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Flashlight saves lives, leads to commercial

By Gayle Jones
Post Falls Correspondent

POST FALLS — Harry Button's brush with death will be immortalized on film because of three 50-cent flashlight batteries.

Button, Post Falls, will narrate a commercial for Union Carbide's Everready flashlight batteries, reliving his narrow escape from death during the collapse of the old Spokane Street Bridge in Post Falls in 1971.

The accident, which occurred about midnight March 27, left one man dead and two men including Button injured following a plunge into the icy Spokane River.

"The fact my Everready flashlight survived the fall and I was able to help one other man in the water and to signal our location to the searchers on the banks interested the Union Carbide people in making the commercial," Button said.

Button is going to Los Angeles Monday for about a week while the commercial is being produced.

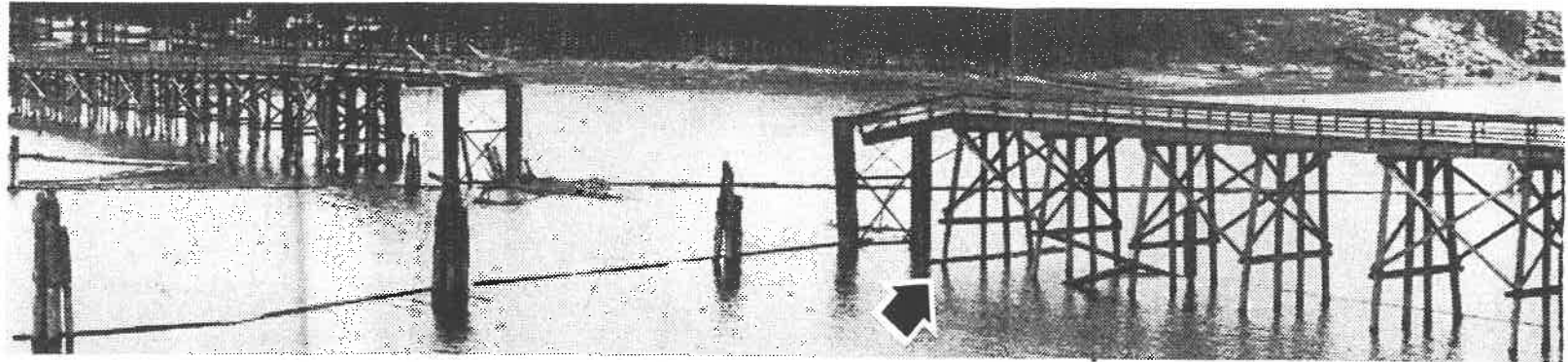
"A replica of the bridge will be reconstructed and a stuntman will reenact my part — fall and all — in the accident," Button said.

At the time of the bridge collapse Button was a Post Falls city policeman.

"I received a call around 11:45 p.m. March 27 to investigate a one car mishap on the bridge," Button said in relating the incident. "Allen Chaffin, a Post Falls fireman and I drove to the scene. When we arrived there was a car sitting crosswise in the middle of the bridge been driving across the bridge from the south, also came



Harry Button



Arrow points to spot where Button and others plunged when bridge collapsed

upon the wrecked car. I drove my patrol car within a few feet of the crosswise vehicle just as Jones walked around the other side of it. He told us the driver needed an ambulance.

"Just as I sat back down in my car and reached for my radio the bridge collapsed, taking all three of us and the two cars down with it.

"I managed to climb on some debris floating in the river and was able to help Jones do the same."

The driver of the wrecked vehicle, Allen R. Kelly, had walked away from his car and was safe on the south side of the bridge.

Chaffin, who was unable to get out of the patrol car, drowned.

Jones had not driven his vehicle onto the bridge.

"We used my flashlight, which had been strapped to my leg, to signal our location to the searchers. I lost track of all time in the water but later I was told we were stranded for almost an hour," Button said.

As a result of the exposure — the outside temperature was 22 degrees and the water was 32 degrees — Button came down with pneumonia.

He also suffered numerous cuts and was in the hospital for five days.

Jones suffered cuts and bruises and from exposure but was not kept in the hospital.

Button said the collapse was caused by the one-car accident.

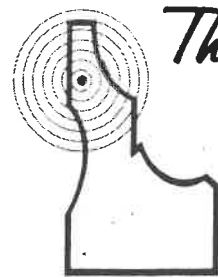
"The car hit a weak spot in the bridge and that's all it took to crumble part of the 50-year old bridge," he said.

Soon after the accident Button received a new flashlight from the Everready company, but he was not contacted about the commercial until July of this year.

The accident was reported in papers all over the country.

"The London Times ran the story and my nephew, who was overseas in the service, read about it in The Stars and Stripes," Button said.

Button, who is the chief criminal deputy for the Kootenai County Sheriff's Department, still uses the standard Everready flashlight that he credits with saving his life.



The Coeur d'Alene

PRESS

Honest John?

CHICKASHA, Okla. (UPI) — John Henry Gore 39, posted \$10,000 bond Tuesday on a charge of writing a hot check for more than \$9,000 to pay for several cars at an auto auction two weeks ago.

Gore is owner of Honest John's Car Lot in Ada.