

'Bargains With God' Pay Off For Youth Rescued From Mine

HILL CITY, S.D. (AP) — "I made some bargains with God—but I always was sure that, somehow, I'd be rescued." Airman Gerald Becker said in telling about the 3½ days he spent trapped in an abandoned gold mine pit near here.

The chance halt of a tourist party brought his rescue Monday.

Becker, 18, of Mapleton, Minn., had last Thursday night off from his duties as a mechanic at nearby Ellsworth Air Force Base. He decided to go swimming in Sheridan Lake.

"But it was too cold and I started exploring instead," said Becker Monday night at the base hospital, where he is under observation.

"I came across this big hole. All of a sudden the edge gave way and I fell 50 feet to the bottom."

After recovering from the initial shock, Becker looked for a hold on the shale and slate walls to enable him to climb out but found none. Then he started shouting for help.

When darkness fell, he gave that up and made himself a primitive bed out of brush that had fallen into the pit.

"But I couldn't sleep very much because it got pretty cold," he said. "It must have fallen to about 50 or less and I only had light trousers and a T-shirt."

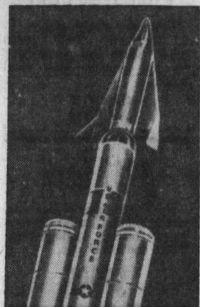
Friday, Saturday and Sunday took a long time to pass.

Early Monday the vacationing Pete Ptacek family from Phoenix, Ariz., stopped in the area to let their youngsters exercise. Becker, with his now very hoarse throat, heard them and called out.

Ptacek hurried to a cabin resort near the lake for help.

Two forestry men, a rancher and Ptacek returned to the pit with a rope, and with it tied around his waist Becker made his way up the sheer wall.

"All I could think of all the time was how my ma would be torn up if anything happened," said the airman. "Yes, and I made some bargains with God—but I always thought I'd be rescued and that confidence helped me along."



1962 Gerald Becker rescued after fall in abandoned mine



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Mon, Dec 20,
2021