident.

Chris Kitchen, general secretary of the National Union of Mineworkers, said all staff at the colliery was asked to go to work on Monday as normal.

Those without specific jobs were sent home for the day on full pay.

He said: "It could be 72 hours before the fire is put out.

"Talk of work not starting up in that part of the colliery for another three to six months is just speculation."

The colliery's closure could lead to the loss of about 800 jobs.

Mining dictionary

A guide to coal mining terminology

C

Cage

In a mine shaft, the device, similar to an elevator car, that is used for hoisting personnel and materials.



Miners from Craghead pose outside the pit cage, which takes them to and from the coal face, after a shift underground. County Durham Miners, 1938.