

Thirteen Berliners Tunnel To Freedom

BERLIN (UPI)—Thirteen refugees who dug a 60-yard tunnel to escape to West Berlin said today the hours they spent in it were like "eternity in a coffin."

The East Germans spent two hours huddled at the Western end of the tunnel, only eight yards from border police, afraid to leave it until friendly police arrived.

The refugees included a blind woman who was guided through by her sister, a 70-year-old grandmother who was pulled along unconscious by a rope tied to her legs and two boys who were told to pretend they were playing groundhog.

The refugees came to West Berlin Sunday at 2 a.m. in a tunnel it took five months to build. They told their story today at the Marienfelde refugee camp.

Too Ill to Work?

All the work was done with a spade by a 42-year-old handyman, who can not work regularly because of ill health, and a 20-year-old medical student.

"The last five yards we dug with our hands because we were afraid Communist police above us would hear our spade," the

handyman, 42-year-old Hans V. said.

The refugees were shaken by their experience and were still in fear of the Communists. They refused to disclose their last names although it was obvious the Communists knew who was missing.

The tunnel was built from a one-family house without a cellar owned by Niels Martin A., 45, who worked in West Berlin before the anti-refugee wall was built. It ran under three rows of barbed wire to a garden behind a shop in a suburban district of the French sector.

The house had only four rooms and at the end it was packed with the sand removed from the tunnel.

"Obviously, we could not get rid of the sand because the Communists would have noticed it and discovered we were building a tunnel," Niels said.

"So we filled everything in the house with sand. We had 50 cubic yards of sand in the house. We filled closets with sand, bureaus with sand, kitchen cupboards with sand.

"We built partitions in the rooms so we could pour sand in. We raised floors to put sand under them.

"At the end we had so much sand that just before we made the breakthrough we were sleeping three on a couch."

The tunnel was only 20 inches high. Getting through it was a problem for all, especially for the blind woman and the grandmother.

HERALD AND NEWS, Klamath Falls, Ore.

Thursday, March 14, 1963

PAGE 5-A

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