

Alaska-Mexican Mine, March 2, 1910

The most disastrous explosive accident in recent years was that occurring in the spring of 1910 at the Treadwell group of mines on Douglas Island, Alaska, 37 men being killed and 9 injured. The following description is substantially that of the general superintendent, R. A. Kinzie.

At 11:30 p.m., March 2, 1910, the powder magazine on the 1,100-foot level of the Mexican mine exploded, killing 37 men and injuring 9. Sufficient powder for the night and day shifts was delivered to the underground magazines every 24 hours.

The 1,100-foot magazine furnished powder for that level only, and the quantity delivered there was 20 to 30 boxes. The magazine was a chamber cut in the rock and boarded up in front; it was situated 25 to 50 feet from the shaft and separated from it by a pillar. A partition divided the magazine into two rooms, each having a door. The doors had open gratings, through which the interior of the magazine could be seen; they were always kept locked, except when the stope boss at certain times passed out the powder to the minors. Light was furnished by a 16-candlepower lamp a short distance inside the door. There was no wiring over the stored powder. No heat was brought in, the powder being thawed before delivery.

The explosion occurred just as the night shift was waiting to go to the surface to eat. The men on the 900-foot station reported two explosions. The first put out their candles, but was of no great violence. As they lighted up again before proceeding to another shaft, a second explosion of greater violence knocked them over, seriously injuring one and slightly injuring three. The men loading the skips, only 45 feet below the 1,100-foot level, were uninjured, as were those on the 1,200-foot and 1,300-foot stations. The posts of the 1,100-foot station were knocked out, and with the lagging and other timber formed a mass of debris which closed the shaft.

From the lagging and other timber formed a mass of debris which closed the shaft. From the debris 22 bodies were recovered; 5 injured men were also taken up. The doors across the skip compartments were closed, as ore was being hoisted from the level; one body was found on these doors. The man-cage compartment was open and eight bodies were recovered from below in this compartment.

The light board shed used for a stable was entirely demolished; two bodies were found there; one of the two horses was killed, the other uninjured. This stable was about 100 feet from the shaft down the main drift. Two bodies were found along the drift, and the fragments of at least one body were found in a corner of the magazine itself.

As is usually the case with an explosives accident, the cause could not be determined. As is frequently also the case, no great damage was done to the mine. A rescue party reached the scene within 35 minutes after the explosion, and the cage was running in about 11 hours. The position of the magazine near the shaft but beyond it, considered in reference to the main drift,

precluded the possibility of any man being cut off from escape in case of accident and also aided in the rapid dissipation of the gas; no man was overcome in that manner.

Note: According to the CDC/NIOSH list of disasters, the Alaska-Mexican mine was a gold mine.