

*Brown*

Birmingham, Ala. April 29, 1911.

Mr. J. W. Paul, M.E.

Pittsburgh, Pa.

Dear Sir:

On April 8th instant an Explosion occurred at Benner Mines near Littleton in the extreme western part of Jefferson County, Ala., about 20 miles from Birmingham.

This mine is operated by the Pratt Consolidated Coal Company and is on the Cane Creek Division of the L. & N. R. R. This mines is operating the Mary Lee seam, which is about 10 ft. thick with a middle man of hard rock about 18" thick, and is undercut with Sullivan Chain Machine. It gives employment to about 285 men; of this number 250 men are inside miners and 35 work on outside. It has a capacity of about 1,100 tons.

The mines has three openings, known respectively as: the slope, #1 shaft, and #2 shaft. The slope is used for Manway. The ventilating apparatus consisted of two Crawford-McCrimmon centrifugal fans., one being 20 feet and the other 17 feet in diameter respectively. The 17 ft. fan which is placed at #1 shaft is used only in case of emergency. The 20 ft. fan is located at #2 shaft, which furnishes about 180,000 to 200,000 cubic ft. per minute. The ventilation is worked on the split-system. The entries are driving 7 ft. high by about 18 ft. wide, carrying a gob of about 9 x 5 ft. The aircourse having about the same sectional area. All over casts and stoppings were built of concrete and stone and cement respectively. Shots were shot by shot fire~~ers~~ while the men were in the mines. All shots were charged with Jefferson #1 bituminite, crescent fuse

and 5 x detonator. Several hundred sticks of this explosive were found throughout the mines (some dynamite was used for making overcasts)

I left Birmingham at 9:30 A.M. on the day of explosion with Chief Mine Inspector Jas. Hillhouse, and Associate Inspector Thomas Dickinson, Mr. E. P. Rossmond, General Superintendent of Pratt Con. Coal Co., and others. Arrived at mines about 10:30 A.M. On arriving at mines I found that about 30 men and 5 mules had escaped, four of whom were hoisted out of shaft #2, and also that three dead bodies had been taken out. Found that work was being done at Rock Slope or Manway and #2 shaft which was originally used for air-shaft. Some coal was hoisted with a steel bucket to fire boilers at head of shaft.

I was directed to work at #2 shaft by Inspector Hillhouse. I experienced a great deal of trouble in getting men to volunteer to go down with men. Finally four men went down; two agreeing to wear apparatus. First went to 7th left inbye #2 shaft. I found a great deal of violence had been displayed in neck of entry. I then decided to work out by #2 shaft towards #1 shaft gone as far as the 4th left. Took two men with apparatus leaving two men on main left haulage. Returned after a period of forty minutes (40). On returning I found that the two men left at this point had been searching around on their own accord and one was partly overcome with after-damp. I had to carry him to shaft #2 and use pulmotor. The other man who did not wear apparatus was in bad shape. All four had dropped their lamps so I had 5 men and one light (my own). I then carried men back to top and found that the Fire Boss who had charge of safety lamps had taken lamps apart broke some of the chimneys, destroyed asbestos washers and gauzes. Also had taken the lock pin out of some of

the lamps and had sent them to Bottom of shaft for me to fix. With the assistance of Messrs. H. H. Hamilton & I. W. Newby of the Du Pont and Jefferson Powder Co's respectively, I fixed all of the lamps in good shape. Then with Mr. Hamilton, Newby, Mr. I. C. Dalrymple, Mine Supt. of T. C. I. & R.R. Co. at Blossburg, and Mr. Webb, M.E. of the Pratt Con. Coal Co., I entered #2 shaft. Traveled along main left haulage to a point between 1st and 2nd left entries finding 13 men & 7 mules all suffocated by afterdamp. We then returned to top of shaft #2. This and the following trip was made without apparatus, having no pump I was unable to charge bottles. Having a severe headache from inhaling afterdamp, I sent Mr. Hamilton with three volunteers down to try and reach #1 shaft which he was successful in doing; telephoning back from #2 shaft. He then traveled up the manway to a distance of about 500 feet out by #1 shaft to rock slope which is used for manway, thence returning to #2 shaft he reported no disturbance beyond 5th left on main left haulage. Having received message from Dr. Rutledge and having no oxygen I awaited his arrival; in the meantime work was being carried on in 7th left and 22 bodies were recovered, which was all the men found in this entry.

Dr. Rutledge arrived at 2:30 A.M. Sunday (9th April) I reported to him at once. By request of Mr. Robert Neill, Associate Mine Inspector, Dr. Rutledge, Messrs. Raudenbush, Key, J. W. Weldon, Geo. Gamble, H. H. Hamilton, H. McCrorie (Mine foreman T.C.I. Co. Blossburg) I. W. Newby and Drs. Rountree and Caraway (both of the T. C. I. & R. R. Co. of Wylam and Pratt City) entered #2 shaft with 5 Dr. 1910 apparatus going outby #2 shaft through canvas brattice placed across main left haulage into the return air-current, traveled main left haulage to 4th left, where Raudenbush, McCrorie and myself put on apparatus, leaving

Drs. Rutledge, Rountree and Caraway and Mr. Hamilton - Newby - Weldon and Gamble and Key on main left haulage. The helmet men then traveled 4th left entry for about 2,000 ft. to cut off to 5th left. Returning after 30 minutes reported to Dr. Rutledge. After resting 5 minutes I took Raudenbush and McCrorie and returned to 4th left traveling to face of entry a distance of 3,200 feet and explored last two rooms, then returned to main left haulage having been gone 1:05 min. We three were in excellent condition. Upon gaining point of origin found two lamps in center of track and hearing groans I realized that something had gone wrong. Ordered Raudenbush & McCrorie to keep on their helmets. We started towards shaft #2 finding lamps and caps scattered along the track. I realized that something serious had happened. I rushed down the track first found Mr. Gamble on his face; stooping down to pick him up I found he was perfectly rigid and presumed he was dead. Next found Dr. Caraway; he had the pulmotor to his mouth, but upon examining it we found that the oxygen was out. Next we found Mr. Newby and Mr. Weldon. We turned Newby on his back and administered artificial respiration until he was able to talk. Our oxygen being nearly out I sent McCrorie for help. Leaving Newby we then found Mr. Weldon and Dr. Rutledge. We found Dr. Rutledge lying in the ditch on left rib on his back headed out by towards #2 shaft; Raudenbush and myself being alone at this time and oxygen very low we were in some distress. We turned Dr. Rutledge on his back; gave him artificial respiration until he was able to talk. He insisted that we go back for the others. We disobeyed orders however and dragged him for a distance of 150 ft. to a rock fall. He was again unconscious, fetching him around, but being so nearly exhausted ourselves were unable to drag him over rock fall.

Here we found Key. Raudenbush being in distress, I decided to go for help and take down the brattice across main left haulage. Reversing the air, helping Raudenbush along we made it to Brattice, where I found some one had attempted to tear down some of the brattices; being in good air we took off apparatus and proceeded to shaft #2, where we gave the alarm. Found the man at shaft had deserted his post. Finally we saw men coming from inby the shaft. They had been sent in by Dr. Rountree, who had escaped but being in a semi-conscious condition he was unable to give lucid directions. The men had gone the wrong way. Rushing the men into the main left haulage we were successful in getting all of the men out. First sending Mr. Key to top in bad shape, I again gave Mr. Newby artificial respiration until he was able to sit up. Going back again I worked on Dr. Rutledge until he came around. He insisted on me leaving him until all the others were taken out, which I did, the air being very good at this time. After all the men were out, Mr. Hamilton and Dr. Rountree had been able to get out unassisted, not having heard from McCrorie I went to the top and found him there. He had lost his way and opening his helmet he was nearly overcome, finally he reached shaft and had given the alarm.

A great deal of credit is due Dr. Wright, Wm. Neill, John Neill and Henry Neill, sons of Mine Inspector Neill, for their assistance in going after and helping us with the men. They showed a great deal of courage inasmuch as they were the first to respond to our urgent cry for help and only had my word (and they never questioned it) that the air was all right. I was sure that it was after tearing down the brattice, as this turned the main current of air into the main left haulage where the men were down.

I will not lay the blame on any one for the accident further

than we had men to tell us that #1 fan was stopped and #2 was running very slowly, while we were in the mines, which must have been the cause.

Carbon monoxide no doubt played a prominent part from the suddenness in which the men were overcome and it came from out by the 4th left as Kay was the first man to go down and was the last man out by the 4th left entry towards #1 shaft. I will not attempt to go further into details as Dr. Rutledge was able to take charge of our work on the morning of the 10th.

We are very much indebted to Mr. Hamilton and Mr. Newby for their able assistance and also Mr. James Williamson of Cardiff, Ala.

I might add that we experienced a great deal of trouble with the boilers and were unable to keep steam. Had to draw the fires out the morning of the 9th while men were in the shaft, on account of not being able to supply water to boilers. The fan was again stopped at this time.

Respectfully submitted,

A. R. Brown.