

Commentary

This story describes the RCMP's working theory of how nine men were murdered in Yellowknife's Giant Mine last Sept. 18. The account is pieced together from court documents, union, company and RCMP press releases and interviews with mine officials, striking miners, miners who crossed the picket line, explosive experts, RCMP and FBI psychological profile experts and confidential sources. The men will be referred to as Suspect-1 and Suspect-2 in this story. Another key party will be known as Man-1.

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YELLOWKNIFE — The destructive power of the bomb radiated out of the mine. In the past year it has poisoned much in Yellowknife.

The reward for information leading to the arrest of the murderers has reached \$307,000. Posters all over town trumpet this fact. But most Yellowknifers don't notice the posters anymore. They are thankful if they can avoid talking about the crime.

But for the miners and the RCMP, the crime doesn't fade. It's an obsession. Men and women on both sides have been pushed to the edge. Some of them have been irreparably damaged by the stress and anguish.

For the obsessed, the only remaining question is one that no one in Yellowknife can answer: when will the arrest come?

The decision will be made by a crown prosecutor. Twice already Calgary crown prosecutor Peter Martin has travelled to Yellowknife to review the case, once in early July, once in late August. Charges were reported to be imminent before both visits. Nothing happened.

The RCMP want more evidence before they go to court.

"We're not satisfied that there is no more evidence to be gathered," says police spokesman Sgt. Dave Grundy.

Nothing much is happening in the 16-month-old strike either. Union leaders say the murder investigation shouldn't get in the way of a settlement, but Royal Oak management sees it otherwise. Until someone is charged there will be no settlement, says mine manager Bill Heath.

Royal Oak can't take the chance of putting murderers into the mine with innocent men, Heath says. "It's a dark, cloistered type of environment. You have to be able to trust the people you work with."

The only solution is for the government to step in and force a solution through binding arbitration, says union vice-president Rick Cassidy.

But Heath is against such a step. "That sends a signal to everybody who is on strike that if you get really violent the powers-that-be will force binding arbitration on you."

The CASAW union hall in a bowling alley building is the striking miners' castle, their stronghold. They go there to have a cigarette, get cheered up by their buddies. Posters encouraging them to keep up the fight cover the walls.

"We will last one day longer than Royal Oak," reads one.

A child's drawing on the wall shows a Miss Piggy rocket ship burning up. "Scabs landed on the sun for one sec," the caption reads. "But then the ship melted and . . . Look, a pudel (sic) of slime."

The largest banner runs along the top of three walls. It's signed by union members from across Canada. It was sent from union hall to union hall, from the West Coast to the East.

In an hour-long meeting with president Harry Seeton, he smiles only when he talks about this banner. It's been a year of hell for him and his men, a year of hate literature, anonymous threats over the telephone, bar fights and of people yelling murderer at them.

One day Marvin Tremblett noticed his young daughter was down-hearted at the supper table. That day at school, a boy said her daddy was a murderer. Tremblett held that pain inside and did nothing but contact the principal. But if anyone ever assaults his girl, Tremblett says he'll murder them. The same sentiment is repeated again and again by men on both sides of the line.

Of the union's original 240

MURDER IN A YELLOWKNIFE GOLD MINE: CONCLUSION

'Who killed you, Joe? Who the hell did it?'

An Edmonton Journal Special Report

members, about 150 remain loyal. The others either crossed the line or quit to take other jobs. Though strikers have been able to collect unemployment insurance because the mine is running at near full production, many of them are almost broke.

Striker Terry Legge has had to sell his home to get by. "This past year and a half have been the worst years of my life," he says. "I've been borderline sometimes, I'll tell you that."

"We were literally shattered after that explosion," Seeton says. "If you're called murderers in the newspaper and the community looks upon you as the people who committed this terrible blast, you can't describe what it feels like."

If a murderer is caught and owns up to the crime, he'll get no sympathy from the striking miners.

Castrate him, says one union man, Al Shearing.

Hang him high, says Marvin Tremblett.

You put him in the chair and I'll throw the switch, says Legge.

After the blast, the union executive advised members to grant interviews to the RCMP. Most of the men have now talked to the police at least once.

The Major Crimes Investigation unit from Edmonton flew up to start the job of interviewing suspects. A team of 25 investigators has done the bulk of the work.

Early on, Harry Seeton became upset by the RCMP's repeated requests for follow-up meetings and with the tone of some interviews.

"What they're doing is trying to convince everybody in the union to turn everybody against each other," striker Tremblett says. "And it's not working."

In a letter to the RCMP public complaints commission last November, Seeton complained union members had been subjected to threats of charges, false accusations and criticisms of the union's lawyers and of the union. He charged the police have been biased since the start of the strike. Too many union men have been charged for picket-line violations, not enough Pinkerton security guards and Royal Oak miners.

The RCMP admits to some mistakes in its handling of the labor dispute and have tried to correct any errors, says spokesman Grundy.

But Grundy makes no apologies for the murder investigation. "We have definite suspects. We are concentrating on those suspects."

Follow-up interviews are necessary, Grundy says. "We're not harassing them. What we're doing is we're trying to find out the entire truth of the matter."

Grundy says every angle has been investigated, including the suspicion held by many union miners that the blast was set by someone at Royal Oak or the Pinkerton guards. "Everybody was a suspect to start out with and from there we've narrowed it down to the suspects that we have now."

Not every interview with strikers has been angry. Vice-president Cassidy says he was treated well.

"Our members don't trust the RCMP as far as they could throw them," Cassidy says.

"Personally, I don't color the RCMP all the same, just like I don't want anybody to color everybody the same in our house. If anybody was charged with anything, just because one person does something doesn't mean the other people did it."

A sore point between the union and the RCMP has been the refusal of many union members to admit the blast was a murder, not an accident.

On the day of the blast, the union released a statement claiming the doomed miners had gone against regulations and were being transported with 50 bags of Amex, 10 boxes of stick powder, and two boxes of B-line explosives. The man-car derailed and the explosives went off.

Royal Oak management immediately said the union's claim was



Giant Mine striker climbs lookout tower during strike, while below, Territorial Assembly Member Michael Ballantyne tells fellow legislators about the bombing and deaths at the mine.

ridiculous. No explosives went down into the mine that morning until half an hour after the blast. Miner George Samardija, who saw the nine miners head down the 750 corridor, said there were no explosives in the man-car.

The RCMP post-blast team from Ottawa sifted through the mess at the blast site, looking for clues about the bomb. Huge lights were set up in the corridor.

"This place was set up like an archaeological dig," says Royal Oak miner Rick Doherty.

Bits of the bomb and other debris were found and sent off to Ottawa for analysis. To further disprove the accident theory, RCMP technicians ran man-cars over different types of explosives again and again. Not once did the explosives go off. Indeed, Amex can't be detonated by impact, it must be ignited by a blasting cap.

The post-blast team's investigation has determined beyond any doubt that the blast was indeed deliberately set, Grundy says.

Despite such evidence, some striking miners still stick to the accident theory.

"In order for me to be convinced it's murder, when they arrest somebody, then that person has got to get on the witness stand and say, 'I done it,' "

Tremblett says.

In the Newfoundland fishing village where he grew up, Tremblett's dad taught him to respect three things: the clergy, his elders and the RCMP. He says his dad would slap him for saying it, but he can no longer respect the police. He believes police are trying to frame Suspect-1 and Suspect-2.

He and other union men wonder why the bomb went off at 8:35 a.m. and it took until 10:25 until police were notified. Royal Oak officials have repeatedly explained how the confusion after the blast led to the delay.

Seeton says he'll wait to see the police evidence before he decides what happened. Otherwise, he tries not to think about the investigation.

"We can't concentrate on what happened Sept. 18. What good is it going to do us? It's going to drive us crazy."

Along with the magnitude of



the crime, the case will be remembered for the RCMP's unprecedented use of the polygraph. About 45 men have taken it. In the September interview, Const. Alan McCambridge tried to convince a suspect to take the test by saying the polygraph is an investigative tool, a highly accurate, scientific way to see if someone is being truthful or dishonest.

"You know this is one way of helping us to eliminate you as a suspect," McCambridge said.

"If I had the RCMP on my ass, OK, talking to me, I'd want to be eliminated now 'cause I don't need the hassle."

Marvin Tremblett was asked to take the polygraph. He was taken to a room in the Explorer Hotel. He sat in an armchair, with pillows under his arms to keep them out from his body. He was then hooked up to the FactFinder. Probes were attached to his index and ring fingers to measure his sweat activity. Around his chest went two coiled cords to measure his breathing. On his arm was a cuff to monitor blood pressure.

The polygraph test lasts 2 to 5 hours. Many men found it to be

an ordeal, even though they passed. Some of them men broke down in tears of relief.

Tremblett passed his test — he didn't know anything about the Sept. 18 murders, just as he had always claimed.

Union president Harry Seeton refused the polygraph and disapproves of his men getting pressured to take the test. But he's even more upset about requests for them to be hypnotized. The police say they have used hypnosis a few times to help men remember details of events.

"We're just waiting for the truth serum to be brought in," Seeton says.

By early spring, the RCMP had interviewed more than 500 people. Now a new phase of the investigation began: 16 searches were carried out in Yellowknife and across Western Canada and, in a major breakthrough, another bomb was found.

Among the items seized were four black quartz clock movements, batteries, clothes pegs, a black face mask, a red circuit tester, two rubber surgical gloves, automotive wire, electrical con-

nectors, VISA slips and written material about weapons and explosives.

In early April, police found another bomb in a trailer in a backyard. The owner, believed to be completely innocent of any wrong-doing, immediately notified the RCMP.

"Yes, it was in the trailer in my yard," he says. "I don't know how it got there."

Throughout April, the police followed the paper trail of VISA slips to search stores in Vancouver and Edmonton.

In May, relations between the union and the RCMP completely broke down over a letter sent from Yellowknife RCMP commander B.G. Watt to a Quebec union leader. In the letter, Watt told the union leader that CASAW leaders had accepted "the fact that the explosion was the result of a deliberate criminal act and that we are appropriately investigating the incident as a multiple murder."

In his letter of rebuttal, Seeton said the union executive did not accept that the blast was a criminal act. He also criticized the RCMP investigation, saying his members and their families had suffered greatly because of RCMP tactics. "Although we agreed to interviews, what has taken place is intense interrogations."

The rift between the union executive and the police was complete. "They lie to us left and right and we got to the point that we don't see the RCMP now," Seeton says.

For this story, Suspect-1 asked for a list of questions before he would grant an interview. At first, he sounded as if he might be open to answering them, but he said, "Right at this point in time I really don't know who I can trust."

A meeting was set up. But when two Journal reporters arrived, Suspect-1 rebuffed them.

"I'm not shaking your hands," he said. "Parasite number one and parasite number two."

Before going any further, Suspect-1 set up his own video camera and a tape recorder. He said he is unhappy with The Journal's coverage of the Sept. 18 blast.

Suspect-1 refused to talk about his dealings with the RCMP. "I don't feel it's in my best interests or the best interests of the investigation to comment on any of that at this time."

The blast site in the 750 corridor is back in use. New tracks and pipes have been installed. The main reminder of the murders is a large puddle beside the tracks where the bomb sat.

On a tour of the mine, miner Rick Doherty points up at ceiling of the blast site. Wood splinters are embedded in the hardrock. They are from the man-car, Doherty says.

But for a chance occurrence that took him to a different level of the mine on the morning of Sept. 18, Doherty would have been in the doomed man-car.

"I hope the murderers are caught," Doherty says. "It will be the beginning of the healing process. Everything is in limbo until they're caught. We have murderers among us and nobody in town likes that."

In the weeks after the blast, a foul smell came from the blast site. After the police were finished investigating the site, miners complained about the smell to mine management. A blanket of white mould started to grow. It looked like a macabre undersea garden, hairy fungus creeping down the ceiling. Finally, the corridor was washed with lime.

Still, the place haunts mine workers. Long-time mine handyman George Samardija can't get the face of his best friend Joe Pandev out of his mind.

Joe was 55 and had crossed the line because he was afraid of losing his pension. He was looking forward to retiring soon and spending time with his grandchildren.

Now when George Samardija passes the blast site he says aloud the names of Joe and of David Vodnoski and the other dead men.

And Samardija asks, "Who killed you, Joe? Who the hell did it?"

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