

EIGHTEEN LIVES IS TOLL OF DISASTER AT BOSWELL

Appalling Result of Gas Explosion in Mine
of Merchants' Coal Company—Six Vic-
tims in Hospital Besides Three Times
That Number Killed.

Eighteen lives was the toll of an explosion of gas Tuesday morning in Orenda mine No. 2 of the Merchants' Coal company at Boswell. Six men were injured, three of whom are in Memorial Hospital, Johnstown, in a serious condition. Sixteen of the dead who bear foreign names were not identified Tuesday night. The two Americans in the list were:

MARTIN M'GUIRE, aged 32, assistant mine foreman; married; leaves widow and five small children.

FRANK BEAGLE, aged 17, miner; single.

Seriously Injured.

James Berdalen, burned over entire head and body.

George Pronast, skull and both arms fractured, slight burns.

George Pesentz, fractured leg; slight burns.

Frank Comalich, burns over entire body.

Beagle died in the Memorial hospital Tuesday afternoon, an hour after he was admitted. McGuire was dead when his body was found in the entry in which the explosion occurred, more than two miles from the mouth of the mine.

Three hundred and twenty-five men were at work in the mine at the time of the accident, which occurred about 8:30 o'clock Tuesday morning. John Taylor, one of the men assigned to inspect the mine Tuesday morning, reported the presence of gas at 6:30 o'clock in an entry almost 12,000 feet from the mouth of the mine.

Don't Know What Happened.

William Palmer was the foreman in charge. He assigned his assistant, McGuire, to go into that part of the mine where Taylor had discovered gas and make an investigation. McGuire went in, accompanied by the miners who now constitute the list of dead. The officials of the company cannot say exactly what happened.

One supposition is that a spark from the hauling motor set off the gas. All the officials know is that a spark or flame reached the gas from some source and the explosion followed. McGuire is said to have gone alone into the entry where the gas abounded, fencing it off to prevent anyone else from entering.

This is the duty of the assistant foreman in cases where danger is known to exist. The miners who had gone in with McGuire meanwhile set to work in a parallel entry, which they did not know to be gaseous. Fourteen of the dead men perished from the afterdamp which followed the explosion. Their bodies, which were brought out late Tuesday night, did not disclose marks of violence.

Hard to Identify Bodies.

Despite the almost perfect condition of the bodies, the company officials found it impossible to identify them. Only the process of ascertaining their check numbers and comparing these with the payroll of the company will reveal the names of the men.

Every part of the mine was explored in the search for possible injured. When the first news of the explosion reached the surface, George Crossland, the inside superintendent with Palmer, the foreman, led a number of rescue men into the mine. This was about 9 o'clock. First reports given out at the mine placed the number of dead at two, then three and four and throughout the day the number grew.

John Gibson, Jr., general superintendent in charge of the mine, was

four miles away from the scene in a section where the Merchants' company is sinking an air shaft, when he was apprised of the explosion. The air shaft is intended to supply this same mine with a quantity of fresh air and is intended to counteract the gas with which the officials have been troubled from time to time in the past.

Second Explosion in Same Mine.

Early in 1908 an explosion occurred in this mine similar to that of yesterday, except that seven years ago the death toll was only five, three of whom were officials of the United Coal Company which controlled the property. The cause of the former explosion also was gas and the officials had been considering the problem of ridding the mine of this danger ever since. The sinking of the new air shaft is a move in this direction.

R. W. Cunningham of Somerset, state mine inspector, who visited the mine Tuesday, following the explosion, made an official inspection of the property six weeks ago and recorded entire absence of gas at that time, according to Supt. Gibson.

Claims There Was No Negligence.

"No negligence can be charged against the company officials," said Supt. Gibson Tuesday night. "The inspection made this morning by Taylor was thorough and the fact that he detected the presence of gas and reported it is evidence that the company was trying to safeguard its men against injury."

"What happened probably never will be disclosed. All we know is that a flame must have reached the gas to set it off. Of course, the men did not die as a result of the force of the explosion, but from the afterdamp—all except McGuire and Beagle. The other 16 men were on their way out of the mine when they were overcome by the damp."

McGuire was doing his duty bravely when he met his death. He had been told to go in and investigate the gas and endeavor to make the entry safe for the miners. He had fenced off the dangerous portion and was making tests with his safety lamp, no doubt, when the gas went off."

The mine had been in operation about 13 years. Five first-aid teams, consisting of five men each, had been organized. About 18 men of these teams constituted the rescuing squad which went into the mine Tuesday morning following the explosion.

Crowds at Pit Mouth.

The first reports that circulated were to the effect that only a few men had been killed, but that a great number were injured. These reports brought practically the entire population of Boswell—more than 2,000 people—to the mouth of the mine. The families of the miners live in long rows of company houses along a hillside, and these houses were emptied almost completely of their occupants when the news arrived that there was trouble in the mine.

Women and children crowded about and probably to quiet their anxiety, or as Mr. Gibson explained, because great excitement prevailed at the time, there was no report made on the number of dead until Tuesday night. As the men came out of the mine during the morning their numbers were checked, so that the officials were satisfied Tuesday night that no bodies remained in the mine.