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Paris, August 9. 1956

MINE BLAST IN BELGIUM

All competition

Positive developed : 217 ft- 64 meters

Marcinello, near Charleroi in Belgium. A wall of flame ignited by a power cable explosion sealed nearly 300 coal miners a half-mile underground yesterday. Hope for their rescue was dimming yesterday afternoon.

Only 29 had escaped in the first 12 hours after a runaway coal car severed the power line. Four were known dead. Police estimated 267 are still trapped.

More than half the missing miners -139 - were Italians who emigrated to work in Belgian mines.

A derailed coal car set off the train of disaster just after the day shift had started work in a new shaft at the AMERCOEUR MINE, 35 miles south of Brussels. The car severed a high-tension cable. The flash of flame set mine timbers and coal ablaze. It also burned out the mine's power supply, crippling elevators, cutting off communications and blacking out the tunnels.

All Belgium mobilized to prevent what could be the worst mining disaster in Europe since 1906. Airport crash crews sped from Brussels. The army sent medical units. Cities from all over southern Belgium dispatched ambulances and work stopped in dozens of neighbouring mines so their men could join the rescue.

Outside the mine, 480 relatives of the trapped men pressed up against the fence waiting for news. Devout Italian women and children prayed on the spot. When the first three bodies were brought up in mid-afternoon, women wailed and moaned. Later, gasping rescuers carried out three survivors, the first since 25 more made their own way out of the blazing pit within minutes after the first electric flash. The crowd stampeded when the 10 gendarmes opened the gate for an ambulance to rush the men to hospitals. Women screamed and men cursed in a vain attempt to get to the pit-head itself.