

THE EXPLOSION AT EUREKA NO. 37 MINE

On the 9th of April a very unusual explosion occurred at Eureka No. 37 mine of the Berwind-White Coal Mining Company, near Windber, by which 7 persons lost their lives.

As no trace of explosive gas had ever been detected in this mine before the accident and as none has been detected since, it is evident that the explosion was caused by an overcharge of dynamite that ignited the coal dust. The amount of dynamite exploded could not alone have wrought such destruction on the fourth main entry, where all the overcasts were blown down and all the stoppings destroyed except one that was built of concrete and was of unusual strength. It is said that the dust from this mine did not explode in the tests made at the Government Testing Station in Pittsburg, but it must be borne in mind that the test made there was not as severe as the test would be from the thirteen holes that had been overcharged with dynamite.

In all cases of this kind, when heavy blasts are fired in rock, even in non-gaseous mines, the roof, sides and bottom should first be thoroughly watered for a distance of about 100 feet from the location of the blasts so as to completely wet and lay the dust. This being the first accident of the kind in this State, I suggest that precautionary measures be taken before similar blasts are fired in future.

The Inspectors' report shows that Assistant Foreman Robert Hunter, while measuring the air current nearly 3,000 feet away, was thrown to the ground by the explosion, a fact that clearly demonstrates its great force. It is fair to presume that if the

dust in this mine had been of more inflammable nature, all the persons inside of the mine at the time of the explosion would have been killed.

The report of the Inspectors and the verdict of the Coroner's jury in relation to the accident are printed herewith, together with a map of the portion of the mine affected by the explosion.

REPORT OF INSPECTORS

“Johnstown, Pa., April 12, 1909

Hon. James E. Roderick,

Chief of Department of Mines

Harrisburg, Pa.

Dear Sir:

As per your request, we, the undersigned Mine Inspectors, on the twelfth day of April visited and inspected that part of Eureka No. 37 Upper Mine in which seven persons lost their lives by a blast on the 9th instant, about 4:30 P.M.

Upon investigation, we were informed by Mr. Edward Jones, the mine foreman, that Michael Gibson, Arthur Custer, William Gibson, Steve Nemis, Joseph Kowatz, Metro Katopitz and Paul Myernak were engaged in blasting down and removing roof preparatory to the erection of two overcasts, one each at No. 3 and No. 4 right off No. 4 main right entry. Michael Gibson was the rock foreman and for some years had had charge of all rock blasting in the mine. He and Arthur Custer charged fourteen holes with dynamite that had been drilled in the roof at No. 4 entry right. While they were preparing

the shots, the other five persons were engaged in removing the roof that had been blasted down the night before at No. 3 entry right. The distance between the two points was about 450 feet, No. 3 being that much nearer the mine mouth. We were informed by the Mine Foreman that Gibson had blasted the roof down at No. 3 entry right the night before and had had some difficulty with it on account of not having used a sufficient amount of dynamite in charging the holes. We were also informed by Robert Hunter, the Assistant Mine Foreman, that he had passed by the place while they were charging the holes and that Gibson, who was tamping one of them, remarked to him that he had had trouble the night before at No. 3 entry right and was giving the holes more dynamite in order to insure the one blast of fourteen holes to break down all the roof necessary for completion of the overcast. On his way out of the mine and on nearing the mine entrance Hunter stopped to measure the air current, and while thus engaged he heard the report from the blast. The concussion produced was sufficient to throw him to the roadway with considerable force. A rescue party was at once formed, and upon their arrival at No. 3 right they found the five persons who had been at work there dead, and some distance down No. 4 right main and about 250 feet back from No. 4 right they found Michael Gibson and Arthur Custer dead. Nearby them was the battery they used for igniting the blast. We were also informed that three other persons on their way out of No. 2 entry right had been overcome and were found on the No. 4 right main near the entrance to No. 2 right entry. They were taken out and soon revived.

A careful examination of the mine disclosed the fact that the roof at the two points before mentioned was quite different. At No. 2 entry where they had trouble the night before it was very hard and firm with twisted and irregular slips; while at No. 4 it

was of a soft character, having regular laminated beds or layers . A very smooth slip was discovered about 51/2 feet above the roof of the entry. All the holes for this blast appeared to stop at this smooth slip and were drilled at such angles as to make their depths about seven feet. One hole was found that had failed to explode, leaving thirteen that had exploded at one time, causing the loss of life as above stated.

We found that considerable force had been developed in the immediate vicinity of the blast, and also along the entries leading therefrom. Considerable fine dust was found in this part of the mine, and we have every reason to believe that a portion of the very fine dust was consumed by the flame from the blast, but we failed to find sufficient evidence to warrant us in giving an opinion that coal dust played a prominent part in this explosion. However, after a careful examination of the place where it occurred, and from all the facts learned in connection therewith, we are agreed in the opinion that the said Michael Gibson, Arthur Custer, William Gibson, Steve Nemis, Joseph Kowatz, Metro Katopitz and Paul Myernak came to their death by an overcharged blast of dynamite, charged and fired by or in the presence of Michael Gibson, the Rock Foreman in Eureka No. 37 Upper Mine.

And further, that in our opinion the said Michael Gibson failed to use good judgment in the amount of explosive used and also in the number of holes included in the one blast, fourteen being the number, thirteen of which exploded. Either of these numbers of holes was entirely too many to be fired at the same time and place in this or any other mine.

C. B. ROSS,

Inspector of Second Bituminous District,

D. R. BLOWER,
Inspector of Sixth Bituminous District,
JOSEPH WILLIAMS<
Inspector of Tenth Bituminous District.”

Verdict of Coroner’s Jury

“Michael Gibson, Arthur Custer, William Gibson, Steve Nemis, Joseph Kowatz, Metro Katopitz and Paul Myernak came to their death from an explosion in No. 37 mine of the Berwind-White Coal Mining Company, on the 9th of April, 1909, said explosion being caused by an overcharge or blast of dynamite while blowing rock at fourth right off No. 4 right heading, the work being under the supervision of Michael Gibson.

Signed;

Selah Linton, Ralph Caldwell, Rev. D. S. Hafer, Jamed Murphy,
Michael Conroy, and S. C. Prosser.”

Source: Pennsylvania Department of Mines, *Report of the Department of Mines of Pennsylvania, Part 2: Bituminous 1909* (Harrisburg: State Printer, 1910), pp. xxxv-xxxvii

