

Lifestyles

Reader Identifies Rope Rider Fatalities

By John Fannin

In response to last week's story on the last living Rope Riders from upper county mines, local resident and native Frank Cernick III shared with the *Tribune* the identities of two Rope Riders known to have died in the #9 mine.

"All the jobs were dangerous but Rope Riding was by far the most dangerous," said Cernick who worked the mines for a year in the mid-1950's after graduating from high school.

Referenced in last week's story was the death of a Rope Rider on the #9 which had the steepest slope of any of the local mines.

According to Cernick there were at least two Rope Rider deaths on #9, and both just two weeks apart.

The first was July 18, 1949 when Rope Rider John Popovich, 32, was killed by a misplaced or miscommunicated coal car signal.

Cernick's cousin, John Cernick, 32, was trained as a replacement for Popovich after his death.

A Marine from 1941-45, John had survived all five major battles of the Pacific theatre during World War II, fighting at the front lines in each battle.

"A big strong kid," Frank said of his cousin. But on August 2, 1949 John, too, was killed rope riding in the #9. According to *The Miner-Echo*, John was killed in a runaway coal car trip that threw him against the bulkhead. His predecessor, Popovich, died in similar fashion.

John, who died on the birthday of Frank's dad Frank Cernick II, left behind a wife of two years, Mary (Starkovich) Cernick and an 18-month-old daughter Sharon Bernadette.

A tip of the reporter's hat to Frank for his help in providing follow-up information on this sad chapter in upper county Rope Rider history.