

Kentucky miner buried alive, rescued after 9 hours

■ **Charlie Jones** was trapped under a 17-foot-thick rock that may have weighed hundreds of tons in a mine only 23 inches high.

By **Roger Alford**
Associated Press

WILLIAMSBURG, Ky.

A Kentucky coal miner who spent more than nine hours buried alive before being freed Wednesday morning said he spent most of the time praying and thinking about his family.

"I thought I was a goner," Charlie Jones said from the hospital where he was taken after rescue crews pulled him out of the

remote mine beneath a mountain in southeastern Kentucky. "I knew that whole mountain was on top of me."

The U.S. Mine Safety and Health Administration said a 17-foot-thick rock that may have weighed hundreds of tons collapsed about 4 p.m. Tuesday onto a small vehicle that Jones was using to haul coal out of the mine. The weight of the rock blew out the tires on the machine, which essentially served as a temporary burial vault for the trapped miner until he was freed about 1:30 a.m. Wednesday.

"It was wonderful, the way it turned out," said Joe Pavlovich, manager of MSHA's district office in nearby Barbourville. "We just

thank God that we were able to get him out of there safely. This is an extremely happy ending."

Jones, 41, was part of a four-man crew working for H.B. Coal Inc. at Proctor Hollow in one of the region's thinnest seams of coal. The mine is only 23 inches high, requiring workers to crawl on their bellies.

The mine, near the Kentucky-Tennessee border about 15 miles south of Williamsburg, had been in operation for only about a

month, and extended about 100 feet into the mountain. The rock fall occurred about 30 feet into the mine.

Miners who work with Jones helped rescue crews to free their trapped comrade.

"You just feel so helpless," said Marty Bowlin, owner of the mining company who worked alongside the other miners. "I was ecstatic, tickled to death, when we got him out of there."

Jones said he was lying on his

side in what ordinarily would be an open compartment in the 19-inch-tall vehicle that's used to scoop coal off the floor of the mine and haul it to the outside. The rock covered the top of the compartment, leaving Jones literally between a rock and a hard place.

"When I come to myself, I was hollering for help," he said. "I was hurting bad. All that pressure was on me."

Jones said at one point, shivering in the cool darkness of the mine, he lost hope that the rescuers would be able to get him out. "I don't know how I maintained myself," he said. "I thought about God, my wife, my kids, everything."

Pavlovich said rescue crews

initially brought in jacks and air bags in an effort to hoist the rock off Jones, but they feared the rock might have broken and crushed the trapped miner. They then began removing rock to expose one side of the machine so they could use a cutting torch to cut away enough metal to pull Jones feet-first to freedom.

Jones was released Wednesday afternoon from the University of Tennessee Medical Center in Knoxville, where he was taken for observation. He said he not only escaped without a single broken bone but that he has been unable to find a scratch anywhere on his body.

"God was sure with me," he said. "You would have had to have seen that to believe it."

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— Charlie Jones

2003 Charlie Jones rescued from mine after nine hrs



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Fri, Oct 29, 2021

Coal miner rescued

The Associated Press

WILLIAMSBURG, Ky.— A coal miner trapped nine hours by a fallen rock was freed early Wednesday by rescue workers and fellow miners who carved his escape path by digging out rock and cutting through a metal vehicle with a torch.

"I thought I was a goner," Charlie Jones said from a hospital bed. "I knew that whole mountain was on top of me."

He said he survived the ordeal without a single scratch. He was released later Wednesday from the University of Tennessee Medical Center in Knoxville, where he had been taken for observation.

Jones was working on his stomach inside a small motorized vehicle that hauls coal out of the mine when a 17-

"I thought I was a goner. I knew that whole mountain was on top of me."

— Charlie Jones, rescued coal miner

foot-thick rock collapsed about 4 p.m. Tuesday. The weight of the rock blew out the tires and pinned him inside. Miners who work with Jones helped free their trapped comrade.

"You just feel so helpless," said Marty Bowlin, owner of the mining company who worked alongside the other miners. "I was ecstatic, tickled to death, when we got him out of there."

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