

1957

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Recommended Citation

Walter A. Luszki, Beating the Underground Molders, 48 J. Crim. L. Criminology & Police Sci. 103 (1957-1958)

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BEATING THE UNDERGROUND MOLERS*

WALTER A. LUSZKI

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A prison siren wails at 0530. Armed guards rush out from their tents and form in the company street. Drivers run to their trucks, start the motors, and form the vehicles in column on the main road. The Supervisor of Prisoners, a Major, stands in front of the guards and barks, "Forty prisoners escaped through a tunnel on the north side of the double fence. Sergeant Jones, organize your men and execute the escape plans."

This mass escape through a tunnel occurred in the Pacific Theater in World War II at the Philippine Detention and Rehabilitation Center, a confinement installation in the vicinity of Manila. The institution was operated by the United States Army for the confinement of both United States Army and United States Navy prisoners. The men escaped at night through a tunnel which had been dug under a double wire enclosure and led to an opening concealed by thick underbrush, out of vision of tower guards. Most of the prisoners were captured within a few hours and returned to confinement, but some prisoners were still at large many months later. As is usual in such cases, a long and exhaustive investigation was made. Among other things, the investigation indicated that more thorough and more frequent checks of prisoners and their facilities inside the compounds should have been made. If this had been done with sufficient thoroughness, the plot might have been discovered.

This prison break illustrates one method of escape but one which is of concern to military prison authorities. Prisoners seem to find some particular fascination in this method of escape. They seem to find excitement in digging a hole in much the same way that children are attracted by holes and caves. Also, digging a hole gives the prisoners something to do. This is particularly welcomed in prisons where there is a large amount of inactivity. In addition, it is a program in which a number of prisoners can cooperate, and if successfully executed, will result in the freedom of a large number.

A tunnel is one of the safest means of escape from confinement. It is true first because a hole usually cannot be identified with any particular prisoners, and, hence, if it is discovered before the plan is completed, individual prisoners are less apt to be punished for it. It is also protection from the danger of being shot, since prisoners

* This article has been cleared by the Public Information Division, Department of the Army, with the understanding that the views and opinions expressed herein are those of the author and are not to be construed as official or reflecting those of the Department of the Army.

going through a tunnel do not provide the kind of target which they would if they were scaling a wall. Escape from the presence of an armed guard may be more dangerous, and the prisoners are more apprehensive of being shot. Escape by hiding in or under a vehicle is usually a one man affair, and such opportunities are limited.

What can be done to prevent tunnel escapes? Here are some suggestions. Try to identify prisoners who might be interested in constructing a tunnel for escape purposes. Former miners and mining engineers might be suspects. Unlikely suspects are prisoners whose health is not good or who are not accustomed to hard physical work. Digging a tunnel even with good tools is hard work and requires good physical condition.

Make thorough and frequent checks of the ground within the confinement area. Determine where the vulnerable points are and have your prison staff check these frequently as part of the Standing Operating Procedure for security.

Put yourself in the position of a prisoner and ask yourself this question: "If you were a prisoner and were to build a tunnel, where in this confinement installation would you locate a tunnel entrance?" In making this selection keep in mind these factors: location of the guard posts and guard towers, depth underground of the fences or walls, location of buildings inside the installation, characteristics of guards in regard to their friendliness toward prisoners, condition and type of subsoil at possible areas of entrance and exits to tunnel, time schedule of various activities (reveille, breakfast, work call, sick call, etc.), tools available. The entrance to the tunnel would probably be as close as possible to the fence so that this area should be examined with particular care. The prisoners would not want to dig a longer hole than necessary. On the other hand, if the site selected is easily detectable, the prisoners might have decided to move the entrance to a more concealed site.

In preventing a tunnel escape, then, finding the entrance is the first step. It will be somewhere within the enclosure, and it is the task of the prison authorities to find it. Naturally, the prisoners will be extremely careful in selecting an entrance which will be least likely of detection. In all probability they will select a part of a surface that is covered with boards, tile, brick, or metal. The surface may be a wooden or a metal floor or a brick or stone wall. Examine carefully for any flaws or irregularities in construction such as lack of or different colored mortar between certain bricks.

The exit to the tunnel will probably be in an area which will be concealed from the guards and guard towers. To expose possible exits, cut away bushes and weeds and remove trees and other obstacles on the outside of the fence line for several yards.

The presence of fresh or different colored soil in the compound may be a clue to a tunnel being dug in the enclosure. The prisoners will be extremely careful in their disposal of the soil, and so it is important to be on the watch to discover fresh soil in any part of the compound. A frequent check of the entire compound including trash and other containers, space under barracks floors and in attics will give prisoners the feeling that tunneling as an escape plan is too risky. Thorough frisking of inmates during the day for concealed soil may expose the scheme. The prisoners may place the soil in bags made of cloth and tied to various parts of the body, such as the neck. Or they may place the soil in coat or shirt sleeves, the ends of which are tied.

Most of the tunneling work will probably be done at night since during day time

the prisoners will be employed. Further, they are more likely to expose themselves if they dig tunnels in the day time. Make unexpected head counts of the prisoners at various times of the night and account for all of them. Investigate the absence of prisoners who are not in their bunks or in the latrine. If you suspect digging in the day time make unexpected roll calls. Segregate all prisoners who are slow in coming to the formation or are late and examine their clothing and appearance for new soil.

Be alert to missing tools or unusual disposal of items such as floor boards, wooden boxes, or tin cans from the kitchen. Prisoners can use these in the construction of their tunnel. They need picks and shovels to dig the hole. They will need to make frames inside the tunnels to prevent the roofs and walls of the tunnels from collapsing. Tin cans may be used for shovels, or as containers to carry out soil from the tunnel or for lamps. Rope, cord, or pieces of cloth may be used as wicks and various fats such as lard as fuel for the lamps.

Dogs may be valuable in preventing a tunnel escape. The mere presence of the dogs may deter prisoners from constructing tunnels. Dogs have an acute sense of hearing and smell, and they can generally be counted on to do an effective job when assigned to installations for security purposes.

To provide for quick apprehension of prisoners involved in a mass escape through a tunnel, escape plans should include special instructions to cover this problem. There is likely to be some uncomfortable feeling on the part of citizens living in towns near the confinement place when they read a headline in the local newspaper, "40 Desperadoes Escape from Local Prison." Local, State, and Federal Police authorities should be notified and their assistance solicited to apprehend the escaped prisoners. Also, all available military police personnel should be obtained to provide additional search parties. Newspapers and radios should be informed of the escape so that all citizens in the locality can assist in the apprehension.