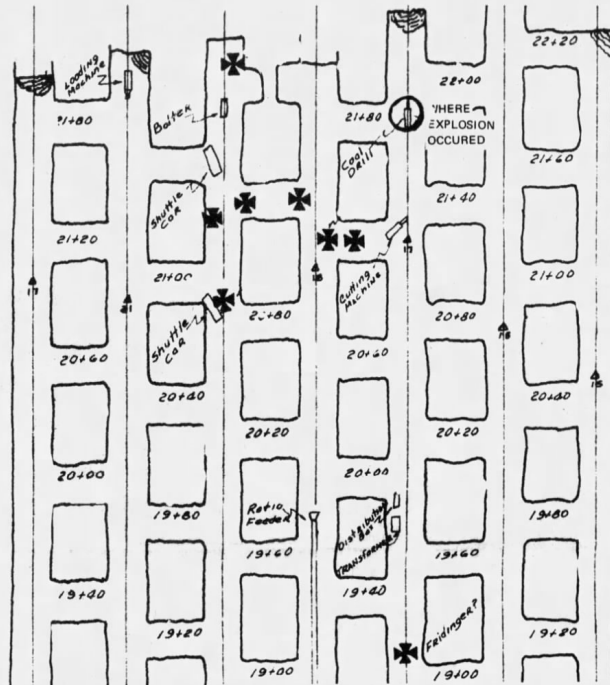




River Queen Explosion Area

MAP SHOWS blast area, upper right, and positions of eight dead miners, represented by crosses, in the River Queen Mine. Rectangles represent "rooms," solid areas of coal. Miner Robert Fridinger, represented by lowest cross, was apparently returning to his crew, after conversation with belt operator Will Rice, who was also killed, but is not represented on the map. The blast area is approximately 6,600 feet from the mine entrance. Rice's body was found 1,600 feet nearer the entrance than those of the other eight miners.

Six Said Killed In Crash

CHARLESTON, W. Va. (AP) — A twin-engine Piedmont Airlines plane carrying 34 passen-

RFK's Goals Used

McGovern Seeks U.S. Presidency

By ROBERT T. GRAY
Associated Press Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — Sen. George McGovern of South Dakota declared his candidacy for the Democratic presidential nomination today, committing himself to "the goals for which Robert Kennedy

Illegal Mine Practices Cause Of River Queen Disaster, Board Finds

By LAURA MCGREW
Messenger Staff Writer

Practices in direct violation of federal mining codes and Kentucky mining laws caused the explosion which killed nine men Wednesday at Peabody Coal Company's River Queen mine near Greenville, according to a board of inquiry held here Friday.

Following a five-hour inspection of the disaster-stricken mine in Muhlenberg County by a 16-man team of inspectors and an open meeting at which 11 River Queen underground miners testified, state, federal union and Peabody officials agreed that permissible explosives being transported on a drilling machine in the number five entry of Main North of River Queen mine were detonated by flying coal from a freshly shot face (the working area of the coal).

"We feel the explosives were on the drilling machine parked 40 to 50 feet back from and in direct line with the face," said J. H. Mosgrove, director of the Kentucky Department of Mines and Minerals, speaking for all members of the inspection team.

"Those explosives should not have been there and it was in direct violation of federal mine codes and Kentucky mining laws," he went on. "All evidence indicated the permissible explosives were on the machine and were detonated by the impact of flying coal upon the explosives during blasting," he said.

William Russell, one of the 10 miners to testify, said he has been a drill operator at the River Queen mine for the last 12 months but has worked in underground mines 23 years. "I have transported explosives on the drill—sometimes two or three times a day, sometimes more. I have been told not to haul explosives on the drill by the mine manager," he said.

Russell said he could only answer for himself and was not aware if this was common practice. He said he was not aware of the safety code. "No inspector, state or federal, ever saw any 'powder' on my drill—I got rid of it if an inspector was on the property," he answered when asked if an inspector had ever seen explosives being transported by him.

Russell said he had seen the drill too close to the face when



OFFICIALS AT MEET HERE FRIDAY

shooting. "I just didn't think about it being that dangerous," he said. Cecil Ledford, superintendent at River Queen mine, explained that the foremen instruct new men on how to handle explosives. "There are no written rules on the proper procedure—at least I have never seen any," he said. Ledford said he has been employed by Peabody since 1944. He holds a first class mine certificate.

The mine superintendent said he has seen the permissible explosives being transported on mobile electrical machines, mostly drills, and each time has had it removed, although he imposed no penalty for the offense.

"I was quite concerned and talked to the foremen and the men on the units about this being a dangerous practice—and they all agreed, it was," he said. "We do discuss safety with the men," he added.

George Siria, a section foreman at River Queen for the last 11 months but with 17 years experience in underground mining, told the board of inquiry he had seen explosives being transported on electrically operated equipment. "I didn't think it was really unsafe until now. I don't know that happened for sure this time," he said.

Siria, who said he holds a first class mine foreman certificate, said he is familiar with the coal mine safety code and

knows it prohibits the hauling of explosives on mobile equipment. Siria, who was 3,400 feet from the blast in the unit closest to the blast area, said he had on occasion transported explosives on machines "to make it easier on the shot foreman."

Wendell Griffith, assistant to superintendent Ledford, explained the correct procedure for transporting explosives to the face.

"The explosives are kept in a wooden storage magazine a safe distance from the working 'face,'" he said. The powder is carried, by the shot foreman, in a powder bag, on his back, to the face. The powder is carried in a powder bag and detonating caps in a separate "cap" bag."

Harmon Stubblefield, a loader operator and chairman of the River Queen safety committee for the last 30 days, said a loader operator seldom catches up with the shooting crew but he has seen explosives hauled on a drill, "Five or six times since April, 1967."

Stubblefield, who accompanied the team of inspectors into the mine Friday, said he saw the drill, the one being used by the ill-fated crew, "I saw the drill in No. 5 entry, it was extensively damaged and was about 45 feet from the face. It isn't customary to leave a drill this close to the face," he said.

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Illegal Mining Practices Caused Disaster

(Continued from Page One)

It had been explained earlier that the drill is customarily parked in a cross-cut possibly two cuts back when the powder is detonated.

Harold W. Pointer, a shot firer, said he had been instructed to keep the caps and powder separate and has been told by the foreman not to carry explosives on the drill. "But it slows down production if you don't carry them on the drill," he said. "If an inspector is on a section, explosives wouldn't be on the drill," he pointed out. "Everyone keeps a watch, all of us including the section foreman, for an inspector."

Those testifying included:

Cecil Ledford, George Siria, Wendell Griffith, Harman Stubblefield, Lenus Moore, John Hignett, Hubert Boyken, James H. Jackson, William Russell and Harold W. Pointer.

Present for and/or directing the meeting were Merritt Deitz, an administrative assistant to Gov. Louie B. Nunn; A.H. Mandt, commissioner of the Kentucky Department of Mines and Minerals; J. H. Mosgrove, director of the Kentucky Department of Mines and Minerals; Fred Bullard, president of Kentucky Coal Association; H. A. Schrecengost, director U. S. Bureau of Mines, Vincennes, Ind., district; Lewis Evans, international safety director UMWA; Rex Lauck, UMWA international director of public relations; Louis Austin,

president District 23 UMWA; Frank Memmott, associate director health and safety, U.S. Bureau of Mines; Foister Siler, general superintendent of underground mines for Peabody Coal Company, Fred Rice, assistant to the vice president of Peabody Coal Company, and E.E. Quenon, safety director for Peabody Coal Company.

Most of the questioning of the witnesses was conducted by Evans, Mosgrove and Memmott.

Following the hearing Louis Austin asked the assemblage of about 80 persons, "Are we going to continue to sacrifice the lives of coal miners, simply because we are apathetic toward the law?"

"Nine men are in the morgue right now because the law wasn't carried out—that's what it boils down to," he said.

Safety is not a one-way street, the president of District 23 UMWA reminded. It takes cooperation from both sides or the law simply is not worth anything. Austin said 95 percent of the accidents in mining can be eliminated if both the mining companies and the workers will only carry out the law.

"The general public wants to know why you have to kill people in order to get coal out," he said.

"I hope this is the last time in western Kentucky where lives are sacrificed because laws were violated," Austin added.

E.E. Quenon told the meeting his company had adopted the federal and state laws "as our book

of rules". He pointed out that he has sent out a great number of memorandums in the interest of safety.

"We all feel very badly about this disaster," he said, and thanked everyone for their help during and following the disaster.

McGovern

(Continued from Page One)

tract those who supported Robert Kennedy for the nomination.

Kennedy forces have not, for the most part, rallied behind another candidate since the Senator's murder June 6.

In a formal statement declaring his candidacy, McGovern made frequent references to the Kennedy family.

Terming Robert Kennedy "the most talented and passionate political leader of this generation," McGovern said he would have been nominated, elected and become "one of our truly great presidents."

"But that is not to be," McGovern said. "Nor is there anyone else to play his role in American political life."

The senator said he had not sought the endorsement of Kennedy's widow, Ethel, or his brother, Sen. Edward Kennedy, D-Mass.

The Kennedys, McGovern said, "are entitled to a moment away from the political pressures of 1968, and I would not anticipate anything other than their quiet understanding of what it is I seek to do."

McGovern pledged active sup-

port to either Humphrey or McCarthy if one of them is nominated, "not only for their own considerable merit but because there is nothing in Mr. Nixon's past record to indicate that he is a man of either peace or compassion."

Former Vice President Richard M. Nixon is the Republican nominee for president.

"I have heard talk about the 'new Nixon,'" McGovern said, "but the Bible warned us long ago about the danger of putting new wine into an old bottle."

The senator recalled his own longstanding opposition to the Vietnam conflict and said "that war must be ended now — not next year or the year following, but now."

In an apparent slap at Humphrey's support of the Johnson administration's war policies, McGovern said "it is our responsibility to take to the American people a platform and a leadership determined to reverse this error — not to rationalize it."

The Texas White House said there was no comment from President Johnson on McGovern's declaration.

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