

# NESBITT'S REPORT ON ABERNANT TO BE FINISHED TODAY

Several Negroes Could Have  
Been Saved if Helmets  
Had Been on Hand

FINDINGS WILL GO  
TO THE GOVERNOR

Numbers of Negroes Sat Down and  
Talked the Explosion Over for  
Twenty Minutes and All  
Were Killed But One

C. H. Nesbitt, chief mine inspector, stated yesterday that he would probably complete the investigation into the cause of the explosion at Abernant mine today. He has already determined the cause of the disaster, but declares that he will not divulge that information prior to submitting his report to Governor O'Neal.

On account of the fact that he is certain that had officials of the mine been equipped with helmets, at least a dozen of the negroes who were killed would have been saved, he will recommend the passage of legislation requiring each owner of a mine judged to be in any manner dangerous to provide trained men with at least three helmets.

"After the explosion," stated Mr. Nesbitt yesterday, "ten negroes gathered together in a ventilated shaft and discussed the situation. They sat on the ground for about 20 minutes. Then the panic ensued, and scattering, the majority of the negroes encountered death. Had men entered the mine with helmets, however, they could have held the negroes in check until the ventilation could have been restored."

#### Entombed Men Consulted

The fact that the negroes following the explosion gathered and discussed the situation as if they were not in the presence of death, was made known to the inspector by Will Yancey, one of the rescued miners.

"We all sat down," said the negro to the inspector, "and went over the situation. The air was good where we were. We reached the conclusion that the trouble was not serious. It was very dark, however, and no one could see his hand before his face.

"All of a sudden one of the men, grown fearful in the face of the danger, suggested in a loud voice that we get out of the place. This produced a panic. The bunch scattered, and I was left behind with George Gregory.

"We talked a moment, and determined to work our way out. We started, but soon reached a spot where the air was so foul that we could not breathe. We scrambled back to a place of safety. Three times we made similar attempts, and each time were forced back to the starting point.

"Then we determined to try again. In some manner we became separated. I was lucky enough to strike a path in which some air was moving, and was saved." The body of the other negro was found the following morning.

### Reporter Tipped Nesbitt

The accident occurred at an early morning hour, but it was 4 o'clock in the afternoon before Mr. Nesbitt was apprised of the fact that miners had been killed. This information came not from Superintendent Dillworth, but from a newspaper reporter.

"I got a telephone message in the morning from the local office of the company," stated Mr. Nesbitt, "but it was stated that no fatalities had occurred. I got a long distance connection with a storehouse about one mile below Abernant and made arrangements whereby a messenger was dispatched to the scene. An hour later I received the news that no one had been killed. I was still unsatisfied, and asked that another messenger be sent. In the meantime, a reporter informed me that he had learned that 18 negroes were dead. Soon, thereafter, the second messenger reported over the telephone that it was said two or three miners had been found dead. Thereupon I rushed to the scene. .

"It is very probable that immediately following the explosion the officials thought that perhaps the entombed men would be rescued. I do not believe that they intended to give up erroneous information."

### Five Negroes Burned

Mr. Nesbitt is in Abernant today. On account of foul odors resulting from decomposed mule flesh, it was necessary to postpone the investigation for two days, and on account of great danger of a second explosion following on the heels of the first, the investigating board has been proceeding with great care.

"We will conclude the work Thursday, however," stated Mr. Nesbitt, "and then the report will go to the governor. There will be no sensational report. I will give my opinion as to the cause of the explosion and will make certain recommendations.

"There were but five negroes who received burns, and these burns were not serious. I cannot report, as a matter of fact, that they encountered death as a result of burns. They also might have been suffocated."