

FIVE MEN KILLED IN CATSBURG MINE.

After Two Unsuccessful Attempts the Dead Bodies
Are Reached by a Rescue Party and
Brought to the Open Air.

ONLY TWO ESCAPED THE EXPLOSION.

These, Injured, Crawled for Miles Along the Shafts and Were Almost
Dead When They Reached Safety—Survivor Tells the
Story of His Dreadful Experience.

BRAVE RESCUERS ACCOMPLISHED THEIR TASK IN SHORT TIME.

By A. G. Best.

MONONGAHELA, Pa., March 7.—

Five expert mine workers were killed by an explosion in the Catsburg mines of the Monongahela River Consolidated Coal and Coke Company about noon yesterday. A rescuing party, consisting of 11 certificate men, or mine officials, which started into the mine shortly after 9 o'clock last night returned at 12:30 o'clock with the bodies.

Beside the five men there were two others in the mine at the time of the explosion. These escaped, one coming out at the main entry and the other through an air passage nearly three miles from the entrance.

The Dead.

ROBERT HOWRY, mine foreman, 30 years old, lived in Cemetery street, Monongahela, came to the Catsburg mine from Pittsburgh two months ago.

JAMES HOWE, of Monongahela, road man, 25 years old, married and has family of two children.

JOHN GILLER, mine boss, 48 years old, married, lived at Chard.

ISAAC EASTWOOD, fire boss, 47 years old, married and lived in Main street, Monongahela, has family of 10 children.

WILLIAM McFARLAND, boss driver, 30 years old, married and lived in Main street, Monongahela.

The Injured.

JAMES TERNENT, electrician, 25 years old, married and lives in Main street, near mine entrance, had cut on right arm, bruised about head and eyes, escaped by crawling on his hands and knees more than a mile along an air passage to a house on Fagan creek.

JOHN HAGER, roofman, 38 years old, married, badly treated and scratched, none of his injuries serious, escaped by crawling on hands and knees to main entrance, a distance of nearly two miles.

The Daring Rescue.

Blackened, burned and bruised almost beyond recognition, the five miners who lost their lives in the Catsburg mine explosion were brought out by the rescuing party of 11 this morning at 12:30 o'clock.

After entering the mine the rescuing party traveled together 1,200 feet, when they began to station men every 300 feet. The search lasted just 35 minutes.

The first body recovered was that of McFarland and was found at the opening to entry 61, a little further on between 61-62 entries. Robert and James Howe, father and son, were found together. Seven feet further on, his head resting on a rail, was the body of Isaac Eastwood, the fire boss. Forty feet further on, at the mouth of entry 62, the last body was found.

The rescuers sent one man back to notify the police of the find and then loaded the bodies in a car. As rapidly as possible the car was shoved to the main entrance to the mine.

Inspector Henry Loutitt stated after coming out of the mine that they had found little or no trace of gas, but had made no tests. He said there was no fire in the main entry, but could not tell the conditions in the other parts of the mine. Mr. Loutitt also said that the mine had not been declared safe by him and that the party that had gone in had been sent to see if they could extinguish the fire. Mr. Loutitt refused to advance any theory as to how the explosion occurred.

Said to Have Removed Brattice.

From one of the men in the mine it was learned that the men yesterday morning took down one of the brattices in the main entry allowing the gas to escape, which was ignited by the flames through a broken gauge in one of the lamps.

Courier John J. Fitzpatrick, at Washington, has been notified that the bodies have been recovered and is expected here today.

The bodies were placed in charge of the undertaker, Frank Beabout and Clyde R. Meredith, of Monongahela, at the order of H. R. Blackburn, assistant superintendent of mines for the river combine.

Word that the rescue party had brought the bodies out was carried to the homes of the dead men's relatives, but at the suggestion of friends they were kept from visiting the mine to see the bodies until prepared for burial.

Members of the rescuing party are of opinion that all the men with the possible exception of Eastwood, met death at the first explosion. The bodies when taken from the mine presented a horrible appearance. The force of the explosion had been great enough in some instances to tear the clothes almost from their bodies.

The trip through the mine with the bodies was made on a run almost as the members of the rescuing party wished to get away from the horrors of the sight in the depths of the mine.

Four Explosions Occurred.

Mine Superintendent William Selden, accompanied by State Inspector Henry Loutitt, who lives here, and George Tempest, a machinist, started into the mine about noon in the hope of getting the men out alive. Their efforts were in vain, and before Superintendent Selden got out he was almost overcome by gas, from the effect of which he is still suffering.

Four explosions have occurred in the vicinity of Monongahela, and when the news spread throughout the town that at least five men were entombed excitement ran high. Hundreds crowded around the mine entrance for a time.

There were two explosions at the Catsburg mine today. The first occurred about 11 o'clock this morning and the second explosion about 1 o'clock. The mine has not been worked since Monday last on account of a fire which started near chambers 6 and 46, near the main entry.

Thought Mine Was Safe.

The fire was caused by a blast put in by a miner and could have been easily extinguished at the time had the miner realized the danger. As soon as the mine officials knew of the fire the entries to the burning chambers were bratticed up to shut off the supply of air and smother the fire.

Close watch has been kept on the mine since then and last night it was decided that it would be safe to enter the mine this morning and prepare for work. Accordingly the most expert mine officials were told to enter the mine, remove the brattice work, board by board, and allow the gas to be drawn out into the air passages.

The men entered the mine about 6:30 o'clock and had torn off several boards to allow the gas to escape gradually, when the explosion occurred.

Tells of His Escape.

James Terrent, telling of the explosion and how he escaped, said: "We had just eaten our dinner, and everything was progressing nicely, when the explosion came. I was blown off my feet and landed a considerable distance away from where I was standing. As soon as I realized what had happened, and found I was not hurt so that I couldn't move, I began to crawl along the main air passage. It was difficult work, as there is no track and there was much water on the ground. As I started I came across Eastwood lying on the ground. He spoke to me and I tried to help him, but his leg was broken and I had to leave him. I also passed McFarland, but he appeared to be dead.

"I made my way along the rest of the distance all right, but kept growing gradually weaker and was nearly overcome by the gas more than once. When I reached the trap door near the fan house I was too weak to pull it open. By pounding on the door I attracted the attention of William Kelley, who, with James Massey, carried me out."

Investigated the Knocking.

It was shortly after 1 o'clock when Terrent got out of the mine. Mr. Kelley who answered his knocking, said: "I was at work at the fan house, when I heard an odd knocking. I thought I had better investigate it. On shoving the door open I found Terrent. He was too far gone to speak, and I called for Massey, who helped me carry him out. It was nearly a half hour before he could talk. Then he told us that there had been an explosion, and that there were at least six others in the mine."

Heroic Attempt at Rescue.

The attempted rescue of the imprisoned men by Mine Superintendent Selden, Inspector Loutitt and Tempest was unusually heroic. The men entered the mine before they knew whether they had a chance for their own lives, determined to push on until compelled to leave on account of the gas. On their way in they met John Hager coming out. He was so nearly overcome that Tempest was assigned to help him out. Selden and Loutitt pushed on.

Selden, who is about 35 years old, went ahead with vigor until he came across the body of Eastwood. Flashing an electric hand lamp around he saw the forms of the other men. Eastwood spoke to him and Selden, when he found that Eastwood's leg was broken, remembered that he had seen a partly filled car a short distance back. He returned to it and emptying the coal pushed the car to where Eastwood was lying. While trying to help Eastwood into the car so that he could be carried to the entrance, the second explosion occurred, and the heroic Selden had to abandon his purpose and run to save his own life. Inspector Loutitt had not reached Selden when the explosion took place and he, too, had to turn back.

Plucky Mine Superintendent.

Selden had breathed so much of the fire damp that for a time it was feared he would die. He was confined to his home during the afternoon, but when the mine officials and inspectors gathered in the kitchen of Frederick Cooper's house, adjoining the company's office, to plan for bringing out the bodies of the other men, the plucky mine superintendent was there, too.

Another rescue party that tried hard to save the men, while yet alive, entered the mine at the fanhouse on Fagan creek, and followed the main air course by which Terrent had escaped. The party was headed by John P. N. Coulter, superintendent of the Black Diamond mine, which is next to the Catsburg mine. With him were Daniel Griffith, Harry Young, Frank Gamble, Charles Coo and Louis Hornickel. This party of rescuers entered the mine about 5 o'clock and did not get back until nearly 5 o'clock. The party got as far as the bodies, which they could see by the portable electric lights they carried.

As the men were not prepared to take the bodies from the mine they returned to the mouth of the mine and reported.

Crowd Sees Rescuers Start.

Nearly 200 men were gathered around the company's office at the Catsburg mine at 9 o'clock to-night when the big rescue party started.

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cuing party, consisting of 11 men, filed out of the building.

For nearly three hours several mine inspectors, mine officials and members of the two crowds that had attempted to rescue the men had conferred together to discover the best way by which the men could be brought out. The conference took place in the kitchen of Frederick Cooper's house. Those composing it were D. B. Blackburn, assistant foreman of mines for the River Coal Company; Inspectors William Mallison, Scottdale; C. E. Ross, Greensburg; Henry Louttit, Monongahela; Charles O'Connor, former mine inspector at Uniontown, and Superintendent Sedden. The members of the rescuing party were examined and the place of the explosion pointed out, on a blue print plan of the mine. The reports of the two parties so nearly tallied that it was decided to enter the mine by way of the fan house.

Details of the plan were then made out. The party was divided into two divisions of five men each. The first division led the way. The other five men were placed at intervals along the passageway just far enough so that they could call to each other. A long rope was taken by the men in the first division which was tied to the forward man and grasped by the others, so that if overcome he could be drawn back. All of the men were fitted out with rubber boots and overalls by the company.

The party was led by Inspector Louttit. The other members were Arthur Neale, mine surveyor, fourth division; William Gillie, superintendent Albany mines; John McVicker, superintendent Washington mines; James Mountain, assistant surveyor; William Minford, superintendent Eclipse mines; Charles McVicker, superintendent, Gallatin mines; James Harding, mine foreman Ivill mines; Peter Neil, machine boss Washington mines; John Black, mine foreman Little Alps mine; Daniel Griffith, fire boss Ivill mines.

All of the men in the rescuing party are known as "certificate" men, having passed a State examination.

Just how the explosion was caused none of the mine officials, nor mine inspectors are able to tell. Ternent and Hagger, who escaped, said they could not tell whether it was due to the gas coming in contact with their lamps, or whether it was caused by the large amount of fresh air admitted when the brattice boards were pulled down to allow the gas to escape.

The Catsburg mine was among the first to be opened in the Monongahela river, the first coal being mined there 40 years ago.

The first serious mine disaster to befall the Monongahela River Consolidated Coal and Coke Company came as a severe shock to the officials of that company yesterday. Since the organization of the corporation it has been remarkably free from serious mishaps, and great care had been taken to keep up this record. Reports received last night by the general officers of the company in Pittsburgh were by telephone and these seemed to indicate that the catastrophe could not have been averted no matter what had been done.

O. A. Blackburn, general manager of mines for the company, said last night after receiving the last report by telephone from the scene of the accident: "The Catsburg mine has always been considered a good mine. It was gaseous, as all mines in the district are, but the most expert men were employed on the work, and the conditions were thoroughly understood by them. The five men who went down into the pit consisted of the mine foreman, three fire bosses and a trackman. It was believed by them, as well as by myself, that the fire which was started from the explosion of dynamite, was out, and the danger had passed. The object of the trip was to investigate the condition of the mine and to see what repairs were necessary. The party was made up of some of the best and most experienced men in the employ of the company, and they were familiar with the conditions of the mine, not only at the time, but for years past. They were all familiar with the conditions that confronted them.

"The explosion that followed was one of those unfortunate things that could not have been averted. No greater care could have been taken. The officials of the mine did not send any men down first or ask any of them to take chances. They went themselves. Gaseous mines at best are not easy to handle, but this was not strange to these men. They knew gas existed, and just how much of it there was.

"This is the first accident that the company has had since its organization, and is deeply deplored by all of the officials of the company. Everythig is being done to prevent further danger to those working about the property, and efforts are also being directed to the rescuing of the bodies. We expect complete details of the disaster in the morning."

1902 Catsburg Mine explosion NEWS

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