

Tape #1

STEVE SANGUINETTI

Reference: Argonaut Mine Disaster

(Where were you working at the time of the fire?)

I was working underground at the 6300 foot level. Myself and her father, Dominic Gianini, we were working in the stokes. He was a machine man and I was a helper. We were on day shift and the fire actually didn't start until around midnight.

I was getting ready to go to work in the morning---we didn't hear anything through the night---and my brother Ben, he was a foreman and they woke him up and Mr. Garbarini who was the superintendent. They came up when they got the news. It started to smoke down there and Bradshaw, the skip boss, came up and discovered the fire. Just about starting it was. And at the Argonaut there was a terrific downdraft, see. And when they got up top they went to get some water to bring down on the skips, but they couldn't do it. It was already out of control. Then, of course, they panicked too. My brother Ben, he had a crew of men and they went down to fight it but they couldn't do anything.

So going into the next day from there, they got the crews to try and fight it every way and the other and they couldn't do it. The men down below were calling for help and ringing the bells, course I don't like to go into too much detail, you know what I mean. The engineer was up against it too; they couldn't get the skips down there, and that was about the end of it. Those guys all died there.

They were all dead around 2 o'clock in the morning. Gas got into them; they built bulkheads to try and stop the gas. They hoped the men would be able to get back in the drift far enough to be free of gas and be rescued. But it didn't work. And from there it went on and on, day after day...let's see, this happened on August 28th, and they didn't rescue the men until the 22nd of September when they made their connection from the Kennedy to the Argonaut. They had to run a drift over because they couldn't get down the shaft of the Argonaut.

(Did anyone have any idea how to get down the Muldoon Shaft?)

Well, that was the trouble. The bosses. My brother wanted to go through there and reverse the fans. But the superintendent had to have his way too. And that's the way it was. If they had reversed that fan and made an upcast instead of a downcast, well, that's my theory and my brother's too. He knew a lot more about mining than Garbarini did.

And from there it was just getting those bodies out.

My theory is if it was worked the other way, changing the air conditioning from down to up---let the shaft burn, it wouldn't burn up much anyhow.

(I've read the Bureau of Mines assessment, and I know there was a big debate about whether they could reverse the fans, and could they get it done soon enough. Also brought up was the difficulty of a man climbing out the Muldoon anyway.)

The Muldoon was 2000 feet, and it wandered around from drift to raise. ...Then the big shots come up...like the two brothers who practically owned it all. What was the name of them? Stent--- that's one of em. It was too late to argue, anyway. They'd probably

have stood by the superintendent anyhow! But one of them went along with Ben. But it was too late to do anything then. The engineer took a chance, but he was working under orders too, see.

Seems to me if I was running things I'd have let the skips down anyhow; I don't give a damn if the superintendent fired me!

Maybe we could have saved them, and maybe we couldn't. It's one of those damn things.

(What did you think of the condition of the manway in the main shaft?)

I think the fire started from a bad cable, see. Electric cable.

You'd go down about 3000 feet and you'd have a junction box.

I think that damn cable pulled out of one of the junction boxes.

That's what started the fire at the 3000 level. I don't think anyone set the fire. No. No. No one is going to climb down 3000 feet to set a fire.

The juice going down there got the timbers---the timbers are dry ya know, and they're big, 14x14.

(Fessel was the subject of a lot of rumors because they didn't find him right away. What about that?)

To this day they haven't gotten out 48 bodies. They don't know if it was him. The other was supposed to be identified...no, Fessel's body was never found. The fire probably burned him up. And no bones left over---that's what I think.

(I thought they found his body.)

I don't think so.

(There were stories about him being seen in Australia...)

Fessel was a German. He was a good fella. Lived up here in Pine Grove somewhere. No...he couldn't get out of there. He could have

got to the 3900 and gone to the Muldoon and climbed out.
But I don't think so. I still say the cable pulled away.