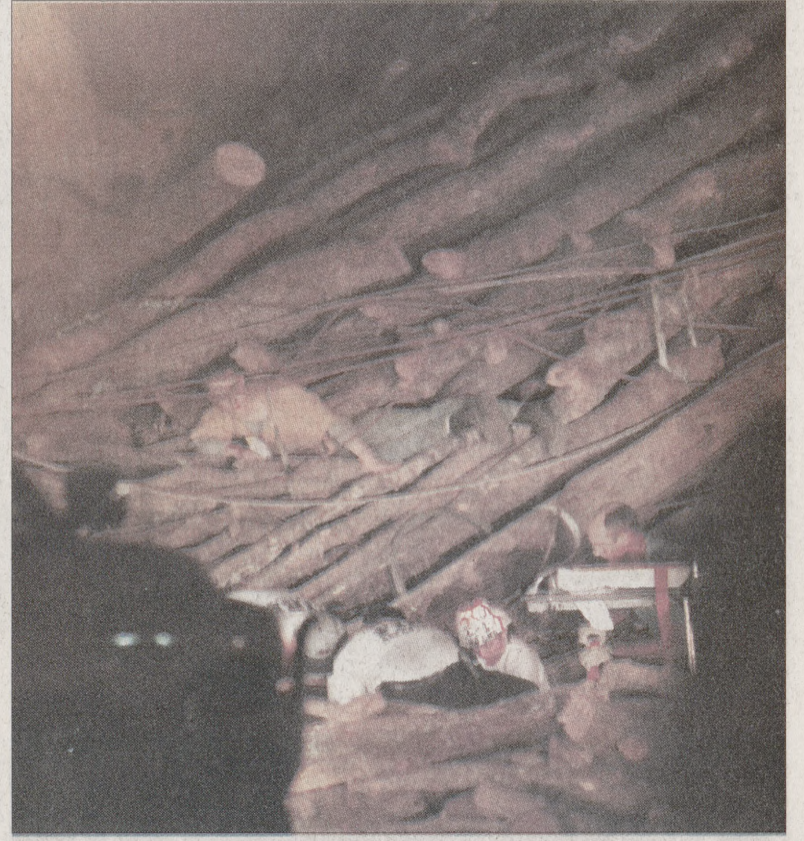


BONFIRE TRAGEDY

Stack falls killing at least 4, students still trapped



BY BATTALION STAFF

At least four students were killed early today when the bonfire stack collapsed into a towering heap of heavy wire logs.

About 2:20 a.m., a crane lifting a log hit the stack too hard, apparently cracking the center of the stack, witnesses said. The stack fell suddenly, trapping workers on and near the stack.

"I heard a snap, center pole cracked and all of stack came down faster than anyone could believe," said Aileen Dryden, a sophomore general studies major who was working at the workers' refreshment stand.

"The next thing I knew, people were going crazy, and there were bodies on the ground."

Police confirmed that four students were dead and at least four were trapped under the fallen logs.

A College Station Medical Center spokesperson said 12 students were hospitalized, five of which were in critical condition.

Officials reported that Corps Cadets Company K-2 was working on the collapsed side of Bonfire.

Other Corps units and residence halls on the stack site are the FHK Complex,

Moses Hall, Aston Hall, Company D-2, Company C-2, Company K-2, Squadron 16 and Squadron 17.

Bonfire officials said at least 24 workers were on the stack when it collapsed.

Hillary Jones, a University Police Department (UPD) security officer, said the UPD critical incident response team, urban search-and-rescue teams and community fire departments and emergency medical-response teams responded to the collapse.

She said an off-duty officer witnessed the collapse.

Michael Guerra, hall council president for the FHK Complex, was escorting a worker from the site to her residence hall when the stack fell.

"I was in complete disbelief," Guerra said. "I had just seen it standing; then it was down. It's something that should never have happened. It's something that you never expect."

Guerra said more than 30 people from the FHK Complex were at the site, and at least two were unaccounted for more than three hours after the fall.

About 4 a.m., redpots called for assistance to transport logs and rescue trapped workers. Guerra said precautions taken by Bonfire orga-

nizers had saved lives.

"By the time I was able to get back to the site, the rescue efforts were being coordinated," he said. "One good thing about Bonfire is there is a line of command that went into action tonight."

The situation was handled as best as it could be under the circumstances.

No one officially commented on the plans for this year's and future Bonfires.

Clockwise from top to bottom: Bonfire collapsed around 2:20 a.m.; (top right) Students were trapped beneath the fallen stacks; (immediate right, immediate below) Students gather to pray; (bottom right) Students raise their pots volunteering to help rescue others from the stack; (bottom left) Emergency personnel help those that were injured by the fallen stack.

Students bind together

Several thousand A&M students gathered Thursday morning to find Bonfire stack collapsed onto itself.

Questions like 'Why' and 'How' largely went unanswered as thousands of students pulled themselves out of bed and streamed onto the Polo Fields.

Most students were forced merely to observe and wait impatiently outside police lines.

Shouts of frustration and confusion, as well as anger and sadness, moved through the assembled student body, but the most common expression was one of blank disbelief.

Most of the students who stood in the cold, also stood in the dark

with only rumors and second-hand stories.

A number of students talked hurriedly on their cell phones, some calling to check on friends' whereabouts, others to tell their parents, who soon would be receiving news reports back home.

Many of those who worked on this year's Bonfire came out dressed in work clothes and pots.

These students moved anxiously from one area to the next, looking for an opportunity to help. Others sat silently staring at the pile of logs that hours ago was Bonfire stack.

Students were seen sobbing

SEE REACT ON PAGE 2.

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