

Match Believed Cause of Blast

Mine Inspector Says
9 Oneida Victims
All Smoked on Job

ONEIDA, Tenn.—(P)—A match, struck to light a cigaret, may have touched off the coal mine explosion which killed nine men near here Monday.

"They all smoked in there, you know," chief state mine inspector J. R. Miller said yesterday. "They had had the ventilating system shut down over the weekend, and a pocket of gas could have collected then."

"But we never will know exactly what happened."

Miller said W. O. West, the surviving owner of the small, family mine told him he intended to remove equipment from the shaft and close it, "for the time being at least."

Miller and federal mine inspectors told a coroner's jury their preliminary inquiry into the blast at the Phillips & West mine indicated gas was the cause. Area miners who helped recover the bodies concurred.

Withheld Verdict

The jury withheld its verdict until Saturday, however, to allow inspectors to complete their investigation.

All of the victims, aged 17 to 52, were related by blood or marriage. Eight of the men, all of whom lived in or near Oneida, were married. Their deaths left 36 persons fatherless.

Funeral arrangements were announced by grieving relatives.

Services for Oscar West, 50, one of the co-owners of the mine, will be held today at Oneida's First Baptist church.

A double funeral is set for this afternoon at Tunnel Hill Baptist church for John L. Pike, 46, and Elmer Phillips, 38. They were brothers-in-law.

A joint service for the six other victims will be tomorrow afternoon at Paint Rock Baptist church. They are Burl Phillips, 52, and his two sons, Hubert, 30, and Arzo, 17; Bernard, 33, and Willard Yancey, 36, brothers; and Ed Chitwood, 50.

Oscar West, who with his brother, sold an interest in the mine five years ago to Burl Phillips and his son, Hubert, only recently had made overtures toward the purchase of the local weekly newspaper, the Scott County News.

C. W. Wright, editor of the News for the past 33 years, said Oscar West approached him a month ago and asked if the newspaper were for sale.

"He said he wanted to get out of the mining business," Wright added.

Miller told the coroner's jury the mine had been classified as non-gaseous prior to the explosion. It now will be classed as gaseous, he added.

Miller joined Steve Bukovitz, an inspector for the U.S. Bureau of Mines, in testifying that gas possibly caused the disaster.

Phillips and West No 1 Mine explosion
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