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THE KNOXVILLE SENTINEL.

VOL. XXV, NO. 294. 4 O'CLOCK EDITION. KNOXVILLE, TENN., SATURDAY EVENING, DECEMBER 9, 1911. TWO CENTS

PROBABLE DEADLY MINE DISASTER AT BRICEVILLE

KNOXVILLE IRON CO. MINE HAS EXPLOSION

From 100 to 200 Miners and Helpers Entombed

Three Miners Emerge Unharmed, Who Were in One of Entries at Time of Disaster—Rescuing Parties Encountered Cave-in, One Mile From Mouth of Shafts—And are Rebuffed.

OXYGEN HELMETS ARE NOW AWAITED

Feared That Many May be Dead Before Assistance Reaches Them—Entry May be Made Through an Abandoned Opening in the Mine—Union Mine Workers Tender Offers of Assistance.

SCENES OF GRIEF AND ANXIETIES

(By Staff Correspondent)

Briceville, Dec. 9.—At 7:20 o'clock this morning a terrific explosion occurred in the Cross Mountain mine of the Knoxville Iron company. A number of men were entombed in the mine, and the work of their rescue is thwarted by a cave-in encountered by rescuers who proceeded into the mine a distance of about one mile. Until the arrival of oxygen helmets and other mine rescue apparatus, which are expected this afternoon, it may not be possible to effect an entrance into what it is feared will prove a chamber of horrors.

Gases and heat eminating from the main entries gave rise to early reports of fire raging in the mine, but this was subsequently denied.

Estimates of the number of men in the mine at the time of the explosion vary f rom 125 to 268, but it is believed that they total less than 200.

Three men in one of the shafts escaped almost simultaneously with the explosion, and they reported that they had observed no unusual conditions previous to leaving the interior of the mine. It is thought that if the rescuers are unable to reach the imprisoned miners through the two main shafts, they may be reached by an abandoned entry on an opposite side of the mountain.

Federal mine rescue agents are now en route to Briceville, and upon their arrival the rescue work will be systematicaly organized and pushed. Now, all is chaos at Briceville.

DESCRIPTION OF MINE

The explosion occurred in the main Cross Mountain mine, which is recorded in the state mine inspector's report as a "class B drift mine." It is 1,006 feet above the level of the sea, and in the Cumberland mountain range four miles from Coal Creek, which is on the main lines of the Southern and L. & N. railroads. The Coal Creek coal seam, having an average width of forty-six inches, is worked in this mine. The roof is of slate and the bottom is of fire clay. It is developed on the entry and airway, double room and pillar system. The ventilation is produced by electric fans with 300 revolutions and diameter of seven feet, and is distributed by the "split" system. Haulage of coal mined is conducted from rooms to the sidetracks, a distance of 2,200 feet, by mules, and from side track to outside, a distance of 6,600 feet, the haulage is by electric motor.

The mine is operated by the Knoxville Iron company, of which T. I. Stephenson, of Knoxville, is president; Otis A. Brown, of Knoxville, secretary; P. F. Lynch, of Briceville, superintendent; George Bulmer, of Briceville, inside foreman, and J. F. Hatmaker, of Briceville, gas boss.

FEDERAL MINE RESCUE CAR ORDERED TO PROCEED TO BRICEVILLE AT ONCE

MINE RESCUE CAR, NOW EN ROUTE TO BRICEVILLE

(Special to The Sentinel.)

Middlesboro, Ky., Dec. 9.—The federal mine rescue car attached to the Knoxville mine rescue station, which has been at Middlesboro for several days, left via the L. & N. today, and will arrive at Briceville where a mine explosion occurred, at 4:25 o'clock Saturday afternoon. Dr. J. J. Rutledge, who was in charge of the local station for several months, has been ordered from Pittsburg to assume charge of the rescue work.

DR. J. J. RUTLEDGE IS ORDE RED TO THE BRICEVILLE DISASTER RESCUE WORK

Pittsburg, Dec. 9.—Dr. J. J. Rutledge, mining engineer attached to the arsenal station of the bureau of mines here, received word of the explosion at Briceville soon after it happened, with orders to leave by the first train to take charge of rescue operations at the mine. Dr. Rutledge is familiar with the Briceville region and the mine in which the explosion occurred. Federal rescue car No. 7, in charge of William Burke, is in Eastern Kentucky, and it was also ordered to Briceville.

HEROIC EFFORTS BEING MADE TO REACH MINERS IMPRISONED TWO MILES OR MORE FROM ENTRANCE

(Staff Correspondence.)

Briceville, Dec. 9.—An explosion imprisoned about 200 men in a coal mine of the Knoxville Iron company, at Briceville, forty miles north of Knoxville, this morning at 7:30 o'clock. The explosion is probably two miles from the entrance to the mines. The federal mine rescue crew was summoned.

It is not yet possible to ascertain the number killed, but it is feared the loss of life will be very heavy.

The rumble of the explosion brought great crowds of townspeople to the mine opening. Company officials made immediate preparations to organize rescue operations, but at 8:30 o'clock the mine had not been entered.

Briceville, the scene of Saturday morning's explosion, became a place of note in Tennessee during the mining troubles in the early nineties when miners rebelled on account of the convict lease system and troops were sent to the vicinity. The town is located in Anderson county near Coal Creek. According to the Tennessee mine inspector's office there are six mines in Briceville.

Fraterville Disaster.

A similar death dealing catastrophe occurred at Fraterville mine of the Coal Creek Coal company, also located at Briceville, on the morning of May 19, 1902. In this accident 184 miners and helpers lost their lives, and it was several days before the mine channel was cleared and it was possible to remove all the dead. In addition to the number of human lives sacrificed, several mules used in the mine for drawing mine cars, also perished. The mine horror was attributed to a dust or gas explosion and it came without warning.

At 10:30 o'clock flames began to issue from the openings to the ill-fated mine. This effectually checked the work if rescue, the parties that had previously entered the mine being driven back by smoke and flames. Such fire fighting apparatus as was available was put into play at the mine opening.

The special train conveying the officials of the Knoxville Iron company and federal rescuers a scheduled to arrive here about 1 o'clock.

It was stated at 10:30 o'clock that 268 men were in the mine.

Shortly before noon, rescuing parties who had entered the Cross Mountain mine earlier in the day emerged from two entrances and reported that they had gone in a distance of about one mile. They were unable to proceed further on account of having encountered a cave-in in much of the entries. The cave-in was of such a character, according to the returning rescuers, as to indicate that the explosion was caused by dust ignition. It is stated that the mine has always been free from gas, and was also dry, and this leads to the belief that the accident must have originated from a dust explosion.

Three Men in Shaft.

Three men who were in one of the adjoining shafts at the time of the explosion, escaped safely and without injury. These men were John Laing, Sam Farmer and Bert Hatmaker. They came out almost simultaneously with the concussion that was felt from the explosion. They report that no unusual conditions were discovered by them in the interior before they left the work this morning.

The exact location of the explosion is thought to have been about two miles in the interior, and about 900 feet beneath the crest of the mountain.

From 125 to 268 in Mine.

The number of men in the mine is variously estimated at from 125 to 268. One of the miners, who is believed to have a knowledge of the number of men who entered the mine this morning, gave it as his opinion that the number would not exceed 140.

Hopes were entertained that the men will escape alive, or at least many of them, as the rescuers planned to re-enter the mine as soon as possible and push the rescue work. This, it was thought, would be possible when the mine rescue helmets and other federal resuscitating apparatus arrived, soon after noon. On account of the cave-in and the smoke and heat it was impossible for the voluntary rescuing parties to proceed further without the aid of the mine rescue apparatus.

Believe Life Chances Small.

The prevailing sentiment among those who understand the situation, is that the men in the mine have little chance of being rescued alive. They are imprisoned about two miles from the entrance. The mine has fallen in about one mile from the entrance, and the rescuers will have to dig their way every foot from this cave in to the scene of the miners.

Physicians from near-by mining camps have gathered here to render any assistance possible. They are: Dr. J. B. Henderson, of LaFollette; Dr. W. H. Richards, of Briceville; Dr. C. H. Phillips, of Briceville; Dr. C. H. Morgan, of Briceville; Dr. G. D. Morton, of Minersville; Dr. E. M. Beasley, of Coal Creek; Dr. T. J. Jennings, of Coal Creek; Dr. E. H. Ford of Coal Creek.

U. F. Lynch, superintendent of mines, is in charge of the rescue forces. He is assisted by William Brasfoush, of the Coal Creek Coal company; John Gelson, of Minersville Coal company; L. M. Carnes, of the Black Diamond Coal company. Mr. Bulmer usually is in the mine all day, but he had not entered at the time of the explosion this morning.

The shock from the explosion was felt on the side of the mountain above the mine this morning, but no noise was heard. A shaft extends from the mountain side to the mine entrance about one mile from its mouth, but at the point where the timber has fallen so that it is believed there is no little chance for fresh air to enter the mine beyond the cave in. There is only a entrance.

Working Cross Entries.

The men were at work in cross entries On the left side of the mine men were at work in cross entries Nos. 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26 and 27. On the right side they were at work on Cross entries Nos. 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23 and 24.

ATMOSPHERIC CONDITIONS ARE THOUGHT RESPONSIBLE

(By Staff Correspondent.)

Briceville, Dec. 9.—J. D. Richards, assistant to Gen. E. Sylvester, state mine inspector, arrived at the scene of the explosion this afternoon and is leading in the efforts to rescue the entombed miners. T. I. Stephenson, president of the Knoxville Iron company, Sam H. Boyd, chief of the Knoxville fire department, and Foreman Miner Sutton, who is in charge of the mining rescue station, located at Knoxville, arrived this afternoon on a special train and are assisting in the efforts to rescue the miners.

Reports came from reliable sources that last night the air in mines here was oppressive, and the air outside of the mine being in the same condition, it is thought draw out the foul air, and it is the belief of many that the air caused the explosion instead of the other theories that have been advanced as to the cause.

OTHER MINE ACCIDENTS ON TENNESSEE RECORD

Since 1894, there have been seventeen mine accidents in Tennessee, caused by explosion or otherwise.

The first of the most serious of these was that at Dayton in 1895, when forty-seven miners were killed in an explosion in the mines of the Dayton Coal & Iron company.

Twenty-two company men lost their lives in the Richland mine, operated by the Dayton Coal & Iron company.

The Fraterville accident, May 19, 1902, was one of the most serious, 184 men losing their lives.

At Cooper Hill, a year ago, a shaft over a cooper mine turned over, entombed eight men, but they crawled out by a rear shaft.

RAIN, SAYS JO-JO.

This is delightful weather you are giving us, Mr. Weatherman. Makes me want to go fishing, but as this is not the season for that, I shall go ballooning. What kind of weather will we have?

Rain tonight or Sunday, warmer tonight.

HIS WIFE'S DREAM MAY HAVE SAVED HIS LIFE

Mrs. Hugh LaRue Appealed to Her Husband Not to Enter Mine Today, as She Had Had Vision of Disaster, and Headless Forms Being Brought From Cavern.—Wife's Tears of Joy.

(By Staff Correspondent.)

Briceville, Dec. 9.—Hug Larue, a miner employed in the Cross Mountain mine where an explosion occurred today, may owe his life to a dream which his wife had last night. Upon awakening this morning Mr. Larue was approached by his wife, who told him that she would not prepare dinner for him to carry to the mines, as she did not want him to work today. She then recited a dream she had, giving this as her reason for asking that her husband stay out of the mine.

Mrs. Larue said that last night she dreamed she saw scores of miners with their heads blown off, being carried out of the mine entrance. That she and her little children and she has been standing at the mine's mouth watching the unfortunate coal diggers being carried out. She pleaded for the life of her husband today, she said. Despite the fact that he has not been at a day from his work for many months, he was prevailed upon today to remain out of the mine. It was only a short time after Mrs. Larue recited her story until the explosion was announced. With tears of joy streaming down her face, she embraced her husband, and thanked God that she had had the dream last night. Their little children are gathering about them, rejoicing to know that their father is yet alive. They joined in sympathy with the little children who are gathered around the mine entrance wondering if their fathers have been killed.

Mr. Larue is doing everything possible to comfort those whose relatives have been entombed.

Goes to Join His Brother.

Harvey LaRue, whose brothers are employed by the Knoxville iron company, in the Cross Mountain mine, where an explosion occurred today, left the city for Briceville this morning, immediately after hearing of the disaster. When leaving the city he had not been told that his brother, Hugh LaRue, had been kept out of the mines today by his wife, who dreamed last night that she saw miners with their heads blown off, being carried from the mines. It is feared that another brother, Luther LaRue, was in the mine when the explosion occurred. Another brother, Jim LaRue, is employed in the Coster shop. W. M. LaRue is out of the city. His son, Lawrence, went to Briceville today. No word has been received by the members of the family from the LaRues at Briceville.

THREE THEORIES AS TO CA USE OF EXPLOSION; MINE PASSED RECENT OFFICIAL INSPECTIONS

(By Staff Correspondent.)

Briceville, Dec. 9.—There are three theories as to the cause of the explosion of the Cross Mountain mine, of the Knoxville Iron company, which occurred this morning. One theory is that it was some powder explosion. Second is that an electric wire came in contact with explosives and the third is that the explosion was caused by powder tamping of a drill.

The mine was thoroughly inspected last Friday afternoon by J. F. Hatmaker, who has been inspector of the mine for eight years. He stayed in the mine nearly all of Friday night of last week. He claims that there was no trace of gasses in the mine when he emerged.

The mine was recently inspected an inspector under Gen. E. Sylvester, state mine inspector, who reported that the mine was in good condition. A representative of a casualty company, which carries insurance on the employes of the company, also inspected the mine recently and reported that it was in excellent condition.

There is an old entrance to the mine, which has been abandoned, from which fine coal dust is escaping. This dust is so fine that it looks like smoke.

NEIGHBORING MINERS BEGIN RESCUE WORK

Scenes of Anguish and Anxiety at Entrances to the Ill Fated Mine.

OFFICIALS ARE RETICENT

Horrors of Fraterville Disaster Recalled by Cross Mountain Accident.

(Special to The Sentinel.)

Briceville, Dec. 9.—As soon as it became known throughout the Coal Creek region that the Cross Mountain mine of the Knoxville Iron company had been the scene of an explosion this morning, in which many men and boys had been imprisoned, if not killed or injured other mines suspended operations and dispatched their forces of men to Briceville. Several rescue parties were organized and bodies of men were sent to each of the three entrances to the mine. On account of the heavy rain distance of the scene of the explosion from the mouth of either entrance it was difficult to ascertain the exact point at which the disaster occurred. Rescue efforts were therefore undertaken from each entry.

At 11 o'clock nothing had been heard from the rescuers who were industriously working in an effort to reach the entombed men.

The scene at the mouth of the mine beggars description. Men, women and children who are relatives and friends of the men known to have entered the mine this morning, were congregated, eagerly and anxiously and carnestly awaiting some word of information that would tell of their loved ones. Reports varied as to the number of men and boys who entered the mines this morning, though it is certain that they were in excess of 100.

The horrors of the Fraterville disaster of 1902 were instantly recalled by the catastrophe of this morning, and the terrible death and suffering precipitated by that accident intensified the fears and anxities of the impatient watchers at the mouth of he several entries to the ill fated mine.

Officials of the Knoxville Iron company minimized the extent of the explosion, and expressed confidence that it would not be as serious as was feared by many. They declared that they believed many if not all the men in the mine would be rescued alive. They stated that nothing would be left undone to bring about the men's rescue as speedily as possible.

A train with officials of the company, physicians and mine rescue workers of the federal government was expected to arrive from Knoxville about noon.

GEORGE P. CHANDLER HEADS BUCKET BRIGADE

Carrying Water to Rescue Workers Who are Seeking to Enter Mine.

(Special to The Sentinel.)

Briceville, Dec. 9.—George P. Chandler, of Knoxville, president of the Tennessee Coal company, is leading a bucket brigade, he being a carrying water from nearby wells and springs to those who are attempting to go into the mine to rescue the imprisoned coal diners. Miners and others from all sections of the valley are arriving here on every train and by other conveyances to assist in rescuing the entombed men.

Rescue headquarters have been opened in the dynamo room of the Cross Mountain mines.

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