

# Petersburg National Battlefield VirtualCache Program

National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior



## Site 7: Tunnel Entrance

N 37° 13'9.214  
W 77° 22'3.869



This present day model of the entrance to the mine reveals some of the skills possessed by, and some of the challenges presented to, the Pennsylvanian miners who dug this tunnel.

The size of the tunnel and the wooden supports reflects the knowledge these soldiers had from a life of coal mining. By keeping the tunnel just to the size needed to work in, meant minimizing the amount of digging needed. This comes straight from working coal seams and not wasting time they weren't paid for in making the tunnels larger than they had to be. The supports built to keep the tunnel from collapsing is no different from the work done found in mines where the threat of roof falls and failing walls could cost a man his life.

The biggest challenge was being able to breathe as the tunnel stretched out to over five hundred feet. At the time this was the world longest military tunnel ever proposed and air flow was a critical barrier to its completion. The wooden tube on the ground, to your right, in the tunnel is the answer. By closing the tunnel entrance off and only allowing the air to enter through this extendable duct, the miners used a fire in the tunnel to pump the air through the ever-lengthening mine. This adaptation of the technology in the coal mines was a success. Another key challenge was the lack of support from Union commanders. This regiment achieved this engineering effort on their own as they found and cut their own wood, modified their own tools and did all the digging. They even had to make their own boxes to haul the dirt out as shown by the box on the floor of the tunnel.

In three weeks they completed the tunnel, created four magazines and placed four tons of black powder in them, sandbagged one-third of the mine, and all the while Confederates were digging counter mines to find them.

**Visit Instructions:** Go to the entrance to the tunnel and record what you see.