breakout from rat hell

The Union colonel chipped at the frozen earth above the tight tunnel in which he lay.

Suddenly the surface broke and the night sky appeared.

Now there was a way out of Libby Prison, and the colonel and his fellow prisoners intended to use it.

by michael morgan

CRIES OF "FRESH FISH! FRESH FISH!" rang in the ears of Colonel Thomas E. Rose as he limped through the door of Libby Prison on October 1, 1863. Rose, the 33-year-old commander of the 77th Pennsylvania Infantry, was one of about 100 Federal officers who were being herded into the warehouse-turned-prison that day, all captured in Georgia at the Battle of Chickamauga on September 19 and 20. Many of them were wounded; Rose had injured his leg in the battle.

By this time in the war, 1,000 Union officers were already packed into Libby Prison's six 4,500-square-foot prisoner galleries. There was little hope of freedom in the foreseeable future. Prisoner exchanges between the Union and Confederacy had ended in April 1863, so the men locked up inside Libby could expect to remain there for months, perhaps even years.

Rose was unwilling to accept this grim fate. He had heard bad things about Libby, and now his first impressions were even worse. So, on the very day of his arrival, he made up his mind: he would find a way out, no matter what it took.

Escape would not be easy. Libby Prison was perhaps the most notorious prison of the Civil War, next to the infamous Confederate camp at Andersonville, Georgia. Taking up a whole city block in Richmond, Virginia, it stood along Carey Street, toward the bottom of a south-facing hill that sloped toward the James River. Between the prison's rear wall and the river lay a narrow road and a canal.

CHICAGO HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Just inside this door is the unused basement fireplace through which Union prisoners in Libby Prison tunneled to escape in February 1864.

Three lots abutted the prison property, two of them empty. There was not much else close to the building, so escapees would have precious few places to hide while trying to flee. To make escape even more difficult, the Confederates had whitewashed the lower portion of Libby's outer walls. A prisoner standing in front of such a high-contrast background would stick out like a gorilla on a cinema screen. Libby was an easy prison to guard.

When Rose and his fellow captives were brought to Libby Prison, they approached it from the Carey Street side. From that vantage point, the building appeared to have three floors. The first held an office for the prison staff, sleeping quarters for prison officials, a hospital, and a kitchen. As the officers entered the building near the west end, they were hustled up a stairway to the prisoners' quarters on the building's top two levels. Each of those levels was divided into three large rooms, each just over 100 feet long and 45 feet wide. The new arrivals were housed in the middle rooms on both levels, and these two compartments became known as the Chickamauga rooms.

Beneath the three floors visible from Carey Street, however, was a basement that ran the length of the building. Ground-level doors led into the basement on the river side. Like the upper floors, the basement was divided into three large compartments. The west end was used as a storage cellar, the middle contained a carpenter shop and several cells to confine special prisoners, and the east end was another storage area. The east end also had a small kitchen for the prisoners to use.

About two feet of straw covered most of the floor in the cellar's east end storage room, and this provided enough nesting material for a thriving rat population. In no time the room had earned the nickname Rat Hell. When heavy rains came, the river and canal often flooded the cellar. "At such times," one Union prisoner commented, "it was common to see enormous swarms of rats come out from the lower doors and windows of the prison and make head for dry land in swimming platoons amid the cheers of prisoners in the upper windows."

Prisoners were allowed into Rat Hell to use the cooking facilities. One afternoon, Rose was exploring the dark end of the east cellar room—the part nearest Carey Street—when he encountered Major A.G. Hamilton of the Federal 12th Kentucky Cavalry. Like Rose, Hamilton was investigating the secluded end of Rat Hell with the hope of finding a way to escape. The two men agreed to join forces.

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Shortly after Rose and Hamilton met, the Confederates decided to shut down the cellar kitchen. The prisoners were now to do all their cooking in the kitchen in the middle room of the first floor—Carey Street level. Prisoners were no longer allowed in the cellar.

Rose spent hours scrutinizing the guards inside and outside the prison to learn their routines. All the while, he gathered tools to use in making an escape route. One night, he was able to lift some of the floorboards in the kitchen on the first floor and crawl down into the carpenter shop, where he collected several chisels and other tools. When several bales of blankets and clothing were donated to the prisoners, the Confederates selected several prisoners to oversee the distribution of these items. One of them was able to snatch a length of rope from the bales and pass it on to Rose.

After examining several options, Rose finally decided that the only practical way to escape was to tunnel out of Rat Hell. But first he had to find a way to get into the closed-off basement. Rose noticed that the fireplace behind the cookstoves in the first-floor kitchen shared a chimney with an unused fireplace below in Rat Hell. He believed he could dig a narrow passageway through the masonry between the two fireplaces without disturbing the stonework in the carpenter shop or hospital room, where Confederates might notice something was amiss. Rose took Hamilton into his confidence, and the two men went to work.

Rose and Hamilton were able to slip into the kitchen during the night without much difficulty. There, they first carefully swept the chimney soot onto a rubber blanket. Then, Hamilton used an old knife to cut out the mortar around a dozen bricks and pried them out intact. While Hamilton worked, Rose kept watch. "Night after night passed," a Libby inmate recalled, "and still the two men got up after taps from their hard beds, and descended to the dismal and reeking kitchen to bore for liberty. When the sentinel's call at Castle Thunder [a nearby civilian prison] and Libby announced 4 o'clock, the dislodged bricks were carefully replaced, and the soot previously gathered in the gum blanket was flung in handfuls against the restored wall, filling the seams so entirely between the bricks as to defy detection."

After many nights of tedious work, the two men had successfully chiseled an S-shaped tunnel from the back of the kitchen fireplace to the fireplace below in Rat Hell, where

Only the upper three floors of Libby Prison can be seen from the building's front on Carey Street, on the left side of this photo (opposite). The basement becomes visible only as the hill slopes downward on the right side. The tunnel dug by Thomas Rose, A.G. Hamilton (above), and the other escape conspirators cut through the uphill portion of the outside basement wall opposite this one.

the tunnel to the outside could begin. Rose was given the honor of being the first man through the S-curve. The rope taken from the blanket bales was tied fast to a post in the kitchen and the other end was put into the tunnel. Rose used it to lower himself toward Rat Hell. Part of the way there, he slipped and slid downward. In the process, Rose's arms got pinned against his body in the narrow hole. He could not pull himself up or lower himself down. Trapped in the confined space, he soon began to gasp for air.

Chickamauga room." After he found Bennett, the two men dashed down the stairs and were able to extricate Rose from the tunnel.

Once Rose had recovered from his ordeal—and Hamilton had enlarged the S-curve a bit—the two men were ready to begin their tunnel to freedom. First they gathered more tools for the job. They appropriated a wooden spittoon for use as a dirt box and attached a piece of pilfered clothesline to it so, when full, it could be dragged from the tun-

Hamilton tugged on the trapped colonel, but could not dislodge him. He could not call for help; that would bring the guards and destroy all hope of eventual escape. Hamilton raced up the stairs to find his trusted comrade Lieutenant F.F. Bennett of the 18th U.S. Infantry. A witness to the scene wrote that Hamilton "trampled upon arms, legs, faces, and stomachs, leaving riot and blasphemy in his track among the rudely awakened and furious lodgers of the

nel and emptied. Several candles and a chisel completed the cache of tools, which they hid in Rat Hell. One last preparation was to fashion the rope into a ladder with convenient wooden rungs. Hamilton did the work. The ladder he made was more difficult to hide than the rope, but it facilitated movement through the enlarged S-curve.

Meanwhile, Rose had dedicated daytime hours to determining the best location for the tunnel. From the prison's

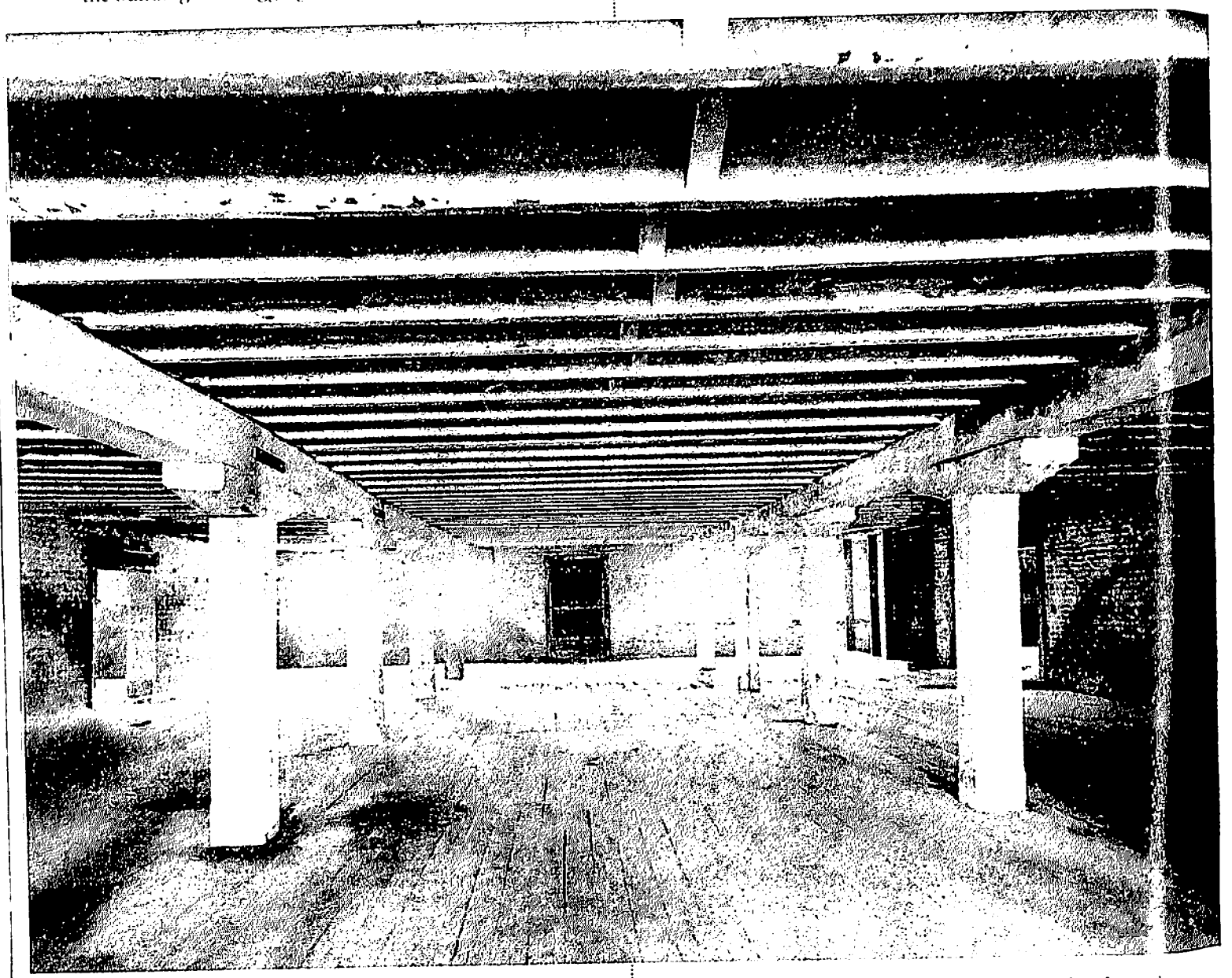
VALENTINE MUSEUM

upper-floor windows, he maintained a surveillance of the surrounding area. One day, he noticed workmen entering a sewer in the canal-side street. He reasoned that the sewer would be a virtual highway to freedom and estimated that it would take a tunnel perhaps as short as 15 feet to reach it.

With the decision made to connect with the drainage pipe, Hamilton and Rose began tunneling out the canal side of the building. The digging went smoothly at first, until just four feet into the tunnel, the candles went out. From then on, it was necessary for one man to stand at the tunnel's entrance and fan fresh air into the opening to supply candles and tunnelers with oxygen.

As the tunnel grew, the work expanded and Rose realized the effort needed more manpower. He recruited 13 other prisoners and divided them into three squads of five each. Each squad worked one night and then had two nights off.

Each member of a squad had specific duties. The best digger would crawl into the tunnel, which was barely large enough for one prone man to squiggle along. Armed with a candle and a makeshift digging tool, the digger loosened the earth near his head and passed it back to the wooden spittoon at his feet. When the small box was filled, the digger gave a tug on the line, and another man in the squad pulled out the dirt. After the dirt was carefully spread about the floor of Rat Hell, it was hidden with straw.



CHICAGO HISTORICAL SOCIETY

While the digger worked, a third squad member fanned fresh air into the tunnel. When Rose and Hamilton had begun the tunnel, Hamilton had used his hat as a fan. As the tunnel lengthened, the hat was rendered too small to move the greater requirement of air. Hamilton created a larger, more effective fan by stretching a rubber blanket over a light frame.

The digger would remain in the tunnel for the full time

of his squad's shift. To insure that there were no delays in emptying and returning the spittoon or supplying fresh air, a fourth man served as a relief for the workers who spread the dirt and fanned the tunnel entrance. The final member of the five-man squad served as a lookout.

At the close of each shift, the digger carefully backed out of the tunnel. The squad hid the tunneling tools in the dark recesses of Rat Hell and then climbed back through the S-curve to the kitchen. The men carefully replaced the bricks in the opening and smeared the soot collected on the rubber blanket over the fireplace wall. Once the stoves and kettles were back in place, it was nearly impossible to detect the tunnelers' entrance to Rat Hell. The digging was hard work, but by rotating three squads of workers, the tunneling could continue every night.

after 39 nights of working in foul air and cold mud, the tunnelers had nothing to show for their labor.

Many obstacles cropped up along the way. Most were dispatched with some ingenuity and hard work. When the digging ran into wooden building supports, for example, the men clawed through the heavy timbers with penknives. One of the project's problems, however, proved insurmountable: water trickling into the tunnel. It appeared that the entire excavation would flood, revealing the escape plot to the prison guards. Instead of flirting with ruin, Hamilton and Rose called for the tunnel to be filled with dirt and abandoned.

Rose immediately put the digging squads to work on a new tunnel that headed toward a smaller sewer to the side of the prison. But part of the tunnel caved in and created a small depression just outside the prison wall. Two sentinels on patrol noticed the low spot. "I have been hearing a strange noise in the ground there," said one of them. The other listened for a short time before he dismissed the cause of the dip as "nothing but rats."

The diggers reinforced the roof of the tunnel where the cave-in had occurred and continued to dig toward the small sewer. With some effort, they reached it, only to discover that the pipe was so small that no one could fit through it. After 39 nights of working in foul air and cold mud, the tunnelers had nothing to show for their labor.

Many in the party were discouraged, but Rose and Hamilton were not ready to give up. They believed they could find success tunneling out the east side of Rat Hell. On this side of the building, the tunnelers would dig toward the north wall of the prison, where the soil was higher up against the building. The catch with going through this wall of the prison was that the tunnel would need to be longer, stretching completely across a side street that branched off Carey. Fortunately for the prisoners, the soil contained enough clay to support a tunnel without collapsing. The tunnel would surface in a yard across the street from the prison, next to a building where parcels sent to the prisoners were stored. The entrance to the tunnel was about six inches off the prison's basement floor, next to one of the building supports, which helped hide it. Rose assembled the digging squads again, and the men began work on a new tunnel in a dark recess of Rat Hell.

By now, the squad members were experienced tunnelers. They had confidence in their recently perfected skills, including their ability to work without being detected. With the two-foot-square entrance to the new tunnel effectively hidden in a dark corner at the east end of Rat Hell, the diggers began to work during the day. On rare occasions, guards entered the large basement rooms while the work was going on. "During these visits the digger would watch the intruders with his head sticking out of the tunnel, while the others would crouch behind the low stone fenders, or crawl quickly under the straw," one prisoner wrote. "This was, however, so uninviting a place, that the Confederates made this visit as brief as nominal compliance with their orders permitted, and they did not often venture into the dark north end."

Working during the day forced the tunnelers to deal with the two daily prisoner counts. Each morning at nine and afternoon at four, the prisoners were assembled in ranks to be counted. Five of Rose's men would position themselves near the beginning of the line. Then, after they were counted, they would duck down and scamper to the end of the line, where they would be counted a second time.

One day some of the prisoners who were not part of the tunnel scheme thought it would be fun to participate in the

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The prisoner rooms inside Libby Prison were named after the battles in which the majority of men who lived in them had been captured. This is one of the Chickamauga rooms (opposite), where Thomas Rose (above) and 100 other Union officers were brought to stay in October 1863.

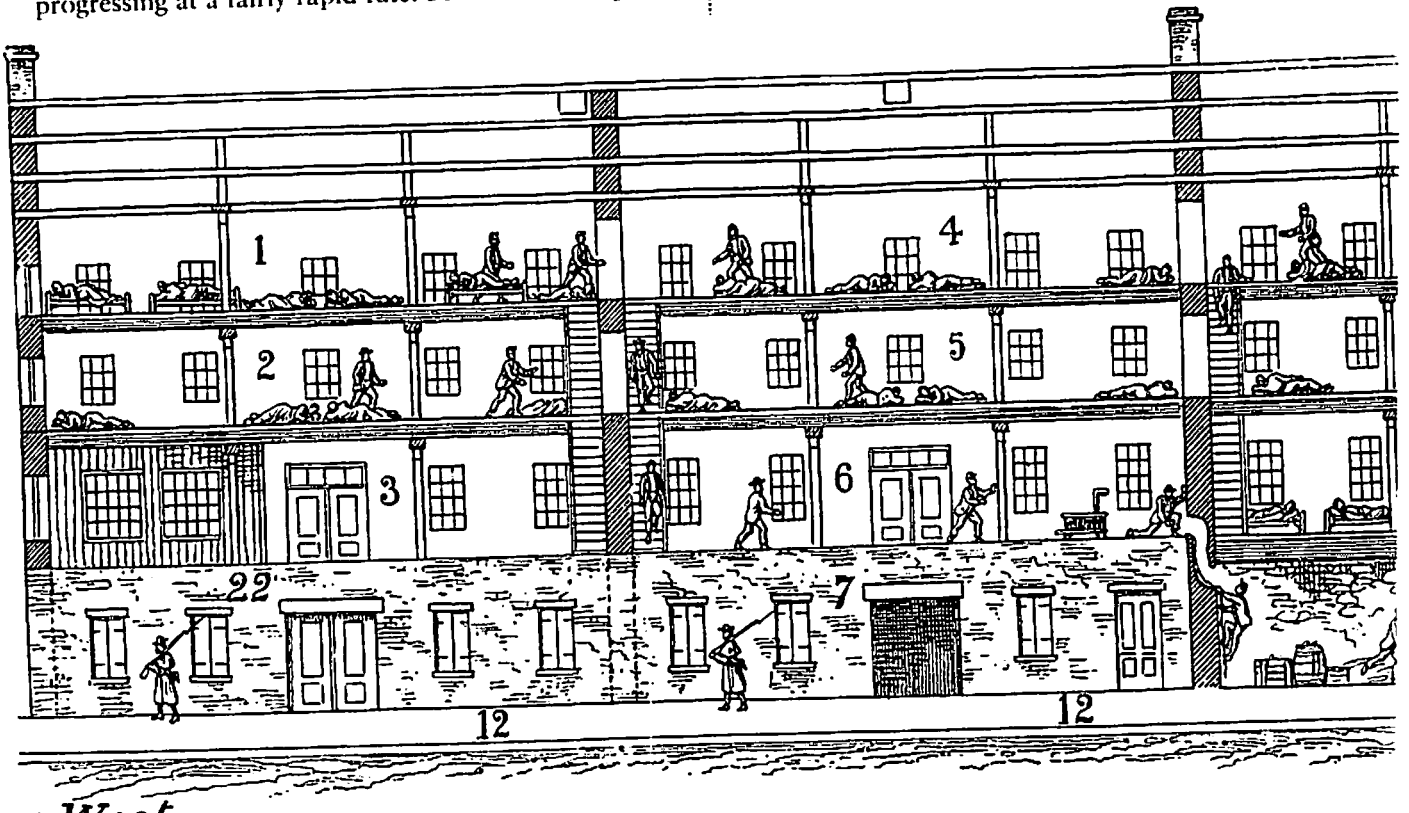
ruse. The first count indicated that three prisoners were missing. A second count ended with 15 extra men. E.W. Ross, a civilian clerk employed by the Confederates to conduct the count, was exasperated. He ordered recount after recount. To the glee of the Union prisoners, Ross was driven into a rage. "Now gentlemen, look here!" Ross sputtered. "I can count a hundred as good as any damn man in this here town, but I'll be god damn if I can count a hundred of you damn Yankees. Now gentlemen, there's one thing sure, there's eight or ten of you-uns here that ain't here!" The prisoners exploded in laughter, but Rose and his fellow tunnelers did not think the incident was very funny. They feared the prank would raise suspicions among the Confederates.

Fortunately for the escape conspirators, the digging was progressing at a fairly rapid rate. Some even thought the tunnel had already reached the yard across the street. Rose disagreed and repeatedly implored diggers to keep to the predetermined course. Despite his warnings, one of the diggers took it upon himself to tunnel upward and break through the surface. To his dismay, the small opening was in clear view of a sentinel.

Someone ran to roust Rose from his sleep. He awoke startled, hustled to the tunnel, and crawled inside to examine the hole. He saw a chance to turn this narrowly averted disaster into something positive. Stripping off his shirt, he stuffed it into the opening so he could look for it the next day from the upstairs prison windows and, based on its location, determine the progress of the tunnel. He must not have been able to spot the shirt the next day, however, and he returned the next night to replace the clothing with a shoe. The next day he was able to see the shoe, and he realized the the tunnel needed to turn slightly to the left.

At midnight on February 6, Rose was working in the tunnel and dug under the bottom of a fence post. It was the 18th day of digging in this most recent tunnel, and the passage had grown to 60 feet in length. Rose rolled onto his back in the narrow crawlspace and began to chisel his way upward. As the dirt fell upon his sweaty face, he suddenly saw the night sky. Then, the sentinel's cry rang out: "Half past one, and all's well!"

Rose pulled himself up through the opening to find that the tunnel opened under a shed, and a board fence stood between him and the guards. He could see the prison's gable roof looming grimly against the sky. He walked down a wagon way that led through a building and up to a gate.



Raising the gate, he was free to enter the street that ra parallel to the canal.

Rose checked to make sure the nearest sentinel was n looking in his direction, then slipped out the gateway an away from the prison. Before retracing his steps to the tu nel opening, he reconnoitered the area around Libby. A he slid back into the passageway, he pulled a heavy pla over the opening. A few minutes later, he was back in R Hell, where he announced that the "Underground Railro to God's Country was open!"

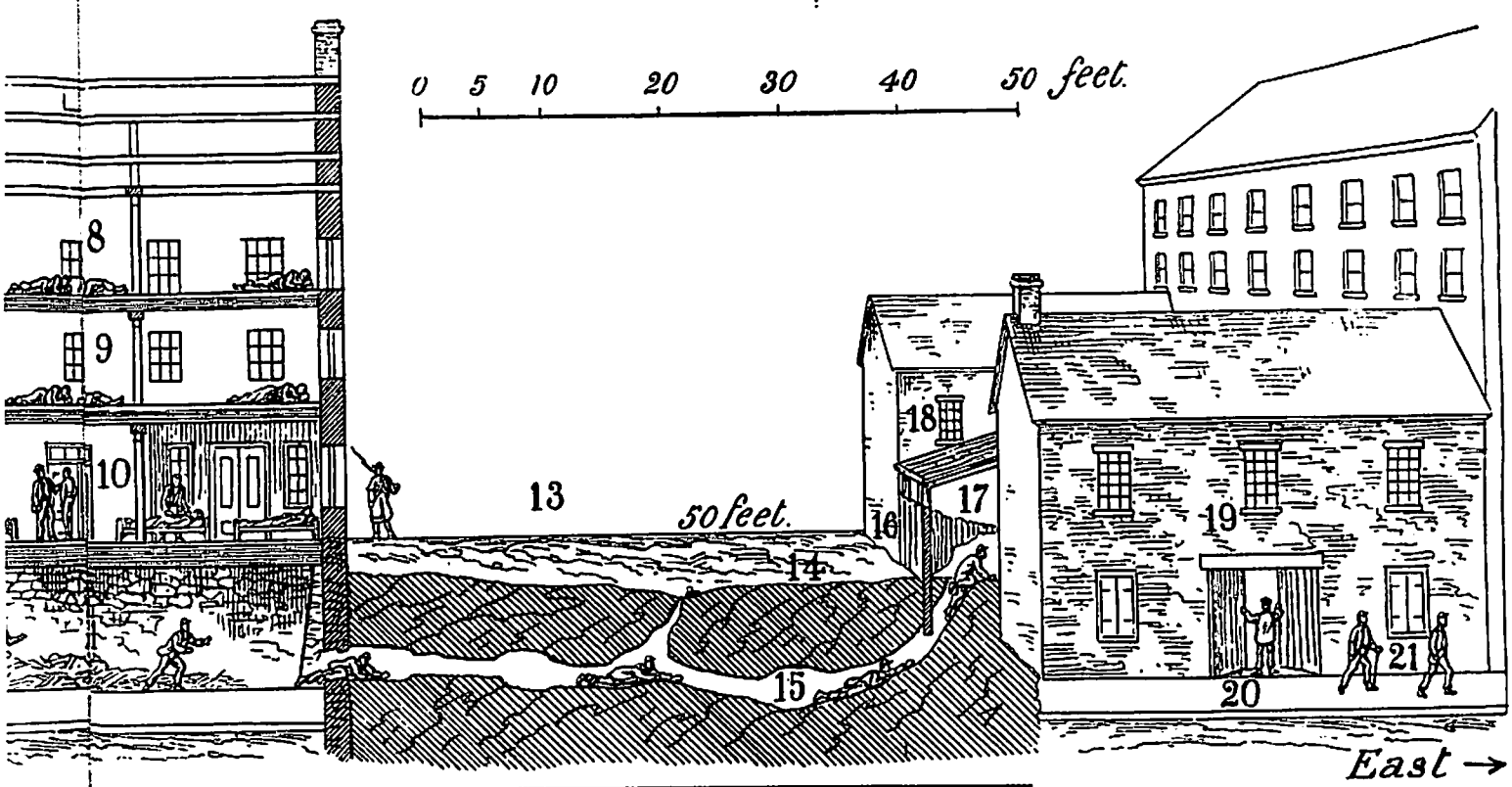
Some of the diggers were ready to flee at once. But m of the tunnelers realized it was safer to take a full night escape clear of Richmond. It was now three in the mo ing, and in only an hour, the Southerners would be in t

"now gentlemen, there's one thing sure, there's eight or ten of you-uns here that ain't here!"

kitchen to begin preparations for breakfast. The plotters agreed to delay their escape until the following night.

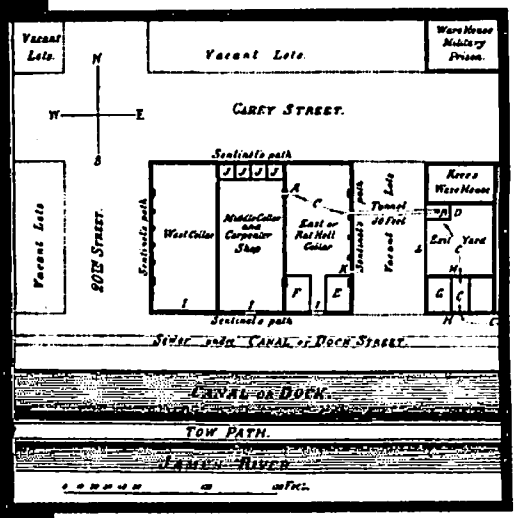
While the tunnelers anxiously awaited the hour of their escape, they worked out some details of their plot. The escape would proceed in two phases. First, the 15 men who worked to dig the tunnel would make their break, followed an hour later by 15 more men, each chosen by one of the tunnelers for the privilege of joining in the escape. Colonel H.C. Hobart of the 21st Wisconsin was drafted to see that this plan was followed. Among Hobart's duties were pulling up and hiding the rope ladder and rebuilding the wall in the kitchen fireplace. Hobart was to remain in the prison until the next night, when he would lead a second group out. On the third night, a leader of Hobart's choosing would set out with another group. The process would be repeated until the Confederates intervened.

At 7:00 on Tuesday evening, February 9, 1864, Rose assembled his tunnelers in the kitchen. To create a diversion, some of the other prisoners began to play music and dance. Unbeknownst to the guards, the escape party was



breakout from rat hell

The illustration at right gives a bird's-eye view of Libby Prison and its surroundings. The one above shows the various rooms inside the prison and some important locations outside. Just left of center is the S-curve tunnel that gave prisoners access to Rat Hell (11) from the kitchen. Just right of center is the tunnel that went through the basement wall and opened at the other end inside a shed (17). Building 18 is a warehouse, and 19 a business. Rooms 4 and 5 are the Chickamauga rooms.



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removing the bricks that covered the entrance to the interior tunnel and slipping down the S-curve one by one. Rose was the last man to go, and when his turn came, he said goodbye to Hobart and disappeared down the hole.

Rose waited in Rat Hell until Hobart pulled up the ladder and repacked the bricks. Then he joined the others at the entrance to the exterior tunnel and placed them in order. He gave each of them a final caution, thanked them for their hard work, and shook their hands and bade them good luck.

Rose entered the tunnel first, followed by Hamilton. The passageway was so narrow that each man had to take off his coat and push it ahead of him as he worked through the tunnel. Within several minutes, all of the tunnelers had reached the yard, and when the way was clear, Rose and then Hamilton each led a small parade of twos and threes along the wagon way. As the escapees entered the street, they dispersed into the Richmond night.

Inside the prison, word of the tunnel spread quickly among the prisoners. Hobart tried to keep order, but was overwhelmed by dozens of men trying to find the tunnel. When they discovered the entrance to the S-curve, they began "jumping down like sheep," one after another. At the entrance to the exterior tunnel, men jostled to be next through the opening. Only the approaching dawn stopped the flow of escapees. The remaining prisoners replaced the bricks at the fireplace, and the guards began their morning routine, unaware that 109 escaped Union officers were making their way toward the Federal lines.

As Rose and Hamilton sneaked through Richmond, they happened upon a sentinel at a Confederate military hospital. Walking in the lead, Rose strode boldly past the guard unchallenged. Hamilton turned and went off in another direction.

At the eastern outskirts of Richmond, Rose followed the tracks of the Richmond and York River Railroad until he reached the bridge over the Chickahominy River, which was guarded by several groups of Confederates. Dawn had

warehouse to big house

by michael morgan

IN 1845, TOBACCO MERCHANT JOHN Enders began construction of a large warehouse in Richmond, Virginia. The site was near the base of a hill that ran down to the James, just a few blocks from the house of poet Edgar Allen Poe. By the time the warehouse was completed in 1852, it had grown into a building 140 feet long, divided into three sections separated by interior brick walls. Enders never saw his warehouse finished; he was killed when he fell from a ladder during construction.

At the start of the Civil War, Captain Luther Libby was renting the western section of the warehouse for a ship supply shop. Libby, a native of Maine, proudly erected a large signboard that proclaimed: "L. Libby & Son, Ship Chandlers" on the building's northwest corner. When the Confederates commandeered the warehouse for use as a military prison, Libby vacated the building, but left the sign behind. Thus the warehouse became known as Libby Prison.

The Confederates used Libby Prison as a processing point for captured Union officers, so an enormous number of Yankees—some estimates range as high as 125,000—passed through its doors. Only a fraction stayed, however, as most were immediately shipped off to other prisons.

Some of the officers who remained at Libby kept diaries which, in the years after the war, they turned into vivid accounts of the prison's hardships. The flood of postwar accounts about Libby elevated the prison's notoriety out of proportion to the conditions there. Enlisted Union prisoners faced far worse conditions at Andersonville, Georgia, and Salisbury, North Carolina. At Libby, Rat Hell and other locations in the cellar were oppressive, but these were areas that prisoners normally did not enter. At Libby, the captured Union officers had access to running water, and they had reasonable sanitary facilities.

The notoriety of Libby during the war led the Confederates to allow occasional visitors to tour the warehouse. "Sometimes we had visitors to look us over, though this did not occur frequently," one prisoner recalled. "One of these parties included General John Morgan, the noted raider, and three or four of his officers, and on one occasion, a party of ladies was escorted through the rooms to view the menagerie."

While Morgan toured Libby on January 10, 1864, Thomas Rose and his tunnelers were busily burrowing their way out of Rat Hell. Ironically, Morgan had tunneled out of a Union prison in Columbus, Ohio, the previous November 27. His escape had electrified the South. Crowds of Richmond residents mobbed his hotel to see him while he was in town. Soon enough those same people would flock to Libby to view the tunnel Rose masterminded, possibly inspired by Morgan's tunneling effort.

On February 28, 1864, Major General Hugh Judson Kilpatrick launched a cavalry raid toward Richmond to liberate the Union captives held in the Southern capital. When the Confederates learned of Kilpatrick's foray, they acted to prevent any mass release of prisoners. "Last night," wrote Brigadier General Neal Dow, a Libby inmate, "a hole was dug in the centre of the middle cellar of this prison, about 3 feet square 3 feet deep! Some officers think it is for powder, to blow us up. I do not share that opinion. Such an act would do the Rebels and Rebellion no good, but infinite harm. The Rebs must see it to be so. This morning, we heard a rumor that the prison officials had put a large quantity of powder in a hole in the middle cellar, dug last night!" Indeed, there was a hole filled with gunpowder, but the Confederates claimed it was just a ruse to prevent the pris

arrived, and Rose's blue uniform was sure to light up in the sun like a raised enemy flag. So he hid in the hollow log of a sycamore tree for the day. That night, he successfully forded the Chickahominy. Thoroughly soaked, he continued his trek through the Virginia countryside until dawn, when he again encountered a Confederate patrol. He found a hiding place in the woods and slept until the following night.

When Rose awoke, he discovered that his clothing, wet when he had fallen asleep, was frozen stiff. Again he started out toward the Union lines and again came upon Confederates. So he slipped off to a secluded area of the woods, built a fire, and slept soundly. The next day he traveled again and continued until he reached New Kent Court House, 22 miles east of Richmond.

As Rose passed through an open area to avoid some Confederate pickets, a cavalryman spotted him and immediately approached. Rose dashed into a nearby thicket and crawled though a long ditch overgrown with thorny brush, eventually eluding the trooper and his detachment. Rose was now on Williamsburg Road. By nightfall, he was close to Williamsburg and the Union lines, and he spotted a squad of Union troops in the distance. As he sat down to steady the emotion of his deliverance, he saw three soldiers walking toward him. Suddenly, his joy turned to panic. The soldiers Rose had assumed were Federals were actually Confederates, and they took him into custody.

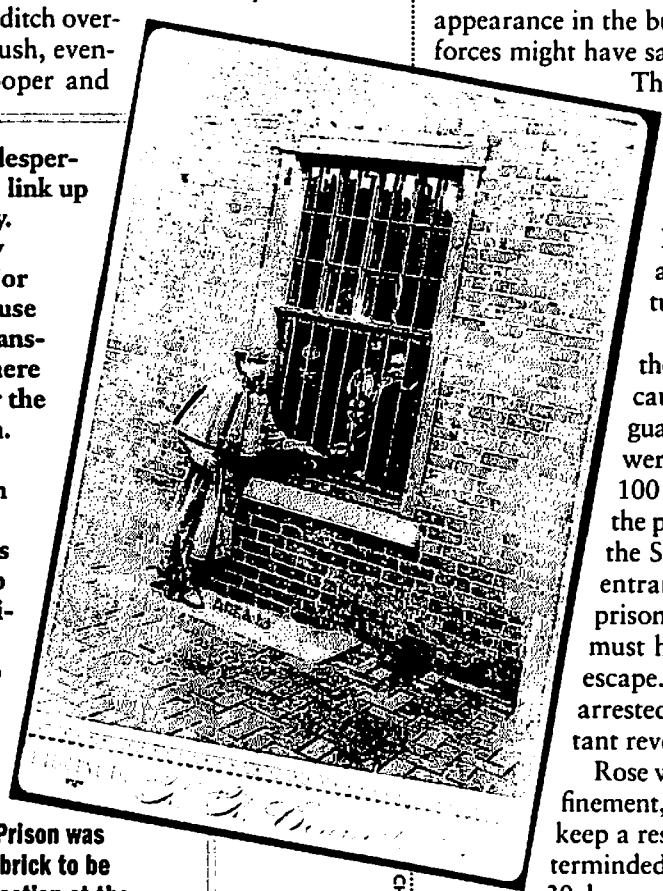
Rose had worked too hard to just give up. As one of the Confederates escorted him away from the Union lines, Rose knocked the guard's weapon to the ground and dashed off into the bushes. The escape was short-lived, however, as another squad of Southerners appeared and apprehended him. The Confederate officer urged his men to act quickly. "Hurry up, boys," he yelled, "the Yankees are right here." It turned out that a Union detachment was nipping at the Confederates' heels. If Rose could have prolonged his disappearance in the bushes just a few minutes, the friendly forces might have saved him.

Though Rose lost his bid for freedom, his co-conspirator, Hamilton, safely reached Union lines within a few days. Dozens of other escapees did too, some of them hidden by friendly civilians in Richmond until the coast was clear. In all, 48 of the 109 fugitives were recaptured. Two escapees drowned.

Back in Libby Prison, Rose learned of the consternation the great escape had caused. The morning after the breakout, guards had taken the daily head count and were astonished to discover more than 100 prisoners were missing. They searched the prison, but did not find the entrance to the S-curve in the kitchen fireplace or the entrance to the tunnel in Rat Hell. The prison's officers concluded that the guards must have been bribed to let the prisoners escape. The baffled guards were promptly arrested. Later, a careful search by the adjutant revealed the tunnels.

Rose was temporarily placed in solitary confinement, but the Confederates did not want to keep a restless prisoner who had already masterminded one successful escape plot. On April 30, he was exchanged for a Confederate colonel. Rose rejoined his regiment in July and served with it until the end of the war.

After the war, Rose remained in the army, but as one fellow Libby prisoner noted, "no one meeting him in these peaceful days would hear from his reticent lips, or read in the placid face of the veteran, the thrilling story that links his name in so remarkable a manner with the history of the famous Bastille of the Confederacy." **CWT**



CHICAGO HISTORICAL SOCIETY

After the war, Libby Prison was transported brick by brick to be reassembled as an attraction at the Columbian Exposition in Chicago (inset).

oners from making a desperate rush to escape and link up with the Union cavalry.

After the war, Libby prison remained a major curiosity. The warehouse was dismantled and transported to Chicago, where it was reassembled for the Columbian Exposition. The old warehouse remained a museum in Chicago for several years. Eventually, parts of the prison ended up in the Chicago Historical Society, and the rest was dismantled to be taken on a nationwide tour. The train carrying the disassembled warehouse derailed in Indiana, and a farmer bought the warehouse timbers to construct a barn.

The Libby timbers remained as part of the Indiana barn for more than 50 years until the barn was torn down during the Civil War centennial. Still, souvenir hunters descended on the site for years to comb through the barnyard for nails from the infamous prison.

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