

# COAL FATAL

1912 0006

Report of an Inundation, July 24, 1912, Superba and Lemont  
Mines; Evans Station, Pennsylvania; 18 Killed  
(From "Mines and Minerals," September 1912, pp.69-71)

On July 24 a tremendous downpour of rain occurred in the vicinity of Uniontown, Pa., that found its way into the Superba mine and trapped 14 men. At about the same time the flood found its way into the Lemont mine about 1 mile away, drowning 4 men.

Both the operations are in Fayette County, a few miles northeast from Uniontown, Pa. Superba, the smaller mine, is at Evans Station, and is purely a coal-shipping proposition working on one of the upper measures known as the Sewickly coal, a bed about 5 feet in average thickness and separated from the Pittsburgh (sic), or Connellsville coking seam by some 90 feet of intervening strata.

The main openings of each plant are more than a mile apart and are on opposite sides of the main valley. The Lemont openings enter direct on the outcrop and with the inclination of the seam; the Superba inlets, in the opposite hillside, swing around in several consecutive angles until they get the natural bearing and follow the same inclinations as the Lemont workings. The dip on the main slope of the Superba mine is about 7 per cent; the Lemont opening is more on a local "backbone" on the basin, consequently somewhat flatter.

The conformity of the surface area covered by the recent flood is not one that would naturally cause apprehension or anticipation of this unusual disaster, save in the fact that the coal outcrops along the bottom of the foot-hills defining the valley; but the latter is one of ample width and extent, with several miles of gently rolling or undulating country to the base of the regular mountain chain on the east (Laurel Ridge).

The waters did not enter either mine through the natural or expected sources, the regular mine openings, but in each place broke through the surface in the low places of the main valley and where the old workings had been driven up almost to the top of the coal, leaving but a few feet of surface to cover these excavations. Flowing into these old excavations, it sought its own course, spread in all directions, and was simply beyond human control for the time being. Eventually the body of water covering the valley did rise sufficiently high to flow into the manways of both plants, and in this rise, sections of low country for miles around were covered and impassible (sic), indicating the suddenness and extent of the storm.

The first sign of serious trouble took place about 1 p.m. in the sudden disappearance of a heavy stream of water that flowed along the western ditch of the railroad; immediate investigation showed the water to have broken through the surface at the Superba mine; and from all reports a similar break occurred at the Lemont mine at about the same hour. Sixty odd men were at work in the Superba mine and a full quota of employees at the adjoining plant.

Messengers acquainted with the workings were at once

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dispatched to notify the men of their danger and then hurry them out as rapidly as possible; and after strenuous effort on the part of the messengers and many narrow escapes, all but 14 of the total in Superba and 4 in Lemont made thier way to safety. That effective and very rapid work was done by the messengers is illustrated in one case where a Superba trackman, working in the extreme dip and fartherst point in the mine, was rescued along with many others. Of the 14 men lost, several were within rescue distance, but the rush of the water carrying with it timber and heavy debris, finally battered and beat them back until there were totally exhausted and lost. Much of this final overpowering was use to the additional stream flowing into the traveling way shortly after the messengers started on their journey to notify the men; this new stream caught even the messengers on thier return trip and in thier then exhausted condition, thier escape was only short of miraculous. Also, in this mine, with only 5 feet of height in which to travel, all the men were handicappedm due to the crouched position necessarily maintained; and as the water continued to rise, their space for air supply became rapidly contracted, and all the way through they suffered many physical disadvantages in the strenuous endeavor to make their way to safety through strong current of water, laden with debris, and with the usual passageways blocked with foreign matter.

While a dip of 7 per cent is rather heavy in the usually flat beds of coal in this section, such pitch does not afford, as has frequently been the case in the have pitching anthracite seams, highly elevated places to which men can retreat in case of flooding, and where for a limited time they will likewise find air storage sufficient to maintain life, if quick rescue can be accomplished. But in the present case, as the water flowed in the main openings or even the new breaks, it would rapidly fill up all the excavations, and those who could not keep ahead of this rise, would be trapped and covered. As the men were all probaly on thier way out from the various parts of the mine, where those who became victims met their end it would be difficult to state; many of them would likely be floated off to other parts from where they met the water until they lodged on some obstruction.

In the Superba mine there are probably 40 acres of exhausted territory now full of water, and the length of time required to pump it out is problematic, depending on the success with which persistent endeavor will be met, and the amount of repair work to be done as the work advances. This work of pumping and eventual recovering of the bodies was put under way as quickly as the conditions would allow.

The inundated portion is one of much commercial activity; several railroads, a street railway, ane numerous mines and industries, as well as the homes of the employees, are strung along the valley for some miles. Bridges are numerous both on highway and rail, indicating the tortuous course of the streams; and the stoppage of water through a few of these at a critical time becomes a serious matter. It would appear that it might be good policy for the numerous industries to come to some arrangement for establishing of definite water channels. While the possibilities of a similar flood are equally for and against its occurrence, an

investment of the kind here referred to will be of much smaller moment than the many thousand dollars lost in a few hours during this recent downpour; and the guarantee of safety to the men working underground will be a feature far more commendable and of greater moment than any monetary consideration.