

DEEP in DIXIE



Up through the Chimney

Escape.

That is all Lt. Charles W. "Savez" Read of the Confederate Navy thought about from the first day he was thrown into the Yankee prison at Fort Warren in Boston harbor.

It was the summer of 1863, and Read decided there was small chance of being exchanged at that late date in the Civil War.

Read, a native of Yazoo County, Miss., was 23 years old at the time. He did not look the part of a daredevil. About 5-feet-6 with a slight build and undistinguished features, he spoke softly with a voice that was nearly feminine.

But a daredevil Savez Read was. (His nickname came from his days at the Naval Academy, when he learned the French for "Understand?" He seldom ended a sentence without "Savez?")

Read's story is one that Charles L. Dudley tells in "Nine Men in Gray" (Doubleday & Co., 1963; \$4.95).

Read had been in command of the stern guns on the *Arkansas* when the Rebel ironclad ran through a whole Yankee fleet in the Mississippi on June 15, 1862. As a commerce raider the following June, he had captured 21 Northern vessels in 19 days, terrorizing the Atlantic seaboard. He had been captured shortly after he had seized the revenue cutter *Caleb Cushing* in the harbor of Portland, Me., on June 27, and had been taken in irons to Fort Warren about a month later.

Read kept studying the cell in which he and other Confederates were confined, trying to figure out how he could escape. Finally he saw a way. In the cell there was a chimney that led to a parapet above. The chimney had been bricked up tight. But Read—working with pocket-knives that the careless guards had overlooked and a rusty ice pick that someone had found in a crevice—began to dig through the bricks and mortar.

The debris was spread on the floor

and covered with the prisoners' clothes, which were strewn around on the floor anyway since there were no pegs in the walls. As the material accumulated it was put in and under the bunks.

Every night Read picked away at the mortar. As the work progressed he had to stand on the shoulders of a fellow prisoner. Then, when he had gone a little higher, he chipped out a foothold in the bricks.

Some lime from the mortar got in his right eye and caused him much pain, but he couldn't ask to see the doctor without giving away his plot. He suffered in silence. The eye was permanently injured.

Finally Read dug through to the night air and pulled himself up onto the parapet. The next man, a navy lieutenant named Alexander who was bigger than he, got stuck and had to be forced through. The other prisoners decided to stay put.

Read and Alexander crept down to the beach. Hearing the approach of sentries, they dove under some sailcloth. Just to clean his bayonet, one of the sentries stuck it into the sailcloth. The blade jabbed deep into Read's thigh, but the Rebel never made a sound.

Later he and Alexander swam out to a small boat in the harbor. Read's idea was to sail the boat to Halifax, where they could take a steamer for Bermuda and then run the blockade to a Confederate port.

But the Yankees recaptured them the next day. Read went back to Fort Warren, where he remained until he was exchanged in October, 1864. He had many more adventures during the Civil War, and afterwards in South America, before he settled down as a Mississippi bar pilot and New Orleans harbor master.

You are invited to submit unusual Deep South stories: \$5 will be paid for each one used. Manuscripts cannot be returned unless stamped, self-addressed envelope is enclosed. Indicate source of material.

