

Cross section of a mine rescue operation

The miracle rescue



SKETCH BY HUGH BUNN

By Hugh Bunn

This miner, Dick Woloshyn, the hero in the story was forgotten and passed away about 25 years ago. He hired on with Hudson Bay Mining and Smelting (HBM&S) in 1949 and proved to be a valuable addition.

A tall athletic man who had one bad habit, he was addicted to roll your own cigarettes. Seems he could not get a good smoke unless he rolled it himself. Not only could he roll his own cigarettes but he could do it with one hand, all the way through from pulling the tobacco out of its pouch. While using his long fingers with his first finger as a roller against the next two he could go through the whole operation from start to finish, stick it in his mouth, pull out the 1/4 inch stub of the old one and light the new one from it. Hard to do? Yes, considering all the while he was drilling up-holes in a raise with the one hand holding the drilling machine and the other tucked under his hand hat to keep the water from getting at the cigarette paper.

I saw him roll this cigarette and of course he knew I was watching him so he really made it look good.

Now for the rest of the story.

Bob McGregor and his partner Russ Allen were at the Schist Lake Mine, near Flin Flon working in a drawpoint. Muck (rock and ore of all sizes) is drawn downward by gravity in a mine, and moved laterally only on certain levels, by trains. Muck passes to lower levels through raises (almost vertical passages blasted out of the bedrock to carry muck to lower levels). Their job was to keep the muck moving on down from above in that whenever it jammed up on the grizzly bars (heavy steel bars designed to stop oversize muck and control the flow of muck between levels) he would move it around a bit with a bar until it again poured on down the three or four levels below to the waiting train crew.

McGregor was of course wearing his safety rope in case he slipped.

The two men were accidentally swept through the grizzly and they came to a stop at the end of their ropes. Fortunately the muck again blocked on the grizzly and the pair was left clinging to a small ledge in the open raise below the plugged grizzly.

Some of the finer muck along with some water was making its way down past the bruised men as they lay against the footwall. McGregor had a small ledge to grip and he supported Allen who had only his safety rope hooked to the belt around his middle.

Shortly after, a third man came along and found the pair were nowhere to be seen, however he could hear them calling for help through the loose muck now covering the grizzly bars and preventing them from crawling back out.

Of course all heck broke loose with everyone within a reasonable distance alerted as to what the problem was, and all came running to help.

Woloshyn, the roll your own smoker, was among the dozen or so people standing ready to assist.

The problem was, the men were close to the level and could be talked to, but if the muck was disturbed at all over the bars, there was no doubt a few hundred tons of the muck above would come pouring on down, hitting them while they hung in their safety ropes below and quite possibly cutting their ropes and letting them fall a few hundred feet below.

Woloshyn and the other rescuers went to the next level below and covered the raise with planks to prevent the men falling past that level so at least they would not go down the other few hundred feet.

All this time smaller bits of rock were coming on down with a little water making everyone think it was just a matter of time before the bigger pieces would work their way loose and come crashing on down.

All this time the rescue crew were talking to the hanging miners trying to assure the two men that they were

coming to their rescue and not to be so worried. HMMMMMM, easy to say. Yes.

Jim Lambkin was shift boss that day and Freddie Baginski was part of the rescue crew but it was the cigarette roller who first stepped forward to take the ladders up the raise. Placing one ladder against the next below, they criss-crossed their way up to where the men were perched, unhooked them from their ropes and brought them safely down.

Woloshyn of course knew the danger he was placing himself in while doing this.

Every thing turned out for the best with nobody getting seriously injured and the job went on as usual.

A few years had passed and I had moved over to Snow Lake in another job and had got mixed up in the hockey program they had over there.

I was on a road trip with the local team over to Flin Flon and was standing out in the lobby of the Whitney Forum. Who should I see but Mr. Dick Woloshyn, the hero of that operation many years previous. By this time he had gotten real sick and looked like only a shadow of his former husky self.

I went over to him and shook his hand and thanked him on behalf of all of his fellow mine workers who knew what he done many years ago.

I cannot recall a cigarette hanging from his mouth at the time so I just guessed he had given up his long time habit of rolling his cigarettes with one hand and smoking them.

Shortly after I read in the paper that he had passed away. Dick was a member of our mine rescue teams from the beginning and a good man to have along on any happening, regardless of its hazards.

Like I said at the beginning "Dick Woloshyn", gone but not forgotten. ■

Bob McGregor is 80 years old and still lives in Flin Flon today. Jim Lambkin is also 80 and living in Flin Flon. Russ Allen got out of mining and moved to BC shortly after the accident and has since passed away.