

# Inspectors Probe Dante Mine Mishap

## Tragedy Termed Worst Disaster In Past 46 Years Operation

Dante, Va.—(Spl.)—Federal Bureau of Mines inspectors and Clinchfield Coal corporation officials held a conference Friday night on an accident at Clinchfield's No. 2 operation here Thursday night in which six miners lost their lives.

The conference followed a routine check of the site by the inspectors, completed late Friday afternoon. One of their

number, Inspector Harold Doctorman, said there would be no public announcement for the time being.

Meanwhile, one company official who asked that he not be quoted said the mine where tons of coal and earth suddenly broke over six members of a 10-man crew about 8:30 p.m. Thursday only recently underwent a thorough federal check and no defects were found in the section where the mishap occurred.

Sunday funeral services have been arranged for two of the victims, James Darrell Rasnick, 21, and Troy J. Phillips, 25.

## Court Ends First Week

### 120 Cases Clear Circuit Session

Blountville—(Spl.)—In the final case of the first week of May Circuit Court, M. M. Frazier of Kingsport was found guilty on a charge of operating a house of ill fame and was fined \$250. Mary Rose, alias Ada Harris, a co-defendant in the case involving operation of Circle Court Cottages, was found not guilty.

Approximately 120 cases have been disposed of during the week and the remainder of the docket, including several drunk driving charges has been passed till Monday.

Earlier Friday, O. R. Huber, alias Bill Huber, a former resident of Kingsport was found guilty of non-support but was cleared of additional charges of abandonment and leaving the state. Sentence was not passed pending a motion for new trial.

Bruce Gosnell of Church Hill, charged with transporting, and possessing liquor and public drunkenness was fined \$10 and costs for possessing, but was cleared of the other counts.

In five school attendance law cases against Joan Blackwell, Frank Simerly, and Herman Rosenbaum of the Big Creek area, three charges were combined and dismissed on payment of costs and the other two were nolle. An appeal in a sixth case by Fuller Moore was withdrawn, and a charge of drunk driving against the same man was nolle due to absence of a state's witness.

The cases of Charlie Lee, assault and battery; and Noah Carter, felonious assault were continued to the next term.

After reporting themselves unable to agree, and hopelessly deadlocked five times, a jury finally returned a verdict of guilty Friday in a felonious assault case against Clarence Wilson, of Bristol, and fixed his punishment at \$2 and costs. Judge Shelburne Ferguson (See COURT, Page 8)

## Police Probe Theft Reports

Thefts of two bicycles and \$25 worth of athletic equipment were reported to city police Friday and Friday night.

Losers of the bicycles were Lynn Wilson, 721 Fairview Avenue, who reported his red and blue bike missing at Broan and Market Streets at 9:31 p.m., and Albert Ellis, Long Island, who reported his red bicycle stolen from in front of a bowling alley at 8 p.m.

Kenneth Pitts, Dobyns-Bennett High School principal, reported a \$35 football and a dozen pairs of athletic socks valued at \$9.99 stolen earlier in the day in a locker break-in at the school.

Washington—TP—The United Mine Workers Union said Friday that it sent a warning April 18 to the Clinchfield Coal Corp. about safety conditions at its Dante, Va., mine where six men were killed in a disaster Thursday night. A union spokesman told reporters federal mine safety inspectors visited the mine from Feb. 26 to March 3 and reported that the management had failed to correct 31 out of 73 safety violations found in a prior inspection.

Others killed were Uris Attrip, Dante, Route 1, 42-year-old father of four children; Arnold Vears, 36, Dante, who leaves two children; and Harold Parks, 23, of Dante, and Oakley Croger, 39, of Aram-mell, each the father of one child.

Two other men suffered bruises and cuts in the accident, but neither registered for hospital treatment.

(See Picture Page 8)

The mishap was the worst from the fatality standpoint in the 46 years since the Dawson Coal and Coke Company began its operations here in 1902.

The tragedy was brought on by what miners call a "bump." It took four hours for rescue squads to release the broken bodies and bring them to the surface. Dispatcher J. M. Smith, at No. 2 tipple, said there was no explosion and no "real cave in."

He and company President A. R. Matthews explained the large mass of coal apparently was forced from the sides of the room in which the men were working by tremendous combined pressure from the hard top and bottom bounding the coal seam.

The six victims were working together in corridor 19-L, about four miles underground when the coal upheaval claimed their lives. Six other miners were also working a few hundred yards away and the concussion of the "bump" knocked them off their feet. Only two of the men, Maxwell Powers and Woodrow Phillips, required first aid for cuts and bruises.

Among the men who survived was Joe Rasnick, foreman of the 12-man unit working in the 19-L section. His son, James Darrell Rasnick, and brother-in-law, Troy Phillips, both were killed in the disaster.

The elder Rasnick joined hastily-assembled rescue squads in the frantic search for the entombed miners. However, it was after 1 a.m. Friday before the begrimed crews, working with picks and shovels, loosened the debris in-

(See PROBE, Page 8)

## PROBE

From Page 1

side the shaft and extricated the bodies.

The shock of the tragedy caused the elder Rasnick to collapse, as he came upon the bodies of his son and brother-in-law. He was taken home in a state of nervous collapse.

Word of the mine disaster quickly spread throughout the entire district. By midnight, hundreds had gathered at the entrance of the mine, including the wives, sisters and brothers, parents and children of those trapped under the tons of displaced coal.

As rescue efforts continued into the night, hope slowly waned among the waiting throngs. And then came the stretchers, bearing the lifeless forms of the miners.

A mine official, who took part in the rescue operations, said that the bodies were found almost in a heap under the tons of coal. Their loading cars and "cutting" equipment also was wrecked by the force of the "bump," which hurled the machinery hundreds of feet down the tunnel.

The six victims had entered the mine at 6 p. m. Thursday, when they started their shift. The "bump" came shortly before they were to take a recess of a few minutes.

After the bodies were removed, even clearance of the wreckage and debris inside corridor 10-L was suspended until a complete examination was made by mine inspectors.

Harold Doctorman, of Norton, district federal mine inspector, arrived on the scene early in the morning and made preparations for entering No. 2 mine.

He stated that the periodic inspection of the Clinchfield coal mining operations had been carried out last week, and that recommendations had been made to the mine owners for a series of timber installation within the No. 2 shaft.

Doctorman said that a "bump" is not necessarily occasioned by negligence in providing sufficient strengthening to the interior, where coal is being dislodged and moved out in loading cars.

### Unexpected Elements

A mine company spokesman termed the mishap as "very regrettable."

"The bump was entirely unforeseen," he asserted. "The tunnels reach miles under the mountains, and while we make allowances for certain pressures in the rock and earth formations where the coal seam is located, there are sudden elements that come unexpectedly."

It was also reported that a minor "bump" occurred in the 10-L section earlier Thursday when the day shift was on duty. The miners working adjacent, however, were only slightly jarred as the coal flew out.

### Funerals Announced

The bodies of Vickers, Parks and Cregar were removed to the Huff-Cook Funeral Home at St. Paul.

Vickers is survived by his widow, Dell Vickers; four children, Erma, Phyllis, Douglas and Robert; three brothers, Russell of Dante; George of Castlewood and Warren of Radford, Va.

Funeral services will be held Monday at 2 p. m. at one of Dante's churches, with burial to follow at Temple Hill Cemetery near Castlewood.

Parks is survived by a son, Billy; his mother; and the following brothers and sisters, Bramble Parks, St. Paul; Orland, Lee and Clifford Parks, Mrs. James L. Watson, Mrs. Roy Bartee and Miss Claudette Parks, all of Castlewood. Funeral arrangements are incomplete.

Cregar is survived by two sons, Gene and Charles Edward; a brother, Woodrow, Prestonsburg, Ky.; and a sister, Mrs. Fontaine Banks, Hardy, Ky. Funeral arrangements will be completed later.

Phillips and the younger Rasnick, who were related to each other, were removed to the Clintwood Funeral Home at Clintwood. Rasnick is survived by his father, Joe Rasnick; his mother Hattie Phillips Rasnick, of Trammell; and two brothers and three sisters.

Phillips is survived by his parents, F. N. and Rosie Smith Phillips, of Nora. Funeral services for both Phillips and Rasnick are scheduled to be held Sunday, with burial in the Leck, Va., cemetery. Phillips served four years in the U. S. Army in the Pacific war theater, while Rasnick had been discharged recently after serving 24 months in military service.

The sixth victim of the mine disaster, Uris Arttrip, is resting at the Estes Funeral Home at Coeburn.