

# Miner Tells Graphic Story

By GERRY McNEIL,  
Canadian Press Staff Writer  
SPRINGHILL, N. S. (CP)—  
When 30-year-old Ken Gilbert left  
his home for the evening shift  
last Thursday, he didn't think he  
would write a will, celebrate a  
birthday or spend 48 gasping  
hours in Cumberland Coal Com-  
pany's No. 4 colliery here.

He said goodbye to his wife  
Marg and four children and drove  
to the mine wash house where  
miners change for work. There he  
talked with other men on the 3-  
to-11 p. m. shift.

"It's too fine a day to work;  
we should have it off for hunting,"  
said one. Most agreed.

At 3 p. m. Ken Gilbert — of  
medium build with black, unruly  
hair—and 25 other miners went  
down as usual into No. 4, gassy,  
treacherous mine with an history  
of accidents.

"GOING TO BE ROUGH"  
Here is Ken's story from that  
point:

"We were at the face at 6:00  
feet when it happened. It sounded  
like a bump, but the air stopped  
and seemed to go the other way."

A bump is a mine earthquake  
peculiar to Springhill.

"Then we had a feeling it was  
going to be rough. Someone above  
hollered 'Knock off.' We checked  
everything and left fast.

"I had salmon sandwiches and  
cookies but I didn't get a chance  
to eat. Part of the food spoiled  
anyway.

"We split what we had left. Be-  
fore we got to the 4,400-foot level,  
the gas was so bad we couldn't  
breathe. We were almost done for.  
I wrote a will and got Wilfred  
Brown, Sonny Nicholson and  
Wayne Spence to sign it. Then I  
wrote a little note to my wife.

"I lost both sheets in the mine,  
though. But I figure it's better for  
them to be down there and me  
here than the other way around.

"Donnie Campbell and I wand-  
ered as far as the corner of the  
stop, rapping on pipes, pounding  
and pulling trip ropes, trying to  
get attention.

"But we got scared. The gas  
would begin to get us and we'd  
go back. Then others would try.  
"Grover Brown said it was his  
birthday—that was Friday noon—  
and we sang him a 'Happy Birth-  
day.'"

"Then he said, 'Boys, if we get  
out today you're all invited to a  
party at my place.' But we said  
no. Our parties, if we had them,  
were going to be in our own  
homes.

"Some LEFT BEHIND  
"Finally we decided to leave the  
stop and try to get to the bottom  
of the mine and find a gas-free  
spot to get out.

"On the way, Wayne Smith, a  
little fellow, said: 'Ken, I was go-  
ing to get married. Now I don't  
know.'"

"I said, 'Aw, you dumb . . .  
come on.'"

"Then we saw lights. We thought  
it was a draeger crew until they  
shouted to each other that we were  
draegers.

"We all got together and they  
knew no more than we did. There  
were more fellows lying in a shaft  
near there but gas stopped us from  
getting them.

"Our underground manager

"I asked the foreman, Wilfred  
Brown, how we could get to the  
surface. He said he knew a safe  
head air passage up farther. We  
tried to get to it but gas forced  
us back to the 5,700.

"Someone said we could get to  
an air hose on the 54 (5,400-foot)  
level. We made it and took turns  
sucking air. There were about 50  
men there.

"I asked Wilfred if there was a  
way to get to the 4,400-foot level.  
He said there was a way and it  
was good travelling.

NO PANIC  
"No one got panicky or discour-  
aged. We all expected to see  
draegermen (rescue teams) come  
through any minute and there  
wasn't too much gas then.

"We started for the 4,400 but  
had to turn back. Wilfred couldn't  
get his safety lamp on and we  
were flying blind.

"We built a stop to protect us  
and stayed there about six hours,  
I guess. (A stop is a niche in the  
mine wall blocked off to keep out  
gas.)"

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"At the 57 (5,700 feet), we heard  
yelling and could smell gas and  
smoke coming down the shaft, to  
the head entrance to an air pas-  
sage), Pal of mine, Jack Mac-  
Leod, shouted, 'There's men in  
that head.'"

"One of the boys grabbed a  
man and hauled him into our sec-  
tion, which was fresher but begin-  
ning to get gassy. Others were  
lying there but we couldn't get  
them. The gas head had come too  
fast.

ALL SCARED  
"We were all scared — didn't  
know where to run.

"I asked the foreman, Wilfred  
Brown, how we could get to the  
surface. He said he knew a safe  
head air passage up farther. We  
tried to get to it but gas forced  
us back to the 5,700.

"Someone said we could get to  
an air hose on the 54 (5,400-foot)  
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"I asked Wilfred if there was a  
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He said there was a way and it  
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RETURNS TO THE PITHEAD

TOP LEFT. A small door at  
the top of the mine was the  
visual point of interest for  
all who awaited news of rescue  
work within the mine. In a scene often  
reported during the past two days  
all attention is centred on this  
spot. Police restrain the crowd  
from joining rescue workers as  
a stretcher case is carried from  
the mine.

TOP RIGHT Norman Boss, a  
miner for 23 years was one of  
the five men working at the pit-  
head of No. 4 mine when the  
explosion occurred. Three of the  
five men were killed and Mr.  
Boss and Alan Skidmore were  
thrown from the building and  
badly burned. Everything inflam-  
mable in the areas was ignited  
by the explosion. Despite pain-

ful burns to face and hands, he  
returned to the mine area on  
Saturday to await news of his  
brother, Earl Boss, well known  
baseball player with the Spring-  
hill Fencebusters, who was one  
of the miners trapped underground.  
LOWER LEFT. — Emerging  
from underground rescue work,  
a crew of miners welcome the  
hot coffee which the Salvation

Army workers have waiting for  
them at the mine exit.  
LOWER RIGHT. His face as  
black as the mine from which he  
was rescued, one of the miners is re-  
moved from an ambulance and  
rushed to oxygen equipment a-  
waiting his arrival at All Saints  
Hospital.

Photos