

Two Men Are Lowered. To Bottom of Shaft Where 21 Men Were Trapped

MORGAN CITY, LA. (UPI): Two members of a Kentucky rescue team today descended to the bottom of the quarter-mile-deep shaft of a salt mine in which 21 men have been trapped since Tuesday, but found no sign of life.

The rescuers, using self-container breathing apparatus, reached the bottom of the shaft at 7:10 a. m. (EST). They reported hearing a motor running and seeing a small fire, but no signs of life.

It took more than 30 minutes for the two men to reach the bottom of the shaft of the Cargill, Inc., mine. Going down slowly, the two men in a make-shift cage called out conditions as they were lowered into the cavern.

THEY SAID the concrete-lined walls of the shaft were in good shape but that elevator guide beams were burned out. The miners were trapped when fire roared up the shaft.

Hope that the miners would be found alive had been steadily fading since calls down the shaft brought no answer. Then, before the two rescue workers went down, a walkie-talkie with a light on it was lowered into the shaft. Nobody touched the walkie-talkie in the bottom of the shaft and it was pulled back up again.

Earlier tests showed evidence of deadly carbon monoxide fumes at the bottom of the shaft-16 feet in diameter.

The men, employed at the Belle Isle Salt Mine on the isolated Louisiana coast, were trapped when fire roared up the shaft, burning telephone lines and incinerating elevator cables.

The only way out of the mine is by elevator.

The mine, accessible only

by plane or boat, is surrounded by swampy Louisiana bayous, and separated from the Gulf of Mexico only by a narrow strip of land. Morgan City, in south central Louisiana, is about 60 miles west of New Orleans.

DOZENS of relatives stood by the top of the mine shaft, their spirits alternately soaring and plummeting.

Officials of Cargill Inc., owner of the mine, earlier said the temperature in the depths of the shaft was a steady 80 degrees, indicating the fire may have died out.

Fears the flames had consumed precious oxygen the men needed to survive abated somewhat with word that a segment of the mine away from the 28 by 28-foot room in which they were trapped contained bottled oxygen that could sustain the miners.

Experts from the U. S. Bureau of Mines have arrived at the scene and said they were hopeful the trapped men might be reached.

EVAN WILLIAMS, a Cargill spokesman, said: "They believe there is enough air for them down there."

He added that the best hope was that the men had moved from the cavern chamber they were working to the area where the bottled, life saving oxygen was stored.

The trapped miners, an instant before communication lines were lost in the searching flames, screamed "help" into their telephone.