

## Battered Youth Saved After Seventy-Foot Fall in Shaft

POWELL, Tenn. (UPI)—Rescue workers hoisted a mudcake, semi-conscious young cave explorer to safety early today 11 hours after the youth fell to the bottom of a 70-foot shaft.

His right leg broken and his face battered by the fall, 17-year-old John Cheka was rushed to a hospital after being pulled from the cave aboard a wire basket that had been lowered to him by rope.

Two companions, Vernon Bruner, 20, and John Connell, 20, helped rescue workers save Cheka. Bruner left the cave to summon authorities and Connell stayed with Cheka, putting a splint on his leg and trying to

keep him warm in the 40-degree shaft.

The youths entered Carpenter's cave, which slices a quarter of a mile deep into copper ridge in the foothills of the great Smoky Mountains, about 4:30 p.m. Thursday.

"John was repelling down the side of the shaft when his rope broke," said Bruner, a junior at the University of Tennessee. "He was using a quarter-inch nylon rope. We told him it was too small."

Bruner said when Cheka fell he struggled out of the cave and walked a mile through dense woods to summon aid.

Connell, a junior at Illinois Wesleyan College, remained

with Cheka at the bottom of the rock shaft about 25 feet in diameter.

"He was delirious," said Connell. "I splinted his leg and tried to keep him warm. He kept asking, five thousand times, 'Is my leg broken?'"

Rescue workers straining under emergency lights finally brought Cheka to the surface at 4:10 a.m. It took another 35 minutes to carry him off the ridge and across the dense woods to a waiting ambulance.

The rescue operation began about 8 p.m., said Capt. W.C. Brooks, head of the Knox County rescue squad. Help from experienced cave explorers came from Knoxville and Oak Ridge, Tenn.

1967 John Cheka rescued after fall and trapped 11 hours in cave



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