

25 Feb 1922 Nevada State Journal

"Tonopah, Feb 24 - Fifteen dead men lay at the top of the Belmont shaft at 6 o'clock tonight to tell the tale of 24 hours of struggle with the fire that baffled the victims and held back until the last hour almost. Fifteen rude pine boxes were waiting to receive the miners who would never again descend into the treasure house which has for years sent out a fabulous freight of silver and gold.

Around the collar of the mine, with the gathering of dusk, there were many sights of wild lamenting, of frenzied searches, of hurried gazing into the faces of the silent ones, to see if father or husband, brother or son, was among the victims.

For the six white men whose bodies were taken out of the shaft there was weeping of women and the sobbing of strong men, but for the nine of the foreigners there were scenes of wild and uncontrollable grief, which continued long into the night.

The entire Slovenian colony joined in the manifestation, and with the idea that perhaps there were more of their countrymen in the shaft, time and time again they tried to approach, only to be kept back by those who knew whether there were any more left or not simply would change the number of dead. It was 4 o'clock in the afternoon before the smoke ceased pouring from the shaft in dense volumes that came ever since 2:30 on Thursday morning. It was within a half hour after that when 11 bodies, limp and pallid, were taken lifeless from the cage at the top of the mine.

A rush came to the mine when the first news was given that the bodies had been found, but it was some time before the human burden could be taken to the foot of the shaft. The bodies had been found prone on the floor, drawn up in the last expiring effort for air and strewn as the men lay on the far side of the timber pile that blocked the passage to the Desert Queen while it breathed the deadly smoke into the nostrils. Below the station and at the bottom of the shaft were the bodies of four more men who had plunged to a horrible death from the cage at the last frantic effort to reach the upper air in the main shaft. These were found later, badly mutilated, crushed by the cage and cut and bruised by the fall. At 4 o'clock the cage brought up the 11 men in two trips through the smoke, which had now almost ceased to rise. Identification of the white men was not hard, but with the Slovenians in their puzzled tongue, it was almost impossible to get the names, or even, under the blackened and grimy faces, to recognize the foreigners by sight.

Two hours more of work brought up the four remaining victims from the very pit of the shaft - four mangled and bruised bodies of the foreigners. With their appearance came again the wild wailing of the Slovenians, who stood, ill clad and disheveled, shivering at the mouth of the shaft, for their dead. The fire had burned itself out hours ago and after consuming a large amount of timber frames for the

mine. Lack of air had smothered the fire to a considerable extent so that when the rescuers finally reached the place it took little to extinguish what blazed up again with the air.

The miners who were caught had been working from 1000 level and 1166 level. Off the 1000 level a winze was being driven and timbered on the ore body. Around the station was a quantity of wood that seemed to be set as a trap, which it proved to be. Beyond the winze and the station there was hardly a stick of timber because of the character of the country rock. In the Desert Queen shaft there was a manway and ladder and it is believed that some of the victims fell to their death from the manway ladder after missing the cage, dropping from 90 to 200 feet, depending on the time they succumbed to the gas.

George Dondero is well known on the Comstock."