

THE NANTICOKE HORROR.

Five Men Killed and One Seriously Injured—The Cause of the Disaster—Full Particulars of the Affair.

At the time of the explosion in shaft No. 2, at Nanticoke, which occurred at a quarter of five on Friday afternoon, there were ten men at work in the mine. These were Thomas J. Jones, David J. Humphreys, Thomas O. Evans, George Nash, Edmund Morgan, James Henry, a trackman, William T. Austin, fire boss, Joseph Audemott, laborer, David F. Watkins and John T. Watkins. Of these, the four first named were working on the West side of the mine, and were prostrated by the force of the explosion, but were not injured. The explosion occurred on the East side, at a point some 500 feet from the shaft. Some one had left open the door of a minor working and thus the air current had been diverted from its course and gas accumulated, as the mine east of the door was left without its proper supply of air. It is not known who is responsible for this open door, nor how long it had remained open. It could not have been for more than twenty-four hours, as men had been there before that time. The ventilation is secured by one fan at slope No. 1 and there is an abundance of air furnished, if the current is not interrupted. Another fan is in course of construction. Had the mine been worked regularly the accident could not have occurred, as the gas would not have been permitted to accumulate.

The force of the explosion was terrific—the timber work at the bottom of the shaft was torn to pieces; and the cage could not get within twenty feet of the foot; loaded cars were piled one upon another and tumbled into the sump; sticks and dirt were thrown from the mouth of the shaft to a height of 250 feet; and the lamps of the men working at No. 1 slope were extinguished.

The explosion was caused by the fire boss, William T. Austin, who entered the working with a naked lamp. The gas instantly exploded, and Austin was dashed against the wall and a portion of his skull torn off. His body was badly burned. James Henry was the nearest to Austin, and he was killed by the concussion. He too was burned. It was Henry's first day in the mines. Edmund Morgan, with the Watkins brothers and Audemott, were at the foot of the shaft, awaiting the cage for which they had rung the bell. It was but thirty feet above them when the catastrophe took place. Morgan was thrown across the gangway and his brains dashed out against the wall of coal. David T. Watkins and Audemott were thrown into the sump and covered with cars, coal and debris. The former was alive when found, but died after being taken to the surface. Audemott was buried from sight except one of his feet, and a boot protruding from the wreck led to the finding of his body. John T. Watkins was found on the edge of the sump and was alive. When taken to the air he revived. Morgan, who was only seventeen years of age, and Audemott were single men, the others were married.

Some time elapsed before it was safe to enter the mine, and at half past seven the rescuers descended. Superintendent Morgan was one of the first to enter and at once discovered the body of his son. He saw that life was extinct, and with Spartan firmness, turned to aid the Watkins brothers, both of whom were alive. They were the first taken out; then Morgan, Austin and the four injured men were drawn to the surface. Audemott was the last found, as he was almost concealed from view by the wreck above him.

Three men who attempted to enter the mine through No. 1 slope were overcome by black damp. They were rescued, placed upon a car and drawn to the mouth of the slope, perfectly exhausted.

No. 2 shaft seems to be an unfortunate one. When the lining was being put in, five men stood upon an insecurely fastened plank and were hurled to death.

This disaster was caused by carelessness—first, by leaving open the door mentioned, and, second, by entering the working with a naked lamp. The unfortunate man who was the immediate cause of the accident paid the penalty of his act with his life. Such shocking events as this bring vividly before us the constant dangers to which miners are exposed. With all precautions taken, their life is full of hazards and when all possible safeguards are not employed working in the mines is more dangerous than in a powder mill.