

UNITED STATES  
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
BUREAU OF MINES  
DISTRICT C

REPORT OF MULTIPLE FATAL COAL MINE ROOF FALL ACCIDENT  
NO. 3 MINE (M.I. 00338)  
OAKWOOD RED ASH COAL CORPORATION  
OAKWOOD, BUCHANAN COUNTY, VIRGINIA

May 17, 1967

by

Harold Wiley  
Coal Mine Inspection Supervisor

Originating Office - Bureau of Mines  
Norton, Virginia 24273  
J. S. Malesky, District Manager  
Health and Safety District C

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INTRODUCTION

This report is based on an investigation made in accordance with the provisions of the Federal Coal Mine Safety Act (66 Stat. 692; 30 U.S.C. Secs. 451-483) as amended.

A multiple fatal roof-fall accident occurred at about 10:00 a.m., Wednesday, May 17, 1967 in No. 9 entry pillar place of the 3 south mains section of the No. 3 Mine, Oakwood Red Ash Coal Corporation. The accident resulted in the deaths of 3 employees and serious injury to a fourth. Killed instantly were Garland Rose, age 44, employed as a motorman, John Honaker, age 39, machineman, and Alvin Hess, age 35, employed as a driller and shot firer. Garland Rose had about 6 years mining experience, 3 years of which was as a motorman in the No. 3 Mine; he leaves dependent his widow and one child. John Honaker had about 15 years mining experience,  $5\frac{1}{2}$  years as an employee in the No. 3 Mine; he leaves dependent his widow and 4 children. Alvin Hess had about 10 years mining experience, 2 years of which were as a driller and shot firer in the No. 3 Mine; he leaves dependent his widow and 3 children. James Street, age 49, employed as a helper on the mining machine, was hospitalized with a fractured pelvis.

Mr. Marvin Yost, mine superintendent, notified the Bureau of Mines field office in Richlands, Virginia, of the accident at about 10:20 a.m. on the day of occurrence. An investigation was conducted the following day.

Information for this report was obtained from observations of the writer and other Federal inspectors during the work of recovering the bodies of the victims, an investigation at the scene of the occurrence on the day following the accident, and from statements of eyewitnesses Harry Harrison, motorman, who was interviewed during the investigation, and the mining machine helper, James Street, who was interviewed later.

## GENERAL INFORMATION

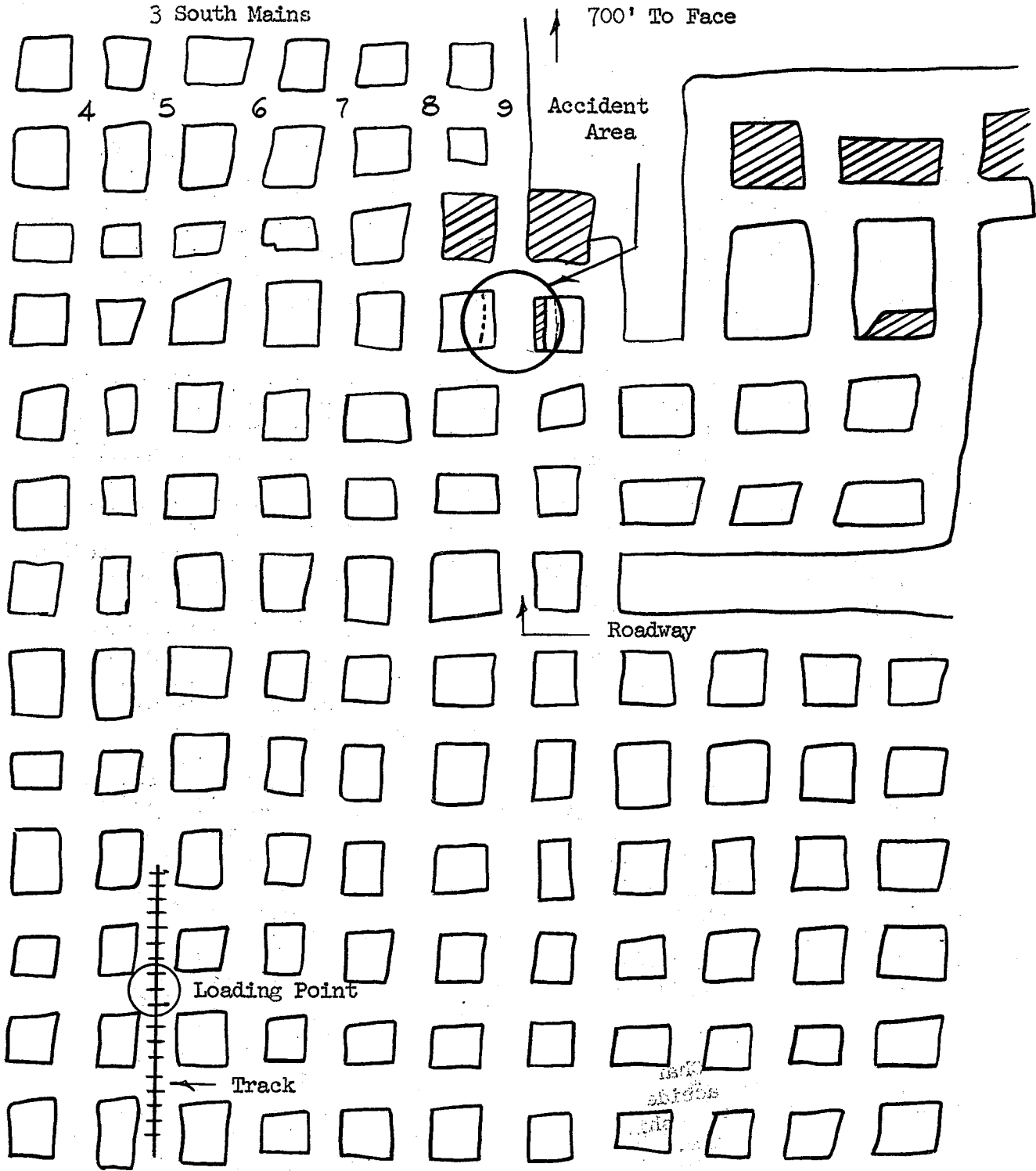
The mine is opened by drift entries in the Red Ash coalbed, which averages 26 inches in thickness locally. Thirteen of the 24 men employed worked underground on 1 shift a day, 5 days a week. The average daily production of 190 tons of coal was loaded into rubber-tired mine cars by a mobile (Long 88) loading machine. Coal was transported by battery-powered locomotives to an underground car-dumping point located about 600 feet out by the working places and thence to the surface in track-mounted cars by trolley locomotive.

The mine was developed by a room-and-pillar method. Main, cross, and room entries were driven in sets of 3 to 10. Entries were driven 24 to 26 feet wide, rooms 28 to 32 feet wide, and crosscuts were turned at 60-foot intervals. All development work had been completed and mining consisted of the extraction of entry chain pillars in the 3 south mains section. A definite or systematic method of pillar extraction had not been adopted and only those pillars were being extracted that were thick enough (28 inches or so) to make recovery economically feasible. In the immediate area of the accident, a full cut of coal had been mined off the entry pillar on the right (west) side of the No. 9 entry haulage road and a second cut completed across the same pillar, which had not been blasted. At the time the accident occurred, the mining machine was in the process of completing a similar 9-foot deep undercut across the entry pillar on the left (east) side of the No. 9 entry haulage road. The width of the roadway from coal rib to coal rib in the accident area was 34 feet.

The immediate roof was a generally firm shale that contained occasional slips and kettle bottoms. According to past Federal inspection reports, roof-testing practices were satisfactory. The company's adopted, systematic method of roof support was posted and required the setting of permanent posts on 4-foot centers to within 6 feet of the faces and the use of a minimum of 2 safety posts at the face of each working place. Because of the size of the fall, the number and placement of roof support timbers in the area prior to the accident could not be determined. However, no posts were found beneath the considerable amount of rock moved during recovery operations and no posts could be seen beneath the fall at the large number of places where it was possible to peer beneath the fall.

James Street, the mining machine helper, when interviewed, stated that he "believed" that one post was set by Alvin Hess, the driller and shot firer, while the machine was undercutting the entry pillar. He also stated that there were no more than 3 or 4 posts set in the area at the time the fall occurred. The mine foreman, Charlie Miles, stated that he had last examined the area where the accident occurred at about 6:10 a.m. on the day of occurrence during his preshift examination of the mine and considered the place to be safe.

SKETCH NO. 1



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SCALE 1" = 100'

The investigating committee consisted of the following persons:

OAKWOOD RED ASH COAL CORPORATION

Marvin Yost	Superintendent
Charley Miles	Mine Foreman
Harry Harrison	Motorman

VIRGINIA DIVISION OF MINES AND QUARRIES, DEPARTMENT OF LABOR AND INDUSTRY

Louis Hennegar	Roof Control Inspector
William Baldwin	District Mine Inspector

UNITED STATES BUREAU OF MINES

Ronald Keaton	Federal Coal Mine Inspector
Harold Wiley	Coal Mine Inspection Supervisor

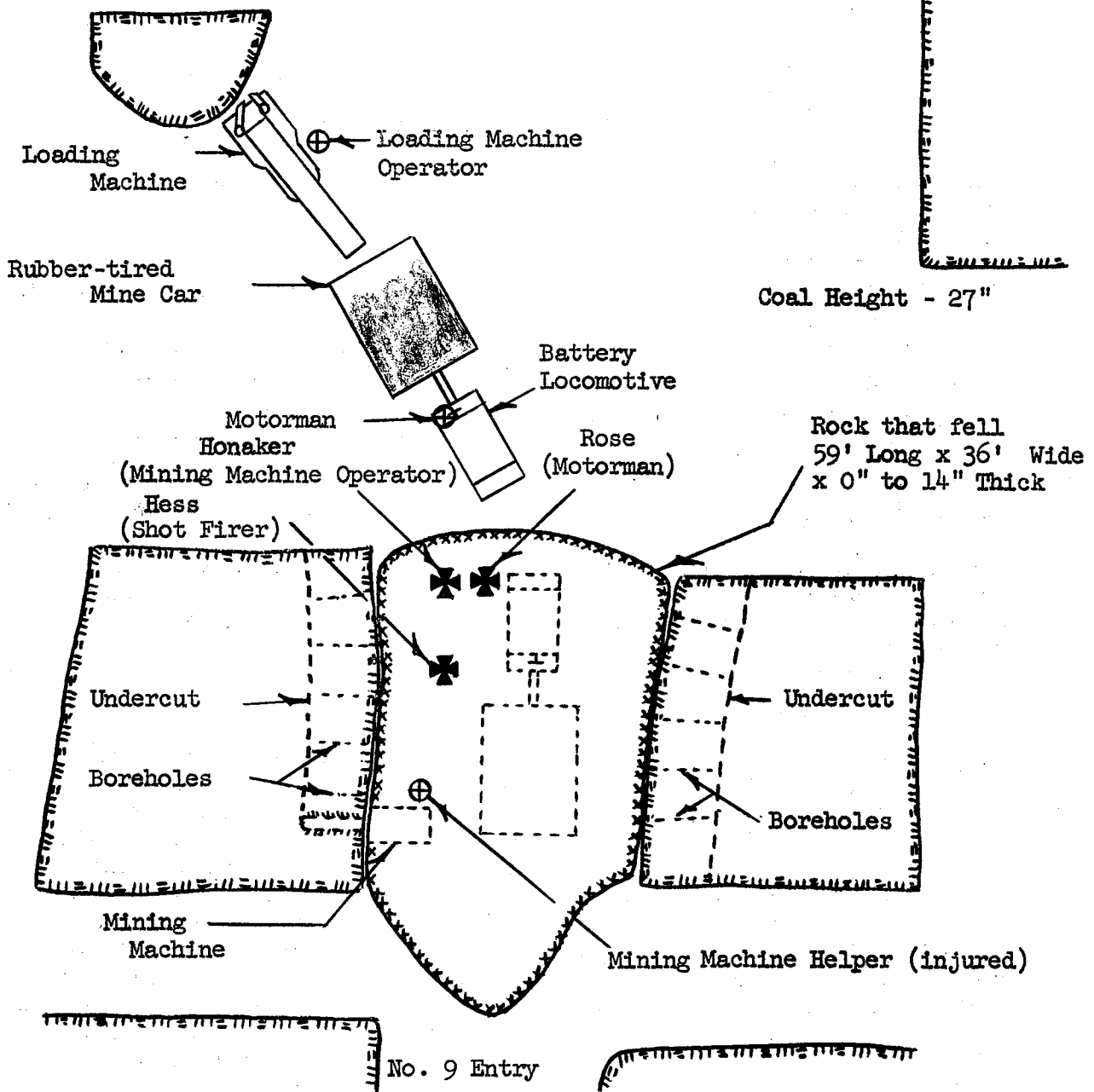
The last Federal inspection of this mine was completed February 2, 1967. The president of the company, Mr. Douglas Whaley, stated that coal production will not be resumed and that the mine is now permanently abandoned.

DESCRIPTION OF ACCIDENT

The underground face employees entered the mine in a man trip at their usual starting time of 7:00 a.m., Wednesday, May 17, 1967 and, upon arrival at the car-dumping point in the 3 south mains section, were assigned their usual duties by the mine foreman, Charlie Miles. While Miles remained at the car-dumping point to attend other duties, the employees were transported to the face regions, an additional 600 feet, in rubber-tired mine cars pulled by rubber-tired, battery-powered locomotives. Upon arrival in the face regions, the usual cycle of mining operations was begun and followed. At about 9:30 a.m., the mining machine crew, consisting of the operator, John Honaker, and his helper, James Street, trammed the machine to the No. 9 entry pillar on the left or east side of the roadway and, after the driller and shot firer, Alvin Hess, had drilled a row of shot holes across the pillar, proceeded to begin undercutting this pillar along a course parallelling the No. 9 entry. Hess, at the same time, began preparing the shot holes as the machine continued to undercut the pillar. Also about this time, according to Harry Harrison, an eyewitness, who was in the deck of a locomotive coupled to a mine car inby the pillar being undercut (see sketch), the second battery locomotive in use returned from the car-dumping point with an empty mine car and parked in the roadway alongside the pillar being undercut. This locomotive

Sketch No. 2

Supports in place prior to fall could not be determined



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SCALE 1" = 20'

was being operated by Garland Rose, who remained in the deck while waiting for the loading machine to finish loading the car to which the other locomotive was coupled. James Street, the mining machine helper who survived the accident, stated that at about 10:00 a.m. when the machine had cut to within a few feet of the left rib he heard a sudden "ripping" sound and the entire area caved without further warning. Street said that he made no move to escape but "just hunkered down beside the machine". He was, however, knocked down by the falling rock with his head near the cutter bar and his feet extended back toward the machine controls. The cutter chain continued to rotate, but the weight of the rock caused the friction feed to slip and the machine remained motionless. It was several minutes later, according to Street, before someone cut off the power from the mining machine. The other three men, Honaker, Hess, and Rose, attempted to escape by scurrying in by toward the loading machine but were caught by the falling rock. Their bodies were recovered from beneath the fall at the approximate locations shown in the sketch. James Street, who had survived the accident but was trapped alongside the mining machine near the outby edge of the fall, was freed by fellow workmen a few minutes after the rock had fallen and was brought out of the mine at 11:00 a.m. and transported to a hospital in Richlands, Virginia, where his condition was reported to be satisfactory. Federal inspectors Ronnie Keaton, Frank Stefkovich, and Harold Wiley entered the mine with the superintendent, Marvin Yost, shortly after 11:00 a.m., and State Mine Inspectors Louis Henegar, Jerald Hileman, and William Baldwin arrived on the scene about 2:30 p.m. Marvin Yost, superintendent, upon arriving at the scene of the accident with the Federal inspectors, had the mine foreman, Charlie Miles, go to the surface. Miles had stated that at the time the roof-fall occurred he was crawling toward the section from the car-dumping point. It was necessary to break and move a considerable amount of rock before getting in proximity to the bodies of the victims and final recovery was effected by the use of hydraulic lifting jacks and wood blocking. The body of Rose was recovered about 1:00 p.m., that of Honaker about 3:00 p.m., and the body of Hess about 4:00 p.m. The victims suffered multiple crushing injuries and died instantly.

The fall, which broke into numerous pieces, extended from coal rib to coal rib, was about 59 feet long, 36 feet wide, and ranged in thickness from 0 to 14 inches.

Equipment involved in the accident and caught beneath the fall consisted of a 212-Goodman shortwall mining machine, a hand-drill electric drill, a rubber-tired, battery-powered (Kersey) locomotive, and a rubber-tired mine car which was coupled to the locomotive. The location of this equipment in the accident area is shown in the attached sketch.

#### CAUSE OF ACCIDENT

Men working under a large expanse of mine roof that was either unsupported or inadequately supported was the direct cause of this accident. The unusual method of pillar extraction, which amounted to "pushing" of entry pillars away from an active roadway, was undoubtedly a contributing factor.

#### RECOMMENDATIONS

Compliance with the following recommendations may prevent accidents of a similar nature:

1. The companys adopted systematic method of roof support should be followed by all officials and employees and additional timbering should be done where the need is indicated.
2. A method of pillar extraction that will provide a maximum of protection for all employees should be adopted at this mine. Methods such as the "open end" and the "pocket-and-fender" should be considered.

#### ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The cooperation of officials and employees and of representatives of the Virginia Division of Mines and Quarries during this investigation is gratefully acknowledged.

Respectfully submitted,

  
/s/ Harold Wiley

Harold Wiley  
Coal Mine Inspection Supervisor