

Three Boys Killed In Rock Fall

HARLAN, Ky. (AP)—A rock fall estimated at 75 tons crushed three teen-age boys to death Monday in an abandoned mine where they had gone presumably to pick up coal for their families.

Miners and pickets worked side-by-side under extremely hazardous conditions to remove the bodies several hours after the mid-afternoon cave-in.

Dead are Rodney Gross, 17; his brother, George, 12, and a cousin, Tommy Gross, 13, sons of Harlan County miners.

Ralph Gross, 15, brother of Rodney and George, was behind the trio and was blown from the mine entrance by the impact.

The large end of the kidney-shaped rock fell on George Gross, who was found in a crouched position. The other boys were side-by-side under the smaller end of the fall.

Bob Shoemaker of the Harlan Daily Enterprise and a member of the Harlan County Rescue Squad, said the 15 to 18 men inside the pit constantly had to shore the roof to prevent further cave-in during the removal of the bodies.

The men used jacks and hammers to break away the rock, which was pulled from the pit by chains. The height at the entrance was only about three feet. Cracks also were evident on the outside of the mine, apparently the result of many days of freezing and thawing this winter in this mountainous area of Southeast Kentucky.

The body of Tommy Gross was brought out about two hours after the cave-in. Rescuers reached Rodney about 1½ hours later and removed George's body another 1½ hours later.

The mine about eight miles south of Harlan on Pine Mountain, was abandoned five or six years ago but was not sealed. Rescue workers said danger warnings were posted in several places around the entrance.

Shoemaker quoted miners as attributing the cave-in to rotten timbers holding the roof and to effects of weather.

A sack containing perhaps 50 pounds of coal was found near Tommy's body.

Ralph Gross made his way from the mine to a nearby commissary where the rescue party was summoned.