

A TIMBER SPLITTER ???

by John Kynor
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There is a trite saying about something like this, "necessity is the mother of invention." Well, I believe with the devices described in this article the saying is very true. First, let me say that this tool may never have been used to produce a timber used for a mine support, but who knows if some miner, somewhere, didn't give it a try. If he did I'm sure that he gave up after several attempts.

I obtained several examples of the "explosive ax" about twenty years ago, one was obviously home made, the other, a commercial variety. However, I could not determine the name of the manufacturer of the device. I was not totally sure the person who sold me the devices was correct as to what they were, as I could not locate any data on them.

Then, one Saturday A.M., as I sat in my den nursing a cup of coffee trying to forget the night before, the TV program my young children were watching caught my attention. The program? Lassie, and ol' Ranger Bill was showing the local ranchers how logs could be split with this NEW device he'd discovered. As I watched, ol' Ranger Bill produced a chunk of pipe that looked like a piece of junk I'd had laying about for years. At least now I knew the ax was for sure an ax. The Lassie program, a rerun, was circa 1955.

THE EXPLODING WEDGE

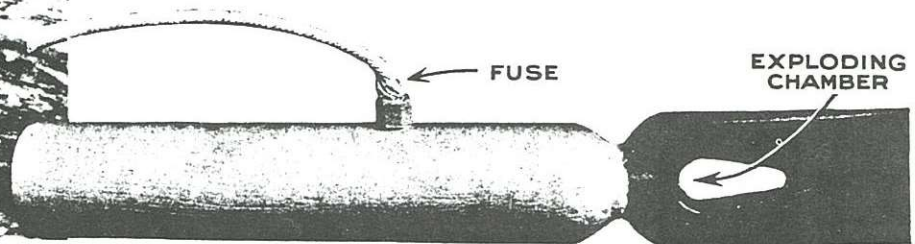
A simple device, but a most useful one, for those who have logs to split and no inclination to waste time in back-breaking labor



IN almost every section of the United States and Canada are found many varieties of timber, such as cottonwood, elm, gum, water poplar and the like—woods so tough in texture that it is almost impossible to split them with ordinary hand tools. On this account many farmers have considered them as practically worthless. The labor involved in splitting the logs was said to be out of all proportion to their value when reduced to merchant-

able form, and so this wood was allowed to rot on the ground.

Now, this timber can be quickly made into firewood, fence-posts, mine-props or pulpwood, at a good profit. Small charges of black powder are loaded into a device called the "exploding wedge," which is driven into the butt of a log as illustrated. The fuse is lighted, and shortly thereafter . . . Bang! The log is split. It is as simple as that. This device, for which a patent is pending, is a product of the Hutchinson Manufacturing Company, located at 7721-23 Susquehanna Street, Pittsburgh, Pa.



With this data I made some more inquiries and learned the ax was in fact known to some folks I knew. I received information from friends in Canada and Arizona who had these devices and had used them. They both said "they work, but. . ." And this brings me back to why the miner may have given the ax up after a couple of tries. Sure the timber is split, but one then has to chase the "explosive ax (wedge)" down after its lengthy flight through the air, assuming you paid attention to its flight path.

After receiving this data I thought to myself, this is an interesting piece of hardware of fairly recent invention. I placed the ax into the pile of other junk gathering dust in the collection room. The ax has been unmolested for almost 20 years now. But. . ., on a recent trip to Bisbee, Arizona, for a little R & R, I was rooting through a book store when I came onto a DuPont magazine. When I looked through the small magazine for articles on explosives what jumped out was an article titled, "The Explosive Wedge." Needless to say the magazine was

returned to Albuquerque with me, and I learned that the ax in the collection also was manufactured by Hutchinson. What was of interest to me was that the article was dated 1932. A copy of the article from the DuPont magazine is shown here.

Now I'm beginning to wonder just how long these devices have been around. Does anyone know?

Yep! Necessity is the mother of INVENTION.

Data was obtained from the following sources:

"The Exploding Wedge," The DuPont Magazine, Vol. XXVI, February, 1932.

"Legal Pipe Bomb????," The Detonator, IABTI, Vol. II #3, May 1984.

"Log Splitting," Explosives for North American Engineers, by Cedric E. Gregory.

AMERICA'S WORST MINE DISASTER

by Ted Bobrink
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In the last issue of the *MAC*, (Number 20 Fall 1993) the first article on page 4 was titled, "A Postcard Full Of Sorrow." In that article I showed you a post card that I owned that depicted what I believed to be a mine accident of some kind at a coal mine near Fairmont, West Virginia. The writing on the back side of the card was informing a friend or relative that two men had been killed in a mine accident and had been taken out of the mine and were going to be buried. The only information as to the location of that accident was that the picture was taken at the mouth of pit # 8, and that the card was mailed on December 12 from Fairmont, West Virginia.

