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MIRACLE AT SPRINGHILL

Miracle at Springhill

By

LEONARD LERNER

ILLUSTRATED

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To the men and women and the children of Springhill for their abiding faith, their grim determination, their quiet courage.

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MIRACLE AT SPRINGHILL

CHAPTER I

Clouds of Tragedy

It was Wednesday, October 22, 1958. Black clouds moved across the Nova Scotia shore to stand above the little town of Springhill. It was a mining town, draped across a rounded hill—at 650 feet the highest bit of land in all Cumberland county.

The town had dominated, and been dominated by, the coal mining industry in Canada. In the heart of the town stood a stone and marble monument, topped by the figure of a miner. It was a monument to the 125 men who had died in Springhill's first disaster, in 1891. It served as a reminder to those of the town of the peril they constantly faced.

Springhill, which had been settled in 1790, had been associated with coal since 1833. At first early settlers dug it only for their own use. But as the years progressed, and mining grants were obtained, mining became an industry —and the industry grew. By 1870 local businessmen had

formed the Springhill Mining Company and started building a railroad to a nearby town.

But the town's progress was marred by disaster. As recently as November 1, 1956, a giant explosion had rocked the No. 4 Colliery of the Dominion Steel and Coal Corporation, Ltd., taking the lives of thirty-nine men. And in 1957 a fire wreaked further havoc on the town of only seven thousand.

Now, in 1958, the pits in Nos. 1, 3, and 4 had been closed. The mine payroll was well below half its peak of a few decades before. The men who went down into the mine—the company miners—were making about eleven dollars a day. Some others, contract workers, averaged fifteen dollars a day for a five-day week. They were paid on the basis of the amount of coal they produced. Usually even the contract workers did not make seventy-five dollars in a week. Illness, equipment breakdown, and trouble all cut into working time.

Despite this, more than seventy percent of these miners owned their homes, and most of them owned cars. These possessions, a collection of furniture, and the love of a family were their holdings. But these few belongings were enough for the strange, hardened men who looked death in the eye every working day, who lived in a dying town and worked in a dying industry, who lived so close to death they were almost unconscious of its touch.

Louis Frost, chief mining engineer for the Dominion Steel and Coal Corporation, had finished his inspection of the mine's remaining No. 2 pit on this day, October 22. Frost reported that he had never seen the mine "in such good shape." He expected no trouble, although he had heard that for several months the miners who worked

No. 2 had been predicting something would happen.

Frost was pleased with the condition of the mine and with the progress of the Longwall Retreat mining system.

In the Longwall system miners worked the entire thickness of the seam, and in No. 2 this meant a tunnel 400 feet long.

On various levels along the 13,000-foot slope the miners had bored long shafts into the seam and begun to work back, mining the coal as they retreated. Special crews of men hauled down the roof behind them.

No electrical tools or explosives were used in this mine, for fear that a spark might touch off an underground blast. The men used compressed-air picks to chip out the coal and loaded the black ore on a shaker pan conveyer, which worked just as its name implies—it vibrated and ran to the pickup point for the ore. When miners pulled the coal off the face, they shovelled it onto the conveyer, whose belt ran—powered by compressed air—to the terminal of the little underground railroad that twisted back to the shaft. The coal was loaded into hand cars, pushed to the shaft, and drawn up out of the ground by the bucket, a combination freight and passenger elevator which linked the men to the outer world.

As each of the two work shifts ended, the maintenance men erected roof supports all the way up and down the face. These trusses ran five feet apart in a line parallel to the face. They were called packs. At no time were there less than two rows of packs standing in the area where the men dug and sweated and cursed and shovelled the coal, hour after hour.

A few months before, the company had proposed lining up the faces of all the working galleries in the mine. The

miners did not like it. Monson Harrison, President of Local 4514 of the United Mineworkers of America, met with Vice-President Harold C.M. Gordon of the company. The miners said their system of staggered working areas gave them protection against bumps. Gordon, one of Canada's best mining engineers, said this was not so. The mine had been plagued with minor bumps recently, and he attributed them to the failure of the unmined material —the roofs—to collapse behind the retreating men. If all the faces were lined up, he said, the roofs could be collapsed more easily.

Gordon's plan was put into effect, and it seemed to work. For many weeks the mine had been worked without a bump. There were differences of opinion, of course, differences which were aired endlessly over beer in the basement of the old brick Miners' hall next to the monument. But that was the way it was to be done. The inspectors were satisfied with the system.

At 11 o'clock on the night of October 22, 1958, Police Chief Leo "Sailor" MacDonald took his usual post at the foot of Main Street. There, not far from the entrance to the mine grounds, an arch over the driveway proclaimed that this was the property of the company. The men who worked the afternoon shift, from 3:00 to 11:00 P.M., would be going home soon, so Chief MacDonald was on hand to direct traffic.

At 11:30 P.M., Charlie Burton, hero of the 1956 explosion, arrived at his home on Athol Road in his new gray and pink Meteor sedan.

Charlie Burton was proud of his car and was fond of

showing off the radio-speaker he had installed on the shelf behind the back seat. Whenever there was a passenger in the car he would demonstrate by switching the sound from the front to the back.

Burton did not seem tired. As he walked into the two-story turquoise house, with its coal-stained trim, he told his wife he was anxious to look through the new seed catalogue that had arrived in the morning mail.

Kathleen Burton was sitting in the kitchen, knitting a pair of socks when her husband walked in. She leaned toward him as he kissed her.

"What's to eat?" he asked. It was always the same question, even at the homes of friends and relatives.

"Hot tea and a sandwich."

"How are the boys?" Burton asked as he sat down and opened the seed catalogue.

"They're asleep."

The boys were the Burton sons, Billy, who at twenty-two stood six feet tall, like his father; and Gary, a twelve-year-old blond. A third son, Merlin, had recently turned eighteen. He was with the Canadian army, stationed in Ontario.

Burton thumbed through the catalogue as he ate and sipped the hot tea. Kathleen resumed her knitting.

When he had finished, Burton stood up and stretched his arms. "Let's go to bed. I've got to drive into Amherst tomorrow."

His wife put away the half-finished sock and stood up. Oh, yes. He was going to get the favors for the ball. It was good for Charlie to be interested in the Knights of Columbus Ball. He had missed last year, because he had

had to work, but Charlie was on the day shift next week. They would be able to go.

The Burtons walked upstairs to their bedroom.

At 11:45 P.M., thin-faced Levi Milley arrived home. He parked his 1951 green Studebaker in the driveway and as usual walked to the back of the blue and white house on North Street to check on his chickens. He peeked into the coops to make sure the small light was burning, to encourage them to lay.

Then Levi Milley peered carefully and closely at the house. His wife, Velda, had painted the trim that afternoon.

Velda was sitting up, waiting for him when he walked in the back door. His sixteen-year-old daughter, Judy, was asleep, her school books piled neatly on the kitchen table ready for the next morning. A ruler and several pencils were placed alongside the books.

Milley pecked his wife on the cheek, said, "Hi," and glanced over to the gleaming white kitchen range to see if the steaming tea pot was on.

"Hungry?" Velda asked.

"I could stand a cup of tea."

"How did things go?" Velda got up to pour the tea and put several cookies on a plate. He never ate more than that at night.

"About the same," the miner answered. "Things are pretty quiet."

Mrs. Milley was pleased. If things were quiet, that was the way they should be.

"You did a nice job on the painting."

"I'll finish tomorrow," she replied, smiling at the compliment.

The two sat at the kitchen table while the miner lighted a cigarette. He drew a few deep drags, sighed, and snuffed it out.

"I'm tired," he said. "Let's go to bed."

By 12:30 A.M. the Milley house was in darkness.

Bowman Maddison did not own an automobile. A fellow-worker, Byron "Barney" Martin, drove him home to the gray house on North Street that night.

Maddison was twenty-seven when he married sandy-haired Solange in 1943, but in the fifteen years that followed he had never been able to save enough money to buy even a second-hand car.

When he married, Maddison bought a piece of land from the mine company for fifty dollars. His buddies helped him convert the shack that stood on the property into a home. Now it had two bedrooms, a sunporch, a front room, a kitchen, and a bathroom.

"There's still lots to be done on the house," he said to himself as he paused on the unpaved street, after saying goodnight to Martin.

Solange was waiting up for him in the kitchen. She was feeding the boy, three-and-a-half month-old Constantinos.

The other children, Zora, a tall girl, who looked older than her fourteen years, and twelve-year-old Alden, who had his father's quiet disposition, were both asleep.

Solange was busy with the baby, so Maddison put some canned tomato soup to warm on the stove. Then he asked how the children were.

"Everyone's fine," his wife replied, putting the baby over her shoulder. "Everything go all right tonight?"

Her husband paused. He frowned when he finally said, "It was quiet enough, but I felt funny all night. I don't know what it is. Maybe it's too quiet. Maybe I'm just tired."

He poured the hot soup into a bowl, took a doughnut from the breadbox, and sat down to eat.

The baby let out a tiny burp and Solange smiled as she carried the child into the bedroom. Then she came out to sit with her husband.

When Maddison finished, she put the bowl in the sink.

The miner checked the furnace and he and his wife went to bed.

Garnet Clarke was not quite twenty-nine years old and, as yet, he did not have a wife. He did have a girl-friend named Stella and a 1950 Pontiac—but this was a work night. He arrived home on Herrett Road at 12:20 A.M.

Clarke lived with his father, brother, sister-in-law, and her two children, but everyone was asleep.

Quietly, so as not to disturb the household, Clarke opened a can of pears and got out a dish. He turned on the flame under the pot of tea and sat down to read the paper while he ate. When the tea was ready, he poured a cup, strong, and sipped it slowly.

A half-hour later he tiptoed to his bedroom upstairs.

Maurice Ruddick, a forty-six-year-old mulatto, walked home that night to Herrett Road. It was only five minutes' walk from the mine.

This handsome miner, with black wavy hair and an

Adolphe Menjou moustache, walked in the door a few minutes after midnight. He felt good. The work at the mine never seemed to tire him. He sang while he worked, and when he did, the men working near him forgot for a while the heat and sweat and itch of the coal dust.

Ruddick's wife, Norma, had come home several days before from All Saints Hospital with their twelfth child, a girl they christened Katreena May.

Norma was awake. So were their three oldest daughters. The other children were asleep upstairs.

When he walked in the door the girls kissed their father, then their mother, and went to bed. They had to go to school in the morning.

Norma was still too weak to scurry about the kitchen. Ruddick fried a plate of bacon and ate it with crackers and tea.

When he finished eating, he cleaned off the long table, washed the few dishes, and said goodnight to his wife. She went to bed.

The miner went into the small room off the kitchen, turned on his tape recorder, lighted a cigar, and sat back on the divan to listen.

He heard his own resonant baritone voice singing "The Sheik of Araby." Ruddick was part of a local quartet. The four had been singing together around town for the past seven years. It was a source of great satisfaction and relaxation to Ruddick, whom the town had fondly dubbed "The Singing Miner."

When the song was over, Ruddick turned off the recorder, switched off the downstairs lights, and went upstairs to bed. Norma was already asleep, so Ruddick read

the New York *News* and the New York *Mirror* before he fell asleep at 3:30 A.M., his alarm set for 7:45.

Now the ominous clouds of yesterday were gone, and the bright moon gleamed above the sleeping town, its pale light kind to the worn houses and rutted streets. Bowman Maddison's fears that it was too quiet seemed hardly warranted on such a peaceful night.

CHAPTER II

The Curse of Old Number Two

Thursday, October 23, 1958, dawned bright and sunny and warm. The surrounding hills were splashed with the colors of autumn. It was an Indian summer day that set men's thoughts to things other than coal.

Charlie Burton awoke at 8:00 A.M. and got right out of bed. His wife had the bacon, eggs, and tea on the table when he came downstairs, still rubbing the last traces of sleep from his eyes.

The two boys had already left the house. The sixth-grader, Gary, was on his way to the West End School. Billy, the older boy, had gone to visit some friends for the day.

Burton finished his breakfast quickly. He rose from the table and put on his jacket. "I'll be home about noon," he told his wife, as he started for his car.

He drove into nearby Amherst, picked up the favors for the Knights of Columbus Ball, but he was home at noon.

While Kathleen prepared lunch, her husband talked to his sister, Mrs. Katherine Beaton, on the telephone.

Then Charlie and his wife had their meal.

Kathleen packed his black lunch can with sandwiches and filled his thermos bottle with hot tea. At two o'clock, he left for the mine.

Levi Milley arose at seven-thirty, went outside to the back of the house and fed his chickens. Then he had his breakfast and drove his daughter, Judy, to the high school.

By the time he came home, his wife, Velda, had put on old clothes. She painted the trim on the house while Milley fixed some of the shingles. The couple worked together in the warm sunshine, pausing only long enough for lunch.

At two o'clock, Velda packed his lunch can with two hardboiled eggs and two bran muffins. Milley never carried a thermos. At 2:30, he kissed his wife and left for the mine, after telling her that it seemed too nice a day to go to work.

Bowman Maddison got up late that morning. It was 9:45. The children, Zora and Alden, were at school.

Solange had a cup of tea to keep her husband company while he ate bacon and eggs. After breakfast, they pushed away the dishes and remained seated at the table. Solange began a letter to the mail order department of the Eaton Company for winter clothes for the children.

Her husband had a much different letter to write. He had composed a song, and if Juliette, a popular television entertainer in Toronto, would sing it on one of her shows, maybe he would make some money.

He finished his letter to Juliette and carefully looked

over the lyrics to "Dearest, My Heart is Calling"; he hummed softly to himself as he read:

Think of the years since we parted, feeling so
lonely and blue,
Why should I be broken hearted,
When I love only you?
I want you when shadows are falling,
And I want you more than you know,
Those mem'ries of you still are calling,
Calling me in the after glow.
I see your face in the twilight,
I hear your voice in the April rain.
As all the drops softly patter,
They whisper, "I love you" again and again.
Tears from my eyes still are falling,
Please make my dreams come true,
Dearest, my heart is calling,
Still calling for you.

Solange had packed his lunch can with two shrimp sandwiches. Maddison tucked his wife's letter and his own into his jacket pocket and, lunch can under his arm, walked to the postoffice on Main Street. He kissed his letter for luck before dropping it in the box.

Then the miner walked across the street to Jimmy's Candy Kitchen for his daily visit with his friend, Jimmy Demetre. They exchanged small-talk until 2:45, when it was time for the miner to leave for work.

Garnet Clarke spent most of the early afternoon at his cousin's grocery store, across the street from his home.

He had awakened at 11:00 A.M., and after breakfast there was nothing much to do but hang around the store.

His sister-in-law packed his lunch can with four sandwiches and a piece of cake. He did not carry a thermos, since he preferred fresh water from his water can in the mine.

At ten minutes past two, Clarke left the house and drove to the mine.

Maurice Ruddick, The Singing Miner, spent the day doing household chores for his wife, Norma.

His alarm had gone off at 7:45 A.M., and he got out of bed, fed the children and shipped the oldest seven off to school.

He thought about partridge hunting, it was such a fine day. Maybe on Saturday, his day off, he would do just that if the weather stayed good.

Meanwhile, after the children went off to school, Ruddick straightened up the house. He made the beds, washed the dishes, and dry-mopped the floors. Norma, still too weak to do any strenuous work, gave him instructions. He did not mind.

Early in the afternoon the children came home from school. His oldest daughter made him a cup of hot tea and a sandwich. While he ate, she packed his lunch can with bread, honey, and cake. At 2:45 he left the house to walk to work.

The 174 men on the afternoon shift reported directly to the mine's Wash House, the first step in their daily routine before going down into the pits.

In this long, rambling building they changed into their

work clothes. A bucket suspended from the ceiling by pulleys, was lowered by each man. He took his work clothes from the bucket and put his street clothes in. Then he raised the bucket again to the ceiling to keep the floor area clear. Springhill's miners did not have the luxury of lockers.

The rest of the building was cut into shower stalls. Here, after their shift, the men attempted to wash off some of the dust and grime, although they never succeeded in scrubbing it all away.

From the Wash House the men walked fifty feet to the Lamp Room. They paused briefly in the sunshine, and someone said, looking up at the sky, it did not seem right to have to go down into the earth on such a lovely day.

At the Lamp Room, rows upon rows of miners' lamps hung from a giant charging-machine that put new life into the batteries after each shift. Every miner carried an eight-sided brass tag, the size of a silver dollar. The tag was stamped with the figure 2, denoting No. 2 mine. A larger number indicated the number of the lamp assigned to each miner. At the bottom of the tag were the letters C. R. & C. Co.: the Cumberland Railway and Coal Company.

The men handed their tags to thin, bespectacled Harry Weatherbee, who had spent forty-two of his fifty-six years with C. R. & C. Weatherbee knew every miner by his first name, rarely had to consult his book for a man's lamp number.

Levi Milley turned in tag No. 1055. Weatherbee handed Milley his lamp and battery, and Milley slid it into place in the grooves at the front of his helmet. The cord from the lamp crossed the helmet, went through a loop at the

back, and down to the battery which he hooked onto his belt.

Weatherbee put the tag on a large board. Here was the record of lamps issued to each miner. It was also a grim, but invaluable, record in case of disaster.

If a man survived an explosion or a bump, when he came to the surface his lamp was turned into the Lamp Room and his tag removed from the board and returned to him. An accurate count of men still below at any given time could be made by checking the tags on the board.

Bowman Maddison turned in tag No. 1122. Garnet Clarke handed in No. 766 and Maurice Ruddick gave up tag No. 624. Charlie Burton turned in tag No. 2007, the same he had always carried since the 1956 disaster.

The only man to forget his tag was fifty-five-year-old Percy Rector. He had carried No. 1202 for more than twenty years, and this was the first time he had ever misplaced it.

Weatherbee instructed Rector to obtain a requisition slip at the mine manager's office. Rector returned in a few minutes with the slip and Weatherbee handed him a lamp.

From the Lamp Room to the mine entrance it was seventy-five yards. Men who were ready early sat around on the bankhead and waited. Others filled their water cans.

As three o'clock approached, the area between the Lamp Room and the mine entrance filled until 174 miners milled about in the bright sunshine.

At three sharp, they entered into the darkness of the mine.

Just inside the mine entrance they got into the rake.

A rake consisted of two or more trolleys hooked together and hauled up and down by strong cable, to transport the men to the various working levels. This kind of rake was called a man-rake. A coal-rake was made up of what the miners called boxes. It was used to carry coal to the surface.

The man-rake was eased gently down the sloping tracks to the 7,800-foot level. Here the men got off to change to a second rake which would take them deeper into the mine, for Springhill's upper levels had long since been worked. The coal was now found over a mile below ground. To get to it, the miners travelled, on the slope, more than two miles below ground. When the rake reached the bottom it would pick up men from the previous shift and return them to the surface, ten men crammed into each trolley, eight trolleys in operation. It didn't take long to change shifts at Springhill.

Maurice Ruddick was in high spirits as he descended. His lusty baritone rang out in "The Curse of Old Number Two." It was dedicated, he grinned, to the bumpiest mine in the world. The others on his trolley smiled. Good old Maurice. A song for everything!

After twenty minutes of grinding and bumping and falling, the rake stopped at the 13,000-foot level. Some of the men got out, their lights bobbing weirdly in the darkness.

Ruddick climbed out here and walked over the uneven floor to the top of the 13,000-foot wall. There he found his shovel and axe. He had forgotten them the day before, but he knew that no one on the other shift would take them. Underground there was only one policy: honesty.

A man's life could depend on the trustworthiness of his fellows. Weaklings didn't last long in the mine.

The rake continued down to the 13,400-foot level where more miners left, to make their way along the narrow galleries to the face of the coal. At the 13,800-foot level the last of the passengers stepped out, and the quitting shift began to load.

Now, 174 men had been transported into the depths of the deepest mine in North America. Straight down from the pithead to the point where the men worked at the lowest level it was 4,400 feet, nearly a mile! The levels themselves were reached by gradual inclines that sloped more than two miles into the earth.

Most of the men worked on three adjacent walls, at the 13,000-, 13,400-, and 13,800-foot levels. About eighty men were right at the coal face. Twenty-seven others worked at the three levels, moving the coal to the slope. The remainder were scattered between the levels and the surface. They operated the hauling equipment and did the necessary maintenance work.

Charlie Burton worked at 13,000 feet with a compressed-air chipper pick. He pulled the shiny black coal off the face, but first he had to find just the right vein, so the coal would fall away easily. Burton had taught many a young miner the intricacies of chipping at the coal in just the right spot.

Garnet Clarke worked what the miners called "the timber road," at the top of the 13,000-foot wall. He and thirty-five-year-old Currie Smith loaded and unloaded the hardwood timbers used in shoring up the areas where the miners worked. The pair loaded the timber into rakes at

the 12,600-foot level and brought it to the wall at 13,000 feet. Here, they unloaded it and went back for more.

Levi Milley was still thinking how well his wife had painted the trim on the house when he hung his jacket on a pack of timbers at 13,400 feet. Later, he would be working at the top of the 13,000 section, but for the next hour, his job was to build the packs high to keep the roof from collapsing.

Bowman Maddison went down the main slope, crossed the back slope, and came up to the 13,000 level. He worked there with thirty-five-year-old Caleb Rushton, unloading timbers.

The whirring of the air fans, the incessant chatter of the chipper picks, and the rumbling of the coal-rakes going up and down created a weird cacophony. The smell of the mine, the hot, wet odor of sweat, coal-dust, and dirt; the mustiness, the heaviness; they grew stronger as the hours passed. No level escaped. This was the smell of men underground.

Each hour the lights from the men's lamps searched a shorter distance than the hour before. The grayish fog grew heavier, the tunnels and galleries hotter. The men's faces blackened in the pulverized coal. Some men removed their shirts and worked stripped to the waist, their muscled bodies glistening, black with perspiration and coal dust. It took a *man* to stand up to this work.

No matter how familiar with the mine they were, the men stumbled on the uneven floor or tripped against the rails that wound along the passageways. They bumped against the timbers. Red welts formed on their backs and arms, welts that blackened quickly with dust. These welts

and raw sores were the marks of the miner, here as all over the world.

At 6:00 P.M., about the same time that their families were sitting down to supper above the ground, the men stopped work to eat some of their sandwiches. The water they had brought down with them was now lukewarm. In the mine nothing stayed cold.

Twenty minutes later, the men got up from the floor of the mine, put their lunch cans away, and resumed work. They would break again a little later to finish the sandwiches and take a breather.

Shortly before 7:00 P.M., a minor bump hit at all working levels. Coal fragments and dust shook down on the men.

Two company officials, observing at the 13,000-foot level, took note of the bump, and an overman (a foreman) at 13,800 jotted down in his notebook the time it had occurred.

Maurice Ruddick muttered, "Good old dependable No. 2."

"Did you feel it?" Bowman Maddison asked his buddy.

Caleb Rushton nodded.

When a serious bump occurred, the usual practice was to clear the mine for twenty-four hours to give the stresses a chance to readjust. No one saw any need for it this time. It was only a minor bump. The men continued to work.

CHAPTER III

Everyone Came Running

At 8:06 P.M., a tremendous roar shook every home in Springhill. Dishes rattled, windows cracked, and telephones throughout town went dead. Even ten miles away, the ground shuddered. Seismographs at Nova Scotia's Dalhousie University in Halifax showed the shock to be of the same strength as a small earthquake.

Kathleen Burton stiffened. She dropped her knitting. Her son, Billy, who had been visiting next door, ran into the house.

"Something's happened. Find out what it is," she shouted. Her mind raced back to a November day, nearly two years earlier, when a similar roar had shaken the foundations of the house.

"Oh, God! Don't let it happen again!" she pleaded.

Billy raced from the house and down the road.

Others were already running.

Garnet Clarke's brother, Harold, was shaking a damper on the pot-bellied stove in the living room of his house.

"What was that?" he called to his wife, Lorraine, knowing full-well what it was.

"It sounded like an automobile crash."

They moved quickly to the front door, looked up and down the empty road.

"I'll find out what happened," Clarke said. He put on his jacket and left the house.

Lorraine returned to the living room where Thomas Clarke, her father-in-law, was still sitting on the divan. They had been watching television. The children from the high school in Springhill sang in a music festival from Moncton, New Brunswick, which was telecast on station CKCW-TV.

Thomas looked up grimly. "I didn't have to run to the door. I know what happened."

Judy Milley ran into the living room. She had been doing her homework in the kitchen when a glass had tumbled from the rack on the wall to smash on the floor.

Velda Milley was standing, unmoving, in the center of the room. Mother and daughter looked at each other silently. Behind them, the television set blared the racket of the Lucille Ball show, "I Love Lucy."

Finally, Judy spoke. "Maybe it was a truck going fast over the holes in the road."

But they both knew better.

Just a few minutes before, Velda had been thinking about how pleased her husband would be. She had nearly finished painting the trim.

"I want to be there!" Zora Maddison called to her

mother. The girl grabbed a jacket from the closet and ran from the house.

Young Alden came running in from next door. He had a good idea of what had happened. You did not live in Springhill without knowing.

"Your poor father. Your poor father," Solange said softly.

Alden had seen his sister running with the others toward the mine. He put his arm about his mother's waist.

"I'll stay with you, Mom."

Norma Ruddick tried to look unconcerned as she checked the nine children in the upstairs bedrooms. Some of them were awake, though lying very still.

"Now go to sleep. Everything's all right," she said, although in her heart she knew that everything was all wrong.

Downstairs, two daughters waited for their mother. The oldest girl, Colleen, had already left the house.

Margaret Guthro's first thought was to run to the mine, to find Hugh.

She had put her two children to bed. Dorothy, her sister-in-law, was seated at the kitchen table, a large towel draped over her shoulders. Margaret was about to start giving a home permanent when dishes toppled from the shelves and the lights flickered.

She screamed, "Oh Dot, Dot!"

In 1956, Hughie and 126 others had been trapped in No. 4 mine. For three days and nights she had waited. She gave up hope on the third day. That was the day Hughie was rescued.

"It can't happen again!" she cried. "It can't. Dot, stay with the children. I'm going out."

Margaret threw on a light coat, ran out, and looked across to the mine pithead, less than 300 yards from her front door. Clouds of black dust almost blotted out the yard lights, but she could see men, women, and children running from all directions.

The resident mine manager, George Calder, picked up the telephone at his home and called the number at the 7,800-foot level, where the rakes stopped on the first leg of the trip down the shaft. There was no answer. He ran the two blocks to the mine.

Doctors and nurses at All Saints Hospital felt the building shake, even on its perch, high on a hill over the town.

Hospital Administrator Stanley Tibbetts felt it on the second floor. He ran downstairs. Everything seemed to be all right in the hospital, so he went outside. People were coming from their homes, and Tibbetts picked up snatches of conversation.

"Bump" . . . "No. 2" . . . "My God . . ."

Tibbetts ran back into the hospital and picked up a telephone to call the mine. He could not get through.

Superintendent of Nurses Rebeccah Hargreaves arrived at the hospital fifteen minutes after the bump. She and Tibbetts held a quick consultation. Some of the patients were discharged immediately, several days earlier than normal. All available space in the fifty-six-bed hospital was made ready, although as yet no one at the hospital knew the full extent of damage and injury.

* * *

Mine Manager Calder's office was in turmoil. No one knew exactly what had happened, except that there had been a terrific bump.

"I'll try the phone again," he told assistant mine manager Randolph Carter.

Carter shook his head. "It's no use. I've been trying."

Nevertheless, Calder picked up the phone and called the 7,800-foot level again.

This time Overman James McManaman answered. "I guess I was knocked out for a few minutes, George. It's awful down here. Some of the men are badly hurt." He coughed as dust clogged his nostrils and throat.

"We're coming right down!" Calder shouted into the phone. "Any communication below your level?"

"Everything's knocked out. Everyone down there must be dead. It's awful, awful!"

"We're coming after you," Calder shouted again. "Hang on. We're coming." He put the phone back on the hook and turned to Carter. "Get me twenty men, fast!"

Carter ran to the front door. "I need volunteers," he called.

Nearly every hand went up. Carter picked twenty men. "Get some equipment," he ordered. "We need lights, crowbars, axes, shovels, everything."

The volunteers sprinted for the supply department.

Calder, meanwhile, called the 7,800 level again. "Clear the slopes," he ordered McManaman. "Stop the coal boxes. Take them off and put on the trolleys. We've got to get the men out as quickly as we can." He hung up before McManaman could answer.

The twenty volunteers returned to Calder's office ready to go. They were "barefaced" men, so called because they

went into the depths without gas masks. Their faces were not just bare tonight, but white with anxiety.

Later, the fully equipped rescue teams of Draegermen, complete with gas masks, would plunge into the mine. But now, there was no time to wait until they could prepare.

"Let's go," Calder called. The men followed him into the throng of anxious friends and relatives who had gathered to begin the vigil.

At 8:45 P.M., Calder led the volunteers into the mine. They had little difficulty reaching the 7,800 level. Here, they were quickly briefed on conditions, as they were known. The 13,000 level and 13,400 level were completely blocked. Gas was reported seeping into the 13,000-foot level. (At least fifty-six men, maybe more, were known to have been working there.)

"We'll work our way back through the other way," Calder informed his men. The group turned and walked, hunched-over, back up the slope. They cut around to the 13,800-foot level.

Calder could scarcely believe his eyes. His light showed a scene of utter destruction. "The floor just came up and smashed into the roof," he whispered to a man behind him. "How could anyone survive this? It's probably worse where we can't get through."

The man nodded in grim agreement. "Those poor, poor bastards."

The group continued to work along the shattered level. Suddenly, Calder stiffened and began to cough violently. He fell to his face and crawled backwards, sliding and scratching. The others behind saw and flattened themselves on the floor of the shaft.

"Gas! Gas!" Calder cried. "Get down!" But the men were already down.

They lay there, panting, and trying to hold their breaths, till their lungs ached. Then Calder began to inch ahead.

"Got to see if it's clearing," he muttered. Hesitantly, he took a deeper breath. Then he breathed again. His head began to clear and he continued to move forward over rocks and splintered timbers.

The men behind did not move. Their lights all pointed on the figure of Calder as he worked slowly ahead of them.

"It's all right now," Calder called back. The men began to crawl after him.

A short way down the level, two men were struggling through rockfalls and timber, unknown to Calder and his rescuers.

Archie Legere and Thomas McManaman had somehow survived. Now they were trying to claw their way out.

Legere, a fifty-five-year-old survivor of the 1956 explosion, had been at the 13,800-foot level when he decided to eat instead of moving up the coal wall. His appetite saved his life.

When the bump came, Legere was munching a sandwich. The concussion knocked him off his feet and down the shaft. He could not see through the swirling clouds of black dust. His back ached. His knees were scraped.

Legere remained motionless for a moment, afraid to move. His light still worked. He turned his head to the right and to the left, but the dust was too thick. Then he heard a voice:

"Get me out of here! For God's sake, help me!"

Legere crawled toward the voice. Within a few feet, he

was joined by Thomas McManaman, who had clawed his way out of a coal trap with his bare hands.

"Someone's hollering for help," Legere said. "Let's go after him." He did not bother to ask how McManaman was. The fact that he was there was enough.

"I think the voice came from up ahead," McManaman said.

The two men crawled on, painfully and slowly.

Bill Blekhornut was a few yards ahead, buried up to his knees in coal and rock. He could not move.

Legere and McManaman found a pick and shovel. They dug the trapped miner out.

"You O.K., Bill?"

"I guess so. My legs are a little stiff. I'll be all right. Go on, I'll catch up to you. I want to rest for a minute or so."

Legere and McManaman continued ahead. They stopped when their lights picked up the limp figure of a man, pinned against the roof by the wooden props.

"Let's keep going. We can't help *him* now," Legere said. They moved on.

They found Clyde Murray, Jr. further up the level. The wooden props had him pinned to the ground. He had a broken leg and a fractured collarbone, but he was alive.

Legere and McManaman worked feverishly to help Murray. Each time they moved the coal away, or rolled a piece of timber off his body, he cried out as the pain stabbed through him.

Finally, when they freed Murray, they left him for the rescuers to find. Then they continued to crawl on.

Suddenly, instead of coming *up* the wall as it was supposed to they felt the air rushing *down* the wall.

"They've reversed the fans! Those stupid sons of bitches will drive the gas in here!" Legere yelled.

But, as suddenly as it shifted, the air flow changed back to normal.

"That means somebody outside is coming after us!" McManaman said jubilantly.

The pair clawed a larger opening in the rockfall to let in more air. They continued on, pausing only to rest and catch their breaths.

George Calder and his volunteers crawled into them, grimy face to grimy face.

Above ground, Lamp Room Foreman Harry Weatherbee told his assistant, Alf Cox, "Better stay on through the night. We're liable to be here a long time."

Weatherbee looked at the 173 tags and Percy Rector's requisition slip on the board.

"How many tags will come off that board after this?" Weatherbee asked himself softly.

He thought how minutes, even seconds, could change everything in a man's life. He had been at home watching television. Then that awful roar came. He knew what it was right away. In fifteen minutes he was at his office.

Shortly, two soot-covered men walked slowly into the Lamp Room. Charlie Alderson and Joe McManaman, one of three named McManaman who were involved in this bump. They were the first men to reach the surface.

The crowd had followed them from the pithead to the Lamp Room. Charlie Alderson and Joe McManaman, one nothing. They did not know what had happened.

Weatherbee had the same question.

"We don't know, Harry," Alderson replied. "There was

a bump. A bad one. There's lots of gas and dust down there." He was still shaken by the ordeal, and his voice cracked as he spoke.

Joe McManaman interrupted. "We came through a trap door. It was blown off its hinges. We came right through." He shook his head in disbelief. "We just came through and here we are." He paused for a moment, not wanting to say the next words. "There's dead men down below."

The two ripped off their lamps and handed them to Weatherbee.

Two tags came off the board.

Now others began coming up under their own power, still coughing and choking from dust-filled lungs. They had crawled and stumbled over bodies in the darkness, but they continued to move upward and upward until they came out into the night.

At 10:10 P.M., Gerald Millard, his face blackened with dust, turned in his lamp and took back tag No. 497. He went home.

Eddie Hayes, slightly injured, gave up his lamp. Tag No. 553 was removed from the board.

By eleven, a few more men had straggled to the surface. Arthur Noiles was among them. He held no conversation with Harry Weatherbee. Frank Brown—No. 519 came off the board. He, too, was silent. Turning in the tag was a reflex action. The men knew they had to turn in their lamps when they reached the surface, so they did.

At 11:00 P.M., Hilton McNutt came out of the pit. He reported in, but did not give up his lamp. He had a hot cup of coffee and left to join the rescue crews; within an

hour, he was underground again, facing the death he so recently had cheated.

George Calder and his volunteers were still clawing, scratching, and digging. They pushed along the 13,800-foot level and tunneled up the wall to 13,400. It was slow going, agonizingly slow. The mine still rumbled. Every once in a while a shower of coal and rock fell from the roof onto the men. Tiny fragments trickled down their backs. The men paused at each rumble, fearful that another gigantic bump was in the making.

Calder's men found Archie White and Percy Hunter at 13,400. The two were half-buried by a rockfall, but the volunteers dug them out, and White and Hunter made their way to the surface.

When White reached the Lamp Room, he reclaimed tag No. 527.

"I guess I won't be needing this anymore," he told Weatherbee. But, he stuck the tag in his pocket.

He did not even bother to go to the Wash House to shower and change his clothes. He walked home.

Percy Hunter, slowly, reluctantly, walked into the Lamp Room and handed Weatherbee his lamp for tag No. 793. He kept his eyes away from the tag board, afraid to look.

Weatherbee handed him his tag, but Hunter kept his eyes down on the counter.

"What about the boys? Any news?" Hunter asked in a low voice. The "boys" were his twin brothers, Frank and Wilfred. They were inseparable.

Weatherbee told him that they were still together, somewhere in the mine.

Silently, Percy handed his tag back to Weatherbee.

The foreman understood. He handed Hunter his lamp, and the miner walked out to join the rescue workers.

The sky had clouded over now, and an occasional shower drenched the crowd at the pithead. Few noticed.

After more than four gruelling hours underground, George Calder and the twenty "barefaced" men came to the surface. They were dog-tired, scratched, bruised, and heartsick. Calder went directly to his office. The others stretched out on benches in the Wash House. They lay there, not speaking, breathing deeply.

Outside, the crowd waiting at the pithead moved back respectfully as a line of Draegermen, Nova Scotia's famed rescue crews, silently marched by in single file. No one tried to talk to them as they disappeared, one by one, into the mine entrance.

Draegerman was a synonym for courage in Nova Scotia. The name was derived from that of a German scientist, Alexander Bernhard Draeger, who invented a type of special equipment for breathing in a mine choked with gas. The equipment weighed slightly less than an infantryman's pack—about forty-five pounds. The main duty of a Draegerman, a coal miner especially trained in rescue work, was to provide safe breathing air in the mine. After he made sure of the air, his next job was to take injured persons to points of safety and medical help.

He carried his equipment on his back into the unknown, into rockfalls, broken timbers, gas. He crawled across jagged chunks of rock and coal, through narrow openings, scraping his shoulders and cutting his hands and knees, to reach men in trouble, men depending on him.

Normally, five Draegermen worked in a crew, under a

captain. At one time, there was no age limit, but the rigors of the highly specialized work now required that a Draegerman be over twenty-one years of age and under forty-five. Each man was tested at regular intervals for physical fitness and knowledge of the mine. If he failed, he was dropped.

When not on rescue work, the Draegerman was a miner, receiving miners' wages. On rescue work, his pay "jumped" to about seventeen dollars a day. That was only a few dollars more than his regular pay. A Draegerman's value was not paid in dollars. For the seventeen dollars a day, he inched his way into a mine, opening gas doors, sealing gas in pockets, all the time moving slowly ahead. The mask he wore was tight, so that a sudden bump or miscalculation could not wrench it free from his face, for a single whiff of deadly methane gas was enough.

Small wonder that the crowd at the pithead moved back respectfully when the first line of Draegermen filed by!

However, the crowd spoke with awe of George Calder and his twenty volunteers, who had gone down into the depths before the Draegermen were ready, men who had gone *without* masks.

Every light in All Saints Hospital was blazing. Already, nineteen men had been brought in, and it was just after midnight.

Five of the first men needed only superficial treatment. They were released. Fourteen others were kept for observation and treatment. There were enough beds, still.

Anxious relatives crowded the waiting room to see their men who had escaped death. Others stood around begging

for information about men still not reported. At that moment, 155 men were unaccounted for.

Doctors, nurses, and supplies arrived from Halifax and Amherst. No one called for them. They just came. Telegrams poured into the hospital from drug firms all over Canada, offering anything that might be needed. Women whose husbands were still below ground showed up to offer their services as nurses' aides, help that was accepted.

It was decided to open the Armories, around the corner from the hospital. If a wholesale rescue developed, the additional space would be needed immediately. A squad of women was sent to clean, set up beds, roll bandages.

No one had called the Red Cross or the Salvation Army. But they arrived at the scene shortly after the bump occurred.

The chairman of the Springhill Red Cross disaster services, forty-four-year-old Edwin McKinnon, could not be on hand to direct operations. McKinnon was a miner; he was trapped somewhere below with the rest.

The first Red Cross unit, a team of twenty-one workers, arrived at the same time the first group of Draegermen entered the pits. A military transport had rushed them the 175 miles over the road from Saint John, New Brunswick. They immediately set up an emergency feeding station near the pithead.

The Salvation Army hastily threw up three huge tents nearby, two of them tents that had been used in 1956. Long wooden tables were brought in from the Miners' Hall and from the Canadian Legion building. Residents of the town carried chairs from their homes. Pot-bellied

stoves were put in the tents, their pipes extending through the top flaps.

Inside, the tents gradually grew warmer. But not so warm that those who waited in the early morning hours could refrain from huddling close while they continued their vigil.

CHAPTER IV

Nearly a Mile Below

Levi Milley had been working at the 13,000-foot level when the bump hit, and he was tossed like a sack of feathers into the air. He somersaulted three times, bounced off the roof of the mine and dropped to the floor with a sickening thud. Dust swirled in great clouds around him. It burned his eyes, clogged his nostrils, and seared his lungs. He lay there panting in the darkness. The black walls had closed in. The roof had come down, the floor had risen, so that only three feet of space was left. In this small section, for some reason, the floor had not smashed into the roof. As Milley lay there, he could hear groaning and screaming all about him. Some cries seemed to be coming from a great distance away. His head pounded, and there was an awful ringing in his ears.

Was this what it was like to be dead?

The far-off cries died out. For several terrifying moments Milley could hear only the sound of falling debris and rock and coal rolling through the shaft. And only

that morning he had been worried about his chickens and the trim on his house. . . .

Milley was shocked to sudden attention by someone calling nearby.

"My damn leg is caught. Someone take the stone off my leg. Somebody help. . . ."

Milley's cap light was out but he reached up and tried the switch. It worked and cast a faint light on the chaos around him. He crawled three feet to his left, in the direction of the cry. His light flashed into a miner's face, a face so blackened by dust that he did not recognize it.

"Who is it?" Milley asked, staring at the miner, whose helmet, lamp out, was pushed down over his eyes.

"Caleb Rushton. Can you get my leg free? I can't move it."

"Hold on, I'll give you a hand." Milley leaned over and gave the stone a hard shove. It rolled off Rushton's leg.

Rushton wriggled his leg, slowly. It did not seem to be broken, but it was painful to move. "Thanks, whoever you are."

"Levi Milley."

"Thanks, Levi."

"That's all right. Think you can come with me?"

"I'm sure as hell not gonna stay here."

"Then let's go."

The two men made their way on hands and knees through the shattered shaft. Rushton lighted his lamp. Their lights stabbed through the darkness, to spotlight the lifeless forms of men lying grotesquely on the floor or smashed against the roof. Tools and shattered helmets and lamps were scattered everywhere. But everywhere

it was silent, the silence of death. Then, one of the bodies stirred and groaned. The two men, without speaking, made their way to the form.

"It's Joe McDonald," whispered Rushton.

The miner was lying on his back, one leg twisted under him. He looked up. "Who's there?" he called.

"Levi. Levi Milley and Caleb Rushton."

"For God's sake, help me. It's my leg!"

"Take it easy. We'll help you," whispered Rushton.

Milley and Rushton worked to free McDonald's leg. It was not caught or pinned by anything. It was twisted under his body. When they straightened it, McDonald let out a searing cry of pain. Milley reached under the leg, shuddered, and quickly withdrew his hand. He had touched wet, slippery bone that protruded through the skin at the hip.

"Jesus," Milley muttered.

"For God's sake don't leave me," McDonald pleaded.

"We won't," Milley assured him. "We're right here."

They stayed with McDonald for several minutes, until he dropped off into unconsciousness.

Milley and Rushton crawled slowly, in circles. They bumped into bodies, some of them dead but still warm. A shower of stones rattled down a slope a few feet away. A form sliding down the incline had loosened the debris. It was Teddy Michniak, who had painfully pulled himself along toward the voices he heard. Michniak's shoulder was broken, his wrist hung limp from his left arm. But he was alive.

The bump knocked Bowman Maddison off his feet. A flying chunk of coal severed the cord from his battery to

his lamp, and he lay on the floor in darkness, not daring to move. For several minutes the miner remained still, breathing heavily and waiting for something else to happen. Finally he stretched out one arm, then the other. There was no pain. Slowly, he twisted his body at the waist. There was still no pain. Then his right leg. His left. He struggled to his knees and then to his feet, smashing his head into the roof. He fell back to the ground, remained there for a moment, and pulled himself back to his knees. "Anybody there?" he called. The sound of his own voice startled him.

Ahead, he saw lights that barely pierced the swirling dust, and he moved toward them in the darkness. He rose from his knees, gently, until the top of his helmet scraped against the roof. There was not room to stand up straight, but crouched, he could take one cautious step after another. "Who's there?" he called toward the lights.

The mine still rumbled. Great chunks of rock and coal slid down from the walls and came to a stop at his feet. Through the noise he heard, "Levi Milley." Then, "Caleb Rushton. Who are you?"

"Bowman Maddison," he shouted back. He continued to move toward the lights until he reached the others.

"There's more alive back there," Milley said. "Joe McDonald is hurt. I think his hip is busted. I felt his bone sticking out. Teddy Michniak is banged up. Got some broken bones." He said it matter-of-factly. That they had broken bones and injuries did not matter so much as that they were alive.

"Let's look around," Maddison said. "Maybe we can find some others. I haven't got a light. The cord's cut."

"You get in the middle," Milley said. "I'll lead the way. Caleb will come up behind."

The three miners had gone no more than ten feet when they crawled into Larry Leadbetter. He was lying on the floor, waiting. He had heard the voices but could not believe they were real. He did not call. He simply waited. When the men arrived, Leadbetter sat up. The sight of the others was too much for him.

"My God! Oh my God!" he cried. "It was awful. Don't leave me alone here! Please. I don't want to die. I'm only twenty-two. I've got a wife and a kid." He began to sob.

"None of us want to die, dammit! None of us," Maddison growled. "And we won't leave you alone. Do you hear me? Listen to me! We're all here together. Understand? We're all here together!" Maddison was shouting now.

Milley patted Maddison on the shoulder. "Take it easy. He's only young and he's scared like all of us."

"Yuh, you're right," Maddison agreed. He turned to Leadbetter. "I'm sorry I yelled at you. I'm just as scared as you are."

The group fell silent. They heard other voices, some crying faintly for help, others praying. In a while, the voices stopped.

For a while, they heard scratching farther down the shaft. Then that sound stopped, too. Someone had died in the darkness, unable to claw his way out from under the tons of coal and rock.

"Who else is here?" Maddison finally called, not expecting an answer from anyone outside his little group.

"Say your names if you can," Milley added. "I'll start it. Levi Milley."

"Bowman Maddison."

"Caleb Rushton."

"Joe McDonald." The voice was weak.

"Teddy Michniak." The voice was strong.

"Larry Leadbetter." The sobbing had stopped.

For a moment there was silence. Then, out of the darkness, as the dust began to settle, other lights shone through!

"Gorley Kempt. I'm all right."

"Lowther, Eldred Lowther."

"Joe Holloway."

"Harold Brine."

"Wilfred Hunter. And my leg hurts."

"Hughie Guthro."

The men squatted on the ground, close together. Their lights flashed in all directions and cast eerie shadows on the walls.

Milley counted. "Thank God. There's twelve of us. Anyone else?" he called as loud as he could. His voice bounced off the walls and echoed back to him. That was all. The mine was quiet. Gone were the cries and groans of dying men. Gone were the last desperate scratchings of men buried alive.

"We can't stand up here," Maddison warned the others, remembering how he had bumped his head. "There's only about three feet of space above us. Reach up and see." He reached up to prove his point. His hand ran along the roof.

"Joe McDonald can't move," Milley announced. "I think his leg's busted. Michniak's hurt, too."

"It was one son of a bitch of a bump," a voice said slowly, accenting each word. A light was flickering against the roof. "Just take a look at those boxes. They're smashed up solid."

The men saw the flattened coal boxes. No one said anything about the bodies flattened with them.

It was too much for young Leadbetter. "Oh God! Let's get out of here!" He began to rise. Hands reached out and pushed him back to the floor. "My grandfather died in this mine before I was born," he groaned. "Now, it's my turn."

"Let's go in threes," Maddison said, ignoring Leadbetter. "We'll look around a bit, but be damn careful of gas."

Rushton, Milley, and Maddison moved away together, down towards the 13,400-foot wall. They bumped into more bodies in the darkness. They stopped, smelled for gas, moved on again slowly.

"This is as far as we can go. There's no way out in this direction." Maddison was panting from the exertion of picking his way over the debris in the cramped space. "We'd better go back and all stay in one place."

The three retraced their way. They had gone only about twenty-eight feet.

The others had already returned from their explorations unable to find a way out of the tomb, a space that measured forty-feet long and sixteen-feet wide.

The twelve men huddled together, waiting, but they did not know for what.

Finally, Maddison asked, "How are we fixed for water and food?"

"My lunch can is at the top of the section. We'll never get it now," Milley answered.

"We've got to have food and water," Maddison said.

Wilfred Hunter spoke up. "Here's a two-quart can. It's nearly full." He held it out to Maddison. "God only knows who it belonged to, but he won't be needing it any more."

"We've all got to look around. There must be some lunch boxes," Maddison said.

The men moved away along the mine floor, their lights poking into every corner. For half an hour they crawled about and searched.

Gorley Kempt came back with two deviled ham sandwiches. The others had not been able to find any food.

"What've we got?" Maddison asked, when the group assembled once again.

"Almost two quarts of water and a couple of sandwiches," Milley said. "That'll keep up going for a while, but we got to ration everything. Who's got something to divide the water?"

Eldred Lowther, a miner for twenty-eight years, had come back with an empty aspirin bottle. "We could use this," he said. He handed the bottle to Maddison, who put it beside the water can.

"That makes nearly two quarts of water, two sandwiches, and an aspirin bottle. We'll manage for a while," Maddison said. He looked over to Caleb Rushton. "What the hell time is it?"

"Ten minutes to eleven," Rushton said, glancing at his luminous watch.

That was enough to set Leadbetter off again. "Almost three hours and there's no sign of anyone coming to get

us. We'll never get out of here." His voice began to rise. "We'll die in here! They'll never get to us!" He was shouting, but the others ignored him.

"We've got to keep looking for a way out," Milley said. "McDonald and Michniak will stay together. They're hurt. Bowsie! Bowsie Maddison! Let's see what we can find."

"O.K.," Maddison replied. "Let's go." The two men crawled away again.

Wilfred Hunter, hunched and limping, stumbled off in the opposite direction.

In twenty minutes they were all back. There was no way out. They rested. The exertion of searching the shaft had taxed their strength.

Wilfred Hunter had stretched out on the ground, his shoes off, his head on a timber. When he felt strong enough to speak, he said simply, "I found my twin brother. I was crawling along and saw a body dangling from the ceiling. It was hard to tell who it was at first, but I know it was Frank. I reached up and touched him. He was dead but he was still warm. I tugged at his leg but I couldn't pull him off the ceiling. I told Frank I was sorry, very sorry it happened. I said I'd probably be joining him soon. We were always together. Even though I couldn't see his face, I knew it was Frank."

The men listened in silence.

"We're probably the only ones left in this whole damn mine," Maddison said, breaking the feeling Hunter's story had aroused in the men. "Why only us?" he asked.

Caleb Rushton spoke up. He felt he could tell the men. He was only thirty-five, but he had spent many of those years singing in the choir at the Anglican Church. "God

meant it that way. Only He can answer why." Then Rushton began to sing softly, almost to himself.

I fancy I stood by the shore one day,
Of the beautiful murmuring sea;
I saw the great crowds as they thronged the way
Of the Stranger of Galilee.

Maddison joined Rushton first, then others joined in, humming softly. For the moment, Joe McDonald and Teddy Michniak forgot their pain. The men were seeking an answer to Maddison's question, "Why only us?"

I saw how the man who was blind from birth,
In a moment was made to see;
The lame were made whole by the matchless skill,
Of the Stranger of Galilee.

Twelve men sang together, Catholic and Protestant alike. Miners, who daily live close to death, live close to God.

And I felt I would love Him forever,
So gracious and tender was He!
I claimed Him that day as my Saviour,
This Stranger of Galilee.

Bowman Maddison had no way of knowing when he asked, "Why only us?" that not four hundred feet away at the 13,000-foot wall, but separated by a mass of stone and coal and timber, other men were alive. They, too, had come together out of the twisted and torn passageways.

Garnet Clarke had been unloading props near the 13,000-foot wall with his buddies, Currie Smith and Herb

Pepperdine. Clarke was heaved into the air, and came down on top of Pepperdine, knocking the breath from both. Smith was thrown only to his knees.

Clarke rolled away from Pepperdine and the two men lay there in the dust, catching their breaths.

"You O.K.?" Clarke asked.

"I think so," Pepperdine answered.

"Where are you, Currie?" Clarke yelled over the noise of the heaving mine. It had all happened so fast that the thought never occurred to him that someone might have been killed. He was alive, and it seemed reasonable that everyone else was, too.

His light still burned, and he turned in all directions. Suddenly, in what for him was an awful moment, he saw the death and destruction. Twisted rails. Smashed boxes. Bodies that twitched and then lay still.

Currie Smith called. "I'm down here."

Clarke, searching in the direction of the voice, made out the faint glimmer of a light through the haze. He crouched and moved cautiously along the wall. Pepperdine scrambled to his knees, then to his feet. They found Smith a little more than ten feet away. He was not hurt.

"Doug Jewkes is buried," Smith said. "Help me get him out."

Jewkes was covered by coal and rock up to his waist, but he spoke calmly. "Give us a hand, fellows."

The three men pulled away debris and dug Jewkes out of his trap. It was 8:45 P.M.

Maurice Ruddick, father of twelve children, came down the wall carefully and bumped into Clarke and Smith and Pepperdine and Jewkes at 9:00 P.M.

When the bump hit, Ruddick could not move. Coal from the roof poured down on him. It smashed onto his helmet and put out his light. It buried him to the waist. Amid the dust and noise, The Singing Miner reached up and tried his lamp switch. His light played on the scene before him. "Oh, my God!" he muttered, offering a silent prayer.

He could move his arms. "Now, if only my legs aren't gone," he whispered. He dug around his waist, pushing great lumps of coal away from his body. Beads of perspiration stood out on his forehead. Little by little he moved away the coal until his waist was free. He bent forward and pushed more chunks aside until he was clear to his knees. Finally he was free. For a moment he dared not move. Then he tried a halting step forward. Then another. The top of his helmet scratched the roof. He took four more steps, then collapsed in a heap. The foul air and the exhaustion were too much.

Then a call brought him back to consciousness. Ruddick looked at his watch, the one with the luminous dial that Norma had given him. It was twenty minutes to nine. "For Christ's sake, someone help me!"

Watching his footing, Ruddick worked his way down the wall toward the sound. He heard the voice again.

"Get me out of here! My arm's caught. I can't move. It's terrible. Terrible." The man was sobbing.

It took Ruddick twenty minutes to move through the debris. Then he met the others. They were trying to free Percy Rector, whose right elbow was jammed tight in a shattered wood pack.

Percy Rector just that afternoon feared he had jinxed

himself when he forgot the brass tag for his lamp! He was imploring the others to free him from the vise.

Pepperdine inched away from the group.

"Where are you going?" Ruddick whispered.

"I'll be right back."

Ruddick watched him make his way down the wall. The rangy miner stooped low, moved with short, careful steps. Ruddick saw him stop a few feet away and break off the blade of a saw that was caught between two timbers. Pepperdine could not pull out the handle, so he brought back the saw blade, holding it behind him.

Ruddick shuffled over to Pepperdine so Rector could not hear. "I hope we don't have to use that," he said quietly.

"I got it just in case. It'll probably be too dangerous. The shock might kill him. But there's no other way to get him loose."

Rector had stopped his pleading. He only groaned, now. He could not stand, even bent over. The slightest movement tugged the arm, sending knives of pain stabbing through him.

At 9:30 P.M., a body rolled down the slope near the men, bringing a thick cloud of choking dust.

"I saw your lights but I couldn't move. Gas knocked me out." It was Frank Hunter, Wilfred's twin brother, not hanging dead from the ceiling as his brother thought, but now struggling to his knees and wiping dirt from his face. He looked carefully into the faces of the other men, glad he was not alone.

"How many of us here now?" Garnet Clarke asked. "I've got a piece of chalk in my pocket. Call your names and I'll write them on the timbers."

Somebody spoke, but no one asked who it was. The words were soft. "Sure, put them down good and clear and save the chalk. We can put the time the gas kills us beside our names. If they ever find us they'll know how long we lived."

Clarke ignored the voice. "I'm writing my name now," he said, and neatly lettered it on a timber.

"Put down Frank Hunter," the twin said. "My family should know what time I died. Wilfred is probably gone already."

"Put down Maurice Ruddick, and I don't give a damn what you guys say. I ain't gonna die and neither are you."

"Doug Jewkes," came another voice.

Clarke lettered the name.

"Pepperdine."

"Currie Smith."

"That makes six of us," Hunter said.

"Hey, don't forget Percy," Ruddick called.

Rector could not talk. The pain was too great even for the exertion of calling out his name.

Clarke added Rector's name to the chalk list. "That makes seven."

"Yeah, lucky seven," Ruddick said bitterly. Then he paused and sniffed the air. He sniffed again. "God damn it," he screamed. "Gas!" He lay back as if accepting death, eyes closed. The others slowly crumpled to the ground. Rector's head dropped. He could not fall.

In a moment the area was quiet. It was 10:00 P.M. But at 10:05, fresh air began to drift up the wall. One by one the men regained consciousness. "It's clearing," Clarke said, as if the others did not know it.

"The gas is gonna get us sooner or later," Pepperdine whispered. "We'll all die."

The men closed their eyes, breathed deeply, and tried to rest. They could not relax. Death was all around, and each wondered if he would ever see daylight again. No one could sleep. Percy Rector's groans kept them on edge. There was nothing they could do except listen.

At 10:30, Ruddick had enough of trying to relax. "I'm going to work my way up the timber road toward the 12,600," he announced. Bent over, so that his hands could touch the ground, he left to seek a way out.

"Dammit," he cursed to himself, after he had gone only forty feet. "The road's right up to the roof." He dropped to his knees and then to his stomach and pulled himself along, looking for an opening in the mass of stone. His arms ached. His elbows were almost raw from dragging himself over the jagged ground. His hands were cut and black dust filled the wounds. He was able to wedge through a narrow opening but could go no more than twenty feet before he found the way blocked. The miner pushed himself backwards. He could not turn around in the coffin-like confine. It took him half an hour to retrace the sixty feet to the others.

They were silent. They knew that if he had found a way out he would have shouted.

Suddenly, Ruddick started. "Why the hell didn't I think of it before?" he asked. "I've got a whole box of aspirins in my pocket. Who else has any?"

The men searched their pockets and the few lunch cans that were left. They found a total of five aspirins and handed them to Ruddick.

"Hold on, Perce," Ruddick said as he crawled over to

the trapped man. "Here, try these. They'll help the pain." He handed Rector a dozen aspirins and Rector reached out for them with his good hand. He could not hold all twelve and a few rolled out of his grasp, blackening as they rolled in the dust.

"Never mind," Ruddick assured him. "There's more. Now put a couple at a time in your mouth."

Rector placed three aspirins carefully on his tongue. Ruddick held his water can to Rector's lips and raised it. "Wash them down good." Rector gagged as the aspirins went down. He pushed the water can away and put three more aspirins in his mouth. Again, Ruddick lifted the water can and Rector drank a great gulp. Once more he pushed away the water and put the remaining tablets in his mouth.

"Take a good deep drink," Ruddick said, lifting the can to Rector's lips.

At 11:30, the aspirins began to work. Rector dozed off, temporarily relieved of the pain.

"We could all do with some water and something to eat," Ruddick said after a while. There was no argument. The men were hungry and their throats burned.

Each man, in turn, took a bite from a sandwich, then washed it down with the warm water. Nothing stayed cool in the mine, where the temperature was always close to eighty degrees, always hot and always stuffy.

"Nothing we can do but wait," Clarke said.

"Well, we can talk, can't we? This quiet is driving me nuts," Doug Jewkes said. "That'll pass the time. Only, we're not going any place. I think the bump hit in all the walls."

"If it did, that's it. We've had it," Ruddick answered.

"They'll seal us in. They can't get to us and they probably think everyone's dead anyhow."

"Don't be foolish," Clarke said. "Maybe the bump only hit in this section. Maybe everyone else is out of it. Maybe we're the only ones that can't get out. Maybe they're coming close to us right now."

"Maybe, maybe, maybe. You're full of maybes," Jewkes interrupted. "You don't hear anyone digging for us, do you?"

Ruddick looked toward Clarke. "You could be right," he agreed. "I sure hope so." He paused for a moment, still looking at Clarke. "The good Lord let us live through the bump. He'll let us live to be rescued."

The men were silent again. They switched off their lamps to save the batteries. Now the darkness was overpowering.

"What time is it?" someone asked.

Ruddick looked at his watch. The hands were together. "Midnight," he called. "Why?"

"Nothing," was the reply. "Just wanted to know."

Another voice. "I don't think they're gonna come."

An answer in the darkness. "The good Lord let us live. They'll come."

Young Garnet Clarke grew nervous, just sitting and waiting, doing nothing but waiting. "Let's look around for some water cans and lunch boxes," he suggested.

Ruddick answered immediately. "Try the other side. There's nothing toward the 12,600." He heard Clarke shuffle to his feet. Then he saw the helmet light flash on. "Wait," he called to Clarke. "I'll go with you." He pulled himself to his feet.

The two miners moved together in the shaft, climbing

over bodies, bumping into bodies. They searched around the dead for water and food.

"Here's a can," Clarke called.

"I've already found a couple," Ruddick answered hoarsely, a few feet away.

They continued slowly, down the waste side of the wall where it was mostly dirt and rock, a wall they called a waste, because there was little coal on it. At 175 feet they stopped. They could go no farther.

"The end of the line," Ruddick said. "Might as well go back." They returned to the others.

"How did we make out?" Ruddick asked, as he gently deposited his treasure on the ground.

"Let's see," answered Clarke. "There's seven water cans." He shook each one gently. "There's only a little bit in them," he said. "And we've got a couple of lunch boxes." He opened them and poked his hand in each. "Only a few pieces of broken sandwiches."

"Better than nothing."

Ruddick piled the cans and boxes in a corner. He was tired. He lay back and closed his eyes. It felt good to shut them. It helped keep out the darkness.

His mind was drifting. His head spun. For the first time since the bump, Ruddick thought of home. Things had happened so quickly, and his world had crashed down on him with such terrifying suddenness, that he had forgotten until now.

. . . Norma . . . "Thank God I've got the insurance. She'll be able to get by." He felt like crying, just thinking about it. It was so final, so much the end of everything. He had increased the policy only a month ago. "I didn't think she'd collect it so quick." He tried to recall pictures of his

twelve children. They would not come. He tried to remember all their names. He could not. "The baby and the three smaller ones," he thought, "won't even remember me when they grow up." He began to sing softly to himself: "I come to the Lord in prayer . . ."

"What was that?" someone asked, startled.

"Just me, singing," Ruddick answered.

"Let's all hear it, Maurice."

Ruddick raised his voice:

> I come to the Lord in prayer,
> Though my path is narrow,
> I'm not alone,
> For I know that my Saviour tarries near . . .

His voice trailed off. "I don't feel much like singing," he apologized.

Silence closed again.

Frank Hunter crawled to his knees. One leg pained him. He switched on his light but everyone looked alike, their faces black with dust. "I'm gonna take another look around."

"Better stay put," Ruddick said. "There's nothing either way. You'll only use up your battery and your strength. Try to rest."

"I can't. I keep thinking about my brothers. They're probably both dead."

But the brothers were alive.

At that same moment—2:00 A.M. of the second day—Percy Hunter was picking through a clogged shaft in search of bodies. With a rescue crew of "barefaced" men,

Percy, who so recently had escaped from the 13,400-foot level, was searching for his brothers.

Wilfred Hunter was with the eleven survivors of the 13,000-foot level, four hundred feet away from his twin, Frank. But they were separated by a wall of stone and timber and coal. And Wilfred was sure he had seen and touched Frank's dead body, crushed into the roof.

CHAPTER V

There Is No Hope

In the early morning of Friday, October 24, more Draegermen arrived from the towns of Stellarton, Sydney Mines, and New Glasgow, where the company also operated mines; they reported to the Draeger House and were assigned their shifts.

Now giant floodlights played on the pithead. The fire department had set up emergency lighting. Civil defense units brought in more lights and loudspeakers. Ambulances from Saint John and Amherst lined up on the grounds. Panel trucks belonging to local merchants were pressed into service as ambulances, in case a wholesale rescue operation developed. The Royal Canadian Air Force sent a helicopter from Halifax with blood supplies for the hospital. Soldiers arrived in trucks to help the local police patrol the streets and keep order at the mine. But, there was no need to keep order at the mine.

The people knew what had to be done. Every action, word, and thought was directed at only one objective: rescue.

Kathleen Burton fidgeted with the pair of socks she was knitting for the Red Cross. Her sister-in-law, Mrs. Katherine Beaton, had arrived shortly after 2:00 A.M. The oldest Burton boy, Billy, was at the pithead, waiting. Young Gary sat up, listening to radio reports of the bump, meager as they were.

"Don't worry, Kay. Charlie did it before and he'll do it again. He'll lead out another bunch of men. Just wait and see," Mrs. Beaton tried to reassure her sister-in-law.

Kay managed a weak smile. She did not answer.

"That's right, Mom. Don't worry," Gary said. "Dad'll be all right. Please don't worry."

"I can't go to the pithead this time. I just can't," Kay whispered. "That waiting there. Just waiting and not knowing."

"No one is asking you to go. You're better off here at home. When there's news, they'll let you know." Mrs. Beaton put her hand on the folded hands of her sister-in-law and squeezed.

The women looked at each other for a long time. The same thought ran through their minds. Would they ever see the man they loved alive again?

At 2:30 Judy Milley remembered something, and told her mother. "When Daddy said 'Goodbye' to me at school yesterday, it made me feel funny." The young girl could not explain. "Mom, I'm going down there. I just can't stay home!"

Velda Milley knew her daughter's anguish. She wished she could go to the pithead and wait, to be that much closer to Levi. But waiting, watching the rescue crews, was more than she could take. If bad news was to come, she would much rather hear it at home.

"All right, dear. Go ahead." Velda could not tell her daughter to remain at home. The child had a right to be there. "Take something warm and be careful," she said. "Don't get in anyone's way, and please, please, be home soon."

"I will, Mom," the girl said confidently. "And I'll bring home some good news."

Judy put on a warm coat and tied a kerchief about her head. She walked into the kitchen, past the school books still open on the oval table, and out the back door.

Her mother stood in the doorway, watching her disappear into the darkness.

At 2:45, the lights in Bowman Maddison's home were still on. Alden sat by his mother, listening to the radio reports. The set was turned down low so as not to awaken the baby asleep upstairs.

The twelve-year-old boy put his arm around his mother's waist and gave her a hug. "Zora will be home soon," he said. "She'll bring us good news." Another child reassuring his parent with a promise of good news. A child, yet now an adult, too, as were so many other children of Springhill suddenly.

Maddison's daughter had raced from the house minutes after the bump. She had not returned, and now Solange worried about this too.

Alden again made an effort to comfort his mother.

"God wouldn't give you the new baby and take Daddy away from us, would he?"

Garnet Clarke's brother, Harold, returned home from the pithead, his face flushed with anxiety. At 3:00 A.M., his family was still awake.

"There was no use waiting there," he told his wife. "I saw Garnie's car parked in the lot," he added, choking back a catch in his voice. "I could have driven it home with my set of keys, but I just couldn't. I felt as if it would be too final."

Lorraine looked at her husband and then at her father-in-law. She spoke to her husband. "Leave the car there. He'll be up soon and drive it home himself."

She did not believe it. She did not know what to believe but she had to say something encouraging.

Thomas Clarke got up from the couch and walked to the closet in the hallway.

"Where you going, Dad?" Harold asked.

"Leave him alone," Lorraine whispered to her husband.

The sixty-seven-year-old Clarke took out his heavy coat and silently put it on. He found his tweed cap and, holding it in his hand, turned. "We're not all here. I'm going down there and wait for my other son."

He left the house, to walk more than a mile to the mine.

Twelve-year-old Colleen Ruddick waited at the pithead. There was no news to bring home to her mother. Her father, Maurice, was still somewhere in the ground.

Standing by herself at 3:30 in the morning, the young girl had watched the lucky ones come to the surface. She knew that in the hours immediately following the bump,

many men had made their own way to the surface. She knew, too, by listening to the people talk, that some men had escaped alive from the 13,400-foot level. She saw ambulances leaving, carrying rescued men to be examined at All Saints Hospital.

Seventy men in all had made the surface by 3:00 A.M. Since that time no one had been brought up. The girl began to sob quietly to herself. She turned from the glare of the searchlights. She did not want anyone to see her crying; she was the oldest of the twelve children and she should not cry.

A small arm circled her waist as she stood there in the drizzle, and the girl jumped. It was her sister, Sylvia.

"Mama wants me to stay here with you."

The two girls waited side by side for their father.

Just before dawn, Margaret Guthro rubbed her red-rimmed eyes and looked up at the sky. The sun would not shine today, she thought.

Hugh Guthro's wife looked about her at the others standing huddled in the drizzle, not moving, scarcely breathing. The black ground was muddy and turning to a sickly ooze. The other women's shoes were splattered. She did not bother to look at her own. She watched a line of Draegermen trudging slowly, silently, out of the mine. Their faces were black with dirt and coal dust.

Margaret moved forward a step with the other women. All wanted to question the Draegermen. They wanted to find out about their men. Did the rescue crews see them? Was there a chance? But no one spoke. The line of Draegermen passed them by, each man looking straight ahead.

"I'd better go home. I'm so very tired. The children will be looking for me," Margaret Guthro said to herself.

She knew that her sister-in-law, Dot, had been awake all the night, watching over Linda and Jerry.

She turned away from the scene and walked slowly down the muddy road for home.

Dawn. A Draegerman rested in the Wash House. He had eaten a sandwich and gulped down a steaming container of coffee. The exhausted man stretched out on a cot, fully clothed, and stared up at the ceiling. The man on the cot next to him also stared. Then, he spoke.

"You know, there just can't be any more alive in there. Those guys who got out at the beginning . . . they were sure lucky. Next time we go back down it'll be just for bodies."

The second man did not answer. He had fallen asleep.

At 5:30, Bill Totten, one of the "lucky ones" who had escaped during the first hours after the bump, held an informal press conference in the Wash House. Totten, a miner for twenty-seven years, had made it safely to the surface from the 13,400-foot level and then immediately plunged back into the depths to help look for his buddies. Now, he was back on the surface.

"You can't imagine what it's like down there," he told newspaper people from all parts of Canada and the United States. "Crawling through a little hole just big enough to pass through. Every time there's a rumble, or a stone falls, you get ready for another bump. That would finish us. The heat and the smell . . . digging out those bodies. It's awful. . . ."

Totten was interrupted by Stan Pashkoski, another rescue worker. "I only wish they would let one newspaperman go into the mine. Then he could tell the whole outside world what it's like down there." He paused to catch his breath.

"There's no room down there. I have cuts all up my arm from scraping it on the rock." He pulled up his sleeve to show the cuts covered with black dust.

"We crawl along in a line, about a dozen of us. It takes a long time, sometimes a whole shift of eight hours, to go a couple of feet."

The reporters took hasty notes. No one interrupted. They let the miner get it off his chest.

"I may be crazy," Pashkoski continued, "but I still have hopes there will be somebody alive down on the 13,000-foot wall. The way I feel about it is that if it's like the 13,400 and the 13,800 there might be four or five fellows alive at one end of the wall.

"Anytime now, somebody might drive his shovel in and find an opening with men in it. But then we might come up against solid rock, too." The miner had finished talking. There was silence.

At 5:40 P.M. at the pithead, word came from below that the first body, the first dead body, was on the way to the surface. Up to this time there had been the living, the rescued, the men who were able to tell their stories. Now, the awful and terrifying impact of the disaster would strike home. Proof was coming to the surface that there were dead men below.

"Oh God, don't let him be my man!" The women offered silent prayers. Until a body came up, as long as

the man was not found, then there was no reality. There was always that slim thread of hope.

At 5:45, a Draegerman appeared at the pithead and signalled to the police and the army to keep the people from surging forward. An ambulance moved up to the entrance, its motors shattering the deathly silence that had fallen over the crowd. Two more Draegermen, carrying a stretcher, stood outlined at the pithead. White-coated ambulance drivers, their uniforms in startling contrast to the garb of the blackened rescue workers, hastily flung open the door of the ambulance. The body on the stretcher was covered with a blanket.

Someone at the pithead whispered, "It's Harry Halliday."

One name. It spread quickly through the waiting crowd.

A piercing shriek echoed above the murmuring of the people.

"Oh God! No! No. Harry! Harry!"

Men rushed to the cry. Gentle hands led Eva Halliday away. The ambulance, carrying the body of fifty-three-year-old Harry James Halliday, sped away to Canadian Legion Hall, now converted into a makeshift morgue. The waiting continued.

Neighbors took Mrs. Halliday back to her home at 181 Main Street. It was a short ride from the pithead at the foot of Main Street. A short ride in terms of distance. An endless ride for the widow.

The tears had stopped for Eva Halliday as she walked slowly in the front door of her home.

Her husband's blind seventy-four-year-old mother was sitting in the living room. Beside her on the couch were

Harry's two step-daughters, Dorothy and Marjorie. The room was still as Eva Halliday entered.

She sat down, without taking off her coat. She was tired. So very tired. It seemed as if she had been waiting for this moment ever since Harry first entered the mines, eighteen years ago. Now the waiting was over.

"It was Harry, wasn't it?" the blind woman asked, knowing the answer. The old woman could not see, but she did not need eyes for this—to feel the presence of death.

Eva Halliday looked around the room and spoke, to no one in particular. "Call Reverend McConnell. We'll have the funeral this Sunday."

At 6:30 A.M., Harold C. M. Gordon, Vice-President and General Manager of the Dominion Coal Company, drove his automobile onto the mine grounds. He had left his home in Sydney, three hundred miles away, many hours before. His back ached from the long drive. His eyes burned from lack of sleep. But he paused only long enough to change quickly into a Draegerman's outfit. In a few moments he was below ground.

When the bump occurred Gordon had been immediately notified by telephone at his home. He called his wife, Dorothy. "Pack a bag. They've had a bad bump at Springhill."

For Gordon it was a repetition of the 1956 explosion, when he went with rescue crews into No. 4 pit, directed operations, cleared deadly gas, exhausted himself. Now he would do it again.

Dorothy called that his bag was ready. Just a few things. She knew what these calls meant.

"Be careful, dear," she told him at the front door.

He kissed her and said, "I'll try. It's bad there."

Dorothy did not ask questions. She gave her husband a hug before he walked out the door.

Gordon threw his bag in the back seat of the car, got in, and began the drive to Springhill.

By 10:30 A.M., eighty-one men had been brought to the surface alive. One man, Harry Halliday, was now known dead. Ninety-two men were still unaccounted for, somewhere in the twisted and shattered mine. Ninety-two tags still hung on Harry Weatherbee's board, the figure unchanged since before dawn. No one had been brought up alive or found alive since that time.

Also at 10:30, Harold Gordon, his face blackened with grime, came to the surface. He did not stop to speak to anyone, but walked tiredly to the Wash House to try to scrub some of the dirt away. But he could not wash away what he had seen.

C. Arnold Patterson, public relations director for the Dominion Steel and Coal Company, had flown to the scene from his office in Montreal. He joined Gordon in the Wash House.

"Arnie, you might as well call a press conference for an hour from now. I've got some bad news."

Patterson nodded. He began contacting the 137 newspaper people, telling them to be in the company office at 11:30 A.M.

The reporters gathered in the office, prepared for the bad news. In a mood of somberness, they exchanged stories of the tragedy, things they had heard in the crowd, things they had seen.

One man told how he had found a small boy wandering aimlessly about the mine grounds.

"What's the trouble, sonny?" he had asked.

"I'm looking for my Daddy."

"Where is he?"

"He's in the mine. He hasn't come up yet."

The reporter found himself fighting back tears. "Well, I think you'd better go home."

"No, no!" the boy had said. "I don't want to go home. Everybody's crying there."

The reporters listened. The words of a small boy, who was frightened about his father but reluctant to return home, had summed up one aspect of the tragedy.

Patterson entered the room. "Mr. Gordon is on his way," he said. "Let him talk first. Then, if you have any questions, he'll try and answer them for you."

Patterson continued, speaking softly. "While we're waiting, I think you might like to know that Her Majesty, Queen Elizabeth II, has sent a message to Springhill by way of Governor General Vincent Massey. She expresses her concern and asks to be kept informed of all developments here." The reporters took notes.

Harold Gordon entered the room and joined Patterson. The two men faced the group. Patterson raised his hands. "Let's have it quiet, please. This is Mr. Harold Gordon."

Gordon faced the crowd. The usual ruddiness of his face was gone and in its place was gray pallor. He looked older than his fifty-nine years. He seemed shorter than his six feet two inches. There were still traces of coal dust under his eyes and at the corners of his mouth. He had washed in a hurry.

"I have just returned from the mine," he said slowly and softly. "I have bad news."

The room hushed.

"There are no more men alive at the 13,000- and 13,800-foot levels. The 13,000 wall was cut off. There are tremendous piles of debris in every approach. For the men in there, there may be some hope. But I say that only because we haven't seen them. The way things look, those still listed as missing must be presumed dead. There is virtually no hope left. That is all I can tell you now."

Tears had clouded Gordon's eyes. Patterson stepped forward. "Are there any questions?" he asked.

There were none. There was nothing to ask.

Gordon left the conference to return to the mine.

The news was immediately flashed to the world. But families whose men were still underground refused to believe Gordon's words.

The crowd at the pithead did not dwindle. A body, a dead body, was the only way they would be convinced. Draegermen continued to push forward for the men that had to be brought out, dead or alive.

More people continued to pour into the town during the day. Nova Scotia Premier Robert L. Stanfield arrived with Labor Minister Stephen Pyke, Lieutenant-Governor E. C. Plow, and Mines Minister A. E. Manson. They talked to rescue workers. They toured the area. They sympathized. But there was nothing they could do.

More rescue units of the Red Cross arrived from Saint John; from Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island; Truro and Amherst, Nova Scotia. The Saint John Ambulance Nursing Division in Moncton, New Brunswick, sent a

mobile twenty-five-bed hospital. It arrived at noon. The equipment was divided between the armories and the morgue.

Clothing began to come in from all parts of Canada. By now, seventy Draegermen were going down into the mine in each shift, working from various approaches. When they came to the surface their clothing was black and sweaty. Constant changes of clothing were needed.

The afternoon wore on slowly as the Draegermen and "barefaced" men continued their work in the pit, only to emerge weary and bruised and heartsick.

By late afternoon, more bodies began to reach the surface. More dead bodies. More proof. Edward Bobbie came up—dead. So did Cecil Cole, Harold McNutt, and Hiram Hunter. The men had spent most of their lives working in the mine.

In the early evening Draegermen, "barefaced" men, and company officials returned to the surface. They agreed there was no one left alive at the 13,800-foot level or in that part of the 13,400 level to which they had gained access. Nothing was known about conditions at 13,000. Rescue crews could not break through.

A "barefaced" worker told how his shift in six back-breaking hours had succeeded in getting up the 13,400 wall only as far as the second stone wall, a distance of one hundred feet.

During the evening, crews were sent into the 12,600 level in spite of the heavy gas still hanging there. The men tried to reach the isolated 13,000 wall. A fresh air base was set up underground, about five hundred feet from the back slope. Men without masks were not allowed beyond this spot.

When the Draegermen reached the point in the level where the floor had been forced up so hard that it jammed the haulage rails against the roof, they had to crawl on their stomachs on the high side of the packs in the 12,600 area. Their paths twisted and turned, by-passing areas where it was impossible to get through.

By late evening, the drizzle above ground had turned to steady rain, transforming the already sodden ground into a sea of black mud. Still the people waited. They stood with umbrellas in the mud and waited.

They waited all day and into the night. No more men were brought up alive. No more men were sighted below alive. Nothing was heard below, except the sounds of the rescue workers, and the inanimate noises of the mine.

CHAPTER VI

These, The Living

Thursday slipped into Friday. And at the 13,000-foot level twelve men dozed and awakened and moved restlessly, vainly, to find a way out of the trap.

In the morning, Levi Milley stirred and blinked his eyes. Morning? It was black as pitch. He had forgotten where he was for the moment. As he felt about in the darkness, his hand brushed a leg. The leg twitched, there was a groan. Heavy breathing and the smell of men and coal brought back the living nightmare. This was reality. He was still in the mine. It was not a dream.

His stomach churned. The churning always came in the morning. But Velda and Judy were always there to have breakfast with him. Thank God they weren't here.

He heard the others begin to move about and he switched on his lamp. The light played on the shiny black walls and the jagged roof. Joe McDonald was still in the same position on the rock pile, his face contorted in pain from his broken hip. Teddy Michniak, despite his broken

shoulder, lay next to McDonald, talking gently. "Take it easy, Joe. We'll be all right." McDonald bit down hard on his lip and did not answer.

Milley crawled over. "How are you feeling, Teddy?" he asked.

"It hurts like hell, but not as bad as Joe, here." Michniak nodded toward McDonald, who stared straight ahead, trying to bear the pain and not cry out.

"Levi, I don't think we'll make it out of here." Michniak, oldest of the twelve men, said it matter-of-factly. He was resigned.

Joe McDonald heard him. "Don't worry, we'll get out," McDonald said, rubbing his hand across his forehead. "I can take it and so can you guys. Somebody will come and get us."

McDonald's reassuring words prompted one of the group to ask, "Why don't we have something to eat?"

"What time is it?" Bowman Maddison broke in. A few of the men snickered when Maddison said, "I always have a late breakfast."

"Rushton's got a watch, ask him," Milley answered.

Maddison turned to Rushton, but did not interrupt the prayer the latter was beginning.

> Our Father who art in Heaven,
> Hallowed be Thy name . . .

The men heard faint snatches and joined Rushton, praying softly. Their fervent "Amen" echoed through the shaft.

"What time is it, Caleb?" Maddison asked.

Rushton looked at his watch. "Almost nine o'clock."

Maddison grinned. "I never get up this early."

"Let's eat," a voice implored.

"What will you have, one or two eggs with your bacon?" It was Maddison again, but this time no one appreciated his humor.

Levi Milley was already busy cutting a sandwich into twelve parts. He moved closer to Joe McDonald and Teddy Michniak and handed them their meager portions. "Here's breakfast," he said. Then he handed the others their bits.

Each man nibbled and chewed slowly.

Levi Milley measured out water in Eldred Lowther's aspirin bottle and passed it around. Not a drop was wasted. The bottle held less than a mouthful, but as each man received his share he swished it around in his mouth. At least it loosened some of the dust on his teeth and tongue. Then he swallowed, letting the tepid fluid trickle slowly down his throat.

Wilfred Hunter, his twisted leg paining him, struggled to his feet and crouched against the ceiling. "I'm gonna look around some more," he announced. He switched on his light and stumbled off into the darkness.

The weak rays from his dim lamp did not help much. He tripped repeatedly over piles of rock. Each time, he winced, pulled himself up, and kept going. It seemed a thousand miles, but he knew where he was headed. When he got there, he reached up to touch the body he thought was his dead brother.

"Frank. It's Wilfred. I told you I'd be back. I won't leave you." He gently stroked the leg. He could not reach the face. The miner remained there for half an hour, talking, patting the leg, assuring his twin that everything would turn out all right. Then he stumbled back and

joined the others. No one asked him where he had been. No one needed to ask.

Bowman Maddison, Levi Milley, and Hugh Guthro switched on their lamps and began to move around in the shaft. Their lights were beginning to fail but they had to continue to search for a way out. Traces of gas still clung to the ceiling and they had to retreat. They changed direction, moving slowly and carefully.

"Jesus, look at that pan engine!" Maddison exclaimed. The engine had smashed into the roof of the mine and dropped back again. The rails on which it once rode were twisted like spaghetti.

"There's someone on the engine!" Milley exclaimed. His light had picked up a form draped over the wreckage.

The men crawled quickly. Milley reached out and felt for a pulse. He looked closely at the face. "It's George Canning," he said. "He's gone. Must have been thrown up to the roof with the engine."

They left Canning where they found him. Then they crept back to the others, but did not report what they had found. It would serve no useful purpose, now.

Once more everyone switched off the dwindling lamps. There were precious few hours left in the batteries.

In the darkness, Larry Leadbetter called. "Guthro . . . Hughie Guthro . . . Joe Holloway."

The two men answered.

"You fellows were in the 1956 thing. Do you think there's a chance for us to get out of here?"

Guthro answered first, sympathetically. "My wife Margaret is waiting for me. She waited two years ago and I made it. She's waiting now. She knows I'll get out. We all will."

"Sure, sure, just relax and wait. We'll make it," Holloway answered, in his usually gruff voice.

The reassurance seemed to satisfy the twenty-two-year-old Leadbetter.

The day wore on. The men removed their shoes, trying to get comfortable. They slept, awakened, then slept some more. They did little talking.

Suddenly, in the late afternoon, Maddison cried out, "What's that?"

Everyone snapped awake.

"Be quiet! I hear something!" Maddison ordered.

The men listened.

"Don't you hear it?" Maddison pleaded for someone to hear. "It's vibration! They're using chipper picks. They're coming after us!"

"I can hear it, too," Milley said, his voice rising with excitement. "Shh. Listen."

Somehow the sounds of the chipper picks used by the rescue crews had reached them. But, in a few moments, the chatter died away. Silence, emptier even than before, crushed in on the men.

"They've probably knocked off for the weekend," someone said. "They figure there's no hurry. Everybody is dead."

Day became night. It was all the same in the darkness. The men finished another sandwich and divided more of their water in the aspirin bottle.

Saturday dawned, pitch-black. The men did not have to be awakened. They had not slept during the night, listening for more vibrations, noise that did not come.

Levi Milley thought about dying. Would it be hunger or thirst? A bump would be better, quicker. He thought

about his wife, Velda, and his daughter, Judy. He felt like screaming and crying. He would not live to see his pretty little girl grow up.

Bowman Maddison was glad that his friend Jimmy Demetre was the godfather of the new baby. Demetre would look after Solange and the children. "I'll never see them again" Bowman said, almost aloud.

Caleb Rushton began his hymn once more.

> In fancy I stood by the shore one day,
> Of the beautiful murmuring sea . . .

His voice was peaceful and soothing.

The men listened and hummed. Soon they fell into sleep.

In the evening, Gorley Kempt left the group for a search of his own. He returned with a battered lunch can he had stumbled over in the darkness. The can had pieces of a sandwich in it, supper for twelve.

The pain in Joe Holloway's leg had deadened and he felt better. Quietly, he told the men stories about hunting deer, even his special spots. "There's a swell spot behind the old Intercolonial Railway, just outside town," he revealed. "It's only about three or four miles in the woods. When we get out of here, we'll all go hunting together."

Holloway's words had a relaxing effect. One by one the men dropped off to sleep. Saturday had ended.

At the top of the 13,000-foot wall, cut off from the group of twelve by a barrier of rock and coal, more men struggled for survival.

The seven had slept fitfully, but were awake when Friday morning came.

Maurice Ruddick slid over to Percy Rector who groaned and cried out without realizing it. Gently, Ruddick shook him into consciousness.

Rector blinked his eyes, but did not speak.

"Might as well give him the last of the aspirins," Ruddick said to himself. "Here, Perce, take these." He handed Rector four aspirins, which the trapped miner took silently and put in his mouth. Ruddick held a water can to Rector's lips. "Hungry?" Ruddick asked. Rector nodded. "I'll get you something," Ruddick said, and crawled away. He returned shortly with a piece of sandwich, which Rector nibbled slowly.

The other men also nibbled on pieces of sandwich, and put some away for the next day. Their water supply was now down to less than a quart.

"Please God," Ruddick offered a silent prayer, "help us the best You can."

Garnet Clarke was weary of searching for a way out. "I'm gonna take it easy," he said. "Just gonna wait for them to come and get us." He sighed and lay back on the ground, his back resting on a wood pile.

No one made a move now to find a road to the surface. They sat, or lay, waiting in the dark. Some asked themselves how long it would be before rescue. Others wondered when they would die.

The last four aspirins had little effect on Rector. The pain was too great. "I can't stand it any more!" he screamed suddenly. His voice, normally deep, was shrill.

It shot through the men like a stabbing icicle. "Please, please, for God's sake, do something for me!" he pleaded. "Cut off the arm. It's no damn good any more. Just get me out of this. I'm begging." His body twitched with sobs

and convulsions. Then, mercifully, he lapsed into unconsciousness.

For several minutes the others sat where they were, shaken by Rector's ordeal, not uttering a sound.

Finally, Pepperdine crept over to Ruddick. "What do you think? I've got the saw."

"Let's talk to the others," Ruddick answered, a cold shiver quivering down the back of his neck.

The rest knew the purpose of the conference. Automatically they huddled close.

"It might kill him," Clarke whispered.

"He just can't take any more," Pepperdine said. "At least we can get him out of there and bring him in closer here with us. We could bandage up the stump with our shirts."

"I don't know. I don't know," Ruddick muttered. "If we did it and he died and then we're rescued an hour later, how would we feel? We can't take his life in our hands."

"Why don't we vote on it?" Clarke suggested.

"Voting on a man's life?" The idea shocked Ruddick. "We don't have the right. That's for the Lord to decide."

"Well, we've got to do something," Clarke answered.

"He's right," Pepperdine agreed. "We've got to do something."

Ruddick gave in reluctantly. "All right, let's vote. But remember, someone has got to do the job if we vote 'yes.' "

The men shuddered and grew silent, each struggling with his own thoughts.

"Ready?" Ruddick asked, breaking the silence.

For a moment no one spoke.

"I say no," Ruddick began.

"No," voted Clarke.

"No," said Jewkes.

"I vote no," said Smith.

"No," Hunter voted.

The men waited to hear from Pepperdine. The sound of their heavy breathing was shattered by another scream of pain from Rector.

Pepperdine had now decided. "Damn it, no!" He sobbed as he spoke. "He's only half-alive now, but you're right. We'd probably kill him." He paused. "I vote no!"

The count was complete. Percy Rector would remain in his trap, his arm crushed in a vise of wood.

The men sat in silence again, emotionally exhausted. They heard only faint scratchings in the distance. "Those damn rats!" Clarke commented. "They're all around us!"

This time, however, the scratching was not mine rats. It was a man clawing for his life, desperately trying to tear his way out of a shallow hole.

Byron Martin—Barney, they called him—was fighting for survival alone. He had been alone since the bump.

The force of the upheaval had hurled Martin down the longwall face at the 13,000 level. His lamp had been blown off his head, and he was pinned between two stone packs by a fall of rocks. There, he lapsed into unconsciousness in the cavity between the packs, rocks piled at his feet, over his legs, under his waist, and only inches from where his head rested in the black dirt.

When the rumbling and the screaming died and the dust had settled, he did not hear the voices of the others, the seven men only one hundred feet down the wall. He did not hear Percy Rector's screams echo off the walls. Barney Martin lay in this position, alone, unconscious,

through the night, separated from the others by a wall of debris.

At 5:00 A.M., Friday, Martin finally awoke. His mouth was filled with dirt he had sucked in during the night. He tried to moisten his lips but his tongue was caked and dry. He looked about, but saw nothing in the blackness. He reached up for his helmet light; it was gone. He tried to move his legs; the rocks on top held them fast. He moved his hands. More rock. He tore at the unyielding rocks, trying to grip something to pull himself free. Only dust and loose stones tumbled back toward him.

Martin was hungry now. He felt for his lunch can, but it was gone. He felt for his water can hanging from a hook on his belt. It was still there! He grabbed it and shook it frantically. It was about a quarter-full. He twisted off the top and drank a great gulp. How long had he been trapped? He did not even remember what day it was. He clawed at the rock repeatedly. He tried to grab something firm, but everything slipped from him. Gas swirled into the shaft and hung from the roof, dropping slowly down. The gas knocked him into unconsciousness again. He slumped forward, face now in the dirt.

Martin did not realize he was in a hole of familiar shape—six feet long and three feet deep.

Sometime Saturday morning, he regained consciousness in his lonely, black pit. Once more Martin began clawing. His legs were numb. The skin on his fingertips was raw and bleeding, the nails split and broken. Coal dust and dirt was imbedded in his face. He rubbed tiny black fragments from his eyes. They burned and itched. He grabbed at his water can and drained it in one mouthful, then retched and threw up the liquid. His stomach ached

from lack of food. His head felt light. He fell unconscious, again.

At 10:00 A.M., Saturday, Garnet Clarke decided he had rested enough. He thought he had slept soundly through the night and early morning, although he did not remember waking or falling asleep. "How's about some food?" he called. He had forgotten how much was left.

"There's only three sandwiches," Ruddick answered, "and damn little water." He was silent for a moment. "We'll have one sandwich today and another one tomorrow. If we're still here on Monday, God forbid, we'll have the last one." He repeated the words to himself. "*If we're still here on Monday . . .*" He counted the days. "Thursday, Friday, Saturday, Sunday, Monday." He cursed softly under his breath. "By Monday, we'll probably all be dead!"

"Might as well look around for some food," Clarke said. He turned to Ruddick. "Maurice, is there any place we haven't looked? Any place you think there might be a lunch can?"

"We've been all over," Ruddick answered. "There's no way out and there's no food." Then he added, "Probably no way in, either."

Clarke pointed to a mass of debris a short distance away. "What about that wall?"

Ruddick knew where Clarke meant. "Go ahead if you want to. It's probably blocked solid behind it."

Clarke was still hopeful. "It might be loose at the top."

Ruddick was irritable. "Well, go ahead if you want to. I'm staying here this time. Be careful. If you pull out a

piece of rock too fast, it might send the whole wall sliding down here."

Clarke wanted company. He called to his buddy, Currie Smith. "Want to come along, Currie?"

Smith answered by slowly getting up from the floor. In a squatting position he switched on his lamp. He swore. "This thing's getting weaker and weaker. It's only got about an hour left."

"Mine too, but the hell with it," Clarke answered. "Let's go."

The pair left, the rays from their lamps barely lighting the way. Carefully, they moved to the top of the debris at the roof and began trying to pick their way through. They pulled with their hands and twisted their fingers into every inch-wide opening, hoping to loosen just a bit of stone. They flattened themselves on their bellies and forced their bodies into places where it seemed no human could fit. Clarke wiggled his fingers between two rocks and yanked. The rocks came away.

"Over here!" he yelled to Smith. "It's loose here!"

Smith scurried over. The two men worked side by side until they had made an opening for themselves. They crawled through, barely able to squeeze in. What they found was a body.

"Who is it?" Smith asked, as he shone his light on the figure. "Whoever it is must be dead."

Clarke reached under the body and gently lifted the face from the dirt. "It's Barney Martin."

Martin heard his name and it summoned him back to consciousness. "Hello," he mumbled and once more fell unconscious.

"It doesn't look as if he's got long to go," Clarke said. "Let's try to work him loose anyway."

The men pulled the jagged rocks from Martin's legs. They moved away the debris that dug into his sides and rearranged him in a more comfortable position. All the time, he did not regain consciousness.

The air was now clear where Martin lay and Clarke and Smith decided to leave him there. To move him might cause injury. And there was no escape. Even if they could drag him out of the hole, they would not be able to push him through the narrow opening at the top of the wall.

Slowly they worked their way back to the others. "There's eight of us now," Clarke announced when they returned. "We found Barney Martin, but it doesn't look as if he's gonna last much longer. I don't know how he lasted this long."

No one said much. Martin, they figured, might be better off than they.

During the day, the men tried their lamps to see if they still worked. One by one, the lights flickered and died. For the first time, complete darkness engulfed them.

Maurice Ruddick spent the evening pressing his body hard against the rocks. Pain was reality. Reality meant he was still alive.

During the night he felt a hand reach over and touch his. It was someone merely wanting to feel the touch of another live human. Neither spoke.

Just before midnight, Percy Rector screamed in pain. The men shuddered, but remained silent.

Then a vibration in the distance brought them to attention.

"Do you hear it?" Clarke asked in a whisper, trying not to drown the sound.

The others strained to hear.

"I hear something," Ruddick answered, scarcely breathing. His heart pounded. "They haven't forgotten us! They must be coming for us!"

"I can't hear a thing," Frank Hunter said. Actually, he was afraid to listen, afraid that if he heard, too, the sound would disappear.

"They'll never get here in time," Pepperdine said disconsolately. "They sound far away. They're probably not even hurrying. You don't hurry for dead men."

It was as if Pepperdine's pessimism drove away the sound. The vibrations died.

"Tomorrow is Sunday," Ruddick said calmly, watching the hands on his watch come close to midnight. "We'll pray."

CHAPTER VII

In the Hands of God

The weather had turned cool and a few straggling clouds drifted lazily across the sky as Sunday began for those on the surface.

Eighty-one men were saved. The same figure had held since Friday morning. No survivor had been brought up since, though the death toll was rising. It stood now at eleven. And eighty-two men were still missing in the bump-rocked mine.

Kathleen Burton had not left her house since Thursday night. She waited and prayed at home, cleaned house and prepared meals for her boys. Gary, the youngest, stayed home with her, helping with the chores and running errands. Billy, the eldest, divided his time between the pithead and home, where he brought the latest reports and rumors to his mother and her sister-in-law, Katherine Beaton.

This morning—Sunday—Kathleen planned to leave the house for the first time, to go to Mass. She knew she would

have to go early. St. John's would be crowded today. All of Springhill's eight churches would be crowded. The Anglican, Baptist, Nazarene, Presbyterian, Roman Catholic, Salvation Army, and the two houses of the United Church of Canada would be filling with sad, strained parishioners.

Billy Burton felt uncomfortable in his best suit. Getting all fancied up, even to go to church, was not to his liking.

Kay Burton told her sister-in-law that she did not feel like putting on even a faint trace of lipstick.

"It's been almost four days now," she said, as the two women put on their coats in the hallway. There was no need for an answer.

Kathleen called to her sons. They joined her at the front door and Billy handed his mother the small family Bible. Then they walked from the house to church.

Velda Milley had not left her home since Thursday night either. Judy had made several trips to the mine but each time the girl returned home with little news and less encouragement. Judy decided not to return to the pithead anymore but to remain with her mother.

On Sunday morning, Velda still did not feel like leaving the house, even to go to church.

"I'll say my prayers here," she told her daughter. Then, irrelevantly, "Did you take care of your father's chickens?"

"Yes, Mom, I fed them and I brought in the eggs," Judy answered. "Daddy will be proud of us when he comes home."

"Yes, he will, dear," Velda answered, forcing a smile. In her heart she had terrible doubts that she would ever see her husband alive again.

"Do you mind if I go out for a while?" Judy asked. "I'd like to go to church if you won't be too lonely."

"Please go," Velda answered. "It will help your poor father. We'll have some lunch when you get back."

Judy threw on her coat, wrapped a kerchief about her blonde hair, and kissed her mother on the cheek. "This time, next week," she said, "Daddy will go to church, too."

"He's going to church with you now," her mother answered.

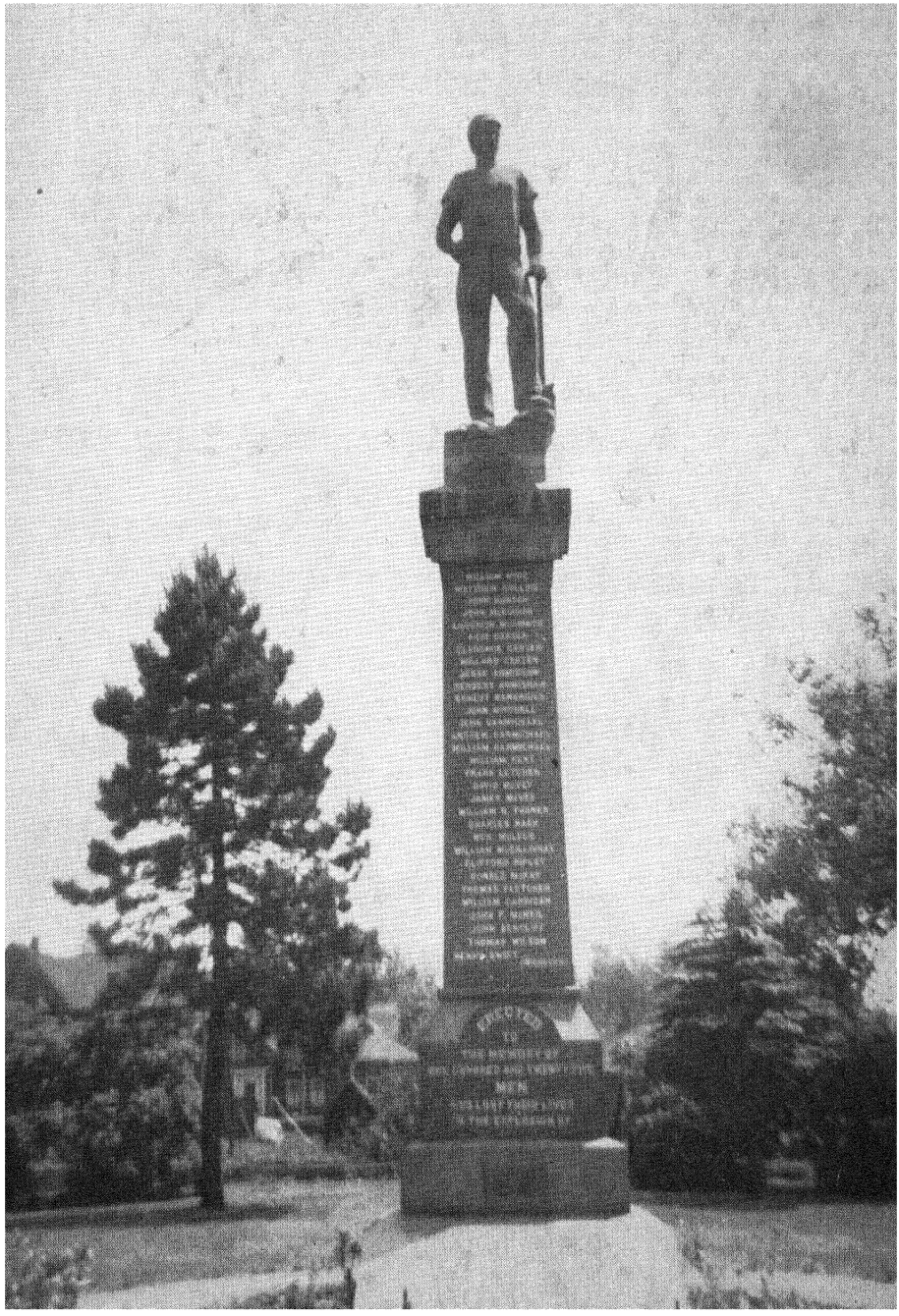
Zora Maddison had not returned home since she raced out of the house Thursday night to wait at the pithead for her father. But her brother, Alden, made repeated trips to the mine to see that she was all right. Each time he brought a message from his mother, asking the young girl to come home and wait there, but each time she refused.

The fourteen-year-old girl waited in the huge Salvation Army tent when the weather was raw. When it was mild, she waited at the mine entrance. She slept in the tent. When she was hungry, she ate with the rescue workers. The men looked at her dumbly. They could tell her nothing about her father.

There was no one to stay with the baby, so going to church was out of the question for Solange. She had been praying all week anyway. She would continue praying right up to the moment when she knew something for sure.

Alden helped his mother straighten up the house. Then he kissed her and left for church.

Harold Clarke had not been home for two days. He

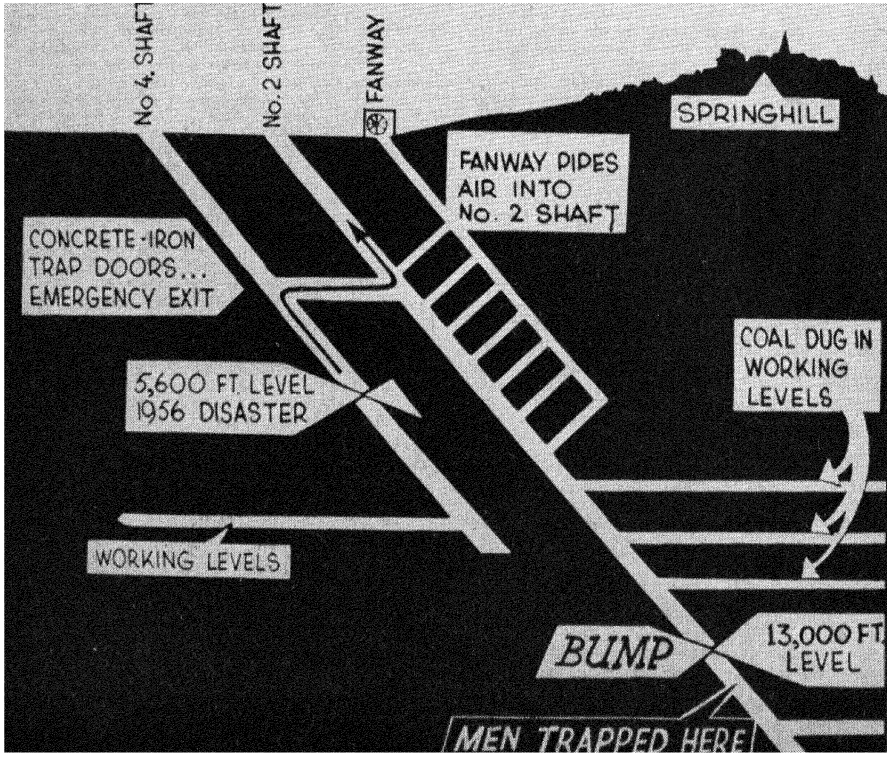


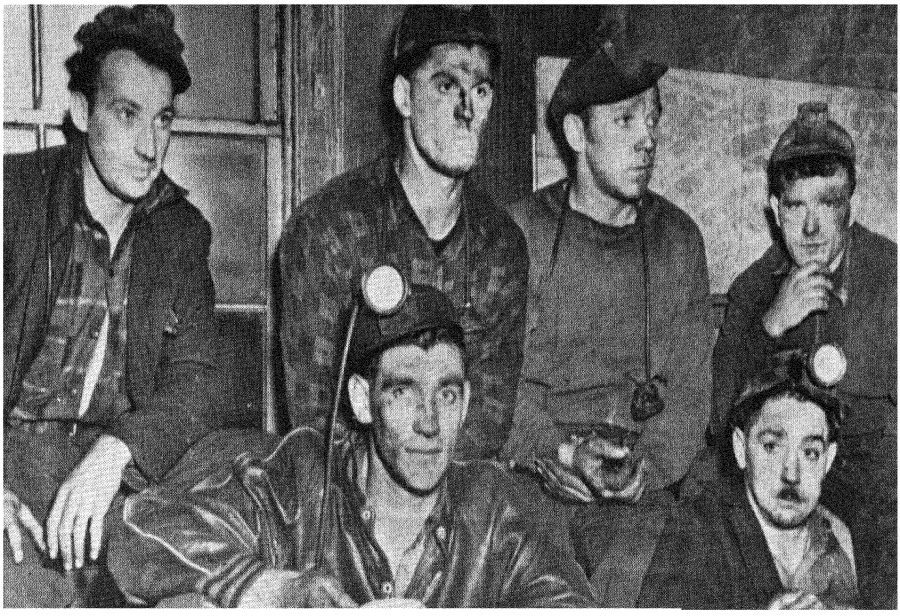
In the heart of Springhill stands this stone and marble monument, topped by the figure of a miner. It commemorates the 125 men who lost their lives in the town's first mining disaster, 69 years ago.



Wide World Photo

By checking the tags on this board, Harry Weatherbee was able to estimate accurately the number of miners underground. The No. 2 shaft, in which the men were trapped, is indicated on the chart below.





Wide World Phot

When the bump occurred, rescue teams prepared for action. Their arduous task was to go on for more than a week. While they worked, ambulances lined up near the mine, ready to rush survivors to the hospital.



Wide World Photos



Wide World Photos

The long hours of vigil were to last for more than a week. Shown here are relatives and friends of the miners trapped below. For only a few did the vigil bring a reward.

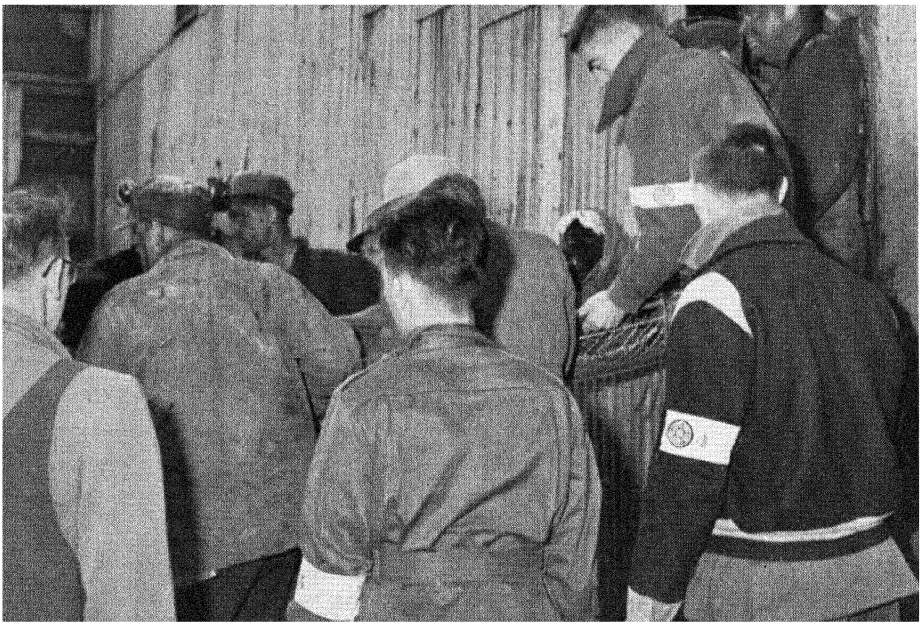


Wide World Photos



Wide World Photos

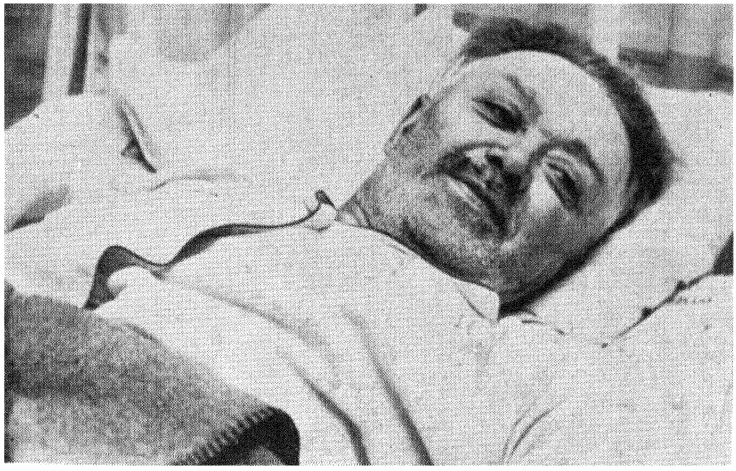
Levi Milley, shown here as he was removed from the mine, was one of twelve men who, buried for seven days, nevertheless survived. He and his buddies had been eating coal in their effort to stay alive.



Wide World Photos

The rescue of Doug Jewkes (above) and Garnet Clarke (on the stretcher below) occurred ten days after the bump, when seven more men were found alive. Although the men had given up hope, they had celebrated Clarke's twenty-ninth birthday by splitting their last sandwich seven ways.



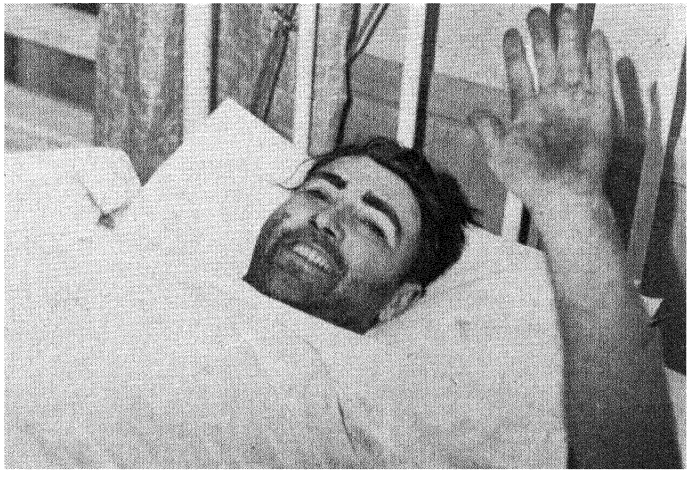


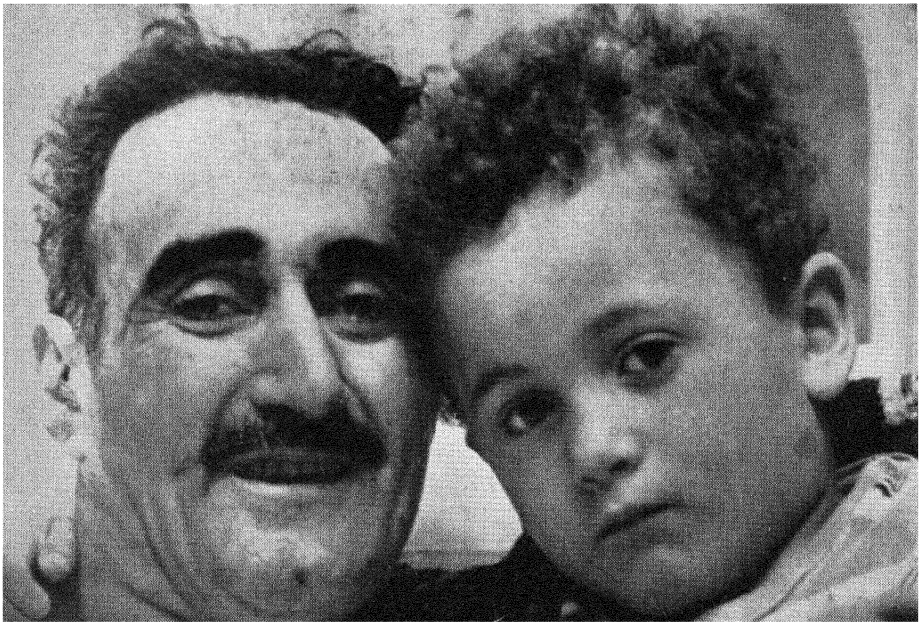
Wide World Photos

Among the miners grateful to be alive were Teddy Michniak



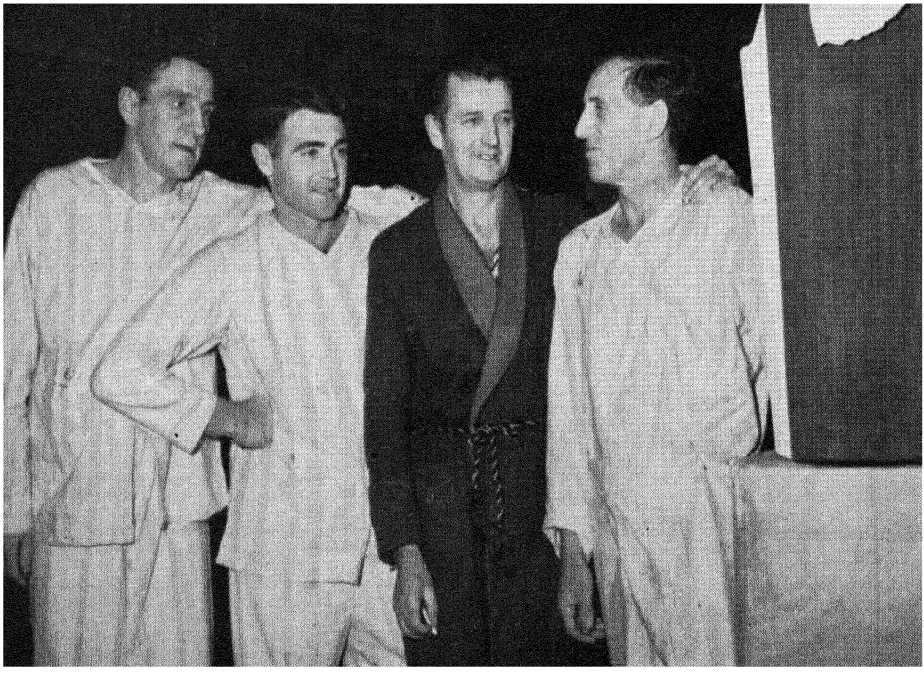
Currie Smith . . .





Wide World Photos

Maurice Ruddick, the Singing Miner, is shown here with his four-year-old son. Ruddick's high spirit and morale were appreciated by the men with whom he was entombed, four of whom—Bowman Maddison, Harold Brine, Eldred Lowther, and Levi Milley—are pictured below.



Wide World Photos

had joined the rescue workers and already had made several trips into the shattered mine. He chipped and tore his way through the rubble, helping locate bodies. Each time he came upon the form of a dead miner he shivered, despite the oppressive heat in the shaft. He feared it might be his brother.

Old Thomas Clarke was awake early on Sunday. With one son unreported in the mine and another son with the rescue workers, the man had given up his vigil at the pithead to remain at home with his daughter-in-law. On Sunday, however, he told Lorraine, "I'll go to church today. Then I'll take a walk to the mine and wait there a bit." He put on his overcoat and tweed cap and left the house.

Norma Ruddick had little time during the day to sit down or worry consciously about her husband. With twelve children she kept busy, although she was still weak after the birth of the baby. The elder children gave her all the help they could, but there were things a woman had to do herself. It was the terribly long nights, when everyone was asleep, that Norma Ruddick dreaded.

Colleen and her sisters, Sylvia and Valerie, helped their mother prepare breakfast and clean up afterward. The three girls had taken turns waiting at the mine, but sometimes they would go together to keep one another company during the long, dull hours of waiting. With the faith of the young, the children were positive their father would soon be home. On Sunday, they went again to the mine, but first they went to church.

Margaret Guthro had planned to attend services at St.

Andrew's United Church, but the shock she received on Saturday had not quite worn off and she decided to stay home.

It was Saturday afternoon that Rev. Douglas Tupper drove up to her home. She saw him coming out of his car and heading for her front door.

Suddenly, the room began to spin and her legs felt weak. "Hughie's dead!" she screamed. "Hughie's dead!" She sank to the couch, trembling, until Reverend Tupper's knock sounded on the door.

The walk to the door seemed like miles. She knew that when a minister came to the house during time of disaster, it meant only one thing.

Terrified, Margaret opened the door. "Hughie's dead, isn't he?" Her voice trembled as she blurted out the words.

At once, the Reverend Tupper realized her state of mind. Placing an arm about her, he led her to the couch.

"I'm terribly, terribly sorry," he said, trying to soothe her. "It's all my fault. I should have known better."

Margaret's eyes filled with tears as she looked at the minister.

"No," he continued, patting her hand, "I haven't any news of Hughie. I just brought these cookies to you from the church." He held out a bag to her. "I thought you might like them."

Margaret could not stop shaking as she took the bag. "Thank you," she whispered between sobs of relief.

"Everything will be all right," the minister soothed. "And I promise I won't be back again until I know something definite. I'm sorry for upsetting you." He patted her hand again, rose from the couch and walked to the door by himself. Margaret was too upset to see him out.

On Sunday, she was still too upset to leave the house.

At St. John's Catholic Church, a dry-eyed congregation listened to the pastor, Monsignor Thomas Buchanan.

"Life is a struggle . . . We must fight on," he said haltingly. "Let us lift up our hearts to God for those who have gone before us for a short time—and remember it is only for a very short time. . . ."

At Wesley United Church, Rev. Desmond McConnell spoke: "These have been faith-shaking times for all of us." But he recalled the 1956 explosion and how faith by those who waited and by those who were trapped helped bring them through their ordeal.

At St. Andrew's United Church, Mr. Tupper was still upset after his visit with Margaret Guthro. "When a miner kisses his wife goodbye before going to work in the mine, he does it with meaning," he said. "They both know he may not be coming back." The Reverend Tupper was preparing his flock for the worst.

In the afternoon, dark clouds moved over the Cobequid hills, bringing a threat of rain. The townspeople strolling on Main Street were silent and thoughtful. The women's faces were drawn tightly, their eyes showing the long hours of anxiety. The men, those not toiling with the rescue crews, looked uncomfortable in their Sunday clothes.

There were two funerals that afternoon, funerals for the first two dead brought up from the mine.

Services for Harry James Halliday began at two o'clock,

at his home at 181 Main Street. Two hundred relatives and neighbors crowded into the modest house in final respect to a man who had spent eighteen years in the mines.

The services were brief. Rev. Desmond McConnell delivered the eulogy quietly. He told the gathering how Harry Halliday loved hunting and fishing and how "this man's life was centered in his home." The choir, lined up at one side of the flower-bedecked casket, sang, "Good Night and Good Morning" and "Breathe on Me, Breath of God."

Halliday's widow, Eva, could not cry. That would come later when everyone had gone and she was left alone in the house.

Fifty mourners filled the cars behind the hearse that moved slowly past the mine entrance and up the windswept hill to Hillside Cemetery.

Eva Halliday stood beside her husband's blind mother, as Mr. McConnell read the prayers delivering the miner back into the ground from which his body had been so recently removed.

The sightless woman groped in her own darkness, her trembling hands seeking to touch the coffin of her son. She was helped forward by her daughter-in-law. Tenderly the mother patted the gray box, whispering, "Goodbye, Harry. May God be with you."

A photographer from one of the big city newspapers had his camera poised. He was ready to record what his editor would have regarded as a fine human interest picture. The photographer lowered his camera and turned away. He could not take the picture.

* * *

At three that afternoon, fourteen miles from Springhill in the small community of Collingwood Corner, funeral services were held for Harold Daniel McNutt.

The services were held at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Ewart Colborne, the parents of Mrs. McNutt. Rev. J. Earle DeLong of Springhill conducted the brief prayers. The choir sang "What a Friend We Have in Jesus" and "Abide with Me."

Then Harold Daniel McNutt was buried at Wyvern Cemetery, near Collingwood Corner.

At the mine, bone-tired Draegermen and "barefaced" men, oblivious to the day of rest, relentlessly pushed forward. Since Friday morning, no miner had been brought alive from the pits.

Fog rolled out of the hills to cover the town with chill dampness on Monday. The rain had begun again and had transformed the ground into rivulets of mud by 6:00 A.M. when seven more bodies were brought to the surface. For seven more families the period of waiting was at an end.

The toll still stood at eighty-one saved. Eighteen now were known dead. Still trapped below ground—and presumed dead—were seventy-five men.

At 9:00 A.M., Billy Burton ran home in the rain.

He told his mother the news. His father, Charlie, the hero of the 1956 explosion who had led fifty-nine men to safety, had been located in the mine—dead.

Rescuers tunnelling through to the 13,000-foot level had found Charlie's body. His hand still clutched his

watch. This time, Charlie would not be the first man out of the pits.

Kathleen Burton did not cry or break down when her son told her. She stared into space, folding and unfolding her hands in her lap. It was the only outward sign of her anguish. Finally she rose from the couch and walked slowly across the room to her sister-in-law who, up to this moment, had not been able to speak.

"Charlie's gone," the miner's wife said simply. "Charlie's gone."

Harold Gordon called another press conference that night. He had just emerged from the mine, shaken and worn. Circles rimmed his bloodshot eyes, and he coughed repeatedly from the black dust he had inhaled.

Gordon detailed the progress: Three separate crews were tunnelling toward the 13,000-foot level. "There's nothing much we can do but keep slugging—and it's tough slugging."

The 13,800-foot wall had been completely explored and only one body remained to be recovered in this area. Crews were busy at the 13,400-foot wall and had travelled better than halfway up the wall. The 13,000 level was clear of gas and the men were advancing rapidly, hoping to get to the face of the wall later that night.

Gas lay on the 12,600-foot level and men working with masks had another two hundred feet to clear before advancing toward the upper part of the 13,000-foot wall. As soon as the Draegermen cleared those two hundred feet, a rapid advance might be made.

* * *

At 11:00 P.M., rescue crews returning to the surface had a different story to tell. The anticipated breakthrough into the 13,000 level would be delayed. Rock, coal, and timbers were wedged in so tightly from the floor to the roof that it might be days before crews could even hope to enter the level.

Many questions were now on the minds of rescue workers and people in the town. How much longer? If anyone had possibly survived for nearly five days—and that seemed impossible—how could they survive any longer?

CHAPTER VIII

The Birthday Party

Twelve men gave up hope, slowly. A terrible hunger gnawed at them. Each of them dreamed about water.

On Sunday morning, they came awake slowly, stretching aching arms and rubbing dirt-crusted hands across the grimy stubble of their beards. They did not know how long they had slept. They did not remember waking in starts many times during the night and straining their eyes, trying to pierce the awful darkness that engulfed them. They did not remember falling back to sleep, after touching someone in the blackness just to make sure someone else was there.

Bowman Maddison yawned as he spoke. "They'd better come for us soon. We're out of everything."

"We're out of everything but hope," Levi Milley answered.

Maddison still felt as confident as if he were waiting for a bus. It was only a matter of time before help would arrive, he was sure.

Milley was beginning to have gnawing doubts about rescue, but he still spoke of hope.

"That's the way to talk," Joe Holloway agreed. Holloway repeated his story of the 1956 explosion. He and the others would survive this one, too. Despite the agonizing pain of his broken leg, he felt it his duty to cheer the others. "Me and Hughie Guthro managed two years ago. We'll all manage this time."

The youngest of the group, Larry Leadbetter, had desperation in his voice. "Yeah, but you were down only two nights. We've been here since Thursday night and today is Sunday." The thought of it choked him. "And now there's no water and not a damn thing to eat." His voice began to rise.

Maddison cut in, trying to prevent Leadbetter from breaking down. "Look," he said, "today's Sunday. If we were home we'd be on our way to church. We can pray here."

Levi Milley agreed. "I know it's one helluva church, but it's the best we've got. Why doesn't Caleb start the singing? We can all follow him."

The men huddled close together on the rubble floor. Caleb Rushton began his hymn in the darkness.

Abide with Me! fast falls the eventide;
The darkness deepens; Lord with me abide!

His voice rang clear, despite the ache in his heart and the dryness in his mouth and throat. One by one, the others joined in. Their words echoed in the black, jagged tunnel.

When other helpers fail and comforts flee,
Help of the helpless, O abide with me!

The voices grew louder and stronger.

Swift to its close ebbs out life's little day;
Earth's joys grow dim, its glories pass away;
Change and decay in all around I see;
O Thou Who changeth not, abide with me.

Someone in the darkness had stopped singing and was sobbing quietly. The others noticed, but continued.

I need Thy presence every passing hour;
What but Thy grace can foil the tempter's power?
Who like Thyself my guide and stay can be?
Through cloud and sunshine, Lord, abide with me!

When the hymn was over no one spoke. Some fought back tears. Each man was close to his God.

"Caleb, that was fine," Maddison finally said, a slight catch in his voice. "Could you sort of lead us in a prayer of some kind?"

Rushton knelt in the darkness. Each man, except Holloway, who could not, lifted himself off the floor to one knee. They bowed their heads and closed their eyes as Rushton began his prayer.

"Dear God," he began, "You know the fix we're in. We don't know any way out of it. We haven't got any food and we're out of water. Please, God, save us and bring us back to our families. Every one of us has a wife and we've got kids, too. They need us and we need them."

He paused for a moment. The silence was punctuated only by the deep breathing of the men. "And, please, God," he went on, "keep the rescue boys safe while they come to get us. Help them, too. Amen."

The others whispered a fervent "Amen."

"That's about the best I can do, fellows," Rushton said. He sighed deeply. He was tired.

"Thanks, Caleb," Maddison said. "It made us all feel better."

The men lay back and rested and thought of home. They daydreamed of sitting down to dinner with their families, and of eating until they were full and drinking until their stomachs ached. They wondered if such a day would ever come again for them.

Later, Wilfred Hunter crawled away from the others, dragging his injured leg painfully over rocks and fallen timber. He knew the way, even in the darkness, but each time he made the trip it took longer and longer. When he reached what he believed to be the body of his twin brother, Wilfred looked up at the roof. He could barely make out the form still suspended there. He touched a leg.

"It's Sunday, Frank. I thought I'd say a prayer for us." He began haltingly, trying to think of the right words. "God," he said softly, "Frank and me are here in the ground. You know that already. Frank is gone and maybe my brother, Percy, is too. I'll probably be seeing them both soon. Please help us. Bless Frank and Percy and the others . . ." His voice cracked with emotion. "That's all I can say, God. Amen for me and Frank and Percy."

Wilfred Hunter crawled back to the others. When he returned they were asleep.

Monday morning brought a feeling of approaching death. Hunger pains woke the men, wrenched at their insides. They were growing increasingly silent, retreating into themselves, preparing for the end.

Levi Milley lay on his side, his head propped on his

arm. It was more restful to keep his eyes closed than to stare into nothingness. He wondered whether Velda and Judy had gone to church the day before. Judy was probably in school today. Or maybe there was no school. Must be lots of sorrow in town.

He tried to picture the town in the daylight. He tried to remember what sunshine looked like, how a field of corn stood proud and high and waved gently from side to side in a soft breeze. Desperately, he attempted to conjure up a picture of the rooms in his home. But his thoughts would not focus. He wanted to scream because remembering was so hard. He felt like smashing his fists against the wall and breaking his way through to the surface. He imagined himself racing out of the shaft into the clean air and running, running, running until he reached his home. There was Velda waiting outside, her arms outstretched. He ran and embraced her. And Judy, walking out of the house, greeted him: "Hi, Daddy. Back from work so early?" Didn't she know where he had been? Didn't they know what he had been through, how he had beaten his way out of the pit, shattered walls with his bare hands and run all the way home just to be with them? Didn't they know?

Who was doing that banging at the back of the house? He hadn't hired anyone to make repairs. Maybe Velda had. "What's that banging?" he called—not realizing he had shouted it aloud.

The men bolted upright. Milley's voice had brought them out of their own daydreams. Milley, too, was now back to reality. They listened, straining. The sound they heard was the clash of metal striking rock! They could barely believe the sound.

"They're coming for us! They're coming for us!" one of them shouted in the darkness. "Listen. Hear that? Someone's coming!"

The men were gripped now in a frenzy of excitement. Some groped for empty water cans, lunch boxes—anything to beat, to make noise. Others smashed their fists against the walls, until their hands were cut and bleeding. Someone rapped on a broken air pipe they all knew was clogged with dirt. But it led to the surface and maybe—maybe—the sound would travel. Frantically, they screamed and shouted:

"We're here. We're here. For God's sake, we're alive!"

The clashing sounds stopped, but the men did not know it, they were making so much noise. One by one the men fell back, breathing quickly, trying to catch their breaths. They felt weak. Their heads spun from the exertion. They felt like throwing up, but there was nothing in their stomachs. Instead, they retched and gagged.

"The noise is gone," Bowman Maddison said at last, when finally he could speak. "They didn't hear us."

"It's all over. They won't come for us," someone else replied.

Caleb Rushton began to sing, softly and slowly.

> In fancy I stood by the shore one day,
> Of the beautiful murmuring sea,
> I saw the great crowds as they thronged the way
> Of the Stranger of Galilee . . .

Bowman Maddison joined him. The voices of the two men reverberated in the shaft.

> I saw how the man who was blind from birth,
> In a moment was made to see;

The lame were made whole by the matchless skill,
Of the Stranger of Galilee.

When the hymn was over, Maddison ran his hand along the uneven floor and picked up a small chunk of coal. He turned it over thoughtfully in his hand. "You know boys," he said, "I heard once that coal was good for heartburn. It must be O.K. to eat, too." He had made up his mind. "I'm gonna try it."

He placed the piece in his mouth and crunched on it. It tasted terrible. He ran his tongue over its many edges and tried to chew harder and harder. The men could hear the sounds, like that of someone munching on celery. Maddison swallowed the soggy chips and felt them going down. "Not too bad," he lied. "It takes away some of the emptiness."

By then, the others were trying it, too.

On the other side of the wall of coal and stone that separated the eight from the twelve, Maurice Ruddick watched the hands on his luminous watch. The movement fascinated and nearly hypnotized him in the dark.

The other men were awake and silent. They had not slept well. Percy Rector's moaning kept them on edge. His cries seemed to come from all parts of the shaft as they bounced off the walls and slammed into the men like sharp knives.

Seven men were together on Sunday morning. The eighth man, Barney Martin, was still cut off from the rest by a barrier of debris; he faced the day alone in a shallow hole, more dead than alive.

"Today's Sunday," Ruddick announced, taking his eyes

off his watch. He reached to his right and gently nudged a form in the dark, trying to get an answer. "It's Sunday," he repeated.

Garnet Clarke stirred and sat up. "I'm damn hungry," he said. "Is there anything left, Maurice?"

"Yeah, we've got two sandwiches. Might as well finish one now." Ruddick reached down and lifted a lunch box onto his lap. He opened it and took one out. In the darkness he could not tell how dirty it was.

Ruddick broke the sandwich into pieces as equal as possible, and the men crawled to him, feeling their way over the floor. They held out their hands. Ruddick pressed each man's share into the outstretched palm. Then he moved over to Percy Rector and held a bite-size portion to the suffering man's mouth. Even in his semiconscious state, Rector realized it was food. He took a small bite from the piece Ruddick held, and chewed slowly. When he swallowed, Ruddick gave him the last small piece. He held the water can to Rector's lips, allowing him only enough to wet his mouth.

Ruddick crawled back to the others and passed the water can. The men were on their honor, in the impenetrable blackness, not to take more than their mouth-wetting share. No one cheated. When the can was returned to Ruddick, the bottom was still covered by water.

"It's Sunday," Ruddick repeated, after finishing his own piece of the sandwich. He did not wait for comment. "It's Sunday and we'll pray." He began with a hymn, his voice clear and strong.

> Rock of Ages, cleft for me,
> Let me hide myself in Thee,

Let the water and the blood,
From Thy wounded side which flowed,
Be of sin the double cure,
Save from wrath and make me pure.

Percy Rector had stopped moaning. The excruciating pain was still with him, but he struggled to hold back and listen to Ruddick. Rector could not sing. He did not have enough strength. Even breathing jarred his mangled arm and almost reduced him to insensibility.

Ruddick's voice continued, unfalteringly.

Could my tears forever flow,
Could my zeal no languor know,
These for sin could not atone;
Thou must save, and Thou alone;
In my hand no price I bring;
Simply to Thy cross I cling.

Garnet Clarke joined in:

While I draw this fleeting breath . . .

Frank Hunter, Douglas Jewkes, Herb Pepperdine, and Currie Smith added their voices. They were not as loud or as clear as Ruddick's.

When my eyes shall close in death,
When I rise to worlds unknown,
And behold Thee on Thy throne,
Rock of Ages, cleft for me,
Let me hide myself in Thee.

The voices trailed off. Each man silently offered his personal prayer to his God. The words "When my eyes shall close in death" stuck in their minds. They were re-

signing themselves to the end. The only question was when it would come.

Almost as if he could read their minds, Maurice Ruddick cried out, "Let's do something! Me, I'm gonna make some noise!" He ran his hand along the ground until he found an empty water can. As he moved slowly along the ground, climbing over the outstretched legs of the others, he kept talking. "Maybe they'll hear us. We've got nothing to lose." When he reached the end of a broken air pipe he began pounding it with the water can.

Garnet Clarke found a rock and joined Ruddick at the pipe.

It was contagious, and soon six men were beating on the air pipe or against the walls. They used rocks and water cans, as well as their fists. Then, exhausted, they fell back to the ground, breathing heavily, panting and sobbing at the same time. In a while, silence closed in again. The only sound came from Percy Rector, who was becoming delirious and was mumbling.

Then there was another sound, almost as if in answer to their pounding. In the distance were thumps, barely audible, far away, faint but distinct.

"Hear that?" Garnet Clarke whispered.

"They haven't forgotten us," said Currie Smith.

Maurice Ruddick struggled to get up. "We've got to make them hear us. We've got to let them know we're alive."

The men were now all sitting up.

"We'll take turns at the pipe," Ruddick said. "I'll go first." He found a water can, returned to the broken air pipe, and began a slow, rhythmical rapping. When his arm began to ache, he shifted the can to his other hand.

He tapped until he could barely lift either arm. Then he crawled back to the others.

The thumping in the distance died away. But several hours later the men heard it once more. Garnet Clarke took his turn at the pipe, until his arms became leaden and hung helplessly at his sides. Painfully, he dragged himself back, stretched out on the floor and closed his eyes. He tried to remember what daylight was like.

Later in the evening, the thumping sound returned. Currie Smith moved to the pipe. He remained at his post until it again died away.

The banging was too much for Percy Rector. His screams of agony awakened the dozing Maurice Ruddick. "That poor, poor bastard," Ruddick muttered. He crawled to Rector and strained to make out a jumble of words.

"I . . . know . . . where . . . big . . . well . . .take . . . horse . . . wagon . . . get . . . water . . ."

"He's talking about getting a horse and wagon and going for water," Ruddick informed the others. "The poor guy's delirious. Thinks he's on a farm or somewhere where there's a well."

Rector stopped talking. His head fell forward on his chest. He was unconscious.

"What do you think we should do about Perce, now?" Ruddick asked.

"We went over that before," Pepperdine answered. "I've still got the saw blade but I don't want to use it."

Each man reaffirmed his earlier decision not to amputate. They all desperately wanted to relieve Rector's suffering. But there was nothing they could do. Intermittently, they drifted off to sleep.

* * *

On Monday morning, Garnet Clarke was the one to break the silence. "What time is it?" he called softly to Ruddick.

Ruddick was already awake. Now he held his arm up close to his eyes to make out the hands on his watch. They stood at 5:00 A.M. He told Clarke the time.

"Today's my birthday," Clarke announced.

"How old are you?" Ruddick asked.

"Twenty-nine. The way it looks, I won't get a chance to get any older."

Ruddick ignored the remark. "Hey fellows," he called out. "Wake up. Everybody up. Today's Garnie's birthday!"

The men stirred, stretched, and sat up. "A helluva place to have your birthday," someone said.

"We'll have a birthday party for Garnie," Ruddick went on, when he was sure all were awake.

Currie Smith tried to get into the spirit of an impending party. "Anyone got a razor?" He rubbed the black stubble on his face. "I can't go to a party without a shave." The others rubbed their faces automatically. They had not realized that their beards had grown so much during their imprisonment.

"Look," Ruddick said. "We've got one sandwich left. We were gonna eat it for breakfast. Let's have it now for the party. When we get out of here we'll have a real party. All of us. It'll last for days and I'll get roaring drunk!" A picture of all of them at his home flashed through Ruddick's mind. He saw them eating and drinking, dancing and laughing. It was a good picture. But it left him the moment someone said, "Better have the party now. Don't plan on getting out of here."

Ruddick continued, as if he had not heard. "I'm gonna break up the sandwich. I don't even know what kind it is." He held it up to his nose and smelled. "I still don't know what the hell it is." He tore off a small corner of the sandwich and moved to Percy Rector. The others waited.

Rector was barely conscious when Ruddick reached him. When the piece of sandwich was held to his mouth, he took it in one bite. Ruddick pressed the water can to Rector's lips and he swallowed eagerly, but the can was quickly pulled away to save its meager contents for the others.

"All right boys, we'll have our party now," Ruddick said brightly when he returned. He tore off pieces and the men crawled to him for their portions. They did not eat, but sat in the darkness, clutching the grimy bits of food, waiting for the party to begin.

"Just make believe it's a piece of cake," Ruddick suggested. "A cake Garnie's girl friend made for him." He was trying to inject some frivolity into the scene.

Ruddick's remark brought smiles to the faces of the men who could not see one another. They began to eat, taking tiny bites to make the food last longer.

"Now we'll wash it all down," Ruddick said jokingly when he figured the men had finished eating. He passed the water can and the men wet their lips. When it was returned, the can contained less than a thimbleful. Then it was gone. "That's the last of everything," Ruddick said, dropping the can to the ground. "We're out of everything now."

The men grew silent and Ruddick was sorry he had mentioned it. They knew it anyhow, he thought. But he shouldn't have spoiled the party by mentioning the situa-

tion. He began to sing as loudly as he could. "Happy birthday to you, happy birthday to you . . ."

The others did not expect Ruddick, or anyone, to sing, and it startled them.

"Come on," Ruddick urged. He tried to make his voice cheerful. "After all, it's Garnie's birthday. Now, I'll start it again." He began once more. "Happy birthday to you, happy birthday to you . . ."

The others joined in; everyone but Percy Rector, who was too weak, and young Clarke, who did not feel it would be proper to sing "Happy Birthday" to himself.

"Happy birthday, dear Garnie, happy birthday to you!"

Garnet Clarke was glad for the moment that it was dark. A man of twenty-nine should not be seen crying.

CHAPTER IX

"No Further Hope"

A fifteen-mile-an-hour northeast wind whipped the rain in great sheets across Main Street. From the top of the street it was impossible to see the mine entrance. Heavy fog hung close to the ground. At the mine, only a handful of people waited inside the great Salvation Army tent. They huddled by the pot-bellied stove, trying to escape the rawness of Tuesday morning.

Draegermen and "barefaced" men stopped at the tent after they finished their shift below ground. All told the same story to the anxious relatives. They were making progress—as little as a foot an hour—but progress. It was hot below, and the work was backbreaking. Many displayed cut and raw hands and elbows from dragging themselves along the ground, from trying to force their bodies into places where no human being should crawl.

Most of the rescuers shook their heads glumly when asked, "Is there any hope at all?"

The majority of the townspeople were still at home this

morning, preparing to attend six more funerals. Seven men had been buried the day before: Edward MacDonald, Percy Bryan, Edward Bobbie, Eldon Stevens, Clyde Corkum, Hiram Hunter, and Cecil Cole.

Today, six more were to be returned to the sodden ground: William Turnbull, Angus Gillis, Bernard Miller, Isaac Holloway, William Smith, and Clarence MacLeod. Services were being held morning and afternoon. The procession of funeral cars seemed never-ending.

On the still green lawns of the cemeteries that fringed the town, row after row of fresh mounds of earth scarred the rolling land. There were not enough gravediggers so relatives and friends helped prepare final resting places for their dead.

This morning, the count stood at twenty-two bodies brought to the surface and identified. Seventy-one men were still missing.

At 9:00 A.M., General Manager Harold Gordon came to the surface for the fifth time and called a press conference. Newspaper, radio, and television representatives gathered in the company office again. The feeling of despair had spread to this hard-boiled group.

Black dirt still caked Gordon's face. His eyes were bloodshot and his voice was hoarse, but he spoke slowly and deliberately.

"The rescue crews are making only ten to twelve feet in each eight-hour shift. They cannot go through any faster. It is almost solid rock ahead of them." He paused to let his words sink in and take effect.

Before Gordon could continue, a reporter quietly asked him what he meant. Gordon stared directly at the re-

porter. "It means," he said, with a look of a man condemning a town to death, "that there is no further hope. There just can't be. We cannot hold any reason to believe that men will be found alive when we finally do reach them."

"In other words," another reporter asked, "the men still in the mine and unaccounted for are all dead?"

"There is no reason to think otherwise." Gordon rubbed his eyes as if to loosen some of the dirt. Actually, he was crying.

Gordon's statement was quickly relayed to the rescue crews who were readying their equipment in the Draeger House, preparing to go below once more. The men hurried with their breathing masks. They hunched their shoulders and straightened them, making sure the weight on their backs was properly distributed.

"I don't give a damn what Gordon said," one of the men said bitterly. He was tired. His bones ached. His nerves were rubbed raw. He hated to go again into the black hole. All he wanted was a clean bed with nothing but hours and hours of sleep. "I don't give a damn what *anyone* says," he repeated. "Until I see the boys dead, I'm gonna keep going back down." He strode from the room.

The rest of the crew fell in behind him, and marched single-file into the rain and across the muddy grounds. They entered the mine, water dripping from their helmets, to dig and claw and crawl once more.

The families of the men still below ground also heard Gordon's statement. They saw him on television. They heard him on their radios. They were told about it at the

pithead. It was something most of them expected but hoped they would never hear.

When the news was relayed to the mine grounds, women and children left the tents and walked slowly out into the rain. They left the pithead, pausing to look back at the activity of the rescue crews coming and going. They passed under the archway onto Main Street. Most decided now to wait at home for the final word that a husband or a father was dead.

Zora Maddison still had not returned home. Despite what practically everyone else now believed, the young girl refused to give her father up to the mine. She had left the tent to stand in the rain and she shivered in the dampness as a Draeger crew moved by her. Maybe, she thought, this shift would find her father. She turned and walked slowly through the ankle-deep mud back to the tent, to continue her vigil.

At home, Solange Maddison heard the news on the radio. She had finished feeding the baby and had placed him gently in his crib when Gordon's announcement crackled over the air. The strength ebbed from her body as she slowly walked into the front room and sat disconsolately on the couch. She sat there, staring at nothing.

Half an hour passed before her brother-in-law arrived at the home. The front door was unlocked and he let himself in. Ralph Maddison took her hand in his. "I guess it's all over," he said. "Is there anything I can do?" He could not think of anything else to say.

"Will you make arrangements at the cemetery?"

"Hillside?" Ralph did not know why he asked that. He

knew Hillside would be the cemetery. It was just for want of something to say.

"Yes, Hillside. I don't even know how much a plot costs. I never thought I'd be thinking of these things so soon."

In Moncton, New Brunswick, the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company was preparing a check for six thousand dollars for Mrs. Bowman Maddison of Springhill. As soon as her husband's body was brought to the surface and identified, they would mail it.

Velda Milley and Judy sat silently for several minutes before the television set. Both had finished a light breakfast and straightened up the kitchen in time to watch Gordon. Velda had not been out of the house since the night of the bump. Judy remained home from school, expecting the worst. But the statement left them momentarily stunned.

Levi's chickens clucked incessantly in the backyard. The rain beat against the windows of the house—background music to the tragedy. Judy took her mother's hand and squeezed. "Gordon could be wrong," she whispered.

Garnet Clarke's father, Thomas, did not say a word when he heard the statement on the radio. But his daughter-in-law, Lorraine, gasped and began to sob.

Clarke remained silent for another moment, absorbed in his own thoughts. "He didn't even live long enough to get married," he mumbled. "Yesterday he would have been twenty-nine."

Norma Ruddick was busy with the twelve children and

did not hear the radio, even though it was turned on for the latest news.

The oldest girl, Colleen, heard Gordon's statement. "I'm not going to tell Momma what he said," she told Sylvia. "She'll only worry more. And anyway, I don't believe him." The girl honestly did not believe Gordon. She did not believe anyone who might even suggest that her father, Maurice, was dead.

Sylvia, acting older than her eleven years, whispered like a conspirator. "Momma's upstairs with the baby. She didn't hear the radio. We won't say a thing."

The girls cleaned up the breakfast dishes and swept all the rooms downstairs. They walked upstairs and informed their mother that they were going to the mine.

"In this rain?" Norma asked. "You'll catch cold. Maybe you ought to stay home today." Norma knew better than to demand that the girls stay home. They had been going to the mine every day.

"We'll dress warm," Colleen said.

"We'll be all right," Sylvia added. "We'll stay in one of the tents."

The sisters put on their boots, slipped into slickers, and wrapped kerchiefs around their heads. They walked out of the house and down the muddy road to the pithead.

By now, Margaret Guthro had given up hope. In 1956, she had waited three days and nights at the pithead and Hughie had come up alive. This time it was different. Hughie had been down in the pit since Thursday afternoon. Now it was Tuesday morning. The only men being brought to the surface were dead.

There were only a few things left to do. Today, she

would buy a black dress and hat and check the deed to the cemetery plot. Thinking of what the funeral would be like, she thought suddenly of the front door. Hughie had built their four-room house with his own hands in 1950, all in his spare time, but he never did get around to putting in a front doorstep. It had not mattered. The family always used the side door. But now a casket would have to be taken out the front way. There had to be a step.

Margaret, feeling strangely alone, walked to the telephone and called her brother. Would he build the step for her?

Tomorrow, he said, he would be at her house with lumber and nails.

Separate rescue crews picked their way slowly through the battered 13,800 and 13,400 levels, working with one goal in mind: break through to the unexplored and unreported 13,000 level. By Tuesday morning, the crews still did not have any idea when the breakthrough might come. Their muscles protested at the agonizing work, but they kept moving.

At the 13,800 level only a few bodies remained. These had been left for last, the ones most difficult to get to. Most of them were smashed against the roof or wedged in between huge timbers.

When there were few people waiting at the pithead, usually in the cold hours before dawn, a supply of burlap bags was sent down into the mine with the rescue crews. Hack saws were used to free some of the trapped bodies and the remains placed in one of the burlap bags. The people waiting at the surface saw the bags come up. They knew what they meant, but it was never mentioned aloud.

Tunnelling down from another direction, gas-masked Draegermen dug along the clogged 12,600 level. Nearly a thousand feet from the exit-entry slope, it was decided that better progress would be made by hacking a low, narrow passage through virgin coal at the high side of the level. Sweating in the oppressive eighty-five-degree heat of the pit, weighed down by breathing apparatus on their backs which seemed to grow heavier and heavier, the men had to pick away at the shiny coal.

Tuesday afternoon. Bowman Maddison crunched on a piece of coal. It did not relieve his hunger. And it only added to his thirst.

He reached out in the darkness and his hand touched Levi Milley. "That you, Levi?" he asked. He knew who it was. He just needed reassurance.

"Yeah, it's me. What's the matter? Feel sick?"

"No, just damn thirsty."

"Me too. I could drink a gallon of ice-cold beer right now." Levi was having difficulty talking because of his parched throat. He ran his tongue over his cracked lips. "Boy, it feels hot in here all of a sudden."

"Probably because we're so thirsty," Maddison replied.

The others were talking low, each to the one nearest him. There was no joking or suggestion to explore further along the top of the wall. Each man felt that the end was near.

"We've got to save our strength," Maddison said hollowly.

"For what?" Milley asked. "And how in hell do we save it? Just by waiting here and not eating or having anything

to drink?" He called out in a raspy voice to Caleb Rushton. "Caleb, what day is it?"

"It's Tuesday. Tuesday afternoon," Rushton replied.

Milley again counted the days. "No one is coming for us!" He made the announcement as if it were a great discovery. "The mine is sealed off," he continued, almost hysterically. "You hear me, Bowsie? The mine is sealed off! We're all gonna die and we can't do a thing about it!"

As if in answer to Milley's words, the thumping sound began again.

"Hear that? Hear that, Levi?" Maddison yelled. His voice was so hoarse he did not recognize it as his own. It seemed to be coming from someone else.

The men scarcely breathed. They listened, straining to catch the sound.

"I'm gonna try the pipe again," Maddison said, lifting himself to his knees. He crawled to the broken air pipe and began to rap it with an empty water can.

The thumping became a vibration, but it did not seem to come any closer.

"Sounds like the air fans making that noise," Maddison said. For an hour he kept tapping, until the vibration faded and was gone. His arms were numb. Perspiration rolled down his forehead and stung his eyes. His chest ached and his face was on fire. He could not speak as he dragged himself painfully across the rough floor, back to his spot.

He lay back, trying to catch his breath. The thirst was unbearable. God, he thought, I'm gonna die of thirst. He became dizzy and his body began to tremble. "I never thought I'd die of thirst," he whispered to himself. His

head spun. A great weakness engulfed his body. Feebly, he reached out again to touch Levi Milley.

Milley was trying desperately, but vainly, to drive thirst from his mind. But he could not keep his thoughts away from his home. And in his home was the kitchen, the sink, the water faucet. The water was running and it filled up the sink, splashing onto the floor. Velda was sitting in a chair watching it, and she was laughing. Laughing! Laughing at water splashing onto the floor! Judy was at the oval table, busy with her homework. She didn't even notice the water. She didn't care. Where am I? I'm not in the house. There's just Velda and Judy! Does that mean I'm dead?

Everything was jumbled together in Milley's mind, but none of the things seemed to fit. He saw his chickens running around inside the house, defecating wherever they went. No one paid any attention to them. Velda! Judy! Look at the chickens! No one even heard.

Now he was outside the house. Velda was splashing black paint over the newly painted trim. Judy was standing at her side.

Milley was sure this meant he had died. He did not hear the thumping sound begin once more. When Gorley Kempt brushed by him in the dark to begin rapping on the pipe, Milley was finally asleep.

Four hundred feet away, on the other side of the wall of stone, Maurice Ruddick clenched and unclenched his fists. The Singing Miner was thirsty and hungry, but he still felt strength. He began to run over the words of a song he would set to music if he ever got to the surface

again. At any rate, even if he didn't, it helped pass the time.

The twenty-third of October, we'll remember that day,
Down the shaft underground in our usual way . . .

It doesn't sound too bad, he thought, and smiled to himself. Maybe some real slow music for it.

In the Cumberland pit town, the rafters crashed down,
And black hell closed around us, way down in the ground . . .

Not bad. Not bad at all. A smile again creased his rugged, filthy face. He saw himself singing the song into his tape recorder at home. Maybe the quartet would sing it. Then they could send it away to some radio station or music publisher. There should be a good market for a song like this.

Percy Rector snapped him out of the daydream. The others stirred and came wide awake, too.

"Oh, no, you're not gonna get that," Rector was yelling.

Ruddick slid over to Rector and patted him on the leg. "He's delirious again. Thinks he's talking to his kids."

"Muriel, I said no!" Rector yelled again, thrashing about with his good arm. Ruddick stroked the distraught man's face, trying to calm him. Rector was clammy. He should have been warm and sweaty, like the rest.

"I . . . get . . . water . . ." Rector went on incoherently.

Ruddick patted him again. "Easy now, Perce. Just take it easy and everything will be all right. We're all here with you. Just take it easy."

But Rector was unconscious. Only his heavy, labored breathing announced that he was still alive.

Twenty-nine years and one day old. That was Garnet Clarke today. Like Ruddick, he had not yet grown weak from the hunger and the thirst. But he could not sit still. Just sitting, waiting for the end to come . . . No, damn it, there must be something to do!

"Currie," he called to his buddy, Currie Smith.

"What is it, Garnie?"

"Want to look around again? We should see how Barney is." It was just an excuse for some company.

"I guess so," Smith answered. He was not anxious to creep about in the dark. And he was tired. But what was there to lose?

The men rose to their knees and hunched over, moved away together down the wall. They inched their way, keeping close to each other, to the narrow opening they had made earlier. They scrambled over the rock and timber and wedged their bodies through the small hole.

"He's not here!" Clarke exclaimed. He felt along the ground, trying to locate the body of Barney Martin.

"He's got to be here! Where the hell could he go?" Smith answered.

They moved around the narrow trap, reaching out to either side for Martin. Panic was beginning to build up as they scoured the pitch-black area.

Finally, Clarke called out. "Here he is! He must have crawled away trying to get out." He bent over Martin and put his ear to the man's chest. "His heart's beating." He put his face close to Martin's mouth. "He's breathing, but you can hardly tell."

Currie Smith crawled over, following the direction of Clarke's voice. He whistled softly through his teeth. "Jesus, I never expected to find him alive!"

Clarke slid his hand under Martin's head and lifted it slightly. "Barney, Barney Martin," he whispered close to Martin's ear.

Martin stirred and blinked his eyes, but he could see nothing in the darkness. "Water?" he asked. His voice was barely audible.

"We don't have any, Barney," Clarke said. "I wish we did." He let Martin's head gently down to the floor. The miner was unconscious again.

"On the way back, feel around for cans or pails," Clarke suggested to Smith.

"I was gonna do that anyhow."

Clarke and Smith started back, squeezing once more through the small gap at the top of the wall. They did not find anything. They resumed their places on the floor and kicked off their shoes again. The crawling and searching for Barney Martin had taxed what little strength they had.

Clarke lay back on the ground and stretched his arms, his hand touching a timber. It gave him an idea. No, it couldn't be any good. It was too crazy. But this whole mess was crazy. So what was there to lose? "You know fellows," he finally said, "I remember reading someplace about some guys who were trapped like us. They kept alive by eating bark." He paused for what seemed like a minute, but no one replied. "They just peeled some from the props and ate it," he explained. The others merely listened. "I'm gonna try it," Clarke said.

He pulled some of the outer covering from the timber next to him. It was dirty, but he could not see that in the

dark. He held it to his mouth and took a small, hesitant bite. Slowly, very slowly, he ground his teeth into it until it became a soggy ball. Then he swallowed.

Maurice Ruddick was doing the same thing. "It isn't too bad," he announced. "Try it boys." The others were already chewing.

After this meal the men rested. Occasionally they dozed.

Some time in the afternoon, the vibrations and thumping started again. But this time something else was added. There was a tapping! It seemed to be coming down the broken air pipe.

Clarke screamed when he heard it. His heart began to pound. "Hear that? Hear it?" He was on his hands and knees. "They're trying to signal us! Count them."

The men listened, counting under their breaths.

"Six times," Clarke said softly. The others agreed. He jammed his feet back into his shoes and, despite his aches, crawled quickly on all fours to the broken pipe. He grabbed the empty water can and tapped the pipe deliberately. Six times. Then he waited. The others remained motionless, listening.

The tapping on the other end began again. Clarke felt weak with elation. His head swam as he listened.

One . . . two . . . three . . . four . . . five . . . six . . .

"Oh, God!" An answer. He got through!

. . . seven . . . eight . . . nine . . . ten . . . eleven . . . twelve . . . thirteen . . .

Clarke could not speak. Thirteen taps for an answer! He flung the water can to the ground and heard it bounce along the jagged rock. The sound echoed hollowly in the shaft.

"They don't hear us! They don't know we're here!" Clarke was close to tears. He crawled back, talking as he moved. "They tapped six times. You heard it. Six times! I answered back six times. You heard me do it. They tapped back thirteen times. Thirteen! It means they can't hear us. They think everybody in here is dead!" He lay back on the ground and began to sob.

Clarke's despair spread. Even Maurice Ruddick remained silent, absorbed in his own thoughts. Garnie was right. No one knew they were there. It was hopeless. The tapping was probably only some of the rescue crews picking their way through the debris. They were a long way off. They didn't seem to be in any hurry.

Ruddick could still taste the bark. A hell of a way to die, he thought. Eating wood.

Later, Ruddick twisted on his side and looked at his watch. It was 4:00 P.M. He was hungrier than he had ever thought it possible to be. He pressed his hands to his stomach until it hurt, trying to drive the hunger pains away. He rubbed his mouth with his grimy fist, loosening some of the dirt caked at the corners. He tried to spit out some of the dust. Nothing came out and he gagged.

Except for the sound of Percy Rector breathing, there was silence everywhere. Ruddick moved over to Rector and patted his leg. When he felt the miner's body, a shiver ran through him, tingling his beard and raising the hairs on the back of his neck. Rector was getting cold!

"Perce is getting cold!" Ruddick shouted loudly. The men who were half-dozing, awoke. "He's getting cold!" Ruddick exclaimed again. "And it's over eighty in this stinking hole!"

The men felt the presence of death all about them. At four-twenty in the afternoon, they heard Percy Rector inhale deeply and exhale, his breath hissing through clenched teeth. He did not inhale again.

CHAPTER X

"Come and Get Us"

Wednesday began as a routine day, if any day filled with despair and constant search for the dead can be considered routine. The rain of the day before had turned to drizzle, and thin fog hung in the air like a gossamer shroud.

During the morning, more bodies had been brought to the surface, the result of the long backbreaking hours of the rescue crews. The toll now stood at eighty-one rescued (all during the first hours following the bump), twenty-six dead (brought to the surface during the next six days), and sixty-seven still missing, unaccounted for, and presumed dead.

On this morning, "barefaced" men reported the 13,800-foot level cleared of all bodies. Nothing was left in this section but twisted rails, shattered walls, and smashed lunch pails and water cans. The only life was in the huge, gray mine rats who somehow sensed they would no longer be disturbed by men.

Draegermen, ashen faced from long hours of toil and little sleep, continued to push forward in the pits. At this time the 13,000 level was still seventy agonizing feet away. The work went on methodically, slowly. There were bodies to bring out for burial, bodies taken from the earth to be returned to the earth. The crews now began to think of themselves as retrievers of the dead. The urgency of their original mission, when it was hoped men might be found alive, had long since gone.

Below ground, to twelve gaunt men, hope was now a forlorn word. Not one of them could survive much longer —and each of them knew it. It might be a matter of hours, or a day at the most, before they would succumb, one by one, to the gnawing hunger and thirst.

Each had begun to give himself up to God, awaiting the inevitable end. Each had tried to sleep, hoping that death would come silently, mercifully. But the subconscious will to survive was too great. They could not sleep.

Wilfred Hunter felt that he had to make one more visit to the body he believed was his brother, Frank. He wanted to say goodbye. Silently he slid away from the others. It was the longest trip he had ever made. He stopped repeatedly on the way, to gasp for a breath or to cough and spit. His stomach was in pain. Hot irons stabbed his chest.

When he reached the body he could scarcely speak. His mouth felt full of feathers. It was almost impossible to swallow.

The stench from the decaying body was awful. Wilfred sat on the mine floor and tried to breathe through his mouth. That way, he figured, the smell would not be so bad.

"I can't come back any more, Frank," he said, looking up to where the body was suspended from the roof. "I can't make it." He paused and sat staring into the blackness. "Wherever you are, I'll be with you soon. I guess it was meant for us to be together." Wilfred rested, then pulled himself painfully to his knees. His entire body ached and there was a terrible shooting pain in his leg. "Goodbye, Frank," he whispered. Then he began the slow, agonizing crawl back to where the others were awaiting death.

Levi Milley could barely speak. He wanted to call encouragement to Joe McDonald, whose broken hip was becoming increasingly painful. Teddy Michniak, despite his broken shoulder, was by McDonald's side, still whispering to him, still trying to console him.

Levi's lips were swollen and cracked. Each time he ran his tongue over them it hurt more. But he did it anyway. He choked when he tried to swallow. "Wednesday, how much longer?" It was not a question of how much longer he would have to wait for rescue. It was how much longer he would stay alive.

The other men had nothing to discuss now. No one acknowledged the fact that it was Wednesday. What difference would it make? If they survived until the next afternoon, it would be one full week spent nearly a mile in the ground.

Caleb Rushton was sucking on a small piece of coal, trying to moisten his mouth. He had already eaten a piece but it did not relieve his hunger. There was nothing left to do but wait. His voice cracked when he spoke. "Boys,

I guess there isn't much time left for us. I'd like to say a prayer for us all."

"Can God hear us way down here?" Milley asked. He knew better, but he said it in despair.

The men remained silent as Rushton rose to one knee and bowed his head. Despite the dark, he closed his eyes. "O God, merciful and compassionate, Who art ever ready to hear the prayers of those who put their trust in Thee; graciously hearken to us who call upon Thee, and grant us Thy help in this our need; through Jesus Christ our Lord."

He did not move from his place for a full minute, as silence settled over the twelve men. At this moment, they had all given themselves up to their Maker.

As they settled down to await the end, the thumping noise and the vibrations began again.

On the other side of the rock barrier Maurice Ruddick knew it was Wednesday morning. His watch had helped him keep track of the passage of time. Still shining in the dark, it somehow brought him comfort. Maybe, when they found his body, if they ever did, someone would bring the watch to his home. It would be something for his kids to remember him by.

Garnet Clarke was now twenty-nine years and two days old. He felt fortunate to have lived beyond his birthday. But he had an idea that was disturbing to him. This morning, he decided, he would tell the others about it. He had made up his mind what he would do.

Doug Jewkes could not stop talking about Seven-Up. He wanted a case of pop, ice cold, he said. He did not

know why he had this craving for Seven-Up and not for water. He only knew that it was all he wanted.

"If only he wouldn't mention it out loud," Garnet Clarke reflected. "It makes it worse for all of us." His mouth was hot and his throat burned. "The hell with it, I'm gonna try it," he said half-aloud. He had already made up his mind. "Boys," he began uncertainly, not knowing exactly how to begin. "Boys," he repeated, "we can eat the bark to put something in our stomachs, but it isn't enough. We need fluids . . ." He purposely did not mention water. Only fluids.

The others merely listened.

"We could at least dip the bark in it . . ." He paused again, waiting for a reaction or a protest that might dissuade him. None came and his temper rose. "Damn it!" he exclaimed. "You guys know what I mean. I don't know about you but I can't take it any more. I've got fluids in my body that are going to waste. I'm gonna use them." Without hesitating any further, he found a water can and filled it.

It took another hour but, one by one, each man followed suit, using water cans and empty lunch boxes. They felt disgusted with themselves but they did not talk about it. Each man consoled himself with the knowledge that Clarke was right. Clarke's idea might keep them alive another day.

Later, Herb Pepperdine crawled away from the others. As he left, he told them, "I'm gonna scout around a little and see if I can find anything." The act of dipping pieces of bark into the fluid had made him desperate.

In half an hour he was back, breathless and exuberant.

Even before he reached the others, he called out to them. "I found something!"

The men thought of a sandwich or a full can of water.

"I found a candy bar—a whole candy bar!" he bellowed. An ordinary, everyday item had taken on tremendous importance. "Just a little way from here," he continued excitedly, as proud of himself as if he had returned with a side of beef. He sat down and spoke rapidly, the words tumbling from his mouth. "I was feeling around on the ground and my hand touched something smooth. I didn't know what the hell it was. I picked it up and smelled it. It was a bar. It was still in the wrapper. A big one. The ten cent kind!" Pepperdine groped his way over to Ruddick and handed him his prize. "Here, Maurice, divide it." Then he settled back in the blackness to catch his breath and rest. He had a wide, satisfied grin on his face.

"Funny, isn't it?" Clarke said, while Ruddick broke the bar into seven pieces. "I remember when I ate all the bars I wanted at my cousin's store. Most of the time I didn't even have to pay for them."

"You don't have to pay for this one, either," Levi Milley answered. His spirits had lifted considerably with the story of Pepperdine's discovery. The candy would take that awful taste out of his mouth.

Ruddick handed each man his small portion. They ate slowly, savoring the flavor, reluctant to swallow.

But when they finished, the chocolate only increased their thirst.

At 11:00 A.M., rescue workers estimated they were still sixty feet from the 13,000-foot level. They chipped at a

corner of a wall of coal and stone that refused to come away.

Earl Wood cursed softly under his breath as his pick bit into the wall. He held the tool tightly in his big hands, pushing it into the debris. Beads of perspiration stood out on his blackened brow. He was flat on his stomach, and had worked in this punishing position for the past five days.

In the narrow shaft, lights bobbed from the helmets of the men in the line behind him, men who were methodically, tiredly, chipping away, looking for an opening that would take them to the 13,000 level.

Wood smashed his pick into the wall again. All at once the debris crumbled and gave way with a roar. A great cloud of dust and hot air seared his eyes and filled his mouth and nostrils.

"Gas!" Wood cried out in panic, sliding hastily away from the opening. He collided with Warren Hunter, who had been working behind him. "Gas!" Wood cried again, and both men backed away.

The others stopped work and the dozen men in the narrow passage moved back some thirty-five feet into the larger space of the level. They waited for the dust to settle, afraid to breathe. They sat hunched on the ground and took this time to remove their water cans from their belts and wash some of the dust from their mouths. They took big, refreshing drinks. It was hot, tiring work, and they were thirsty.

"Maybe I punched through," Wood suggested hopefully. He could not tell. The dust continued to swirl around the area where his pick had struck.

The rescuers continued to wait. Slowly the dust cleared.

Bob Cummings, the overman, crawled ahead and made a quick test for gas. The air was safe. He reported that Wood's pick had uncovered the broken end of a length of compressed air pipe.

Wood went up to investigate the end of the six inch steel pipe protruding through the debris. "That's what caused the dust," he said. The air trapped in the clogged pipe had rushed out when the pick struck it and loosened the dirt.

Some of the other workers crowded up and took turns looking at the pipe. They had seen pipes like this thousands of times before. But this one was different. This one led to the 13,000-foot level. If only they could get in the pipe and slide right through, one of the men remarked.

Suddenly a fragment of a word startled Wood.

From somewhere, he heard: ". . . en." Nothing more.

"What?" he asked, turning to Percy Weatherbee, who was now directly behind him.

"I didn't say anything," Weatherbee replied.

"What is it?" Wood shouted to the others. "Who called?"

Arnold Reese had not said anything, he informed Wood. Neither had George Hodges or George Scott.

"Probably somebody down the level where we came in," Wood reasoned. "Sound travels funny in here." He dismissed it from his mind.

At the other end of the pipe, in the 13,000-foot level, twelve men were waiting now for death.

At noontime, Joe McDonald whispered to Teddy Michniak, "My leg is hurting again."

Michniak's shoulder ached and he could not turn his

head easily. The two men remained near each other.

"We've got to take it easy and keep hoping," Michniak told McDonald. "But it all seems so damn hopeless."

"I've tried not to complain," McDonald answered. "It doesn't do any good. It hurts real bad now." He gritted his teeth, determined not to mention his leg again.

Bowman Maddison was listening hard for something. He did not know what, but he had the strange feeling that there were sounds in the distance. They did not sound like the familiar noises the rats made scurrying around in their search for food. Still, he thought, they were scratchings. A shudder ran through him. If he died, the rats would get him. They wouldn't leave much to identify. But what the hell difference did it make when he was dead?

Gorley Kempt listened to the sounds, too. He could not understand what caused them. He nudged Harold Brine. "Hear that?"

"I've been listening."

"What do you think it is?"

"I'm not sure," Brine answered. "At times it sounds like chipping. Then, I think I can make out the sound of something like a fan." He shrugged his shoulders. "But I know it couldn't be."

"Sometimes it sounds like it's coming from the air pipe," Kempt replied. "Want to crawl over with me? Maybe we can hear it better."

"Why not?" Brine said.

Together, Kempt and Brine moved across the floor to the broken pipe. They could wait there just as easily as anywhere else, they agreed.

* * *

At 1:45 P.M., Chief Mine Surveyor Blair Phillips came into the tunnel to test the air's gas content. It was purely routine, one of his jobs even when the mine was working.

Phillips inserted a bottle into the mouth of the uncovered pipe. Chemicals in the bottle would react and change color if the air were mixed with gas. He hesitated for a moment. Still about sixty feet from the 13,000 level, he estimated. He knew that men were unaccounted for at this level. If the bottle showed a high percentage of gas, then there would be nothing to do but send word to the surface.

He bent over the pipe, arched his head so the light from his helmet would shine on the opening. He moved the bottle carefully toward the pipe.

Harold Brine was listening intently at the other end. Suddenly he stiffened. "Gorley," he called. "Look!"

Kempt, who had been resting with his eyes shut, came alert. "What the hell is it?"

"The pipe. The pipe!" Brine stammered.

Kempt scurried closer for a look.

Brine's heart was beating wildly. "I'm not sure what it is. Is it a light or some kind of crazy reflection?"

Kempt slid toward the pipe opening. "How can you have a reflection in the dark?" Then he saw it: a tiny pinpoint of light stabbing through the blackness of the pit.

"It's a light," he whispered hoarsely to Brine. He did not dare yell, afraid that the light might disappear. A pinpoint of light in the darkness! It was unbelievable. Where was it coming from? He put his ear to the opening of the pipe.

"I hear sounds. I can make out voices!" he shouted to Brine who was beside him. This time the others heard.

They crawled from their places, the places they had selected to die. They forgot their aches, their hunger, and their thirst.

Only Joe McDonald could not move. He strained his eyes trying to pierce the darkness to see the light.

"Voices!" Kempt screamed. "There's voices coming through the pipe!"

"Yell into the pipe. Try and make them hear us."

"There are twelve of us here," Kempt called with every bit of strength he could muster. "Come and get us!"

CHAPTER XI

"Stay Where You Are!"

Blair Phillips stiffened. Tiny shivers ran up his back, lifting the hair on his neck. He jerked the bottle away from the pipe while the words rang in his ears. His heart raced and pounded, his breath grew short. "Stay where you are! We'll come as quickly as possible," he shouted back.

"They're here! They're here! They found us!" Gorley Kempt's voice was shrill.

Life flowed back into twelve men. Their despair of only a moment ago had now turned to delirium. They laughed and hugged one another, then wept like babies in the dark.

Harold Brine shoved his way to the pipe. "For God's sake come and get us!" he screeched. The control he had manifested since his entombment was now gone. He could not keep back the sobs.

"We made it! We made it! We're gonna get out of this rat trap!" Bowman Maddison yelled. He pounced on Levi

Milley in his exuberance and both men fell to the floor, embracing each other.

For the moment, the men forgot where they were. They tried to stand erect, banging their heads on the roof but scarcely noticing it. Then Maddison sobered.

He called out several times to the others, trying to make himself heard above the din. "Quiet down!" he finally had to yell. "Quiet down!"

The men grew silent.

"Let two of the boys do the talking through the pipe," Maddison said. "We'll never get out of here if we keep this up. We'll celebrate later."

Kempt and Brine remained by the pipe. Kempt called up again. "Don't forget we're alive in here. How about some water?"

Blair Phillips was too excited to answer Kempt's request. And he had but two thoughts. First, the crews must get through the wall of stone and coal as quickly as humanly possible. Second, word must be sent immediately to the surface.

He called to one of his crew. "Get back as fast as you can. Tell them at 7,800 to call up to the surface. Tell them there's twelve men alive at 13,000."

A rescue worker moved off in a crouch, as fast as he could go along the three-foot-high tunnel, to carry the news to the world.

Phillips leaned into the pipe once more. "Call out your names. Who's down there?" His heart raced as he waited for the reply.

"Gorley Kempt . . . Harold Brine . . . Wilfred Hunter . . . Caleb Rushton . . . Joe McDonald . . . Larry Lead-

better . . . Hughie Guthro . . . Teddy Michniak . . . Levi Milley . . . Eldred Lowther . . . Bowsie Maddison . . . Joe Holloway . . ." Kempt's voice sounded proud as he called out the names of the men who had made it. But he didn't stop talking. "Joe McDonald's got a busted leg. Teddy Michniak's arm is bad." Finally he paused and, with a note of exultation in his voice, said, "But we're in pretty good shape. Just get us the hell out of here!"

"Take over," Phillips called to Earl Wood. "I'm going up top with the names."

"Can you remember them?" Wood asked.

"Every blessed one of them," Phillips grinned. "Every blessed one of them!" He scurried down the tunnel toward the slope that would take him to the surface. The top of his helmet just cleared the roof as he hopped over timbers and rails.

"Hold on boys," Wood called below. He could think of nothing more to say. What could he tell these men after what they had already been through?

Percy Weatherbee edged close to Wood. "Let me talk to them. Kempt is my nephew." Wood moved aside and Weatherbee put his mouth to the pipe. "Gorley. Gorley, how are you?" he called.

Kempt could not believe it. He shivered when he recognized his uncle's voice. "Percy! I'm all right you son-of-a-gun. We're *all* all right. Just come and get us out of here!"

Weatherbee was too overcome with emotion to carry on the conversation. There were many questions he wanted to ask but the words would not come. And he found, without embarrassment, that he was crying in front of the others.

George Scott moved up to the pipe to yell words of encouragement in his Scottish burr.

"Take the apples out of your mouth and talk English!" Kempt yelled back. Humor had returned to a man who had been perched on the brink of death only minutes before.

Scott laughed and cried.

George Hodges shoved Scott aside. His brother-in-law, Harold Brine, was alive! "Harold, are you O.K.?" Hodges called. "This is George. George Hodges!"

"He's fine. We're all fine," Kempt answered. He called to Brine. "Get over here. Someone wants to talk to you."

The men had momentarily forgotten their thirst. They knew nothing except that someone was aware they were alive. They would get out—eat food—drink water—and breathe fresh air.

Harold Brine could barely bring himself to speak. "George, it's Harold," he said. "I'm all right." The excitement was too great for him to think to ask about his family.

"Thank God," Hodges cried as he moved back from the pipe and let Wood take over again.

"It's gonna be a while before we can get through to you," Wood called. "It's almost solid wall between us, about sixty feet. Stay put."

"We can't go anyplace. If we could we would have been out long ago," Kempt joked. The men laughed. Anything, even slightly funny, seemed to send them into hysteria now.

Levi Milley had a suggestion. "We're gonna have a long wait before they get to us. Just let's take it easy. We'll leave Gorley and Harold at the pipe."

"You stay too," Maddison said.

"O.K.," Milley agreed. "We'll all spell each other."

Shortly after 2:00 P.M., the morning drizzle had settled into a steady rain. Most of the townspeople stayed home; it was easier to wait there for the bad news.

When Blair Phillips reached the 7,800-foot level, he telephoned the names of the survivors. Seconds later, word was flashed to the surface that twelve men were alive at the 13,000-foot level. In a few minutes the town came to life.

When the telephone rang at Margaret Guthro's house, she walked slowly, disconsolately, to answer it. Her brother, Bud, had spent the morning putting in the front step so things would be easier at the funeral. It was only a matter of time, she knew, before Hughie's body would be found and brought to the surface. Then the funeral. Each blow of Bud's hammer had been like the sealing of a coffin, had torn at her emotions until she actually became physically sick and vomited in the bathroom.

The moment Margaret picked up the telephone she heard Loretta Holloway shout. "Margie, Margie! They've found twelve men alive! Joe and Hughie are with them and they're all right!"

Margaret Guthro flew into a rage. For almost a week she had been driven frantic by wild rumors. Finally, she had succeeded in facing the agonizing fact that Hughie was dead. This morning, when Bud was building the step, she had turned off the radio and television. She did not want to hear any more rumors that men were found alive.

"Don't call me with stories like this!" she yelled before slamming the receiver into the cradle. Bitter tears flowed as she buried her face in her arms and sobbed.

Moments later, Mr. Tupper's car pulled up in front of her house. This time, he was not bringing cookies from the church. He ran from the car to the front door.

Margaret wiped her eyes. Her hands were wet with tears when she answered the door.

Tupper did not wait for her to speak. "Margie, Margie!" he shouted. "Hughie's alive!"

All at once it struck her. It wasn't Loretta passing on a rumor. Mr. Tupper was telling her the very same thing! She fell into his arms, laughing and sobbing.

Bud was in the back yard cleaning up. He had not heard the telephone ring, but he heard the minister's car pull up and he could hear the laughing and crying.

"Hughie's alive!" Margaret cried out.

Bud grinned. "I'd better get rid of these," he said. He was still carrying a piece of lumber and a handful of nails. "What would Hughie think if I left the place a mess?"

Tupper left to deliver the good news to others.

Margaret switched on the television set and went into the kitchen to whip up a pan of ham and eggs for herself and her brother. All at once she was hungry. Soon she would be preparing meals for her husband. Things were getting back to normal.

Not far away, Velda Milley was making lunch for herself and Judy when the telephone rang. She, too, had turned off the radio and television sets. She did not want to hear any more news.

"Get that, will you dear?" she called to Judy. "I'm busy."

Judy got up from the couch to answer the telephone. Reverend Earle DeLong of the United Baptist Church identified himself.

"Yes?" Judy said.

"Tell your mother to get ready." The minister did not know how to begin, how to break the news. His own heart was racing. "Tell your mother to get ready," he repeated. Then he quickly blurted out the news. "They found twelve men alive. Your father is with them!"

At first Judy did not understand the message. "What happened to Daddy?" she asked fearfully. She was expecting bad news. It was impossible that he could be alive. At the moment she thought twelve more bodies had been located in the pit.

"He's alive. They found him with some other men," the minister replied.

"Are you sure it's Daddy?" She waited breathlessly for the response.

"Yes dear, I'm sure." He spoke quietly this time.

Judy put down the receiver. She did not even remember to say "thank you" or "goodbye." She raced to the kitchen.

Velda was standing in the doorway of the room, nervously wiping her hands on her apron. She had heard only snatches of the telephone conversation and had grown cold and weak when she heard her daughter ask, "Are you sure it's Daddy?" It could mean only one thing: Levi was found dead.

"Momma, Momma! Daddy's alive! He's alive!" The words tumbled from the mouth of the excited girl. "That

was Mr. DeLong. He said Daddy's alive! They found twelve men! Daddy's with them!"

She ran into her mother's arms.

It took only minutes for the news to spread through the town. Church bells rang. Automobiles roared up and down the streets, horns blasting as if it were New Year's Eve. The drivers yelled to anyone who would listen: "Twelve alive! Twelve alive!"

Stores were abandoned as proprietors and customers raced down Main Street to the mine grounds. They sloshed through the mud, ignoring the rain, eager to get to the pithead. No one realized that the men would not yet be coming to the surface.

Zora Maddison, Bowman's fourteen-year-old daughter, was pushed and shoved along in the throng. Who were the men alive? No one was quite sure. She ran back and forth, trying vainly to stop someone, anyone, who could give her news. More than one hundred children were in the Lamp House when the girl raced in.

A man was calling out the survivors' names. The girl listened, standing on her toes to watch the man's mouth. She half-heard, half-saw, his lips form the names: "Joe McDonald . . . Levi Milley . . . Gorley Kempt . . . Bowman Maddison . . ."

"Daddy's alive! He said 'Bowman Maddison.' That's my father!" For the first time since the bump, the girl turned and ran home. Now she could tell her mother the news she promised she would bring.

Within minutes after the word was relayed that twelve

men had been found alive, Dr. J. Arnold Burden of All Saints Hospital appeared at the office of Mine Manager George Calder. The doctor, a short, wiry man, knew the workings below. He had helped finance his medical education by working for the mine company. Now he was dressed to enter the mine.

"I'm ready to go down, George," the doctor told Calder. Both men were smiling for the first time in almost a week.

"The sooner the better," Calder replied, patting the doctor on the shoulder. "You know contact was made through an air pipe, don't you?"

"I guess a dozen people told me that on the way over here." He stopped for a moment, trying to plan. "I've been thinking," he said. "Can you get a length of copper pipe. Half-inch? Clean? We could try to pass it down through the air pipe and maybe send some water and soup down to the boys while they wait."

"Damn good idea," Calder agreed. "Damn good." He paused to picture in his mind the particular area where contact was made. "It's on a downslope and the stuff will flow right down to them. I'll make arrangements."

"Fine," Dr. Burden said. "Send the pipe down as soon as you can. I'm going below now."

The doctor left the office and walked in the rain to the pithead, waving greetings to the crowd.

At 4:30 P.M., rescue crews reported that they were still a heartbreaking forty feet away from the twelve men. Slowly, "barefaced" men chipped away at the stone and coal. There was no time to gouge out a large hole in the wall. A small tunnel, big enough to squeeze a body through, would be enough. The men ignored the sweat

that poured from their bodies as they worked flat on their stomachs, pushing through the wall.

At the same time, Police Chief MacDonald was busy on Main Street, clearing off all unnecessary vehicles. Only ambulances, police cars, and the press were to be allowed on the street. The chief conferred with civil defense authorities and men were posted at every street intersecting Main Street on the way to the hospital, to keep the roads clear.

The chief ordered rope barriers set up around the pithead, with local police and Royal Canadian Mounted Police on hand to keep the eager crowd from pressing forward and hampering the work of the now exuberant rescue crews.

At 6:30 P.M., rescue workers again sent word to the surface. They were now thirty-five feet from the trapped men. They had been able to make only five feet of progress in the past two hours. Fresh crews were sent down to spell the grimy and sweaty men. The original crews did not want to leave. They wanted to be there when the breakthrough was made.

All Saints Hospital was buzzing with activity.

When they received the word, Administrator Stanley Tibbetts and Superintendent of Nurses Rebeccah Hargreaves held a hurried consultation.

"We've got to make room for twelve men," Tibbetts said. "That means moving some of the men injured last Thursday. We'll put them in the armory."

"When will they be coming in?" Nurse Hargreaves asked.

"I don't know for sure. Probably not for quite a few hours. You know Dr. Burden is going down to talk to them. He'll know what to do."

"We should get started right away, though," the nurse said.

"Right. Have the supply of blood plasma checked and ready. We still don't know what shape the men are in."

They hurried to get things prepared.

Men who had been brought in on the first night of the bump were glad to give up their beds in the hospital and be transferred to the armory. It meant that some of their buddies were coming back from the dead.

At 9:30 P.M., the "barefaced" men had found new strength below ground. They worked and smashed at the wall. Perspiration soaked through their shirts, but they were now only twenty-five feet away from the breakthrough. They paused, long enough to gulp from their water cans, then they smashed again at the wall. When enough coal and rock gave way, they filled the buckets and passed them down the line for the men at the end to dump.

Inch by inch, they bored through the wall. When the man in front could no longer lift his arms, he took his place at the end of the line and dumped the buckets of rock and coal. Everyone moved up to take his whacks at the barrier.

Once more fresh crews were sent down. Dr. Burden arrived with them and helped pass the bucket, working his own way up to the front of the line. He moved to the air pipe and called through. "Hello. This is Dr. Burden."

"Hello doctor," Gorley Kempt's voice came back. "Good to hear you."

The doctor called again. "Get the men to get some water cans and bring them to you. We're going to try to send some water down through the pipe. We'll let you know when."

"We sure could use it, doctor."

"In the meantime, I've got some instructions for you," the doctor continued. "Above all, remember, when you get your water can full, don't drink it all at once. Understand? You'll get violently ill. I know it's going to be difficult, but you've got to take one mouthful only. Swallow slowly. Then count to five hundred before you take another. Do you understand?"

"Did you say five hundred?" Kempt asked.

"Yes, that's right. Five hundred."

"Jesus, doctor," Kempt called, laughing, "some of the guys here can't count to five hundred!"

"I mean it, Gorley. Don't gulp it down when it comes."

"O.K., O.K., just send it."

"It'll be here in a while."

Almost as if on signal, a crew of men arrived with the half-inch copper tubing. They crawled up to Dr. Burden.

"We're going to insert a copper tube through the pipe now," the doctor informed Kempt. "Call back when it comes through."

The men began to snake the tubing through the air pipe, slowly, carefully, to be sure that a stray fragment of coal or rock would not block it.

At the other end, Kempt waited. He held his hand over the pipe opening, just to feel the tubing when it came through.

The gush of air that whooshed through when Earl Wood's pick first struck the pipe had cleared it and the tubing went through easily.

Kempt saw it, first a wiggle, then a piece of metal he could touch. "I can feel the end here." He scraped a space beneath the life-giving tube, careful not to touch it.

"Good," the doctor answered. "Now just wait at the pipe and I'll let you know when the water's coming. Did you get the water cans?"

"We're all ready and waiting." Kempt was almost frantic with excitement. "Doctor," he called, "the guys here want to know what the weather is like outside."

"It's raining."

"The sun was shining when we came in. It'll be good to see rain."

"Don't talk too much," the doctor cautioned. "Take it easy and . . . hold on . . ."

At that moment two men appeared, carefully carrying a bucket of cool water.

The doctor looked back, approvingly, then leaned again to the tube.

"Get ready with your water cans."

Gorley Kempt placed a can at the bottom of the tubing.

Dr. Burden, helped by another man, lifted the water bucket and poured its precious contents through the half-inch tube. It gushed through, filled the water can, and splashed onto the mine floor.

"Hold up! For God's sake, I'm getting all wet!" Gorley Kempt's trousers were soaked through. The fresh, cool water felt good on his skin, but after all these hours, the waste of water seemed somehow to be a sin.

Dr. Burden pulled the bucket away from the pipe. The

doctor put his mouth close to the opening. "Remember, count to five hundred after each drink."

Kempt took a quick mouthful and passed the can to Harold Brine, who shook it first, just to hear the pleasant sound of water splashing. Brine held it to his lips and drank. Tears flowed down his cheeks and he could taste the salt at the corners of his mouth. In the darkness, he passed the can to Levi Milley.

Someone handed Kempt another empty water can. He called up, "Send some more water."

The water flowed through again, this time more slowly, and Kempt filled the second can. "O.K., that's enough for now," he called. The water stopped.

Kempt handed the can to Milley. "Make sure Joe and Teddy get this." In all the excitement, he still remembered that Joe McDonald and Teddy Michniak were together. Joe could not move and Teddy remained faithfully by his side. Milley moved off in the darkness, clutching the can.

Count? None of the men stopped to count to five hundred. Some started to, but they could not wait for their second drink. The second can was soon emptied.

"We're out of water," Kempt hollered up the pipe. "Send us some more."

"Nothing doing, Gorley," the doctor answered. "You've all had enough for now. I know you didn't count to five hundred. You couldn't have."

"No, we didn't count, doctor. We just couldn't wait."

"Well, I can't say that I blame you. But don't move about too much now. How do you feel? Any bad effects from the water?"

"No. I feel fine. Still thirsty, though." Kempt called. He asked around. "The others are O.K., too."

"Tell them we'll send some good hot coffee down in a little while."

At 11:00 P.M., rescue crews were ten feet away. They hacked ceaselessly at the wall, moving closer, ever closer to the twelve men.

Coffee, heavily sugared and steaming hot, was sent down through the pipe, and again Gorley Kempt's trousers were soaked through as the liquid overflowed the water can.

At 11:55 P.M., Dr. Burden called down the pipe. "How would you fellows like some soup?"

"What kind?" Kempt joked.

"This is no restaurant!" The doctor turned to the rescue men. "Can you imagine that? Dying and starving for more than six days, and now they want to know what kind of soup!" There was a grin on his face as he yelled down the pipe, "Tomato soup, take it or leave it!"

"We'll take it, we'll take it! I was only kidding. But for Christ's sake, don't soak me again. I want to look my best when I get out!" Goose pimples prickled at Kempt's black beard. He still could not believe they were saved.

The tomato soup was piped to the men and, for the third time, Kempt's trousers were soaked. He cursed softly, but without malice. "The bump didn't kill me, but it looks like I'm gonna drown in here instead!" He filled two water cans with soup. Once more the men drank without counting to five hundred. They did not get sick.

Dr. John R. Ryan of Springhill and Dr. Kenneth Gass of Pugwash joined Dr. Burden below ground. They brought more medical supplies for the moment when the final breakthrough would be achieved.

Now it was like a circus. At 12:10 A.M., rescue men reported that they were only five feet away. Word was flashed to the surface. The waiting crowd grew tense.

At 12:30 rescuers smashed through the final foot of stone and coal. One by one, they crawled through the opening in the wall, lights flashing in the darkness.

Kempt saw them first. He grabbed the man nearest him and hugged and kissed him. Rescued and rescuers wept silently together.

Dr. Burden's voice rang clearly through the shaft. "Don't waste any time," he ordered. He crawled directly to Joe McDonald and Teddy Michniak, and began to examine the injured men.

Doctors Ryan and Gass made superficial examinations of the others, then ordered blindfolds placed across their eyes.

"What the hell's that for?" Kempt asked as he was lifted, blindfolded, onto a stretcher.

"To keep the glare of floodlights on the surface from injuring your eyes," Dr. Ryan said. "You've been in complete darkness for so long we don't know but what the sudden light might hurt them."

Kempt ripped away the blindfold. "No offense, doctor," he apologized. "But that's just it. I've been in the dark since last Thursday. I'm not going upstairs in the dark, too."

On the surface, the crowd could feel the tension that increased almost to hysteria when Dr. J.G.B. Lynch, seventy-four-year-old medical officer of the Dominion Steel and Coal Corporation, ordered the floodlights dimmed. He knew the miners. He knew that most of them

would do exactly as Gorley Kempt had done with his blindfold.

At 3:25 A.M., a grimy rescue worker appeared at the pithead, his face wreathed in a beautiful smile. He waved excitedly to an ambulance driver to back his vehicle closer. "Gorley Kempt's on the way up!" he yelled. A murmur swept the crowd.

A stretcher, borne by two men, was framed suddenly at the entrance of the mine. The crowd surged forward, eager to catch a glimpse of the man who had been snatched from the bowels of the earth.

Kempt lifted himself to one elbow on the stretcher and waved, his teeth flashing white through a face as black as the rain-soaked ground. Then Kempt slumped back, exhausted by his show of bravado.

A white-coated driver opened the back door of the ambulance and the stretcher was lifted gently into the vehicle. The driver closed the door, raced around the side of the ambulance and into the driver's seat. Police waved the crowd back as the mud-splattered ambulance, its siren wide open, sped away from the mine.

Joe McDonald was eased onto a stretcher below ground. Each movement jarred his body and tore at his hip, where the bone protruded. He did not cry out, but simply whispered to Dr. Burden, "It hurts." Like Gorley Kempt, he was carried through the shaft to the man-rake.

When McDonald appeared on the stretcher at the pithead, the crowd again surged forward. Some applauded and some wept. In a few minutes, another ambulance roared away to the hospital.

Eldred Lowther followed Joe McDonald. Then came

Teddy Michniak, Levi Milley, Bowman Maddison, Wilfred Hunter, Caleb Rushton, Harold Brine, Hugh Guthro, Joe Holloway, and Larry Leadbetter.

Leadbetter thought he was in good shape. He felt fine, he told the rescuers below ground. "I'm gonna walk out of here and then I'm gonna walk home," he said as workers tried to lift him onto a stretcher. He took several steps forward, and staggered, as arms reached out to support him. Leadbetter, like the others, was carried out on a stretcher.

At 5:02 A.M., Thursday, October 30, the last ambulance left the mine grounds for All Saints Hospital. The rescue of twelve men was complete.

The people who had waited in the rain at the pithead now appeared at the hospital, anxious to talk to the survivors, to see them, touch them. Women, whose husbands and sons were still unreported below ground, cried as they stood on the stone steps outside the hospital, huddled together for warmth in the cold rain. One question burned in their minds. They wanted to ask the survivors if they had seen their men below ground. But they were not allowed in the building. It was not cruel, it was necessary. The men were weak. They needed medical attention. Above all, they needed the best therapy in the world for them, the sight and touch of their own wives and children.

Even before doctors began administering plasma to the survivors, before they removed the grimy clothing or began to wash away dirt from their bodies, the women and children who had waited six and a half agonizing days were allowed into the ward.

The men were filthy and gaunt; eyes sunk in their heads and black, coal-stained beards made them appear unreal.

Margaret Guthro, blinded by tears, raced into the ward with the other women. She thought she recognized her Hughie and ran to his bedside and hugged him.

"That isn't Hughie, Margie," a woman laughingly told her. "That's Joe Holloway!"

Startled, Margaret looked at the black face of the miner in the bed. He was smiling at her.

"Joe?" she asked.

Holloway nodded.

"Well, I'm glad to see you, too," she said. She leaned over and gave him a kiss and then hurried down the aisle between the beds until she found her husband. She threw herself into his outstretched arms, giving vent to all the emotion stored up in those long, terrible hours of waiting. When she stood up, her face was as black as her husband's. Tears had washed the dust and dirt onto the front of her dress.

Levi Milley was in bed, trying to pull off his grimy trousers, when Judy rushed in with her mother just behind her.

"Hi, Judy," Levi called out, when he spotted his smiling child. He said it as if he had seen her every day for the past six days. "How's about getting your Dad another pillow here?"

Judy was too excited to answer, but dashed off to find a nurse who would get a pillow.

Velda did not run to her husband's bedside. Her legs would not react the way she wanted them to. When she

reached the bed, she was shaking and felt faint. She leaned over to kiss her man, to touch his face, to caress his dirt-encrusted forehead.

Milley felt his wife's slender body quivering. "Don't worry, hon," he said, trying to console her. "Don't worry," he repeated. "I'll be home soon. This finishes me with the mines."

Velda did not answer. A great sob welled up in her and she bent over once more to kiss and hug her husband.

Milley tried to comfort her. "You know, I tried to sell one of the doctors some of our chickens on the way up." He laughed and Velda, tears streaming down her cheeks, looked at him and laughed too.

"At least you won't have to worry about money for a while," Milley continued. "I'll be getting compensation."

"Who cares about money?" Velda answered, giving him another hug. "Judy and I have you back."

At this moment, Judy appeared, breathless, and with a pillow. She propped it behind her father's head, leaned over and kissed him. Then she spoke for the first time to her father. "Hi, Dad," she said softly.

Bowman Maddison could not speak when his wife and children reached his bedside. He looked at their faces and began to sob. They were faces he had never expected to see again.

Solange wept and embraced her husband. "Oh, Bowsie, Bowsie, I thought you were gone. I thought we'd never have you back!"

Alden pushed his way to his father's side. "I prayed for you, Daddy. I never stopped. And I took care of Mom, too." He kissed his father.

Zora stood at the foot of the bed and stared. This was the girl who never left the pithead until she received the news that her father was safe; now, she did not utter a word. She could not. Great tears cascaded down her cheeks and she made no effort to wipe them away.

Maddison looked away from Solange and Alden, at his daughter. "How are you, dear?" he asked.

The girl ran to the side of the bed sobbing and shaking. "Oh, Daddy, Daddy, I love you so!"

By noontime, doctors had finished examining the twelve men and announced that they were in "surprising" condition.

Each survivor had lost only about ten pounds. Their eyesight was unimpaired, despite the six and a half days in darkness. No aftereffects were expected.

Joe McDonald would have to remain in the hospital for some time, in traction, while his dislocated and fractured hip mended.

Teddy Michniak had a broken shoulder and would be hospitalized for several weeks.

Wilfred Hunter's left leg was in bad shape. Doctors were not sure they would be able to save it. They were afraid of gangrene.

But the others would probably be discharged within a week. All had been given plasma to restore their strength. Solid foods would be given to them gradually.

Rescue workers had a grim report to make later in the day. At least twenty-four bodies had been located in the general area where the rescue took place. The gladness and joy of the town quickly turned again to

gloom. Once more the reality of the disaster struck home as tired rescue crews continued to push onward in the pits. They would not stop until all bodies were brought to the surface for burial.

CHAPTER XII

A Royal Visit

Friday morning, October 31, dawned bleak and raw. The rain had stopped, but heavy clouds still blanketed the town. A chill wind whipped across the mine grounds and tugged at the flaps of the Salvation Army tents. Small knots of women huddled close together, their shawls pulled tightly about heir heads. They were the wives of men still below. All had the same thought. If they found twelve alive after so long, then maybe, maybe, they'd find another. Each hoped it would be her man.

It was now more than a week since the bump had rocked the community. The toll of known dead stood at thirty-two men brought to the surface and identified. Ninety-three men, including the twelve so recently snatched from approaching death, had been rescued. Forty-nine men still remained unaccounted for in the depths.

During the morning, General Manager Harold C.M. Gordon made a televised and broadcast statement which

took the breath out of the town. In the main company office, the press had gathered to report his speech. Dirt still creased his face and his mouth was set in a thin line. His eyes told the story everyone expected.

"It will take at least another week," he said, "to fully explore the remaining sections of the mine at the present terribly slow rate of operations." He paused for a moment to let his words have their effect. No one in the room stirred. "It pains me deeply to say this, but I cannot see how any men, if they are still alive, and mind you, I said 'if,' can survive until we are able to reach them. We'll keep going until all the bodies are brought up." He accented the word "bodies."

The press had a few questions. They understood what Gordon meant. How long, they asked, can a man survive in a black hell without food and water? How many days? The fact that twelve men did it for six and a half days was practically impossible to comprehend. But can a man go seven days, or eight or nine?

"No," Gordon answered solemnly.

Members of the press seemed to agree.

But the rescue crews continued to chip their way forward through the black tunnels. And the women, at the pithead and at home, continued to wait.

Maurice Ruddick was sure he heard noises in the morning. At this point, he did not care what was causing them. They might even be the mine rats moving closer, sensing that men would soon be dead. Then the rats could begin feasting on the bodies. Ruddick shuddered and drove the thought from his mind.

Doug Jewkes was talking once more about Seven-Up.

This time, he added a quart of ice cream. He would die happy, he said, if only he could have them both.

"Shut up, Doug!" Ruddick called. It was the first time he had spoken harshly to any of his buddies and his voice surprised him. It sounded weak and thin, not like his at all. "Christ," he thought, "my voice is changing to a tenor!" He felt his arms. They were thinner than he had ever known them to be. He rubbed his face and felt his beard. It itched something awful. "How did we ever last this long?" he asked himself. "I'm an animal now, trapped in a cage. We're all animals. We eat bark and we drink . . . we drink . . ." He could not bring himself to say it, even to himself.

He tried to wet his lips. But his tongue was thick and coated. His lips hurt when he ran his tongue over them. They were cracked and dirt had gotten into the cracks. A wave of weakness, a light, cool feeling, swept over him. It passed quickly and he began to sweat.

Garnet Clarke was awake. He had dozed off without realizing it. And when he awoke, he did not remember sleeping. The minutes and the hours and days were now one. Time was nothing. Everything was the same. He touched his arm. He pinched it. Would he ever awake or was all the world like this?

The sound of noises in the distance, a million miles away, cleared his head. He nudged Currie Smith beside him. "You awake, Currie?"

"Yeah, I'm awake."

"You know today's Friday?"

"So what?"

"So nothing!" Clarke answered with distinct irritation.

"Sorry," Smith said. "I just don't feel well."

"Neither do I. I guess we all feel lousy." Clarke paused. "When do you think it'll come?"

"What?"

"When do you think we'll die?" Clarke asked.

"Soon, I hope. I can't take any more. I wish it happened right away. Why does it have to take so long?"

Both men fell silent. Then Clarke spoke. "I don't feel like looking around any more. I haven't got any strength left. I can hardly move."

Smith changed the subject. "What do you think happened to Barney Martin?" He wondered about the unconscious man, alone, without food or water.

"Probably dead," Clarke replied. "He couldn't last, not in the shape he was in when we saw him. He's probably better off."

They grew silent again. Even a brief conversation now taxed their strength. They could hear scratching and vibrations from somewhere, but they paid no attention any more.

Maurice Ruddick was humming softly to himself. Then he began to recite slowly:

> Rock of Ages, cleft for me,
> Let me hide myself in Thee . . .

The others listened in the warm darkness. Garnet Clarke joined him and sang in a hoarse whisper.

> Let the water and the blood,
> From Thy wounded side which flowed,
> Be of sin the double cure,
> Save from wrath and make me pure.

The two men paused to catch their breaths.

"Sing some more," Currie Smith asked.
"Please," said Frank Hunter. "It makes us feel better."
Ruddick and Clarke began again:

> Could my tears forever flow,
> Could my zeal no languor know,
> These for sin could not atone;
> Thou must save, and Thou alone;
> In my hand no price I bring;
> Simply to Thy cross I cling.

Barney Martin was, incredibly, still alive. But he was in an advanced stage of delirium.

For nearly eight days he had been without food or water in complete darkness. By animal instinct alone, in his infrequent periods of consciousness he had scratched and clawed, trying to dig his way out of the shallow pocket in the ground. His nails were now broken and jagged, his fingers bloody and sore.

Each time he awoke, he scratched again and tried to pull himself forward. But his body was numb and he could barely move. He retched but nothing came up. Barney Martin no longer knew where he was or how he had got there. He was alone in a private Hell.

Above ground, late in the afternoon, the weather turned even colder and the wind began blowing in gusts. At 4:25 P.M. a sleek B.O.A.C. jet airliner touched down at the airport at Moncton, New Brunswick. His Royal Highness Prince Philip, en route from Ottawa to London, had come to visit Springhill at the request of the Queen.

Philip stepped briskly from the plane and into a limousine, and sped the sixty miles to Springhill's All Saints

Hospital. At 5:50 P.M. the car glided up the long, concrete driveway in front of the building and stopped.

Crowds waited outside the hospital in the damp cold, eager to catch a glimpse of the Prince. There were children, with painted faces and white sheets draped over their bodies, for it was Halloween. Tragedy might grip the town, but for the youngsters, too young to comprehend, the fun of Halloween had to be observed.

Those who waited were silent as Philip left the car and strode into the hospital. That night in Springhill, with Harold Gordon's statement still vividly etched on their hearts, the people of the town were in gloom.

Philip entered the hospital in the glare of television lights and photographers' flash bulbs, and was escorted to the twelve survivors.

They looked like different men. Their beards were gone. Their faces were clean. They smiled. But inside, the haunting memory of their entrapment would probably be with them the rest of their lives.

Administrator Tibbetts was in shirtsleeves when the Prince entered the ward. Mud from the depths of the mine still stained the floor.

Philip strode to the first bed, occupied by Harold Brine. "You don't look like you should be in bed," he said with a smile. "I hear you're the man who dug out one of his comrades." He patted Brine on the shoulder and walked to the next bed.

Joe McDonald's leg was in traction. A bottle of plasma, suspended by the side of his bed, was feeding slowly through a tube into his arm. Despite this, he grinned broadly at the Prince.

"You had a long wait underground," Philip said.

"Yes, we all did. From now on, I want the sky for my roof."

Wilfred Hunter waited nervously for Philip to approach. His leg, swathed in bandages, still hurt, and his heart pounded strongly. But it was a different kind of pounding than that he had felt below ground.

The Prince reached his bed and paused to chat. But Hunter was at a loss for words. "Thank you for coming," he managed to say.

When Philip stopped by Levi Milley's bed, the thin-faced miner had a paper and pencil ready. He held them out. "Would you sign this for my daughter?"

Royalty never gives autographs and Milley knew it. But what was there to lose?

The Prince took the paper and pencil and signed *Philip.*

Then he turned to Caleb Rushton. "I hear you kept the others alive with your singing."

Rushton laughed, embarrassed.

When Philip emerged, a light rain had begun to fall and the people had disappeared. The children had been taken home, their Halloween cut short by cold and rain.

The royal party drove to the muddy mine grounds and parked near the manager's office. Gordon briefly outlined the rescue work as they walked together through the mud to the pithead. "It still doesn't seem possible that twelve men survived for so long," he said.

"Is it possible that any more are still alive?"

"I hardly think so."

The Prince shook his head.

The visit and inspection at the mine was brief, for rescue work was still in progress. The next stop was the United Baptist Church, headquarters for the Red Cross.

On the way out of the church, Philip asked to be taken to the home of one of the men lost in the bump.

He was driven to Cowan Street, to the home of Mrs. Harold Raper, whose husband's body was the twenty-fourth recovered from the pit. Mrs. Raper had been sitting in the living room, watching the visit on television. She had switched off the set when the announcer reported that Philip had left the church and that his destination was unknown.

She did not hear them come in the door. When she looked up, Philip was standing there. He walked to her and took both hands in his. "I'm so sorry," he said.

The Prince and the widow looked at each other for what seemed a long time. Finally she gasped, apologized, and asked him to sit down on the divan.

"What do you think about the mine?" he asked.

"I think it should be padlocked," she answered. "All we want here is a good industry that would keep the men out of the mines. It's a good town, with good people."

In a few moments, the visitor left. On his way to the front door, without asking, he paused at the Memoriam Book on the hall table, opened it and wrote: *Philip, 31 October, 1958.*

CHAPTER XIII

An Anniversary

The hands on Maurice Ruddick's watch clung together like lovers at midnight.

He could barely make them out. It was a luminous watch, but eight and a half days in darkness had taken the luminosity out of it. It needed light again in order to glow in the dark.

Another day, he thought to himself. How many more? What day is it? All the days and nights ran into each other. He decided it must be Saturday.

"It's a new month, too," he muttered to himself. "November first, a new month." Then the thought struck him. "Boys," he announced quietly, "we've got an anniversary today."

"What are you talking about, Maurice?" Garnet Clarke asked. "What kind of an anniversary?"

"Two years ago today Number Four blew up." Ruddick said it just to make conversation.

"How's that gonna help us?" Clarke wanted to know.

"I just thought I'd mention it, that's all."

"Wouldn't it be funny if we all died today, on the anniversary?" Doug Jewkes asked.

"What's so damn funny about that?" asked Clarke. "Big joke."

Ruddick was silent, pondering the conversation he had started. Yeah, wouldn't it be funny if we all died on the anniversary? God, let it be over with. We've all had enough. We keep hearing noises but nothing happens. Funny, I can't hear them now. They must have knocked off for the weekend. Someday they'll find us. Just enough left to bury after the rats get through with us. Maybe if I go to sleep I won't wake up.

He stretched out and rested his head on a pile of rock.

Above ground a cold southwest wind blew a shower of snow through the air. It melted as it touched ground.

At 2:00 A.M., a crew of rescue workers awoke on the hard wooden benches in the Wash House. It was time to return to the pits.

Vice-President Harold Gordon appeared in the room, dressed in coveralls. He wore his helmet, and a can of water hung from his belt. He was ready to go down again. "Ready boys?" he asked softly. "It's time."

The men nodded. One by one they rose from the benches, yawned and stretched and reached for their shoes on the floor. Then each man picked up his helmet where he had left it near the shoes.

Overman Bill Miller, whose wiriness belied his sixty-two years, walked to the door. He and Gordon were joined by Bud Henwood, deputy overman. Then Ken Murray and John Calder walked over. "We're ready,"

one of them said. Leonard Boss, Vernon Barry, Matt Pearson, Bill Downey, James Rossong, and Dan O'Rourke completed the crew.

They moved silently out of the Wash House, across fifty feet of muddy ground to the Lamp Cabin. Their lamps were snapped into place on their helmets. Freshly charged batteries hung from their belts.

The men were tired. They did not relish the thought of the hours ahead, crawling on their bellies, digging and chipping through rock and coal, only to find more bodies. It would be more of the same. They would pass the bucket in a long line from the man in front, who filled it, to the man in back, who had to look desperately for a place to dump it.

They filled their water cans and walked single file from the Lamp Cabin. It was nearly over. Only a few more days. They were already working in the 13,000-foot level. There was not much area left to search. Then they could go home and rest.

The floodlights in the yard outlined the men in the morning darkness as they bowed their heads to keep the swirling snow from their eyes. It was cold. It would be warmer, much warmer, in the mine.

Harold Gordon led them in as another group, sore and weary, scuffled by on their way to a few hours sleep on the wooden benches.

Barney Martin still lived. Somehow, he kept his hands moving. They were red-raw, like chunks of meat in a butcher store window. But he kept scratching and clawing for life. He felt he would die if he remained still.

He tried to dig his fingers into the dirt and to pull

himself out into the light. But there never seemed to be any light. There was nothing. No one. He was alone.

He did not even feel hunger any more. Only thirst. If only he could dig and keep digging until water spouted up from the ground.

He pushed his fingers deep into the dirt and pulled again, trying to move his body forward. The pain spread from his finger tips and shot down his arms. He fell unconscious.

Maurice Ruddick awoke at 3:30 A.M. I'm still alive, he thought grimly. Why do I stay alive? Does God want it that way? Is there something He wants me to do?

Ruddick sat up, his body aching and stiff. "Anyone awake?"

"I'm awake," answered Garnet Clarke.

"Me, too," said Doug Jewkes. "I was lying here just thinking about Seven-Up. I tried not to. Honest. I just can't help it." He said it apologetically, remembering that Ruddick had become angry with him before for talking about it so much. This time, Ruddick said nothing.

Currie Smith nudged Clarke.

"What is it, Currie?" Clarke asked.

"We're getting closer to the end. I can feel it. I don't care what happens any more. That's how I know."

"I don't even want to talk about it," Clarke replied. "I've been thinking about the same thing."

"Me, too," Ruddick said. "Maybe we should try once more on the pipe. Just once more. For the last time."

The men pondered the suggestion. "I'll do it," Smith finally said. It was better than sitting still.

At 4.00 A.M., Currie Smith and Maurice Ruddick

crawled to the broken air pipe. They did not feel it would do any good. But Smith began to tap slowly on the pipe with an empty water can.

Harold Gordon and his crew were flat on their stomachs, passing the bucket that Bud Henwood slowly filled. Perspiration stained their shirts and the coal dust clung to the wet surface.

"Here comes another one," Henwood called back. He arched his back and twisted the bucket around his body to pass it to the man behind. Slowly, the bucketful of coal and rock moved to the end man. He dumped it to one side and it made a small cloud of dust that smarted his eyes. He quickly sent the empty bucket back up the line.

"It's almost solid up ahead," Henwood called to the man behind him. "It's really packed in tight." He was using a pick with a sawed-off handle. With it, he filled the bucket again.

At 4:30 A.M., Henwood uncovered a section of compressed air pipe. "We're moving in the right direction," he quietly announced.

Barney Martin regained consciousness once more. When he opened his eyes it was no different than when they were closed. He blinked several times but nothing happened. He could not blink away the darkness.

Painfully, he pushed his arms in front of him and tried again to dig his fingers into the dirt. He wanted desperately to grab something solid. But the dirt rolled back and trickled down his neck. He began to sob in the blackness of the mine.

He opened his mouth to cry out in anguish and voiced a deep croak. He tried again and again to call, to scream. But he could only groan and sob, and claw at the dirt.

Maurice Ruddick and Currie Smith sprawled at the air pipe. Smith was sweating, dizzy from the simple exertion of tapping on the pipe. "It's no use, Maurice," he panted. "I can't do it any more." He lay back, still clutching the empty water can.

"Let me try it for a while," Ruddick said, sliding closer to the pipe.

Currie Smith held out the water can and Ruddick took it. He tapped several times, slowly, deliberately.

"Why does it have to be this way?" Smith asked.

"I don't know, Currie. I don't know."

"We could have died in an automobile accident or in bed of old age. But not like this. Like animals in a filthy, stinking hole." His voice began to rise.

Ruddick tapped harder on the pipe to distract Smith. "We don't pick the way we die, Currie. The good Lord does that."

"But why here?"

"I guess because He figured we were . . . well, like we were born in here. Since we were kids we worked in the mines. Maybe that's what He figured. We spent so much of our lives in here that when our time came, we should die in here."

"We can't argue about that," Smith said.

"No, we can't." He kept on with his rhythmical tapping.

At 4:45 A.M., Bud Henwood told the others in his crew

that he could no longer move a muscle. He was near exhaustion. "Someone take over for me," he said.

He pulled himself back out of the hole he had chipped and rolled to one side, making room for the next man to move up to his place.

Exhaustion and heat had made the men silent. There was nothing to talk about, anyway.

Tap . . . tap . . . tap . . .

Matt Pearson heard it first.

No one had said a word, but Pearson called, "Be quiet!"

The men listened intently. Then it came again.

Tap . . . tap . . . tap . . .

"Hear that? Hear that?" Pearson was shouting now.

The tapping was distinct. "There's at least one alive!" shouted Henwood. "Maybe more!"

"Get word to the top quick," Harold Gordon called. "Let them know."

Gordon could scarcely believe it. Everything rational told him that no one should be tapping on the pipe. By all rights, anyone on the other end should be dead. But there it was!

At Gordon's command, Bill Downey backed quickly out of line. He tumbled over rock and scraped his knees in frenzied haste. He crawled through the shaft and raced on two feet when there was room. Finally, he reached the emergency phone strung down from the 7,800-foot level. He picked it up and waited for what seemed like hours.

"Yes? Hello," came a voice.

Downey could not speak. His heart thumped hard in his chest.

"Hello. Hello."

Downey swallowed, clearing his throat. "We heard

tappings on a pipe!" he yelled. "Tappings!" he repeated. "There's someone alive down here!" He hung up without waiting for the inevitable questions. He tumbled and bumped and crawled back to rejoin the crew.

They worked like crazy men, with their picks and their bare hands. They tore at the wall with a fury they had never before known. Their lungs felt as though they would burst. Their throats ached, raw from the dust. But they did not stop, even to drink. They filled bucket after bucket with stone and coal, and gradually inched their way forward.

In fifty minutes, at 5:35 A.M., they broke through the last of twelve solid feet of rock and coal.

"Quiet, everyone," Gordon commanded hoarsely.

The men listened.

Ken Murray heard it first. "What is it?" he whispered.

"Sounds like a cat scratching," answered Dan O'Rourke.

"There's no cats down here," Murray answered. "There it goes again. Sounds like pebbles falling, or something. I can't make it out."

"It's coming from this direction," Henwood called, and he plunged through an opening in the wall. The others followed.

Henwood kept turning his head, so that his helmet light would flash in every direction. It played on the walls, and weird shadows danced on the shiny coal. "Jesus!" he suddenly exclaimed, sucking in his breath. "Look at that!"

He crawled over to the body of Barney Martin.

"He's alive," Henwood said, leaning over Martin. "He's breathing!" He called for the others, and their lamps lighted up the scene.

"Look at those fingers!" Henwood exclaimed. "That must have been the scratching we heard."

Barney Martin opened his eyes. The sight of another face, after eight and a half days, gave him the strength to smile. He had scratched his way out of darkeness into light. "God must have saved this little hole for me," he cried.

Harold Gordon spoke up next. "Give him some water. Not too much at first. Somebody stay here with him." Then he turned to Bud Henwood. "Bud, get upstairs and get a doctor here quick!" Henwood moved away toward the surface.

"Follow me," called Gordon. He crawled toward an opening, the same that Garnet Clarke and Currie Smith had come through when they first stumbled over Barney Martin.

The men chipped at the small opening. Within twenty minutes, they smashed their way through. They did not know what to expect, what they would find.

Maurice Ruddick and the others had heard them. They were waiting, tears of joy streaming down their cheeks.

When Harold Gordon appeared in the opening, his lamp outlined the figure of Ruddick, who was sitting on a stack of stone, a grin on his face.

"Maurice! It's Maurice Ruddick!" one of the rescuers yelled at the scarecrow before them. Despite the dirt and days of suffering, the rescuers knew The Singing Miner.

"Sing us a song, Maurice!"

Ruddick straightened his back and held his head up proudly. His words reflected the faith and courage, and

the humor, that had kept these men alive against what seemed impossible odds.

"Give us a drink and I'll sing you a song!" he fairly shouted.

CHAPTER XIV

Aftermath

By 9:15 on the morning of November 1, 1958, the rescue of the seven men was complete.

Most of the group, led by Maurice Ruddick, walked part of the way out of the pit, to a point where they were placed on stretchers and carried to the surface.

Barney Martin was too weak to walk. He was taken out first, semiconscious. When he reached the exit, he sensed that a crowd had gathered. The snow squall was over and a bright sun was shining. Martin, hearing voices, ripped off his blindfold and waved to the crowd.

At All Saints Hospital, the men were immediately examined. Each had lost about ten pounds, but like the others, who had been rescued two days earlier, they would all survive.

Then came the reunions with their families. Wives of the men, and their children, had waited patiently in the corridors of the hospital until doctors announced that the examinations were over.

The women made no effort to fight back tears as they hurried down the aisles between beds to find their men.

Mabel Smith's eyes were red from crying as she flung herself into her husband's arms. Earlier, at home, where she had heard the news of the rescue, she had leaned on the refrigerator and wept. Her nine-year-old son, who had rushed home to tell his mother, had broken into tears, too. It had taken many minutes for mother and son to regain their composure. Now, they were at Currie Smith's bedside and the tears began again.

Mrs. Norma Ruddick led four of her twelve children toward Maurice Ruddick's bed—and the children dashed to embrace their father. For a moment, Norma stood by and watched. Then she leaned over the bed and stroked her husband's hair. She did not say a word until Maurice spoke. "We made it, honey. We made it." But she held his face between her hands and kissed him on the forehead and the mouth.

"God bless you dear," she finally managed to say.

Seven-year-old Dean nudged his way between his parents. "Daddy, can I come up in the bed with you?"

"Sure. Come on, climb up here."

The boy scampered into the bed and nestled himself in the cradle of his father's arm.

Maurice leaned over and kissed his child.

Garnet Clarke's father sat by his son's bedside, smiling. He kept staring at his boy and repeating, over and over, "I knew you'd make it, son. I knew you'd make it."

Young Clarke reached over and took his father's hand.

He squeezed it and smiled back. "Wish me a happy birthday, Dad. I wasn't around when it came!"

But the reunions were brief. The doctors said the men needed attention—washing and scrubbing, sleeping pills, plasma. So the families left, reluctantly, secure in the knowledge that an unbelievably happy ending had occurred for them.

For several days rescue crews continued to explore the mine, but they found no one else alive.

At 8:30 P.M. on Thursday, November 6, exactly two weeks after the bump, a crew found and removed the last body, that of thirty-nine-year-old Fidele Allen. His wife, Sadie, had waited at the pithead until the very end.

The count now stood at one hundred men rescued, seventy-four dead.

On the day after Allen's body was brought to the surface, the Dominion Steel and Coal Corporation announced that the shattered No. 2 Colliery would be permanently closed, ending coal mining in Springhill and wiping out the only industry in the town.

On November 12, Wilfred Hunter's left leg was amputated between the hip and the knee. On November 23, a month to the day after the bump, the death toll rose to seventy-five. William Stevenson, rescued among the first, died in All Saints Hospital. He had broken a leg, an arm and one shoulder, but seemed well on the way to recovery when his heart just stopped.

By Christmas all the rescued men had been released from hospital except Joe McDonald, whose hip was healing slowly. But on the following day, another casualty

was added to the list when Mayor Ralph Gilroy collapsed from exhaustion. He had toured practically all Canada, speaking for the Springhill Disaster Relief Fund, trying to find new industry for the town. He had managed only to attract a small woodworking plant.

Not for six months did Joe McDonald move from the hospital. Then, on May 30, 1959, his fortieth birthday, he was finally released and brought home on a stretcher. It would be many more months before he could walk again—and at least a year before the stiffness left his leg.

Toward the end of June the Canadian federal government announced location of a new prison farm near Springhill. A storage battery manufacturer decided to move his plant to Springhill, too. At least some of the men would be able to find jobs.

Meanwhile, skeleton crews worked in the mine, salvaging what they could for other mines of the Dominion Steel and Coal Corporation.

One hundred and twenty-one years had passed since coal was discovered in Springhill. They had been years of sweat, heartbreak, and hope.

At first, coal had seemed synonymous with wealth. It had brought miners and their families to the town, and given hope that Springhill would prosper.

But eventually, cheaper fuels invaded the markets of Canada and the United States, and mining—with its antiquated and costly methods—could not effectively compete. When the danger factor was added to the other costs, the price of coal became prohibitive.

Thus it was that, at the end of July, 1959, the No. 2 Colliery was sealed off. And the fate of a town was sealed.

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