

Blast Kills 37 in Coal Mine, But More Than 125 Escape

Bodies Found 300 Feet From the Entrance Of Shaft on Virginia-West Virginia Border

By the United Press

BISHOP, Va., Feb. 4—Thirty-seven miners were killed here today when an explosion attributed to gas rocked one of the largest soft coal mines in the U. S. Rescue workers found the bodies scattered about in one area of the sprawling mine within six hours after the 1:55 AM blast.

Officials of the Pocahontas Fuel Co. said the men were trapped 300 feet from the mouth of the mine, which runs under Virginia and West Virginia.

The men apparently died instantly. Their bodies showed no indication of external injuries, indicating they had died from concussion or gas.

An official said the blast killed three 12-man work crews and another man who was with them.

It was the worst mine disaster in the U. S. since 1951, when 119 miners were killed at West Frankfort, Ill.

The Bishop mine is the second largest of the Pocahontas coal fields. The miners here produce 10,000 tons of coal a day.

There were 177 men working in the mine on the midnight to 8 AM shift when the blast occurred, but most of them escaped through an opening not available to the victims.

A. V. Sproles, vice president of Pocahontas, and West Virginia mines inspector Julius Olzer said the section where the blast occurred was examined by a fire boss just before the workmen entered the mine at midnight.

They said the examination showed that the section "was free of hazard at the time of the inspection."

At the time of the explosion, the statement said, the three crews were working at six different hole faces. A foreman and four other miners were equipped with apparatus for the detection of gas.