

# Tunnel Explosions

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## FRIGHTFUL EXPLOSION.

**Gas Carelessly Ignited in a Tunnel on the South Pacific Coast Railroad—A Foreman and Fourteen Chinese Horribly Burned, Some of Them Fatally.**

SAN JOSE, February 13th.—One of the most distressing accidents that have ever occurred in this county took place at tunnel No. 2, now being run through the Santa Cruz Mountains on the line of the South Pacific Coast Railroad, four and a half miles above Alma station, or seventeen miles southwest of here, about half-past 9 o'clock last evening, by which one white man—McHyland, the foreman—and fourteen Chinamen were so severely burned that it is thought eight or nine of the latter cannot survive. The particulars, as near as they can be gleaned from Dr. Potts, who was sent for and taken out to see the sufferers by a special train about 2 o'clock this morning, are as follows: For several weeks past, owing to having struck petroleum gas oozing from fissures in the rock through which the tunnel is being run, great care has been taken to flash or burn this gas and carburetted-hydrogen accumulation between the blasts, which heretofore, owing to an engine being kept at work pumping in fresh air, had never accumulated to any great extent. This was done by approaching the inner end of the tunnel, when all was ready, with a lighted

taper on a long pole. The gas, as soon as the light reached it, flashed off, and all FRIGHTFUL EXPLOSION. r, for a time, for the men to work. It is reported that the amount of gas has increased so of late that the foreman, fearing danger, quit, and the foreman, M. O. Hyland, who is among the injured, was substituted several days ago. At the hour above-named last night, as near as can be gleaned, the man selected approached, as usual, to touch off the accumulated gas, the others having retired some distance. It is thought that the blast just previous had opened up a larger fissure of gas than had been known, and, instead of the usual flash as soon as the light reached it, the most terrific explosion followed. The report was heard for miles, and a volume of flame shot through the tunnel and from its mouth to the height of 200 feet in the air. The ten-ton engine used for supplying the tunnel with air, which stood about fifty feet from the mouth of the tunnel, was turned completely over, and the blacksmith-shop, distant about seventy yards from the mouth of the tunnel, was blown to pieces. A few minutes after the explosion, Hyland, the foreman, groped out of the death-hole, and was soon after followed by three or four of the Chinamen, all of them hairless and horribly burned about the heads, necks and hands, or such portions as were not covered with clothing. A hundred or more from the Chinese camp contiguous and railroad graders were soon on the spot, and the work of getting out the others commenced. It was found that lights could not be used for any distance, and the men went in and carried the others out, groping about after them until they were found. Not knowing where they stood at the time of the explosion, it cannot be told how far they were thrown; but they did not show much injury from that cause.

All were alive, but burned to such a degree that those who live will be frightfully marked. Several have had their eyes burned out, and all are unrecognizable, so severely are their faces crisped. Several of those assisting fainted at the sight. They were removed to the uninviting tents, and cared for by Dr. Fells.

Spand showed the most indomitable grit while

under the doctor's hands, and in reply to the doctor, when informed that his hair was all gone, said, "Well, doctor, that will save me having to pay the barber 25 cents for shearing for sometime." It is believed that many have inhaled fire, and it is probable that before this reaches your readers three or four will have passed away. It is not known what damage has been done to the tunnel, as none of those present last night would risk making an examination. It is probable that a shaft will have to be sunk to ventilate it before any great amount of drifting is done. The sufferers are penniless and without the aid of a physician, and something should be immediately done for their relief.

Two of the Chinamen injured by the gas explosion in the tunnel on the S. P. C. R. R., died from the effect of their wounds to-day.



SAN JOSE, November 19th.—At ten minutes before 12 o'clock, on Monday night, the most dreadful accident that ever occurred in our county took place at the north end of **Tunnel** No. 3, just beyond Wright's Station, on the Narrow Gauge Railroad, sixteen miles southwest from San Jose, caused by the **explosion** of petroleum oil gas. For upward of a year a large gang of coolies have been engaged under the contractors, Martin & Ballard, in running a **tunnel** through the mountain for the Narrow Gauge Railroad, now being built to Santa Cruz. Several months ago the workmen cut through rock in excavating the **tunnel**, from the fissures of which crude petroleum and petroleum gas escaped; and despite air pipes, which were used to supply fresh air to the interior, the utmost care had to be taken to prevent explosions.

About five months ago, the air-supply pipes or engine got out of order, and before it was fully repaired an explosion occurred, by which one or two Chinamen were killed, and two white men and several Chinamen badly burned. A better system of ventilation was supplied, by adding an additional ten-inch air-supply pipe to the eight inch one then in use. Since then, all has apparently gone well, and no gas of consequence, or not sufficient to burn, was noticed. Last Saturday afternoon the men opened up

#### AN ADDITIONAL GAS FISSURE.

Parties who visited the face of the tunnel on Monday afternoon, scented the gas, spoke of the odor and the danger, and hurriedly left the place with the remark that there would likely be an explosion before six hours. Owing to the hazard attending it, it is said, the gas was not flashed out as it was formerly, the fans being solely depended on to keep the air fresh and pure. On the night in

question, just previous to the first **explosion**, there were twenty-one Chinamen engaged on the face of the **tunnel**, 2700 feet from the mouth, under the foremanship of a white man named Perry Hinkle. There was also a white man named Tom Johnson, who drove the mule in carting out the rock. The latter was waiting for a car-load of dirt when the Chinese fired off a blast, igniting the gas and causing

#### A MOST TERRIFIC EXPLOSION.

The noise aroused everybody within a mile, and the cause was instantly conjectured. Those in the vicinity as soon as possible started for the tunnel. Arriving there, it was found that it was almost impossible to enter on account of the smoke, and the contractor, Ballard, and a few men tried to keep the Chinamen, who appeared bewildered, from rushing in. A few minutes after the first arrived, Foreman Perry Hinkle and Tom Johnson groped their way to the opening, with their eyes closed, and their faces and hands horribly burned. They were immediately taken to their cabin, a few hundred feet from the **tunnel**, and placed in bed until medical assistance could be summoned. Seeing these men yet alive increased the anxiety of the celestials outside to try to rescue their friends and relatives, known to be inside. Securing torches, about twenty or more—the exact number being unknown—pushed past the men at the entrance, and went in. The first of the rescuing party had probably got in 1500 or 1600 feet, when

#### A SECOND EXPLOSION

Took place. This was at 12:20 A. M., which was by far more terrific and death dealing than the first. It was a double explosion, one report following the other so rapidly that the echo blended into one. The **explosion** was preceded by a rush of air from the tunnel, which gave the majority of those



near the mouth time to step one side, so that none were exactly in front. Quicker than it can be told, a volume of lurid flame, the full size of the tunnel, shot out, expanding as it issued for upward of a hundred yards. This was accompanied by a crash and the splintering of the engine-house, which stood about fifty feet from the mouth of the tunnel, on the left of the track, and the utter demolition of the blacksmith shop, which stood on the right of the track, over a hundred feet from the tunnel. For a few minutes after the second explosion a heavy volume of smoke issued from

#### THE HOLE OF DEATH,

Which continued to lessen until it had almost entirely died out yesterday afternoon. After the second explosion, it took some time for those uninjured to realize what had occurred. Word was sent in by telegraph for Dr. Thorne, of this city, to go out to render such assistance as was possible, and a few hours later the Doctor was on the ground, having been hurried out on a special locomotive. When he arrived 15 wounded had been taken out, and 2 others were soon afterward rescued, all alive, but horribly burned. The last of these were found about 1500 feet from the smoking mouth of the tunnel. To go further would cause asphyxia, and search had to be discontinued. Nothing further was attempted yesterday, not even an effort being made to arrange the engine and air-pipes so as to enable those present to bring out the dead. Of those it is known that there is one, others say twenty-four, and others twenty-seven and a mute. The rescued were brought out on small cars, and taken to their cabins or shanties. At the time of the second explosion, when the engine-house was blown to pieces, Engineer Winters was standing almost in front

engine-house was blown to pieces, Engineer Winters was standing almost in front of the cylinder head, and was thus shielded. The largest portion of the room was blown into the air, and, after gyrating, descended edgeways and stuck in the ground within a few inches of him, and then toppled over and knocked him against the engineer. He coolly shut off steam and went to work to look up those who had been blown helter-skelter from the mouth of the death chasm. With the exception of one man, none of these (there were seven or eight of them) had been injured to an extent worth mention. His name we could not learn.

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## THE TUNNEL DISASTER.

### One More Death—Cause of the Explosion—Scenes at the Tunnel and in the Chinese Camp—Delay in Recovering the Bodies.

The San José Herald of yesterday afternoon has a long account of the disaster in a tunnel on the Narrow-Gauge Railroad, from which we extract the following :

On the 13th of February last a terrible explosion occurred in tunnel No. 3, on the South Pacific Coast Railroad, by which about sixteen men were seriously injured, two or three Chinamen subsequently dying from the effects of their wounds. It was known that the tunnel tapped the strata containing oil, for which men were boring at that time in the gulch, and very little knowledge of geology or mining was required to satisfy any man of ordinary sense that the tunnel would in all probability open up seams enclosing large quantities of gas, and that unless extraordinary precautions should be taken to expel the gas and clear the air in the workings, explosions would follow the blasts. A ten inch pipe was laid in the tunnel and a blower employed to draw out the foul air, but this was not sufficient, and it was found necessary to flush out the gas frequently in order to render the work safe

under even ordinary circumstances. But these precautions were not complete enough to guarantee safety when large bodies of gas should be tapped suddenly, and the lives of men working on the face of the tunnel were not worth ten cents insurance at any moment, as was clearly demonstrated by the disaster of February 13th and subsequent fires that burned for several days and destroyed much of the timber supporting the roof. It is apparent to every engineer and miner that a tunnel through such a formation as that under Sequel Summit can be properly ventilated only by a vertical shaft, and if a shaft had been sunk when the necessity became obvious, these frightful accidents would have been avoided and about thirty human lives saved. The expense of sinking a shaft would be large, of course, as it is about 650 feet from the summit to the level of the tunnel, but money so expended would have been well invested. The accident of Monday night was in a great degree the result of foolhardy carelessness and neglect to heed the warnings of previous experience. Gas began to escape in small quantities some hours before the blast, and this ought to have been taken as an indication that further progress would release a dangerous amount of the stuff. All the men in that tunnel should have been ordered out before the charge was exploded, but that precaution was not taken, and the result was one of the most frightful holocausts ever known on this coast.



The vicinity of the **tunnel**, yesterday, presented a scene of wreck and ruin. Stepping from the train at the depot, the *Herald* reporter first walked up the track toward the slope of the mountain, where the portal yawned black and wide as the gate of Death, the grim and awful grave of a score of human beings. A hundred and fifty feet this side of the entrance, the roof of the blacksmith shop was seen lying upon the slope of the hill splintered and broken. A few steps further on, the stationary engine used to drive the blowers stood in the debris of a ruined shed, some of the timbers resting upon the boiler and leaving a small space where the engineer, Winters, stood when the second **explosion** swept everything movable away. Broken timbers, parts of machinery and pipe were strewn around, and standing amid the ruins one could judge of the fearful force of the discharge. The **tunnel** was like an immense cannon when it belched forth its deadly flame, and men who were half a mile away tell how they saw the sheet of fire and smoke leap into the air far above the tank, some hundreds of yards from the gigantic muzzle. Around one of the posts that supported the engine shed was wrapped a length of sheet-iron pipe, flattened like a piece of paper, that was driven out of the tunnel like shrapnel from a columbiad. Coats, hats and other articles of clothing, laid aside by the men nearly half a mile inside the bore, came flying out in the flame and were scattered far and wide. A heavy block of wood was shot from its position a hundred feet from the portal and struck the exhaust-pipe of the engine, bending the iron nearly double.

From the portal 400 yards down the gulch is the Chinese camp, where the wounded are being cared for. Going down the slope, a workman reports that one of the poor fellows taken out early in the morning had hanged himself during the absence of his attendants, and that his body lies in the first cabin. Opening the door, a naked body, burned and lacerated, meets the eye. An examination shows that the charred hands never could have adjusted a noose or tied a knot, for the flesh had literally been roasted off. The face is swollen and burned, bearing scarcely any resemblance to humanity—a horrid spectacle. A silk scarf is twisted once around the neck and sunk deep under the chin, but there is no knot or evidence of one. The neck is not stretched, showing that the body has not been suspended. It is plain that two men have drawn the scarf around the neck and exerted all their strength in tightening it across the windpipe, producing strangulation and death. Constable Hall and Dr. Thorne are called in and agree that the poor fellow was helped out of his suffering by his friends. Groups of Chinamen collect about the door, pale, frightened, but will not come into the presence of death. Nobody blames the Chinaman who held the scarf. It was an act of humanity and according to their customs, so the universal "no sabe" is accepted as an answer to all inquiries in the matter. In the next cabin, built of redwood bark, Dr. Thorne, with sleeves rolled up, and piles of cotton, bottles of oil, and sacks of flour around him, is dressing the wounds of the injured occupant. The poor fellow groans with



the pain of burns and a shattered leg. Immediate amputation alone will save his life, but the superstitious Mongolians will not permit it. The wounded man has a cousin in Santa Cruz who must be consulted, and, moreover, a man with only one leg is no good and cannot work, say the Chinamen, so the Doctor does the best he can and turns to the next. Some of the Chinamen bear the pain with stoical fortitude, and none of them make much noise. Half of one man's scalp is turned back, washed and replaced, but he merely groans once in a while. The scene in and around the cabins are sickening and make strong men shudder. It is not out of place to say that Dr. Thorne is working nobly, giving the same solicitous care and attention to the poor Mongolians that he does to white men. The heathens are quick to perceive this, and render him every assistance in their power

#### TAKING IT EASY.

It is different at the tunnel itself. Nothing is being done all day toward recovering the bodies, although there is a remote possibility of some one or two being alive. The Chinamen claim to have rescued all the living in the morning, and probably are right; but if the dead were white men, the engine and blower would have been in running order before this. Contractor Ballard takes it coolly, and says he will continue to work the tunnel in the old way for the remaining 700 feet.

The Chinamen refuse to enter the tunnel again under any circumstances, and it will be difficult to find men willing to risk their lives in such a place. From the statements of the white men, it appears that the second explosion was preceded by a violent blast of air, driven out by the gas, which knocked every one down near the tunnel. One man

was caught by this blast and carried up on the side of the hill without injury. Another man was thrown from his feet, but recovered and started to run, when the second puff came and laid him out again. A barrel of coal-tar came flying through the air, burst and completely covered him with tar. This discouraged him and he lay quiet until the disturbance was over.

The white men injured are doing finely. One more Chinaman died last night. No more Chinamen have been taken out of the tunnel yet. Workmen have repaired the blower, and started pumping out at 1 o'clock. The head Chinamen are trying to get some men to go into the tunnel after the dead, but have found no one willing to go in yet. They will probably get some one in after the blower runs about twelve hours. The air pumped out is very foul and full of gas. Twelve or more of the wounded were shipped to San Francisco to-day.

#### THE LATEST.

SAN JOSE, November 19th.—Evening.—The latest news from the tunnel is that one Chinaman died this morning and two this afternoon, making 31 in all. Thirteen wounded Chinamen were taken to San Francisco to-day. None have been taken from the tunnel yet. The white men, Hinckle and Johnston, will recover.

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## THE TUNNEL EXPLOSION.

**More Dead Bodies Taken Out—A Horrible Scene—Chinamen Leaving for San Francisco and Santa Cruz—“Nobody to Blame.”**

The San José Herald of yesterday afternoon, had the following: A Herald representative left for Wright's Station this morning, for the purpose of ascertaining what measures had been taken in the matter of removing the bodies of the Chinamen which remained in the tunnel after the explosion. At 2 P. M., he sent the following report over the wires of the Bay Coast Telegraph Company.

The blowers have been pumping gas out of the tunnel all day, and the air is now all right. At 11 o'clock Martin and Stillman, accompanied by several Chinamen, went into the tunnel with a car, after the bodies, and at 11:15 came out with three, which were found at a distance of 1900 feet from the portal, under the wreck of several cars. Returning after another load, they found four more bodies at the same place and brought them out just as the first train arrived. All these men were among the second gang of Chinamen that went in with torches after the first explosion, and were not burned much. They were evidently thrown against the timbers by the first explosion, as their heads and limbs were

### TERribly CRUSHED.

The bodies were laid out near the depot, and the Chinamen proceeded to dress them, and put them in boxes for removal to San Francisco. The scene is horrible in the extreme, very many being crushed and mangled out of all shape. Death must have been instantaneous in most cases. The car has just gone in with men searching for the bodies of the first gang, probably 2300 feet from the portal. Coroner McMahon arrived at noon, and summoned the following named to act as a jury: E. Clark, R. H. Mowbray, T. Shannon, G. Comstock, F. Brownell, Wm. Hoyt, H. Ackerman, H. J. Moody and O. B. Castle. The inquest will be held this afternoon on the bodies taken out. Many Chinamen have left for San Francisco and Santa Cruz, refusing to work in the tunnel any more.

Several of the others are not expected to live. Work in the tunnel will be suspended for an indefinite period, and it is not believed that any progress will be made until the contractor or the company shall have sunk a vertical shaft to tap the tunnel in the oil rock region. No Chinamen will again enter the tunnel under the present arrangement, and it is not presumed that white men can be found foolhardy enough to risk their lives there.

### LATER.

WRIGHT'S, November 20th—2:30 P. M.—Seven more men have just been taken out, leaving but twelve bodies in the tunnel.

The jury has just returned a verdict in the case of the first batch. “Nobody to blame.”

#### THE CORONER'S VERDICT.

SAN JOSE, November 20th.—The inquest at the tunnel to-day was a perfect farce. The jury was necessarily selected from men more or less dependent upon the works for business, and the witnesses were nearly all employes of the contractors. Some testimony was dragged out, showing that means could have been employed to better protect the lives of the men, but Coroner McMahon soon saw that the result would be the same in any case, and concluded the investigation. The jury rendered a verdict of accidental death and nobody to blame. In the case of Ah Wo, said to have hanged himself, the jury found that he came to his death at the hands of persons unknown.

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#### The Chinese Sufferers.

Ten of the Chinamen injured by the gas explosion in the tunnel at Wright's Station, Santa Cruz, and brought to this city for treatment, are lying at No. 1114 Dupont street, the upper part of the building having been converted into a hospital for the occasion. The men have been covered from head to foot with an unguent largely composed of opium and resembling the *chef d'œuvre* at a barbecue.

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Number 10814, 22 November 1879

An inquest was held on the body of Low Kewet Hock, one of the Chinamen injured by the recent tunnel explosion, and who died on the way to the city. A verdict of accidental death was returned.



## **The Hunt for the Dead.**

The *San José Herald*, in its account of the search for the bodies of the victims of the tunnel explosion, says :

Ballard held a large mirror in the sunlight outside and flung the light far into the interior of the mountain, this being the only light that could be used with safety. Of course it was a matter of uncertainty whether the air was respirable, and the progress of the party was watched with intense interest, Ballard keeping the light upon them steadily, so that if a man should be seen to stagger or fall, assistance could be sent at once. The gas in the tunnel has a peculiar effect upon a man. He may walk along for some minutes without realizing that he is breathing a dangerous amount of it, and without any warning it will take immediate effect, depriving him of his senses to such an extent that he staggers on and on into its deadly embrace, his eyes grow dim, his head reels, he chokes, gasps, clutches at his throat as if he were in the coils of a serpent, and at last falls unconscious, to die unless taken quickly into the open air. It required some nerve to be the first to brave the horrors of such a place, even though the means of being rescued were at hand. The little party of pioneers pushed on and on until they appeared like gnomes in the wierd light flashed from the mirror, all around them dark and terrible as the Plutonian shades.

The carelessness of the coolies, even after the terrible lessons of experience, is a constant source of anxiety to the white men having them in charge. When about 2000 feet in the tunnel searching for bodies, Stillman turned around and caught one of the party in the act of lighting a cigar. While looking around for bodies, one of the party noticed a man standing between two of the heavy timbers, and thinking it to be a companion, carelessly brushed against him. To his astonishment and horror, the figure fell forward heavily across his feet, a dead and mutilated body.

Cook, the telegraph operator at Wright's, discovered yesterday among the corpses the body of a Chinaman who had aroused him after the first blast and endeavored to persuade him to leave the office and seek a place of safety. Cook had rendered Jim some service for which the latter was grateful, and, when the blast went off and an explosion followed, Jim realized that the depot might be in danger in case of a second explosion and hurried to warn his benefactor. "Me no likes you stay here, Charlie," said Jim, and he insisted upon Cook's arising and getting further from danger. Then this Chinaman, expecting a second explosion, rushed into the tunnel to rescue his comrades and was never seen alive again. His mangled body was brought out yesterday, and nobody but Cook gave a thought to the heroic spirit that dwelt in the despised clay of this Mongolian slave.