

# EXPLOSION WHICH CLAIMED 18 VICTIMS WAS CAUSED BY GAS

Local Accident at Abernant  
Mine Being Investigated By  
Nesbitt and Ray.

NEGRO TELLS THRILLING  
STORY OF HOW HE ESCAPED

Fellow-Workers Were Over-  
come By Afterdamp, While  
Attempting To Get Out.

## VICTIMS OF EXPLOSION

The dead are:

In the fourteenth entry:

Dan Hardey, driver.

Ed Green, driver.

Will Henry.

Louis Henderson.

John Banks.

Taylor Sutton.

Dave Williams.

A. B. Williams.

Henry Duncan.

In the fifteenth entry:

Allen Brown.

Caesar Harris.

Cornelius Coleman.

Bert Clemens.

Will Lee.

George Gardner.

Henry Winn, driver.

"Kid" Clark.

Ernest Sheares.

BY LEON FRIEDMAN.

The explosion in the mines at Abernant, Tuscaloosa county, was a local accident and was caused by gas. The accident was confined to one part of the mines. Eighteen negroes and two mules were killed.

This is the belief expressed, while an official investigation of the latest mine horror of Alabama is on. Chief State Mine Inspector C. H. Nesbitt, with Assistant Ray, is in charge of the investigation.

Though the accident happened Tuesday morning at 9:30, with the exception of a brief message received by Chief Mine Inspector Nesbitt that a local explosion had occurred in the mines and "nobody was hurt," no news of the accident reached Birmingham until after 3 o'clock.

The Birmingham News informed the state officials definitely that there had been loss of life, and in an automobile, geared up for fast traveling by Blaine Brownell, of the Ford agency, the state chief inspector and a Birmingham News representative were rushed to the scene late in the afternoon, arriving shortly before 6 o'clock, just as the first eight bodies had been brought out of the mines.

Law Strictly Enforced.

That there was not a more terrible loss of life is accounted for by the care and method now employed throughout the state, the effort to work strictly under the mining laws of the state and the enforcement of all rules to the letter.

Seventy-eight men, among them a number of whites, were in the mines at the time of the explosion. The belief expressed is that in digging, a pocket of gas was loosened and becoming ignited with an open lamp on a miner's cap, exploded.

It was not a loud explosion, according to men who were in a comparatively short distance of the place of the accident. In fact, one negro miner was in one of the entries where several of his fellow workers were killed, but managed to get out. He tells a harrowing story of the accident.

The explosion sent a volume of hot air through the mines and the miners' instincts gave warning that an accident had happened and that safety must be sought at once. Within a few seconds after the accident the miners began swarming out of the place, and a general alarm was given.

The mine foreman, John Ross, got word to the outside to Superintendent J. E. Dilworth, who was on the tippie at the time, the rescue work was started at once. Foreman Ross worked so hard in the afterdamp that spread slowly through the mines after the accident, that he was overcome and had to be cared for by Dr. Jones.

The alarm not only spread to the outside at the mines, but through the mining camp, and within a very short while, women and children in numbers

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had crowded around the entry to the mines and were giving vent to tears and moans.

Then began the rescue work. Men who had had experience in such affairs came from Davis Creek mines, from Adger, Johns and Sumter, from two to nine miles away, while Yolande furnished assistance. In fact, every mining camp in that section of the coal bearing district of the state offered help.

Superintendent Byars, of the Tennessee Coal, Iron & Railroad company's mines at Johns, with necessary apparatus, was among those who showed up at the mines and remained there some time, offering any help that might be asked by Superintendent Dilworth.

## Fans Were Not Injured.

The fans of the mines, fortunately, were not injured in the least, and they were kept busy as could be. The explosion was in the fifteenth right entry, less than a half mile under ground.



The brattices and woodwork in this entry, as well as in the next entry, fourteenth right, were demolished, which permitted the afterdamp to circulate freely and prevented safe ventilation of the mines.

As explained by Will Yancey, colored, who was working on the fourteenth entry:

"I was knocked down by the explosion, which was in the next entry, and feeling the hot air I knew something had happened. Crying to men near me, I bade them follow me to the main slope.

"On my way to the main slope I fell to the ground. I felt myself slipping to sleep. I saw two men and they had fallen down. I called to them to exert themselves and get up once more, but they remained down and attempted to bury their faces in their arms. I got to my feet again and in the darkness groped my way in the direction of the main slope. Though it was as dark as pitch I knew I was going in the right direction.

"Then I felt a little fresh air. If only I could get to the main slope. I had to pass by eighteen rooms of eighty feet each. It seemed to be a week before I got to the main slope, and, turning in the direction on which was the incline, which I could feel, I started out, and, with assistance, finally managed to be carried to the outside.

"I looked around for my companions, but they had dropped by the wayside, and I saw them no more until their bodies were brought out, stiff in death."

#### **Knew It Was an Explosion.**

"I remembered the minute I felt the hot air rushing through the mines that the quicker I could get to the outside the better it would be, and I did not lose my presence of mind. I dropped to the floor of the mine twice, my eyes heavy and my brain in a whirl, but I knew that was the blackdamp overcoming me, and I aroused myself and groped my way to the outside.

"I can't tell you how the two men I tried to get to come with me fell by the wayside. I knew that it would have been useless for me to have tried to carry one of them, for I needed all the strength I had to get myself out."

There was evidently an intention of keeping down information of the accident as much as possible. Superintendent Dilworth, however, gave orders to notify State Mine Inspector J. B. McClary, president of the Abernant Coal company, was in Anniston Tuesday, but no one in his office would admit that trouble had occurred at the camp.

When The Birmingham News had been told that between fourteen and seventeen men had been killed the chief state mine inspector was offered a seat in the automobile.

At 5:45 o'clock the first lot of bodies of victims was brought out, and shortly after 7 the others were brought out. Superintendent Dilworth explained to Mr. Nesbitt that orders had been given to give information, and he regretted the state official had to get definite information from the newspapers.

When President J. B. McClary returned to the city Tuesday night he was informed at his office that an accident had taken place, and he made arrangements for transportation to the scene. A Birmingham News reporter, just back from the scene of the accident, gave Mr. McClary the facts about the explosion.

#### **Trip Taken in Ford Runabout.**

For a long road, Jefferson county cannot complain of the Tuscaloosa road, from Bessemer southward to the county line at Yolande and Abernant. The ride at the rate of half a mile a minute for a great portion of the route Tuesday afternoon in a Ford runabout, driven by Blaine Brownell, demonstrated the good of having splendid roads.

The Ford runabout, just lately put in use, carried an extra passenger, too. The three men with several safety mining lamps, got over the road in fine shape. A few miles from Bessemer, in the vicinity of West lake water covers the road for a foot or two for at least the length of a city block. Through this the car was driven without trouble.

At Johns, Adger and Sumpter and again at Yolande, the people watched The Birmingham News automobile rushing to the scene.