

ON THIS DAY IN WEST VIRGINIA HISTORY DECEMBER 27



West Virginia State Archives

On December 27, 1934, a boiler in a locomotive hauling mine workers at McDunn in Fayette County exploded, resulting in the death of eighteen miners.

CSO: SS.8.9, SS.8.24

Investigate the Document: (*The Montgomery News*, January 3, 1935)

1. Where did the locomotive boiler explosion occur?
2. How many miners was the work train carrying at the time of the explosion?
3. How many people were listed as dead or injured as a result of the accident?

Think Critically: A formal investigation was launched due to the locomotive boiler explosion. Consider the description of the event as told in the second portion of the article. What did the inspectors conclude was the cause of the explosion? How do boilers work? Why might one explode?

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MONTGOMERY, FAYETTE COUNTY, WEST VIRGINIA, THURSDAY, JANUARY 3, 1935

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DEATH TOLL IN TRAIN BLAST IS 18; 21 OF VICTIMS STILL IN HOSPITAL

Most Serious Industrial Accident in Valley Since Boomer Mine
Explosion November 30, 1915, When 23 Men Were
Killed, Occurred Thursday Morning in
Work Train Blast at MacDunn

The death this afternoon at 4:30 o'clock at the Coal Valley Hospital of Okey V. Litton, 54, of Powellton, where he had resided the past six months, brought the total deaths in the explosion of a locomotive boiler at MacDunn, on Armstrong Creek, Thursday morning, December 27, up to eighteen.

It was stated this afternoon following Litton's death, by hospital physicians, that all of the others who were injured in the accident, and now in the hospital would recover barring unforeseen and unexpected complications. Litton's body was turned over to a Milton undertaker and taken there for burial Saturday afternoon.

The complete list of dead follows:

The Dead.

JAMES HUNTER, 34, of Whipple.
WILLIAM JUDD MAYNUS, 38, of Powellton.
S. L. RUNYON, 55, of Powellton.
DELMAR L. OXLEY, fireman, 37, of Powellton.
WILLIAM B. BLANKENSHIP, engineer, 55, Powellton.
EDDIE HUELETT, 23, Leach, Ky.
JEROME WALTERS, 38, Charleston.

J. L. (PAT) MURPHY, 49, MacDunn.

THOMAS CRAFT, 22, of Cannelton.
RAY A. TARTER, 18, of Marting.
EVERETT LEACH, 48, Mt. Carbon.
STEVE KOZMA, SR., 51, MacDunn.
BURNICE HALL, 29, Lacky, Ky.
JOHN LOWE, 39, of Kimberly.
HOMER CART, 38, of Powellton.
HENRY McMILLION, 46, Powellton.
JESS PERSINGER, 42, of Eagle.
OKEY V. LITTON, 54, Powellton.

Representatives of the Interstate Commerce Commission investigating the explosion of the boiler reported Sunday that the blast was caused by "an overheated crown sheet on account of low water."

Three inspectors for the Bureau of Locomotives of the commission said that a formal report to that effect will be submitted to the chief of the bureau in Washington.

Crown Sheet Overheated.

L. D. Allison, of Columbus, one of the inspectors, said "the explosion was due to an overheated crown sheet on account of low water."

Allison, W. A. McKown, of Columbus, and J. M. Hall, of Washington, assistant chief inspector, conducted the inquiry.

The finding as reported by Allison concurs with that of Clarence L. Jarrett, state labor commissioner, who also expressed the opinion that lack of water caused the boiler to explode.

The No. 5 mine of the Elkhorn-Piney Coal Company, to which the work train was carrying about 350 miners at the time of the blast last Thursday, resumed operations Monday.

The train of four wooden coaches was being drawn by the engine which was backing up the creek, with the front part directly against the front coach. The train carried more than 300 men enroute to their work in a mine of the Elkhorn-Piney Coal Mining Company. The train had made its last stop of the trip and was preparing to again get underway when the explosion occurred.

With a deafening roar the boiler reared into the air and crashed back upon the first car. A part of the cab was hurled to the left, across the creek and crashed into the rear of a house, barely missing a woman and her two children who were asleep in their beds. Another part of the engine was hurled to the right of the track and through another home, injuring no one.

In the car there was an indescribable scene of horror. The morning was cold, and the men were huddled in the forward part of the coach where it was warmer. The seats were filled and many stood in the aisle. The front of the engine apparently was blown directly through the front end of the coach, mangling many. The hurling

boiler crashed down upon many more, and escaping steam burned still others.

In all 65 persons were killed, or injured in the explosion. Five persons who received minor injuries were not sent to the Coal Valley Hospital in this city, to which 47 of the injured were rushed in ambulances and private automobiles, while 12 men who had died instantly were taken to the Hooper undertaking establishment here.

During the day three of the injured died at the hospital to swell the death list to 15, and this week three more have died to bring the total deaths up to eighteen.

The complete list of those injured and taken to the Coal Valley Hospital follows:

Jesse Persinger, died at hospital entrance from shock.

John Lowe, 40, died four hours after admission to the hospital.

Ray Tartar, 18, died three hours and 35 minutes after admission to the hospital.

Henry McMillion, 41, died six hours and 50 minutes after being admitted to hospital.

Homer Cart, 38, terribly burned, died Monday.

Okey V. Litton, 54, died one week after being admitted to the hospital.

Treated and Discharged.

The following were treated and discharged same day entered:

Fred Smith, 40, scalp contusion.

Winky Montgomery, 24, scalp wound.

Thomas Ridenour, 17, scalp wound, burned face and legs.

Charles Kitchen, 17, burned face, hands and ankles.

William Taylor, 25, contusion thorax.

Hobart Montgomery, 18, scalp wound.

Norman Brooks, 20, scalp wound.

Ralph Shaver, 17, scalp wound.

Simon Erby, 58, scalp wound.

Herbert Harris, 30, lacerated wounds on forehead, wrist and knee.

William Woods, 26, burns on right hand.

Bradley Lockard, 38, contusions, elbow and hip.

Isaac White, 50, burns on face.

The following have been discharged from the hospital:

Basli H. Holstein, 35, scalp wound.

Spencer Hurley, 20, scalp wound and burns.

Okie Hambrick, 23, burns.

George Bragg, 31, lacerated wound right leg.

Charles Owens, 56, right shoulder contusion, burns on face.

F. W. Romine, 51, cerebral contusion, contusion right hip.

M. V. Goheen, 51, multiple abrasions, face.

Still In Hospital.

Late this evening it was reported after Litton's death that 21 remain in the hospital, all of whom are making satisfactory progress to recovery. The condition of W. H. Deem was reported as serious, but not alarming. It was said he will recover. Those remaining in the hospital today are:

George Syner, 23, badly burned.

Jack Cole, 35, badly burned.

Alexander Wood, 48, scalp wound, burns.

Willie Hurley, 33, burns.

Lee Jones, 39, scalp wounds, burns on hands.

Theodore Tappax, 58, burns.

Russell Simins, 33, burns.

Charles Hagan, 27, burns.

Steve Laposky, 40, burns.

Marvin Wills, 22, burns.

A. F. Gearhart, lacerated wounds, face and thigh, burns.

Blaine Vannatter, 35, scalp wound and burns.

Clarence Cook, 20, burns.

Glenn Nelson, 19, burns, cut lip.

Lewis Wymer, 17, burns.

Richard Mays, 24, burns.

John Hammell, 41, scalp wound and burns.

Lexter Bailey, 27, ruptured ulng, burns.

James Govianzzi, 56, scalp wound, burns.

W. H. Deem, 60, burns.

John Moore, 70, burns face and neck.