

COAL

THE N.C.B.
MAGAZINE



OCT. 1950

THE EPIC OF KNOCKSHINNOCH

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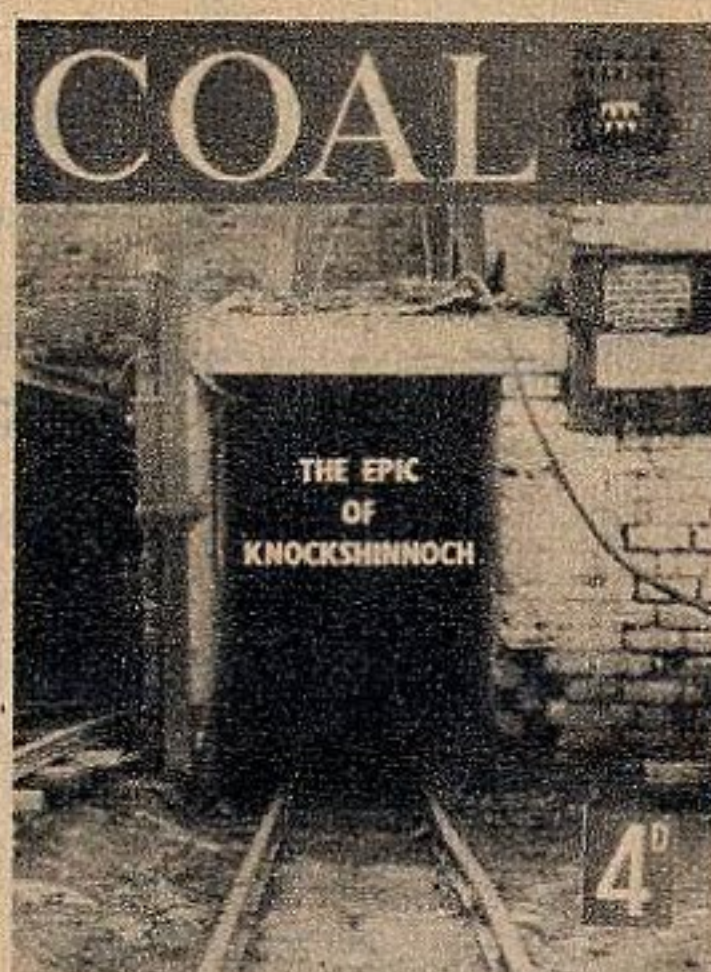
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COAL

Vol. 4. No. 6

October 1950



Cover Picture

The entrance to the Bank 6 mine, out of which 116 entombed men in Castle Colliery made their way to safety in the greatest mine rescue of all time. The full story appears on pages 10 to 17

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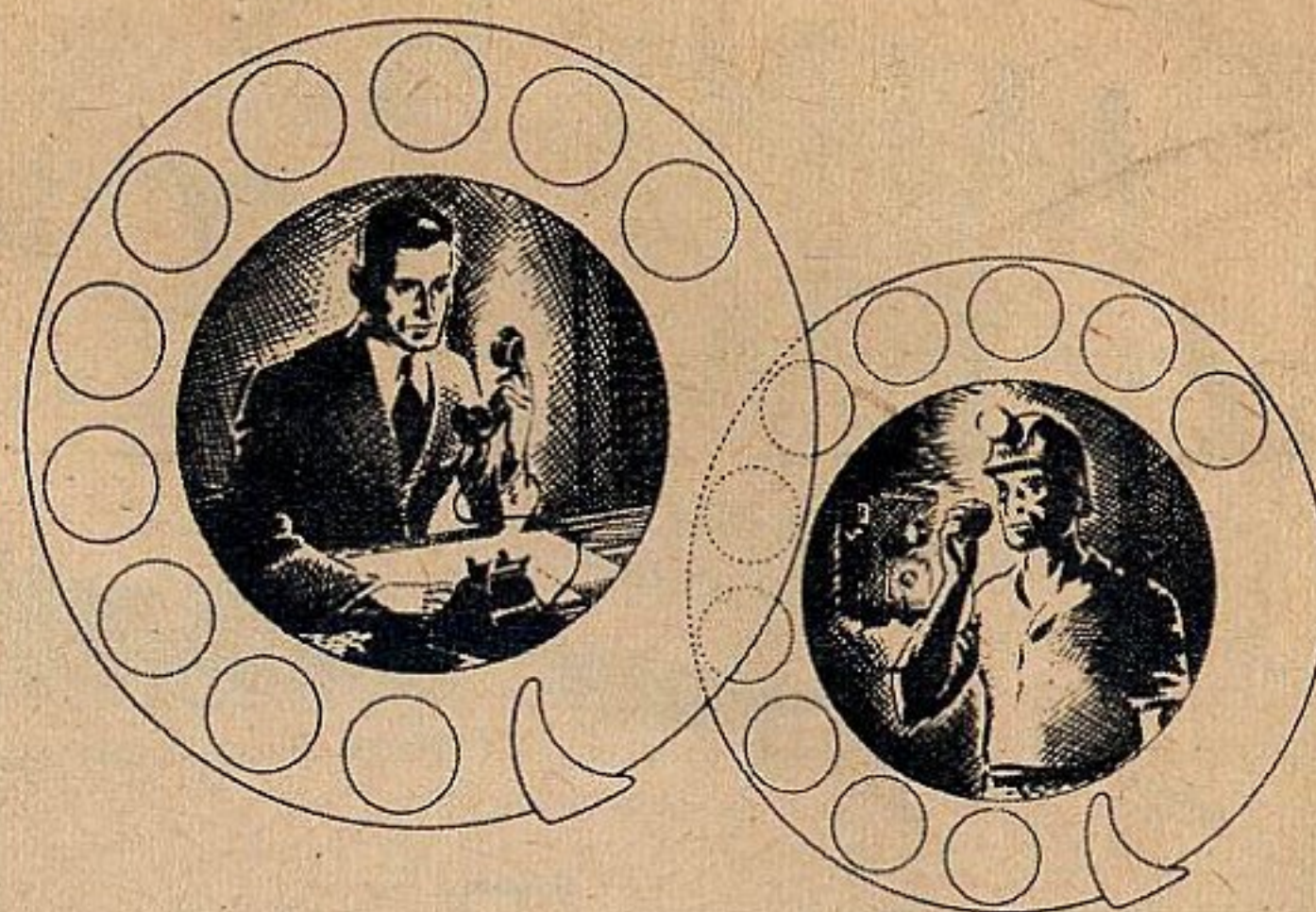
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THE KNOCKSHINNOCH STORY

Tragedy came to the little mining town of New Cumnock in Ayrshire on the night of September 7, when a sea of mud broke through the earth's crust and swept into the workings of Knockshinnoch Castle Colliery, sealing off every exit from the mine. Though 13 men lost their lives, another 116 were saved in one of the greatest rescue operations in the history of British mining. Here for the first time is the full story of that weekend of tragedy and gallantry as told to COAL'S representatives Sid Chaplin and Henry Donaldson by the men of the mining community who shared in the rescue operations. It is an epic story made possible by the closest co-operation of all who took part—the calculated planning of the Area and Production officials, the endurance and courage of the Rescue Brigades as they bored their way through the deadly firedamp, the volunteers who lined the rescue route along which the trapped men clawed and stumbled their way to safety and the disciplined courage of the rescued men

ON Thursday, September 7, it was raining at New Cumnock. It had been raining for days beforehand, but on this day the rain was torrential and it was driven by a north Atlantic gale. The gale whipped the large sheets of water which lie near the town, artificial lochs partly caused by subsidence. It scoured the streets and spent itself against the bare slopes of Black Craig, a hill which looms over the scattered township.

The River Nith was higher than it had been within living memory, and the Afton, a tributary which joins the Nith near New Cumnock, was in full spate. People kept indoors and one inhabitant remembers sitting by the fireside making out his football coupon, glad that he had not to go out in it. There were floods in other parts of Ayrshire and landslides were reported, while a mining engineer later in the day walked down to the shore at Ayr to see a ship which had been blown on the rocks.

The man making out his football coupon went to the door for a moment and waved to a friend making his way to work in the afternoon shift at Knockshinnoch Castle Colliery. He returned to complete his coupon, which he put in his wallet. Remember that coupon. It is a symbol of how unimportant time was to become shortly afterwards.

In the Burns Country

The "Castle", as it is called locally, is situated on ground which rises to the Kirkcudbright Hills. To the south of the shaft there is a field which lies in a hollow. Beyond is Laight Farm, where Robert Burns often stayed. This field is of importance in the story that follows. It is pasture land surrounded by drystone walls. In the middle there is a cairn of stones piled by generations of farmers and beside it two rowan trees, aflame with scarlet berries. To complete the picture there are companion collieries to the west. One of them, a mile from the colliery, is called Bank No. 6. It is a small drift mine.

The afternoon shift had been down nearly four hours when Andrew Houston, the oversman in charge, who had come to the surface for a meal, was called to the phone. He was told that there had been a fall in the No. 5 Heading. He went down the mine immediately and there met the fireman who informed him of the position. He gave this man instructions and returned to the surface, suspecting that something might have happened there. He was right!

First Signs Above Ground

In the field I have described there was a small hole and he returned to the colliery to phone the manager, Mr. Halliday, and instructed Bob Nairn, a blacksmith, to fence it in. When the manager arrived Andrew went underground to make his way to the fall. After he left, Bob Nairn, needing more timber, went back to get it. When he returned the hole was a crater and the fencing he had erected had disappeared into it.

Thousands of tons of moss and sludge had poured into the pit workings and swept along the roads, demolishing timber, uprooting conveyors and motors, and tearing a locomotive bodily from its track.

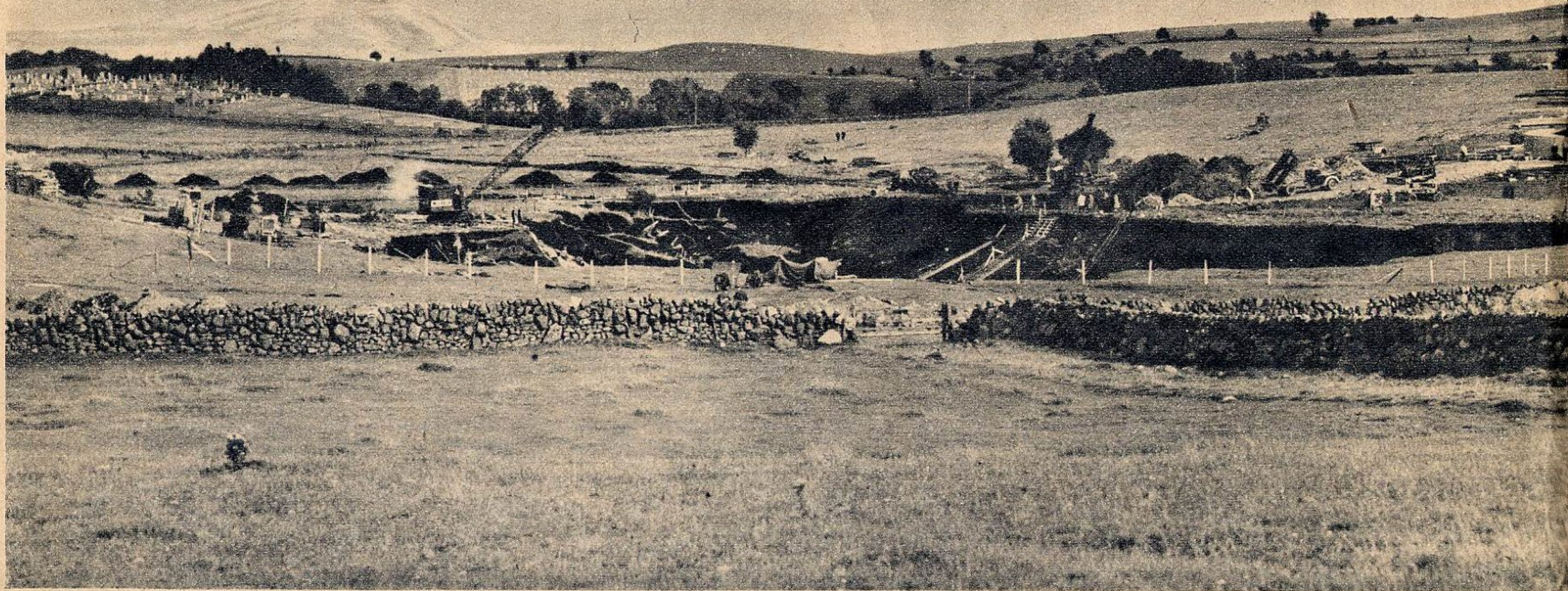
Underground, Andrew Houston was on his way to the fall when he was blown off his feet by a sudden rush of air. He picked himself up and continued his journey. A little farther on he stopped to speak to two men standing by the gate conveyor. There was a terrible roar and the whole conveyor was moved out of position. He took the two men with him to rising ground, pursued all the time by a rumbling noise. Houston told the men to make for West Mine telephone station, while he himself went towards the shaft. There he met other men who told him that the West Mine tunnel to the Castle Pit bottom was completely blocked. They then went to the West Mine telephone station.

Eight men had escaped to the surface. One of these, James Serrie, a 26-year-old locomotive



Down the old Bank 6 Drift goes another squad of volunteers to line the rescue route, while relatives and helpers from the neighbouring countryside watch—and wait





The crater in the field. This picture was taken some days after the subsidence when Wimpey's workmen had bulldozed a road of approach timber track down to the crater's mouth

driver, has described his experience. "I was the nearest man to the fall. I heard a rushing noise and saw loose muddy sludge bursting through the walls. I turned and ran, shouting to the others as I went. Over my shoulder I saw the muck coming faster and faster behind me."

Mr. Halliday, the manager, and Mr. Bone, the agent, then went down and found the West Mine blocked. They went to the surface and notified Mr. Alex Stewart, the Sub-area manager, of the position. Rescue brigades were sent for and simultaneously the Divisional Board, inspectorate, N.U.M., medical people and police were told. At this moment (9.45 p.m.) the whereabouts of Houston and his men was unknown, but at 10 o'clock the telephone bell rang. It was lifted and a voice was heard. It was Andrew Houston speaking from the No. 5 Heading Workings.

Andrew had returned to the West Mine phone station to find the majority of the men already there. Eventually all gathered at the station except the 13 missing men. He collected the men together and told them the exact position, that they were closed in, and all means of escape were blocked. "I kept nothing back from them, I told them we might be in for days and that they should switch off their lamps. I promised to keep them informed of everything." Later he sent Samuel Capstick and four or five volunteers to inspect the South Boig workings.

The Only Hope

At the surface senior officials were in consultation. The agent, Mr. Bone, knew the workings of Bank Mine Colliery and that at one point there was only a 24-foot barrier of coal between Bank 6 and Castle workings. To get to this barrier and breach it was the only hope.

Action was taken at once. It was decided that the officials should divide into three parties. One

party to go to Bank 6 to inspect the workings, another to organise work to obstruct the flow of moss and water at the crater, the third to establish a control H.Q. at the Castle offices.

All this time torrential rain continued. It was now pitch dark and officials had to guide firemen to the crater. Volunteers worked in mud, drenched to the skin and buffeted by the gale. Material was commandeered wherever it lay—straw, timber, pit-props, trees, hutches—anything to arrest the deadly movement of moss and the flow of water. A farmer gave his hay and yoked his cart to draw it. Somebody mentioned that growing trees would be useful, and a volunteer said, "Leave it to me; I'll get them," and trees arrived.

Darkness and Pouring Rain

The work went on ceaselessly. Engineers worked to provide electric power and light, and with daylight work was begun on a conveyor 400 yards long from colliery to crater. Within a few hours it was ready for transporting.

An eye-witness has given his impression of the work that was going on, not only at the crater, but at Castle surface and at Bank. "Men moved in darkness and the pouring rain. I saw nobody directing them but they all knew what they were doing and why—and they went on doing it. Hardly anyone spoke a word. It was a silent army working to a silent discipline."

Rescue brigades had already arrived at Bank 6, awaiting the result of an inspection being made by a party headed by Alex MacDonald, Area production manager, and Mr. Richford, the inspector. They were inspecting Bank 6 workings towards the barrier, workings which had been abandoned more than seven years before.

By this time the world was waiting for news of the trapped men. Reporters were making their

way and soon telephone communications would be overloaded as they made their reports. At 3.30 a.m. Friday morning a tape in a machine in London read: "If, as is feared, there is little hope for the 128 trapped men, this will prove to be the biggest mining disaster since Gresford."

All unconscious of this, the men at West Mine telephone station were waiting for word to start tunnelling. They lay and rested. Some tried to sleep. They told each other jokes, sang hymns. In the tunnel their voices rang out wonderfully clear, and Andrew Houston, waiting some distance away at the telephone, says they sounded like a trained choir as they sang "The Old Rugged Cross".

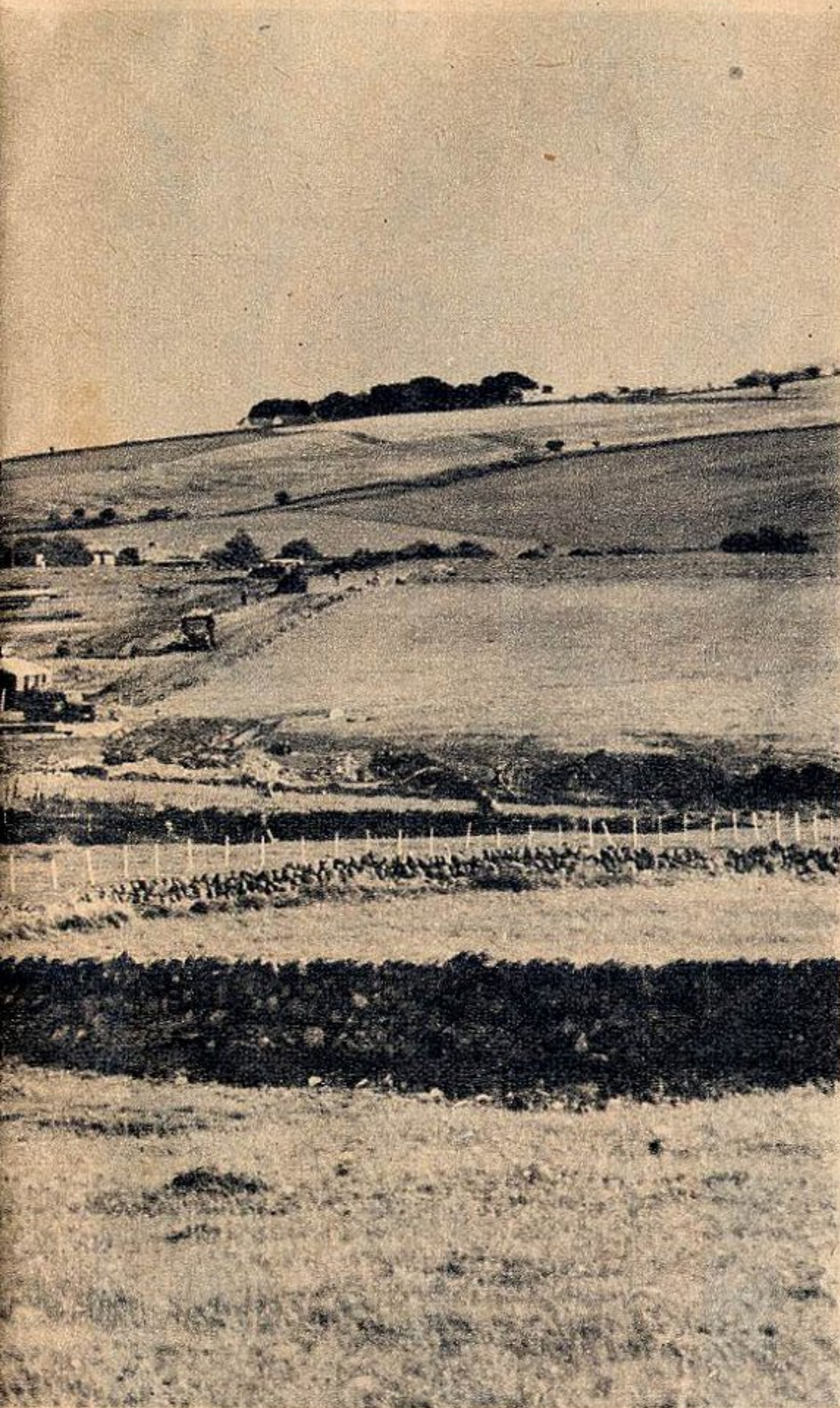
At Bank Mine the party returned and made its report. They had found 400 yards inaccessible owing to gas, and as yet were not sure that teams could get through to the barrier. It must be emphasised that the approach to this barrier between Bank and the Castle was through old abandoned workings.

Help Arrives

Immediately following this report, teams were organised to penetrate these workings, establish a fresh-air base on the edge of the gas-filled waste, and proceed from there to the barrier. The teams carried out these instructions and reported the roadways accessible.

Auxiliary fans were sent for from neighbouring collieries. More Area and Sub-area officials arrived and large numbers of miners from nearby collieries. Heavy switch gear and fans had to be manhandled into position, since there was no haulage in the abandoned workings. Many men were needed. They were needed, and they were there, and they did not spare themselves.

All this time contact was being maintained by telephone every 15 minutes with the trapped



across the fields from the main road and laid a

men, and they were kept informed of the position. At 8.40 a.m. a message was sent of such importance that Andrew Houston was asked to dictate it to someone as it came over. He handed his book to Andrew M'Knight, an engineer, who wrote it down.

It was that the gas was on the move, that the rescue team had already been past the place where the bore was (in the coal barrier) and that it was hoped to give them definite instructions in an hour's time. The oversman had to take volunteers with him to inspect the Castle side of the bore and report by phone that there was nothing in the way of them getting there. No operations were to start until definite instructions came.

Gas Danger

Then followed precise instruction as to how the barrier was to be holed. A borehole had to be kept in advance and when they holed they were to test which way the air was drawing—if towards them they had to plug the hole immediately. When the rescue men heard the Castle men working they would also start in the coal. "The oversman must arrange that the men take short spells and husband their strength." These instructions were given because the rescuers were afraid that the men might move into the gas.

At the surface the rescue brigades were coming forward and being organised into rotation by the superintendents of Kilmarnock and Coatbridge stations. Police were appearing in large numbers to control the swelling crowds, while doctors were busy making arrangements to handle men at Bank pit first-aid rooms and in the baths.

There is no canteen at Bank 6, but rooms in the baths were utilised, with women volunteers—some with menfolk among the trapped, local



The wind and the rain. While the storm rages volunteers fork hay from neighbouring farms to hurl into the crater and to stem the flow of mud and moss

people and Salvation Army officers working under the direction of Miss Helen Macdonald, Area catering officer. Local tradesmen put all their supplies at their disposal. From then on food was always ready, including that which eventually reached the trapped men.

Among the waiting crowds were relatives of the men. They waited patiently and silently. Among them was Mrs. Tom Walker, with three sons among the trapped men. The crowd obeyed the same canon of discipline as the men.

"We Scottish Women . . . !"

Later during that long week-end one of them made this statement when the crowd had been asked to go so as not to hinder the operations. "We Scottish women have been trained not to get in the way of our menfolk when they are in trouble at the mine. We can do more good by staying away."

Now ambulances began to arrive to handle the first consignment of rescued men. Others were being held in reserve. This was organised by Charles Fleming, not a member of the industry, but a bank agent, as they are called in Scotland. Later he manned the Bank 6 telephone night and day until every man was out. Two-way telephone communication was established from West Mine station to Castle surface, from there to Bank 6 and down to the fresh-air base.

Approximately 18 Salvus respirators—a form of self-contained breathing apparatus—were at Bank, and 12 were sent underground—a purely precautionary measure at this stage.

The problem confronting the rescuers was that of getting fresh air into the wastes so that when the trapped men penetrated the barrier they could be brought to the surface. Operations had already started to dilute the noxious gases. This entailed increasing the number of auxiliary

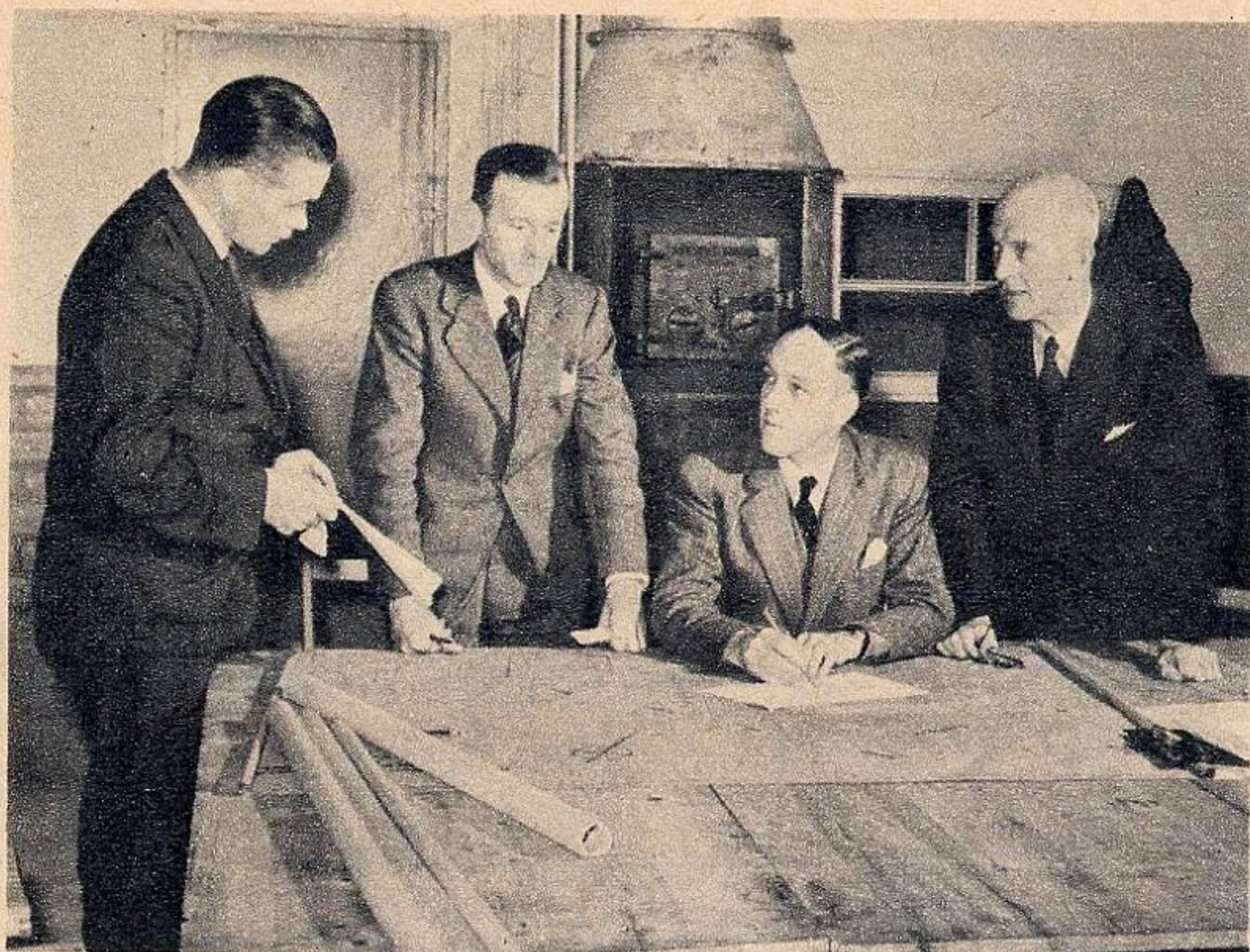
fans, and this took time, owing to the need for manhandling. It was quickly realised that the volume of gas was very extensive. While some of the reports from the fresh air-base said that the gas was being pushed back, only too many revealed no progress, or even that the base had had to be moved farther back. The rescuers tried to maintain 3 per cent of gas in the atmosphere passing through the auxiliary fans to the main ventilation stream.

About one p.m. on Friday, Andrew Houston reported to surface that the telephone was weakening and that the bell was very faint. So faint indeed that he had discussed with his engineers the possibility of using lamp batteries to strengthen it. The management were now faced with a dilemma. On the one hand they might lose contact with the men. On the other the gas might blow through on to the trapped men if they authorised the pushing through of the tunnel too soon.

Message Every Ten Minutes

An answer was found in each case. It was arranged that contact would be established by phone every 10 minutes by the clock, and the A.G.M. sent a message telling the men to start but to work slowly in the hope that their reduced rate of progress would coincide with the clearing of the firedamp. Fan operations had continued relentlessly, but now were pushed to the limit.

By this time Andrew Houston and his men had begun work on the rescue hole, the men going down in squads of four with a shotfirer or fireman in charge. About 4 p.m. on Friday one of the squads reported that they had heard a tapping in answer to theirs. Later, when the rescue team had started in the coal, the squads reported that they thought they were too far to the left hand. Andrew checked this with a later



Sub-Area Mgr., A. M. Stewart; Asst. Prod. Mgr., J. Davie; A.G.M., D. L. McCardel; and Prod. Mgr. A. B. Macdonald were planners



A rescue team set out to reach the entombed men in the Castle workings with food to sustain them in the difficult hours



Charles Fleming, who manned the telephone system



Sixty-eight-year-old James Haddow, oldest of the entombed men, in hospital, finds that a cup of tea goes down well.



Tom Breckney, one of the first rescue workers

squad and reported it to surface. Surface instructed the rescuers to move outbye 25 yards, and this proved to be in line with the Castle men.

Shortly after 11 p.m. on Friday a message was received from the men that the tunnel had holed through and that the air was flowing from Castle to Bank; also that they could hear the rescue workers. Houston hurried back to tell the great news over the phone. The hooter was sounded at the surface and Will Pearson, Lord Balfour and the A.G.M. gave the good news to the waiting crowd. But there was an edge to the announcement. The rescue hole could not be used because of the noxious atmosphere reaching from it to the fresh-air base. This was also explained to the trapped men below.

It was noted by Alex Stewart at the base that when the hole went through considerable quantities of gas were forced towards the fan by air coming through the rescue hole. It was then considered possible that this flow could have been due to the pressure caused by the inflow of moss at the Castle side.

The first team went through with food, drink and blankets. It was a difficult moment. Some of the men sprang to their feet and snatched their powder tins, thinking they would be leaving at once. There was an outburst of joy, only to be

dashed when they realised that beyond the barrier of coal they had breached was a more intangible and deadly barrier which would have to be cleared. But they agreed that with food they could be kept going.

Food and drink. That made all the difference. They had been underground now almost 34 hours. Most of them had had their last meal at 6 o'clock on the Thursday. Many of them searched the pit floor for old crusts, brushing off the mould before eating them. Their only water supply had been in an old barrel used for storing water for wet drilling. This was polluted with oil and when the men filled their bottles they found a thick scum on the bottlenecks. Houston warned them not to drink this, but only wet their lips.

Now at last they had real food and water, although not in great quantities. When the hole was breached they had started a gay concert. They had talked of food and drink. One lad counted the meals he had missed and said he hoped his mother would have them all lined up on the table when he got out. Another had sighed for a drink and Houston had joked, "A half whisky in a pail and a cigarette a mile long might satisfy you, eh?" As opening time drew near an older man spoke of a publican

who had moved from the district—"if he was here he would be down with the rescue teams—gas or no gas—making sure he'd lose none of his customers."

A tribute is due to their discipline in face of many disappointments, their unswerving obedience to their leader, and to the way they faced tribulation with a joke, a quip or a song.

Their discipline was to be tested again about midnight on Friday when it was decided that the system of ventilation should be changed. Instead of exhausting, the fans would force air into the tubes. This instruction was transmitted to the fresh air base, but the people there had anticipated the decision and were already changing over.

On more than one occasion groups of officials working separately thought their way to simultaneous decisions. Tired and sleepless though they were, their minds were geared to the job in hand and the timing of every new move was almost miraculous.

Hours of anxious waiting followed this change, when only too small an impression was made by the diluting process. A temporary stopping had to be put into the rescue hole. Once again the trapped men were informed of this. It was a severe strain on their discipline. Teams were

coming and going, a rescue hole had been made. Why should they stay put?

There was an answer, and there was a man on his way to give it. David Park, deputy Labour Director of the Division, had hurried to the scene. He had worked as a young man in the New Cumnock Collieries. His parents still live in the town, and he had relatives among the trapped men. He had known and worked with many of them.

About midnight on Friday, Park approached the A.G.M. with a request. The gist of it was that with the hole made the men would be wondering why they could not come out. He volunteered to go through and explain the position to them. It had been 10 years since he had done rescue work so, permission granted, he was medically examined, found fit and set off underground.

First Talk of the Salvus

He reached the fresh-air base about 3 a.m., where he found the reorganised plans in motion. When he informed Alex Stewart of his mission the latter replied, "You're too late, David. We have put a stopping in the rescue hole."

Ventilation was not clearing the gas quickly enough, and the use of Salvus for bringing out the men was at this point discussed at the base as, indeed, it was at the surface. Once again there was an example of separate groups independently reaching the same conclusion. After some discussion it was agreed that Park should be allowed to go through as the sixth member of a rescue team, on condition that he returned with the next. They set off.

The stopping at the rescue hole was a brattice heaped with coal, and they had to remove this with shovels, wearing their Proto apparatus. The distance from the base to the rescue hole was 400 yards, from the rescue hole to West Mine station 680 yards all uphill. It was a severe test on Park, but eventually they reached the West Mine station.

Park did not return but sent the team back with orders to rebuild the rescue hole stopping and then carry on to the base. He then explained the situation in detail to the men and assured them that the best brains in the industry were concentrating on their escape. He succeeded in convincing them that their best chance was to stay put until the order came to make a move. He is a man of intellectual ability, and there can be no doubt that his arguments were cogently put. But, in the words of Andrew Houston, "What counted most of all was that he was there—and stayed there." There is no doubt that his staying was the most powerful and convincing argument of all.

Search for Apparatus

Stewart had by this time returned to the surface and discussed with officials the possibility of using self-contained breathing apparatus. He found agreement, and at 8 a.m. on Saturday, arrangements were made to collect Salvus apparatus from all parts of Scotland, including fire stations, R.O.F. factories, and naval sources. There were even provisional arrangements to bring special apparatus in a fast naval pinnace to Wemyss Bay. The possibility of flying apparatus from America was considered. But the response from near at hand eventually provided enough apparatus.

Gas Continues to Increase

At 11 a.m. a message was received from the inspector at Bank that gas had reached 3 per cent about 50 yards above the fan—and the

percentage was increasing. Four brattice stoppings had been erected to stop all leakages of gas between the fan and the rescue hole, but the percentage continued to increase.

Two messages on Saturday morning also gave cause for anxiety. One of the men, 19-year-old Gibb McAughtrie, was seriously exhausted, so much so that one of his mates had to cradle his head and wet his lips with water. And the team making its way from West Mine to the rescue hole had discovered that 3 and 5 per cent of gas was accumulating only 150 feet from the trapped men.

The situation at the West Mine station again became extremely difficult. It was felt that Gibb was the first—that soon others would collapse. Some felt that a breakout should be made. Then three incidents and some good news restored morale. Park put on his apparatus, went toward

in 1879, and the project brought new hope to what had been considered to be a dying area by the local mining community. The chairman of the then owning company made a study of American mechanised mining methods, and the West Mine was driven at record speed, using one of the first Joy-loaders to come to Britain from America under Lease Lend.

Since then it has maintained its reputation as one of the most advanced of the Ayrshire collieries.



Knockshinnoch Castle Colliery

Specially drawn by Keith Watson, Art Editor of COAL

ON rising ground above the township of New Cumnock is the heapstead of Knockshinnoch Castle Colliery. Beyond "the Castle", as the colliery is locally known, are the Kirkcudbright Hills, Black Craig the nearest, with a pattern of drystone walls and little whitewashed farms half hidden by bent trees. This is on the edge of Burns country, and the poet's "sweet Afton" flows not 300 yards from the pit.

The shaft was sunk in 1940 on the site of the old Knockshinnoch No. 2, abandoned

the rescue hole, and brought bottles of water previously left there. This gave them water at a time when it was badly needed. Immediately after this there was a draught of fresh air from the West Mine. Then a team brought more food and the good news—that the next team would take Gibb out, wearing Salvus apparatus.

The messages regarding Gibb and the accumulation of gas had brought a decision. This was that a member of a rescue team should go in wearing Proto apparatus and return wearing Salvus, reporting on his experience. This could not be done because of the urgency of getting Gibb out. So it was decided to send a team through to bring him out wearing the previously untried Salvus.

This was accomplished. Those three simple words contain a world of endeavour. Gibb was borne out all the way on a stretcher—a distance



John Park worked in the lamp cabin, pictured with George Breckney, brother of Tom, and one of the early volunteers



Emrys Hughes, M.P.; Sir Andrew Bryan, H.M. Inspector of Mines; The Minister of Fuel and Power: Mr. D. L. McCardel, and Lord Balfour view the crater

of two miles—part of the way by men wearing heavy breathing apparatus. His rescue involved the use of 27 team members, and at once it became obvious that even with men able to walk some other system of rescue would have to be evolved. But Gibb—the first of 116—reached the surface, and his arrival was greeted with joy not only by the waiting crowd, but also by the trapped men who were told of his arrival by phone. As he was passed to the doctors, reinforcements were arriving—rescue teams from far afield—and they were sent underground. At this stage there were no fewer than 10 separate brigades underground.

But Gibb's arrival was followed by a long interval. The crowd became depressed as time passed. But arrangements were going on at full speed now that Gibb was out. Alexander MacDonald decided to carry on with a plan already worked out. The encroachment of gas on the trapped men had pulled the trigger for this new scheme. It was that the men could come out in Indian file, wearing Salvus apparatus, along a route lined by rescue men stationed at intervals of 25 to 30 yards all the way from the West Mine station to the fresh-air base—a distance of about half a mile in an unbreathable atmosphere. This route lining was in itself a great feat of organisation, since the rescue men along the route had to be relieved at regular intervals.

Like Blackpool Illuminations

One of the three doctors at the fresh-air base volunteered to go to the advance air base which had now been established, to give help with oxygen reviving apparatus. This was in case any man was near to collapse when he reached this point.

Volunteers manned the route from the main air base to the mine mouth. Later one of the rescued men was to compare the sight of these hundreds of lights to the Blackpool illuminations. A defective lamp in the noxious atmosphere inbye would have caused an explosion at any

moment. They knew this, but they stood their ground, proud and glad that they were able to play their part, and some looked searchingly when the trapped men started coming through, waiting for a face they knew—a father, a brother, a son, or a mate.

One lad at least had no face to watch for—before going down he had been asked for his name and where he came from. "From Falkirk," said the lad. "Yes, but what party are you with?" "I'm with no party—I'm on ma own!"

No Lack of Volunteers

In fact, as we found later, he had never been down a pit before. He was not alone in this among the men lining the rescue route. "I recognised bakers, butchers, carpenters, and many other tradespeople from the district among the volunteers," said one of the rescued men. They were there to help, and that was the only qualification needed.

When a hundred volunteers were asked for at Bank 6 every man in the crowd surged forward. Out of the hundred selected one man was without a belt—to carry his lamp. He called for a belt and, as another man described the scene, "The air was thick with belts" from those who had been disappointed.

Back at the West Mine station, Park, Houston and the firemen were making their arrangements.

The Diesel locomotive was shunted into position so that its lamps could light the spot near the telephone from which the men would be sent off. Names were taken and the men were grouped in threes, in descending order of age. Houston informed the men of his plan to send the oldest out first and they wholeheartedly agreed.

The oldest man, James Haddon, was 68. They had been in the pit some 50 hours. Some of them suffered from ailments or old injuries. But they set a great example to the younger men. One of them, a Spaniard, Juan Carracedo, reached the base in 13 minutes. This gave occasion for some dry Scots humour. As soon as this news reached Houston he said to the men: "Well

boys, old Wang has got out in 13 minutes—there's no reason why any man shouldn't get out in 14 minutes!" It was a while before the men realised that Andrew was pulling their legs.

Another, Hugh Brown, was asked how he felt when his mask was being fitted. "I'm all right," he replied. "Don't worry about me." He set away as if for a stroll, in spite of his game leg.

Yet another, Tom Currie, suffers from asthma. He was sent out twice and each time was brought back, the second time more distressed than the first. The doctors sent in an injection and a fresh respirator and on his third trip, after a long rest, he succeeded.

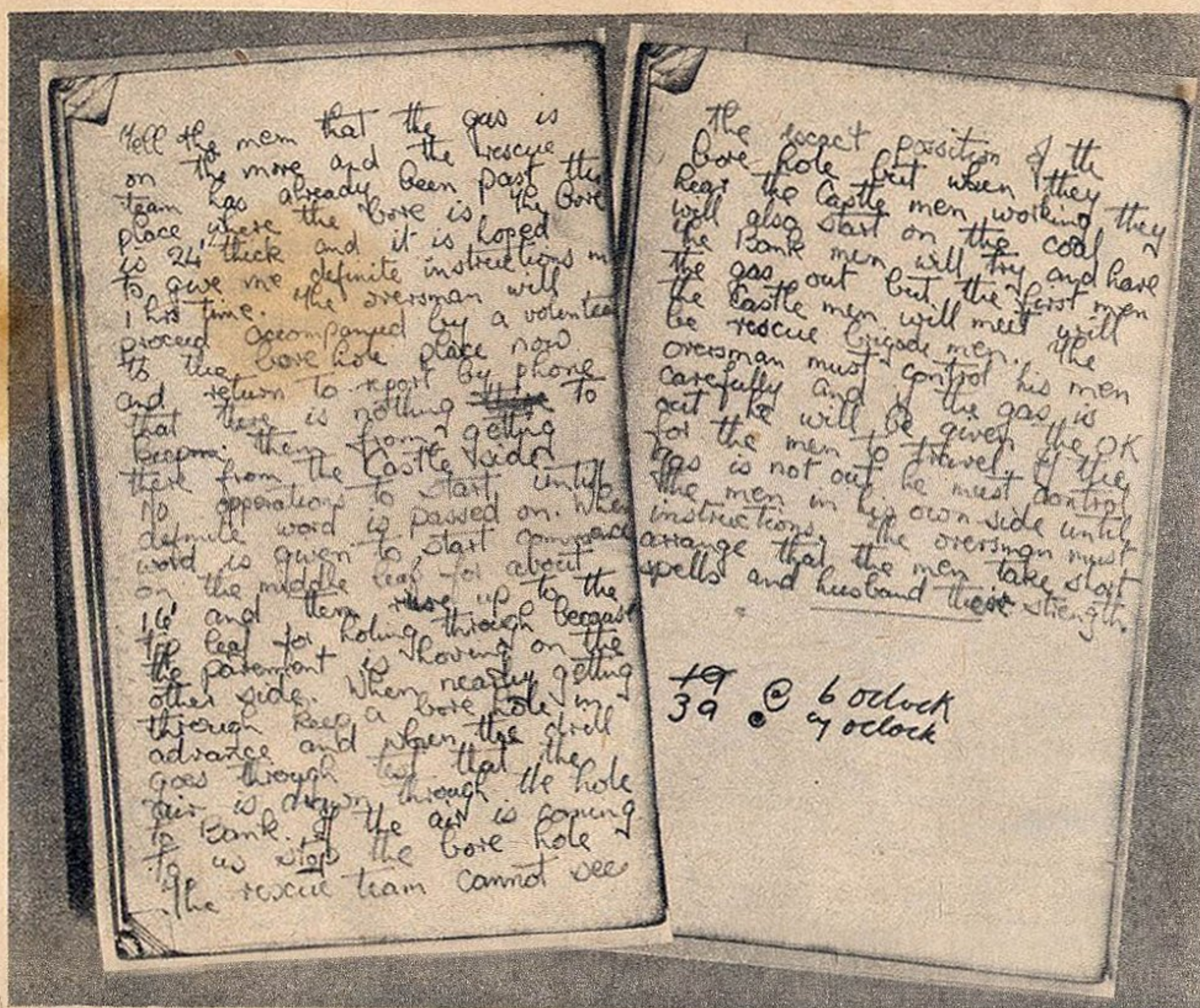
As the men reached the fresh-air base their comrades were informed. At 5.22 on Saturday afternoon the first walking man reached base, and from then on they left in varying numbers until David Park was able to announce at 11.41 p.m. that the last man had left, and that he was about to follow.

In a little under seven hours, 116 men had endured the final test and stood up to it.

The Way Back

The immediate effect of wearing a respirator is to speed up breathing, and this causes panic. Nothing induces panic more than interruption with breathing even when a man is fresh. But this was not the only thing they had to suffer. The way out was through old workings. They had to crawl through the painfully narrow rescue hole and were tried by uneven ground, but they came through, every last one of them, stooping, scrambling, stumbling; some of them falling into the arms of the men awaiting them at the advanced fresh-air base.

The first great task was accomplished, but another awaited. The attention of all was already turned on the missing 13 men, and on Saturday evening with the rescue operation well launched, a message had been sent asking for Andrew Houston to be given priority to the surface, since his knowledge of conditions below would



A.G.M. McCardel's order to stand firm, and the plan which Houston put into operation. Following is his timing of men out for the first two hours



Andrew Houston, with David Park, Deputy Labour Director, who was the last man to leave the Castle Pit

help in planning the search for the missing men. Park had to urge him to go, since he did not wish to leave his men, but eventually the oversman left for the surface. There he gave his information and was taken to hospital.

The men were received by doctors as they came out, attended to, and then sent on to hospital by ambulance. Some were taken by car. Others decided to go home and were taken. But there was no waiting. All that they desired was at hand. And at Ballochmyle Hospital beds were awaiting them, with all the comfort and attention they needed. Of those who went home many had later to go to hospital. But it is told that on the Sunday morning one man at least of the rescued was discovered working with the volunteers and had to be ordered home.

Memorial Services

Sunday morning came. It was a fine day, and the congregations in the kirk and the chapels were larger than usual as the people gathered to give thanks for those saved and to offer prayers for the missing. The crowds had now gone, but towards noon a trickle of people began up the hill toward Castle pit to seek for further news.

Work was still continuing at the crater and among the volunteers was the man who had filled in a football coupon on the afternoon of the previous Thursday. One of his mates was going home for a meal. "Just a minute," he said, and felt in his wallet for his coupon. Then he stopped dead. "It doesn't matter," he said. Time had ceased to exist for him. All that counted was his neighbour down below.

He was not alone. Men and women, hundreds of them, underground and on the surface, had forgotten sleep, forgotten food, forgotten home, forgotten themselves. Some had used their strength, some their brain, but they had not broken. They would not allow themselves to break. They held up and, in holding up, brought their trapped companions home again. Some have said that the 115 were saved by a miracle—

but if it was, it was a miracle of human endurance on the one hand, of concerted, concentrated endeavour on the other.

Sunday morning saw a lessening of the crowds, but not of the effort to discover the missing men. Work had never stopped at the crater. Civil engineers and the Fire Service in co-operation with the N.C.B. were working to stop water from running into the crater. They were attempting to secure the opening to the mine which the subsidence had exposed. New ditches had been cut to divert water to a common pumping point, where a row of trailers and electrically driven pumps lifted water across rising ground to where it could run away.

It was decided that operations designed to allow safe inspection of No. 5 Heading through the hole in the crater should be carried on. In addition, ventilation operations would continue at Bank 6 to maintain fresh air as close as possible to the rescue hole. A stopping would be built in the rescue hole to separate the ventilating systems of the two collieries. Dredging operations were started in the Castle shaft with an improvised chest attached to the cage bottom bringing up silt and water.

Descent Through the Crater

Another decision was about to be made. Since Andrew Houston was now rested, permission was obtained from the hospital authorities to interview him to determine as far as possible the position of the missing men. Armed with this knowledge a party made a descent through the crater hole into No. 5 Heading. They went down with life lines and carried a portable telephone. The heading descends at a gradient of 1 in 2 and the floor was extremely difficult, but the party penetrated 500 feet.

On their return, their report was discussed and a second party went down and penetrated 700 feet. On their return they reported that they had seen no evidence of the missing men, but they had got to a point 150 feet from the place

reached by Samuel Capstick and his party in the early hours of Friday (at the direction of Houston) and before they retired to the Main West mine station.

It was decided to attempt to make a hole through this distance of 150 feet, since it would provide a known open road from the crater to the mouth of Bank 6 mine. This would give promise of facilities for greater investigation. Unfortunately, during Sunday night violent storms with heavy rain came and a further movement of silt took place in the crater, while large quantities of water again flowed into the workings.

Inflow of Water Continues

Further investigation from the crater hole was now impossible, and work was confined to activities in the crater designed to stop the continual inflow of water. This was successfully accomplished and sumps were provided near the hole mouth from which compressed air pumps operated.

On Monday night David Livingstone McCardel, A.G.M., made this statement:

"We regret having to say that while exploration work will continue as rapidly as possible, no false hopes can now be entertained for the recovery of the 13 men trapped in the Knockshinnoch Castle Colliery. We unite in offering our deepest sympathy to the relatives of the men."

The names of the 13 men who lost their lives are:—

John Dalzell, J. D. Houston, T. Houston, W. Howat, J. Love, W. Lee, J. Taylor, J. McLatchie, W. McFarlane, S. Rowan, Dan Strachan, John Smith, John White.