

Two die as Ampucao mountain collapses. Published in Baguio Midland Courier Vol. XLV, No. 39 issued on September 27, 1992. The article is located at pages 1 and 19. This copy was retrieved from the Cordillera Studies Collection of the University of the Philippines-Baguio Library.

Two die as Ampucao mountain collapses

ITOGON, Benguet -- Two persons died and two wounded when a mountain in sitio Dontog, Ampucao, this town, collapsed a day before typhoon Maring set in last week.

With this incident, Rodrigo Fuentes, Director of the Environmental Management Bureau (EMB) of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources, Cordillera Administrative region (DENR-CAR), was requested by a non-government organization through a press release statement to "immediately suspend the operations of the Benguet Corporation in the area until such time that a thorough investigation is made on its mining operations."

Initial investigation by the Mining Communities Development Center (MCDC) regarding the incident bared that residents within the

Dontog community felt an "intensive shaking of the ground" at around 11:00 midnight, last September 19.

Two hours later, the whole neighborhood was roused from sleep by the crashing roar of the mountain which crumbled and caved in some 30 feet underneath to form a yawning crater and burying three houses.

Residents conjectured that there could be a huge subterranean tunnel under-

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nent the residential area causing the collapse of the mountain.

At around 2:00 a.m. after the crashing sink-in, responding neighbors started digging into the collapsed houses to look for survivors.

The search yielded two dead bodies at around 3:20 a.m. They were later identified as Noel Sunien, 31, and Berta Sunien, 41, husband and wife who were buried along with their house at around 1:00 a.m.

The couple were later on reported to have died "due to lack of oxygen or anoxia." Noel did not have any visible injuries on his body. Berta, however, sustained massive bruises on the left shoulder and on the right wrist.

Their two children were not at the house at the time of the incident. One was staying near the Virac Elementary School where she was studying. The other was sent on an errand the night before and was reportedly advised to return the next day.

Meanwhile, as residents scampered for safety at the time of the crash, Danilo Kabaten, 28, was buried alive but was rescued on time when he hollered for help. He sustained fractured ribs and at present being treated at the Baguio General Hospital (BGH).

On September 22, a fourth house was buried under by continuous erosion from the mountainside. Days before, residents of this mining community experienced ground tremors or "aftershocks" as a result of underground blasting, MCDC reported.

Residents reportedly claimed that Benguet Corporation regularly blasted the earth underground three times daily since 1991. Blasting was reportedly heard in the time frames of 6:30 am, 3:45 pm, and 10:30 pm.

It was reported that erosions were occurring near the site of the fatal incident. A wide crack in the area reportedly developed into a

big ravine and was endangering the houses below it.

Destroyed in the collapse of the mountain were two ball mills, one crusher, one electric motor and a water tank of the community.

Meanwhile, it was reported that said mountain was the same one which collapsed previously in 1991.

-- Alfred Dizon