Don Livermore

Date of Interview: 2009

Interviewer: Margaret Cook

See comments from page 9 about Box Flat. In particular, evidence on pages 14 and 15 from the Warden's Inquiry.

My first involvement with the coal mining industry was prior to my becoming an apprentice electrician, actually, when I worked for contractors in Ipswich in Bell Street, called H G Walkers. It was in 1944, and I was 14 years and four months old. My first paid day was underground at Haighmoor, installing the pumps to pump water out. It was an old mine and it had to be de-watered.

We went round quite a few mines. Ipswich in those days was a real hive of industry. The war was still going. There was big demand for a lot of the things that Ipswich produced. It had its own gasworks for producing gas from coal which came from the mines. Rosewood/Walloon area coal was best for making the gas. Woollen mills – there were three major woollen mills, there were sawmills all over the place, ply mills, not to mention the Railway Workshops, which employed a lot of people, too. Transport during the War period was very demanding. It was all coal-fired steam trains, and it was quite a few years after that before we saw the first diesel, and then you get into the electric trains.

It played a major role – in Ipswich, I'm talking about – in the development of Queensland, and specifically through those stressful times.

Interviewer: Were there manpower shortages?

Yes, because the manpower had taken away quite a few of the qualified people into special jobs, including electricians and people that were qualified and had experience in other fields also. Anyway, I stayed there until I became an electrical tradesman, which was about 1950/51, and then I managed to get a full-time job in the mining industry as an electrician at Haighmoor Colliery, the one I had mentioned previously.

At that time I couldn't say with any accuracy how many people were actually working there. I'd say 70 or 80

or something like that, at that time, 1953. They had several mines or responsibility for several mines. One was New Hope, which was old mines that had been reopened again, started. I used to go there doing electrical work, and the manager initially was a chappie who was Fatty Williams. We called him "Fatty." I can't remember his name. His brother was the most well-known and respected doctor in Ipswich.

I recall very vividly Beres Evans, who was an apprentice at that time, and I used to go to do electrical work at New Hope Colliery on an Army Indian motorbike with Beres on the back. Now, that's true – and he doesn't like me saying it. We only joke about it.

After working there for quite a few years, I went to Mt Elliott Colliery.

Interviewer: You said they had a few mines. They had New Hope. What others did they have?

Several others, yes. When I was working for HG Walker, and in 1945 – in fact, it was 2 February, 1945 – there was an explosion at the New Ebbw Vale Mine at Woodend. Ebbw Vale is a suburb near Bundamba and is named after a city in Wales. It was first settled by coal miners from Wales, like my wife Shirley's grandparents. Shirley and I went looking for it a few weeks ago. We couldn't find it, actually. It's all different now.

Anyway, at that explosion we were doing the electrical work from H G Walkers at that time, and there were four people killed in the explosion. One of them was one of my uncles, and that really stuck very, very hard in my mind, of how dangerous an occupation underground mining can be. For some reason my mind challenged this.

Anyway, after gaining my mine electrician's ticket, I moved to Mt Elliott Colliery, where the manager there was a fellow by the name of Roy Wass. He was also a part owner and there was quite a group of mines that were all separate little businesses. The people that were directors there, there was Dale and Fallu, who was a solicitor in those days. Dick Beaumont was well known because he had Dick Beaumont's buses. They were very well known because they were forever breaking down. You couldn't buy new ones. There were quite a number of other people that I could mention.

During these years I also worked as a contract coal miner to qualify as required for "at the face experience" for a total of 18 months.

So I was responsible as a mine electrician for Mt Elliott, Mountain View, Amberfield, Coalfields, Moreton Extended, and one at Moggill called Riverside, so I was a pretty busy little fellow. But I studied during this time and got my First Class Mine Manager's ticket.

Then in 1960 I was successful in getting a job as Colliery Manager at Caledonian Collieries in the Rosewood/Walloon area. I was there for approximately six and a half years. Then the group was owned by Binnie's, and the two directors I knew were Arnold Binnie and Bob Binnie. They had to bring the pays up every Friday. It was a different world, totally.

Anyway, they then in 1966 moved me into Cornwall, Edward S Cornwall Mine, as the Manager.

Interviewer: And where was that one?

That was not far from Blackheath, and it originally had been owned and established by the – I think we called it the City Electric Light – and I think the name E S Cornwall came from one of the original developers of the Electrical Supply Companies in South East Queensland. I was certainly told that.

Anyway, it was a pretty big job to be responsible as the Mine Manager for that place. It was faced with a lot of difficulties. It was very steep, there were a large number of faults, and we were surrounded by other old workings and a great deal of care had to be given as to where you were going to mine next week.

At the end of that year, I applied and got a job at Collinsville, with Dacon Collieries. Now, papers relating to that are all lying on the table there. There were two mining companies operating in underground coal mines, and some opencut work in the Collinsville area at that time. One was called B.C.C.M, Bowen Consolidated Coal Mines, and the other one was Dacon Collieries, which originated from an overseas company, mainly from the United States. They used to send a director out every so often to see that we were toeing the line. Dacon had bought out the two State Mines No. 1 and No. 2

Well, the Superintendent was George Sanderson, and he was obviously older than I, and it was a pretty big deal for my wife and I to move to Collinsville, because we had six children. We had a home in Ipswich, and we rented it and they paid to move our furniture. We were supplied with a home which they made big enough for six children and two adults, and that was supplied. We were only there two and a half years, but I was initially manager of the Garrick seam we were working - but the main coal seam was called the Bowen coal seam, and it was a very good coal seam.

One of their two underground mines at that time was mining in the Bowen, but I was managing the name of the other one, the name of which I was very familiar with then. Anyway, we were only there for two and a half years, and during that time I had six months looking after a drilling and exploration company, part of Dacon Collieries. The coal from the Garrick seam was used for a trial export of coking coal from

the port of Bowen in 1968. However, it was high in sulphur.

We had an area of 510 square miles in those days, and we had to go through it, and it was in conjunction owned 50% by Coal & Allied from New South Wales. They sent a geologist up, whose name I forget. Anyway, that doesn't matter. I don't imagine he's still around. Guy Pallice was a geologist, but he was with Bond Corp. It's no wonder I do forget names, because there were that many of them, when you get thinking about it, not to mention all the blokes working for me.

Anyway, it was not successful at that time in finding a suitable area for mining. They were obviously looking for opencut areas to work. There have been areas found since.

Both Shirley and I took an interest in things that were happening in Collinsville. A good deal of it was to do with children, but the older ones were growing up. Football. Rugby League was the most popular club game in those years.

Then we decided that the future for our family would not be found in Collinsville, we should really go back to Ipswich – which we did. I went back there and worked for Rylance Collieries in North Ipswich. At that time their superintendent was Wally Broadfoot, and my immediate superintendent was Douglas Broadfoot. I was there until 1973.

Ron McKenna was the Manager of the other Dacon mine. He became Chairman for the Collinsville Rugby League and I was the Secretary.

Interviewer: You were Mine Manager?

Yes, I was there as Mine Manager, the Rylance No. 2. This took over Moreton Extended leases and I remember driving underground through faults and putting underground stone drives through the "Gulland fault". You'll find Gulland, he was a miner in the early stages of the Tivoli mining district, and this fault was called the Gulland Fault. It was quite a deal, because there were small faults there as well that we had to drive through to intersect the old Moreton Extended workings so that we could then have closer access to the coal, when this was commenced as an underground mining venture under Moreton Extended areas that had been left.

The coal was going out through the Rylance No. 2 Mine to the coal treatment plant, from which it was taken to the river and sent by barge to the power stations at Tennyson and Bulimba in Brisbane.

Interviewer: Where was the loading place?

Well, it was not far from Abermain mine beside the river.

Interviewer: So it went on trucks? Did it go on trucks down to the wharf? There wasn't a line, a railway line?

No, it went by truck to the wharf where it was loaded into a large circular steel bin, and then loaded onto the tug boats, barges that were towed by the tugboats, actually, at that time.

Interviewer: And were Rylance Mines mechanised at all?

Yes, but it was what was called in those days conventional mining. Conventional mechanisation used a coal-cutter, explosives, a mechanical loader, and shuttle cars to take the coal to the end of the conveyor belt. All three machines were supplied by flexible cables. We had two sections that were mechanised in that way. However, whilst I wasn't still employed there – I went there in '69. In 1974 that mine and where they were working in Moreton Extended (next to Hill Street, North Ipswich) was all eliminated because of the 1974 floods. The water ran in one and virtually came up like a big water spout, straight up into the sky, to the other one. It was all wrecked. You know, it was hopeless. But that was after I'd left, fortunately.

Tape 2

I received on 21 September 1973, correspondence from a good friend of mine, Wal Ritchie, who at the time was superintendent for Rhondda Collieries, suggesting that I might like to apply for a job that they'd advertised for in the *Sydney Morning Herald* for a Colliery Manager. I very quickly responded and had the job by the end of the week. That was one of the best things that ever happened to us.

Interviewer: You had long wall experience?

I had some long wall experience. It wasn't a hell of a lot, but I had some. The Mine Manager was Roy Wass; this is going back a few years, before we went to Collinsville. He helped me a lot, too, actually because he allowed me to have the day release to go to college to study for my First Class Manager's ticket and also to get my coal-face experience as a contract miner.

Interviewer: So long wall was new to Ipswich?

I believe so. In those times it certainly was.

Interviewer: That must have been quite exciting.

We never did it. It hit Rhondda on the head. I don't know how it would have gone for Rhondda, but that's what they were asking for.

Interviewer: So you applied and got the job in 1973?

Yes, and you might note my bit of luck was, of course, was that the '74 floods were about to happen in a few months and I think there were five mines that were destroyed by the '74 floods, underground mines, and there was only one of them that was reopened, and it never ever operated except with great difficulty thereafter, and that was

Westphalen in the Collingwood Park area.

Tape 3

At the same time, mining was a very, very big part of my life. It supported us, and in Ipswich in those days mining was a pretty big deal.

Interviewer: It employed a lot of men.

Yes, and it was a constant challenge.

Let me tell you about my Mines Rescue Work. In 1960 I joined the Booval Mines Rescue Brigade. Bill Owens was the superintendent and he had come from Collinsville, believe it or not. They had a competition. It was the first competition in that era for the Rescue Brigade, and it was virtually following on from what was called the Mills Cup. I don't know when it was last used. It might have been the 1920s, but it would be a good while ago. I happened to be in the team that won, and I was pretty new at that time. They were teaching me stretcher drill while we were waiting, ready to be called to go underground for the test.

Anyway, a chappie that I know approached me at this recent Centennial and he said, "You know, there's only two of us left alive?" We only had a five man team – the team was usually six, a captain, a vice-captain and four to carry the stretcher. Bear in mind that sometimes you were going up grades like that, and you were already wearing your breathing apparatus, which wasn't light.

Interviewer: Your award reads: Winners, Mine Rescue Competition, 1960. D Livermore. Donated by CIG Queensland." So who was CIG Queensland?

Chemical Industries – but they used to supply gas. That's where our explosives used to come from. Our explosives used to come from CIG in those times – which is a pretty important part of coal mining. CIG – Consolidated Industrial General Engineering or something like that.

Interviewer: The Mines Rescue people were a very special group of men in my opinion. Why did you get involved?

I had been busy much prior to 1960. We were obviously having a large family. Anyway, I was studying. Now, I had to get a Mine Electrician's ticket. I wanted to get that first, and then I had to get a Mine Manager's ticket, and then I started teaching, teaching mining/electrical at the Technical College in Ipswich, which was in Limestone Street.

Interviewer: So you taught mining electricians?

No, I taught some mine electricians, but mine managers had to sit and do two mining electrical exams, too. They had to do two years of this, as I remember. Again, most of that information's in there. I helped a lot of people get their Deputy Certificates.

Interviewer: You were a busy man!

Yes, I was. I have a Mines Rescue photo from 1968. Now, that's when I was in Collinsville. That's the Minister for Mines trophy. It says 1968. We went to Collinsville in '67, came home in '69, and I know we went down for a competition at Booval, and I was with the team that came down from Collinsville.

This one here is the 11th Annual Inter-District Mines Rescue Competition. You would have seen that, though. That was just a few years ago.

There's the group that came down. Normy Rule was spokesman at that, at the Town Hall in Ipswich.

Interviewer: So how long were you with Mines Rescue?

I was with the Booval for something like three and a half or four and a half years in that era (1960-1964).

Then I went to Collinsville and I was in it the whole time, two years and four months, I think, and then I just re-joined Booval immediately after I came back.

Then at the '72 explosion, I was Team Captain there, but as I've already told you, I stepped back for John Roach because he knew the underground workings at the mine. I didn't. I was a bit angry about that in a way, because Box Flat didn't seem to deal with this in the report. I didn't think that they encouraged a lot of participation in the Mines Rescue Brigade. I mean, I could never remember going to Box Flat for a training night or anything, which would have given you a bit of an insight into their underground workings and where things were.

Of all coincidences Alex Lawrie was the Mine Manager at the time and he was in my class at primary school (1934-1941).

When we came back from Collinsville in 1969, I went to Rylance No. 2, and I left there in 1973 for Rhondda. That was Manager of the Haenke Mine. The reasons were there, and I would suggest that at that time I would have been pretty attractive to them for what they wanted. They had two underground continuous miners and they were great.

Interviewer: So who was managing the Haenke Mines when you went there?

They didn't have a First Class Manager. They had a Second Class Manager. They had two Second Class Managers. Anyway, in those says a Second Class Manager was limited to under 20 men underground.

Interviewer: Was that still owned by Willis Haenke?

Yes, well, Willis Haenke, but I'm not quite sure – M W Haenke. I just might be mixed up because there might be

two Haenkes involved, MW, and I remember Willis.

Interviewer: So if they were in expansion mode, that would have been quite interesting work for you?

Yes, the mine was all ready to go. Then we had the '74 floods that closed five underground mines, one of which only re-opened, and all of a sudden the gates were open. We could supply whatever we could produce to Swanbank Power Station, and there was this great road across to the power station, so I made a success of that.

Also, on top of that, with all of these fellows being in the flooded mines, many of which I knew, were sacked.

Interviewer: Looking for work?

Yes. The Central areas were starting to develop then for export, but not many of them really wanted to go up there. They wanted to stay in Ipswich with their families where it was better for most of them.

Interviewer: So you had a good pool of men to employ, experienced men?

Mostly I knew because I'd moved around a bit.
Interviewer: So how many mines did Rhondda then open up?

They opened up what was called Rhondda No. 5, and we opened MW Haenke No. 2 Mine. I did that, too, but anyway, if you want to jump forward about 12 or 14 years, I was there with Rhondda for about 14 years, but I finished because I'd had heart surgery a couple of times.

At the time I went with Rhondda Collieries in 1973, it was still the family-owned company that had started in 1901. But in 1980 they sold out their operations to Bond Corporation, and so I had to adjust myself to a whole new set of directions, and Wally Ritchie retired and I was appointed General Manager. I'd been Assistant for Wally for a year or two prior to that. Anyway, all of a sudden I found that here I am reporting to Bond Corporation.

They had a Mining Division, and they owned another mine in the New South Wales area called Great Greta. It mined the Great Greta seam, but it was the Greta mine, well known in the Newcastle area. They were looking for other mining interests. I was their General Manager in the year that they won the America's Cup.

Interviewer: You didn't like working for them, or it was just so different?

Actually, no, it wasn't the best. Quite honestly, they didn't interfere too much. They did in the latter years when they – I finished in 1987, was General Manager from 1980 to 1987, and I reported directly to Bond Corporation, and I went to some of the annual Board Meetings of Bond Corporation.

They owned Channel 9 by then, and Fourex.

But they did try and expected the Fourex down at Milton to burn our coal. I told them that our coal was not Rosewood/Walloon coal, and that's what they're used to, it's a totally different product, but that didn't have any weight. 'Oh, we want to try it.' They tried it all right, and it didn't work, so they sent it back. Anyway, we were trucking it down.

There were other things, of course, but they did employ a Mining Engineer. He did have qualifications as a Mining Engineer. He came up with a few suggestions that were totally inappropriate for our circumstances. They also had a geologist but he didn't have much mining experience at all, you know. Quite honestly, to go to Special Board Meetings, to have to sit there and listen to this, and when they were finished I had to break down their suggestions because it was me that would have had to make them work, and they were totally unworkable or inappropriate. I had to do it without making too big a fool of these particular fellows, or the Directors, by making myself out to be too much of a know-all.

Interviewer: So how many men were you responsible for in the '80s?

The colliery employed 260 people, another 30 were employed by contract and fully engaged with the operation.

There were at least another 30, as the Opencut works, the trucks and truck-drivers, they weren't employed by us. They were employed by contractors, and the same thing applied to some other people, too, at that time.

They started No. 2 Mine in 1983.

Interviewer: Let's talk about the Box Flat disaster now?

Certainly. The Mines Rescue were called in. Actually, I was an extremely keen fisherman in those days. I'd been away fishing all day since very early morning. Then I got home, and I was in bed for an hour or something, and I was called at half past 9.00 to go. I had a friend that used to go fishing with me, Ray Verrenkamp. We're still friends, we talk to one another.

I called him, and I actually went out and picked him up, and he came, too, with me, out there. He called his brother, Merv Verrenkamp, who came from Marburg. Unfortunately, he ended up being killed in the explosion.

Anyway, we went out to the explosion – so you want me to talk about – what I'll be saying is virtually printed in my report to the warden. (see appendix).

Interviewer: You were called out because there was a problem?

It had started from Alex Lawrie, the Mine Manager at Box Flat, going out. If I remember correctly, or what I was

told, the Superintendent of the Mines Rescue Brigade was not present. He was on holidays. He was a very dedicated man, but he just happened to be away. He was up in Central Queensland heading towards a place where he used to get gemstones. He used to be very interested in that area, and he got to hear about the explosion, turned straight around, and came back.

Merv Jensen was the Acting Superintendant. He had a long time association, and he was pretty badly hurt in the explosion also. He had his head damaged pretty well, and he was expected not to live. He had some brain surgery and that.

Alec Lawrie went out to re-start the mine fans around about 4.00 o'clock in the afternoon, because Swanbank had cut off power to the coalmine, Box Flat Collieries. Now, I don't know the reason or the cause for that. So he went out to re-start the mine fans. Well, when he started the mine fan up, black smoke came out of the exhaust, or what we used to call the Evasse of the fan. That's where the air that was pulled up from underground was blown out into the atmosphere, the smoke. So he rang several people, including the Department of Mines. It would have been Reg Hardie's after-hours number, so it all started from there.

Tommy Marshall was the Superintendent. He was well considered, too. They contacted Bob who was sort of semi-retired, and John McQueen was there too. Reg Hardie came.

Anyway, we went out and we were asked to put together a team as quickly as possible. There were other people there from the Rescue Brigade who'd got there before, and they'd gone down with their suits, and there was smoke coming behind them. Okay? So we were to take breathing apparatus, extra breathing apparatus, down with us to give to the people that didn't have breathing apparatus so that they could come back out. They were concerned that the smoke was going to overcome them.

Anyhow, we only got started going down when they stopped the rake. The rake is a number of man-carrying wagons that run on rails. That's what it was called and used for in those days. It stopped, and then slowly pulled us back up again, because it only went down a few hundred yards. That was because these men had managed to get on the other side of the smoke, so they went down and brought them up with the rake.

So then it was decided –and I think I remember correctly – there was 14 trained members of the Rescue Brigade there. That made two seven-man teams.

I would normally have been Captain of one of those teams, but I stepped back to give it to my Vice-Captain, John

Roach because he knew the mine, and so we went down again. I know we took down a foam generating machine. That was used to block roadways in those days, and that's just what it did. It generated foam and it was foam that would block a roadway up, like, a roadway the size of that wall there. You could block it up by using this – only temporarily, of course.

Interviewer: To stop the smoke and gas?

It would stop air and gas going down. They'd have to be able to live on the atmosphere that was on the other side of that. Anyway, we took it down, didn't use it, but then we went down the other tunnel. One was No. 5 and one was No. 7. We went down again to get that foam generator back, but I think it had been taken down No. 7 and we went down No. 5.

We'd been down three times, I had been down three times and other people around me had, and we went over to go down again, and anyhow, these other poor beggars, including Merv Verrenkamp, had turned up late, and there were others. Anyway, they said, "Oh, we can make a fresh team out of these fellows" – that was the people that were running the show. There was Reg Hardie, Tommy Marshall, Alex Lawrie, and other people whose names just don't spring out at me right at this moment, who were virtually running the place. You know, really, if you want something to really be successful, you don't all try to run it.

So anyway, we went back and were sent back to go on standby because these new fellows had turned up, and they hadn't long gone, and it was 14 minutes to 3.00 when the explosion occurred – it says in the records somewhere it was 15 minutes to 3.00, but it's only a minute. I remember Reg Hardie telling me that it was 14 minutes to 3.00 because he looked at his watch instantly, something stopped or something.

There were 14 men down there, but there were three in the other tunnel who were putting up a temporary stopping, and apparently re-circulation must have occurred. Re-circulation is when the product from one fire re-circulates and goes back over the fire, because what's been driven off will contain explosive methane gas mixtures, and when it comes back over the fire it explodes. That's the ignition, because then the explosion really is the coal dust that's put up into the air, and it's just like one huge explosive area. Of course, the force of the explosion is very high.

We lived eight to 10 miles away, we were at Leichhardt, and my wife saw the smoke and the blazing sky. Fortunately there was somebody that turned up that I knew in a car that was also coming out, and I said, "The moment you get home, you ring my wife." Actually, it was an engineer at

the mine where I was working at the time. I said, "You ring my wife the moment you get home and tell her that you've been talking to me and I'm all right." So that's what happened.

Interviewer: So you were in the cabin that had its side blown out?

Photo of Deputy's Cabin after Box Flat explosion

Yes. I was the only one in there that wasn't injured in some form. There was John Hall. He was on the floor under a lot of broken roof timber, and I didn't see him at first. I went out the window, because the window had been blown out, and of course the first thing I wanted to do was get away from there. I took a few steps, running away, and there was a fellow behind me – Graham Smith, I think it was; he was another Rescue Brigade bloke – he'd been outside and he was injured, and he needed help. I think he had three broken ribs or something.

Anyway, so I ran back and stuck my head through the window that I'd just jumped out of, and here's Clarry Walski leaning on the bench. I've told this story a hundred times, at least. Clarry was a pretty tough bloke, and he's standing there, and I said to him, "Are you all right, Clarry?" He said, "No," he says, "my pelvis is all busted. I can feel all the bones grating."

Anyway, I was told during the week after when I visited him in hospital that his pelvis was broken in 14 places. His son, Daniel Wolski, recently told me at this Centenary Mines Rescue Brigade in 2009 that his spine and back and pelvis were broken in 23 places, and his mother had told him all those things. He would have been a little kid at that time, and his memories of what his mother told him, wouldn't necessarily be right. He said his father was a Team Captain. Clarry wasn't a Team Captain that I remember in my time.

Interviewer: So you looked back in the window and saw a lot of injured men?

No, I saw Clarry, who was injured. The other fellow, John Hall, was hidden because there was all this broken timber over him, but standing up beside the doorway was Merv Jensen. He'd got hit on the head. He was the one that we thought was going to die first, but he'd been on the phone talking, and he was talking at that time.

If my memory's right, he was talking to Lenny Rogers. Well, Lenny Rogers was underground. Lenny Rogers at that time was helping Merv Jensen to make decisions in relation to what was happening. Lenny Rogers was considered to be a very experienced and capable and qualified person. Anyway, he got killed, too, of course, because he was underground. Up until this time he had been the nominated trainees representative on the brigades committee which met monthly.

In those days it was essential that a Warden's Hearing was had after any serious accident in a coalmine that caused a death or serious injury. They certainly had to do at least that. We weren't invited to go because – in fact, we were told we weren't welcome there. We weren't to go because they were saving us for anything further that might happen, so we could be asked questions that didn't come from the Warden's, or questions that did come from that, so we didn't have preconceived ideas about it. I imagine there could have been other reasons, too, but I know that one of the wives or mothers asked Reg Hardie why he didn't go underground: Was it because he knew it was going to be dangerous?

Reg Hardie was sitting on the rake ready to go with those blokes that were killed, and he was called back because he was wanted on the phone. He got off and went and answered the phone. This woman said that it wasn't that at all, it was because he knew that it was too dangerous.

Reg wouldn't do that. He was a prisoner-of-war with the Japs, and he was an officer in Malaya. He was Inspector of Mines, and that's what happens, I'm afraid.

They had the warden's court and there was nobody charged over it, and quite honestly, I don't know who you would charge. Yes, there were mistakes made, but everybody that was there had the best of intents. We didn't want anybody hurt, either, but that's what happened.

We went out to Box Flat about 8am on Monday morning, and you know, I didn't really want to go. We got out there, and there was smoke pouring out by that time, so whatever was underground wasn't going to be accessible, so they didn't have much choice about whether we could go underground to search for the bodies.

One of the fellows that was killed was John Roach. His uncle was the Chief Inspector of Coal Mines, which is about where the final decision was. He would have had a say in it. That was his nephew. That was in the papers, too.

Appendix: Don Livermore's Account of Box Flat explosion for Mining Warden

Appendix:

Account of Box Flat Disaster prepared by Dion Livermore for Warden's Court

Name: Donald George Livermore

Address and Phone No.: 86 Samford Road, Leichhardt 81-5784

Time of call to Brigade or mine: 9.20pm. Sunday, 30th July

How were you called? Telephone

Who called you? The Superintendent's (J Speghen) son

What was your route and means of travel?
I drove my car from home to Brassall and collected Ray Verrenkamp, thence to the Rescue Station as requested, but Brigade transport had left. We got into overalls and proceeded to Box Flat, in my car.

What time was it when you arrived at Box Flat? Approximately 10.00pm.

What action was there taking place at your time of arrival? *Who did you see and speak to?*
John Roach was at the entrance to the No5 tunnel and he said he had been left there by Mr Jensen to direct the preparations of other trainees to underground work. He advised us and other trainees just arriving that there was a team of men from the station underground and also staff and men employed by Box Flat. He asked us to prepare to go underground and to take spare units plus the ones we were wearing and other materials, as they phoned from UG (underground) to say that smoke has appeared behind them.

Describe your activities and observations during the time between your arrival at the mine and 2.45am (time of blast):

I proceeded underground with other trainees as requested on the supply rake, but after being lowered approximately 300 yards, the rake stopped and brought us back up to the surface, where we were advised by John Roach that the men underground did not now require us to assist, but wanted the empty rake to convoy them to the surface.
After a short break on the surface following the arrival of the men from UG a count of trainees was made and found to be fourteen, plus the acting Superintendent. It was decided to make two teams of seven each and we went underground about 11.15pm. Smoke was issuing from a section of the roof of No. 5 tunnel where some old disused steel chutes were installed.

Messrs Tom Marshall and R Hardie were present at the time and also M Jensen, whom after discussion and some exploration above the smoke area asked us to put up a Polyrock seal across a hole in a brick stopping in the left hand companion to the No 5 supply tunnel. We completed this but the extra air sent down the No. 5 tunnel did not appear to greatly thin out the smoke issuing from the disused chute area. It was decided by the persons named before that nothing effective could be done in No 5 to contain the fire, and we all proceeded to the surface.

After a short time on the surface we again went UG (about 12.30am) but via the No7 tunnel to a point where a stone drive had been completed and belt structure was in the process of being installed. Mr Reg Hardie asked a team of us under Captain John Roach to make an attempt to retrieve the foam generator from No 7 UG haulage via the stone drive, in this we were successful although the smoke was very thick and

whilst passing under the overcast noticed to be hot.

We all then went to the surface and were taken to the office for sandwiches and coffee. At about 2am Len Rogers asked us if we would come across and made a stand by team up to go UG again at No 7. However, on arrival at No 7 we were told to wait on the surface and if required UG we would be called as some fresh trainees had arrived and a team of eight men went underground plus additional staff and workmen from Box Flat Coy. A number of us then took up a position of rest in the deputies brick cabin adjacent to the No 7 tunnel mouth. About 4 to 5 mins before the blast John Roach was speaking to Alec Lawrie on the UG telephone system to the deputies cabin where I was resting.

Describe your actions and experiences at and after 2.45am. (Time of blast).

At the time of the blast I was in squatting position at rest in the NW corner of the deputies cabin on the bench situated there, I was unhurt by the blast or by flying debris, and a few seconds afterward moved out through the window on the North wall which was blown out. I immediately saw Graham Smith stagger out and collapse to the ground, and I assisted him until some more men came over when I called for help. During this time I heard A Hutchins tell someone to send for ambulance etc. Then realising that some men must be injured inside the building I went back to the window and was able to help John Hall and also C Wolski who was in great pain out of the building. Several of us carried C Wolski on a canvas stretcher up and into ambulance which was the first to arrive. Whilst assisting C Wolski in the wrecked building. I saw M Jensen move out of the Southern wrecked side in an obviously dazed state.

Later I and others made further checks to make sure nobody remained or re-entered the area in front on No 7, as we felt a further explosion was possible.

At about 4.40am we decided to go home and rest, as we advised that nobody would be entering the mine to perform rescue work for some hours, and we could be contacted if wanted, but we decided to come back between 8 and 9am. When I subsequently did this I was advised due to the extent of the smoke obviously coming out of the tunnels no investigation attempts would be made and work to seal off the mine was commenced. I returned to the station and with assistance commenced to get the equipment there in order. About 4 to 5 minutes before the blast John Roach was speaking to A Lawrie on the UG telephone system to the deputies cabin where I was eating.

A Lawrie asked J Roach to try and get a temporary stopping across the drive from which the smoke was issuing as advised by J Roach.

About one minute later the phone rang in the deputies cabin and one of the trainees wanted to talk to M Jensen. M Jensen came to the telephone and I believe he was having a conversation with Len Rogers at the time of the blast.