

Mine Explosion Leaves Fate Of 25 Uncertain

MOAB, Utah (UPI)—A rescue worker searching through debris at the site of the Moab mine disaster made voice contact today with nine of the 25 men trapped underground.

MOAB, Utah (UPI)—A multi-million dollar potash mine near here was shattered by a fiery explosion late Tuesday, trapping 25 men 3,000 feet below the earth's surface.

Rescue teams were hopeful today that at least some of the men were alive. They said there was a possibility that parts of the crew was stranded in passageways leading from the base of the vertical shaft of the mine where rescue squads worked in 150 degree temperatures.

And, a worker who was blown through a plywood windshield while standing on the head frame above the shaft top was doubtful they survived.

"The way the explosion knocked me back I'm sure it must have come from the bottom of the mine," said Matt Rauhala, 47, a bucket dumper who was not seriously hurt. "The explosion was so strong I really don't think that anyone in the bottom could have survived it."

Steve Hatisis, state mine inspector, also was doubtful.

"The situation is very, very grim," he said. "It would be a miracle if anyone is alive."

Hatisis reported that huge quantities of carbon monoxide were flowing from the mine. He said the carbon monoxide meant that debris probably was still smoldering in the mine, designed primarily for commercial fertilizer production.

However, Hatisis conceded there was a chance some of the men were in an air pocket.

The men had been working in three groups—one in a shop area near the base of the shaft and the others in the two horizontal passageways tunneled in opposite directions from the shaft.

The area in the mine and cause of the blast were not known. But rescuers theorized that if the blast originated in one of the passageways, members of the crew in the other might be alive.

Another factor was continued operation of high pressure steel pipe lines which supplied compressed air for the workers' tools. The blast did not knock out the lines.

Above ground, the mine and plant buildings, sprawled over a wide area a half mile from the Colorado River and situated in a picturesque valley formed by steep cliffs, was bustling with rescue operations.

"The number of men has been definitely established at 25," reported Frank Tippet, general manager of the Texas Gulf Sulphur Co. plant. "The blast knocked out the mine's communications and we are not certain of the men's location."

The military chiefs said they, and not Ngo Dinh Nhu, initiated the crackdown which resulted in the arrest of thousands of Buddhist leaders and the imposition of martial law throughout this Communist-ruled country.

The statement issued Tuesday night by the entire joint general staff headquarters of the Vietnamese army was interpreted as a slap at the U.S. State Department and was certain to cloud U.S.-Vietnamese relations still further.

The State Department had said in a statement that the army leaders had not been forewarned of the Vietnamese government's plans to arrest Buddhist monks and attack pagodas to crush opposition to the administration.

It had been reported reliably that Nhu, brother of President Ngo Dinh Diem, had engineered the crackdown on the Buddhists last Wednesday and quietly took power in a palace coup.

The United States, which has poured millions of dollars a day into South Vietnam to help the government's fight against Communist guerrillas, has expressed strong disapproval of the strongarm tactics used in the pagoda raids.

The government claims the raids were staged to block an imminent plot to overthrow the administration, which has been controlled by the Diem family since 1954. The crackdown followed widespread anti-government demonstrations by Buddhists who charge religious discrimination on the part of the regime.

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What to do about such things? Well, we could pass a law.

But—

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