

# Cause Of Violent Explosion Near Robbins Unknown

By JIM SKELTON

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ROBBINS, March 23—Deep in the bowels of Brimstone Mountain about seven miles northwest of here a violent explosion snuffed out the lives of nine coal miners early today. All nine bodies were recovered by 2:30 p.m.

First hint of the disaster came to Os West, one of the owners of the mine, who was standing near the entrance to the pit. The time was about 7:30 a.m. (CST). Only minutes earlier had the men entered for the day's work.

West said he heard a muffled "whoosh." Dust and debris flew

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from the entrance. In that instant the nine—including West's brother—had died, apparently instantly. All bodies were badly burned. One rescuer said he could recognize only one of the bodies and that because of a gold tooth.

The victims included a father and two of his sons, and two brothers.

Dead are:

Burl Phillips, 52.

Hubert Phillips, 30, Burl's son.

Arzo Phillips, 17, another son of Burl's.

Oscar West, 47.

Bernard Yancey, 33.

Willard Yancey 38, Bernard's brother.

John L. Pike, 46.

Elmer Phillips, 38, a distant relative of the other Phillips.

Ed Chitwood, 50.

State and federal mine inspectors after a preliminary check of the mine declined to speculate on the probable cause of the explosion. But, Scott County Sheriff D. E. Rosser, one of the early arrivals at the desolate scene hard by Brimstone Creek, said there was no doubt that gas was the cause.

All the bodies were recovered near the furthestmost part of the L-shaped, 4000 foot mine. Four men were fairly close together in a room off the main shaft and the other were separated by 400 or 500 feet in the shaft. All bodies were found face down.

Leon Walker of Robbins, one of the first in the pit, said that position of the bodies of the men in the main shaft indicated they may have had a moment's warning of the impending blast and started to flee. Most were badly burned and had bloody noses.

Ironically two glass water jars sitting on a mine car near the explosion scene were undamaged. Some of the miner's helmets and

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## FBI Nails Crossword Swindlers

WASHINGTON, March 23 (AP)—The FBI today cracked an international ring which allegedly obtained more than \$45,000 by getting advance solutions to crossword puzzles in newspapers across the United States.

FBI Chief J. Edgar Hoover announced the arrest of 12 Americans and said fraud charges have been filed in this country against two Canadians now across the border.

Operators of this "far-flung swindle," as Hoover described it, dreamed up a dummy newspaper company and a dummy bank in Canada to trick the puzzle solutions out of two New York feature services Superior Features Syndicate Inc. and General Features Syndicate.

American members of the ring then got the solutions by telephone, the FBI said, and collected more than \$45,000 in prizes between last November and February.

### AGENTS MOVE IN

FBI agents moved in on the alleged ring, arresting four persons in Oregon, three in Michigan, two in Pennsylvania and one each in Indiana and Wisconsin. A twelfth arrest of a Minneapolis man was made in Miami, Fla.

Charges were filed at the same time against Joseph Dyson, 30, of London, Ontario, and George Dingman, 34, of Port Stanley, Ontario. Officials said a legal study will be made as to whether these men can be extradited for trial in the United States.

GOT BULK



BASS

## Miners' Burned Bodies Recovered

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other gear was blown several hundred feet from the scene.

Cars of rescuers, relatives, mine officials and the curious had backed up nearly a half mile from the pit entrance by midmorning. A crowd of several hundred stood somberly near the entrance waiting for word from the mine.

Most realized before noon that there was little, if any hope, that those yet in the mine were alive. Small groups of relatives for the most part just sat and stared as if in disbelief. However, to most a mine accident was no new experience.

Most were dry-eyed but some openly wept.

The body of Oscar West was the first brought to the surface. This was about 9 a.m. An hour and a half or so later three more bodies were rolled from the mine on a car. The last two bodies were not recovered until about 2:30 p.m.

Oz West said he immediately called Jack King when he heard the explosion. State and federal inspectors were notified. Word spread rapidly through the mountainous Cumberland Mountain Country and the first contingent of a rescue team was on hand soon.

West was joined by Ernest Moses, Pleasant View, Ky., Audie Acres, Robbins, and Leon Walker as the first to enter the mine. Efforts to reach the men were slowed by the presence of gas which had to be cleared out before rescuers could reach the explosion scene.

At least four members of the Tennessee Highway Patrol arrived early.

Acres said that apparently a gas pocket had formed in the mine over the weekend as the ventilating system was cut off. This, he said, could have permitted the deadly gas to accumulate.

Jake Miller of Knoxville, chief mine inspector for the state, directed rescue operations and he and other inspectors were the last out of the shaft before it was closed pending an investigation. Miller said the investigation would begin "at once," but that it would probably be "tomorrow" before

he would have any statement on the probable cause of the disaster.

Assisting Miller were J. M. Sisson, assistant chief inspector, Oliver Springs; Inspector Dean Stewart, Petros; Inspector Houston Payne, Sparta; Eric H. Brown, US subdistrict inspector; and US Inspector D. Zimmerman, Jellico.

The bodies of the miners were all removed immediately on recovery to West Funeral Home at Oneida.

Eight of the nine who were married are survived by a total of 37 children. Arzo Phillips was unmarried. Burl Phillips is survived by five children; Oscar West by four; Hubert Phillips, four; Willard Yancey, 5; Bernard Yancey, three; Mr. Pike, two; Elmer Phillips, five; and Mr. Chitwood, nine.

Funeral services for Mr. Pike and Mr. Elmer Phillips will be held at Tunnel Hill church at 2 p.m. (CST) Wednesday. They are brother-in-laws.

A double funeral will also be held for the Yancey brothers at Paint Rock Baptist Church at 2 p.m. (CST) Thursday. Mr. Bernard Yancey, in addition to his coal mining, was also a Baptist minister.

Services for Oscar West are set for First Baptist Church at Oneida for 10 a.m. (CST) Wednesday. Arrangements for the other four victims were incomplete late today. However, it is likely that the three Phillips will have a single service.

Today's mine disaster was the worst in the history of Scott County.

### Blast Worst State Disaster Since 1940

The mine explosion yesterday at Robbins which took the lives of that year at Etna Coal & Coke disaster in Tennessee since 1943 when 10 men were killed in an explosion near LaFollette.

The explosion occurred in May of that year at Etna Coal & Coke Company's New Rex Mine on Highway 25-W between LaFollette and Jellico.

Two Rockwood explosions, both at Roane Iron Co. mines, took the lives of 10 men each. The first explosion was July 23, 1924, and the other Oct. 4, 1926.

Tennessee's worst mine disaster came in 1902 when 184 men were killed at Briceville.

### Miner Failed To Get Job—How Lucky

Special To The Journal

ROBBINS, March 23—"By golly, I guess I'm about the luckiest man alive."

Columbus Duncan, 51, of Paint Rock was the speaker. He was standing within a few feet of the Phillips & West Coal Co. mine about seven miles northwest of here.

As he spoke three more of the bodies of nine miners killed in an explosion in the mine earlier today were brought to the surface by rescuers.

## FBI Nails Swindlers

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probably would present the charges to a grand jury next week.

The FBI listed these American arrests:

Harry Balk, 33, of Detroit, described as winner of a \$4,400 contest in the Chicago American last December.

Walter Rex Johnson III, 30, and his wife Ann, of Detroit.

Myer Bloom, 27, of Harrisburg, Pa., listed as winner of \$250 in a Harrisburg Patriot contest in January.

Lawrence A. Dyson, 32, of Philadelphia, referred to as a brother