

33 MINERS DIE IN ALABAMA PIT

EXPLOSION IN MULGA MINE THIS MORNING LAID TO COAL GAS

RECOVER BODIES

Distraught Wives, Children And Parents Watch Grim Proceedings As Bodies Brought Up

By LEROY SIMMS

BIRMINGHAM, Ala., Oct. 16—
(P)—A terrific explosion killed 33
trapped men deep in Mulga coal
mine near Birmingham early to-
day.

Rescue crews battled heroically
through smoke and dangerous
gases to bring out the blackened
and mutilated bodies.

Only one elbow of the mine was
affected. Had the blast occurred
near the mine entrance, all of the
350 workers at Mulga would have
been trapped.

Mangled and burned, the bodies
were brought up from the depths
on coal cars. Approximately 500
spectators, including distraught
wives, children and parents, watch-
ed the grim proceedings.

The detonation was heard in sec-
tions of Birmingham, more than
12 miles from the scene. Fire Mar-
shal Sam Williams blamed coal gas
for the blast.

Forrest Kelley, a miner, was
first to reach his stricken fellow
workers.

"Some of them must have been
killed by 'black damp,'" he said.
"They might have been saved if
they had remained in a small pock-
et which was not demolished."

Many of the victims were cover-
ed by debris and identification was
difficult. The grime-streaked res-
cue crews pulled the torn bodies
from the wreckage of a working
r, approximately four miles from the
mine entrance.

One man, Ivan Fox, escaped in
the blast. He suffered major burns
and was unable to tell of his ex-
perience.

The bodies were taken to und-
ertaking establishments at Bessemer,
13 miles from here, where a list of
the dead was being compiled.

R. M. Marshall, vice-president of
the Woodward Iron Company, oper-
ators of the mine, said the victims
were about equally divided between
whites and negroes.

Chief Deputy Sheriff Charlie
McCombs said "most of the men
apparently were thrown against
the sides of the shaft with great
force. Their gloves were burned off
their hands, in many instances."

Marshal Williams said Mulga
was "known as one of the hottest
mines in Jefferson county."

He explained that a "hot" mine
is one in which coal gas collects
rapidly. Despite this tendency, he
said, the Mulga mine has not ex-
perienced an explosion since the
Woodward Iron Company began its
operation. However, explosions in
Mulga mine have claimed the lives
of 56 men. A blast on April 20,
1910, took 39 lives, and 17 more
were killed Oct. 5, 1914.

The bodies were brought to the
surface as the first rays of the
sun broke into the little hollow
at which is Mulga. Homes of the
miners were deserted, but state
highway patrolmen and Birming-
ham police kept the rural roads
open.

Only one telephone was avail-
able to newspapermen and for
emergency calls, and conversations
were limited to one minute each.

Mulga lies in an isolated, moun-
tainous region which includes the
best coal lands in Alabama. Its coal
is used primarily for iron making,
being shipped to the Woodward
blast furnaces a few miles away.

Rescue crews fought their way
into the elbow despite warnings
that a trip into the mine was ex-
tremely hazardous. Equipped with
oxygen masks, a squad from the
United States Bureau of Mines, led
the way into the elbow where the
victims lay.

This disaster was the first of
major proportions in Alabama since
the Overton blast in 1925 in which
54 lost their lives. Mulga is only
a few miles from Dolomite, where
93 died in a dust explosion in 1922.

1937 Mulga Mine explosion NEWS

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