

CAVE DIVING ACCIDENT

Ulster County Divers Club

Report of the Cave Diving Accident

Cave Diving Fatality of 5 Men

On a Sunday afternoon, February 25, 1962, ten members of the Ulster County Divers Club participated in a dive near Whiteport, NY. Whiteport is approximately 6 miles south of Kingston, NY. This activity was to be a regular bi-monthly club dive. Club divers had been scheduled twice a month and the winter dives were divided between ice dives and cave dives. This type of diving had been a standard practice for several years, performed by club members and though it was not compulsory, many of more experienced divers participated in these activities. Research work for civil defense had been performed in another cave in the area by club members and underwater ice recovery work was always a possibility. Thus this type of diving was considered a necessary and useful endeavor providing some of the club membership experience in case an emergency should arise. The club maintained a record of well conducted recovery and research work with local and community organizations.

The Whiteport cave had been used many times before by club members and divers from other locations. Actual entrance to the underwater part of this cave was accomplished by walking through a 150' long, head-high tunnel that extended into the side of a mountain and opened into a large man made canyon. This canyon had been formed by quarrying of limestone rock. The walls of the canyon rose 50 to 70 feet in height. The width of the canyon was approximately 25 feet and its length extended several hundred feet. The average water table level was approximately one foot below the canyon floor. In the floor of this canyon was an excavation in the form of a shaft which continued downward underwater at a 35- 45 degree angle and opened into a large underwater man made cavern. This

canyon which is directly under the canyon above, was formed into a room 25' wide, several hundred feet long and 40 feet high. The ceiling was 20' thick thus making the floor of the room 60 feet below the surface of the water. A submerged railroad track descended into this shaft. It was supported by a heavily timbered trestle part of the way down to the 60 feet level. This trestle maintained an even incline of 35 to 45 degrees. When the quarry was in operation, cars were pulled up this incline by winching methods.

In line with this descending shaft was another inclined shaft which extended downward through the 60 ft. floor level of the underwater room to a depth of 115 feet. This inclined shaft or tunnel also contained a track for hauling cars up the incline but did not require a trestle.

At the 115 ft. level the shaft continued horizontally as a tunnel. The tunnel roof was arched and was approximately 10 to 15 feet high and approximately the same width.

At the present time the length and condition of this tunnel beyond 150' is unknown but it is felt that it extends to another room which in turn, eventually allows to the surface of the earth at a different location. This theory is partially substantiated on the understanding that mules were once used to haul the railroad cars through the lower tunnel to the incline shaft. The shaft was too steep to remove the mules at this end of the quarrying and another opening had to exist. This quarry work was abandoned approximately 70 years ago.

Four divers geared up in preparation to making two two man dives. Two other club divers were at hand with complete gear and tanks ready and available. A 3/8" manila rope, well connected in three places made up a complete 620' line which was wound on a reel. This reel was mounted on a frame and was capable of being turned by a crank. The reel was placed in position beside the shaft opening for ease of paying out or taking in the line. This safety line was also paint marked every 25 feet. The line tender

would maintain direct contact with the divers by using a signal system of tugging on the line. A reel tender stood behind the line tender and was ready to call off the line footage as the line was payed out. Another club member was assigned the job of time keeper. All air tanks were re-checked for pressure and none were less than 1800 lbs. The day was clear and cold, the water temperature was 39 degrees. The water visibility was ultra-clear.

Upon final checking of the scuba gear before starting the dive, it was found that Gerry Klemm, one of the four divers scheduled to dive, experienced a slight leak in the high pressure teflon washer connection on one of his tanks. By extra tightening it was possible to stop the leak. However, it was felt, since it might be a question of his safety, that instead of 2 dives of 2 men each being made, one 3 man dive would be performed, leaving the 4th man who had previously had a leak problem, as a safety stand-by diver instead of the two as originally planned.

The equipment used by the three divers was as follows:

William Mills Age 43 President of U.C.D.C.

Experience: Scuba - 4 years, Skin 14 years

- 2 70 cubic ft. tanks standard yoke
- 1 US Divers Calypso regulator (built in auto reserve)
- 1 US Divers 250 ft. depth gauge
- 1 knife
- 1 underwater watch
- 1 Burgess light
- 1 Quick release weight belt
- 1 1/4" 2 piece pull over wet suit (complete)
- 1 pr US Divers swim fins
- 1 US Divers champion mask
- 1 compass

David Lasher age 32 Treasurer U.C. D. C.
7 years skin 7 years

Experience: scuba

- 2 70 cu.ft. tanks standard yoke (manual reserve)
- 1 double hose regulator (Divair) (Healthways)
- 1 depth gauge
- 1 knife
- 1 life jacket with CO2 cartridge
- 1 3 cell Aqualux flashlight
- 1 slate and grease pencil with decompression table written on it
- 1 Quick release weight belt
- 1 3/16" 2 pc. wet suit (complete)
- 1 pr. Swimaster Duck feet fins
- 1 mask

Jack Lepinski age 27 Guest member of U.C.D.C.
skin

Experience scuba

- 2 70 cu. ft. tanks
- 2 Sportsway regulators (1 Navy type) (1 sport model) (1 J and 1 K valve)
- 1 depth gauge
- 1 knife
- 1 Burgess light
- 1 underwater watch
- 1 belt type life preserver with CO2 cartridge
- 1 Quick release weight belt
- 1 3/16" wet suit (complete)

All three divers had entered this cave section on previous occasions. One of the club member requirements was to be able to "Buddy Breathe" while swimming a continuous distance of 500 feet underwater. Bills Mills and Dave Lasher were charter members and were two of the most experienced divers in the club. They were also recognized for their capability, calmness and safety. The club is 3 years old.

Jack Lepinski was a member of the U.S. Air Force and was receiving special training at the Kingston, NY IBM plant. It was the practice of the club to allow the men attending this school to obtain guest membership providing they were experienced divers and would submit to a club check-out in the local Y.M.C.A. pool.

Bill Mills had checked out Jack Lepinski on the club requirements and had passed him as a proficient diver. Jack had made a previous dive with Dave Lasher in this same cave. Dave stated that Jack was a good diver and he would dive with him anytime.

Many of the club members had been skin diving since World War II and some of the club members had been using SCUBA gear for at least 6 or more years. Beside physical diving qualifications, it was necessary that all members be at least 21 years of age and male.

On this particular Sunday, the divers were bridled at the end of the safety line. Dave Lasher and Jack Lepinski's lines were approximately 6 ft. long. Dave's line was attached to him by a removable wrist loop. Jack Lepinski's line was tied to his harness. Bill Mills', who was connected by the use of a safety snap, hooked into a metal harness ring, was about 8 feet from the center connection of all three lines. Attached to this center connection was a water filled plastic Clorox jug which carried the names of all three divers and the date. It was planned to leave this jug at the farthest point of the dive as a "Kilroy gesture" for other divers to find at some later date.

This dive had not actually been planned to be a decompression dive. It was agreed that 15 minutes after the divers entered the water they were to return to the surface at a normal rate of ascent. During final test of the regulators and tank valves, it was found that one of Jack Lepinski's tank valves was closed very tightly. It was then turned on. The three men

entered the water at 2:56 pm and descended at a steady and reasonably rapid rate.

At the end of 7 or 8 minutes approximately 460 ft. of line had been payed out. The line stopped at this point and remained stationary.

Approximately 15 minutes from the start of the dive, the line tender, experienced at the job, gave the signal to return by applying three tugs on the safety line. He received 5 tugs in return and started to take in line while passing it through his hands hand over hand to the man who cranked on the reel. The line was retrieved for a distance of approximately 100 ft. where it stopped.

The line tender did NOT pull heavily on the line but only took in the slack. After approximately 2 minutes the line tender gave three more tugs on the safety line as a signal to continue to return. There was no response. The line tender was then backed up by a second man. They gave three more tugs in tandem to create a stronger signal. Again there was no response. This was repeated several times. It was immediately decided that the safety man should go down and investigate.

The time keeper noted that the safety man entered the water 10 - 12 minutes after the 15 minute signal to return was initially given to the divers below. The safety man was attached to the safety line by a sliding loop, the other end of the line was attached to his left arm by using a wrist slip loop. The safety line was held reasonable taut during his descent.

Equipment used by Gerry Klemm age 29 Club Equipment
Chairman

- 2 70 cu. ft. tanks
- 1 automatic and 1 J valve reserve
- 2 regulators
- 1 Healthways Scubair
- 1 US Divers Aquamatic
- 1 knife
- 1 depth gauge
- 1 burgess light
- 1 Quick release weight belt
- 1 pr fins
- face plate
- 1 3/16" 2 pc wet suit (complete)

Gerry Klemm gave the following information.

I swam down the line, until I was swung around when the sliding loop of my wrist line caught on a splice connection of the safety line. I passed the loop over the connection and continued on down the line. I swam down past the trestle to the bottom of the first level. When I started down the second shaft the water began to cloud up. The further I followed the shaft downward the murkier it became. I cleared my ears about 5 or 6 times on the way down. I didn't check my depth gauge. I couldn't see a thing ahead of me so I felt along the left wall of the shaft. I held the light out in front of me so I wouldn't hit something with my head. I kept going, then I hit something. I couldn't even see my own light. I finned to a standing position; I believe I reached the 115 ft. level or horizontal part of the tunnel. I felt something like mud in front of me, a mound about head high and sloping back away from me. I followed my wrist line down to the safety line; it appeared tight against the bottom. I also felt some loops of

rope or something but they would not come free. I tried to feel around for the boys....Nothing.

I figured I couldn't do anything more and decided to cut loose from the safety line so I could get back to the surface quicker. When I slipped off the safety wrist line, I also slipped off the loop holding my light. I lost my light. I started to hand over hand it up the safety line, but the line became slack. Boy! I never was so scared in all my life. I thought the safety line had parted. It came taut again and I started up. When I got to the surface, I don't remember what happened for a few minutes or so.

The men who were on top said Gerry Klemm hit the surface of the water and yelled, "there's been a slide. Pull, pull, Ed get your suit on. Get help."

The men on top had given Gerry slack for a moment when they felt 5 or more fast tugs on the line and mistook them for a signal for more line.

Two club members and a visiting member of a nearby club ran for assistance, for ambulance, doctors, and decompression facilities. Two other club members started to get suited up. The line could not be retrieved, finally six people were pulling and with much effort the line came up slowly. After 10 to 15 ft. of heavy pulling, the line became easier to retrieve and was returned at a steady rate. Just as bubbles started to show at the mouth of the cave, the line became taut again.

Without safety line attachment, Gerry Klemm again entered the water and hand over hand down the safety line he dove and found the following conditions. Approximately 15 ft in front of the divers and loosely sound on the safety line, was a piece of timber about 2" by 6" by 3 ft long. This timber had wedged itself in a indention in the ceiling of the shaft. Dave Lasher was found floating upside down against the ceiling; near him was Jack Lepinski. Bill Mills was missing. Gerry Klemm pulled Dave Lasher and Jack Lepinski down from the ceiling, this action also freed the timber from

the ceiling and the line was pulled in with the two divers attached. The down time of these two divers was over 35 minutes. The timber mentioned above had been wedged approximately 20 ft. inside the edge of the cave.

Dave Lasher and Jack Lepinski were frothing blood from the mouth and nose. They were a slight cyanotic blue in color. Gerry Klemm immediately started mouth to mouth respiration on Dave Lasher and another club member immediately started back pressure arm lift on Jack Lepinski which was replaced almost immediately with mouth to mouth respiration. The two divers were worked on by various qualified men for over a period of two hours. During this time the doctor administered his help and a resuscitator was used. These men were not revived even though effort to make them breathe was continued in the ambulance on the way to the hospital. Due to shock and possible embolism, Gerry Klemm was also taken to the hospital by ambulance. Upon observation for several days in the hospital, Gerry Klemm was released without any apparent physical damage.

While efforts were being made to revive the two divers that were retrieved, it was felt that the missing diver Bill Mills might have unsnapped himself and was possibly lost in the cave or had tried to escape to one of several air holes located in the ceiling of the large upper chamber. A search was carried on at the air holes that were accessible; meanwhile the State Police arrived and maintained law and order among gathering spectators. They also helped arriving Fire Dept's, provided radio communication for immediate helicopter stand by service from Steward Air Force base and took over official command of all rescue activities. Local Fire Dept's assisted wherever possible. Club members were not allowed to enter the cave for a search, because of the possible danger involved. The curtailment of diving activities, proved at a later date to be the correct decision.

It was later revealed, that somehow during resuscitation operations on the two divers that were retrieved, a local diver unfamiliar to the club

members had entered the cave a short distance but returned and reported that the water was too murky to see anything. Recent discussion disclosed that this man's name was Bill Mastro and that he had dived in this cave before.

Observations made of the deceased divers and their equipment when they were removed from the cave are as follows.

Dave Lasher - Mask missing. Intake hose torn apart and mouth piece hanging. No air in tanks due to but intake hose. Slight traces of mud on the neck and chest. No apparent external physical damage. (Note) It was later observed at the State Troopers barracks that Dave's depth gauge was stuck at 50 feet. Mud was cleared from the orifice and the gauge and the needle returned to zero.

Jack Lepinski - Mask around neck, mouth piece hanging, one tank empty, one tank showed 1300 lbs. Traces of muck on neck and chest. Striated black lines or marks visible longitudinally on his yellow tank harness.

Many family members were present. Mr. Mills and his family were both at the dive. The scene of anguish will long be remembered by those members who were at the accident.

The search for Bill Mills was given up as darkness fell. Members of the club offered their services to State Police for any recovery work that might take place the next day,

The following day, Monday 26th several members assisted State Police at their barracks in identifying the deceased gear. All gear appeared to be in good working condition except the torn intake hose on Dave Lasher's regulator.

An official State Police recovery team was called upon for assistance. They arrived early Monday afternoon and reviewed the scene of the

accident. After detailed questioning of the club members as to the underwater configuration of the cave; it was decided by the Captain in charge of this team, that under the circumstances existing he would not expose his men to an underwater recovery attempt at this time. All club members greatly respected the frankness and sincerity of this decision. Hard hat divers were contacted by officials, but they were not successful in locating a volunteer to do this type of work.

Late Monday afternoon, the State Police contacted an officer of the Ulster County Divers Club for more consultation about the cave and also what he thought of any recovery operations. This man was somewhat familiar with the cave but had not been at the scene of the accident. therefore he had not been subjected to the mental duress of the divers who were there at the time of the accident. This club member said that he felt he could make an exploratory dive safely, providing extreme caution on his part was exercised. He described in detail exactly what steps would be taken in setting up such a dive, and that he would not take any unnecessary chances and thus expose the safety stand-by divers that he needed. He was again reminded that consultation was not for the purpose of getting a diver but to decide what other measure of recovery could be performed. This man was finally given permission to make an exploratory dive. It was felt that by Tuesday morning, 27th good visibility would have once again returned to the cave water. The following plan was consist of 7 club members and one local unaffiliated diver. All men volunteered their services. The unaffiliated divers name was Fred Schindler. This man stood by at the cave all day Monday with the hope that the State Police would accept his services. He was recognized as an experienced diver and also familiar with the cave. On this basis the club officer in charge of this dive accepted his services. Fred Schindler acted as the second back-up diver on the recovery team.

Available at the scene would be an ambulance, furnished by the Round-Out Valley 1st Aid Rescue Squad, let by Herman Miller, the State Police and their recovery team and Mr. Nichols of Nichols Oxygen Co.

from East Hyde Park, NY who volunteered his services as a registered male nurse and provided several large tank of air plus oxygen and a special regulator with 150 ft. of hose attached. To show the willingness of the people to help, the wife of Mr. Markle, the Town Supervisor provided the men who participated in the recovery operations with not coffee and donuts. The weather was cold and damp.

The diving plan was as follows; The lead diver would use two 70 cu.ft.tanks plus two regulators and three lights. The buddy system would be used, it was felt that the less men in this cave the better thus one man would act as a lead diver; he would be attached to the end of the safety line buy a removable wrist loop. Following him at a distance of 120 ft. would be the 1st back-up man. It was planned to use no more than two divers in the water unless an emergency existed. It was hope that the second and third back-up team would be on stand-by only. It was also felt that the 120 ft spacing would allow for clear signal transfer to and from the surface and that the visibility would be good enough for the two divers to see each other and their lights. If an emergency did exist the second back up diver would swim to the 1st back-up divers location and if all was a o.k. at this position he would remain there and the 1st back-up diver would proceed cautiously and investigate. The 1st, 2nd and 3rd back-up diver were attached to the safety line by using a short piece of line employing a loop around the safety line on one end and a removable wrist loop on the other end of the line.All men wore knives as well as depth gauges and lights. All tanks were rechecked for pressure just before the start of the dive. Each man understood his job and debriefing took place several times. The line tender was the same man who tended the line on that fateful Sunday and had requested this job during the recovery operations. The same line and reel arrangement were also used. When the lead diver entered the water the line tender was to take charge of the operations.

The rope signals used were as follows: 1 tug all ok, 2 tugs - hold, 3 tugs - take slack, pull easy and slow, If the line becomes taut with no ok signal immediately send down diver to investigate. Under planned procedure he

would report conditions by returning with the 1st back-up diver, if he was down or help the 1st back-up diver if possible or stand by and allow him to investigate with caution.

The lead divers plan was to inspect every inch of shaft, roof and sidewalls as he progressed downward and to expend minimum effort in order to cut down as much as possible any disturbance from his exhaust bubbles. He was also obligated to follow this procedure because of the other diver following him.

As the lead diver entered the cave and traveled a short distance down, he observed that the water was still murky. Visibility was limited to about 10 ft. He gave the signal to return and upon returning to the surface reported the water conditions to the other members of the team. It was decided that the original plan would still hold and that only line signals could be relied upon. Since the temperature was close to freezing, he replaced the regulator he had used with a duplicate type to assure a dry regulator when he reentered the water, so as to prevent any possibility of a freeze-up while he was above the water. He again entered the cave and progressed downward slowly. He experienced difficulty in inspecting the ceiling sidewalls and bottom because of the lack of visibility and to continually swim up and down in order to inspect all the parts of the tunnel, trestle work and space below it. He continued this search pattern slowly and cautiously until he had taken out about 120 ft of line. Meanwhile recognition (ok) signals were being initiated by the diver below and acknowledged by the line tender. He found Bill Mills shortly after reaching 120 ft. Bill was lying on his side on the edge of the railroad trestle. There was no appearance of a struggle but it did appear that his tank valves might have caught on the trestle as he was being pulled in, and enough force had been exerted to open the steel loop of the harness ring and the safety snap had been fastened to. His mouth piece was hanging and his mask was in place. At this depth which was approximately 60 ft he was a slight negative buoyancy. The lead diver picked him up and gave the signal to return to the surface.

Bill Mills body did not show any signs of visible physical injury. His double tank rig still contained 850 lbs. of pressure in each tank and his regulator functioned correctly.

The coroner's report showed that the three divers had died of asphyxiation. The report also revealed that there was no evidence of physical damage to any part of the body on any of the divers. There was no trace of heart failure and the general condition of all divers appeared to be good.

Conclusions and Recommendations

At the present writing, the exact nature of what caused this catastrophe is not known; however an underwater disturbance must have occurred when reviewing the available evidence.

Upon questioning many divers who had been in this cave before, it was reported by all that the water was always ultra clear. It is therefore reasonable to assume that considerable underwater disturbance existed in order to cause murky water throughout the cave for over a two day period.

The mud clogged in Dave Lasher's depth gauge signifies something.

The possibility of a subterranean disturbance or the irritating affect caused by exhaust bubbles escaping at approximately 4 absolute atmospheres of pressure might be considered a contributing factor.

After careful consideration and calculations by some of the club divers regarding the temperature and depth of water, it is felt that the deceased divers had stopped breathing several minutes before efforts were made to retrieve them.

The people on the surface during the time of the accident said there was no visible or audible indication of any underwater disturbance.

Jack Lepinski's diving light showed heavy damage, as though torn apart.

As near as calculations will permit these three men were not pulled by force before their downtime exceeded 27-32 minutes, which would be getting near the time they would run into serious decompression problem especially when considering the temperature.

Vapor freezing of the regulators and valves was not discounted; however there were no visible evidence of water vapor in Bill Mills tanks or in any club member's tanks that were tested and had received air from the same bank of tanks.

The piece of 2" by 6" by 3 ft long timber, which was buoyant, shows some fouling of the safety line. This fouling could have triggered a disturbance. It is possible the divers themselves tried to free the line during their return and thus triggered a cave in.

Discussion with other divers familiar with the cave revealed that to their knowledge only the upper level of the cave contained cribbing or timber work.

Gerry Klemm's report was checked with other divers to find if there might be some mistake of misinterpreting some previous obstruction in the lower tunnel. for a new obstruction. All divers questioned on this matter reported the lower tunnel clear of obstructions.

A recheck with the coroner verified that there was no physical damage visible on Dave Lasher's wrist; it is assumed the strain of heavy pulling on the life line should have imposed damage, if it were the body of the divers

that were being pulled. It should be remembered that Dave was the only member attached by the wrist.

The air used for this dive was obtained from the club air bank. This air was furnished to the club by a pharmaceutical supplier, who in turn received his supply from the Edison Compressed Gas Co., a large and reputable organization.

The air in the club bank and also in Bill Mills' tanks have been tested with the following devices:

- 1- Pyrite oxygen indicator made by Bacharach Industrial Instrument Co.
- 2- Vapor Tester, made by Davis Instruments Model m-1 Type L

Oxygen content in all tanks showed within readable limits a 21% quantity of oxygen in the air of all tanks tested. The Davis vapor instrument, which is capable of detecting flammable gas content, one of these being carbon monoxide did not reveal any flammable gas content in any tanks. Recognizing that a gas spectrometer test would be a better test as to the condition of the air, it is felt that results of these two tests made with the above instruments does indicate that the air was normal; however a spectrometer test of Bill Mills' tank has not been discounted and may be performed in the near future. Dave Lasher's tank was empty and Jack Lepinski's gear and tanks were returned to the Air Force.

Discussion with a few local people who know a great deal about these caves, feel that it may be possible to pump the water out of this one; however this operation may become expensive and lengthy if not very difficult. They do not feel there is another opening to this cave. It is agreed that mud seam accumulations contained in a fault in the limestone formation is possible and could have contributed to the accident.

The club divers concurred that it would be safer to enter this cave with water in it, than after the water had been removed.

It is questionable at this time whether man made limestone caves or excavations are save diving areas. Where temperatures do not go below freezing an erosion action due to frost will not occur and thus allow at least the surface entrance to be more stable.

This sport like any other, does present an element of risk, most of which can be anticipated in open water.

The use of the safety line in certain kinds of cave diving may be questioned, also the type of safety line to be used whether it should be buoyant or not and of what size. Should the safety or life line become a underwater phone line?

It must be recognized that the slight disturbance placed on objects that night have remained in a static condition for a long period of time, as deterioration slowly ate at them, could set off a chain reaction that might be disastrous.

This club is presently discontinuing all cave and ice diving activities, unless they are called upon by the local officials to perform a specific duty.

A recent return trip to the cave revealed that a part of the 150 ft tunnel leading into the canyon area has collapsed, this no doubt has been caused by the action of spring thaws.

Underwater photographs may be taken in the future; however with the spring thaws any activities within the cave should be curtailed.

Several years ago Tom Hains a previous member of the club who moved away from this area, questioned the safety of diving in these local caves. It was not possible to measure the value of his wisdom at that time.

Many members have been very close to the immediate families of the deceased. The risk involved at this time in making another exploratory dive is unknown. The possibility of raising public indignation no matter how slight an accident that might occur, can also be anticipated. All these things tell us, even though we are very anxious to know, that we should discontinue further investigation for the present time. The State Police would have to sanction further investigation in this cave.

We have received many kind letters of encouragement. We are very grateful for the cooperation we have received from local Fire Dept's, Civil Defense and Rescue Squads. The newspaper and radio have been understanding. Above all we thank the State Police and their diving team for the support that was so important.

We will continue to try and maintain a record of good service to the local communities and above all follow safe practices. If there are any suggestions or criticisms about this report or further information needed, do not hesitate to contact us.

William S. Parker Vice-Pres. U.C.D.C.

13 North Manheim Blvd. New Paltz, NY

Feb 25 1962

Skindiving In Quarry— Three Die

Special to the *Herald Tribune*
KINGSTON, N. Y.

Three skindivers perished yesterday in the murky water of an abandoned quarry at the suburban hamlet of Whiteport. A fourth, who had exhausted himself in heroic attempts at rescuing the other three, was taken to the Benedictine Hospital here.

The victims, members of the Ulster County Divers Club of Kingston, had gone to the quarry on a practice diving exercise on SKINDIVERS—P. 2

Skindivers

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cise in cold water and were trapped by a mud slide 150 feet below the surface.

Eight members of the club, to which fifteen diving buffs belong, went on the exercise, their third at the quarry, which is in the foothills of the Shawangunk Mountains. They passed into a cave at the entrance and back about 150 feet to the quarry itself, picking their way with the aid of flashlights.

Three of the eight—David Lasher, thirty-two, of 192 Hurley Ave., Kingston; Jack Lepinski, twenty-eight, of 124 W. Chestnut St., Kingston, and William Mills sr., forty-five, also of Kingston,—slipped into the chill waters. The other five held guide ropes on the quarry's bank. The divers dropped to 150 feet, then made a left turn for another 150 feet.

Fire Companies Alerted

Suddenly all movement on the guide ropes ceased and no bubbles rose to the surface. Gerry Clemm, twenty-seven, of Kingston, dropped down to see what was wrong. He reappeared with moments later with the inert form of Mr. Lasher. He passed him up to his companions and went down again, bringing up Mr. Lepinski.

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Again he went down, only to bob up at the point of exhaustion and report Mr. Mills buried in the mud.

While artificial respiration was applied to the three men, a hurry call was sent out for state troopers. At the Kingston sub-station, volunteer fire companies in Bloomington, Tilton and Stone Ridge were alerted and brought 100 men to the scene.

News of the tragedy went out over the radio. Soon the families of the eight members hurried to the scene. Several priests showed up. Scores of residents of the area converged on the cave. Dr. Anthony Tocco, of Stone Ridge, pronounced Mr. Lasher and Mr. Lepinski dead.

Mr. Clemm was taken to the Benedictine Hospital in Kingston, where his condition last night was reported fair. Arrangements were made for divers with professional equipment to attempt to bring up the body of Mr. Mills, who was president of the club.

Mudslide in Quarry Kills 3 Skindivers

Special to The New York Times

WHITEPORT, N. Y., Feb. 25

—Three skindivers died today in the frigid water of a deep pool at a quarry here.

They were trapped by a mudslide after they had swum into a tunnel leading off from the main pool at a depth of about 150 feet. While they were trapped, their oxygen supply ran out.

A fourth skindiver, who would have been with them if his own oxygen equipment had been working properly, retrieved two bodies. The third victim was believed pinned by rocks.

The bodies recovered were those of two Kingston men, John Lepinsky, 28 years old, of 124 Chestnut Street, and David F. Lasher, 32, of 192 Hurley Avenue. William Mills Sr., 48,

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3 SKINDIVERS DIE IN MUDSLIDE TRAP

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of near-by Port Ewen, was the third victim.

All belonged to the Ulster County Skindivers Association, a group that had frequently practiced cold water diving in this quarry and others in the region.

The quarry, which once produced rock for cement, has not been worked for seventy-five years. It is a labyrinth of caves and tunnels, about 300 feet from the Whiteport-Binnewater road.

The skindivers went there early this afternoon. In addition to the three who died, there were Jerry Klemm, 27, and four observers from another diving club.

Using flashlights, they penetrated to the quarry's main pool, which is about the size of a baseball diamond and has a known depth of at least 300 feet.

The four members of the Ulster County club donned their rubber diving suits, flippers, swimming masks and oxygen tanks. Mr. Klein, however, found that his oxygen regulator was malfunctioning. Instead of joining the dive, he acted as anchor man by holding ropes tied to the three other divers.

Descending about 130 feet, the trio began exploring a shaft that extends some 100 feet from the pool proper. What happened then remained unclear.

It was believed, however, that one of the divers may have jarred a rock and touched off the mudslide.

When air bubbles suddenly stopped appearing, Mr. Klemm dived in despite his faulty equipment and brought Mr. Lepinsky and Mr. Lasher to the surface while the spectators went for help.

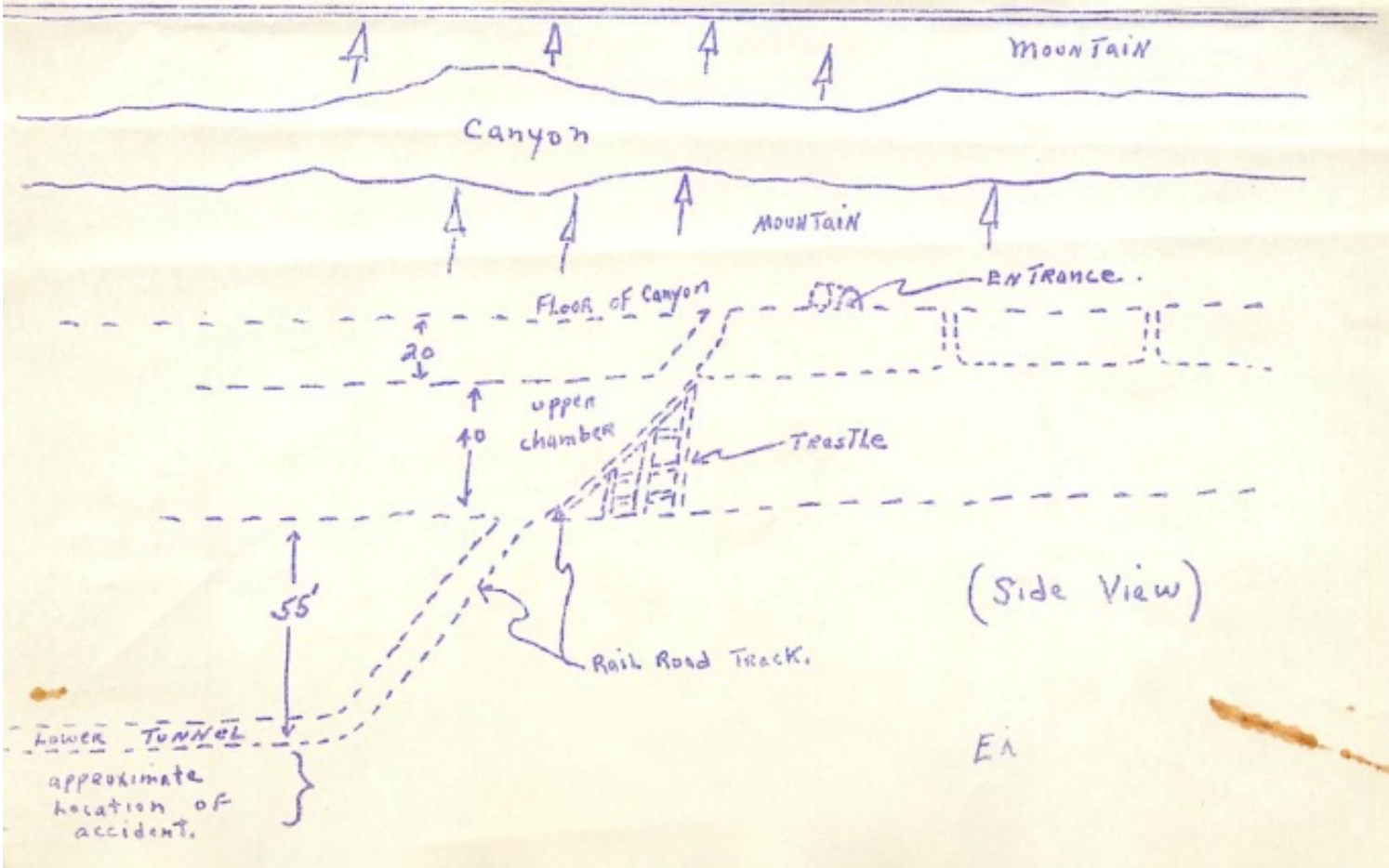
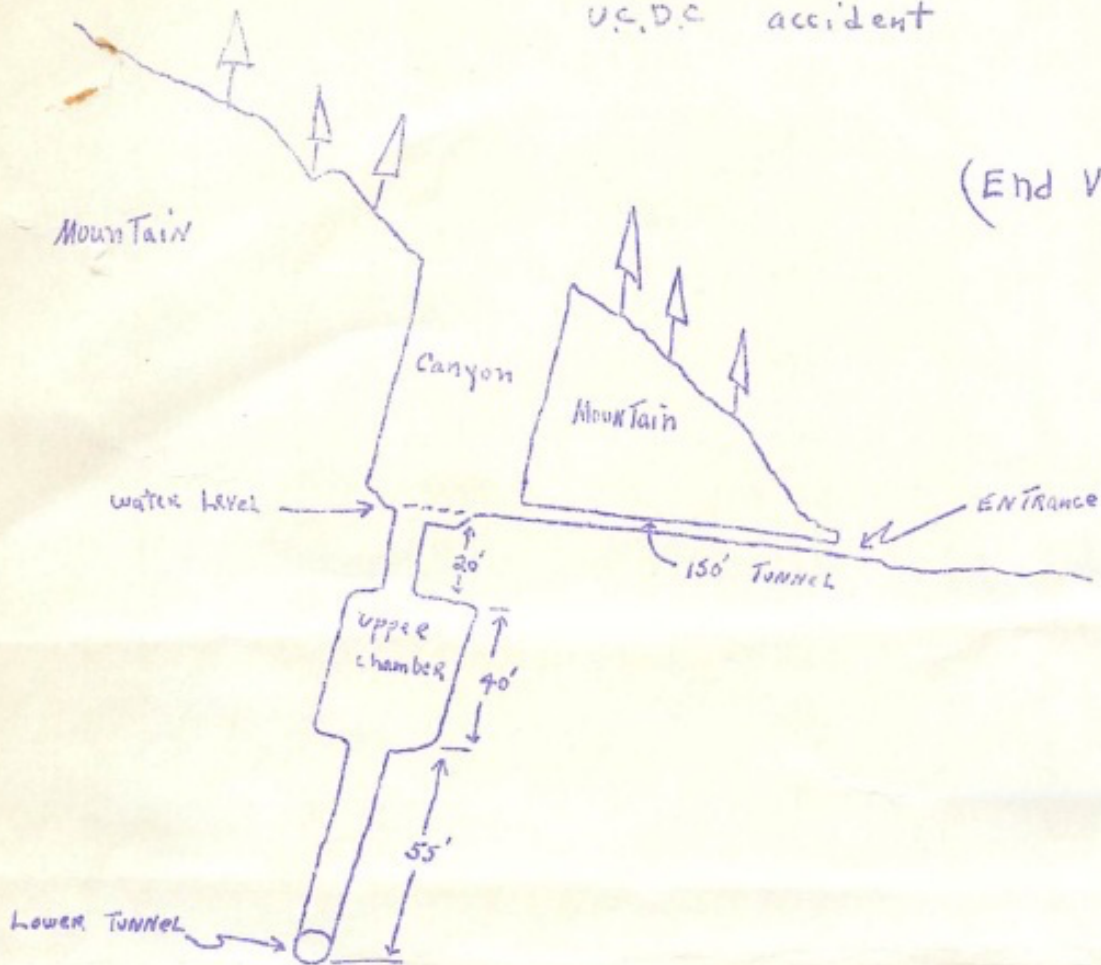
State Troopers, Sheriff's Officers and firemen from Binnewater, Rosendale and Bloomington rushed to the quarry. Resuscitation equipment failed to revive the victims.

Mr. Klemm, suffering from lack of oxygen and exhaustion, was taken to Benedictine Hospital in Kingston, where his condition was reported as fair.

Efforts to recover Mr. Mills' body were suspended at 6:30. The authorities plan to resume tomorrow, using a professional diver from Albany.

U.C.D.C. accident

(End View)



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