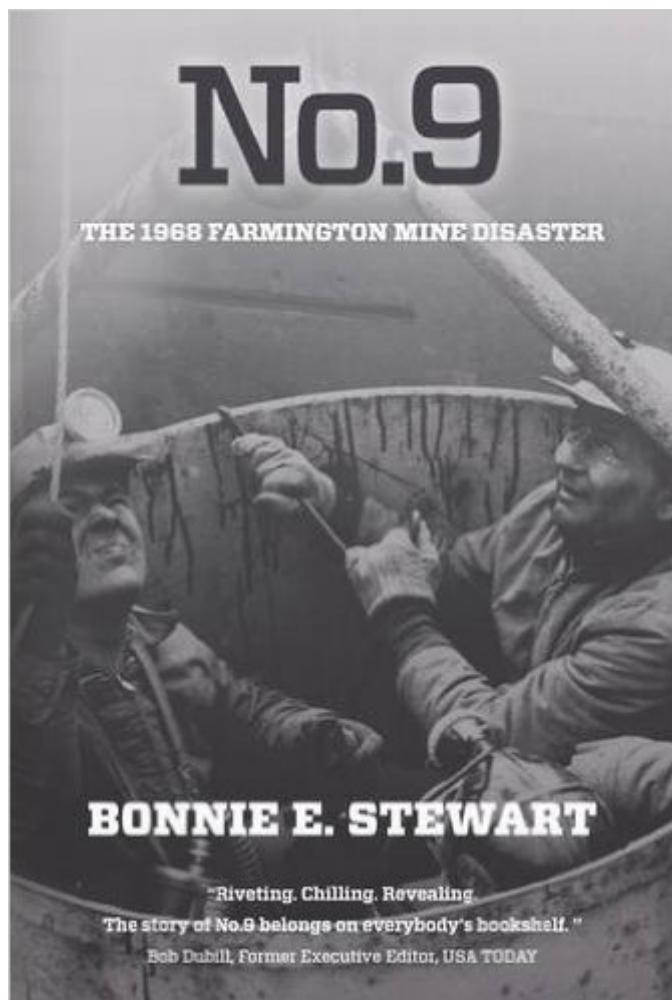


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No.9: The 1968 Farmington Mine Disaster



Synopsis

Ninety-nine men entered the cold, dark tunnels of the Consolidation Coal Company's No.9 Mine in Farmington, West Virginia, on November 20, 1968. Some were worried about the condition of the mine. It had too much coal dust, too much methane gas. They knew that either one could cause an explosion. What they did not know was that someone had intentionally disabled a safety alarm on one of the mine's ventilation fans. That was a death sentence for most of the crew. The fan failed that morning, but the alarm did not sound. The lack of fresh air allowed methane gas to build up in the tunnels. A few moments before 5:30 a.m., the No.9 blew up. Some men died where they stood. Others lived but suffocated in the toxic fumes that filled the mine. Only 21 men escaped from the mountain. No.9: The 1968 Farmington Mine Disaster explains how such a thing could happen "how the coal company and federal and state officials failed to protect the 78 men who died in the mountain. Based on public records and interviews with those who worked in the mine, No.9 describes the conditions underground before and after the disaster and the legal struggles of the miners' widows to gain justice and transform coal mine safety legislation.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

No. 9 is another work with a strong local connection. It also gives me yet another lesson in thinking before criticizing. West Virginia produces a significant portion of coal for the United States. It has done so for about 120 years. Likely, that will also be the case for the next 50 years. West Virginia history is checkered with mass casualty mine accidents. (Many more miners have suffered injury or

death from individual accidents, and that's a shame - both that they suffer and that it takes a lot of simultaneous deaths for anybody to notice industrial dangers.) One of the "big dogs" of the coal business in West Virginia is Consolidation Coal Company (pronounced "con-SOL"). One of Consol's larger mines of the 20th century was No. 9 at Farmington, Marion County, which is about 7 miles from my home. On 20 November 1968, 99 men were working the cat-eye (midnight) shift. At 5:30 AM, the west side of the mine exploded. In ensuing days, there were more explosions. 21 miners escaped. 78 died. Of those, 19 still remain in the now sealed mine. I know several the people from whom author Stewart got her information and many of the players on both sides of the litigation. And so, I was briefly prepared to hold Stewart's biased conclusions to my own, well, biased conclusions. Okay, that's darn poor practice for a reviewer or for anyone who wants the name of being "thoughtful." Stewart strongly condemns Consol for safety violations which likely led to the explosion. All of those were related to the accumulation of explosive materials in the mine. I think what bothered me at first was the deep stridency of the author's anti-industry prose before there was any factual development. But then, this is a book and not a courtroom.

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