

# Mine Rescuers Recover Nine Bodies

By JANICE PERRY  
ORANGEVILLE, Utah (UPI) — A rescue team discovered the bodies of nine coal miners deep inside a mine today and pushed ahead through smoke and poison gas looking for 18 other victims trapped by a fire in a dead-end tunnel.

Crews contained the fire that broke out Wednesday night and specially equipped rescue teams tethered together by ropes inched past the smoldering coal to discover the bodies in the Wilberg Mine in eastern Utah.

Searchers exploring the tunnel beyond the deadly fire had to retreat later because of trouble

with a slurry machine used to cool a burning coal seam with foam and water, Emery Mining Co. spokesman Bob Herrie said.

But crews got the malfunction cleared up and the effort resumed. "The foam machine wasn't working properly," Herrie said. "It is now working again."

Herrie said the 18 missing victims were believed to have retreated into a safety pocket a half-mile from the fire. He projected the team could reach the pocket in three to five hours.

Another crew identified the nine dead miners who were found in the tunnel just beyond the fire. Next of kin were being notified

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before the names were released. There was no word on the fate of the others who were trapped when the blaze started on a conveyor belt and thickened the only escape route from a work area 1.3 miles underground, trapping 26 men and a woman Wednesday night.

Herrie said the bodies were found in the first third of the 2,000-foot-long tunnel beyond the fire.

"They were apparently trying to evacuate themselves," Herrie said. "Kenneth Blake, the miner who escaped, said several others were behind him. I believe they were trying to follow the same route out of the mine."

The trapped victims included six top company officials — including James Hamlin, Emery's vice president of operations and David Wood, manager of the Wilberg mine. One of the missing miners is a woman.

There was still some hope that others had fled deeper into the mine into a safety chamber where they could have protected themselves from the smoke and deadly

carbon monoxide gas by lowering heavy canvas curtains. Herrie said the rescue workers found better air as they moved further into the horizontal tunnel, spurring hope that others may have survived. He said the safety chamber was away from the main ventilation system and the curtains could have prevented smoke from engulfing them.

Three five-man teams clad in bulky protective suits slowly moved along the tunnel groping and feeling for safety hazards and damage. "They have to travel very very slowly. They have to sweep the area. They all stick together,"

said John McGrath, spokesman for the Federal Mine Safety and Health Administration.

Blake, a section foreman, escaped from the tunnel by feeling his way through thick smoke past the fire. He said other workers wearing breathing apparatus were right behind him, but he lost them in the black cloud.

Herrie said the dead miners were apparently overcome by the smoke.

The intense heat had kept the rescue team out of the tunnel for more than 21 hours. But workers finally cooled the burning coal with a slurry mixture of foam and water early today.



Ann Byerly stands in front of the portal to the Wilberg Mine in a photo taken in the fall of 1983.

## Miner Cries, Waits For Word of Friends

By PAT CHRISTIAN  
Herald Staff Writer

Tough and seasoned Wilberg miner Ann Byerly spent part of Thursday last crying.

This morning the 44-year-old grandmother returned to the mine to help with the disaster at Orangeville, Emery County. Her close friend Nanette Wheeler, 23, was one of the 27 trapped by the Wilberg Mine disaster and the small contingent of woman miners at the Wilberg Mine are real close she says.

"All of us girls have been real close and we always exchange Christmas presents. Nanette was from back east somewhere and had no family out here. She was a real good friend and a sweet person. She and her boyfriend each gave \$100 to needy families for Christmas. I've been crying off and on all day," she said.

She was about to retire. He had enough years to have retired earlier but decided to wait a bit," Byerly said.

She had been in the Wilberg Mine on the day shift before the fire started and said that crews were working hard to set a production record.

She said record attempts were not uncommon in the mine and said that a while back she was a jacket for being part of a record-setting crew.

Byerly said miners on her shift had cleaned up coal that had fallen from the conveyor belt heavily laden with coal in the latest record-setting attempt that was cut short by the fire that trapped 26 men and Nanette.

She was surprised by the fire. "A couple of years ago we were about the first in the nation for accidents, but for the last year it had been going pretty well. It just seems so impossible."

A fire had ignited in the Wilberg Mine about a year ago. Byerly said it was more like an explosion along an area called the Long Wall but it was quickly extinguished and no one was hurt. And she said once the conveyor belt caught on fire, "The belt produces cyanide gas when it burns."

"The Desbow Dove Mine right next to our Wilberg is still burning," she said. "It started about spring of this year and they pumped water out of the Wilberg to try to put it out."

But she said it still kept burning even after all man-made openings were sealed in an attempt to suffocate the fire.

Byerly said there is a geological fault that runs through the Wilberg and Desbow Dove Mine that apparently feeds air to the fire and she fears if the Wilberg fire isn't quenched soon it could be shut down permanently like the Desbow.

# The Daily Herald

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## Safety Statistics Had Been Improving

By PAT THORNE  
Herald Washington Bureau

WASHINGTON — Although the Wilberg Mine disaster has become one of the worst accidents at a Utah mine according to federal statistics, a major federal health and safety inspection of the Wilberg Mine Tuesday, Dec. 18, revealed only minor violations and turned up nothing to suggest a pending disaster, according to the Mine Safety and Health Administration.

Administration public affairs specialist Frank O'Gorman said major "AAA" inspections are conducted four times a year on all mines and cover all aspects of safety and health. "We always find some violations," he said. "But most are related to health and ventilation. They are corrected quickly."

So far during this first quarter of fiscal year 1985, mine inspections have been conducted at the Emery Mining Co. mine. In addition to major inspections, all violations are subjected to follow-up inspections to assure corrective measures have been properly completed.

O'Gorman said statistics for the mine indicate a steady improvement in its safety record. In 1981, 240 violations were assessed at the mine. In 1982, 124 violations were found; in 1983, 46 violations; and in 1984, 27 violations.

"The company has corrected them all," O'Gorman said. "If they had not, we would have shut them down."

Improvements were also noted in the rate of accidents with injuries at the central Utah mine.

In 1982 there were 37.23 accident injuries reported per each 200 man-hours. That compared with a national average of 12.21 accident injuries per 200 man-hours.

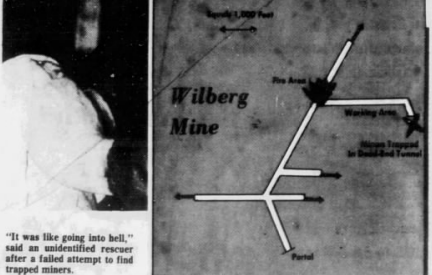
Figures for 1983 indicate 17.01 accident injuries per 200 man-hours, compared to a national rate of 10.44.

In 1984, 11.48 accident injuries per 200-man-hours were recorded against a national average of 10.96.

O'Gorman said agency records beginning in 1975 indicate that Wilberg Mine disaster could be the worst in the state.



"It was like going into hell," said an unidentified rescuer after a failed attempt to find trapped miners.



## List of Persons Trapped in the Wilberg Mine

- ORANGEVILLE, Utah (UPI) — Officials have released the names of the bodies found Friday morning, the 26 men and one woman trapped by a fire Wednesday night in central Utah's Wilberg Mine, including two of Emery Mining Corp.'s top executives and four other company officials.
- James Hamlin, E. Price, Emery vice president-operations
  - David William Wood, E. Price, Wilberg Mine manager
  - Ray Chapman, E. Price, Emery general manager
  - Allen Davis, E. Price, long-wall general foreman
  - Tom Leffley, Milton Herrie, 60, East Car belt supervisor
  - Philip Bell, E. Price, long-wall supervisor
  - Bert A. Bennett, E. Price
  - James Bernhart, E. Price
  - Bert A. Bennett, E. Price
  - Carlton Carter, E. Price
  - Robert S. Christensen, E. Price
  - Garland P. Connor, E. Price
  - Stanley J. Curry, E. Price
  - Owen K. Curtis Jr., E. Price
  - Roger G. Ellis, E. Price
  - Brian Bennett, E. Price
  - Barry Jacobs, E. Price
  - Carl Jennings, E. Price
  - Lawrence Johnson, E. Price
  - Carl L. Smith, E. Price
  - Kelly Riddle, E. Price
  - Lawrence Johnson, E. Price
  - John Wadsworth, E. Price
  - John Wadsworth, E. Price
  - Nanette Wheeler, E. Price
  - John Wiley, E. Price

## Friday:

### Stores Show Spring Amid Snow

The first snow of winter has barely piled up, and already the latest 1985 spring and summer fashions have hit local stores.

White snow and real people are wearing woolen mufflers

outside, store employees and customers are sporting shorts inside. Still, the topsy-turvy fashion season isn't ending.

See column on Page 18 of the Today Section.

### Here's Where to Find It All

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## Scouts Help Man Go to Holiday Bowl

By KAYLENE NELSEN  
Assistant City Editor

The Jack Murphy Stadium in San Diego will be full of Cougar fans tonight and few will notice one fan who would not have been there if it had not been for the caring of a group of Otter Creek Explorer Scouts.

But that young man and his family will never forget today.

Rich Harding's Explorer Scouts

wanted a meaningful project to undertake. He went to Hospice and asked if there wasn't someone who could use their services. Then the idea of sending that someone to the Holiday Bowl developed and mushroomed.

Hospice, an organization that helps terminally ill patients and families to deal with dying, was delighted the Scouts wanted to undertake the project.

"This Christmas we've had a

few ask to help people but this is the most interesting proposal we had," said Hospice Director Claire Averett.

With the help of the Cougar Club, LaVell Edwards and many others, the boys raised nearly \$975, got tickets to the game, received a pass into the locker room after the game and arranged for a tour in California.

The recipient, a young man in his 20s, asked to remain anonymous but Harding said "he was really excited about it."

The young Otter Explorers decided to do the project two weeks ago and worked hard to put together the plan.

The experience has been so rewarding the group plans to make it an ongoing project. Harding said the boys will continue to earn money for a fund that will make dreams come true for other Hospice patients.

## If Winter Began Today, What Was It Before?

Winter officially arrived at 9:23 a.m. this morning.

Somewhere, though, most Utahns didn't notice. The date means little to them, who generally consider winter's beginning as the date of the first major snowfall. That

came in mid-October this year.

"Most weathermen don't really pay much attention to today," said Jerry L. Smith, a Provo resident. James, noting that it's the first day of winter astronomically. "Climatologically, winter began about Dec. 1."

James has measured nearly 10 inches of snowfall in Provo this past week. But, he said, no more is expected until Christmas night.

(Additional weather information is on Page 15.)

Almost all the official first day of winter means is that the hours of sunlight will steadily increase for the next six months. According to the National Weather Service, nine hours and 18 minutes of sunshine were possible today, the least amount this year.

## The Wilberg Mine Fire

# Touted Rescue Teams Join Mine Fire Effort

ORANGEVILLE, Utah (UPI) — Rescue squads from four Utah coal mining firms, backed by college instructors, today joined in the dangerous effort to save 27 miners trapped by fire in Emery Mining Corp.'s Wilberg mine.

A federal mine safety official said the rescue teams do not rush in their work but, instead, carefully and deliberately advance to trouble spots, setting up air stations every 300 to 1,000 feet.

The rescue activity at the south-central Utah mine involved teams from Emery Mining, which in 1979 and 1981 claimed top honors in the National Coal Mine Rescue Contest, a spokesman for the U.S. Mine Health and Safety Administration said Thursday.

Another mine with a team at the Wilberg is the Solder Creek Coal Co., whose vice president and general manager, Don Ross, is the

chairman of the coal liaison committee of the Utah Mining Association. Ross also was a member of a rescue team at the Texas Gulf Sulphur Co. Cane Creek mine disaster that killed 18 workers near Moab in 1973.

In 1981, the Emery team won the one-hour first aid contest and the two-hour problem solving contest in competition against 86 other top teams from across the country.

Also three years ago the Emery Mining rescue team and the Price River Coal Co. team joined in rescue efforts at the Dutch Creek Coal Mine disaster at Redstone, Colo., where 13 miners died.

Sam Stafford of the Mine Health and Safety agency said rescue team members are "brave men." "They are all volunteers," he said. "They frequently train on their own time at their own expense."

"The first rule is to preserve the team and to control the trouble. They have to move carefully to make sure they won't do anything to worsen conditions," said Stafford.

As a backup for the rescue workers, two instructors from the College of Eastern Utah's mining department took their mobile rescue station to Orangeville Thursday. Gary Grubbs and Jay Fairbanks

maned the rescue van, which carries breathing apparatus, a charging pump to refill the apparatus, oxygen bottles, medical supplies, telephones, water, washing facilities and generators.

"We mainly use it as a backup for the mines, which have rescue equipment right on site," said department chairman Richard Robinson. "There also are several mines near here where we are their only rescue operation."



Scott Johnson decided dangers of mining wasn't for him.

## Local Man Quit Mine Dangers

By TOM CHRISTENSEN  
Herald Correspondent

Scott Johnson, a press operator for The Daily Herald, spent three years working as a coal miner in Utah. But the dangers and unhealthy conditions influenced him to seek employment above ground.

"I worked in the mines for three years. They are dark, dirty, and cold. It was dangerous and not a very healthy place to work," said Johnson.

The work in the mine is mostly done by machinery, but an accident on the conveyor belt would mean a lot of coal would have to be shoveled by hand.

"Shoveling coal is definitely the hardest work," added Johnson.

The threat of an accident is a major concern in the life of a coal miner, even with a lot of safety precautions.

Most mines have first-aid kits located at strategic areas within the mine. They are equipped with oxygen tanks, picks, shovels, respirators, and other convenience materials.

The miners must wear steel-toed shoes and hard hats with lamps. The mines go through daily inspection for dangerous gases, and weak support areas, and have a telephone network within the mine.

A lot of mines use electric motors instead of combustion engines to help reduce a lot of the fire risks.

The electric motors are heavily insulated to prevent any dangerous sparks from occurring.

"We would have to walk our escape ways once every three months. We had three different ways out," said Johnson.

Even with all the safety precautions taken in coal mines, it is still a very hazardous profession.

"A guy got killed in the same mine I was working in," said Johnson.

"It scared me so bad. I didn't go back to work for three weeks. A coal miner can make a lot of money, and even more if they were willing to work in certain areas of the mine. When Johnson was employed he could make 106 dollars a day."

"They paid you for where you were at, and not for what you were doing," said Johnson.

Johnson has a good idea of what the miners are going through in the accident at the Emery Mine.

"If they can get to it. They may be able to find an air pocket for 48 hours."

A lot of coal miners are high school drop outs, and people who can't find other work, they can make good money at the mines, said Johnson.

"I had worked on the Herald Press before, and I decided to go back after my experiences in the mine," said Johnson.

## Mine Accidents Solemn Times, Says Veteran Miner in Provo

By VICKI BARKER  
Herald Staff Writer

The Wilberg coal mine fire was a topic of solemn contemplation over lunch Thursday afternoon for 74-year-old Sam Conover.

An old-timer whose coal mining career began in the '30s when it was done with pick and shovel, Sam could only shake his head and hope for the best for the 27 men whose time was running out miles beneath the earth's surface.

"I think it's terrible. Me and my wife were just talking about it. Those men — if they can't get through and get to them, they'll choke to death, and if there's any gas up there it'll explode," the veteran coal miner worried.

Sparse on words, the raspy-voiced grandfather remembered what turned out to be a minor cave-in in a Huntington-area mine long ago that left an inter-usable scar on the memory vein of his 30-year mining career.

"There's a feeling of fear. About all you think about is getting out. I thought about getting out and living and breathing."

Luckily for Sam, the lights stayed on, the burial was brief, and he had two other experienced miners for company.

"Most coal miners that know their business, after awhile they don't have no fear of anything. They take care of themselves," he said. "You know you're in danger. It never stayed with me continuously, but a lot of people think about it all the time. I never did."

Retired since 1977, Sam says a coal miner in the business knows the company cannot be totally blamed for a disaster.

"There's many accidents caused in a mine that nobody can control. It's just hazardous in there. There's so many things that can cause fires — conveyor belts catching fire, and an electricity line — that's nobody's fault."

"Anything could have caused that belt to get on fire. It wouldn't be the company's fault necessarily."

Sam recalled "one or two cases" at the Clear Creek Mine at Scofield where miners expired because of inhaling too much gas "or the air wasn't good enough and they'd pass out."

While he along with everyone else hopes the Wilberg accident would not turn out a pre-Christmas death toll, Sam maintained no illusions. The victims must have air, or they would suffocate. "If there's gas and smoke in there, it's horrible. Without air, they can't last long," he said.



Retired coal miner Sam Conover of Provo remembers life inside a mountain.

"Naturally, the only hope I have for the men is if they can't get close to an air course that doesn't bring the smoke in to where they're at. If the smoke got in to them, they have very little chance."

Thirty years in the coal mines of Wyoming, Colorado and Utah gifted Sam with another hazard a miner comes to expect as his due — black lung.

"Nobody, and I mean nobody unless they've worked in coal mine, knows what life it is until it's done with. I worked

there 30 years and I'm glad it's over."

And yet, says Sam, if he had it to do over again, he'd be a coal miner. His son is now, in Wyoming.

"It's always been good to me. I get pension. I did real well, extra well, by being a coal miner," Sam said. He liked the fact it was eight hours and overtime, and the pay was excellent.

"If I had my life to live over again, that's the mine I would do."

Each mine also must have its own training plan approved by the federal agency, said Kulawski.

Each miner is required to wear the rescuers, and extra units must be scattered throughout the mine.

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## Trapped Miners Extensively Trained For Keeping Alive Under Mountains

By PAUL ROLLY  
ORANGEVILLE, Utah (UPI) —

The 27 men and one woman trapped by a fire deep in a central Utah coal mine underwent rigorous training where they learned how to save their lives in case of accident, a federal official says.

Rich Kulawski, of the U.S. Mine Safety and Health Administration, said Thursday night, the government bars miners from working underground until they have passed a 40-hour safety course.

If the trapped miners followed the prescribed procedures and helped each other, their chances of surviving would increase, he said.

Emergency County Sheriff Feels Pressure

By NANCY BRINGHURST  
Herald Staff Writer

CASTLE DALE — Capt. David Owens of the Emery County Sheriff's Dept. pulled out all the stops as soon as he heard 27 miners were trapped in the Wilberg Mine.

Every officer in the department rushed to the scene where distraught relatives and members of the community were gathered.

Media representatives descended en masse to try and learn of the miners' fate, something everyone

"This is just speculation on my part, but if they stick together and can create a safe pocket of air by using the ventilation system properly their chances will be greatly increased," Kulawski told UPI in a telephone interview from his office in Lakewood, Colo.

A firm allowing workers to enter a mine without the extensive training would be in violation of federal law, Kulawski said.

"They must pass this course under federal law before they can ever work in a mine," Kulawski said. "The training course will vary depending on the type of mine," he said, adding that a hori-

zontal shaft such as the Wilberg Mine's would require different safety techniques than for a vertical mine.

A fire Wednesday night in the mine 113 miles southeast of Salt Lake City trapped 27 workers, two top officials from Emery Mining Corp., which operates the mine for Utah Power & Light Co., and four other Emery executives.

The Wilberg Mine, at the 7,500-foot-level on East Mountain, 8 miles north of Orangeville, goes straight into the hillsides. At the Fire East shaft, where most of the trapped miners were about 1,400 feet under the mountainside.

to handle this kind of situation, although it is still difficult.

"There's an awful lot of crying, of course," he said. "Some people get totally mad because they can't go up to the mine to find out what's going on, and some of those guys might be some of our best friends. It's just adrenaline pumping."

Owens said a temporary medical examiners office has been set up at the mine. Police will aid in transferring casualties to either the morgue or medical center in Provo, Utah.

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