

Money was motive, man confessed

By Ben Gish

A 33-year-old man accused in the murder of William Harvey Johnson told authorities he killed the Letcher County coal operator because Johnson owed him \$5,500.

State police Detective Frank Fleming testified in Letcher Circuit Court Wednesday (yesterday) that Larry "Jughead" Taylor told police last year he shot Johnson because the 41-year-old Payne Gap resident refused to pay him money Taylor said he was owed for bulldozer parts he sold Johnson.

The trial of Taylor, one of two men accused in the murder of Johnson, was to continue today. Frank Wayne Jenkins, 36, the other man accused in the slaying, is not scheduled to go on trial until next April.

The two men were arrested in September, 1980, after Taylor told police it was he and Jenkins who killed Johnson, the owner and operator of Upper Elkhorn Coal Corp., as he stood near the front of his A-frame home on an early July morning in 1975.

Taylor's confession to police was made public for the first time Wednesday when Fleming read portions of the nine-hour statement to the circuit court jury.

Fleming, a witness for the prosecution, testified Taylor, a former night watchman at a tipple Johnson owned at Thornton, told authorities he shot Johnson because Johnson made fun of him when he asked for the money he said he was owed.

"I sold him some (parts) for a bulldozer and he never paid me so I just killed his ass," said Fleming, reading from Taylor's confession. "I said, 'Bill, if you give me \$3,000 I'll settle with you.' He said 'Kiss my ass' . . . he laughed at me. He made me mad."

"I didn't want to do it, I swear I didn't," Fleming continued reading from Taylor's confession.

The prosecution has called eight witnesses to the stand, including a woman who says

she was an eyewitness to the murder, since the trial opened Monday. Harlan County Commonwealth's Attorney Ron Johnson, the special prosecutor assigned to the case, is expected to call two more witnesses. A source close to the case said defense attorney Sam Chandler would call on six witnesses to testify before the case would be handed over to the jury for deliberation, possibly Thursday evening. The 11-member jury is sequestered.

Lois C. Anderson, a long-time girlfriend of Johnson, testified she and another woman were in Johnson's home at the time of the shooting.

Mrs. Anderson, who says she has known Johnson since 1961, said she and a friend were preparing to drive Johnson to the Wise, Va. airport for a business meeting when the shooting occurred.

"I could have identified the names of the killers but I didn't have any way of pro-

(Continued on Page 20)

Officials seek cause of blast

State and federal officials are continuing an investigation this week into the cause of an explosion in a Knott County coal mine Monday which killed all eight miners inside the mine.

Pre-shift inspections of Adkins Coal Co.'s No. 18 mine near Topmost began at 8 a.m. Wednesday, and the formal investigation into the blast started at 10:30 a.m.

Though Kentucky Department of Mines and Minerals Commissioner Willard Stanley had said he expected the state's formal investigation to be completed at noon, state inspectors were still inside the mine late yesterday afternoon.

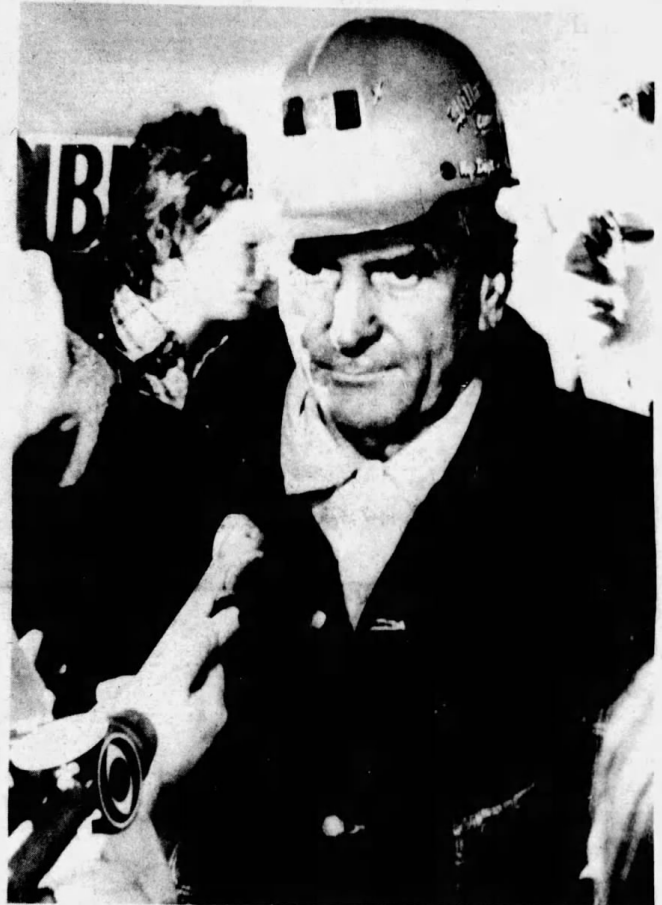
"We haven't heard anything so far," said a spokesperson at Stanley's

field office in Martin. "We really think the investigation will go on through tomorrow."

The spokesperson did not know when the state would report the conclusion of its findings.

Along with the state investigation, federal Mine Safety and Health Administration (MSHA) officials also are conducting an investigation into the blast. A MSHA spokesman said inspectors would be on the site for at least three

(Continued on Page 9)



State Department of Mines and Minerals Commissioner Willard Stanley, shown here Monday night announcing that all eight miners trapped by an explosion in Adkins Mine No. 18 near Topmost had been found dead, is heading an investigation into the cause of the accident (Photo by Ben Gish).

Development funds needed

Eastern Kentucky's major coal-producing counties are making a surprisingly strong local tax effort but unless they get local tax monies from coal they will not be able to meet future financial demands for roads, schools and other public needs in the next decade.

Hundreds of millions of dollars for new homes, roads and other facilities must be spent in the coming decade to take care of the population explosion brought on by the coal boom.

If needs are to be met, then the state must stop looking upon coal taxes as "just another source of revenue to balance the state budget," according to Robert M. Cornett, director of the Appalachian Development Center at Morehead State University.

Cornett suggested that Kentucky may need to follow the example of western states and set up trust funds from coal tax revenues to meet the long term needs of the area.

The demands for revenue to finance development needs are too great to be met from traditional local revenues, Cornett said.

In fact, Cornett said, Eastern Kentucky coal county residents already are making a stronger effort to support themselves through local tax measures than do residents of the state as a whole.

Eastern Kentuckians already are taxing themselves more, not less, than other Kentuckians.

Cornett's findings come from a study in which the Appalachian

Center attempts to assess the future needs for public funds in the major coal counties.

The statement represents something of a summing up of Cornett's current views on Eastern Kentucky development problems. He has spent most of the past two decades in development activities. He directed the Kentucky Office of Program Development in the early years of the Appalachian Regional Commission, and then was executive director of the Council of State Governments before assuming the Morehead Appalachian Center post. Cornett said he will be leaving Morehead soon to join a private firm in Eastern Kentucky.

(Continued on Page 20)

Blast kills eight

(Continued from Page 1)

days. The agency's report, however, may not be completed for as long as three or four months.

The Knott County tragedy was the second of three mining accidents to occur in the past five days in the 5-state Appalachian coalfields. On Tuesday afternoon, 13 miners were killed in a methane explosion in a Grundy Mining Co. mine 30 miles northwest of Chattanooga. Last Thursday, three miners died in a roof collapse in a mine in Bergoo, W. Va. Grundy Mining is a subsidiary of Tennessee Consolidated Coal Co.

The explosions in Knott County and in Tennessee were the worst mine disasters in the US since 15 miners were killed in a Colorado mine last April.

The Knott County disaster was the worst in Kentucky since 1976, when 26 miners and inspectors were killed here in twin explosions at Scotia Coal Co.

There were conflicting reports yesterday as to the cause of the eight deaths at the Adkins mine.

According to reports from the Associated Press, state medical examiner George Nichols said the miners died from smoke inhalation and not from injuries sustained in the blast.

Nichols, who performed autopsies on the bodies at the Hazard Appalachian Regional Hospital, reportedly said there were no signs the deaths were caused by the blast.

"They were not mutilated in the slightest," Nichols is quoted as saying. "None were burned, but one had a singeing of the left eyebrow and above the forehead.

(Continued from Page 1)

These guys had no sign of a blast injury at all."

Nichols said further testing of tissue specimens from the bodies and particles taken from the miners' clothing would be required before determining the exact causes of the deaths.

However, *The Courier-Journal* reported Wednesday that a sister of one of the dead miners said the nature of her brother's injuries were so that his casket would not be opened at his funeral.

State rescue teams recovered the bodies of all eight miners from the Knott County mine around 2:45 a.m. Tuesday, slightly more than 12 hours after the blast was reported to the Depart-

ment of Mines and Minerals.

The explosion occurred shortly after the 2 p.m. shift-change at the mine, located just off KY 7 on the Potato Branch of Right Beaver Creek.

"It looked like they'd gotten underground to the last crosscut and each been assigned to their duties," said Stanley. "We were called around 2:30. It takes

(Continued on Page 12)

Nader

(Continued from Page 2)

wage reductions from their workers because of lower Japanese wages.

6. Finally, US companies can make gifts out of a large number of 1981 Cadillacs and corporate jet aircraft to their counterparts in Japan. The Cadillacs are luxurious lemons which, among other maladies, stall. Japanese business executives will arrive late to work and in a bad mood. The corporate jets will breed more class divisions inside the company and workers will signal their disrespect toward their bosses by refusing to sing the company song every morning.

So you see, there is an American industrial strategy to challenge the Japanese. The only problem is that US business goliaths probably will want a Washington export guarantee before they go with it.

The Register and Tribune Syndicate

Mrs. Gross dies in Indiana

More Mabel

(Continued from Page 19)

ed well. Billy Joe said his mother, Mrs. Opal Hall was doing fine. He and Fern were on their way to Frankfort to visit a sister and her husband, Mr. and Mrs. Deane Neace. It was so good to see them.

I hear everyone in Letcher County, the ones we know, are doing better but like us I imagine they dread the cold and the snow and the housing up for the winter.

Grandson Timmy, our farmer, is growing up. He has his driver's license which makes him feel more confident in driving. He is also putting in a claim on some cattle his parents bought.

Officials investigating fatal explosion in Knott coal mine

(Continued from Page 9)
about 15 minutes to go from the portal to the explosion area (about 2,500 feet inside the mine) so we think they were underground about 30 minutes and had been in the area where the explosion took place for just a few minutes."

All the men appeared to have died instantly, he said.

Stanley declined to speculate what caused the explosion, but he has been quoted as saying he expects to find "a large quantity" of explosive material inside the mine. Stanley did say, however, that his preliminary conclusion leaned toward ruling out dust as the cause of the blast. He said the explosion was con-

fined to a relatively small area of the mine which seemed to indicate that the heat of the blast was not as great as would be expected in a coal dust explosion.

Those killed in the explosion were: Keith Crager, 25, Hueysville; Clarence Perry, 28, Pine Top; Roy Perry, 22, Pine Top; Dillard Ashley, 40, Mousie; Tommy Centers, 31, Vicco; Bob Slone, 39, Topmost; James E. Gibson, 25, Pippa Passes, and David Slone, 25, Topmost. Clarence and Roy Perry were brothers. Bob and David Slone were cousins.

The mine employed 22 people, all represented by the United Mine Workers of America, and produced an average of 250 tons of coal a day, Stanley said. The operation is in the Elkhorn No. 1 seam and averages 34 inches in height.

Adkins Coal Co. is owned by Orville Adkins of Langley (also known as Maytown), according to listings in the *Keystone Coal Manual*. Adkins' son, Adam Adkins, is listed as the company's vice-president. Both Adkins and his son were at the site after the explosion. Orville Adkins reportedly owns an interest in S&H Manufacturing Co., a Hueysville firm which produces mining equipment, mostly scoops.

(It is unclear whether the Adkins mine at Potato Branch is officially known as Mine No. 18 or Mine No. 11. State inspectors refer to the mine as No. 18, while federal inspectors refer to it as No.

11. A roof control plan posted at the mine Monday night listed it as Adkins Mine No. 11.)

Monday's explosion was not the first fatal accident at the mine, Stanley said.

He said Maynard Hunter, a 31-year-old roof bolter, died October 8, 1980, from injuries he sustained when worker "shot through" a crosscut into the area he was working.

Stanley said that incident was caused by the company's failure to follow map projections of the mine.

Though the mine has been cited for safety violations on four occasions this year, Stanley classified the operation's safety record as "average."

State inspectors cited the mine in January, July, and November of this year, mostly for violations con-

nected with roof control. He said all the miners killed by the blast were certified and had taken part in "retraining" safety classes within the past six months.

A representative of MSHA, John McGrath, said his agency had visited the mine 72 times during the past year and had found 86 violations of federal mine safety rules and issued two withdrawal orders — stopping production at the mine until the deficiency was corrected. Given the number of visits, the number of violations was not excessive, he said, and the number of visits was not unusual either.

McGrath said MSHA's investigation would look at all aspects of the mine which might have had an effect on the explosion. Inspectors will examine physical evidence, will measure,

photograph or sketch, will take samples for laboratory analysis and may remove some equipment from the mine for further examination. They also will examine records at the mine site and in MSHA's Hazard office and will hear testimony from witnesses. The MSHA team will include two specialists from the agency's main office at Arlington, Va., and personnel from Kentucky MSHA officials.

According to Adam Adkins, it will be at least until after the first of the year before the mine, now "red-tagged," reopens. The Adkins Mine No. 18 is one of four small "conventional" mines owned by Orville Adkins and his son. It has been in operation since April, 1978, and subleases and sells its coal to Island Creek Coal Co.



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