

Earth shift kills four coal miners

GARY, W. Va., Feb. 17—(AP)—An earth shift with the force of an explosion took the lives of four coal miners and injured seven others near Gary Friday.

The mishap occurred as the men worked or ate lunch one mile from the entrance to the U. S. Steel Company No. 6 mine. Walter H. Steen, manager and industrial relations officer for the firm, said the shift was caused by a "mountain bump," which is not unusual in the area.

In such a shifting of the mountainside—Friday's could be heard for two miles — miners may be caught by in-rushing air which thrusts them against the sides of the mine, or by coal falling from the roof and sides.

Mine Mishap Kills 4 Men

Seven Others Hurt In Gary Area Pit

GARY, W. Va., Feb. 17 (AP).—An earth shift which had the effect of an explosive blast took the lives of four men and injured seven others, four seriously, in a coal mine near here yesterday.

The mishap occurred as the men, along with six additional miners, worked or ate lunches one mile back in the U. S. Steel Co's. No. 8 mine.

The dead, all residents of this southern west Virginia area, are Matthew Houck, 53, assistant mine foreman; Mood Church, 41, a cutting machine operator; brakeman Joe Boner, 23, and Andy Kish, 30, a loading machine helper.

Walter H. Steen, manager and industrial relations officer for the company's coal division, said the disaster was caused by a "mountain bump."

Although the victims suffered crushing injuries it was not known immediately whether they were struck by falling rock and coal, or were caught in the concussion caused by an onslaught of air.

E. L. CHATFIELD, inspector at large for the state mines department, said such a "bump" is not unusual in the Pocahontas No. 4 seam of coal mined here, but he described yesterday's earth shift as of "unusual severity."

In such a mountain rumble—yesterday's could be heard for two miles—miners may fall victim either to in-rushing air which thrusts them against the sides of the mine, or by falling coal from the roof and sides.

Steen reported that the sides and top of the mine passage were pushed in slightly, but that none of the miners had to be dug from beneath large amounts of coal, rock or timbers.

Steen set the time of the accident at 12:18 p. m. (EST). John Mergucz, 31, a loading machine operator who escaped unhurt, said he and several others among 17 miners were eating lunches when "we heard it coming."

"One of the men had time to turn off the electricity," he told a newsman. "I was knocked down, but I saw the stuff fall on Houck and Church who were working near the digging machine."

Part of the passageway from the affected section was blocked, but it still was possible for a man to get out, Mergucz explained.

See MINE TRAGEDY
(Page 3, Column 3)

Mine Tragedy

(Continued from Page One)

He carried Joe Boner and his brother, Andrew Boner, about 4,000 feet up the passageway to the mine face, Mergucz continued. Joe Boner died before he could be brought to the surface, however. Mergucz related that most of the coal which fell landed in or about the digging machine, which was badly crushed. Most of the seriously injured miners were in that vicinity, he said.

THE SERIOUSLY hurt were James Garnick, 20, of Gary, who faced possible loss of both legs; Andrew Boner, 26, and Winfred Prazier, 25, both of nearby Elbert, and Grant Akers, 33, of Gary.

Injured, but apparently not badly, were Sam Thompson of Thorpe, Andy Lustic of Elbert and James Cox, Gary.

State and Federal mine inspectors were to enter the operation today. Chatfield said their inspection would take most of the day, and possibly longer.