

COAL FATAL
BUREAU OF MINES

1937 0002

SUBJECT: Explosion of black powder, Rupert Coal Company,
Keystone, Ohio, June 21, 1937.

Five men have died and one is not expected to live as the result of burns recieved when a keg of black blasting powder exploded in the Rupert Coal Company Mine at Keystone, Ohio, on June 21; 1937.

The Rupert mine is a small truck mine operted by Fred and William Rupert. The mine was opened about one year ago by two drifts, which had been driven off one entry and two off the other. Ventilation is natural, induced by a stack over a shallow

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The Rupert mine is a small truck mine operated by Fred and William Rupert. The mine was opened about one year ago by two drifts, which had been driven off one entry and two off the other. Ventilation is natural, induced by a stack over a shallow air shaft. Carbide lights are used, and coal is shot off the solid with black powder and squibs.

Six men were in the mine on the day of the accident, and had congregated in a cross-cut about 100 feet in by the drift mouth to eat their lunch. According to a story related by the man who was still living, one of the men was in the act of preparing a cartridge when the black powder was ignited, but since all the men were wearing carbide lights and some probably smoking, it seemed safe to assume that either a carbide light or smoking was responsible for igniting the powder.

Following the explosion, four of the men were able to walk outside and the other two men crawled to the outside. Two truck drivers were the only ones on the surface at the time and they, until doctors and ambulances arrived. All the men were severely burned about head, face, arms, body, and legs. A pony that was standing nearby was also severely burned.

Five of the victims died during the following day, and when the writer visited the hospital at Gallipolis, Ohio, during the morning of June 23, the sixth man was unconscious and was not expected to survive. The dead included three brothers, sons of one of the owners of the mine.

Examination of the keg holding the powder that exploded showed a pick hole in top and the side of the keg was flattened out. Examination of empty kegs in the mine showed that it was common practice to open kegs by means of a pick.

No violence resulted from the explosion was primarily the result of carelessness

on the part of one of the men. In the first place, the use of carbide lights and black powder, especially in 25-pound kegs, should not have been permitted in this mine. It is only a short distance to the outside and cartridges could have been prepared outside rather than underground. The mining law of Ohio permits the use of carbide lights and black powder, and in the final analysis, the State is responsible for deaths resulting from their use. IN this case, the man who was preparing the cartridge with an open light on his head was careless and is primarily responsible for the accident.

P.S.--Since writing the above, it has been learned that the sixth man has died.

OK on C.M.F.
UNITED STATES
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
BUREAU OF MINES
WASHINGTONCONFIDENTIAL MEMORANDUM
(Not for Publication)

July 26, 1937

TO MEMBERS OF THE SAFETY DIVISION:

SUBJECT: Explosion of black powder, Rupert Coal Company, Keystone, Ohio,
June 21, 1937.

5+1=6 killed

Five men have died and one is not expected to live as the result of burns received when a keg of black blasting powder exploded in the Rupert Coal Company mine at Keystone, Ohio, on June 21, 1937.

The Rupert mine is a small truck mine operated by Fred and William Rupert. The mine was opened about one year ago by two drifts, which had been driven into the hill about 350 feet. Four rooms have been driven off one entry and two off the other. Ventilation is natural, induced by a stack over a shallow air shaft. Carbide lights are used, and coal is shot off the solid with black powder and squibs.

Six men were in the mine on the day of the accident, and had congregated in a cross-cut about 100 feet in by the drift mouth to eat their lunch. According to a story related by the man who was still living, one of the men was in the act of preparing a cartridge when the black powder was ignited. The story does not relate just how the powder was ignited, but since all the men were wearing carbide lights and some probably smoking, it seemed safe to assume that either a carbide light or smoking was responsible for igniting the powder.

Following the explosion, four of the men were able to walk to the outside and the other two men crawled to the outside. Two truck drivers were the only ones on the surface at the time and they, with the help of nearby neighbors, rendered first aid treatment until doctors and ambulances arrived. All the men were severely burned about head, face, arms, body, and legs. A pony that was standing nearby was also severely burned.

Five of the victims died during the following day, and when the writer visited the hospital at Gallipolis, Ohio, during the morning of June 23, the sixth man was unconscious and was not expected to survive. The dead included three brothers, sons of one of the owners of the mine.

Examination of the keg holding the powder that exploded showed a pick hole in the top and the side of the keg was flattened out. Examination of empty kegs in the mine showed that it was common practice to open kegs by means of a pick.

No violence resulted from the explosion. A woven mat curtain in the cross-cut was not blown out, and empty powder kegs and lunch pails located in the cross-cut were not disturbed. A keg with about two pounds of black powder in it was also not disturbed.

This accident was primarily the result of carelessness on the part of one of the men. In the first place, the use of carbide lights and black powder, especially in 25-pound kegs, should not have been permitted in this mine. It is only a short distance to the outside and cartridges could have been prepared outside rather than underground. The mining law of Ohio permits the use of carbide lights and black powder, and in the final analysis, the State is responsible for deaths resulting from their use. In this case, the man who was preparing the cartridge with an open light on his head was careless and is primarily responsible for the accident.

This memorandum is confidential and should not be published.

W. J. FENE

P. S.--Since writing the above, it has been learned that the sixth man has died.

Approved:
D. HARRINGTON