

Our Story [PA mine tragedy] by Jeff Goodell (2002)

7.24.2002 started as a normal day for the men working down one section in the Quecreek coal mine in Somerset, PA. They thought they were 300 ft from an old abandoned mine, but at 9 pm their 11.5-ft diameter mining machine cut through & 70 millions of gallons of water came rushing in. They called the next section (who got out), but it was too late for them. When the water hit a low spot in the mine, the men were cut-off & so was the natural ventilation.

Days before they started noticing more water & a soft ceiling where they were cutting, but management told them to keep going. Coal mining is one of the most dangerous jobs. The nine miners were Randy Fogle, Mark Popernack [Moe], John Unger, Dennis Hall [Harpo], Bob Pugh [Boogie], Ron Hileman [Hound Dog], Tom Foy [Tucker], Blaine Mayhugh & John Phillippi [Flathead].

The families were called & they went to the town's fire hall, but didn't get much answers. Engineers guessed they would head for high ground & drilled a 6-inch hole to pump air in. The men tapped on the pipe nine times to let the rescuers know all nine were alive. Then the rescue party began drilling a 29-inch hole to get the men out [245' below]. This took days. They were pumping water out, but it was still rising.

The men went to high ground, built walls, stayed together & waited. They were hungry, thirsty & craving nicotine. The drill-bit broke & the silence was discouraging. The men wrote final letters to their families. It was pitch black down there & they only turned on their headlamps when needed. After 77-hrs, they finally punched through. A 22-inch rescue capsule brought the men up one by one.

Books:

Lonesome Dove & Tom Clancy books