‘It was half a miracle’

Trapped miner rescued

BAUXITE, Ark. (AP) — Sidney P. Hale, 57, of Little Rock, one of the two men trapped in a bauxite mine cave-in here, said after surviving 13 hours in sandy water up to his chest that he had only fear that rescuers would give up too soon.

A fellow miner reassured Hale in his hospital bed Tuesday night that the 15 other men in his crew would not have given up. Hale then repeated softly, "That 'anny, that 'anny."

Hale said he prayed that the water would stop short of his head and it did. "It was half a miracle," another miner said, referring to the rescue.

Hale and James R. Grooms, 55, of Bryant, who remained missing Tuesday night, were caught in what miners call a "sand run."

Sand and water sometimes dribble out of the walls or roof of the tunnels of Mars Hill mine here. When that happens, timbers are placed tightly against the small sand run and dirt is piled against it to keep it firmly in place.

But the flow that caught Hale and Grooms was a "blowout," rushing sand, water and rock down the 8-foot-high tunnel like a flash flood.

"I knew what was happening," Hale said. "It was flying toward me."

Hale said he was sitting in the driver's seat of a 20-foot long tram, a device taller than a man that scoops up bauxite ore. Grooms ran toward him, yelling, "Hold it back! Hold it back!"

But Hale and his machine couldn't begin to hold it back. Grooms was swallowed up by the rushing sand. "I knew he was gone," Hale said.

Hale was pushing a "wind" in front of it and the wind knocked Hale off the seat, he said.

Hale, a 30-year employee of the Reynolds Mining Co., said everything occurred in a split-second. He said he jumped up quickly and ran toward the only place he could — to the back of the tunnel, away from the shaft.

It proved to be the only place he could have gone and survived, Hale said.

Hale said the room or the cave was about 20 feet high as compared to eight feet in the tunnel. When the sandy water reached him, it raised him up to within four feet of the ceiling.

Since he wasn't injured, he said he treaded water in the semi-solid mess. Some air was trapped between the sand and the top of the cave. But Hale's oxygen mask was back on the tram, some 16 feet below him in the shaft.

Hale said he almost "froze" to death in the chilly slush. He said he kept moving his arms to maintain some body heat.

"I prayed awhile last night," he said. "I never panicked."

He said that although he didn't think he was dying, he was resigned to leaving his life in the "hands of the good Lord."

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