



# The MOUNTAIN EAGLE

IT STILL SCREAMS! Whitesburg, Letcher County, Kentucky, Thursday, March 11, 1976 Vol. 68, No. 47

## 15 die in mine explosion

Fifteen men died Tuesday in an explosion at a Scotia Coal Co. mine near Ovenfork less than 24 hours after a federal mine inspector had cited the section of the mine where they were working for three failures to observe its ventilation and methane and dust control plan.

The explosion was the worst mine disaster in Letcher County's history.

At 7 o'clock Monday night federal Mining Enforcement Safety Administration (MESA) inspector Cecil Davis of Blackey noted that the No. 2 Southeast Main section of the mine had only 25 water sprays in operation out of a minimum total of 36 required by the mine's supplemental ventilation plan. Davis issued a citation, directing that the violation be remedied by 4 p.m. the following day (Tuesday).

But at 11:30 a.m. on Tuesday an explosion ripped through the southeast section of the mine, trapping 15 men underground. Nine of the miners apparently died instantly. The other six men survived the first blast, donned self-rescuers and attempted to build an air-tight barricade against the bad air and poisonous gases surging through the mine tunnels. Their efforts failed.

According to a doctor's report, the six men suffocated behind their barricade after their self-rescuers ran out of oxygen approximately one hour after the explosion.

The average age of the dead was 27 years.

Inspector Davis also had noted two other violations involving the ventilation system in the mine on his Monday evening visit. His

Here is the list of the 15 coal miners killed at Scotia mine on Tuesday:

David Gibbs, 29, Partridge  
Jimmy Sturgill, 20, Eolla  
Roy McKnight, 20, Cumberland  
Tom Scott, 23, Dongola  
Virgil Coats, 23, Cumberland  
Gail Sparkman, 33, Gordon  
Kenny Turner, 25, Cumberland  
Robert Griffith, 24, Jackhorn  
Dennis Boggs, 26, Pound Va.  
Larry McKnight, 27, Cumberland  
Everett Scotty Combs, 28, Cumberland  
Denver Widner, 31, Blair  
Earl Galloway, 44, Ovenfork  
Willie Turner, 32, Cumberland  
Lawrence Peavy, 25, Benham

report showed that both had been corrected within a half hour after he pointed them out. Davis's inspection was the last federal inspection at the mine before the fatal blast.

Davis said that the brattice being used to provide ventilation at the working face of the coal seam at the No. 5 entry, where a continuous mining machine was being used, was maintained to within only 25 feet of the point of deepest penetration of the miner, when it should have been maintained to within 10 feet. Davis said he observed the violation at 8:20 p.m. on Monday and it was corrected 10 minutes later. (A brattice is a partition used to form ventilation passages.)

At 5:30 p.m. Davis observed

that the amount of air passing through the last cross cut separating the No. 1 and 2 air intake and return entries was only 8,092 cubic feet per minute as measured by instruments. At 6 o'clock, his report showed, the amount of air had been increased to 10,472 cubic feet per minute.

Scotia is a subsidiary of Blue Diamond Coal Co., Knoxville, Tenn., which also operates mines at Stearns and Leatherwood and produces about three million tons of coal a year. A company spokesman, Ralph Dye, vice president of Blue Diamond, Knoxville, told The Mountain Eagle in a telephone interview Wednesday that the cause of the blast had not been determined, but he added that it "undoubtedly was a meth-

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Friends and relatives of trapped miners await word on their fate. (Photo by Helen Winternitz)