

SAVARKAR: THE GREAT ESCAPE

Part II

This article is dedicated to:

Dr. Arvind Godbole



To my everlasting regret, I was not able to do the research and write this article before the passing away of Dr. Arvind Godbole, who meant more to me than can possibly be put in words.

ANURUPA CINAR

Illustrators:

AVANTI GODBOLE

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Introduction

Savarkar jumped from the Morea porthole, swam ashore and escaped to French soil.

Many times these words, or others similar to it, are used to describe Savarkar's escape in Marseilles; many say it with genuine awe and wonderment. And yet—these words are supremely inadequate to express the degree of impossibility, the degree of difficulty of Savarkar's escape. In fact, it is hard indeed to find any words that will do justice it.

He didn't *just* 'jump'; he didn't *just* 'swim'; he didn't *just* 'escape'.

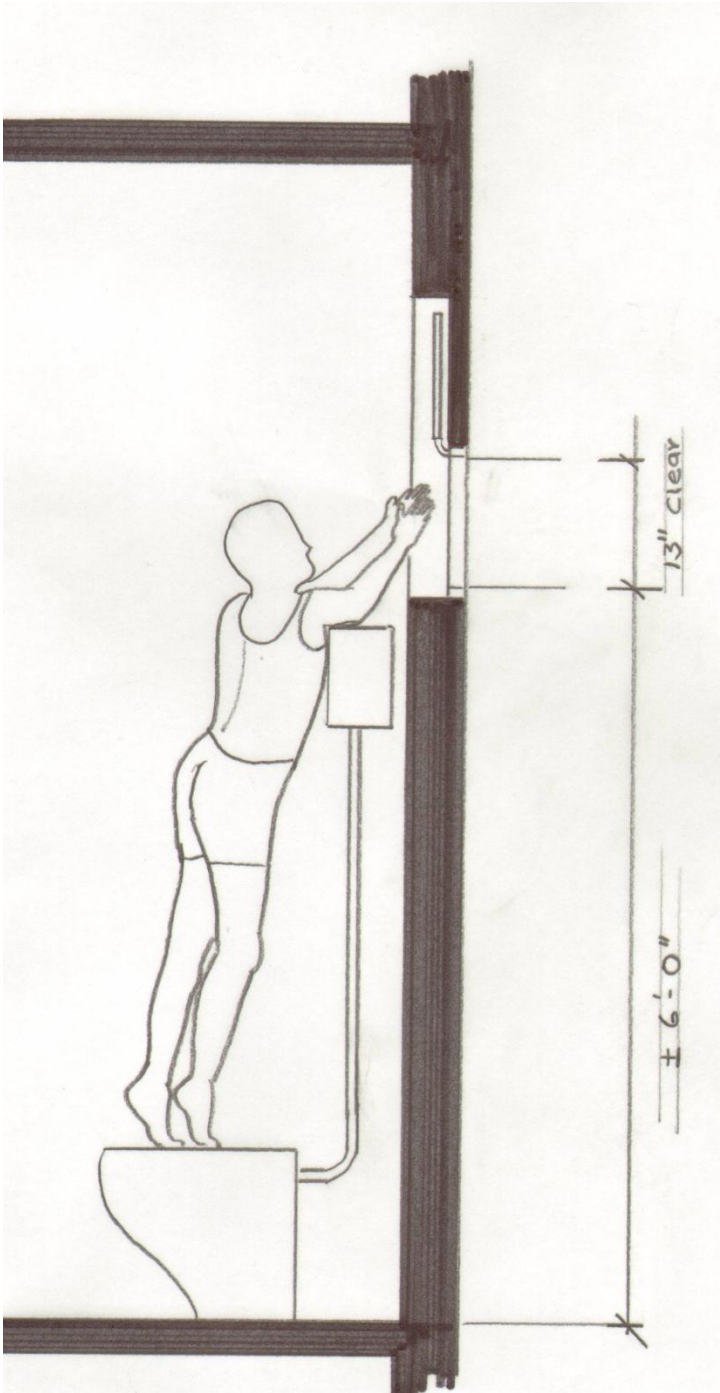
Each and every action was a feat of incredible daring and remarkable resourcefulness, carried out with rock-steady nerves. For days I tried to picture how Savarkar must have jumped to the porthole, squeezed out through it, and flung himself thirty feet down into the water. How did he pull himself out of the water? How did he climb a sheer wall? My imagination boggled. It was impossible; no one could *possibly* do it, and yet Savarkar had done it!

When words failed me in describing Savarkar's escape the idea of putting it in a pictorial form popped into my mind. My artistic talent being limited, I roped in Avanti Godbole, Dr. Arvind Godbole's thirteen-year-old grand-daughter, into preparing the drawings for me. She was very enthusiastic and eager to do them. Unfortunately, I had delayed in putting it all together, so with the time constraints and school-work, she could do only one set (the Detailed Section Through the Porthole) and I had to turn my inexpert hand at doing the other.

To visualize how Savarkar squeezed out of the porthole, I set up a makeshift Morea-wall-with-porthole in my basement—not, of course, at a height of thirty feet! I made my kids jump to the 'porthole' and squeeze out over and over until they did it, more or less, with all the limitations that Savarkar had—no kicking off from the floor; no bracing legs while jumping to the porthole; no gripping anything with the hands etc.

It *really* brought home to me how fantastic Savarkar's jump was.

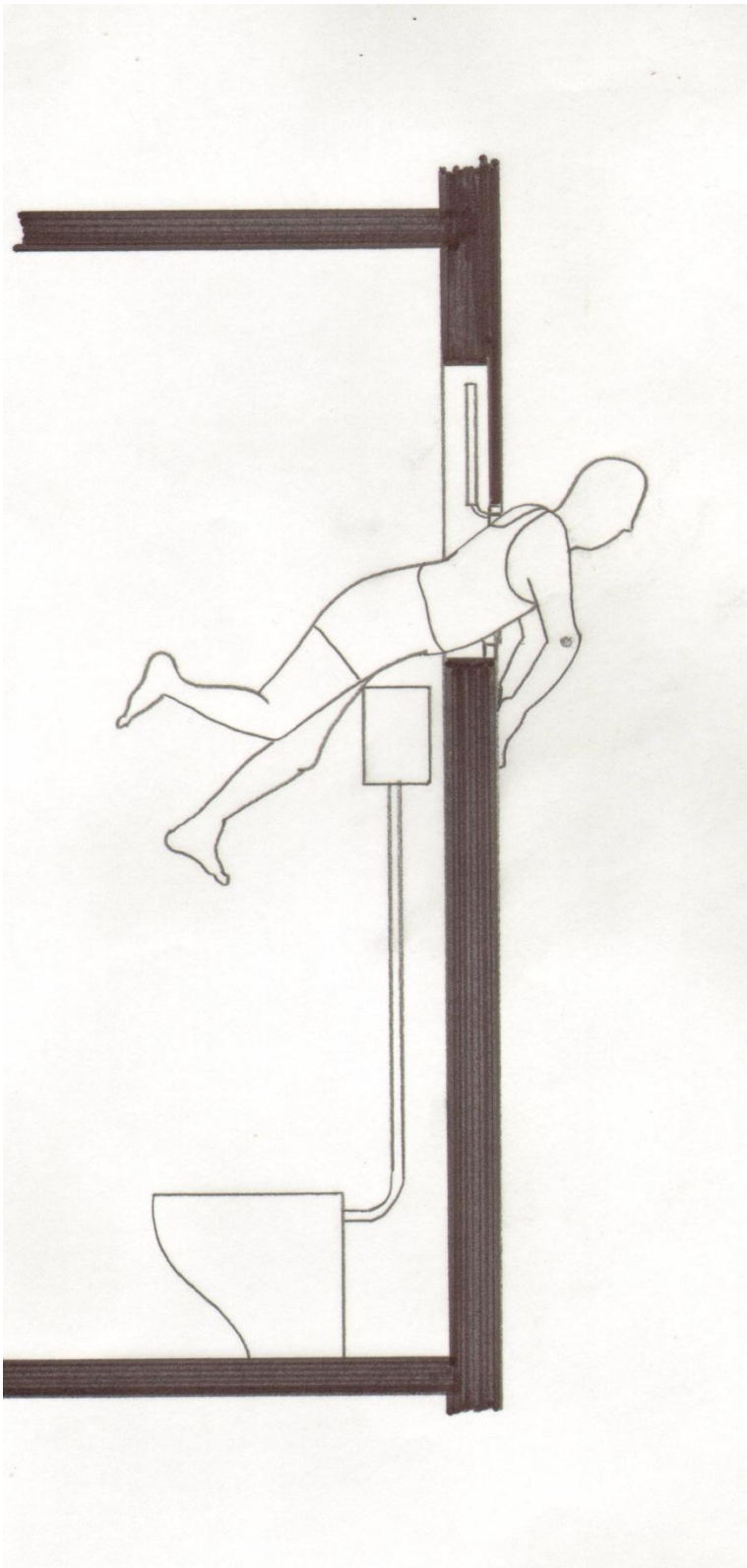
Detailed Section Through the Porthole of W.C. # 2, SS Morea



Position 1

Points to note:

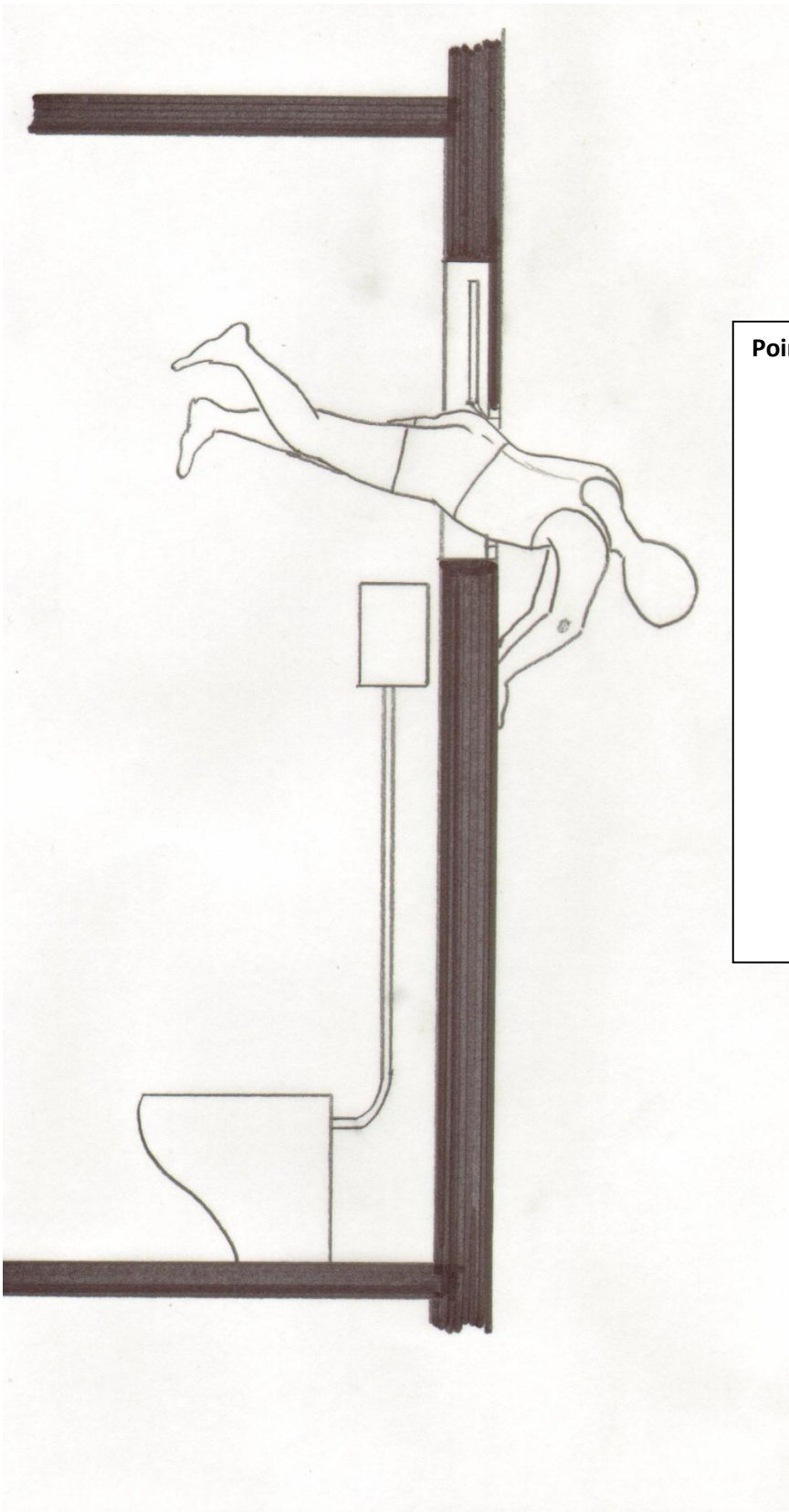
- The porthole must have been set over the flushing cistern—too high to reach easily.
- Standing on the toilet was tricky business; if closed the seat was likely to move, if propped open then likely to fall shut.
- The flushing cistern made it more difficult to reach the porthole, especially without making a noise.
- The porthole was only 13" in diameter.



Position 2

Points to note:

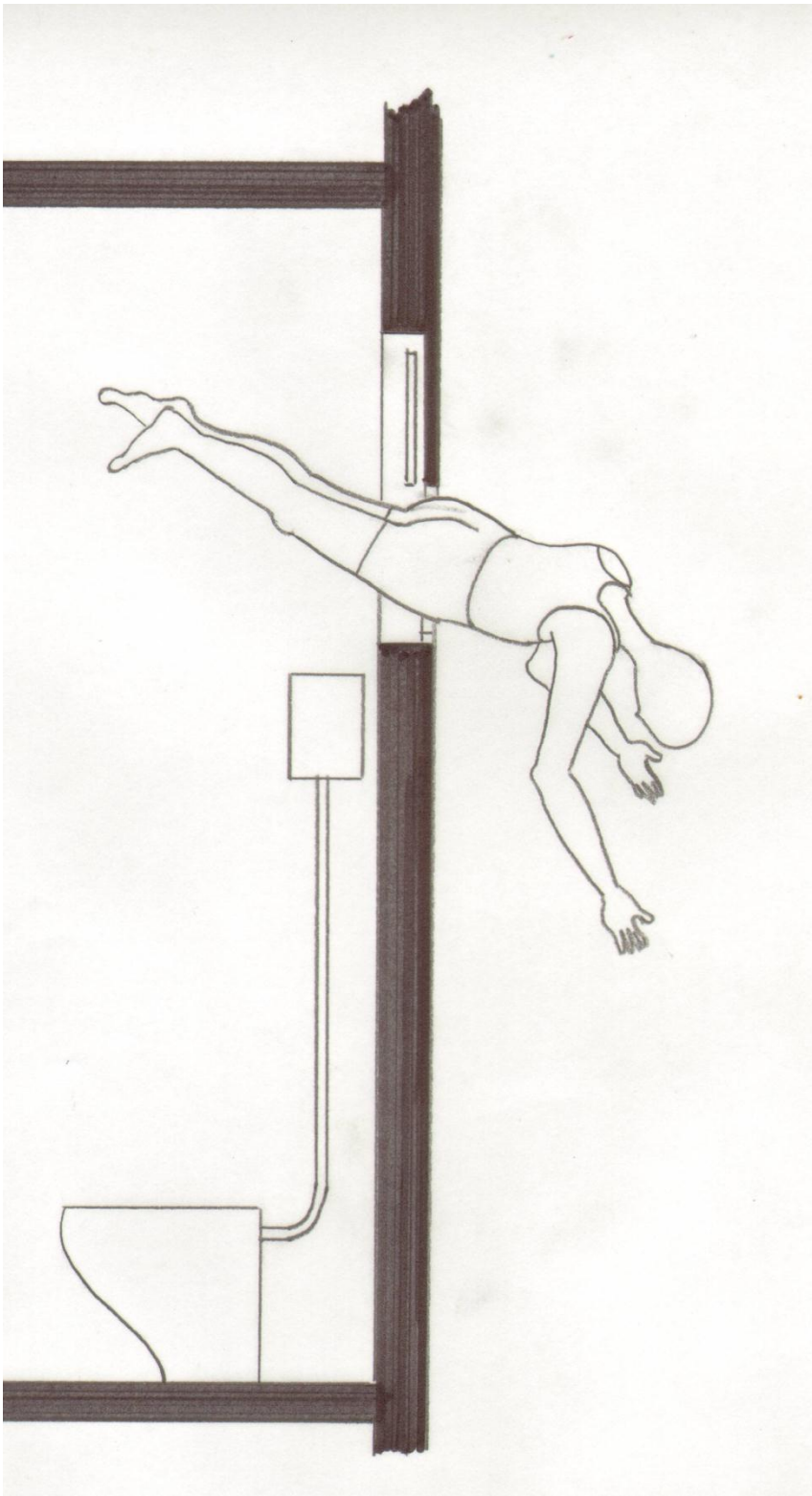
- Savarkar must have had tremendous strength in his hands—fingers of steel!
- Gripping the porthole, he had to pull his body upward, scraping his body over the flushing cistern, taking care not to disturb the lid.
- The porthole was too narrow to grip and insert his body through it.
- He had to slide his hands out and brace himself on the outside of the wall.
- Then sque-e-e-eze first one and then the other shoulder out.
- All this while Parker was hovering in and out of the restroom, and for all Savarkar knew he was right outside.
- Silence and speed were paramount.



Points to note:

- Savarkar had to turn his body in the downward direction, hands still braced and start wriggling.
- How did the tiny strip of water 30' below look to him?
- Did he wonder if he would fall onto the quay itself rather than the water.
- **It was in this position that Amarsingh spotted him.**
- Any second he could expect to be caught from this moment; perhaps even be shot at.
- Yet he continued, with aplomb!

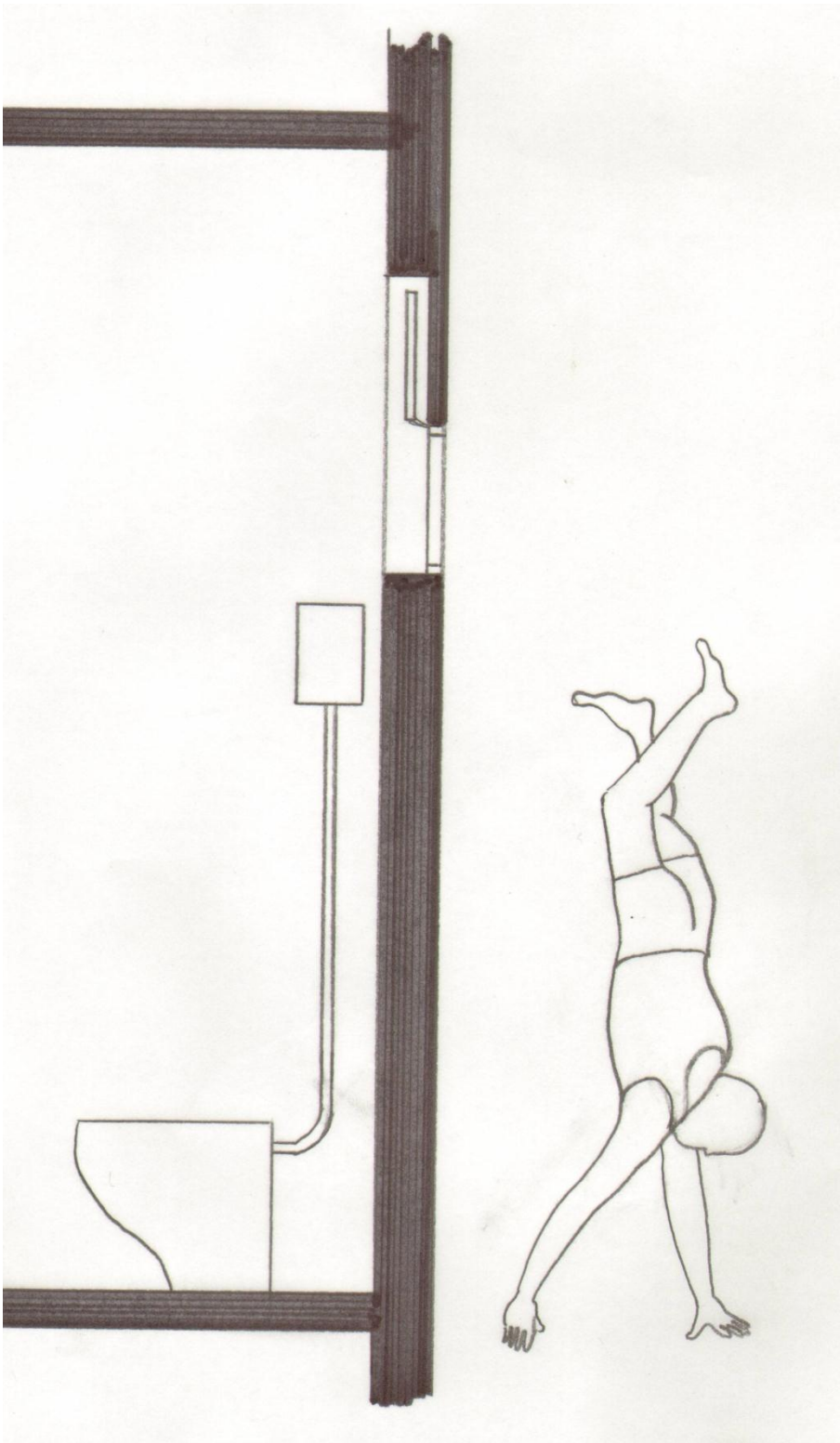
Position 3



Position 4

Points to note:

- Now Savarkar must have come out so far that perhaps his hands couldn't reach the wall.
- How *furiously* he must have wriggled and moved his body to get the momentum for the final push out through the porthole—he had to fall out before Amarsingh crashed the door open and grabbed his ankles. He had only seconds.
- Imagine how the water 30' below and the quay must have swayed before his eyes with every swing of his body?
- Would he crash his head on the quay instead of landing in the water?



Position 5

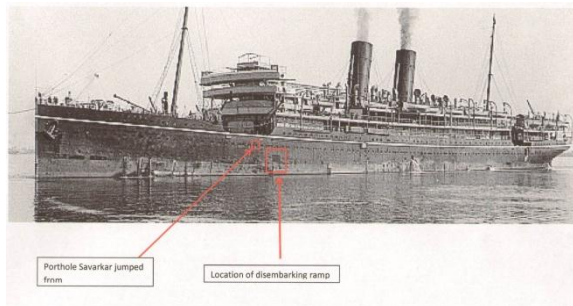
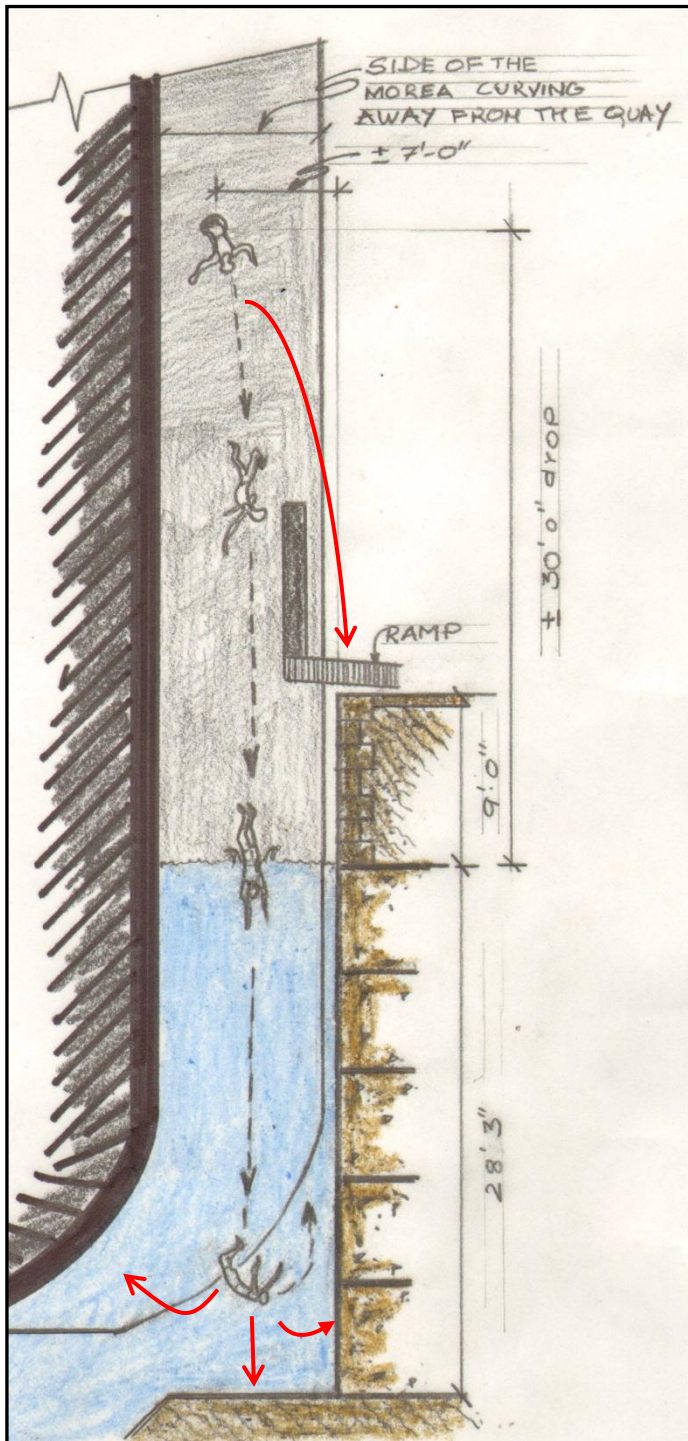
Points to note:

- Falling out of the porthole, Savarkar's body must have been out of control with the momentum he needed to come out.
- The water and the quay were rushing at him—he had only seconds to get his body under control and suck in the air needed for the dive into the sea.
- He had made it! He was now free of the British jurisdiction.

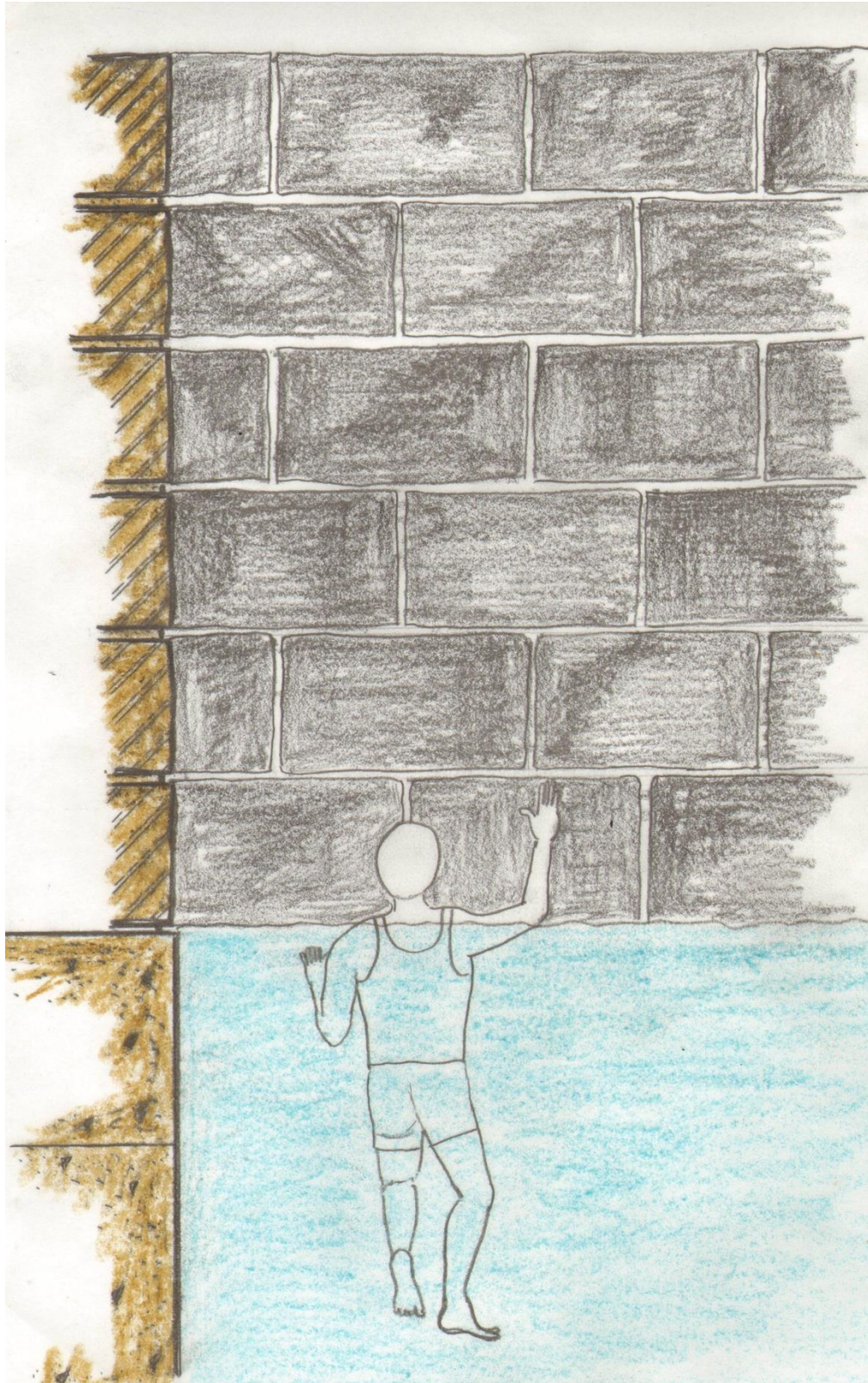
Section A-A

through the SS Morea showing four positions of Savarkar's fall into the water

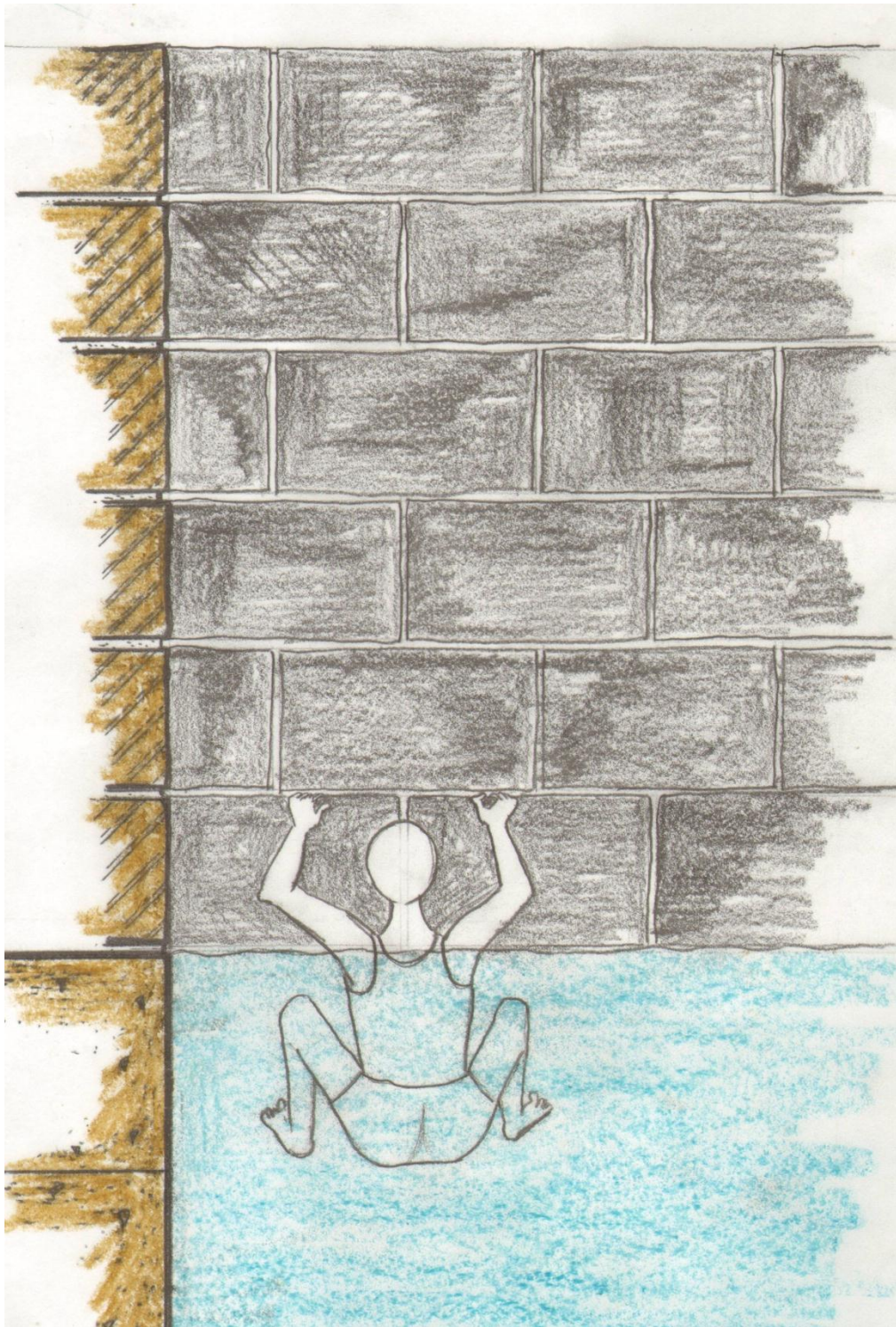
Red arrows indicate the various places Savarkar could have bumped into.



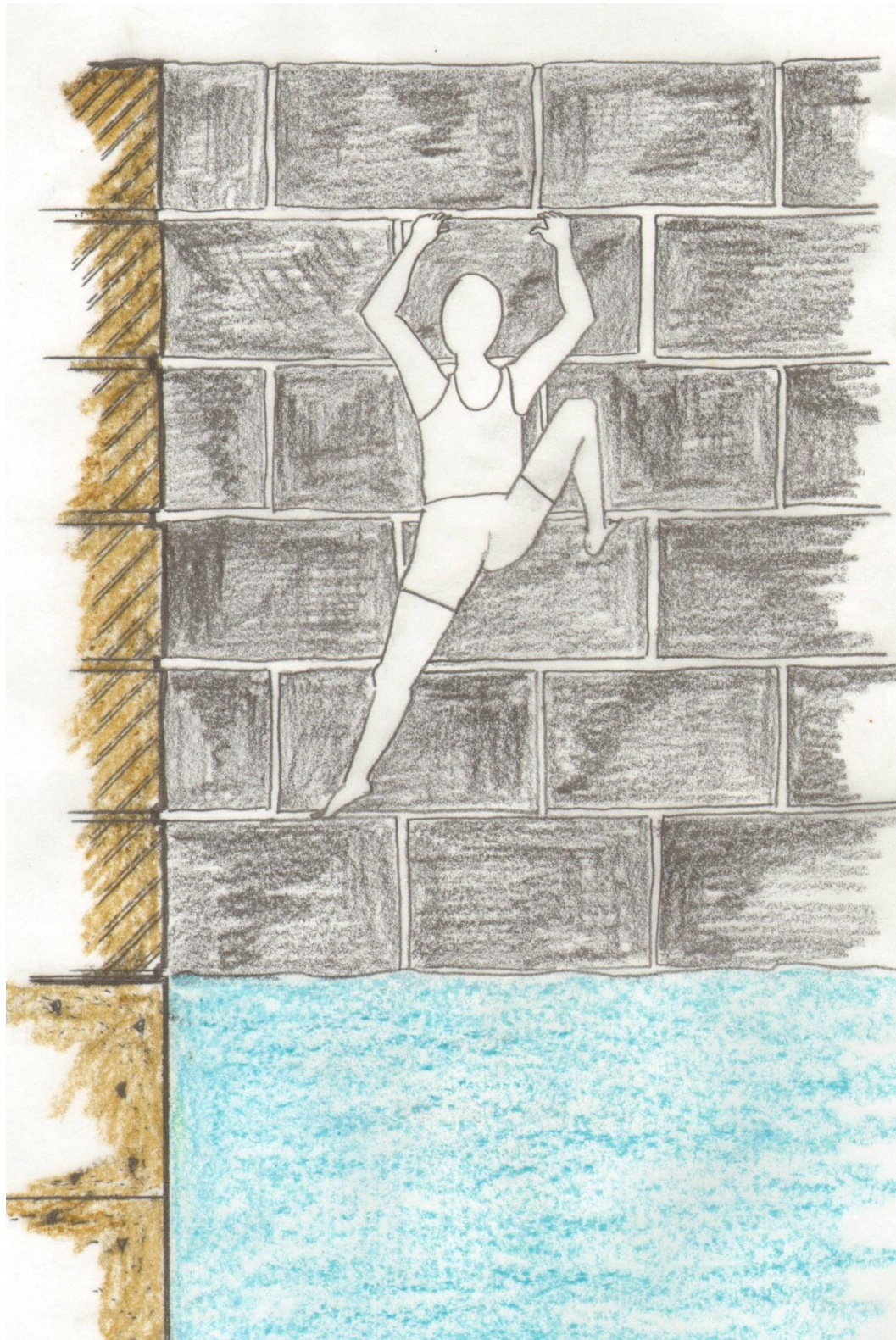
Savarkar Climbing the 9' Quay wall



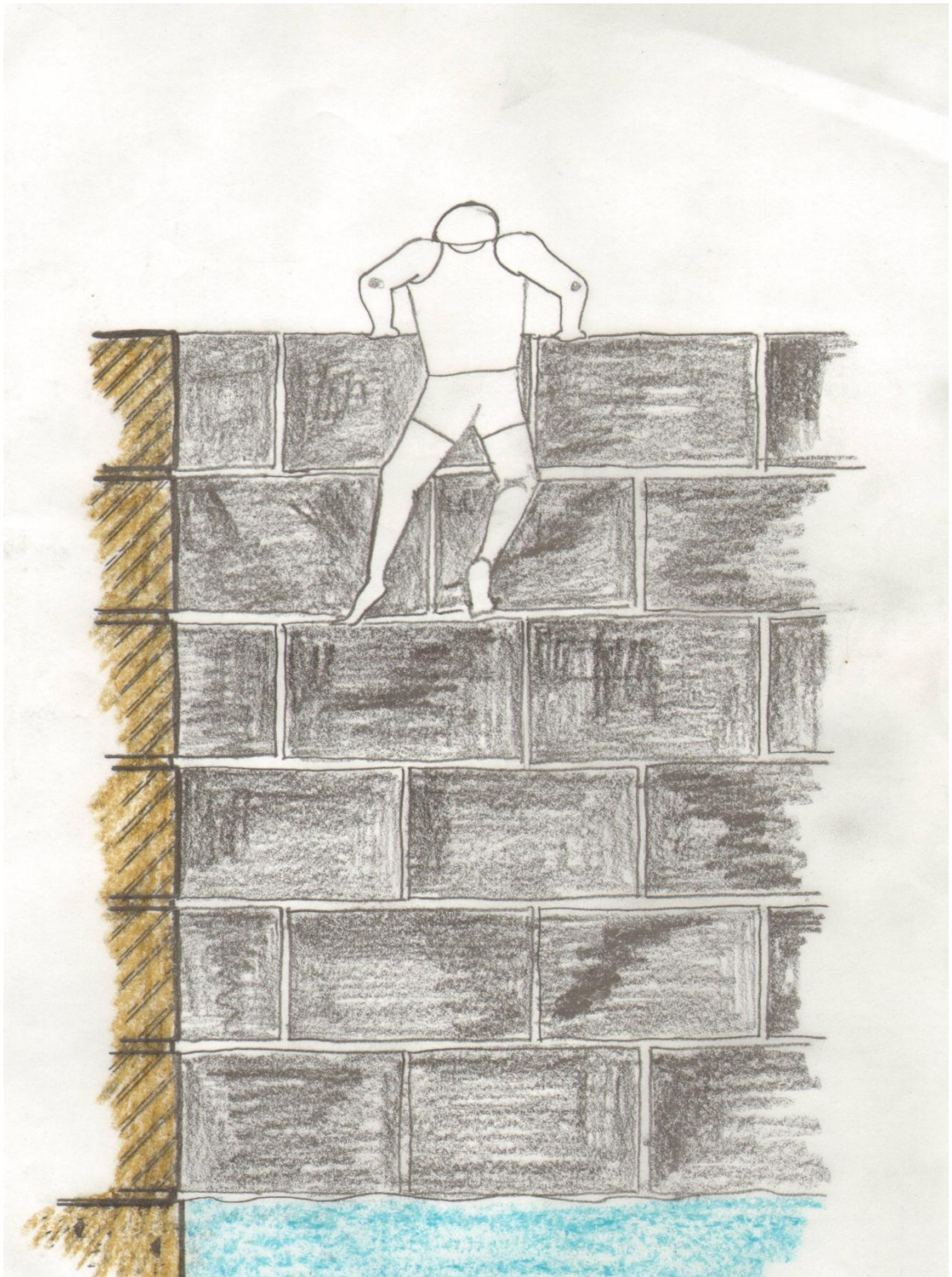
- The 9' wall appears even taller from the water, for Savarkar's head is at the very foot of it.
- First he treads water and touches the wall with his palm.



- Below the water level the quay wall is made of concrete blocks that were dropped into the water—no grooves. The surface of the dressed stone above the water was smooth.
- Savarkar had to cling to the groove made by the grouting with his fingers and pull his body weight out. His feet may have scabbled against the concrete block, but that could have been slippery.
- He must have had fingers of steel and *tremendous* power in his arms—especially after the work they had done to push him out of the porthole!—to pull himself up against the drag of the water and his own body weight.



- *How* did he climb the 9' wall—clinging with *only* fingers and toes; body hurting and battered from the dive, possibly bruised and bleeding as well from being scrapped while coming out of the porthole?
- Once he fell in, and then again he tried.
- He knew Amarsingh had given alarm, any moment they could take him captive, perhaps they even were waiting for him at the top of the wall. But he didn't falter.



- At least he reached the top of the wall.
- He gave himself only a moment to catch his breath and then took off running.
- Incredible . . . ! Astounding . . . !

Who else but Savarkar could have done this successfully?