

INVESTIGATION OF EXPLOSION  
AT KINLOCH MINE, VALLEY CAMP COAL COMPANY,  
PARNASSUS, PENNSYLVANIA.

Explosion occurred at 7:15 to 7:20 A.M., Thursday, March 22, 1929.

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Testimony of Harvzy Rearick, Carpenter.

"I was at the top of the slope picking coal off the conveyor, and loading my wheelbarrow, at about 7:20 A.M. I generally got a wheelbarrow load of coal from the conveyor first thing in the morning because this coal coming from Dabble Duck is the best coal for our stove in the carpenter shop. I saw the conveyor stop, then start back. The motor, which drives the conveyor was running idle. The colored boy, Taylor, was standing on the tipple steps about 12 steps from the top landing. I stepped back from the conveyor when I saw it coming back because I was afraid it would come through the guides and catch me. I got to within a few steps of the supply house when the explosion occurred. I was knocked down and struck my head against the supply house, but did not hear the explosion. The first thing I realized was that flames were around me and a piece of sheet iron fell on my back. I got up and started to run away from the slope, following William Holsar, supply clerk.

Just before I was knocked down I could hear a rumbling sound which I thought was the conveyor rushing down the slope."

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Testimony of James Arnold, Tipple and Convoyor Operator.

"I got a signal to stop the tipple machinery, including the conveyor. I was about 15 to 20 feet from the controls when I got the

right off 10 face at No. 1 room, and also found

signals. I ran to the controls and got the big conveyor stopped and the power shut off. Immediately the crash came. The flames singed my hair and coat collar. The signal I got to stop the conveyor was unusually long. Walter Palwaski also heard the signal."

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Testimony of John Brim, Fire Boss (Not working on account of broken leg.)

"There is a three plunger pump located at the first cut-through in 4 butt left - 1 face. This pump was moved from the third cut-through to the first on account of a squeeze. My best recollection is that gas was found in 4 butt about 3 or 4 months ago. This pump got its power from the trolley line. 1, 2 and 3 butts left were sealed up. The cut-through into No. 1 room off 1 left butt was open. Blow torches were used in the machine shop at the foot of the slope. 4 left overcast was complete. Dust was piled up over shoe-tops on the entry to Dabble Duck section. The haulage roads were kept clean but the back entries were not kept clean."

"On February 8th, on my first run, I found gas on 24 butt right off 10 face at No. 1 room, and also found it at No. 7 room on 23 butt right. I fenced it off. This gas was moved that night."

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Testimony of William Holscher, Supply Clerk.

"I was sitting at my desk, in the supply house, when I heard the rumble. I thought it was the conveyor going down the slope. I went outside, and saw Bearick walking towards me. He said, "Listen to that son of a b--- going down the hole." Almost immediately the

explosion came. Flame, smoke and dust shot out of the slope.

Before I came out of the supply house, I heard the load going off the conveyor motor, then I heard the rumble. The telephone operator said the first call about the explosion came through at 7:20 A.M."

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Testimony of James Wilson, Machinist.

"My duties require me to be on the tippie most of the time. I was in the toilet when I heard something roar. I thought it was empty railroad cars running away. I pushed the door open and saw the dust flying and heard the conveyor motor running irregular. Then the fire blew out of the slope. This all happened in 5 or 6 seconds. I had no reports that morning that the conveyor needed repairs. The links on the conveyor give the most trouble; they wear out in the eyes. The conveyor makes a complete revolution, when loaded, in 12 minutes; when empty, in 8 minutes. One revolution fills a 50 ton car. The hopper at the bottom of the slope holds 6 cars. The coal from the hopper is fed to the big conveyor by a small feeder conveyor. There is no motor in the pit. The signal wires are in a 2-inch conduit and are 110 volts. a.c. The pump at the foot of the slope is usually operated in the morning. The voltage on this pump is 250 volts d.c. Another 250 volt d.c. motor operates a short chain haul for loaded cars onto the dump. This motor was in operation. Both motors are open type. We used the cutting torch in the machine shop at the bottom of the slope. We had no orders when to use or when not to use the blow torch at the

bottom of the slope. We examined the conveyor the morning of the explosion. Charles Hempfield examined one side and I examined the other. This was done every morning. We have frequent breaks in the conveyor in cold weather."

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Testimony of Martin Fleischer, Blacksmith.

"I was in my shop and heard a crash, the shop filled with dust and I saw flames outside the shop. I started to run to the side door and there saw smoke coming out of the fan. I then ran to the opposite side door and up the railroad tracks and home. A few minutes afterward I came back to the mine. I did not hear anything unusual before the crash."

Testimony of Lewis Dustin, C. & I. Police.

"About 5 minutes before the explosion I was standing on the steps leading down the slope. I had left there and gone to the old machins shop, and had just stepped out of there when I heard the signal to stop the tipple machinery. An instant later the explosion came. I saw flames and smoke over the tipple.

While I was at the slope, before the explosion, I saw Wm. Taylor on the left side of the tipple. Wm. Kash spoke to me as he started down the slope.

Cramer was with me when the explosion came and my first impression was of a heavy concussion of air that forced us back through the shop door. Then the flames swept almost to the door. The air was full of debris. I knew that an explosion had happened and ran to get ropes to guard the slope mouth. Before anyone ar-

rived, I had ropes stretched part way around the grounds.

I do not search the men for matches or smoking articles. I think that is the job of the assistant foreman and fire bosses.

I saw Hearick picking coal off the conveyor before I left the slope mouth.

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Testimony of E. R. Jobes, Assistant Mine Foreman.

Nine and eleven face section - east side of mine.

"The total number of men on my section is 78. There are 4 assistants and 4 fire bosses in the mine. The fire bosses enter the mine at 2:00 to 3:00 A.M. and get out from their first run at 6:00 to 6:15 A.M.

The morning of the explosion there was no gas reported in my section. The last report of gas on the section was in 12 right stumps 11 face. That was some time ago.

I brought 135 men out of the mine following the explosion. We came out through the old Valley Camp mine.

On the morning of the explosion I had started my company men to work and was sitting in my shanty on 11 face. John Callaghan, motorman, was greasing his motor in front of the shanty. He jumped in the shanty and said, "My God, something has happened." I went out on the entry and noticed that the velocity of air was unusually high, going inby. This air seemed warm. In a minute or so the direction of flow of the air reversed and the air got cold as though coming from the Valley Camp shaft. I figured that there had been an explosion and started out toward 9 face. At 9 face and 15 right

I met Joseph Spolnick, check 120, and could smell the afterdamp on his clothes. He was covered with rock-dust. This man told me there were other men down at 7 face 15 right. I went on out and met two more men, Pick, a roadman, and George Adams, roadman. Hogan, my fire boss, and I were together and we traveled outward 250 feet from 9 right toward 7 face on 15 butt and there smelt smoke. I did not see any men who had been knocked down by the explosion. I short-circuited the air at 9 face between 14 and 15 right by opening a door. I then returned to the shanty and sent men to the different entries to gather up the men who were working. I sent one man to each entry.

When we got all of our men gathered up, we started out toward Valley Camp. Five of our men were missing but we did not know it. These men had been notified but they did not come at once and the party had started off without them. These men were found later overcome by afterdamp.

Hogan and I short-circuited the air again 15 right at 11 face, then started out with 75 men up 11 face to 20 left, to 10 face and there notified 9 more men. We added these to our party and proceeded up 10 face to 24 left down 24 left to 1st chute and there saw 3 men from Haas' section working in their places. We told them about the explosion and took them with us. We crossed into 23 left and met another man. Then we met Haas and Kearney, the assistant and fire boss on the section. I told them about the explosion and told them to round up their men and follow us out Valley Camp. Haas and Kearney followed us and we all got out Valley Camp drift.

Shooting was done at anytime during the day by shot firers

Using permissible explosives, electric detonators and single shot batteries. There were two machines in my section but they were not in operation at the time of the explosion.

The power went off about one-half minute before the concussion of the explosion. All haulage roads on my section are rock-dusted but none of the trackless entries are rock-dusted. We have a few rock-dusted barriers in the airways. These barriers consist of 4 troughs. The main entries were rock-dusted the Friday previous to the explosion. Brim was fire boss on Haas' section until the day he had his leg broken.

The door across the main haulage road was located just outby 4 butt. This door was intended to prevent the dust from the dump from entering the mine.

In getting through to Valley Camp drift, we waded water up to our waists in places. One of these places was about 700 feet long. We might have gotten out sooner by going up the shaft but I was afraid to trust the steps in the shaft with so many men.

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Testimony of John G. Eryson, Outside Foreman.

"I was at the end of the tibble facing the loading boom. I had left the slope mouth about 1 minute before the blast. I did not hear the horn signal before the blast nor did I hear a rumbling noise. The flame scorched my hand. As soon as I heard the crack, I ran down the railroad track. A few minutes later I returned to the tibble which I found was in flames. William Taylor was lying

on the ground badly burned. I helped him all I could. We had ten men on the tibble. These came off by themselves.

The conveyor is not only greased but also examined every day. There are four signal horns on the conveyor - one of them is at the bottom of the slope. The voltage is 20 on signal wires while the pump part way down the slope is operated by 440 volts a.c. All signal wires on the slope are insulated - 20 volts a.c. Other wires were not in use. The only wires in use were those of the pump and signal. There are two rotating sprinklers (inch pipe) at the dump to keep down the dust when the coal is dumped. There is an 8-inch pipe cut into the hopper which is connected with the return airway. We were not issued orders telling when the blow torches should be used. From the dump and extending back 300 feet, we had 800 pounds of calcium chloride. This is the first time the conveyor ever broke on the loaded or upper side. We have had breaks on the under side. This conveyor made a revolution in 15 minutes. When filled, it holds 70 tons."

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Testimony of William Powers, Assistant to the General Manager.

"The pump on 4 left is at No. 4 room. Four left as well as 1 and 2 left are intakes. There has been no active work in 4 left for two or three months. Between 3 and 4 left nearly half way up the butt, there is a door in the cut-through. This door opened from 3 to 4 left."

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Testimony of Walter Palowski, Outside Laborer.

"My job is tending to trucks haulin<sup>g</sup> domestic coal. I



was on the first floor of the tibble at the time of the explosion. I looked out of the window of the tibble and saw William Taylor, colored boy, pushing the signal button which gives the signal to stop the tibble machinery. The signal which Taylor gave this time was unusually long. Then I saw flame and started to run. I fell over the guard on a gear wheel but got up and ran to the back steps where I got out of the tibble. I have worked here two years and have seen the conveyor break before, but never the top strand, and go down the hole.

My lips and the back of my head was burnt a little. I have seen Henpfield examine the conveyor."

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Testimony of William Mason, Fireboss, Dabble Duck Section.

"I examined my section Wednesday afternoon for the night shift, and found it clear of gas. I was at home when the explosion occurred. I have never examined 1, 2, 3 and 4 left butts. Dabble Duck Section does not generate much gas. There are three splits in the ventilation of Dabble Duck. I have heard that 1, 2 and 4 left butts were intakes and also that a pump was in 4 butt left. I have walked up 1 and 2 left butts to the water; that was about a year ago. I have seen them use a blow-torch in the machine shop when the dump was in operation. They rock-dust around the shop and the bottom about every week. I have been there when they were dumping coal and it was pretty dusty. The motor hauled around the bottom in Dabble Duck Section; this coal was hauled at night. With few exceptions the places in Dabble Duck are dry. There are two rock-dust barriers in my section; each barrier has 4 troughs. Peter Kearney is the assistant on my section. I made no weekly examinations nor was I instructed to make any. I did not know of any being made although I have heard the assistant say he would have to make his weekly examination."

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Testimony of James Hogan, Fireboss.

"My section is from 7 fact to 11 face. Jobs is the assistant foreman on this section. I was standing in the door of the assistant's shanty on 15 butt when Callaghan the motorman came

running in and said that something had happened. (Jobes and Callahan were together and their stories agree). I found no gas on my section that morning; 12 butt stumps would show gas if the air was cut off. My section was rock-dusted the Saturday morning before the explosion. There is a barrier set in each back entry at each set of butts. There are 4 troughs to each set. I have nothing to do with the work around the bottom. It is very dusty when they are dumping coal at the bottom. The electric lights show dim through the dust. I have heard of blow-torches being used in the machine shop. I knew there was a pump in 4 left butt off the mains. From what I could learn it ran continuously. Two years ago the big conveyor broke and it took them 10 days to repair it."

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Testimony of John J. Murhamer, Assistant Mine Foreman.

"I was on 15 and 16 butts off 5 face and I was leaving to go to 1 face when I met smoke. I met a colored man and he asked me if I did not know that an explosion had happened. I knew something was wrong. I kept walking back and forth from 15 butt to 1 face. We barricaded ourselves in and told the men to stay. I opened the regulator in 12 right off 1 face to short circuit the air. I went up to 20 butt and knocked a hole in a stopping. The air was clear. I went back for the men after telling the men with me to go out. I got the men and started and fell down. I told the men to go on. I did not think I could make. The colored man said not while I am with you and dragged me to fresh air. We barricaded ourselves in one room with three brattices about three feet apart in the neck

of the room. I had some men outside watching the air. Robert Stevenson is the fireboss on my section. He was on 1 face section at the time of the explosion. Gas was found at the top of two left butt six or seven months ago. The pump in 4 left butt was at 13 room. This pump was moved some time ago on account of a squeeze. As far as I know this pump ran continuously. The air went up all 4 butts and came back 5 and 6 left. The haulageways were rock-dusted but not the trackless entries. There are no barriers in my section. I found smoke on 5 face at 11 left. It was dusty at the bottom. After they put the pipe in it was not so dusty."

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Testimony of Peter Quigley, Machine Repairman.

"I have seen blow torches around the shop and have seen them used. I work on the night shift. The mining machines are all of permissible type. I left the mine at 1 o'clock on the morning of the explosion. I have been at the pump on 4 left. They get the power for this pump off the trolley line. The pumps are all grounded to the rails."

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Testimony of Arthur Waterloo, Night Boss.

"I left the mines at midnight. I was looking after the machine men and supplies. No gas was reported the night before the explosion. The air went up 1, 2, 3 and 4 butts left, and returned to 8 left over-cast. There is a pump in 4 butt. It was moved up on account of a squeeze. This pump ran continuously. There are 4 troughs to each rock-dust barrier. Gas was found at 25 right off 7 face on 2-8-29.

Mining machines are permissible. In the machine shop we have an emery wheel and a drill press. They use blow torches and acetylene burners. The machine shop is not dusty. The shop was rock-dusted. The bottom of the slope was rock-dusted as often as four times a week. We had a door on the haulageroad outby 4 left. Week prior to the explosion the bottom and Dabble Duck was rock-dusted. The man who rock-dusted was also the welder and was killed in the explosion. No one was assigned to examine 1, 2, 3 and 4 left butts that I know of. About two years ago the conveyor broke near the top and went to the bottom. This was the bottom strand. On February 8 they had gas on 25 right off 10 face. It was found that the entrance to the butt off 10 face contained this gas. This butt entry is 1000 feet long. Bitner told me he had examined these butts two weeks previous to this explosion before I had taken old rails out of there. I do not know whether weekly examinations were made of abandoned workings. I was in 24 butt and 25 butt off 10 face to take out iron before the gas was found. We just got 50 feet up the butt. I did not examine ahead of the men. The night shift goes to work about noon and at 4:30 p.m. The lights around the bottom of the slope were dimmed by dust. The lights are 50 and 100 watts."

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Testimony of O. F. Taylor, Superintendent.

"I have been superintendent since April, 1928. The big conveyor broke last September. The empty conveyor broke about 25 feet from the top. It did not kick up much dust. The bottom conveyor

does more damage to the structural work than the top. As near as I can tell the explosion occurred at 7:25 a.m. I came to work about 6:40 a.m. and talked with Mr. Riley the mine foreman and asked him how everything was. He said everything was clear. No gas reported. I do not recall when the last gas was reported in 2 left. I have never been up in 2 left butts although I was in 4 left last week. The 4 left pump did not run continuously. The pump ran at night. This pump was moved up on account of a squeeze. We employ underground 250 men and 30 on the surface. We have used two railroad cars of rock-dust and started on the third since the first of the year. To control the dust at the dump we had three sprays and also had a dust collector which consists of a 12 inch pipe running to the return airway. The end of this pipe is within 25 feet of the fan shaft. Since November the sprays have been disconnected. From the information I got I think the conveyor broke before the explosion. The conveyor is examined every night by mechanics. The breaks usually occur in the links. The conveyor when full holds 60 to 70 tons of coal. The Dabble Duck pump is operated at night. Two right pump is operated 24 hours a day. There were 258 persons in the mine at the time of the explosion; 213 came out alive; 45 were killed inside the mine, and one was killed outside. There are 21 widows. The escapeways from the mine are: 7th street shaft; old fan shaft, (no men came out this shaft); Valley Camp drift opening. There was no stairway in the fan shaft. There was ice in both shafts. There was no one taking care of the ice in the 7th street

