

COFFINS AWAIT DEAD

Fifty to Sixty Workingmen Perish in Pocahontas Mine Explosion.

EIGHTEEN BODIES BROUGHT OUT

Two Members of Rescuing Party Succumb to Fatal Afterdamp—Demand for Burial Supplies Exceeds Stock on Hand—Cause Yet Unknown.

Pocahontas, Va., Oct. 5.—Eighteen known dead and from 30 to 40 more men entombed and doubtless all dead is the situation up to a late hour at the West Fork mines of the Pocahontas Collieries company. The known dead are: B. Cook, Hall Richards, W. C. Kelley, Henry Green, George Radford, J. A. Dancey, John Davis, John Cumbee, Paul Valsko, Joe Elash, Bertie Estony, John Odham, Ed Brown. Negroes: Henry Ward, Dick Moorman, Lightburn Woody, Ben Peery, John Green.

The bodies of these men were recovered from the mines as the result of the heroic work of a band of 35 men, constituting a rescue party that worked incessantly night and day.

It was not until 7:30 o'clock last evening that the rescuers reached a point near St. Paul entry, where the explosion occurred. The work of rescue was very slow, as the conditions confronting the party were difficult to surmount. Toward the middle of the evening the hope was expressed that all the bodies would be recovered by midnight.

Order Carload of Coffins.

The authorities anticipated the fearful extent of the casualties by ordering a carload of coffins and burial supplies, which are now on the way. The order is being rushed at Bluefield and the burial supplies, which include 60 coffins, are expected to reach Pocahontas early today.

Superintendent William Leckie, who entered the mine as one of the rescuing party, had a narrow escape from death. He was overcome by the fumes and had to be carried out. Edward Jones, the inside mine fireman, led the first rescue party, and when that party failed to return in a reasonable time a second rescue party, under Superintendent Leckie, followed.

John Odham and Ed Brown were overcome by gas and died and Leckie barely escaped with his life. Then the third party was formed and continued the work. Meantime the first party had reached another entrance to the mine in safety and sent word over the mountain announcing the fact.

Pitiful Scenes Witnessed.

All this time the work of bratticing the mine, necessary for carrying on the work of rescue, was being carried on. Some confusion was caused in the determination of the exact number of men entombed by the fact that when the explosion occurred the exchange of shifts was in progress, added to which was the fact that a number of the men escaped from the Tug Fork entrance.

Scenes around the mine were pitiable. Relatives and friends gathered in groups and at the entrances and elsewhere, awaiting tidings of the victims, and gave vent to their grief as the bodies, one by one, were brought out.

S. B. Cook, one of the victims, whose body was found within 300 feet of the outside, was the only survivor of the big explosion in the Pocahontas mine in 1884.

Parties coming to work from the Tug river, on the West Virginia side of the mine, did not know there had been any trouble in the mines until they ran into some bodies on the tracks and some mules dead with a man pinned between them.

At 6:15 o'clock last evening a number of the party, headed by Superintendent Leckie, came out of the mine and stated that they had reached the bodies, some of them being horribly mutilated by the explosion. Will Davis's body was found near the drum. While his body was being brought out a crowd of several thousand people were congregated near the drift mouth. The men who escaped from the Tug river side of the mine failed to come to the office and report, adding to the difficulties of the company in determining how many were in the mine at the time of the explosion.

S. B. Cook, the first miner to be taken out, crawled over 100 yards from the point where his bucket was found and had almost escaped.

The old Pocahontas Wholesale Grocery company warehouse has been converted into a temporary morgue, where the bodies are being taken.

Former Disaster Recalled.

John Odham, one of the men who

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lost their lives while attempting the rescue of the Ed Jones party, which they thought was in the mine, is a brother of the Odham who lost his life in 1901, when the party of inspectors, headed by Walter O'Mally, was caught in the Baby mine and overcome by afterdamp.

The West mine was over 700 acres "worked out" or abandoned workings. This fact alone made it difficult for the men to get to the part of the mine where the explosion occurred. All the brattices in these old workings had been blown out. The scene of the disaster is over two miles from the drift mouth.

Telephone Boys Perish

In the operation of the telephone system of the mine a number of boys are employed, and the greater number of these are said to have met death in the explosion or were caught by the afterdamp. It is said that shortly after the explosion one of the boys called up the office outside, but was overcome before he gave his message. The boy probably died at the telephone.

It is said at the mine that such disasters usually occur in damp weather, like that of the past few days. A peculiarity of this explosion is the mystery surrounding its cause. The force of the explosion, as well as its intonation, was almost imperceptible at the drift mouth.