

SIX MEN

Killed in Slope 2, Pratt
Mines, This Morning.

WERE COLORED CONVICTS

There Was a Terrific Explosion,
but Whether from Powder
or Fire Damp is
Not Known.

RESCUERS CANNOT REACH SCENE

Shortly after 4 o'clock this morning there was a terrific explosion in main slope No. 2 at the mine of the Pratt & Iron & Railroad Company, near Pratt City, and as a result six negro convicts are dead. They are:

ALEXANDER SHELTON,
ELI LAWRENCE,
GEORGE JONES,
HENRY JOHNSON,
WILL SCOTT,
TOM OLIVER.

The cause of the explosion is not positively known. There is a difference of opinion as to whether it was caused by fire-damp or powder.

The six men, named above, were in the end of the slope about 12,000 feet from the surface when the explosion occurred and were the only persons that were working in that part of the mine. Another gang of men were engaged in working about 1,000 feet from them and they escaped from the mine without injury. According to the story told by these men they heard an explosion and a second later the earth trembled as though there was an earthquake. Several of the men and mules were knocked down by the force of the explosion and a great many of the boards about the shaft were blown out of place. At the same time there was a great rush of air which was laden with after-damp, and the men who could make their escape to the surface as soon as possible.

Immediately after the explosion Superintendent P. J. Rogers was notified, and hurried to the scene. He went down into the mine at once and made an investigation. He found that he could not come within a long distance of the six missing men, as the extreme end of the slope was filled with after-damp. The force of the explosion blew the brattices out of place and disarranged the air passages so that there was no ventilation in that portion of the mine, and nothing could be done until the air passages had been repaired.

The work of repairing the air passages began at once, and at the same time everything known that could be done toward clearing the mine of after-damp was done.

Mr. Rogers remained in the mines until 11 o'clock this morning, when he came to the surface for a few minutes. He was met by a News reporter at the mouth of the shaft and questioned in regard to the affair. Mr. Rogers said that he was yet unable to state the cause of the explosion, as no gas had been found in the mines in many months. He had no doubt but the men were dead, as only a miracle could save them. When asked if the men would be reached this afternoon he replied that he believed they would, but he did not seem sure. He said that they had come within about 500 feet of where the men were supposed to be, but could not approach any nearer until the air shafts had been repaired.

While Mr. Rogers was talking Mr. Eekins Ramsey, Chief Engineer of the company, and Dr. R. M. Cunningham, the company physician, came up and were in consultation with him for a time. At the conclusion of the conference with Mr. Rogers Mr. Ramsey told the reporter that if it developed that the explosion was caused by fire-damp it would be a great surprise to him, as the mine was one of the best ventilated in the State and no gas had been found in it, though it was inspected daily. At this point he asked Mr. Rogers how much powder the men had with them when they went down to which Mr. Rogers replied: "They had none; they were using dynamite." Neither of them seemed to think the explosion was caused by dynamite.

When the reporter left the scene Messrs. Ramsey and Rogers were descending the shaft, going down to the scene of the explosion, or as near to it as they could go.

When the explosion occurred Fire Boss William Turner was in the slope with the gang of men who were working about a 1,000 feet from the point where the six men were engaged. He did not notice the presence of gas prior to the explosion. All of the other men who were present stated also that they did not notice the presence of any gas in the mine.

The six men who were working at the extreme end of the mine were engaged in working on one of the air passages at the time of the explosion.

The belief is entertained that the men were overcome by the after-damp produced by the explosion, and that they died in a few minutes.

The slope in which the explosion occurred is considered one of the best in the State from a standpoint of ventilation, and the news of the explosion caused general surprise among those who are acquainted with the conditions.

Every effort is being made to reach the men, and they will probably be brought to the surface late this afternoon or tonight.

The damage to the mine is very slight, and work was resumed shortly after the explosion. The full day shift was at work when the reporter arrived on the scene.