



## CHAPTER 14 – The Granduc Slide



**ON FEBRUARY 18, 2013** The *Globe & Mail* published the following as its inside front page “Moment in Time” story of the day:

**“FEB. 18, 1965** After weeks of bitter cold, when only a dusting of snow fell, a heavy storm suddenly hit the mountains north of Stewart, BC, on the southern tip of the Alaska Panhandle. Overnight, 4.3 metres of snow dropped on the Granduc Mine site, where 154 men were housed on the Leduc Glacier. Work crews were shovelling off roofs and digging out equipment when a slab of snow released on the mountain above them. Survivors said it fell noiselessly and ‘was like watching a huge white wave with bulldozers and men rolling on the top.’ Of the 68 men caught in the avalanche, 26 died and 20 were injured. The last found alive was Einar Myllyla, who was buried for three days and six hours. ‘Don’t move me, I think my legs are frozen,’ were his first words to rescuers.’” – *Mark Hume*

The Granduc Mine was certified to LiUNA Local 168 and Bro. Marvin Cardinal was working there when the avalanche hit:

**Because I Know What’s Going to Happen** When I first went up there, there were about thirty miners there altogether. We were only in there roughly twenty-eight days when the slide came down. It snowed all night, there were two labourers shovelling snow from the bunkhouse to the kitchen, going back and forth all night. By the time they got to the other end, they had to turn around and go back, there’d be a foot and a half of snow behind them.

The guy I was rooming with, his name was Harold Hagen, he was up there before, up in that country years ago, and he and I went for a coffee about ten o’clock at night. He said, “You know if there’s a way of getting out of here tonight, I’d go. Because I know what’s going to happen.” He was right.

**The Slide Hits** The next morning we went to work, I was on day shift, and I had a train of muck coming out of the portal. The track crew was working at the portal because the track was kind of spreading a little bit, and they were stabilizing it. So I had to stop, well I didn’t really stop, I was just creeping along, waiting for them to get their tools out of the road. And down she come.

It hit that portal and we had an eight-inch air line, that supplies air underground, 120 pound air pressure on it, you can imagine when that let go, it was just like a big explosion. It shook the whole bloody tunnel right into where the guys were working. The guys at the face, they knew right away something was wrong, they could feel the concussion and they all come running out.

It didn't close the tunnel completely because the tunnel was fourteen by fourteen and right at the top there was a little opening. So I crawled out and I could see one man, that's all. That was at the dump, "Porkchops" Campbell, he was dumping cars at the dump and he saw the slide coming, so he jumped towards a car, an empty car, and he hung on to the car. And the car floated up, so he was pinned underneath the car, just sitting there having a smoke. Didn't even lose his hard hat.

**The Silence** But you know, when you come out of that portal, the noise out there is so loud—compressors, and lighting plants, and all that stuff going—that you can't hear yourself talk. And all of a sudden everything's gone silent. Not even one sound. Everything was buried.

**Rescue Operations at the Shop** So right away we got a team together and they picked a guy to lead it, a guy with avalanche experience, to organize what we were going to do. So he laid out a plan, and there was about seven guys working in the shop, so he laid out a plan that we start with four holes. A hole here, a hole here, I think they were about twenty feet apart, in the shop area because we wanted to get in there to see if anybody was alive. So I was over here in this hole and I was already down maybe eight feet from where I started. I went down about six feet and then you bench over so you can relay the snow up on the next bench. And there was a guy on that bench throwing it out of the hole. In fact, there was three of us there already. So I must have been starting in the second lift already.

The next hole over, they hit the shop. And they let out a holler, "We found it! We found the door of the shop!" Well, that's what we were looking for. So everybody took off, the guys that were working with me,

...he was hollering his head for all he was worth and nobody could hear him.

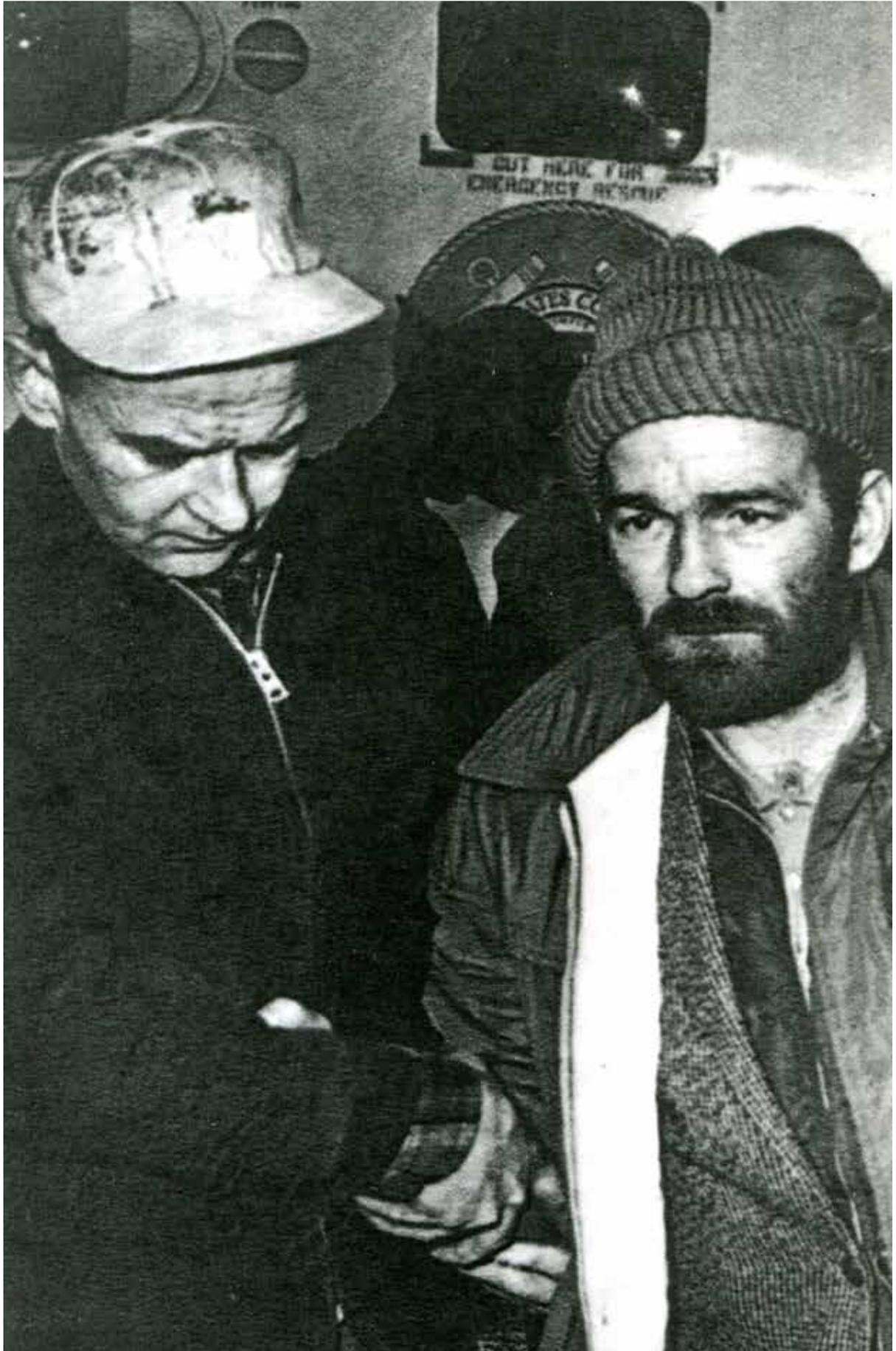
they went too. I don't know what made me stay there, I don't know what it was. I think I took about another four or five shovels and there was no place to put the snow because there was nobody on the next bench to throw it up further.

**Out Come a Hand** We had these brand new muck sticks from the warehouse, they come to a point, and I was just going to take another swat there, out come a hand. Well, I tell you, that was spooky. It was the Master Mechanic. He was walking across the yard and the snow just closed in around him. Anyway, here he is and there was about that much snow between me and him. He could hear every word we were saying, but we couldn't hear him. He was hollering his head off—he had a little cubby hole around his face there where he was breathing—and he was hollering his head for all he was worth and nobody could hear him. And we were right there. He was maybe eight, nine feet under, ten feet at the very most.

So anyway a helicopter come in with a nurse, we could see him up there hovering over top of us, the snow - there was big flakes like that coming down, you couldn't see any more than ten feet ahead of you. And we could hear the helicopter up there, in fact we could see a dark spot in the sky, but he couldn't take a chance coming down at first because it was a white-out.

They flew all the cripples into Ketchikan, they were the first passengers on the helicopters. And when I got to Ketchikan the next day—we had to go get checked in the hospital by the Red Cross, and I was okay, nothing wrong with me. In fact, I shovelled snow from right when it happened, from about nine o'clock in the morning until seven the next morning. Never stopped, have a bite to eat and keep going. So I went up to the hospital, and there's this mechanic there and he's crying just like a baby. He said "Thank you very much for saving my life."

**I Was Happy to See Him Die** So we got to the end of the shop because we knew there were people in there. We had this great big mucking machine called a Conway Mucker and when the slide hit the shop,



*Survivors at the Granduc Slide.*  
Photo courtesy of Vancouver Public Library

they were welding on it there and the thing fell over on top of this mechanic. The torch was going and the torch went into the side of his head and when we dug him out he was still alive. He was still moaning a little bit. But as soon as we got him on top of the snow, he died right now. And I was happy to see him die because the poor man, he had like two heads, eh? Big bubble there from the torch cooking his head.

**It Could Have Been Me** We only lost one miner. "Cap" Palmer was the only miner we lost. Just happened he was outside and it caught him running across the yard. And if the track crew hadn't been working at the portal, I would have been right under it too. And Roy Decker, the Shift Super, he'd come running underground to give those guys shit for holding us up, because we're on a cycle and we've got to try to make our complete cycle every day, and he come running in to tell them to get out of our way, not to hold us up, and the snow was right on his ass.

It was mostly carpenters and labourers that got killed. They were building a snow shed from the portal up to the camp, there was about ninety feet difference in elevation. They were working putting a roof over the walkway. And there were three miners that went into the coffee room we had there, a shack about fourteen by fourteen where the guys used to go drink coffee, they walked in there going to have a coffee and that's when the snow slide come down. Two of them went with the shack and one stayed with the floor. And he said he never got such a ride in all his life, he went about a good half a mile in a matter of seconds.

**Doctor in Camp** Somebody spotted an arm sticking out, so that's how they found the two guys that went with the shack. They weren't dead, just banged up real bad. One guy had a broken back, a broken neck. They were lucky there was a doctor in camp. He'd come into camp to talk to the First Aid people and upgrade all their tickets and stuff. A lot of guys would have suffered, he had a lot of painkillers with him, I guess.

Somebody spotted an arm sticking out...

**T-Bone Dinner Break** So I shovelled all night until the next morning, and I was tired, man, I was tired. That was hard work. There was no end. You know there's somebody down there, you want to get them out. And every so often you'd hear rumble coming, another slide coming down, because there were big mountains all around. You'd hear this rumble coming and everybody dives for the portal. One guy got his leg broken trying to get in the tunnel, guys running over him, stomped on him, I guess.

That night we had T-bone steaks for supper. We were frying them on a muck stick, a shovel. Because it took the cook shack out, but it didn't take out the meat shack. The cook shack was gone, but it went right over the bunkhouses. There were some guys in the bunkhouses didn't even know there was a slide until they woke up. They didn't even know, went right over top of the bunkhouse. This is what I heard, I don't know for sure.

**Einar Myllyla** There was a guy who was buried underneath the snow for seventy-two hours, seventy-two hours he was buried under the snow. I think it was the guy in the lunchroom, the guy who stayed with the floor. He was away in a spot where they were using a D8 to make a path for the helicopters, he was underneath there. I'd never seen so many helicopters in all my life. There'd be two sitting on the ground and about four or five hanging up in the air waiting to come down. The D8 packed it down so the helicopters didn't kick up too much snow when they came in for a landing. And it was the helicopters that uncovered him, finally uncovered him from whirring the snow away. He lost his legs from his knees down. They were frozen, they had to cut them off. But imagine living through seventy-two hours under the snow.

**The Evacuation** The helicopters flew us all out to one of those rescue cabins along the shore by the salt chuck. There's a cabin there and a boat and a little three or four horse motor and dry food for people



that are stranded. The helicopters dropped us all off there. Well the bad ones, the broken backs and all that, they flew them right into Ketchikan. There was a big pleasure craft that was in the area, some rich American, and it was roughly about one hundred feet long—it was a big boat, eh—so I guess they got in contact with him and he said he'd come in as close as he could and from there we'd get expedited out in the little fourteen-foot aluminium boat with the four or five horse motor. And you could only haul three guys at a time and that big pleasure craft was way out there, probably about half a mile. And this was the middle of February. Do you know how cold it is?

They started hauling us out there, and me and Archie McDonald, Vince Ready, and I can't remember the other guy, and the guy who was running the motor, we were the last ones left. We were only allowed to carry three and the guy running the boat, but there were five of us left for the last trip. Well we weren't worried about taking that boat back. We took a chance on the five of us getting in rather than having to make another trip. You take the boat back you're going to have to swim. So anyway, we all got in and it was a good thing we had our muckers on, big steel muckers, underground boots, and our hard hats because we started taking on water, the water was coming right over the bow. We all took one boot off and started bailing water. Oh man, I tell you, that was cold! At the end of February? That was cold. When we got on that big pleasure craft, man, it was like in heaven. Like a dream. Even had a cocktail lounge in there. We piled in there as many as could get in there.

**Ketchikan, Alaska to Vancouver, BC** Then we got into Ketchikan and they had to take us all to the hospital. The Red Cross wanted to check us over though most of us were okay. And they opened up a hotel there that had been closed for the winter, just specially for us. Because there was a hundred and ten of us, though of course that's counting the cripples too that were in the hospital. So there might have been a hundred of us that went to check into the hotel. And all the TV cameras were there in the lobby when we were checking in.

After we got checked over by the doctors we were all ready for the bar, that's where we were heading for. So went into some tavern there, a fairly good sized tavern, because there must have been forty of us. Some gentleman came along and he found out we were in that slide and he went over to the bartender and he told him, "Give those guys anything they want and put it on my tab." I hate to think of the tab he

picked up. Everybody drinking doubles. Then we had to fly out of there to Vancouver, about a hundred of us. And when we got to Vancouver, everybody thought we were going to be landing at the International Airport, but we didn't land there, we landed at some army base because they didn't want the media to be there. The wives and girlfriends knew. But man. I tell you, then the party was on in Vancouver. For a whole month every miner in the country was there. What a performance that was.

**On February 18, 1965 twenty-six workers lost their lives in the Leduc Avalanche at the Granduc Mine**

Craig Anderson	Donald McKinnon	Reginald Rose
Andrew Burdick	S. McLeod	Rodney Rose
John Clausen	Jerimiah McNulty	Roth Rose
C. Crawford	Wayne Matowski	Ulrich Schack
R. Currie	C. Nitsos	James Scott
Aldege Davis	Ivan Olson	Dalton Shannon
Vilma Fekete	Herman Orlaw	Steve Soltesz
George Geiger	C.A. Palmer	John Tellam
Robert Lloyd	Arthur Paulson	