

# COAL FATAL

REPORT OF A FIRE AT KATHLEEN MINE  
DOWELL, ILLINOIS  
AUGUST 1, 1936 - 9 KILLED

(From Bureau of Mines report by C.A. Herbert)

About 5:15 p.m., August 1, 1936, a fire was discovered on the 7th north entries near the 31st and 32nd east entries, which resulted in the death of nine men. A set of three transformers, one of 25 KVA and two of 30 KVA, capacity, together with a primary oil switch, had been installed in a crosscut on the 7th north near the 31st and the 32nd east entries earlier in the day and it was believed that one of these transformers might have blown up and caused the fire. A subsequent examination of the fire area and the transformers following the opening of the fire seals, disproved this surmise and it is now believed that the fire had its origin on the 8th north, also referred to as the 7th north, aircourse, and to have been due to a "shorting" of the trolley circuit due probably to a fall of roof. Apparently the fall had also knocked down the secondary 220 volt alternating current power wires which crossed over the trolley wire, as a section of trolley wire was found fused to the power wires at the point where the fire was believed to have started.

The mine had been idle the day of the fire.

During the time the State Mine rescue team from DuQuin, Illinois was erecting seals on the 7th and 8th north entries outby the fire, several motor trips of material were sent into the 7th north haulage road which is on the return for this section. With these trips, either riding or walking, there were between fifteen and twenty men who had been sent in to assist with the sealing. All of these men were more or less affected with carbon monoxide; nine of them lost their lives. Those who escaped death managed to get through from the 7th north haulage road into the parallel 8th north aircourse entry.

The fire was first discovered shortly after 5 p.m. by a face boss who had a crew working in the 25th west off the 7th north. Upon smelling smoke he made his way up to the fire and saw that it was of such magnitude that additional help would be needed and at once telephoned to the surface. This was shortly before 6 p.m. The recording wattmeter on the surface recorded a sudden flow of current at 5:15 p.m., indicating that the short circuit which evidently caused the fire occurred at that time.

The DuQuin State rescue team was called about 6 p.m. and arrived at the mine about 7 p.m. with their Gibbs apparatus. By that time the mine foreman who had been to the fire to see what would be needed had four empty locomotive trips waiting on the bottom to haul the men and supplies to the fire area, a distance of about 2 1/2 miles from the shaft bottom.

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The rescue team accompanied by the mine foreman and other employees left in the first trip. Smoke was encountered at the 25th east off the 7th north so the trip was stopped and the rescue team and the other men got out and went through into the 8th north, which is the intake aircourse, and up the aircourse to the 25th east.

In the meantime the trip containing the rescue apparatus and materials was taken to the 25th east. It was stated that the motorman wore a gas mask while taking the trip from the 23rd east to the 25th east. The rescue apparatus was assembled and the materials unloaded on the 25th east, which is on the intake, and carried up the 8th north to the fire.

Work was begun on the seals outby the fire and was progressing rapidly when word was received that the men who had gone in with the succeeding trip had been overcome along the 7th north haulage road. They immediately ceased work on the seals and went back to assist in the rescue work. Six of the bodies were recovered by apparatus crews and three by men without apparatus.

It is believed that there were between fifteen and twenty men with the three succeeding trips. All of these men were affected by carbon monoxide; all but nine however, managed to make their way into the parallel aircourse or were rescued by fellow workmen. Nine of these men lost their lives.

The 7th north haulage entry is practically a neutral entry so far as ventilation is concerned, except for leakage around trapdoors or when the trapdoors are opened. There is a trapdoor on the 7th north haulage road between each pair of west panel entries to force the air into these panels. For this reason the left hand 7th north carried practically the full return from the fire and no doubt when the mine foreman traveled in to the fire area along the 7th north haulage just prior to the first locomotive trip going in, this entry was relatively free of smoke or fumes, and the same condition no doubt prevailed when the first trip with the mine rescue crew went in, as it is reported that smoke was first encountered by the crew at the 23rd east entries. However, it is probable that when the first trip with the rescue crew went in the trapdoors along the 7th north haulage road were propped open, making a more direct return of the entry. It is also stated that when the rescue crew first started to work a trapdoor outby where they were building the seals was opened, thus "shorting" the air from the intake to the 7th north haulage road, and that later this door was closed thus throwing the air up to the fire, and then later it was again opened. If this is the case no doubt during the time the trapdoor was open and the air largely cut off from the fire there was a considerable accumulation of monoxide which was later released along the 7th north haulage entry when the door was closed and may account for the conditions being so much worse when the subsequent trips went up the 7th north haulage than they were when the first trip with the rescue crew went in.

Following the recovery of the bodies it was found to be impossible to finish the seals that were started because the fire had gained so much headway.

They next attempted to place seals just outby the 27th and 28th entries but were again obliged to drop back to a point outby the 25th and 26th entries. Here they succeeded in building three wood seals which were plastered with wood fibre plaster. After allowing these to stand twenty-four hours, permanent concrete block seals were erected just outby the wood and plaster seals. These concrete seals were completed Monday, August 3.

The fire area remained under seal during the period August 3 to September 30, inclusive, 1936.