

Mine Safety Aide Hit In Rescue Shaft Death

By LEE BOWMAN

A community volunteer dedicated to saving lives, John E. Marn lost his own life in a mine rescue capsule he thought was safe.

Marn, 33, of West Newton, Westmoreland County, rode 180 feet to his death in the capsule Wednesday at the Consolidation Coal Co.'s Mathies Mine, Peters Township, Washington County.

Washington County Coroner Farrell Jackson concluded after an open hearing into the accident that a federal mine safety inspector was "irresponsible" in allowing the capsule to be used. The coroner cited that Edward Nogal of Pittsburgh "had no knowledge" as to how a coupling device on the boom that held the capsule should be installed.

Jackson ruled that the inspector, despite this lack of knowledge, "did not warn anyone . . . did not use his power as a federal inspector to shut it (capsule) down."

Jackson said Nogal admitted in the hearing that he was not sure the mechanism was safe and did not know how the device should be installed, although he had ordered its installation.

The coroner said he will confer with an attorney about the possibility of filing charges against Nogal.

As a safety supervisor at the mine, Marn spent his days working to ensure the well-being of the men there. But he also spent most of his off-duty hours helping others.

A member of the West Newton Community Ambulance Service for three years, Marn had just completed 32 weeks training at Westmoreland County Community College to qualify as a paramedic.

He was a seemingly tireless worker for the ambulance service.

"John was the type of guy who'd be out on a call at midnight and if another

call came at 4 a.m., he'd be there, even if he had to be at work the next day," said Thomas Penney, chief of the ambulance service. "Anything you asked him to do, you always knew it would be done and done right."

Before joining the ambulance service, Marn was a volunteer fireman. As he advanced in his emergency training, he spent hours a week sharing his knowledge of CPR and Red Cross first aid with other community organizations and ambulance services.

In the headquarters of the West Newton Ambulance Service hangs a plaque bearing the names of all members who have died since the group was founded 12 years ago. Marn's name will be the 11th added to the scroll. An ambulance will be a part of his funeral procession.

Friends who gathered to pay their respects to Marn last night recalled he had been a tractor-trailer driver with a million-mile safety certificate.

But since he went to work at the mine 4½ years ago, Marn had been involved in three accidents with mine shuttle cars in the shaft, one of which required him to have his face sutured, they said.

Yet those in the mine who depended on Marn for their safety said there was no doubt he had done a good job in the three years he had been a supervisor.

According to Alex O'Rourke, acting district manager for the federal Coal Mine Health and Safety division in Pittsburgh, at least part of the fault in the accident lies with the fact that such rescue capsules are rare in the district.

Of the 125 deep mines in the area, very few have this kind of device, which is used only in a shaft that has no auxiliary elevators or drift openings.

"The inspector did have experience with this kind of device — he'd been working with them for almost a year," O'Rourke said. "But viewing hoists like that was a long way from being a full-



JOHN E. MARN
Was a tireless volunteer.

time job for him or any other inspector in the area."

O'Rourke said Nogal, a civil engineer, has been with the mine safety administration for about seven years.

While investigators probe the accident, Nogal will continue such duties as inspecting mine refuse piles. However, he will not be viewing any similar hoists "simply because there aren't any that are due inspection," O'Rourke said.

Marn was a member of the Holy Family Catholic Church, West Newton; the West Newton Moose Lodge and the Herminie VFW Post.

Marn is survived by his wife, Jo Ann Prosba Marn, who is expecting their second child; a son, John Jason, 2; his mother, Victoria Knor, and two sisters, Katherine and Janice, of Herminie, Westmoreland County.

Friends will be received from 7 to 9 tonight at the McCauley Funeral Home, West Newton. A mass of Christian burial will be said at 11 a.m. tomorrow at Holy Family Church. Burial will be in West Newton Cemetery.