

# New Blast Hits Mine With 78

By Myron S. Waldman  
Newsday Washington Bureau

Farmington, W.Va.—A new explosion shot flames from the coal mine called Consol No. 9 early today, further dimming the already limited hopes for the safety of 78 trapped men.

"(The fire in the mine) could burn for hours, for days, for weeks or for years," a spokesman for the Consolidation Coal Co. conceded last night. "We've got a mine in the next county that's still burning."

The latest explosion "lit up the sky" early this morning at the so-called old entrance of the Consol No. 9 mine, about half a mile above the mine's main entrance. The latest blast is about seven miles from the entrances where smoke has poured from the flaming passageways.

The tremor made lights blink for several minutes at the company store where a handful of people kept an all-night vigil. They compared the flash of light to summer lightning and said that it was about 100 feet high.

Rich Opyoke, 19, was standing on a bridge above the shaft when the explosion occurred. "I felt the impact in my face," he said. The explosion shook the bridge. Mrs. Emma Opyoke, who lost a brother-in-law in an explosion at the No. 9 mine in 1954, rushed to her porch after the explosion. "I got chills. It lit the sky up," she said. The new blast followed a smaller one earlier, which dampened spirits of relatives of the trapped miners.

"I don't want to prophesy any gloom," said Tory Boyle, president of the United Mine Workers Union, before the latest explosion. Boyle, who flew here from Washington yesterday, said "Of course, I wouldn't give up hope. I'd be the last one in this group to give up hope. But it looks very dark to me."

Boyle was asked what steps could be taken to insure the employment of the 488 miners above ground if Consol No. 9 is shut down. "I can't answer as to whether the company will find employment for them," he said, "but of course they will be eligible for Workmen's (unemployment) Compensation."

Later, L. J. Pnakobich, the union's District 3 representative, said, "With the shortage of miners (in the area), we feel that the men who might be unemployed here will find employment elsewhere."

A six-inch copper pipe was lowered 600 feet through a bore hole into a portion of the mine where the 78 might have survived. The pipe, newsmen were told, was to be used to take samples of the atmosphere within the mine. But John Roberts, assigned by Consolidation Coal to address the waiting relatives of those below, told them of another purpose. "If there's anybody there," Roberts said, "they can thump the pipe and establish contact." A miner looked at a map of Consol No. 9 and murmured: "Their only hope is that blow hole."

The more than 100 men, women and children crowding the company store listened in silence. Some of them had been without sleep for nearly 48 hours. Brought together in grief, they could not bring themselves to leave. Roberts turned to two middle-aged women and kindly told them that they would do well to leave for awhile and try to get their minds off the tragedy. "It's hard," he said, "but maybe you could go window shopping." The two women nodded, turned away, and stayed. A short time later, one of the two suddenly began to weep.

Others would not come to the store, women like Delphia Takacs, who sat at home, to await word of the fate of her husband, Albert, and her son, William, who were in the mine when the first six explosions rumbled through Consol No. 9 Wednesday morning.

"I can't see going down around the mine," Mrs. Takacs said. "It just makes it harder. I think your grief should stay among the family." The people at the store, she said, are there "in the hope that if something does come up, they'll know it. But there isn't any use. If they did find anything at the mine, or if anyone was brought out, you couldn't see anything."

West Virginia state mine officials said earlier yesterday that carbon monoxide no longer was seeping

from a shaft and that the emission of deadly, explosive methane gas was under one per cent, the safety minimum.

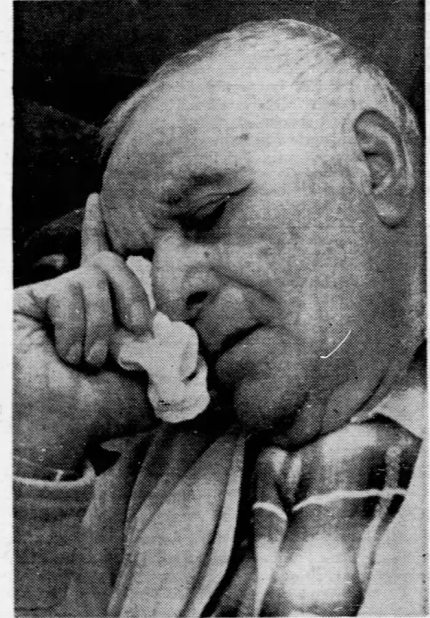
Although mine officials could measure the amount of gases coming out of the shaft, until they drew samples from the copper tube they would have no way of knowing the atmospheric conditions 600 feet below. The buildup of methane in the mine is measured by meters attached to the automatic coal-cutting machines. When the atmosphere contains two per cent methane, the machine automatically cuts off.

Yet, one of the 21 survivors, 43-year-old Byron (Mike) Jones, said yesterday that the only loss of power came after the first explosion. "All that happened," he said, "was that the shuttle car went real slow and the lights went real dim." Mine officials agreed that the only way to put out the fire was to cap all the shafts and cut off all oxygen. At the same time, they said that this would probably kill any survivors. And this, they will not do. "We still have hope," William M. Poundstone, executive vice president of Consolidated Coal, said. "But we cannot be optimistic."



**COMFORT.** Frank L. Tate, 18, comforts his mother yesterday as the two await word on Frank Tate Jr., the youth's father, one of 78 persons trapped in a burning coal mine.

Friday, November 22, 1968



**GRIEF.** Frank L. Tate Sr., whose son, Frank Tate Jr., is one of 78 miners trapped by a coal mine fire in Farmington, W. Va., weeps yesterday while maintaining the vigil.

5

1968 Consol No 9 Mine Explosion NEWS

Clipped By:  
usmra\_rob  
Jul 11, 2025