

Rescuers Held Up In Deep Mine

**Explosion Traps
Men 680 Feet
Down; 47 Escape**

By W. KIRK VOGELY

CARMICHAELS, Pa. (UPI) — Weary rescue workers battled against time today in an effort to reach 37 men trapped 680 feet below the earth's surface by an explosion in the Frosty Run shaft of a U. S. Steel Corp. coal mine.

Rescuers pushed to within 5,500 feet of an area where the men were believed trapped. At that point, progress was halted as a horizontal shaft was sealed off to permit further advances.

Officials said there was a slim chance the miners had reached a safe area and survived the methane gas explosion and a fire which apparently followed. But no word had been received from the trapped men since the blast at 1 p.m. Thursday.

Eighty-four men were in the mine, but 47 reached safety.

The blast area was about 680 feet underground and between three and four miles from the mouth of the shaft.

Thursday was the 55th anniversary of the worst mine disaster on record in the United States—one which killed 361 men Dec. 6, 1907, at Monongah, W. Va.

James B. Girod, assistant general superintendent of the Robena Mine, said it was "difficult to say" whether there could be any hope the missing miners were alive.

Girod said that two assistant mine foremen who were among the missing men were "crack rescue men ... if there were any chance, those two would have accomplished something."

Among the missing was 18-year-old Albert F. Bronakoski of Bobtown, Pa., a U.S. Steel student-trainee under a five-year engineering program operated jointly with Pennsylvania State University.

The rescue workers, operating in relays of three eight-man teams, encountered traces of carbon monoxide fumes, indicating fire, and small amounts of methane gas which Girod described as "below the safety level."

The rescue workers had to dig through rubble from rock falls and timber cave-ins. As they went along they shored up the walls and roof of the shaft and set up power lines to operate the ventilating system.

At midnight, Girod said it would be a "great many hours"

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before the rescue workers could reach the blast area.

Weather conditions at the site were bad. Strong winds whipped a steady snowfall, hampering the movement of emergency supplies to the site. State police reported many trailers jackknifed along the main arteries leading to this soft coal mining area in southwestern Pennsylvania about 40 miles south of Pittsburgh.

Because of the bad weather the U.S. Steel Corp. at first asked the families of the trapped men not to go to the mine. But about eight hours after the accident the company began calling the families to tell them they could go to the site. The families waited in a large corrugated structure which along one side houses the elevator leading down into the Frosty Run shaft. They were mostly silent. There was no weeping.

Girod said that workers in the corrugated structure got their first indication that something was wrong at 1 p.m., EST, Thursday when the ventilator fan in the Frosty Run shaft stopped operating. Shortly after that miners came rushing out of the shaft.

Some of those who escaped said they were working about two miles from the blast area. Some said they heard a "thud," some felt a rush of air. Some said the blast waves knocked their helmets off their heads.

The Robena No. 3 mine, together with its sister mines, Robena No. 1 and Robena No. 2, form a vast spider web of shafts under 69,000 acres in Greene and Fayette counties. They are called "captive mines"—workings which are owned and operated by steel companies to provide soft coal for their mills. The Robena mines serve U.S. Steel's mills in the Pittsburgh area.