

33 MINERS CUT OFF BY GAS EXPLOSION, FEAR ALL ARE DEAD

FAIRMONT, W. Va., March 18—Hundreds of rescue workers struggled today to reach 33 miners entombed in Barrackville Mine Number 41 of the Bethlehem Mining Corporation, three miles from here, who were cut off by a terrific explosion at 9:30 p. m. yesterday.

Belief that all the miners entombed were dead was expressed early today by Benton Mitchell, superintendent of the mine.

"The mine is a total wreck as a result of the explosion," he said, adding it was probably on fire.

The blast last night, believed to have been caused by a gas explosion, rocked the vicinity for 20 miles, destroying structures near the mine and causing the lights of Fairmont to go out temporarily.

Ten hours after last night's explosion, rescue workers had penetrated one mile in the workings without finding any trace of the men entombed.

Despite denial by mine officials that the explosion was caused by dynamite planted in the mine, Sheriff Riggins arrested three men today on suspicious character charges. These men, it is said, were hired by the company recently and were the last to leave the workings before the explosion. The men held gave their names as A. G. Kendall, Clarence Wetzel and M. D. Edmunds.

R. M. Lambie, chief of the West Virginia department of mines, would not hazard a guess as to the cause of the explosion. He said rescue work was progressing rapidly and the chambers where the men are believed trapped should be reached this afternoon.

Passage Roof Collapsed.

It is believed the roofs of the underground passageways collapsed, sealing the men as in a tomb.

Thousands of persons gathered at the mouth of the pit following the explosion and rescue squads were organized with the state department of mines in charge.

After more than six hours work, members of the rescue parties had not been able to reach any of the men, dead or alive.

Rumors of a bomb explosion were linked up with the fact that the mine started work on an open shop basis on October 1, 1924, but they were stoutly denied by officials of the Bethlehem corporation.

The prevailing theory is the explosion was caused by ignited gas,

since it is known the mine is practically always filled with gas. In 1916, ten miners lost their lives in an explosion in the same mine.

Flames Shoot Through Mine.

The victims of last night's explosion were members of the mine's night shift, who were cutting coal to be loaded and carried away in the morning. They had been at work only a short time when a rumble was heard and then a terrific blast broke loose. Flames shot through the mine.

The company's storehouse nearby was wrecked and window panes in hundreds of homes were broken. The country resounded with the echoes of the blast and the crash of the falling mine structures.

Barrackville Mine Number 41, now owned by the Bethlehem Mine Corporation, was formerly a mine of the Jameson Coal Company.

Hope that the men might be alive was raised, however, by R. M. Lambie, chief of the West Virginia department of mines, who at 8 a. m. expressed a belief the men might be safe.

Find Horses Dead

Rescue workers reached the bottom of the wrecked shaft early today and found 36 horses dead from the blast. Study of the horses, Lambie said, showed the explosion "ran" towards the entrance of the mine and did not sweep inward. The men who were trapped were one and one half miles inside the workings, Lambie said. This gave hope that the miners escaped death in the blast. Gas, however, filled the mine immediately after the explosion and some fear was expressed that the men may have been asphyxiated.