

# THE NAZI AND THE OPAL MINERS

By George Perham

I won't mention just what opal field these events occurred on, for obvious reasons that you will later appreciate. All I will say is that it happened more than 30 years ago and the main characters involved are now in that great opal field in the sky where even the mullock is top grade. One died of old age and one was later killed in a vehicle roll-over while drunk.

Most Mining Inspectors and Local Mining Wardens I've met socially, or had necessary contact with on the many opal fields I've worked, have been pretty decent and helpful people.

Briefly, on an opal field, most of the regulations apply to Precious Stones Claims, Registration of Claims, safety while mining and the use of explosives. Ninety-nine percent of the officers administer the regulations in a fair, calm, very helpful and professional manner but, like a box of great eating apples, there can be that one rotter.

## NICK-NAMED HIM THE NAZI

On this particular opal field we had a beauty. He was like a Gestapo officer and in fact the miners had nick-named him 'The Nazi'. He was extremely officious and administered the Mining Regulations to the letter. Black and white was all he could see regardless. The only good thing that could be said about him, but not from the miners, was that he was very conscientious in the job.

He would check the various claims out and if you weren't working that day for some reason he would put it in his diary and then purposely check that claim on

following days. The regulations at the time called for you to work a Registered Claim 40 hours a week and if you were going to be absent for any length of time, you had to get an official leave of absence to cover it, or your claim could be cancelled and the pegs pulled. These rules were usually relaxed a bit at Christmas on most fields.

Not on The Nazi's field. This bloke would clock you to the nanosecond and if you didn't have a signed official request of absence, he'd pull your pegs and take them back to the office. Meaning that after a few days of being ill or absent for some other genuine reason, you could find that someone else had pegged your claim.

The Nazi was in his rights as far as the letter of the law went but he just seemed to delight in sticking it to the miners whenever the opportunity arose.

Another antic was when you wanted to register your claim. He would come out and first of all try to push your pegs over to see if they were really solid in the ground. Then, if that didn't work, he would check the directional trenches and actually measure them for width, length and depth. After that, out would come the tape measure for the height of the pegs.

If all that was to his satisfaction, then from each corner peg of your claim he would measure the distances between the pegs and if they were out by just centimetres he would carry on about you not having the claim ready for him to inspect for registration. Even if everything was absolutely spot on, after he fixed the position of the claim on that particular hill, you would still cop a lecture on working and maintaining it. Again, it was all within

the regulations but very much over-done by him.

## MAKING UP YOUR EXPLOSIVE CHARGES

At other times, if he saw you on the surface making up your explosive charges (gelignite, autonite, or most usually, treated Nitro-Prill poured into a taped newspaper tube sized to fit your auger holes, with gun cord inside that protruded a few centimetres out from a taped end to which you then fixed a detonator crimped to a length of fuse) he would stop his vehicle, get out and come over and check the length of any fuses you had already cut and crimped a detonator to. If the length was less than two yards (180cm) you would cop a lecture and have those fuses and detonators confiscated. And even if they were the regulation length of two yards, you would still get a lecture about using explosives even though you used them two and sometimes three times a day on average and probably knew more about the dangers and proper use than he did.

Another of The Nazi's tricks was to take down people's vehicle registration numbers on the field and give them to the local police to check to see if the vehicle was registered and in whose name. This was way out of his jurisdiction but he just seemed to have it in for the miners.

The result of it all was that the miners disliked him more than just a little bit and would, at any opportunity, take the piss out of him whenever they got the chance. This was often done just as he left one hill to go across the shallows to another. Someone would let off a surface explosion on the hill, which was very loud, and then

jump back down their shaft and pretend to be working away with the compressor revving up as they used their jackhammers.

The Nazi would turn around and come back to try and catch whoever did it but this was nigh impossible to do. It was quite a laugh to hear these loud surface explosions follow him about the field. You could virtually pin-point his position by them. Of course all this didn't help to ease the friction and probably made him even more determined to give us all a hard time.

### NEARLY KILLED THE BLOKE

One morning someone went a bit too far and nearly killed the bloke.

He had been in his usual officious demeanour giving anyone he came into contact with the absolute shits. This time one of the miners set up an empty 44-gallon drum on a bit of an angle with mullock under one edge and half a stick of gelignite on a short fuse beneath the open end. The drum had been aimed to impact somewhere just off the track that the inspector would be driving on as he left.

After the inspector started down the hill the charge was lit and we all hid behind mullock heaps out of sight to watch. The explosive went off with a hell of a bang and the 44-gallon drum soared about 100 metres into the air with smoke trailing out of its end and in a perfect arc towards its destination.

If the inspector had stayed on the track everything would have gone off as planned but for some reason he drove off the track. The loud noise had caused him to look back to see the drum coming in his direction and he had panicked and actually driven into the impact area. The drum smashed into the cab of the vehicle as he jumped out of it. Then the driverless vehicle disappeared over the edge of a 10-metre deep bulldozer cut!

While it probably sounds heartless, we were all nearly hysterical with laughter at the sight of it and were laughing so much it was a job to run to our shafts and get down them as quickly as possible to trigger the jackhammers.

While I obviously couldn't see him, I could imagine him in a fit of pure rage storming back up the track to find the culprit. It was a few minutes before we heard his voice yelling out down one shaft then another for the miners to come to the surface. There were about six claims along the edge of the hill that the drum could have come from, mine included, so I got a yell as well. I got to the surface with a look of 'I know nothing' on my face. When he asked me if I knew who'd fired a 44-gallon drum at him, I looked nonplussed and shook my head at the same time wondering what he was talking about. I said I'd heard a bang but didn't take much notice as explosions went off all day long and I was very busy in the drive with the jackhammer going.

### SAID MUCH THE SAME THING

Of course all the other miners had said much the same thing. He knew someone was telling lies but didn't know who. By this time he was shaking and nearly in tears with absolute frustration. He threatened us all that the police would be involved and the culprit would be charged with attempted murder and the destruction of Government property regarding the vehicle.

The offender would definitely be going to jail for a long, long time. He then asked if any of us could give him a lift back to town so he could report it! One of the miners replied that if he wanted

to wait for an hour or so until he finished cleaning out the drives, he'd oblige. Of course we all then followed suit in saying we were too busy right then for one reason or another. The inspector then lost it totally and said angrily that, like all opal miners, we were all bloody criminal scum and then started walking back to town very red faced.

We made a pact that if we were questioned later by the police we had all been down our shafts at the time and had seen nothing. It would be impossible for them to find out who actually did it if we stuck to our guns.

Surprisingly, while it was all the talk around the watering-holes for a few days, no police questioning eventuated and then we found out that The Nazi had been immediately transferred to another locality. None of us ever heard any more officially about the affair.

A few days later a crane-truck was hired by the Mining Warden to pull the inspector's badly damaged vehicle out of the bulldozer cut.

Personally, I think the Mining Warden at the time (now also deceased) had had enough of the complaints about the bloke from the miners and when he reported the damaged vehicle and just how it happened, the warden, worried for the bloke's future safety on the field, transferred him immediately and killed two birds with the one stone.



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