

FRANCISCO NO. 2, FRANCISCO COAL COMPANY

Francisco, Indiana

December 9, 1926

Six cage loads, totaling 71 of the normal day shift of 325, had been lowered into the mine when the explosion occurred at 6:30 a.m. An accumulation of gas in the south west section, where five rooms had been caving, was found by a fireboss, who did not report it but stayed in the mine to try to clear it out. Open lights of incoming men caused an ignition that picked up dust and traveled to the shaft, damaging it so that the cages could not be used. Crews were sent in by the stairway in the escape shaft. A bucket was rigged in the air compartment of this shaft, and the seriously injured were hoisted out. Men who were outside the explosion zone or not badly hurt went up the stairway. The explosion doors were blown open, but the fan was undamaged. Oxygen breathing apparatus was not used; but gas masks were, to good advantage. After 24 hours all but 3 of the 26 bodies had been found and the 45 survivors removed. Eleven of the injured died from burns.

Smoke had been found coming from main west entries, too dense to penetrate to the fire. Because of the danger of an explosion of methane in 2 sealed panels in that section, all men were withdrawn, leaving 5 bodies inside. A slight explosion occurred shortly afterward. The shafts were sealed. On January 27, 1927, these seals were removed and the main west section was sealed off. The five bodies were removed.

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Bringing up Dead and Injured From Francisco No. 2 Gibson County - - Many Suffer Burns

Princeton, Ind., Dec. 9 - - Death toll of the explosion at the Francisco mine No. 2 near here today mounted rapidly as rescue workers penetrated the debris that choked the shaft. At 2:30 o'clock this afternoon thirteen bodies had been recovered with only part of the dead brought to the surface. The death toll may reach twenty-five or more.

Forty persons dead or alive had been carried from the mine through the air shaft, the first having been brought up in a steel bucket raised by the engine hoist.

Seventy-one miners were in the mine at the time of the explosion, having gone below shortly after six o'clock. They were not to have gone to work until seven o'clock.

At 6:30 o'clock a gas explosion let loose. Flames and debris shot out the entrance to a height greater than the iron tippie. The top was blown off the air shaft.

There are 350 men on the payroll of the mine. Others would have been below a few minutes

later if the explosion had not occurred.

There are rescue workers here from all sections of this part of the state. No intimation has been given as to when the rescue workers expect to locate the last of the bodies.

The shaft was badly wrecked, but not completely blocked. Rescue work started at once.

Rescue workers continued bringing others to the surface and said they believed none would die from their injuries.

Five injured miners were carried from the shaft soon after the explosion.

Two hours later two dazed workers crawled to safety through a manway. They could tell but little of what had occurred inside the mine.

Company officials and employees together busied themselves, the air shaft was sealed and in the meantime word of the blast was telephoned to many sections. Shortly afterward, mine rescue crews and the truck of the U.S. Bureau of Mines arrived and men at once entered the air shaft. Between 7 and 8 o'clock the first of the miners caught in the pit by the explosion were being removed.

It was dangerous, as well as slow and tedious work for the most part, as the rescuers had to carry each injured man up through the air shaft. The first men were brought from near the shaft on the bottom and all attention was being given to the injured, rather than those at that time known to be dead. Many of the injured were badly burned, the flesh dropping from their

faces, hands, and bodies, while others were blackened and still others less seriously injured.

The sides of the shaft had been caved in they said. "When we heard the explosion we ran toward the manway," one said. "We have been struggling up ever since."

Ventilators were still working in the mine however. The shaft, more than 500 feet deep, reached a vein of No. 4 Indiana coal which is classed as "gaseous."

All physicians and nurses who could be spared from the city were rushed to the mine where a base hospital was improvised.

Most of the miners brought back were suffering from burns. Some had been crushed under falling debris in the mine shaft. Most of the injuries were said to be more painful than dangerous.

Some of the miners less seriously hurt were taken to private residences in the city to make room for the others at the Methodist hospital, already filled almost to capacity.

Rescue workers at the mine brought the injured to the surface rapidly. The shaft was partially blocked but there was sufficient opening to allow the work to continue without digging although progress was hindered somewhat by the condition of the shaft.

On the surface physicians, nurses and volunteers administered first aid as soon as the injured were brought up.

The crowd of bystanders grew larger as news of the accident spread through the community. Families of the entrapped men stood by some weeping, others quietly waiting.

Only immediate families of the most seriously injured were allowed to go to the hospital with the men.

PRINCETON, Ind., Dec. 10 - Fire raging in the depths of the Francisco coal mine No. 2 today forced abandonment of further attempts to locate three men still listed as missing in the check of casualties from yesterday's explosion. With smoke pouring from the top mine shaft and the peril from the fire increasing momentarily for the rescuers working below, the men were ordered from the shaft. After a conference with W. G. Powell, federal mine inspector located at Evansville, officials of the Francisco coal company ordered the mine sealed to check the fire. They were unwilling to risk the lives of the

volunteer workers in an attempt to recover the bodies of the three missing. There had been no hope of recovering the three alive since last night.

It may be a month or more before the mine can be unsealed and explored for the rest of the bodies officials said.

Owing to the smoke and fire in the mine, very little was done after midnight last night toward the rescue of the entombed men. Shortly after five o'clock when the crew of men went below the bodies of two men were located but conditions in the mine were such that they were forced to return to the ground level without them. Just after the crew gained the surface there was another explosion that shot flame out of the top of the shaft.

The second explosion came about 7:40 o'clock this morning, barely five minutes after the last members of a rescue crew had come to the top for breakfast. Those near the main and air shafts reported feeling the "puff!" accompanying the blast. It seemed to originate in the southern part of the mine where Wednesday's blast wreaked its heaviest toll among the band of 71 men in the mine at the time. Most of the force of the explosion was lost as it spread unhampered through the underground mine. It was then that plans were begun for sealing the shaft.

The list of dead in the Francisco coal mine disaster mounted to twenty-five today with the finding of two more bodies in the mine and the death of two of the injured in the Methodist hospital here.

Rescue squads this morning found the bodies of S. J. Roll of Evansville, and W. P. Ratliff of Francisco in a section of the mine that had not been explored before.

Three men were still reported missing in the mine by officials of the coal company and no hope was held that they would be found alive.

Seven men were taken alive from the mine last night by the weary rescue crews after practically all hope of finding any more survivors had been given up. One of the seven died a short time after being rushed to the hospital.

The fire for a time during the night blocked all rescue efforts but early this morning the crews went back to their work.

An investigation to determine the cause of the explosion was being made today by officials of the Francisco mining company, inspectors of the state mining department and a representative of the federal bureau of mines.

Two fire bosses had completed an inspection of the workings a short time before the disaster and reported conditions satisfactory in the mine at the time they made their survey.

The theory was advanced that a squeeze of the walls in an old channel of the mine forced an accumulation of gas out into the workings after the inspection and this pocket was touched off by a mine lamp or a spark from an electric motor.

TELLS OF BEING IN DARK WHILE AWAITING RESCUE

A story of being in utter darkness and anxiously awaiting developments during 12 hours on the bottom of the Francisco mine No. 2 following the explosion Thursday morning was told by Milo Dossett, one of the seven men rescued at 6:20 o'clock Thursday evening, the last group of men to be brought to the top.

Mr. Dossett and his companions, however, were in the west entrance approximately 1500 feet from the place of the gas explosion and only a dust explosion occurred where they were. The force of the explosion knocked Mr. Dossett to the ground rolled and hurled him a distance of about 60 feet.

After recovering from the effects of the explosion sufficiently, Mr. Dossett with his "buddy" Rex Rembe turned from the sand hill into the "S" road and then back to the second west, trap door, on the "main second west." There they found Abe Whitman, Charles Cooper and Pete Bass. They remained there until about 11 o'clock. Rembe and Bass left the group to saying they were going to try to find a way out but soon came back and reported that there was too much gas and smoke. All of them then went to the "first right" into the air course and ran into "damps". Rembe, Cooper, Bass and William Slater were forced to the ground, while Dossett, Whitman and Harry Slater were able to retreat. Later, Mr. Dossett went through a slide door into the main air course and remained there until the rescue party found him. He was able to tell them where the rest of the group were and all were alive except Rembe, who was overcome with the bad air and damps.

Gas Came From Old Mine Rooms, Not Inspected

The gas which caused the explosion in Francisco mine No. 2 December 9 came from abandoned workings of the mine which showed no evidence of inspection, said a report on a general inquiry into the explosion made by coroner Karl S. Strickland and state mine inspectors and filed this afternoon by the coroner.

"The explosion was caused by the accidental lighting of gas in the southwest part of the mine, probably by one of the James brothers; that this gas came from rooms 5, 6, 7 and 8 in the southwest workings of the mine; that there was evidence of inspection of working parts of the mine, but no evidence of inspection of old rooms." Rooms 5, 6, 7 and 8 from which the gas was held to have come, are abandoned rooms.