

BURNETT MINE IS SCENE OF SORROW

Sixteen Lives Were Lost by Explosion and All
But Two Bodies Have Been Found.

Three of the Victims Walked Into Death Trap
After the Explosion—Brave Men Make
Heroic Efforts to Rescue Them.

(BY A STAFF CORRESPONDENT.)

BURNETT, Dec. 8.—This was a day of ceaseless activity and yet constant sorrow in this village of 350 inhabitants, following the awful disaster which wiped out sixteen lives in the coal mine of the South Prairie coal company here Wednesday afternoon.

The monotonous hum-drum of daily village life, agitated by the procession of the funeral brigade up the valley to the underground line of industry which supports the people of Burnett, was varied today by the tramp, tramp of hundreds of visitors. Many came here out of sheer morbid curiosity. Others hastened to lend the hand of the good Samaritan to those stricken, while some gathered in Burnett, called to this place by business. Although a day of grief, it was still one of bustle in the little village nestling among the western knolls of the Cascade mountains.

There was evidence of grief and sorrow on every hand. Women, carrying infants to their breasts, could be seen walking the one street of the hamlet, their eyes red with weeping. Sad-faced groups of men gathered in little knots to discuss the fate of their unfortunate fellow workmen and to congratulate each other that they escaped a like end. Even young, happy childhood, bursting with the spirit of youth, appeared to realize that it was not a time for revelry, and the few who ventured out upon the playgrounds appeared to be less noisy and more reverent, although some of them were not old enough to realize the awful calamity which has been visited upon this little community.

Willow Searchers Brave Danger.
Brave and willing hearts worked eagerly from early morning until supper time in an effort to lift from the tomb its prey. Ten after ten of debris in the mine was scattered and time and again the searching party found themselves enveloped in anxious fumes, death-dealing to every living thing. Yet they progressed, slowly, it is true, but by scientific methods, and it is believed that the last of the bodies will have been rescued from their temporary burying place by noon tomorrow.

The searchers were soon rewarded after going to work this morning by finding the body of Matt Peura, a miner, and the father of six young children, buried in a mass of dirt comprising coal and earth. He had evidently been on his way out of the mine when the fatal concussion occurred, covering him with such a shower of debris that he must have been suffocated within a very short time. To all appearances he was on his way out alone. He was somewhat turned about the upper part of the body, but his head was not so deeply seated as was the case with several of the other victims. Tenderly the men picked up the dirt-begrimed corpse and bore it to the surface, where it was placed in the improvised morgue. The discovery was made about 9:30 o'clock in the morning.

Two More Bodies Located.
During the remainder of the day the search in the bowels of the earth was continued under the supervision of State Coal Mine Inspector C. F. Owen and D. W. Watkins, assistant superintendent of the Burnett mine. Much effort had to be directed toward opening up the various passages to permit of a free circulation of air and much time was occupied in making everything safe. In the afternoon the bodies of George Barber and J. S. Taylor were found, and they will be brought to the surface tomorrow morning. The corpses of Sals Hill and James Chapman are thought to be near, as a hat belonging to Chapman was found. It is expected that all of the corpses will be taken out of the mine tomorrow forenoon.

No hope was entertained for these four unfortunate who were cut off from escape. As soon as the last corpse was taken from the mine Wednesday night, the air grew so foul that all hope was at that time abandoned. This morning more gas was encountered, and no one now believes that the four had even a fighting chance for their lives.

One of the saddest features of the awful catastrophe was learned today, when fellow miners with James Chapman, James Barber and J. S. Taylor, the three who perished together, asserted that they unknowingly walked into the death trap. They had often taken the route before, but on Wednesday it was filled with gas so foul that death stared them in the face long before they recognized it. This feature of the tragedy is one of the most heart-rending.

Young Lads Are Victims.
Chapman and Barber were mere lads of 19, whose grief-stricken parents are residents of Burnett. They were employed as timber carriers and were assisting Taylor, who was of middle age. The latter's office was that of timber, or in other words it was his duty to see that the various diggings were properly propped. The boys were working with him when the explosion occurred.

Following the concussion the men found the air too fetid to breathe, and they retreated a considerable distance until they met Iax Para and Oliver Wetherow, who were engaged in what

is known as looking east. For possibly an hour the five men, little dreaming of the disaster that had occurred but a short distance from them, chatted pleasantly, and then Taylor, Barber and Chapman started on the trip which ended in their meeting an awful death. Para and Wetherow were unacquainted with the route taken by the others, and to this is due the fact that they are living today. This pair concluded to follow the longer passage, when emerged almost on the level of the ground at Burnett. But the trio selected the shorter route, whose exit is through an air chute to the top of the hill, the men being in the habit of climbing a ladder built in the air pipe.

Unable to Save Themselves.

On they went, but it is evident that asphyxiation soon overcame the trio. Unable to turn back, they probably sank in a deadly spell, never again to rise. An investigation proved the concussion had blocked the passageway between the spot where the bodies were lying and the lower end of the air chute. Consequently, the farther the unfortunates advanced, the more poisonous became the atmosphere, and it was impossible for them to retrace their steps.

It is stated that it was 4:10 o'clock, or an hour and ten minutes after the explosion, that the five men perished, three of them never again to see the light of day.

The searching parties soon became aware of the terrible plight of Taylor and the two boys. Brave men almost fought in their eagerness to rescue the helpless, and this effort almost led to the snuffing out of two more lives. Incidentally, it established the heroic qualities of Gust Strand and his partner, Jim Odlin.

Strand is a muscular descendant of the Vikings, a resident of South Prairie, and very popular with his fellow workmen. For some time he has been employed as a miner at Burnett. He was a candidate for the legislature in the thirty-fifth district at the recent election. He was about to go off shift when the catastrophe occurred, and, with several others, he helped take out a body within a short time.

Masses Show True Heroism.

Then a body of brave men, comprising Strand, Odlin, Art Jones, a driver boss; Jim Polary; Mike Ryan and Lyle Roe, went into the dangerous portion to seek for the lost boys and Taylor. Peering neither further caverns nor the deadly fumes, they made as fast progress as possible. Every step meant possibly their own lives, but these unselfish fellows thought only of those whom they hoped to save. For hours they toiled onward, each minute the atmosphere becoming more deadly.

Gust Strand was leading the little party. As he attempted to ascend a shaft leading to the air chute, where he figured the lost men had attempted to make their way, Strand was seized with a fainting spell, and he fell heavily to the floor of the passageway.

Seeing their leader succumb to what seemed almost certain death, the others did not falter nor forsake the unconscious man. Jones became deathly ill and almost fell unconscious before he could get into fresher air. The others had similar experiences, yet none left Strand, unconscious and apparently with his life fast ebbing away, to his fate. Jim Odlin, who was the next behind Strand, bravely seized his pal by the limbs, and, struggling against desperate odds, dragged the prostrate form out of the danger zone. It was an awful task to lift the heavy and limp body, but, by almost herculean effort, it was finally accomplished, and the brave Strand was saved, but only by a narrow margin. He owes his life to his fellows, and they also realize that for a time their existence hung by a very slim thread. A few steps farther and all would likely have been stricken down, never to again emerge into the daylight with breath in their bodies.

Strand's Narrow Escape.

"I don't remember anything at all and knew nothing until I woke up at noon today," said Strand to The Ledger as he lay in bed in his comfortable little cottage at South Prairie this afternoon. "I couldn't tell what time it was, but I know we were after those boys. I remember getting a lot of that bad air and I fell unconscious. After that I can recall nothing."

Strand speaks modestly of his brave effort to save those in danger. His greatest complaint is that his arm and shoulder pain him severely, but this is attributed to the fall he sustained when he became unconscious. He will be back to work within a few days it is expected. Strand is unable to offer any explanation for the terrible tragedy. With other miners he was preparing to set off a fuse upon leaving his shift at 3 o'clock when the explosion occurred. The cause he is unable to state.

A scene ghastly in the extreme presented itself at the entrance to the mine yesterday. The machine shop had been turned into a morgue, and in this little building there were laid the bruised and burned bodies of those who died while earning bread and butter for their loved ones.

It was a pathetic sight to stand there in the presence of a dozen still, quiet forms, each hidden by a gruesome white shroud. And when the larger masses

