

Miner Digs Out of Trap With Hands

CENTRALIA, PA., (AP)—Trapped 52 hours in a coal hole 60 feet below the surface, 18-year-old Joseph Loftus dug his way out with his hands yesterday after rescue workers had given up hope of saving him and a priest stood by to administer last rites.

The youth, who had been unconscious for a time after a slide blocked the shaft opening and filled the 40-foot horizontal gangway in which he was working, pushed his head through an opening made by astonished rescuers and was dragged to the surface. He had several bruises and his fingers were scratched open to the bone. Rescue workers estimated he had dug 20 feet in darkness.

Lawrence Burns, 45, trapped with Loftus in the gangway of their makeshift anthracite mine, was rescued early Saturday. The cavein occurred Friday morning.

Rescue crews started a new hole Saturday, behind where they expected to find the younger miner. Late yesterday, two of the workers returned to the original hole. After a few minutes of digging, the ground moved beneath them, and Loftus stuck his head out.

He thought it still was Friday.

1941 Joseph Loftus rescued after 52 hours rescuers gave up hope of saving

RESCUED BOY WANTS TO STAY ON GROUND
Declares He Never Wants to Go Back to A Coal Hole Again.

Fifteen-year-old Joseph Loftus, who saved himself from death 90 feet underground because he "didn't know enough about mine mechanics to give up fighting," declared yesterday from his hospital bed in the Ashland Hospital. "I never want to go down a coal hole again."

But, added the boy who clawed his way 10 feet to freedom through tons of earth and rock after 82 hours entombed, "maybe I'll have to go back to the mine. After all, brothers and sisters have to eat."

His hands were raw from digging his way out of the pit where he had almost been given up for dead, Loftus recalled the four hours he spent in the darkness. Doctors said his hurts were superficial, although he suffered a slight concussion. He was knocked unconscious, he said, when a rush of coal and dirt buried him last Friday morning in the independent coal hole he and his partner worked at Central.

"I knew two weeks ago there was going to be a cave-in," he said. "Burns (Lawrence Burns, 45, who was trapped with Loftus, and was rescued Saturday morning) and I figured there would be some warning and we could get out."

"There was no warning. All at once the tunnel closed up and I was caught. I didn't know what had happened to Burns."

"I don't know how long I was knocked out. When I came to, I just started digging and kicking. I slept every now and then to keep my mind off it. I got hungry and thirsty but I didn't mind it so much."

"All I know is I never want to go down a coal hole again. I hope I can get a job on top of the ground somewhere. I'd really like to be a boxer but maybe I'll have to work in the mine again. After all, brothers and sisters have to eat."

Joseph and his father, William Loftus, a miner for 22 years, support a family of eight. Four of the six children at home are younger than Joseph. The oldest, a sister, has no job. He quit parochial school last year in the eighth grade to go to work. He's large for his age, five feet nine inches tall and weighing 122 pounds.

Veteran miners say the only reason Joseph is alive is because he "didn't know enough to quit" and because he's "young and full of vitality." An experienced miner, one said, would have given up and accepted death.

Burns and Loftus were working at a 60-foot level when the slide came. Burns was trapped on the spot, but the rush carried Loftus 20 feet further down the slope.

When Loftus finally emerged, feet first, yesterday before the eyes of startled rescuers, he thought it was still Friday.

1941 Joseph Loftus never to go into a coal hole again



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