

1911-0007

M/NM FATAL

REPORT OF A FIRE AT BELMONT MINE
TONOPAH, NEVADA
FEB. 23, 1911 - 17 KILLED

In a fire at this mine, 17 men lost their lives. The fire should not have been a serious one; little damage to the mine resulted. It was discovered while it was still small and was attacked for some time at close quarters, yet the unfamiliarity of the men with fire-fighting methods, together with a reversal of the air currents, permitted an insignificant blaze to develop into an appalling disaster.

The Belmont mine had two shafts - the Belmont, normally upcast, and the Desert Queen, normally downcast. Smoke was first noted by the cager about 5:50 a.m. An hour or two of searching was required before the fire was discovered at the bottom of a winze on an intermediate level, which did not open into either shaft; communication was by means of the winze and two raises to the level above. The fire was burning some mine timber that had been piled at the winze bottom for distribution in the stopes. It seems reasonably sure that the fire was caused by a lighted candle or a snuff left in the timber by a man of the night shift, which had quit work at 3:30 a.m. It was decided to build a brattice in the drift and close the winze above the fire. Up to this time, dense smoke was present in only a few parts of the mine, and although the smoke issuing from the Belmont shaft prevented the descent of the men, many of them, including the timbermen, entered the mine through the Desert Queen shaft. When the fire was discovered men were detailed to withdraw everyone from the mine except those fighting the fire. The men were scattered and did not obey orders promptly; so when the disaster occurred, a good many men were underground in various parts of the mine. It is uncertain as to exactly what happened, but apparently some reversal of the air currents forced smoke into parts of the mine that had previously been safe. The men who died were trapped at different points, several in the shaft stations, whether they had crawled but from which they were unable to signal. According to one report, four men were overcome and fell off the cage while being hoisted. The fire was put out that same night by an organized party, and the bodies of the men were recovered the next morning.