

**'I'll Be In Church Sunday'**

# Rescued Miner Gets Water, Preacher

HARLAN, Ky. (AP) — Jessie Cornett's nine-hour ordeal deep inside a coal mine left him with a parched throat and a desire to talk with a preacher.

"I got religion, buddy," Cornett said after rescue workers succeeded late Friday in breaking through the rock fall that had trapped him approximately 200 feet from the entrance.

"When I came out of there," he recalled, "I asked for a drink of water and a preacher 'cause I needed to talk to somebody. I ain't been very religious but that preacher convinced me I should go to church Sunday."

The 25-year-old miner, employed at the Grays Knob Coal Co. three miles from here, was operating a coal cutting machine when he spotted the rock beginning to fall.

"I'd been through this before so I knowed what was coming," he recalled. "I ducked under the steel cage on the machine, heard a roar, and saw all that slate in front of me. Buddy, I was scared."

The other eight men on the work shift scattered, then sounded the alarm around 8 a.m.

Cornett's co-workers thought he was dead but started rescue operations immediately. Chains and shovels were used to move the debris and the interior was timbered up to prevent further slides.

Four hours passed before Cornett heard his name shouted by the rescuers.

"I began beating on the side of the machine with my hat to let them know I was alive," he

said. "I didn't want them to blast any of that rock 'cause I'd been a goner."

Once voice contact was established, Cornett relaxed. "I work with good fellers, I knowed they'd get me."

Another miner said later that "we didn't have to try to keep up Cornett's spirits. That boy has got nerves of steel."

Cornett, who has been a miner about five years, escaped unharmed but said his wife Ann, 26, was a "nervous wreck. She's really shook."

Mrs. Cornett, who made several trips to the mine, first was told her husband was dead.

"I went up to my mother's house and I got a call saying he might be alive but it would take about 10 hours to get him out."

She and her daughter, Elizabeth Abbie, 4, spent the hours "praying and waiting."

"I heard on the radio that Jessie had been found alive and I couldn't believe it," she said. She telephoned the Appalachian Regional Hospital, where Cornett had been taken for a checkup, and learned the report was true.

Worrying about her husband's safety has become a daily habit for Mrs. Cornett. "I just trust in luck, I guess. His only accident before was one time when he got his fingers smashed."

She recalled the day had started on a somber note. "My husband felt bad and didn't want to go to work. He said he ought not to go. He felt sick."

She also vowed to put up a fight if Cornett returned to the mine. He will.

"Mining pays good money, buddy," he explained. "I make \$37 a day, six days a week. My daddy was a miner but got out of it when things were slack and now works in the big city, Louisville."

He admitted mining is hazardous. Last year, there were two fatalities and 10 non-fatal accidents among the 34 employees at Grays Knob.

But, said Cornett, "What other kind of work is there around here?"

He said he would be back in the mine Monday. "And you can be sure I'll be in church Sunday."

## Jessie Cornett's nine-hour rescue

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