

It was July 1864. The North and the South were at war. Their armies faced each other just south of Richmond.

They had been there for weeks. And it seemed they might be there for months. Each army was well dug in, with miles of trenches. And these trenches could not be stormed. The Northern army had tried that.

—Now the North had another idea. There was a fort right on the Confederate line. If they could blow it up, they might break through the line. They might even win the war then and there.

They decided on a bold plan. They dug a tunnel 511 feet long. It ended right under the fort. There they placed four tons of black powder. To it they attached a long fuse that stretched back to the mouth of the tunnel.

At dawn on July 30 they lit the fuse. Then they waited. Minutes passed, but nothing happened. Something had gone wrong in the tunnel. And someone would have to find out what.

That job fell to Sergeant Harry Reese. He was from the 48th Pennsylvania Infantry. The 48th was made up of coal miners. The whole plan had been their idea, and they

had dug the tunnel. Reese had been boss on the job. He took it for granted that it was up to him to finish it.

Into the tunnel the sergeant went. It was pitch-black. He felt along the fuse, foot by foot. Somewhere up ahead was that powder. For all he knew, it might go off at any minute. If it did he would be buried forever, deep under the earth.

—He crawled on for 400 long feet. At last he found what the trouble was. The fuse had burned out.

He went back out to report. Then he and an officer crawled back in. Now the fuse had to be lit again. And it was not a long, safe fuse now. It was only 100 feet long.

They lit the fuse. Then they got back out in a big hurry. When the powder blew up, they were safe outside.

The South's line was broken. But the Northern army did not follow through, and the attack failed. Still, this does not make Sergeant Reese any less a hero. Nor does the fact that he never got a medal. Many Civil War heroes never won the medals they deserved. If they had, there might not have been enough metal to make bullets.

## CHECK YOUR READING

1. In early July the North had given up the idea of
  - A storming the South's trenches
  - B attacking the Confederate fort
  - C winning the Civil War
  
2. The tunnel they dug was about
  - A five hundred feet long
  - B three hundred feet long
  - C one hundred feet long
  
3. The 48th Pennsylvania Infantry was made up of
  - A mule drivers
  - B steelworkers
  - C coal miners
  
4. The idea of digging the tunnel came from
  - A a Northern general
  - B the men of the 48th
  - C some unknown soldier
  
5. Reese thought he should finish the tunnel job because he had
  - A done no other work on it
  - B been against the whole plan
  - C acted as boss on the job
  
6. While he was in the tunnel, Reese's biggest fear was that the
  - A enemy would hear him
  - B powder would blow up
  - C lights would go out
  
7. Reese found that the trouble was that the
  - A powder had become wet
  - B fuse had burned out
  - C tunnel had caved in
  
8. When the powder blew up, Reese and the officer were
  - A killed
  - B wounded
  - C unhurt
  
9. What was the result of blowing up the fort?
  - A The war ended quickly.
  - B Nothing much was gained.
  - C Reese got a medal.
  
10. The writer of the story thinks that Reese was a
  - A hero
  - B fool
  - C fake