

**ON THIS DAY IN WEST VIRGINIA HISTORY  
OCTOBER 28****13 Perish As Explosion  
Rips Nicholas Coal Mine**

On October 28, 1958, an explosion at the Oglebay Norton's Burton coal mine in Nicholas County resulted in the deaths of fourteen miners.

**CSO: SS.8.9, ELA.8.1**

**Investigate the Document:** (*Nicholas Chronicle* October 30, 1958)

1. The State Director of Mines, Crawford L. Wilson, suspected it was a gas ignition that caused the explosion. What type of gas do you suspect was the source?
2. How far underground did the explosion originate?

**Think Critically:** How have coal mine safety regulations changed since the 1950s? Are inspections required more frequently? Can you think of another potential danger that would ignite an explosion in a coal mine?

# The Nicholas Chronicle.

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THURSDAY, OCTOBER 30, 1958

## 13 Perish As Explosion Rips Nicholas Coal Mine

An explosion deep underground in a gassy coal mine Tuesday killed 13 miners but four of their fellows managed to survive.

Early Wednesday morning all of the bodies had been recovered from the Oglebay-Norton Co.'s Burton mine.

The dead are as follows:

Henry Bryant of Summersville.

William Anderson of Camden-on-Gauley.

Harry Fletcher of Camden-on-Gauley.

Pete Weese of Richwood.

Joe McVey, Gwen Wyatt, Kyle Spencer, O. C. Gates, Eddie Stephenson, Henry Westfall and Ralph Adams, all of Craigsville.

Howard Chafin of Fenwick.

Donald Davis of LaFrank.

State Mines Director Crawford L. Wilson said the mine was badly torn up, but not excessively, meaning that

it possibly could be restored to production without too much delay.

Wilson told newsmen late Tuesday night that "everything indicates a gas ignition."

He said that only the formal investigation could determine exactly what ignited the gas. There was no ensuing fire.

The explosion occurred about one and a half miles from the surface, between 10:30 and 11 a.m. Tuesday. There were 54 men underground at the time.

One of the 37 who reached the lung-filled air outside soon after the blast was Marvin Harless of Camden-on-Gauley.

He said he was about 1,000 feet away, and the explosion was so forceful he temporarily went deaf in his left ear.

Harless ran down the main entry

but the dust got so stiffling he turned off a side entry. He found his way blocked, returned to the main entry and eventually made his way out the driftmouth.

The big mine, strangely silent after the first 37 scurried out into the overcast daylight, sealed the fate of the remaining 17 until shortly before 4 p.m.

Rescuers came out partially supporting Artie Humphryes of Craigs-ville. He had taken refuge in one of the less-damaged sections of the mine and had managed to stay alive until rescuers found him.

An encouraging report went out that six other men had survived, but this did not stand up. There were only three. They were brought out in a group more than an hour later.

They were on stretchers which the rescuers had managed somehow to

carry along just under the roof of the mine as they negotiated waist-deep water in some areas underground.

Two of the men were burned so badly their conditions evoked gasps as they were brought out wrapped in blankets. They were Paul Davis a timberman of Craigsville, and William Tucker, also a timberman, of Persinger.

The third man, burned, but not as seriously as the other two, was Oakey Donaldson of Summersville.

Sacred Heart Hospital at Richwood, where all four survivors were taken, said Tuesday night that Davis and Tucker were listed as critical.

The Burton Mine sits on the banks of the Gauley River at the foot of Cranberry Mountain. The nearest town is Craigsville, about a mile away.

