

*the*

# KAISER'S QUEST

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ate FRANK MacDONALD  
416 1<sup>ST</sup> CANADIAN MOUNTED RIFLES



Omaha

Feb.

Aug 1920

Hello Purnohini

Just a copy of my  
name to show you that I  
remember.

Sincerely yours.

The author

F. P. Macdonald

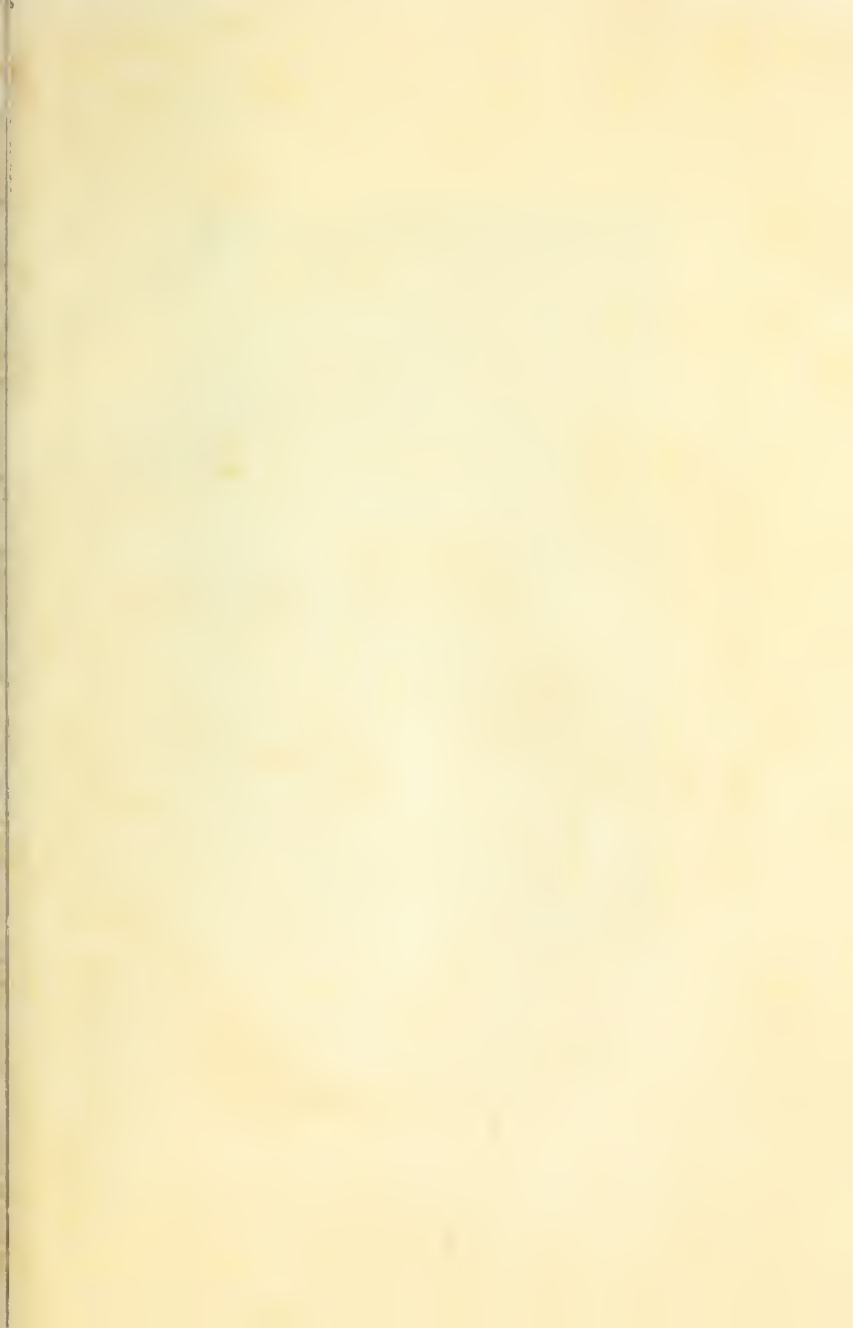




**THE KAISER'S GUEST**



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O'BRIEN AND MACDONALD  
Who fought their way together out of "The  
Black Hole" of Germany and over  
the Holland Border

# THE KAISER'S GUEST

BY  
PRIVATE FRANK C. MacDONALD

ILLUSTRATED

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1918

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THIS history of nine months in the trenches and a year of slavery in the prison camps of Germany I dedicate to the memory of

THE LATE LIEUT.-COLONEL A. E. SHAW

*Officer Commanding the First Canadian Mounted Rifles*

KILLED IN ACTION AT THE BATTLE OF SANCTUARY WOOD

JUNE 2, 1916

and to the original members of the Battalion. By them, gallant soldiers and good comrades, he was loved and respected as one of the finest soldiers who has gone to France—impartial in his judgment, fearless in his duty, kind to his horse, and considerate of his men, a gallant soldier and a true gentleman.



## FOREWORD

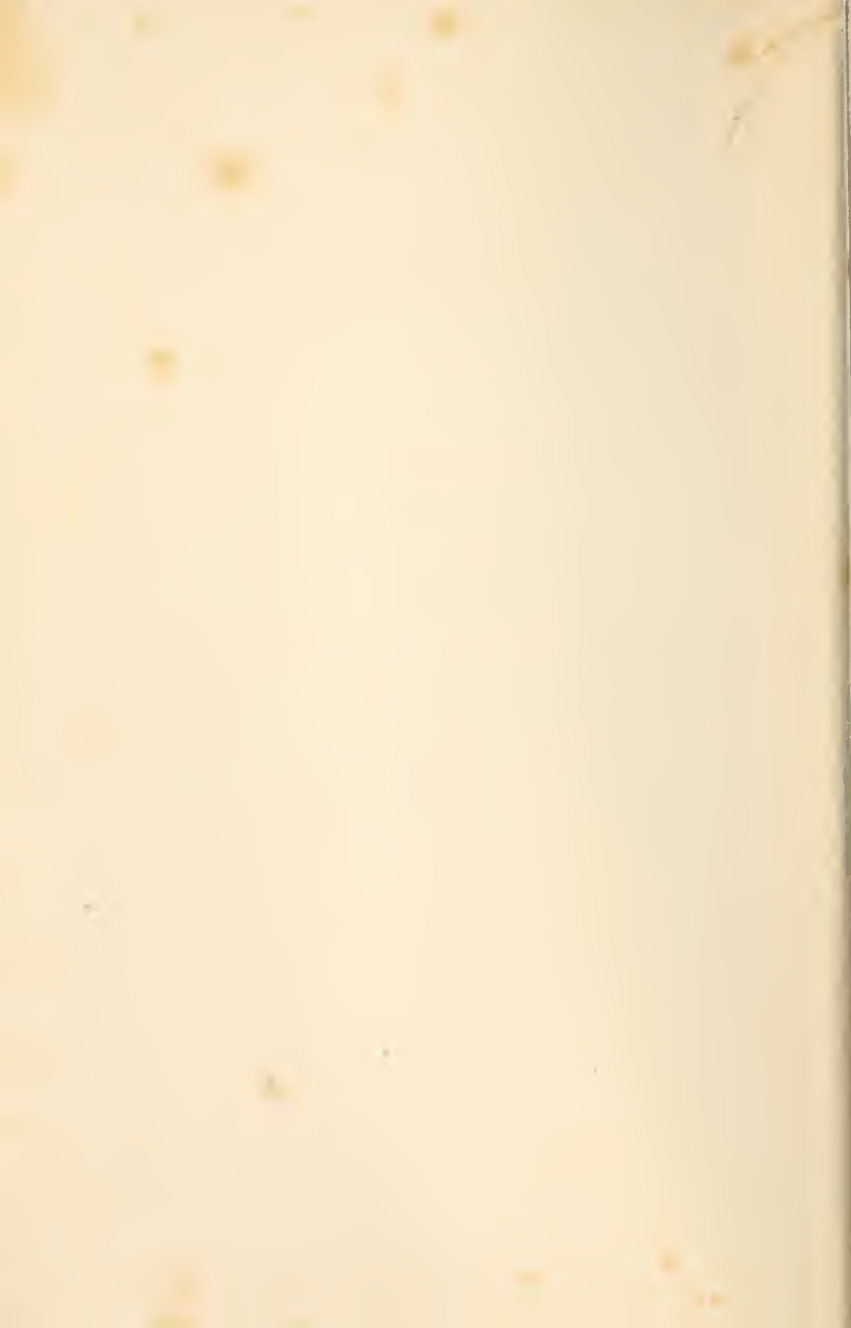
By SIR SAM HUGHES

*Lieut.-General*

“THE KAISER’S GUEST” is a very interesting book written by Private Frank C. MacDonald, No. 106,416, 1st Canadian Mounted Rifles, who was made a prisoner on June 2, 1916, at Sanctuary Wood, and who escaped from a German Prison Camp in Westphalia, in 1917.

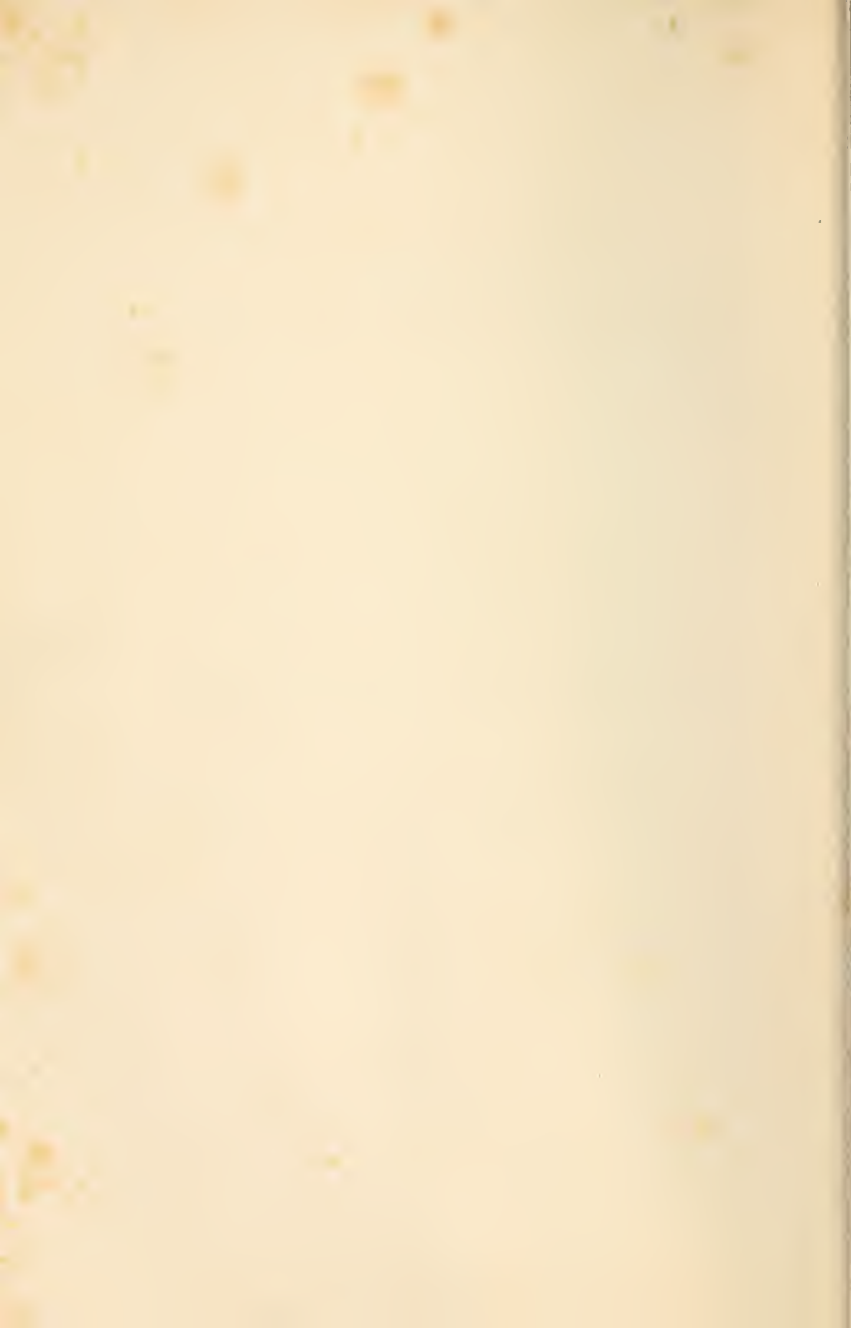
Private MacDonald’s story of his three attempts to regain his freedom is full of startling revelations and thrilling experiences. He is a good type of the Canadian soldier, in courage, hopefulness, fearlessness, persistence, resourcefulness, and determination.

SAM HUGHES.



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THE KAISER'S GUEST



# THE KAISER'S GUEST

## INTRODUCTION

"*The Kaiser's Guest.*" That title had a good deal of meaning for me. And I believe you will agree that this is warranted when you read the story.

It takes me back—whenever I think of it (and no matter what I do or try to think of, the memory of it is always with me because it is seared ineffaceably into my brain)—it takes me back to a gallant little band of fellows, with hearts as stout as God ever put into man, most of them; back there in the fall of '16 and the spring of '17 in the Auguste Victoria prison camp—the "Black Hole" of Germany. The name was bestowed in one of the few humorous moments we had then, when—with wounded and broken bodies, in a spot which was the nearest approach to Hell I ever expect to enter—those savage, relentless, and cowardly Huns tried to break our British spirits.

In those days we fought a battle a hundred times harder and more heart-breaking than anything we had had to face around Ypres and Hooge and Sanctuary Wood a little time before. And among those conditions one saw the spirit of the British race stand out among the others—clean, manly, true, ready to suffer, to die; yes, anything for the dear land and the cause believed to be right.

The name itself came this way:

To distinguish clearly the prisoners from the guards and civilians, and to make the chances of escape more remote, the Germans provided special markings for our clothing. In the early days of the war this was done with paint. Later, strips of the clothing were removed, usually from sleeves and trouser legs, and strips of red material sewed in their place. We were branded as criminals, as of course we were regarded. When one of us tried to escape and was brought back—as most were until we learned something of conditions on the Dutch border—he would be honoured with another decoration. In my case—I tried four times before I finally got away—I think I was awarded about all the decorations going. In addition to the strips on the arms and legs they gave me a six-inch panel, also in red, up the middle of my back; to this, later, a good, healthy cross-bar was added. And, for fear this might not suffice, they reverted to the paint method and in letters which sprawled over the whole of both the front and back of my tunic, they inscribed me “K. G.” It really meant “*Kriegs Gefangenen*,” which, being interpreted, means, “Prisoner of War.” When, however, I was let loose among the other boys after this huge daub had been applied, one of them immediately twisted it into “Kaiser’s Guest.”

Not so very inapt, either, was it? though I don’t believe any one will accuse me of egotism when I say that a more unwilling guest was never forced to accept his Imperial—I was about to say “Satanic”—Majesty’s invitation.

But first of all I must tell you why I came to be there.







THE AUTHOR

From photograph taken in Holland three  
days after his escape



THE AUTHOR  
From photograph taken in London  
a few weeks later



## CHAPTER I

### FROM ENGLAND INTO FRANCE

OVER and over again has been told the story of the raising of troops in Canada, of the trip across, and of the training in old England. So we can take that part of it "as read." I'll start in at the point where my experiences seem to be a bit different from the usual. They were decidedly different a little later on. But more of that later.

We had been three months in England when we marched in that night from the Hythe ranges and got the word—most welcome it was, too—"We're under orders for the front." Looking back now after the hardships of months in the trenches and the undescrivable miseries of torture, starvation, and abuse endured during a year in the prison camps of Germany, I can realize what a really good time we had been having in England.

Most of the boys had been on leave for a week or two to Scotland or Ireland and had come back loud in praise of the hospitality they had enjoyed. Others had spent their time in "The Smoke"—the name which our fellows had jokingly given to old London. And most of us had had a good deal of fun along with the hospitality. How astonished some of the good people were when we complained of the cold. They seemed to think their cold, drizzling rains and raw, damp breezes blowing in off the sea made up an ideal

summer weather. They couldn't understand how a lot of husky boys such as we were—dressed for winter and coming from "Our Lady of the Snows," with all its blizzards and zero weather—could be cold in England.

And oh, what a chance there was for the lad with a taste for fiction. And who hadn't—in the circumstances? The Canadians were in high favour in England. The First Division had already made its reputation in France and in consequence the good people were eager to hear more of the life and conditions which had bred such splendid natural fighters. So most of the stories told, I am afraid, were not likely to stimulate emigration to Canada after the war.

But, to get down to business.

We had left Canada, of course, in the expectation of making a name for ourselves as cavalry. As yet it had not been realized how far the first three years of the great struggle were to be carried on under—or rather in—the ground. And while the battalion had several times volunteered to go to the front as infantry, we still had our horses and were hammering away at cavalry drill.

We were marching in light order that day—belts, bandoliers, and rifles—and as the head of our long, dusty column swung in at the camp's main gate we seemed to sense a change in the air. The whole camp was on the *qui vive*. There was new life and force in the "Present Arms" of the guards as we swung by. The old "fed-up" way of doing things had disappeared. All over the camp we could see the men gathered in groups talking earnestly. As each regiment of the 1st Brigade, Canadian Mounted Rifles, received the order: "Head, right wheel," which brought it out of the line to its respective

parade ground, the groups in camp dissolved and sought their chums in the marching columns to pass on the good word. The battle of Loos was then on and rumour had it that we were billed there. If so, we were like all other support for the gallant Highlanders—late! But while the Twenty-fourth and the Guards divisions arrived late, *we* never arrived there at all.

The squadrons broke away to the stables and we wondered, as we cleaned and fed our horses, whether we were at last to lose our best friends. We were not long kept in doubt, for after supper we were paraded again and told that we were to turn our horses over to the artillery, draw infantry equipment and boots, and get ready to proceed to France “shortly.”

Our training had included very little marching and that had all been done in Canadian boots and light cavalry equipment. Consequently we viewed with not particularly friendly feelings the heavy, steel-soled English boots and the huge packs issued the following morning. Those packs were the excuse for a varied amount of cursing that day. No one seemed to have the faintest notion of how the stuff should be put together, and when we started out in the afternoon for a twelve-mile route march I don't think two men in the regiment had their packs arranged in the same way. However, we managed to get things settled down and, two nights after the first word had been circulated in the camp, we were ready for the great adventure. Supper was dished out early but no one had much appetite for it. We were too busy planning for the change and speculating on what awaited us across the Channel.

All summer long, while tramping over the hills, digging trenches or dug-outs in the flinty chalk

cliffs of Kent; scouting, bombing, or charging an imaginary enemy, whenever opportunity offered; our eyes would instinctively be directed across the choppy waters of the Channel to where the shores of France rose dimly out of the mist, and every man, doubtless, wondered what the future held for him over there. Now we were shortly to find out.

With supper over, kits packed, and everything shipshape, ready for the "Fall in" call, most of the boys could be seen saying good-bye to their horses. Riding them, caring for them, living with them for nearly a year, a man with any sentiment in him naturally becomes somewhat attached to the animal that has served him faithfully if treated fairly. I'm not ashamed to confess that a lump rose in my throat when I stroked the glossy neck of my beautiful mare, Hula Hula.

The name? Well, she was named by the boys, in a joke, after a Hawaiian contortionist some of them had seen, because of her bad behaviour. She bore the brands of thirteen ranches, which went to show that she had been traded about twice a year, since she was only about seven years old. When she was turned over to me by Major A. M. S. Ross, the C. O. of my squadron, she was still untrained and about as wild as they make them. Major Ross—who spoke his mind in the most plain, unpolished language possible, but to whom his troopers could speak as man to man, and who was universally respected because of his manly qualities—told me to take the mare and to spend two weeks away from the regiment to break her. While I finally managed the breaking process she never became docile and would buck and cut up continually. She was coveted by every officer in the regiment for her beauty and speed but they all admired her from a safe distance. No



one else ever cared to ride or feed her because of her evil temper. While she would put back her ears and kick every time a stranger appeared she never kicked me, and when her heels were cracked and sore and needing attention, she would stand, while I fixed them up, but trembling with nervousness and every muscle standing out like iron beneath her glossy skin. No, it was a sore point to leave Hula Hula. But I met her again in different circumstances.

We shall most of us remember, I think, even in spite of the terrible things that happened afterward, the sights of that day. All the boys had told their sweethearts—(yes, they had managed to make them in three months, all right)—and friends of our going; the fence around the camp was lined with people to see us off. Finally the long-awaited "Fall in" sounded and our famous mounted Bagpipe Band, the second of its kind in the world, played us into line and marched ahead of us to the boat. As we swung through the gate many people, mostly girls, fell in alongside their friends and marched to the gates of the pier. There final good-byes were said, some of them touching, some funny. For instance, one little girl who was crying quietly, said in a thin, high voice to the boy beside me: "Good-bye, Frank, dear. Don't forget me." All eyes turned to Frank who in his turn became very red. No one spoke then, and indeed no one felt very funny just at the moment. Later, when the lumps in our throats—which had somehow cropped up just about then—had disappeared, Frank was very frequently reminded by his chums, in high, piping voices, that they didn't expect to be forgotten.

We won't easily forget that boat trip, either. From the pier the whole brigade was crowded on one little side-wheeler. By this time it was dark

and, since no lights of any kind were allowed, the hatches were closed. Down below we were so closely packed and the air was so bad that a few of the boys fainted and some started bleeding at the nose. We thought our entrance into England had been none too pleasant. But our departure was even worse. Of course we excused it all by saying that we were at war and that allowances must be made because of this.

Mightily reassuring it was, I *don't* think, to be cooped up like that below decks in a little steamer and to think what would happen if anything—you will know what "anything" means—should hit her as she ploughed her way steadily across the Channel in the darkness. However, we were only aboard about two hours when she docked safely and we were able to disembark and get some fresh air.

And then came our first sight—or rather first *feel*, for the night was black as India ink—of France. We were lined up in long rows, loaded down with rifles, ammunition, and equipment, while orders were passed along: "No smoking. No talking." Then with "Sections right; Quick march," we were off, stumbling silently along until we came out from the long line of wharves and on to the round, slippery, and much-cursed cobblestones paving the suburban streets of France. By the time we were halfway up what seemed that night to be the highest and steepest hill in the world, in the midst of a cold, drizzling rain, the pent-up feelings of the boys broke loose and they exercised right royally the one undenied prerogative of the British soldier. Heads were thrust out of windows above as we marched, and their owners silently watched us. It came to me rather suddenly, once, that it was a good thing those people didn't know the Canadian vernacular

or they would not have been so enthusiastic about this wholesale invasion of their country. Say! if those cobblestones ultimately reach the place they were consigned to a million times that night, some of us will be walking them again in the next world I am afraid.

Our first sleep in France came all in good time—a good long time. After an hour's march we arrived at what seemed to be a camp, and, after standing in the rain for another hour, we were assigned to tents and rolled into our wet blankets. Just about then a stranger stuck his head into our tent, meant for six but sheltering twelve tired Canadian boys, and was about to withdraw it, apparently satisfied that all was as it should be, when one of the boys shouted:

“I say, Bud, what place is this?”

The stranger hesitated a moment and the most benevolent smile I have ever seen spread over his countenance.

“This,” he remarked, dryly, “is a health resort known as Boulogne *Rest Camp*.”

Then, before any one could reply, he stumbled off among the tent ropes, chuckling to himself.

That smile worried me and finally I dozed off and dreamed that someone was loading me down with packs until my feet were sinking into the ground. With every sack the smile grew broader until, just as the face was about to crack, I woke to find an energetic working party already astir and piling baggage into the tent on top of me, under the evident impression that the tent was empty. We organized a counter-attack and they were repulsed. A large quantity of material was taken. They took it.

Reveille sounded at six and after a meagre breakfast we were each introduced to a pick and shovel. A *rest camp*! Poor innocents. We were soon to

learn, and to have it thoroughly implanted, that a Canadian *rest* camp in France is a spot where manual labour is so refined and condensed into such absolute perfection that any real man prefers the front-line trenches. Hence the reason for the broad smile.

After an arduous day's work we were paraded and marched down that memorable hill again to the wharves where we got aboard a train. On the way down we saw a number of Ghurkas and tall, sinewy Sikhs, some of whom spoke to us in very good English. I got into conversation also with a French-Canadian who had been slightly wounded though not badly enough to send him to "Blighty" and heard him bemoaning his hard lot. His stories in broken English of the terrible things he had seen up the line were not specially reassuring, particularly when he ended up by swearing that the Germans had invented a machine by means of which they were bombarding our trenches with Massey-Harris binders. The laugh that this provoked offended him so that he refused to talk further and strolled off swearing to himself in broken English.

When the train pulled out we began to jolly away with two or three of the British-born lads who were with us as to conditions in the Little Island, but soon settled down to get what rest we could while the train rumbled along, carrying us slowly nearer the front and the scene of our ambitions.

I suppose we stopped several times during the night. Most of us were too tired to notice. But we knew it all right when the final stop came about 1 A. M., when we were wakened and tumbled out in the darkness of a cold, rainy morning to find ourselves apparently in the middle of a great circle of quivering, curving, ghostly lights. Flares were shooting high in the air, rising blue and dim and flaming out in a

great yellow blaze as they turned over and slowly sank to earth again. That was our first view of the front. Every time a flare went up half a dozen rifles cracked, and every few seconds a machine gun stuttered and just as suddenly ceased again.

No sounds in the world bring the same sense of hopeless, heart-breaking loneliness as these which drift back from the front at night. Every full rifle crack seems to carry a message of anguish to the lonely listener. The bold defiance of the machine guns seems to die away again in dismay, afraid of its own echo. And the lights, those flashing, silent, yellow lights, lend a ghostly aspect to the scene which helps to deepen the lonesome feeling.

All of us experienced those sensations, I guess, as we lined up that night. To us it seemed that we were right up into it, much closer than we really were, and it surprised us that there was not *more* sound. Our officers were just as badly deceived for they gave the strictest orders that no one was to speak above a whisper; they also forbade smoking. And I want to tell you that we had some queer feelings just then. However, we formed up with our packs and equipment and were soon out on the slippery cobblestones, marching through the streets of Bailleul. The streets were narrow, dark, and deserted, and had a badly battered appearance, but as the steady tramp of marching regiments resounded on the pavements, windows along the way were quietly raised and watchers appeared.

After marching about half a mile we were halted and one of the boys, trying to ease his shoulders by leaning against a house, shoved his pack through a window. The resulting crash and the rattle of the glass on the stones startled everyone. Our nerves were all on edge. It wasn't much wonder, for from



the orders given and the flares rising, seemingly all round us, we got a good bright impression that we were right behind the front line. However, we were not to see it for awhile yet. After plodding for an hour through narrow, crooked streets, we came out in the market square in the centre of the town, and there, lining up, one regiment behind the other, we soon had our packs off, flopped down on the cold, wet cobblestones, pulled our great coats over our heads, and lay until daybreak. When in the early morning we were hurried off to billets in the houses and outbuildings we learned from the French inhabitants that we were still seven kilometres from the front line and that the town had only been hit twice by shells since the beginning of the war.

The town had been occupied by the Germans, however, for ten days until they were driven out by the British cavalry, which charged through the streets. One old lady who sold us "eggs and chips" showed us where a British trooper had fallen right at her door, shot from a window above. We were told also how two spies had been caught in the steeple of the church with a machine gun and how the British had hurled them into the street below. We could scarcely help being surprised, during the five days we stayed in the place, at the happiness of the people, living as they were within range of the guns. But they danced and made merry as though they hadn't a trouble in the world. British and Canadian troops had been quartered in and around the town for a long time and consequently the people in the vicinity had picked up a fair knowledge of English. We used to sit around the houses in the daytime watching the old women and girls work away with wonderful dexterity at lace-making. Even little girls, six or seven years old, were working at this.

*Estaminets* were all over the place. Most of these had a dance hall, into which the boys and girls used to crowd almost every night. The fun was harmless, however, and moral conditions compared very favourably with those existing in England.

On the fourth day of our stay here, which, by the way, happened to be Sunday, we got our first pay in France. This amounted to fifteen francs—about three dollars—and most of the boys proceeded to make good use of it at once. On that same day, too, we saw our first air fight. A big German machine had ventured across our lines and was just nicely visible, thousands of feet in the air. When he was almost over the town a dull, stuttering sound, which we could not at first locate, came from the clouds and suddenly a British plane appeared out of a cloud bank and made for the German. The two planes circled and soared, with the hum of their motors and the intermittent stutter of their machine guns coming down to us, till suddenly the German machine, after an attack from below by the British plane, began to show distress signs. Banking and dipping, he suddenly dropped for at least a thousand feet, then, seeming to regain control, he glided away toward home while the “Archies” spotted the sky. He passed out of sight, but we learned, when he was brought into the town wounded next day, that he had been forced to land behind our lines.

About six o'clock on the fifth day of our stay in the town we were warned to keep near our billets. Half an hour later another order came: to pack our kits and parade for inspection. Then another: to pack our kits for transport, which meant carrying equipment only. When we were ready on this basis somebody's idea was changed and again we were ordered to carry our kits. Finally, after a good

deal of growling and swearing, quite warranted in the circumstances, we started off on one of the worst marches of my experience. My! how those heavy packs did weight us down as we plodded along through the darkness and rain. We shortly learned that all the clothes we were carrying were a useless encumbrance and "ditched" them all along the road; leaving a trail of shirts and underwear behind us. Even our rifles and ammunition, of which we carried two hundred and seventy rounds, were a pretty fair load in themselves.

However, we kept on for hours, seemingly, over the slippery cobblestones—footsore, tired, and wet. The continual flares were seen now to be much nearer, and these threw into relief the shattered old buildings along the road and lit up the faces of the boys around me, making them seem white and strained. Huge motor trucks passed us continually, forcing us off on to the broken stone on the side of the road and splashing up filthy, stinking mud. None of the rank and file knew where we were going or what we were going there for. Our colonel, for some unfathomable reason, surrounded all his orders with a most galling secrecy which was particularly trying to the men, who, while ready to face anything, naturally wanted to know what was expected of them. (That O.C., however, did not stay with us long in France. He did not show any great desire to share with his men the hardships and dangers of the trenches, so when he was recalled to England, early in 1916, very few farewells were said.)

We struggled on, however, through the night, sullen and determined, stopping occasionally for a short rest, at which times we would flop down in the muddy road to make the most of the opportunity. Just as we were moving off after one of these halts



a bombing party away over on our left pulled off a raid on the German trenches and, to our uninitiated ears, the fuss they kicked up was amazing. The red blaze of the bombs luridly lit up the sky; machine guns rattled in a panicky sort of way, and in a few moments the artillery began to contribute its share to the *mêlée*—a battery close beside us roaring out suddenly with blinding flashes and startling us out of our weariness, for the time being at least. We strained our eyes anxiously toward the “fireworks” and were surprised when the exhibition died out as suddenly as it had begun and, except for a few German machine guns stuttering nervously at intervals, everything was as quiet as before.

Soon we began to meet troops coming down from the trenches. We noted that they had gotten rid of a good deal of their equipment and, instead of the Ross rifles that we carried—and which, by the way, later on—when our officers were not watching too closely—used in building dug-outs and for similar purposes, they were armed with short Lee-Enfields. We asked some of them where we were but their answers were unintelligible. Then someone foolishly asked where we were going. In a second a gruff voice emanated from the darkness: “Straight to Hell, if you follow this road.” We learned next day that the road led through Ploegsteert and right on into the German trenches.

We followed it through Ploegsteert and a little beyond and then were halted for half an hour but finally were guided to our billets and turned in to sleep in a big barn. Very comfortable we were there, too. When we left, the third troop of B Squadron left their spurs hanging on a rafter as a “souvenir de guerre” for the Belgian farmer.

Any discomfort we suffered in that section was

attributable to the greenness of our troop officer, and, since this gentleman is to occupy a somewhat prominent place in the immediate future of this narrative and for reasons which will subsequently be obvious it is scarcely advisable to mention his name, I shall speak of him now and hereafter as *Bee Kay*, the cognomen by which he was notoriously known to the whole regiment. Bee Kay was British born, well educated, fairly familiar with the world through travel, and had been a very successful business man. But in the army——; well, he never should have been there. How a man who gave evidence of so much innate stupidity ever got, or could hold onto, a commission was an enigma to us. He was ambitious and tried most faithfully to master the rudiments of our drill and fit himself for promotion. But it was no use. He simply was not cut out to be an officer. Instead of improving he became worse. Added to these difficulties he was easily embarrassed and could not stand the chaffing of his brother officers. Though he carried his blundering habits to France and ultimately paid the highest penalty, along with two of his men, for one of his stupid mistakes, he won the respect and admiration of his unit by his fearlessness and devotion to duty. He feared nothing—except ridicule; and, unlike most brave men, was very sensitive on the question of courage. Occasionally, for fun, the other officers would hint that he was not so brave as he might be. At such times he would turn red to the roots of his hair, his long nose would start to quiver, and if the door of Hell itself had stood open in front of him I believe he would have stepped in rather than be accused of being afraid.

We got a demonstration of his ideas the first night we were near the front. He had heard of the "Stand to"—that daily incident in the life of the trenches

when we all turned out of our dug-outs and "lined the trench" ready to go "over the top" or to receive Fritz if he took a notion to visit us.

The "Stand to" is dear to the heart of the soldier. In that chill, ghostly hour, while he peers shivering out into No Man's Land—where the heavy, stinking vapours rise from the shell-holes, and half-opened graves form strange, stealthy-moving shadows—the "Listening Posts" are in and no one knows who skulks silently among the ghosts of No Man's Land. A machine gunner in the enemy's line spitefully sweeps the parapet, hoping to puncture one or two of the cautious heads he knows are peering over the top and knocking bits of dirt and old tins about as he rips away. The stuttering gun arouses the suspicions of the grim watcher.

"Is that something moving along our wire?" He strains his eyes through the wavering shadows and is startled by a touch on his arm. Turning quickly, he looks down into the gaunt face of the muddy old "sergeant that issues the rum."

"Here, boy," whispers the sergeant, as he holds up his little tin cup half full of rich brown rum. "This 'ere'll warm yer ole heart."

In a second the prowling ghosts are forgotten and the shadows of "No Man's Land" are fading away, daylight is slowly breaking, and a dim, irregular line of mist stretching away in front marks the line where Fritz, like ourselves, is letting his fires die away, so as to avoid the unwelcome attentions of our artillery through the day.

Bee Kay was as yet in happy ignorance of all this. He knew only that the fateful hour had arrived and decided that his troop would "stand to." Anyhow he rummaged round in the dark till he found a bit of tumble-down old trench which hadn't been

used since the retreat from Mons and which was fully a mile behind the front line. We were beastly tired and sleepy after our long night march but that made no difference to Bee Kay and at the usual time we were wakened and "stood to," absolutely without reason, in that old trench.

When morning broke we saw passing us a long line of soldiers coming back from the trenches, choosing their own path and taking their own time. They were mightily surprised when they saw us in that ridiculous position and the things they said made our blood boil. If all the wishes we heaped on Bee Kay that morning had had any effect, his end would have been sudden and strange. However, just about "stand down" time, Major Ross came up the road and we had the satisfaction of hearing Bee Kay made the recipient of an awful grilling while we crawled back to our blankets and straw.

We were called for breakfast about eight that morning and were given strict orders not to move from our billets. In the event of the approach of a hostile airplane we were to keep perfectly still and not to look up. White faces turned toward the sky, it appears, are easily picked out by the powerful glasses of the birdmen.

However, Davie Calderwood and I climbed into the loft of the old barn, and, removing one of the tiles, made a tiny window through which we could see the German lines about a mile away. The foreground presented a desolate sight. Winding in and about, all over, were old, flattened trenches and lines of rusty barbed-wire entanglements, the latter broken here and there by the shell fire of earlier engagements. Scattered through this were shattered trees and farmhouses. It was a vivid proof of the fact that war is no picnic.

Davie and I wanted to get closer, so we decided to do some exploring on our own hook. Descending from the loft, we slipped out of the building and down into the old trench we had occupied so ridiculously that morning. It turned out to be an old communication trench running directly to the front line. We followed this for about half a mile, learning more about trench life as we went on, and finally came out in an orchard alongside the ruins of two or three farm buildings. I remember that orchard well for we picked some delicious pears which were hanging ripe and juicy from the trees and lying on the ground. Just here, too, we ran across a huge pile of empty rifle cartridges and concluded that the tree above had been used as a sniper's post when the leaves were thick enough to afford good cover, earlier in the year. Rummaging around the building for an hour or so we found another sniper's post built up in the end of an old barn. This one bore the ear-marks of having been located by the Germans, for the old wall, while still standing, was blazed and scarred with shrapnel and bullet holes.

An exciting moment was to come. Leaving this quiet spot we crossed a field toward another group of buildings farther up and, when about halfway across, came into plain view of the German trenches. A rifle in the distance cracked and a spurt of mud flew up just behind us. Startled, we hesitated for a moment and a machine gun began to ra-ta-ta-ta furiously, the screaming bullets knocking up jets of earth all over us. Then we bolted like scared rabbits for a long, narrow ditch we could see running across the field in front of us. Reaching this we flopped into it on our faces. Then, when we saw that we were out of reach of that fire, we crawled along until the ditch crossed an old fire trench; and here we stayed till dark.

Snooping around in that old trench we ran across a sniper's plate. As they used them then it was a comparatively simple thing—a chunk of sheet iron about three and a half feet square with a hole in the centre to put the rifle through, this hole being covered by a sort of lid which was raised for shooting but dropped down when the plate was not in use. These plates were really death traps, for when the lid was raised the light shining through from the back could easily be seen by the German snipers and, in consequence, many of our boys "got it" in the head while looking through the opening.

As we examined this peculiar piece of equipment an idea came to me to provide for a vast improvement by adding a safety loophole and range register. While more will be said regarding this later, it may be interesting to note here that for some time I worked away at odd moments at the idea conceived then and finally had the satisfaction of having it approved by the Inventions Committee of the British army. This, by the way, was all the satisfaction I did have, for by reason of various annoying incidents I never saw the device in operation, though I believe it has been used to some extent on the western front.

Stealing back to our billets that night, when it became dark enough to move with safety, we found an N. C. O. looking for us but managed to "square" him by promising him our rum ration next morning.



## CHAPTER II

### INTO THE THICK OF THINGS

THE next morning I was one of eight men told off to guard an ammunition dump in the basement of an old house half a mile to the rear. Everything went nicely till, along about noon, we were sitting around a table playing poker when suddenly we heard a long, moaning scream. This was followed immediately by a crash, and a shower of tiles came tumbling on our heads. A big shell passed clean through the roof and exploded in the backyard, killing a poor old Belgian who was working there. Somewhat excited, we all scrambled out into an old fire trench beside the house, where we would certainly have been blown to pieces if the dump had been hit. But after dropping a few more on the road in front of us Fritz apparently thought better of it and quit. After gathering up what was left of the old Belgian we went back to our game.

We had our first actual experience under fire next day. Our O. C. ordered us out for a bath and the whole regiment marched in broad daylight over the open roads to the bath houses at Armentières, where, in an old brewery, the huge beer vats and tubs were made good use of as bathing pools. The day was sunny and bright and a big German sausage balloon could be seen hanging over their lines, seeming, in the thin air, to be very close. Nothing happened on the way over but they seemed to get a line on us

coming back for three or four batteries opened up and for a few minutes all was confusion in our ranks while the air was full of shrapnel, flying mud, bricks, and cobblestones. Like a flash everyone dived for the ditches on either side of the road, and by the best of luck not a single casualty resulted.

We crawled along the ditch till some trees afforded cover when we formed up on the road again and marched back to our billets without further incident.

We were rather amused to note a day or two afterward that the German report for the day, copied in the English papers, said: "On Saturday our artillery successfully engaged a column of troops moving on the Armentières road, resulting in their total destruction."

Down in the bottom of our hearts we had wondered how we would behave the first time under fire—what it would be like. Now the experience was past. My first feeling was one of hot anger. When those coal boxes began to come over, tearing up the road and showering us with débris, I felt almost uncontrollably mad and helpless. But when we had crawled along for half a mile to cover—dropping on our faces when the moaning of a shell gave us warning of its approach—and when we finally lined up on the road again without the loss of a single man, we were all ready to laugh and joke at Fritz's artillery.

For a few days after that, while some of our officers and N. C. O's. went up to the trenches to look them over and get a line on how things were done up there, we lay around our billets and tried to scrape up acquaintance with the Belgian civilians. While these people were very ready to sell us anything they could supply—such as beer, coffee, eggs, and chips, and bread and butter—and while they were all making



a good deal of money out of the soldiers, they were not only unfriendly but also, in many cases, openly hostile and seemed to do everything they could to make us uncomfortable. Rumours were continually being circulated as to the prevalence of both Belgian and German spies and occasionally we heard stories of executions of spies who had been caught in the act. Naturally, with this sort of thing going on around us, our feelings toward the Belgians themselves were not particularly friendly.

During our stay near Ploegsteert our billets were shelled a couple of times, but as we had no casualties, this did not appear specially notable.

One afternoon we fell in again, in heavy marching order, to go—as usual—no one knew where; another instance that our O. C. would not trust us with news as to our whereabouts and which, naturally, did not tend to add to his popularity. Again, too, the ignorance which was first evidenced in overcaution soon changed into overboldness.

That evening, we were marched out from our billets in broad daylight, while we could see several German sausages hanging over their lines. That time, however, we were not shelled and, after marching some miles, were drawn up in a square alongside a large camp consisting of row upon row of long, low huts, carefully camouflaged with a view to concealment from aviators. While standing there we looked at them curiously, speculating on the amount of comfort they would afford. That curiosity was destined to be well satisfied for we spent many, many nights during the following year, stretched on their cold, hard floors.

Piling our rifles and throwing off our kits we had supper on the parade ground where we were later joined by two other Mounted Brigades (both on foot)

namely (a) the Second C. M. R. Brigade, consisting of the 4th, 5th, and 6th Canadian Mounted Rifles, and three East Canadian regiments, and (b) the Canadian Cavalry Brigade, made up of Lord Strathcona's horse, the Royal Canadian Dragoons, and a Colonial regiment enlisted in England and known as King Edward's Horse.

Under cover of darkness we moved off again, the nine regiments with their machine-gun sections and transport covering more than a mile of road. The darkness was intensified by the quivering and intermittent light from the star shells. We plodded on steadily hour after hour with scarcely a halt till nearly morning when it became evident that something had gone wrong up in front since we were continually halted and almost instantly moved on again. Just as day broke we were drawn up in a small wood at the foot of a hill—the Kemmel Hill, by the way, made famous in the German pushes this spring—and after standing an hour in a drizzling rain were ordered to throw off our packs and stay there. The three brigades were drawn up in the wood with their transport in a hollow close by. We soon learned that our guides had gone astray and had come within an ace of leading us into a death trap. We were then barely a thousand yards from the enemy's trenches.

Despite the order to stay where we were, I sneaked off with a couple of others anxious to see a little more of the fuss—down to a small village about a quarter of a mile nearer the front trenches. The houses here had been mostly battered down, but some of the people were still staying there selling coffee and other supplies to the soldiers. Here and there small signposts were posted with a warning in French and English to the effect that that point was within view of the enemy.

Back in the wood the officers tried in every way possible to keep the men quiet and under cover—no small job, considering the limited size of the cover and the number of soldiers crowded into it.

Early in the afternoon the inevitable happened. A large German plane appeared overhead and circled about like a huge bird while the Archies peppered away at it and we were showered with falling shrapnel. Evidently we had been discovered and we were ordered to get into our equipment and to get out of camp as quickly as possible. In a very few minutes we were on the road and regiment after regiment marched up over the hill *in plain sight of the German trenches.*

Why Fritz did not fire on such a visible target is incomprehensible, but he seemed to be determined to clean up the wood first and opened up a terrific bombardment, commencing on the side nearest the trenches and systematically reducing every dug-out, every vestige of shelter, and half the trees to a mass of tangled rags, mud, and splinters.

With the best of luck, considering the circumstances, the last regiment to leave was the only one that suffered any casualties. They had to pull out in a hurry without even taking time to get their packs. Again we had the laugh on Fritz's artillery.

Continuing our march we came about midnight to a dug-out camp where several Old Country regiments were drawn up on their way out of the trenches. The night was as black as death, it was raining as usual, and it is not to be wondered at that in the darkness and mud we got into the most hopeless mix-up. Our brigade became jammed in the road between a battalion of the Duke of Wellington's Light Infantry and a transport column. The others overtook us and ranged alongside till the road was packed

solid. When the head of the column was finally released the regiments were so hopelessly confused, and the men and officers so muddled up, that no one knew where he belonged.

I struggled for a while to get out of the mess and was soon moving along again in an endless line of plodding figures when a voice in front of me said in the broadest accent: "Gor blimey, Bill, I wish the bleedin' kaiser had this bally pack." My suspicions as to my whereabouts were naturally aroused and when I asked: "What regiment is this?" the same voice answered out of the darkness: "Don't yer know? This 'ere's the Dook er Wellington's bleedin' Infantry."

So I had to "About turn" and try to locate my own regiment. In doing so it seemed that I met representatives of every regiment in the British army and was "cussed" in every tongue and dialect for butting into their ranks.

Finally we were sorted out and on the way again. Straggling along over a low, wet field, we came into a long, crooked, and badly battered communication trench. Here we got tangled up again, losing touch with the leading half of our company through no fault of our own but because a lieutenant of another company, lost and rather badly excited, insisted on breaking our ranks and leading his platoon through. We had orders not to lose touch with the men in front—orders that we tried to carry out—but none of our officers was there to insist on right of way and so we had to prowl around in a bush behind the front line for an hour or two. Finally we decided to "flop" for the night and lay down where we were, some stretching out on the wet ground in front of the trench, others sleeping on the parapet as the most comfortable spot.

I was wakened early in the morning by someone cautiously pulling at my foot. Sitting up, cold and drowsy, I rubbed my eyes and looked at Bee Kay.

"Get those fellows in out of there," he told me. "We are in plain sight of the German trenches."

Naturally that dispelled the drowsiness. Looking round I could see, only about two hundred yards away, a long, crooked ridge, looking like a furrow turned by some gigantic plough—our front line. The communication trench where we had been lying wriggled round the edge of the wood like a snake and zigzagged across a low field to our front line, a little to the right. Daylight was just breaking and with it a thin fog was beginning to lift. Over our line and on slightly higher ground another long brown furrow—the German front-line trench—was becoming visible.

I lost no time in waking the boys and, shivering and grumbling, they crawled back into the trench. Here we shortly located a dug-out which a bunch of us appropriated and which we were to occupy for some time to come.

One might go into descriptions of trench life, of its dangers, its hardships, its humours, and its pathetic features; but this, like other matter, has been told a thousand times. And since my aim is to present experiences out of the ordinary I shall pass on.

One incident which developed in this dug-out is highly interesting—to me, at least. It will be remembered how the idea for a safety loophole had come to me back at Ploegsteert. I got time now to do some work on it, carving out a small model with a service knife. I had already talked over the idea with Sergeant D——, and he had seemed to be greatly taken with it. Now that he shared the same

dug-out he seemed again to be very much interested, and asked me a good many questions about it. This by way of explanation for what is to follow.

For the next few months our regiment was utilized as a sort of flying column, relieving battalions here and there on the line where conditions were very quiet at the time, and doing a good deal of work in trenches and on narrow-gauge railways behind the line. We suffered few casualties but—for a really good reason, when one understands the situation—gained considerable reputation for our tendency to “pinch” anything that was transportable. While all the other troops had their regular billets when out of the trenches and held the same trenches each time they were sent in, the C. M. R. were nobody’s soldiers and were shifted from place to place, frequently and irregularly. Inasmuch as we had to build fresh shelters at practically every new place, and as supplies were meagre, we simply had to appropriate sandbags, oil drums, trench mats, and other necessary things too numerous to mention. At that time troops were being warned of the approach of hostile aircraft by the blasts of a whistle, two blasts meaning: “Get under.” This became somewhat perverted, on that section of the line at least, for after a while we found out that three blasts meant: “Get your goods under cover, the C. M. R.’s approaching.”

Never shall I forget the misery of that winter in France—the long, weary marches through the mud and rain, over the slippery cobblestones and through side trails where we sank to our knees in the slimy, stinking mud; sleeping in the outbuildings of the French and Belgian farmers, without fire and often rendered specially uncomfortable by the farmers themselves. It was hard to realize sometimes that



we were putting up with all this for an ideal and that we were fighting largely for the benefit of these people who only used us as a convenience in making money through the sale of their produce, though the French people generally treated us well.

November was spent in tents and dug-outs at Dranoute and while here I finally finished my invention. I had carried it with me all through the miserable fall, working every minute I could snatch on it, and in no way trying to conceal it.

One day, when it was almost complete, I was sitting in my tent working at it when a shadow fell across the flap and Captain Bob Richardson looked in. "Captain Bob," as he was familiarly known, was second in command of my company—later becoming O. C.—and was greatly liked by all the boys. When he came in and sat down I quickly put the model away but he was anxious to see what I was doing and was so pleased with the idea that he insisted on my finishing it that night and showing it to Major Ross, who at that time was company O. C. When Major Ross saw the device he called a meeting of his officers to whom the whole thing was explained. They all professed to be highly pleased with it, some of them praising it in very complimentary terms. Major Ross explained that since I was a soldier and under the direction of the Government it would be out of the question for me to provide for any proprietary rights in the matter but that I could put it before the proper authorities and take a chance as to what reward might be forthcoming. I followed this suggestion and the device was approved by the Battalion, Brigade, and Divisional commanders in turn and I was sent to General Armstrong, C. O. of the Canadian Engineers, to direct the making of a full-sized model. For this I left the battalion for a

month and was billeted at Bailleul, about seven miles back from the front.

I was naturally somewhat chagrined to hear a story from one of the boys just before I left for Bailleul. He said he had gone to Sergt. D——'s dug-out for some sand-bags and had surprised him working on a device which looked exactly like mine. When he questioned D—— as to where he had got "MacDonald's invention" the sergeant had put the affair quickly out of sight and had answered confusedly: "Oh, this is something I have invented myself." Whether D—— ever was able to make any use of the device is a query. I have heard rumours since that he subsequently joined the Tank Corps, and that a special covered loophole similar to mine is being used on these huge crawlers, but this is something I cannot verify. At any rate, I had a good deal of satisfaction when I heard a little later on that D—— had had the effrontery to bring his version of my invention to Major Ross who at once detected the thievery and gave him such a tongue-lashing as few men ever got, warning him that if he tried to do anything with it he would make trouble for him.

I had an easy time in Bailleul where I was able really to work at my invention, and eventually had the opportunity to show it to General Armstrong and several other officers; but when nothing definite seemed to be developing and since my work was finished, I asked for permission to go back to my regiment. Just then, however, they were coming from a tour in the trenches for a rest and I was able to rejoin them right in Bailleul as they marched through to billets.

I don't think I ever saw a regiment so exhausted or so hopelessly muddy and battered as they were. They had been, as I soon found out, in the line in



front of Messines where the trenches were exceedingly low and wet, following around the foot of a hill on which the Germans had their front line. Added to this was the fact that the River Douve, which ran along behind our trench for a short distance, crossed and flowed down into the German lines where they eased off from the hill. The wily Germans had dammed the stream where it crossed their lines, thus backing the water up into our trenches until our boys had been standing for three or four days at a time in water up to their waists. During this time the German artillery dropped a plentiful supply of shells along the line, adding showers of clammy, freezing mud and icy water to the other discomforts. Just at this time, too, the 3d C. M. R.'s were badly mauled in the trench not far from our fellows, one company especially suffering terribly from shell fire. Shortly afterward our Brigadier was relieved of his command and returned to Canada. Apparently "someone had blundered."

The discomfort did not end with the boys' relief from the trenches, since for nearly two months after that we were quartered in old barns between Bailleul and Meteren. Cold and wet were predominant here because, for fear of firing the barns, fires were forbidden, and many a time, after a hard day's drill or a route march in the cold rain, we had to turn into our blankets as we were. But it was active service and we tried to make the best of it. Of course there was grumbling. That's a soldier's privilege in such conditions. But I do say that our boys were mightily considerate and it was only when some unnecessary hardship was loaded on us by reason of carelessness or incompetence that any general grumbling was heard.

Here, too, we had to learn a new system of drill. We had been trained, of course, as cavalry and had gone through all our work under the cavalry system and with the regular orders we had learned back in Canada. Now they went at it wholesale to make infantry out of us and we had to try to forget all we had learned before and become familiar with a new system and entirely new commands. Why, scarcely any of our fellows knew how to "form fours" properly, by the infantry method, and a great many of us never learned. While a cavalry regiment is made up of about six hundred men—of which a large number are taken up by transport and details—ours was always below "strength," but we had taken the place in the firing line of infantry battalions of approximately one thousand men, and our trenches were sometimes pretty slimly held.

This was now remedied to some extent; the 3d C. M. R. were split up between the 1st and 2d, and the 6th between the 4th and 5th, the two former C. M. R. Brigades were then formed into the 8th Infantry Brigade, but until I was wounded and taken prisoner the following June, we had never been brought up to full strength. With the new order, our last hope of being withdrawn from the trenches for mounted service in Egypt—for which I believe we were originally intended—vanished, but we were not sorry as it had been evident for some time that if we went to Berlin, we would walk.

Just about this time our first O. C. returned to England, and Lieut.-Colonel A. E. Shaw—one of the finest soldiers that ever went to France—took charge of us. We were right sorry to see Major Ross invalided to England at the same time, but his place was well filled by "Captain Bob."

The hand of Colonel Shaw soon began to be felt

in the regiment. Discipline, always good in the 1st, was tightened up a little more. After five months at the front, we didn't take very kindly to infantry drill, its introduction caused no little dissatisfaction, and about half of the regiment reported sick every morning to avoid it. But when our new O. C. ordered the sick parade for six o'clock in the morning, and we had to pile out of the cold, fireless barns and stand in a long, shivering row awaiting the doctor with a hundred-to-one chance of getting a No. 10 and duty, the sick parade soon resumed normal dimensions. And by reason of his constant exercise of justice and consideration, Colonel Shaw soon won the confidence and respect of his men.

An instance or two will be illuminating.

On one route march we were caught a long distance from our billets in a cold, heavy rain. The Colonel was the only man in the battalion who had a rain coat. Surprisingly, he refused to put it on and rode at the head of his men with the coat rolled on his saddle. On arriving at billets he went directly to the Quartermaster and ordered an issue of rum for the whole parade. For some reason there was no rum in the stores and without waiting to change his wet clothes the Colonel rode into Bailleul, and, disappointed there, commandeered a car and went on to Hazebrouck, thirty miles, and on his return went from billet to billet, giving every soldier a drink of rum to warm him up.

One story from our last trip in the trenches that year, in December, will illustrate some of the conditions of trench life not usually spoken of. One of the misfits in our company was Corporal P——, a big ungainly chap who used his pull to get a corporal's stripes but who, as an N. C. O., proved himself such a sneaking fellow that no officer would recommend

him for further promotion; and, though several of them would have been glad to reduce him, he was too clever to give them the chance. He was always looking for trouble and, being so overbearing and insolent to the men, usually found a good deal of it. By being a stickler for punctuality and discipline, however, he tried to make himself solid with the officers. When we arrived at the front the real stuff in him became evident for while not actually a coward he evidently considered discretion the better part of valour and passed on to any one he could such "dirty work" as came his way.

Another corporal, D—, a little dark chap, was of an entirely different type. Though a splendid little fellow, he had neither taste nor liking for military authority and lacked the resolution to back up the few orders he did give. In consequence he was a good deal taken advantage of and it was only by reason of the liking and respect the boys had for him that he was able to control them at all.

On arriving in the trenches this trip P— was warned for Listening Post, which, as most people know, means lying out in No Man's Land, sometimes right up against the German wire, "listening" and watching for any enemy movement. P—, characteristically, went to D—, passing the duty on to him and the latter—either taking the order as O. K. or to avoid trouble—immediately picked his men and relieved the post of the regiment withdrawing. However he managed it, Corporal P— worked things so that D— was kept on duty out there at Listening Post all the time we were in the trenches. This was not only contrary to orders but was exceedingly hard on D—, since the steady tension of watching and the dangerous nature of his work were made a great deal harder by the fact that the trenches

we held were flooded. D—— soon became exhausted and the night before the regiment was relieved while he was half asleep and trying to clean his rifle, it was accidentally discharged, killing one of his men and crippling another.

Corporal P—— then had to take over his post and was shot on his first trip out to change his sentries. But, with better luck than he deserved, he received a nice “cushy Blighty” and was later invalided home to Canada.

D—— himself was heart-broken and never recovered from the shock of the incident. He was arrested and was away from the regiment for a time but was afterward brought back and remained with us till his trial. At the trial he was defended by “Captain Bob,” who, with the best intention—though, it seems to me, foolishly—persuaded him to plead guilty to a charge of “Killing one man and seriously wounding another through carelessly discharging his rifle.” By this time D—— knew of P——’s interference with the orders but he said nothing whatever of this and was sentenced to two years with hard labour, to be served after the war. This meant that he must keep on fighting, with two years’ penal servitude hanging over his head. This and the shock of the accident broke his heart. He moved about among the boys like a ghost, silent and brooding, and while the whole battalion sympathized with him and tried in every way possible to cheer him up it was of no use. We knew that he went into the trenches each time praying that he might not come out, but too conscientious to throw his life away.

When we got settled in our billets after this tour in the trenches and the reorganization of our regiment fairly well under way, the boys all began to talk of Christmas and to plan for a little celebration. We

collected five francs (about a dollar) each from the men and, with a little financial aid from the officers, prepared for a real old-time Christmas feast to include turkey, plum pudding, a variety of fruit and cake and, last but not least, a few bottles of champagne.

So on Christmas morning we woke—in the cold, dismal barn where we were quartered—with rosy visions of a real home-like feast for once. Mine were suddenly and sadly shattered by a khaki-clad runner from Divisional Headquarters who arrived just at breakfast time to warn me to report at Headquarters at once and to proceed in a government car to Hazebrouck with the models of my invention so that an explanation of them might be made to the Inventions Committee. I hurried over, found the car and a tall French captain who was to drive me down. How that big gray car did fly over the roads which were exceedingly good after leaving the immediate front.

Arriving in Hazebrouck the officer left me, suggesting that I meet him again at eleven o'clock for the run back to Bailleul. Just then my chances of getting a share of that Christmas dinner looked mighty blue.

After some little trouble I found the Inventions Committee's Offices and reported. The sergeant in charge, who was the only person there, was rather put out that I should have been sent down on the holiday. However, he went to see the officers and to my satisfaction six of them returned with him. I went over my device as carefully as possible and was gratified at the reception they gave me since they all appeared to be greatly interested. A hint was given that something similar had already been shown them but they promised definitely that they would go



further into the matter and that I should hear from them later. I did. Some considerable time later a letter came from the Committee informing me that they had been in possession of exactly the same thing for months and that they didn't think it was of much use anyway; or words to that effect. However that may have been they declined to return the drawings of the device and for a time I gave up the hope of gaining recognition for my invention.

Other more material hopes were much better realized, though. Hurrying over to meet the French captain as he had suggested, so soon as the Committee got through with me, I found the car waiting and before long I was in Bailleul again, arriving just as the dinner was under way.

Get a picture of that Christmas feast if you can. The boys sat in two long rows in the straw with blankets stretched between for a table and cloth combined. The officers of our company occupied the end seats and "Captain Bob" was master of ceremonies. When we came to the wine course he stood up and delivered a long, disjointed speech, mostly in praise of his battalion and company and finishing by proposing a toast to "The boys who were with us last Christmas but are gone to-day," which, naturally, was very quietly and earnestly responded to. Then each platoon officer was called on for a speech and he in turn was followed by a private in his platoon. Almost invariably the officers followed "Captain Bob's" example and said something in praise of their own men. The privates in their turn praised their officers, though in one or two cases it was quite evident the man was not very enthusiastic over the sentiments he expressed.

When our platoon's turn came Bee Kay rose to the occasion like a hero, stood for a minute red

and embarrassed, unable to get his thoughts together. Then, with a mighty effort, he finally got under way and spouted out a lot of almost wholly unintelligible jargon about his platoon. To my dismay I was called on to respond and by no manner of means could I squeeze out of it. I did not feel like praising him for while I respected his courage I remembered dangerous expeditions in No Man's Land when his carelessness or stupidity had nearly cost us our lives. Very unwillingly I got to my feet, almost as badly embarrassed as Bee Kay himself had been, and when the between-speeches fuss died down I said: "Now, all the boys have been cracking up their officers. What's the matter with Bee Kay?" In the uproar which followed I was able to make my escape.



## CHAPTER III

### TRENCH LIFE DAY BY DAY

SHORTLY after Christmas we were ordered up the line again to take up the trenches of the 2d Infantry Brigade. Here, although we were only about two hundred yards from the Germans, we had a quiet and uneventful trip. Colonel Shaw arranged his force so that no man spent more than twelve hours at a stretch in the front line, this being possible through the placing of supports in a hollow close to the line and permitting a change night and morning. The changes of troops had to be made over an open road running straight into Messines, the town being located on a hill directly in front of us. The German front line wound along close to the foot of the hill and their second line, halfway up the hill, dominated our trenches as well as the Messines road. Every night hundreds of men—working parties and relieving parties—travelled that road and, considering the dominating positions of the Germans, it was surprising that our casualty lists were, comparatively, so small.

Conditions here were typical of a greater efficiency on the part of the German command than at that time was expected from ours. While British and Canadian regiments marched to their front-line trenches on an open road without a vestige of cover, the Germans had everywhere the most wonderful system of communication trenches, underground

tunnels, and dug-outs. They followed a policy of saving their men in every possible way except when some direct object was to be gained when they did not hesitate to sacrifice them. Our men and officers alike seemed to be careless of life. An instance of this will be conclusive.

We spent weeks in building a communication trench to avoid the necessity of exposing ourselves on that open stretch of Messines road. When almost finished a heavy rain came on and it was practically all washed in. And this simply because our engineers had neglected to brace it with posts and wire. Later we worked at it again for weeks but for various reasons gave it up.

The trenches themselves on this part of the line were all in good shape, having been held by Canadian battalions. You could always tell, when taking over a trench (if you did not know in any other way), who had been there before, by the shape things were in. The Canadians generally had won a splendid reputation along this line and we worked night and day to keep these temporary habitations as safe and as comfortable as possible. It was rather stiff, coming back from billets after leaving trenches in good shape, to be sent into those which had been occupied by some Imperial battalion, to find them scarcely up to our waists, with no evidence of any attempt to rebuild them; with their bombs rusty, unoiled, and sometimes without detonators, and with their ammunition wet and rusty. It should not be thought that such conditions were general. The Guards divisions, for instance, had us beaten a mile for trenches, but occasionally—as for example when we relieved the Tommies at Dickebusch in 1915 and at Hooze in 1916—such was the case.

Here at Messines the trenches were high and dry,

the sun during the day was bright and warm, and we spent most of our time sleeping or playing cards for small sums to give the game a little tang. One day four of us were having a game of banker and one chap, Pete Martin, of Brandon, was nearly broke when the Germans started their daily shelling performance. They started over on the left and worked slowly and methodically to the right so that after a little time the shells began to drop uncomfortably close to us and soon were landing into the parapet just in front of the dug-out. Three of us wanted to quit but Pete insisted on hanging on, seeing a chance to get his money back. Finally one of the trio could stand it no longer, slipped out of the dug-out and disappeared. Just then a black shrapnel burst directly overhead and bits of it flew singing through the air in all directions, landing on the roof above our heads and all over the place. Player number two disappeared while Pete denounced him as a quitter and shuffled the cards again. I had just backed the cuts when a whizz-bang hit the corner of the dug-out, tearing a sheet of corrugated iron and two or three sand-bags off the roof.

"Come on, Pete," I said. "Let's beat it."

"No, no; just another hand," growled Pete's big bass voice.

The dug-out was hit three times and the last shot, fortunately a "dud," drove through the thick wall of sand-bags until its bright steel nose bulged out behind us. That was near enough for me. I grabbed my money and made a bee-line for the shelter of a near-by culvert. Pete followed, grumbling and swearing, but instead of crawling into safety under the culvert he characteristically *settled down behind a bomb store* until the bombardment was over. That was a nice spot to pick, about the last most of us

would have thought of. If one of those shells had hit the store—well, you can imagine how much there would have been left of Pete. He often exposed himself to danger unnecessarily and seemed to be absolutely devoid of fear, but he could always be depended on to put through any dangerous duty given him, and this means a great deal at the front. He was killed a few months later in the Battle of Sanctuary Wood where he went down fighting gamely to the last.

But to resume the story. Part of the trench near us was broken and this spot had to be patrolled at night to guard against German patrols getting through and surprising us. German snipers had been worrying our patrols in this open spot and one night Bee Kay decided to go out and see if they could not be located. As usual he sent for me, told me to get another man, and to come with him. In due time we started, Bee Kay wearing a khaki great coat which was almost white. As he stepped out of the trench in the bright moonlight he was plainly visible and, as my comrade said in my ear, looked "as big as a house." However, he struck boldly across the fields, taking in the scenery as he walked, and though he must have presented a splendid target, everything was quiet—at first. We sneaked along about twenty yards behind, ready to drop at the first warning. We didn't have long to wait. Bee Kay got as far as the German wire and began to poke about with his stick when the rifles started to crack and the bullets flew by uncomfortably close. In the fifth of a second we were on our faces on the grass. Not so the bold Bee Kay. Turning quietly around, he walked over to where we were holding down the grass and said:

"D—n it, I believe they are shooting at me."

Then he turned and walked slowly back to the trenches. We followed a little more cautiously at a safe distance but began to believe that Bee Kay had a charmed life.

A few nights later, while we were in support, I went with a working party to build up a bit of D Company's trench. While we were at work a terrible thunderstorm came on and to add to the fuss the Germans started a bombardment a mile or two on our left. That was a fearful night. With the lightning, the sullen glare of the big guns miles behind the line, and the blaze of bursting shells near us lighted up the night, even through the driving rain, with a sickly, despairing sort of light. Underfoot, thousands of loathsome, scabby rats prowled around the old tin cans or scrambled, squeaking, about our feet. Finally the night became so bad that we were ordered in and plodded back to support, but in our joy at the unexpected relief we forgot all about bringing in the sand-bags we had been working with out in No Man's Land.

The next night saw us detailed for the same duty, but we had scarcely started to work when a rattle of rifles from the German lines sent a shower of bullets in amongst us, the first volley getting one of the boys through the ankles. Down on our faces we dropped, pronto. The next volley struck one of the boys on the top of the head, killing him instantly. Another was shot through the arm and foot with the same bullet. Picking up our casualties we got back to the trenches without further loss. The Germans, having discovered the sand-bags we had forgotten the night before, knew what was going on and had set up a rifle battery during the day to command the spot. That cured us of leaving sand-bags about indiscriminately.

At that stage of the war bombing was at its height and was considered so important that the bombing officer was given the privilege of choosing his men and could take any one he pleased and who he judged would make good in this special work, irrespective of the wishes of any company officer. Naturally this caused friction between the officers. Again, since the "Suicide Club"—as the bombers were usually called because of the dangerous nature of the work—were (for the same reason and as a sort of compensation for their heavy casualty lists) excused from all working parties, some of the same friction appeared among the men. The bombers were all right, in the opinion of the others, when there was something doing in the front line, but "no d—n good" when they were marching up from reserve trenches on working parties while the bombers stayed behind in billets.

I had the good—or ill, whichever way you choose to look at it—fortune to be chosen for this special work and thus was numbered among the "No d—n good" squad. Our work was to guard the front line, and any weak spot or section where the trenches were unusually close together were specially allotted to us. In some sections, again, bombing posts were placed out in No Man's Land and in these sections we were called upon to protect working parties which were building up the front line. A few bombs carefully placed were very effective in breaking up a German raid. The trench raid, introduced by the Canadians, was at that time just becoming popular, and also fell within our duties. Taken all in all, a bomber lived a busy life and one that was usually as short as it was busy.

Near Meteren the brigade had built a big bombing school, with which had been developed an elabo-



rate system of trenches, dug-outs, and saps. This became our headquarters when out of the front-line trenches and all the men of the battalions of the brigade were sent down here for a short course in bombing. Provision for gas tests was made at the same place and once the whole brigade was marched down to undergo the test. The trenches were filled with a gas, presumably the same as the Germans were using, and after being warned that under no circumstances were we to remove our masks, we were all marched through these gas-filled trenches. That gas was genuine, all right. One chap who thought he would try a taste took off his mask when halfway through. Another dropped his cap and went back for it after he had taken off his mask. They were taken away in an ambulance and we heard that they ultimately died from the effects.

Up to this time our pipe band had been with us constantly and had been a great help on parade and on the march. Particularly during the long, distasteful hours of infantry drill—the need of which we could scarcely understand—the band stood us in good stead. Of course some of the lads were continually joking at the pipers, but they all stepped out just the same with a good deal of vigour when, for instance, the band would strike up “The 42d,” or the good old “Cock of the North.”



## CHAPTER IV

### UP TO THE YPRES SALIENT

ONE fine morning our brigade was formed up in a big field outside Bailleul, under orders for the Ypres salient.

At that time the spot was not so well known as it became later, though we had heard stories from French, Belgian, and British soldiers of the horrors of the place and were naturally looking forward to an active time. We were not disappointed.

Just as the band struck up that morning and the huge mass of khaki began to melt up into a long, winding column, a huge German plane sailed high overhead. Spotting us, the pilot came lower and lower and with every circle we expected the bombs to begin dropping. The load must have been given to someone else earlier in the day for, finally, and to our rather material relief, he flew away without dropping anything.

That day we reached billets behind Ypres where we stayed the same night and the day following. The next night, however, we had our first sight of the town when we went up to relieve a division of British regulars at Hooge.

In the dusk of the evening we entrained in cars and a very silent and gentle old locomotive pulled us up toward the old city. Fritz, however, in some way got a line on our movements and shelled the track so heavily that we were forced to detrain and march for an hour, with shells bursting all about us.

Ypres and its ruins have been described a score of times so it is not necessary for me to stop to picture it. It was terrible, even for us who by this time were pretty well accustomed to the German ravages, to see the destruction that had reduced the thousands of happy, prosperous homes to a shapeless heap of bricks and rubbish and had driven the people, destitute and suffering, to wander homeless in other countries.

There are, or were, several gates leading into the city and adjacent to each was a bridge crossing the canal. All the surrounding roads converge on the town so that to follow the roads it was necessary to pass through it. Sometimes we marched around it through the fields, but the artillery and transport all passed through the narrow streets and often became jammed in the maze of traffic.

On this first trip in we crossed the bridge and entered the city about eleven o'clock. The night was very dark and the road was full of shell-holes with a row of débris from the fallen buildings piled up along either side, so it was necessary to pick our way along very carefully. Coming along to the old Cloth Hall, with a tiny pinnacle on each corner still left standing, we had to halt awhile for here we met a British regiment coming out and also a long line of transport which was rather badly jammed. We had some trouble getting through and were thanking our stars that the German artillery were not giving the place their usual attention for if they had shelled it at all just then we should have suffered heavily. Our battalion was known among the others of our brigade, however, as "The Lucky 1st" because we had had remarkably good fortune in the trenches and had suffered less than half the casualties sustained by the other battalions. This good fortune

was largely due to good management on the part of Colonel Shaw, whose watchful care and sound common sense certainly had a good deal to do, in more ways than one, with the battalion's efficiency. We never went into the trenches without first being addressed by him and one of these talks will be typical of his consideration:

"Boys, we're 'going in' again and I want to give you a little sound advice. Last trip we had our usual good luck and suffered very few casualties. Even some of those could have been avoided. Jack McCauley was killed standing at daybreak with his head and shoulders above the trenches. Now, I want you to remember that one man can see as much as twenty and you must keep under cover as much as possible and take care that you do not draw the enemy's attention in any way. In a month or two we shall be called on to do something and we will do it right. Then one live man will be better than twenty dead ones. I know you all feel, as I do, the disadvantage of our present position, but with the coming change we shall need every available man. So remember and take care of yourselves. Good-bye and good luck."

The "Good-bye" did not mean that he would not "go in" with us. It was for the boys who would never be addressed in this way again, those who would be carried silently out to join their comrades "row on row," and for all of us if the end should come for him. Colonel Shaw could always be depended on to be on the job as was proven later.

The "present position," spoken of by the Colonel we understood as the pacific policy which our High Command seemed to be following at that time. And it need scarcely be mentioned that this sort of thing was exceedingly distasteful to the Canadian troops.

We were told continually to "Keep quiet and let the Germans alone and they will let you alone." The Germans soon learned of this and took every advantage of it, shelling us regularly and harassing our working parties with machine-gun fire. The Air Service, too, seemed to be following the same policy since the German planes hovered over our lines almost unmolested and our planes kept away, consistently refusing to meet them, something which—knowing the courage, daring, and initiative shown by them earlier and later—must have been as trying to the pilots as it was to us.

When we came up into Ypres salient, however, this policy was wearing out. Our airmen were becoming more aggressive, our artillery was beginning to "back up" the infantry, and when an S. O. S. call came in from any part of the line Fritz was assured of a large shipment of "souvenirs" (the Canadian name for the artillery offerings) by rapid transit.

Finally we got clear of the transport and picked our way along a side street over piles of bricks and rubbish to avoid "Hell-fire Corner," where Fritz seemed to have some idea of establishing a new graveyard, for he raked the spot day and night with coal boxes, Jack Johnsons, and other brands of high explosive.

Coming out on the main street again, we were halted, waiting for the rear companies to close up. Lying by the side of the road we talked in whispers, and everything was strangely quiet except for the occasional crack of a rifle in the distance. We watched the glare of the fluttering Very lights which could just be seen over the top of Sanctuary Wood. As usual, smoking was prohibited, but while waiting, one of the boys shoved his head inside his comrade's tunic and withdrew it again shortly with the forbid-

den "nail" between his teeth. Soon from all sides poured in the whispered request "Give us a light," and soon the whispering ceased while a good many of the boys were enjoying stolen draws. Suddenly old Bee Kay, standing in the middle of the road in his white coat, twitched his long, red nose and sniffed, muttering: "Dammit, I smell something burning." With this a keen eye might have seen strange convulsions among the forms on the side of the road, as if they had suddenly been attacked with cramps.

In a few minutes the word was passed up: "All closed up in the rear," and we were about to move off again when, with a rush and a terrible, blinding crash, a huge shell dropped into the ruins of an old house near by, showering us with bricks and shrapnel. Some of the boys were bruised and cut by the flying rubbish but no one was seriously hurt and we were off in a moment at the double. In a few minutes, while the bombardment was still kept up—most of the shells fortunately falling over the road and among the ruins—we passed out of the city across a battered but still serviceable bridge and came out on the noted Menin road. For some time the Germans had been using their machine guns as well as artillery in indirect fire on the road, making it terribly dangerous. The machine guns, like the cannon, were placed some distance behind the lines and fired over the top of their own trenches, picking up and registering special ranges so that fire could be turned on particular points day or night.

We plodded silently along the muddy and slippery road for about fifteen minutes when Br-r-r-r-r-r—a machine gun opened fire, probably not directly intended for us, but with the off chance of getting something. Fortunately the gunner started just a moment too soon, for a shower of sparks went up

where the bullets ricocheted off the cobblestones about ten yards ahead of us. The shower swept back along the road—where we *had* been—(for about half a second after the first bullet landed we were on our faces in the ditch)—doing no particular damage, and when the rattle ceased we were up and away again.

That was destined to be an interesting night. Soon we came to the great zigzag sand-bag structure known as the "China Wall," winding over the top of a rise to the second line behind Hooze. This had been built by British regiments some time before to take the place of trenches where it was almost impossible to dig in and we had to follow close along the base for shelter.

Coming into the second line we found the trenches in a terrible state. In some places they contained a foot of water in the bottom; all along the line they were badly battered and in many spots were almost entirely obliterated. Here we met the first companies of the division we were relieving and mighty happy they were to get out of what one Tommy described as "The worst hell-hole on earth." We could understand the allusion when we learned that this battalion had held the trenches at that spot off and on for six months and in that time, without taking part in a single scrap, claimed to have suffered nine hundred casualties.

Crowding and pushing past the tired and muddy but happy Tommies, exchanging news and advice as we passed, we finally left them behind and were surprised to come to a stretch where the trenches had been entirely wiped out. Keeping on across this spot we came into the ruins of Hooze and, running through the farther edge of the town, found what was dignified by the name "Front Line."



It was surely very comforting when we saw, even in the rain and darkness, that the trenches were in terrible condition. The men of the battalion we had met going out had not hesitated to tell us that they hadn't put a sand-bag on the parapet for six months; no use, they said, for the German artillery would knock down next day any constructive work done the previous night. And at this spot, too, the German trenches were only twenty yards away. But still more cheering news awaited us.

When our bombing officer drew us back to a bomb store for instructions before relieving the English bombers we met the bombing sergeant and a couple of men from the other battalion and were told that their officer had got lost the night before while out on a patrol, had fallen into the German trenches, and that he carried with him plans of all the bomb stores, showing their location and also information regarding the Canadian Division—(us)—which was to relieve that night. We were puzzled to know why Fritz didn't extend to us his usual hot welcome to relieving troops. Perhaps it was a compliment.

However, there was still worse to come. On our left, about half a mile of the trenches had been entirely levelled and never rebuilt, and there the so-called front line was represented at night by an isolated bombing post here and there, by nothing in the daytime. And we were to be the defenders of these defenceless posts. However, we filled our aprons with bombs and carried an extra box apiece, and each squad waded—there is no other way to describe it—through the sticky, stinking mud to its respective post.

My squad was told off for what was for several good reasons a famous spot known as "The Stable Entrenchment." At the narrowest point in the lines,



in the ruins of an old stable, a bombing post had been established. The Germans had a similar post in the other end of the same building. While the place probably had been a stable there was nothing to indicate definitely what it had been, for it was a mass of ruins with scarcely one brick left standing.

The Germans, characteristically, had built their post up with old iron, stones, and concrete till it was almost a fort. Our end was a little V-shaped ditch, nothing more, and gave protection only up to our waists, offering no cover whatever from bombs and rifle grenades and very little from snipers, who, in this part of the line, were thick as flies and had their posts so cunningly concealed that it was almost impossible to locate them. At that some of them were so close that the crack of their rifles would deafen us.

The snipers took a terrible toll of lives here. Ours at that time were poorly organized, had very little training, took little interest in their work, and could not compare in temperament with the patient thoroughness of the Germans. Then there wasn't a single sniping post we could use, for Fritz had them all spotted. One German sniper would expose himself rather boldly while his mates watched craftily from their posts. The moment a head showed over our parapet two or three rifles would go *bing!* and nine times out of ten their shots got home. One big German who was specially bold at this game, and who himself got many of our men, was dubbed "Deadwood Dick."

Naturally we went into that "Stable Intrenchment" somewhat gingerly—crawling, bent almost double—until we came to the point of the V, and here we found that the German snipers had been picking at the sand-bags till they had cut a hole

down to within about eighteen inches of the ground. When we managed to get a look around another surprise awaited us for we discovered that there was absolutely nothing in the way of defence, not even a string of wire, between Fritz and ourselves.

At first everything was quiet. After a few minutes, growing suspicious, we tossed over a few bombs. When the usual five seconds passed with no explosion following we examined our bombs and found that every one in the bunch we had brought along from the store was without a detonator and was therefore about as much good as a baseball.

Luckily everything was quiet that night, and next day we got a chance to put in some good work at getting them in shape. It was a good thing we did for we had a bomb fight every night during the remainder of that tour.

The trenches looked even worse in daylight than in the dark. Well up in the point of the salient they were exposed to shell fire from both flanks as well as from the front, and the British Tommies who had been in there previously had become so disgusted with the trench material being knocked around their ears repeatedly that they refused to try to build them up again. They advised us, also, to follow the same course. About 50 per cent. of their number had "finished their footsteps" and were "Pushing Daisies." Many more had gone to Blighty on stretchers. A cheerful outlook for us, surely!

But, following the Canadian proclivity for activity as well as for fighting, we were soon hard at it improving the situation, building up the trenches with sand-bags, digging dug-outs, and improving things generally. The break in the line received first attention and the isolated bombing posts were

linked up with a trench which, when I last saw it, was about three feet deep.

We bombers were employed as covering parties, lying out against the German barbed wire to protect the working parties from patrols or raiders. That was exciting work, and some of the nights spent there I recall vividly as the "hottest" of my experiences. For instance, one night just after dark, our bombing sergeant, Howell, who was and is one of the finest soldiers living, put his head in an old culvert under the Menin road where we slept when off duty and "warned" us for a covering party. We were each to take two riflemen and to place them where we thought best. Wallie Nicholson—get well acquainted with him, please, for, splendid pal that he was, he's going to figure rather largely in this tale from now on—and I were among the four and so proceeded to get busy on our supper. Wallie opened a Maconachie and put it on the fire to warm. It was to be diluted with water but—; well, we carried our water into the trenches in the same cans as we used for the oil for the cookers and Wallie in some way got hold of an oil can and was considerably surprised and disgusted when the stew went up in flames. There was no time to substitute, however, so with no more satisfaction than hearty grumbling, we had to pile out, fill up our aprons with bombs, pick our riflemen, and get up to our posts.

It had been raining for a week and was still drizzling. The trenches were slippery and full of water and the ground outside was so soft that we sank to our knees and in the darkness staggered into shell-holes and ditches, swearing softly and whispering back a warning when we felt a bit of barbed wire under our feet. Crossing quietly over the new

trench—into which a long line of stealthy figures (the working party) loaded with sand-bags and shovels was already pouring—we picked our way among the shell-holes, barbed wire, and rubbish out into No Man's Land.

The position assigned me was the most advanced and lay on the side of a decline down which the Germans were expected to rush in the event of a raid. It was our business to stop them, should such a contingency arise. Posting my riflemen one on either side of me, though at some little distance, and giving them orders not to shoot except as a last resort, I crawled into a shell-hole on the edge of Fritz's wire and began my dismal watch. The hole was half full of water and the rain continued to drizzle down. I squirmed and wriggled to try to get into a comfortable position, but with feet and legs in the water and those bombs, which seemed to get harder and heavier every minute, in the breast of my apron, comfort was out of the question.

All went serenely and the party had been at work about an hour when—Bingo!—someone with a sheet of corrugated iron on his back slipped and fell. Everything had been quiet as a country field just before the roosters begin to crow, but that falling iron banked into the quietude so that it seemed as if the clang must have been heard in Berlin. It was. In a second a dozen flares shot up from the German line and a whizz-bang battery, which had our range, started in to bust up that quiet. It did, too. For the next twenty minutes I think they landed on every spot except the three feet where I was lying. I was showered with mud and shrapnel and expected every minute that my head would go off in bits.

One of the flares fell on my feet. Of course it was the easiest thing in the world to shove it into

the water and end its usefulness, but things are not always what they seem. I had once had the pleasure of helping in cleaning up a German listening post, the occupants of which had been foolish enough to stamp out one of our flares which fell on them, and thus had given away their position. That taught me a lesson. So I had to squat there and silently curse the thing, until it burned out while the fumes nearly choked me; and every minute I expected a bullet, from a sniper somewhere, in the "cow-cow," as the Tommies say.

When the bombardment eased off and everything was quiet again I heard something approaching from behind and in a moment a dark figure appeared, picking his way cautiously toward me. I halted him in a low voice but he paid no attention and came along directly. Fortunately I recognized him as the sergeant in charge of the working party so I didn't shoot. He told me they had had some casualties and had been ordered in. I was to follow with my riflemen in ten minutes.

He had left me only a minute or two when a rifle cracked on my left. I learned next day that this same sergeant had approached one of our other riflemen without answering his challenge and had been shot through the shoulders—just a nice "Blighty."

Crawling over to where I had posted my first man I sent him in. Then I made my way to the second post; it had been deserted utterly. I prowled for an hour but could find no trace of the man I had posted there. At last I gave it up and made my way back to the trenches where I was cursed by the corporal who had been detailed to see us all in.

"Where are your riflemen?" he asked.

"I sent them in a while ago."

"What the H——l kept you so long, then?"

(It seemed to me it was time to do a little wise prevaricating.)

"I thought I heard something moving in Fritz's trenches," was my answer. "I stopped to investigate."

Grunting in disgust he told us to get back to our dug-outs and I was soon asleep among the prowling, scabby rats, which lived in countless thousands in this section.

In the morning a messenger came down to find out where my missing rifleman was and why he had not returned to his company. It seemed advisable in all interests to back up my first lie with another, so I swore that he came in with me, and started off down the trench to see if I could find him anywhere.

It had been a mistake to send that boy out anyway. I had noticed when we started that he seemed to have his "wind up" rather badly and had concluded that the whizz-bangs had been too much for his nerves and that he had funked. It was hot stuff and I didn't blame him. He was in the trenches for the first time. However, since that was the worst crime possible and usually meant a "firing squad" I was rather anxious. The boy turned up later in the day and went back to his company. I never learned what excuse he gave but it seemed to be good enough to get away with for no one else found out what actually happened. After a little experience he turned out to be a splendid soldier.

Going down the trench that morning I ran into something which caused us a good deal of satisfaction. Passing a point where the trenches were very close together I heard a voice in the ditch of our friends (?) opposite. Pulling my bayonet from its scabbard I jammed it in between two sand-bags



and opened a tiny crack, carefully covering the hole with my body so that no light could shine through. Directly opposite me a big German with a black, bushy beard was standing head and shoulders above the parapet. His ugly face was twisted into an evil, sneering grin and he was talking to someone in the trench beside him, apparently urging him to get up and look around. While I looked, the pale, scared face of a young boy appeared beside his ugly one, and frightened eyes stared across toward us.

I was just cursing my luck for leaving my rifle behind when a shot rang out close to me and the big German threw up his hands and fell back into the trench, shot through the head. Praises be! It was "Deadwood Dick," who had at last paid the penalty for his foolhardiness. "Dick" never troubled us again.

A moment later I found how it had been done. Two bays down from me a crafty old Scotch-Canadian had refused the big sniper's invitation to stick his head over the parapet but had cannily bored a hole with his rifle and bayonet through the sand-bags and waiting for an opportune moment, had "pinked" him.

The next night we were relieved and I was mighty glad to get out of that spot alive.

It was a long, weary tramp back through the narrow, muddy trenches to the rest billets, and as we plodded along in a straggling line, often the message would be passed from man to man—automatically, almost, without realization that any such thing was passing—"Steady in Front." In a few moments the figures in front would be stopped and the same monotonous procedure sent back the message: "Pass the word when you've closed up." We would



all lean our packs and equipment against the sides of the trench to ease our tired shoulders till back came the message: "All closed up"; and then we slowly moved off again. On the way we invariably met and crowded past other straggling lines of heavily laden troops, coming in to relieve. They usually asked as to conditions and the questions and answers ran something like this:

"How's things up the line?"

"Jake."

"Many casualties?"

"About fifty."

"Get shelled this trip?"

"Just what you'd notice." Or a grim voice would answer:

"It's only a rumour."

Every once in a while, as the man following passed a spot where the footing was out of the usual, there would be passed down the line a warning message, such as: "Wire underfoot"; "Wire Overhead"; "Step Up"; "Step Down"; "Loose Mat"; "Hole to the Right"; "Hole to the Left," etc. This proved very helpful in avoiding bad spots which otherwise would have been run upon without warning and would have caused a great deal of confusion.

## CHAPTER V

### THAT TERRIBLE DAY AT SANCTUARY WOOD

BUT the end of my fighting experiences—in France—was drawing near. The next two months were spent in and out between Hooge and Sanctuary Wood and were rather monotonous. Though we were in no serious fighting, our casualty list, nevertheless, was regularly heavy; and, so that we might have needed protection, the companies worked steadily, building up and putting the trenches in better shape.

I was very glad, then, to be a bomber, for the bombers were free from this working-party duty. The men of the companies worked every night while in the front line; were marched up every night for the same duty while in reserve; and, even while back for the so-called "rest," were loaded every night into the old London 'buses and taken up to Ypres, marched from there to the front and worked all night, coming back to the rest camp in the morning.

The casualties in the bombers' ranks were replaced from the companies by men whom we put through a bit of special training. We also did some practising ourselves for we had to keep in trim. But at nights we were free to enjoy ourselves and when the other fellows were falling in, grumbling and swearing, for a working party, we were usually making for a Y. M. C. A. canteen or a show—if we had the price.

We seldom had any money after the first day or two "out," seemingly because of a strange lack of change at the canteens. Each of us was given in five-franc notes the sum of fifteen francs (about \$3.00) every time we came out, but most everybody had a good healthy hankering for a change of rations. We always got enough, but sixteen days of the same thing grew monotonous. So the "Y" canteens were usually crowded. Since change seemed to be so scarce—*why*, we could never understand—we often had to "buy" to the full extent of a five franc note, and as a consequence three trips to the canteen on this basis left us broke for the remainder of the rest period.

These Y. M. C. A. canteens and Picture Shows were run at that time—one hears that these conditions have changed somewhat since—on strictly commercial principles; sentiment was not allowed to interfere in any way with business. Even though a long line of men were waiting their turn to be served the institution closed at the set time—regardless of whether the troops were going in or coming out of the trenches! The Picture Shows—for which a straight charge of "tuppence-ha'penny" ( $2\frac{1}{2}$  pence; 5 cents) was made at the door—were crowded to the roof twice each night. Their canteen goods were sold at the same prices as in the other canteens (civilian and military), and as a business concern the Association gave us good service at reasonable rates. Of course we got, gratis, the use of buildings, usually government-owned, and a supply of writing paper loudly advertising the Association.

One of the bright spots in my memory, before the black ones began to be impressed on it, is that of a Leave spent just at this time, most of it back in old Glasgow. I had known for some time that this was

*sur le tapis*, but it was none the less welcome when finally the notification came. Collecting a few souvenirs to take home, I tramped in to Poperinghe and got the train there. On the same car I found, under guard, Private Watts, one of our fellows, who seemed to have a way of his own of getting into trouble and a little of whose story it is worth digressing to tell.

However it came to him, for he had few bad habits and neither drank nor smoked, Watts seemed to be always in disgrace and spent most of his time doing pack drill or "First Field." He had been held in England when we first went to France; being much disappointed, he tried—in every legitimate way he knew—to get drafted to the battalion, but unsuccessfully. He meant business, though. So when one day he ran across the first man of the battalion on leave he managed, quietly, to get hold of that chap's ticket and crossed over to France on it. Our O. C. was so pleased with his determination to be with his battalion in the middle of things that he tried in every way he could to hold him, but in vain; Watts was packed off to Blighty to do a few more weeks of "First Field." I saw the boy in London again, a good many months later, after I had been in the clutches of the Kaiser's slave-drivers for a year, and found him considerably changed. He had made good in the trenches, had been given his sergeant's stripes, had been wounded and was getting nicely over it when I ran across him. Strangely, he was not a bit anxious to get back to France this time.

But to resume: we were tied up in Boulogne that trip for twenty-four hours but finally, after a night trip across the Channel, arrived in London on a dark night. Dark? Say! of all the black places on earth

I believe London, in war-time dress with its lights out, is about the worst.

I ran up to Glasgow directly and was wonderfully well treated by the big-hearted Scotch folk. Nobody can talk to me any more about the tight purse-strings of the Scot. No race in Britain has shown the same hospitality to the Canadian soldier. Perhaps the fact that I had a little of the clanny blood in me emphasized this somewhat, but any Canadian has a home in Bonny Scotland.

Returning to "The Smoke" I missed my train and had an extra twenty-four hours there. And—would you believe it?—when I got back to France and up near the lines I began to feel better. As we reached the camp—the battalion was out on a rest—and I saw Sergeant Howell and the bombers practising the same old stunts, I began to realize that I had been a little lonesome all the time I had been away. All the pleasures enjoyed on leave, even the warm hospitality and kindness of those Scotch homes, couldn't take the place of the sounds and sights of the trenches and the *camaraderie* which had grown up] among the fellows with whom I had spent so many months in such trying circumstances.

Matters ran along about as usual till the last day of May—how well I remember those dates; I had good reason to—when we went in and took a position on the point of the Ypres salient just in front of Sanctuary Wood. For some unexplained reason a change had been made in the disposition of the companies both in our battalion and also in the 4th C. M. R., which held the line to our right, both having three companies in the front line and one in support. This was unusual and may have had something to do with after events. Be this as it may, the two battalions, both considerably under

strength, were covering a frontage usually held by three battalions.

Just back of the front line were the Cumberlands' dug-outs, which were regarded as reasonably safe from the German artillery. During the day the bombers were allotted to these dug-outs, going up every night for our usual duties.

The second day in—June 1st—Fritz had been showering us with big trench-mortar shells and Wallie Nicholson and I were picked to go up with a rifle-grenade battery on A Company's front. Here, in accordance with the "Pacifist Policy," we were instructed to send back a little rifle grenade for every big trench-mortar shell dropped on our line, but, further, not to start anything unless we had to.

While Wallie and I were getting our equipment and rations ready a young bomber who had been told off for another squad came along and tried to change places with me. His squad was going back to a safer place in support and he preferred the front line. Holding to my belief in my own good luck, which up to that time had been reliable, I refused to make any change, sticking to my determination to go where I was sent. So, after a fruitless argument, the youngster finally delegated me to a "hot spot" and went away while Wallie and I started slowly up the winding, narrow trench leading to the front lines. This formed a junction with the front-line trench on the extreme right of our section just where the line sloped down over "Mount Sorel"—a low rise almost too small to be called a hill. Our left flank rested on B— Avenue, a communication trench running up from Sanctuary Wood.

Reaching the front line we turned to the left, walked down a couple of bays and passing through a narrow opening in the parados, found a small sand-



bag emplacement where we set up our grenade battery, ready to punish Fritz should he drop any more sixty-pound sausages on our trench.

The fuss, however, appeared to be over for the night, which, strangely enough, in the light of what followed, was the quietest I ever spent on any part of the front. There was scarcely a sound all night long and only at long intervals were star shells—usually so frequent—fired from either side. Things were so easy that Wallie and I crawled into a bit of a dug-out with a couple of sheets of corrugated iron for a roof and went to sleep.

Just before "Stand to" time Sergeant Howell and one of his men came down the trench with the bombers' rum ration and woke us up. After giving us a good stiff jolt of rum and making the usual inquiries about our position, the supply of ammunition, etc., they passed on down the trench. A few minutes later the company's rum jar came along and we managed to "spear" a second helping which, as Wallie remarked, "fixed us up about right for breakfast." We were ready all right but the breakfast— Well, we had it a year later, in Holland.

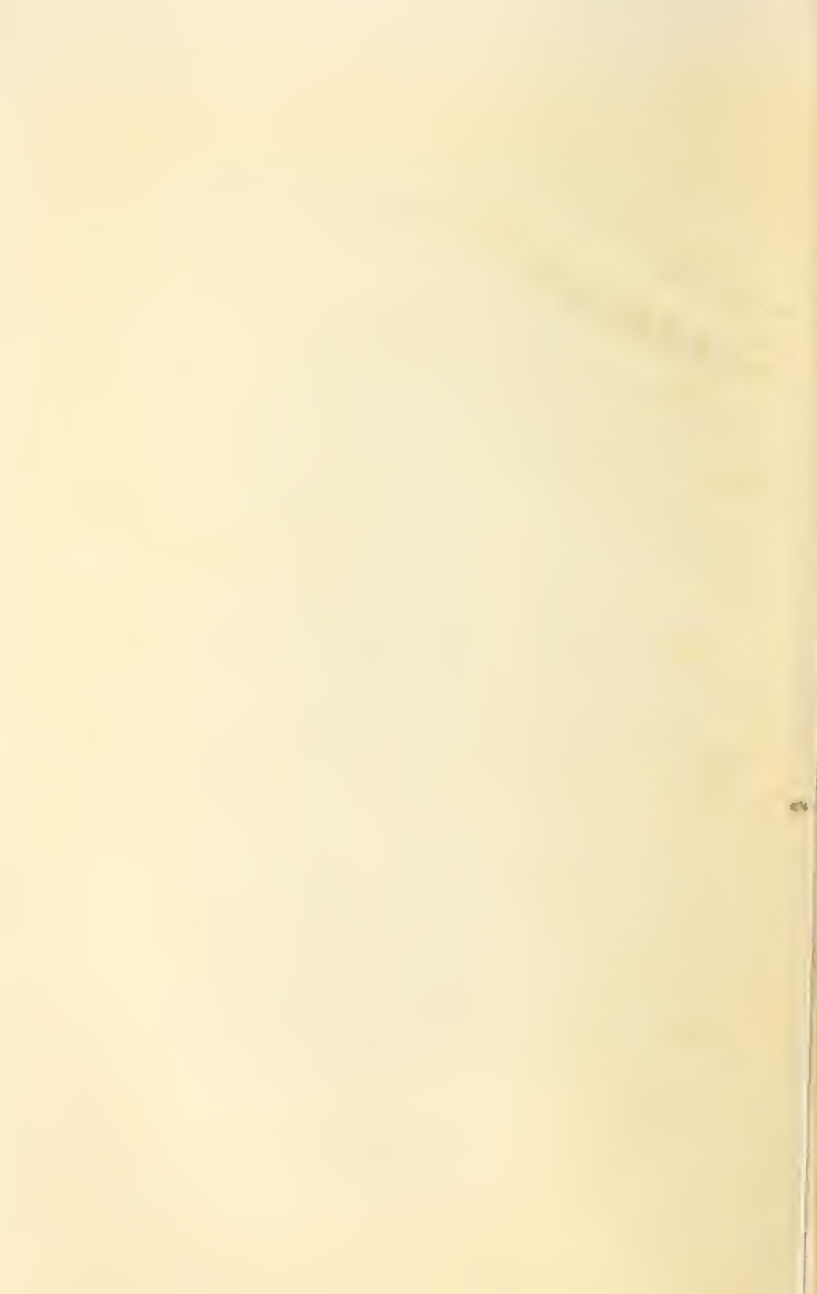
The order to "Stand to" had just been passed and we were thinking of getting that breakfast ready when the shrill scream of a shell due to alight somewhere near us called for first attention. We dropped, *pronto*, in the bottom of the trench. Nothing happened in our immediate vicinity from *that* shell but it was the first of thousands that rained in on us for the next six hours. The first few fell just behind the trench. Then one landed right on top of our grenade battery, putting it out of business, of course. A minute later Sergeant Sharpe stuck his head around the parapet and asked:

"Is your battery hit?"





“WALLY” NICHOLSON  
From a photograph taken in a pris-  
oner's uniform



"Yes, Sarge," Wallie answered, laconically. "She's blown to Hell."

Sharpe was just as direct in his order.

"Get to Hell out of here, then," he said. "There's more cover in the big trench." And we did, but took a different direction from the one our battery had travelled.

Picking our rifles and ammunition out of the rubbish we stepped out into the main trench and were moving down to a more sheltered spot when another shell hit the corrugated iron roof of a dug-out and a jagged piece of iron, hurtling through the air, struck Sergeant Sharpe, cutting him almost in two. Some of his men placed him in the firing-step and were attempting to dress the wound but he died instantly.

We crawled down the trench a short distance and stopped for a while in the narrowest place we could find while a terrible rain of iron fell all around us. The din was deafening; the very ground rocked with the violent concussion of the big shells. The scarcely broken scream of the approaching shells and the wailing whine of the flying bits of steel and shrapnel bullets made a horrible, hellish song, the recollection of which is engraved deep on my brain. And added to the din, the scene was indescribable. Sand-bags, planks, chunks of corrugated iron, and with these the mangled bodies of men, were tossed jumbled in the air to fall again on the men beneath. The trench, instead of being a protection, was soon reduced to a shapeless mass of mud, débris, rags, and mutilated bodies. It was impossible to move the wounded so they lay where they fell and usually didn't suffer long. It is incomprehensible how we—how any one present—survived that terrible fire.

We all knew there was adequate artillery support behind us and when the bombardment started that,

morning we cheered one another by talking about what our artillery would do to Fritz in a few minutes. As time passed, with the severity of the German fire increasing and the retaliation was not forthcoming, our boys were naturally bitterly disappointed and sullenly cursed the artillery. It was heart-breaking to see the wounded lying around us in the trench waiting for the death that under these conditions was almost certain to come to them shortly—a situation which a hearty fire from our guns would, to a large extent, have alleviated. It was of course no fault of the gunners. They would have been mighty glad to do all they could for us. Either the word did not get through or there was a bungle somewhere. We have heard stories, since, to the effect that requests sent back from our headquarters for due support were acknowledged and the promise made that everything would open up shortly. However that may be the fact remains that in what was (up to that time at least) the worst bombardment ever known on the western front, not a single gun (with the exception of a gallant little "Peanut Battery" directly behind us which was squashed early in the game) in the vicinity on the British side answered. Certainly not until the end of things came for us.

As we lay huddled in a corner of what was left of the trench, trying to get what cover we could, a big fellow came staggering along, cursing, a great jagged hole in his shoulder where his arm had been. When he saw us he straightened up and in a voice of agony cried out: "O Christ, when *will* our artillery open up?" As he spoke a bullet caught him through the head and he pitched forward on top of me, mercifully saved from any more agony.

The German snipers lay along on the parapet of

their trench and kept up a merciless fire on the wounded and battered men who were crawling back and forward through the heaving, boiling mass of débris, searching unavailingly for cover.

The artillery fire was directed in a way we had never known before. Three German planes, unmolested by either our planes or our guns, flew continually back and forth over our position, so low down that we could plainly see the pilots watching our trenches through their glasses. They were able to spot the smallest movement and immediately a signal was transferred to their "whizz-bang" batteries and extra fire was directed on that spot.

About eleven o'clock Nicholson and I crawled down the trench for a quarter of a mile without seeing a single man who hadn't been wounded. What was left of the trench was like a butcher's shop and in addition to the nerve-racking sight of wounded and mutilated men, the odour of blood and flesh was sickening and horrible. We crawled into a culvert, hoping that this would give some protection, but the planes had spotted us and directed such a fire on the spot that we thought it better to leave it and crawl down a bit of a trench our boys had dug the night before out into "No Man's Land." Out through the wire we went, most of the time on our hands and knees, till we came to a spot up quite close to the Hun trenches where the ditch, turning sharply to the right, formed an acute angle, which, largely by reason of its very nearness to the enemy position, offered a little more cover than anywhere else we could find.

After a little time we were joined here by four others who came up behind and tried to persuade us to go up still farther. The trench was too narrow for any one to pass, and since I was in the lead, and expected a German patrol to come up this trench

shortly, I refused. For a little time we were fairly secure here but the airmen spotted us again and directed some of their big trench mortars on us. Three hundred of these big stubby guns had been placed on our front and they were certainly made good use of that day. Ordinarily, it was possible to estimate with fair accuracy where the shells would fall and to get ready for them. The huge, slate-coloured projectiles would rise almost vertically to a great height, then falling slowly, would come wabbling down with a "flopping" sound and explode with terrific concussion. These guns had been placed in pairs so that the shells crossed in the air, and with the shells coming from all along the front, it was impossible to guess where they would drop.

They soon got to us. Two of the fellows who had come in behind were killed and another wounded. The latter passed a .32 automatic Colt up to me. It was loaded, but since I had never had one like it in my hand before and didn't know how to use it, I slipped it in my pocket and forgot about it.

The other one of the four, who had been mumbling and cursing, suddenly seemed to go out of his head for he climbed out of the trench in the middle of all that fire and walked slowly back toward our lines, refusing to answer when we shouted to him to come back. He had only gone a few yards when a machine gun rattled and he went down in a heap. Just about then a flying chunk of shrapnel struck me, entering my leg at the knee and driving up into my thigh.

Wallie dressed my knee as well as he could, which was a job indeed, in the midst of that hell of fire. The big shells seemed to be coming closer every minute and the shock from the concussion threw us time and time again against the bottom of the trench

and bruised us with falling chunks of earth. A few moments after I was hit a big shell exploding near by tossed up an enormous bank of mud which fell literally on top of Nicholson, buried him completely and nearly killed him. I dug him out, nearly suffocated and so badly bruised that he was scarcely able to move.

We knew then that further existence in that spot was only a matter of minutes and decided to try to get back over the top—the trench behind had been entirely flattened out—to where the support trench had been.

We managed to crawl along for some distance, but on reaching what had been the support trench found it now merely a ragged scar on the earth. Little was to be seen of dead or wounded, for the tumbling earth and rubbish had buried them almost completely. All we could do was to try to keep behind occasional banks or to get into bits of holes which had not been altogether filled up. Once in a while, when we took a look at the German trenches, we could see them lying peacefully in the sunshine with not a shell falling from our side. Dozens of heads could be seen over the top of the parapet and a steady fire was kept up on anything moving in our line.

While we crawled on for some distance I got another flesh wound in the thigh from a rifle bullet. Suddenly the angry rattle of a machine gun on our right drew our attention.

“They must be coming over,” Wallie shouted.

When we peered over the little pile of rubbish in front of us there were the gray-clad figures, pouring over the parapet in swarms with their rifles slung over their shoulders, evidently expecting no resistance. Just then the machine gun, which some-



one had managed to keep in order all through that *mêlée*, swung round and caught the line in front of us and those Germans went down like grain before a binder. We were surprised, too, to hear a rifle speak from a shell-hole here and there. We got our own rifles into play and fired till they were red hot, making every shot tell.

We could see the surprise on those German faces. Our trenches had been so reduced that I suppose they didn't expect to find a living man. They made a couple of short rushes but suffered so heavily that they soon retired and left that part of the line to be dealt with later.

Up till that time we had no idea whatever of what was going on behind us. While we got some inkling of it then, it wasn't until we had a chance to talk it over in Germany with some of the boys who had been in other parts of the line, that we learned of the general situation that morning. As a matter of fact, we had been cut off for some time. The Germans had driven a wedge through the right flank of the Princess Pat's, where their line rested on the corner of Sanctuary Wood, by means of a mine, which, prepared previously, and exploded at the psychological moment, formed a breach. Through this they drove down into Sanctuary Wood and the Cumberland's dug-outs where our Headquarters and the support company were established.

To the right, in the lines held by the 4th C. M. R., another mine was sprung. This opened another breach and another drive went through here, the wedges converging on Sanctuary Wood. Here, under the command of Colonel Shaw, the few remaining men of our supporting company, with some stragglers from the front line who had succeeded in crawling back to the shelter of the wood, put up a

gallant but hopeless fight. They resisted desperately but the Germans poured in from both sides in huge numbers, many with machine guns strapped to their backs. To put the guns into action these fellows knelt, their bodies serving as tripods, while others worked the guns.

Colonel Shaw was killed there, fighting to the last, as we knew he would. And with his little force finally reduced the main body of the Boches pushed forward and established their new line in Maple Copse, just behind Sanctuary Wood. Then large parties were sent back along our positions to "mop them up."

When the attempt to come over immediately in front of us appeared to have been given up Wallie and I felt a good deal more hopeful and, never dreaming of what had been going on around us, decided to try to get back to Sanctuary Wood. We crawled on from one shell-hole to another, over dead and mangled bodies, seeing here and there a few wounded. Scarcely one of these could speak and apparently had been so stupefied by the shock of the shells that they could not even hear when we spoke to them. The German barrage had lifted some time before but the heavy trench mortars, too big to move quickly, were left in their places till the new line could be consolidated and to ward off a counter-attack and still kept firing on our wrecked trenches. We had to move very carefully to miss these shells. Usually we followed the plan of keeping still until we saw a shell drop and then crawled along for a few yards and waited till we could hear the dull report of the mortar again. We managed to work our way along in this fashion for a quarter of a mile or so to a communication trench running back into Sanctuary Wood, but

there was mighty little of this left and such a hot fire was centred on the spot we thought it better to turn back. Near us here we saw four or five wounded fellows under the care of a Red Cross man and, not wishing to draw attention to them, we crawled back down the trench again.

By this time we were both in pretty bad shape. Wallie was bruised and almost helpless from the effect of the shell shock back near the German lines and was worse off than I, though my wounds had been paining fearfully. We helped each other along as best we could but hadn't gone far when a shell burst with a blinding flash right in our faces. With this I felt a sharp crack between the eyes and a queer pain followed shooting through my head. Putting my hand to my face, down which the blood was streaming, I felt something sharp and thin, like the blade of a knife, sticking out between my eyes. It was a piece of shrapnel which had lodged in the lower part of my skull, just at the inner end of my right eyebrow. Wallie tried to pull the splinter out but it was too deeply imbedded and had to be left though the pains in my head were becoming unbearable.

While we stayed here we heard a few scattered rifle shots and noticed jets of black smoke rising here and there. Peering over the top of the ragged remains of the trench to find out what was happening we saw the German mopping-up party making their way slowly along the line, and to our horror saw that *they were pumping liquid fire—the cause of the smoke jets—on the wounded men in the shell-holes*, burning them up. When any resistance was offered the victim was mercilessly shot.

We had used up all our ammunition when the Germans had attempted to come over, a little time

before, and Wallie's rifle had been smashed by the shell which wounded me, so that we had absolutely no means of defence; and, since there seemed to be no hope for any one in that section that day, we thought it wise to look around for a place in which to hide from those cold-blooded murderers. After a moment's search we discovered the mouth of a small wooden culvert which had been built to drain the water out of the trenches, and managed to crawl painfully into the narrow opening until we thought we were about halfway through. Then we lay still, awaiting we knew not what, hoping against hope that we might not be discovered but scarcely, knowing what would be in store for us in any event, since even there we were behind the new German line.

In a few minutes pairs of gray-clad legs with top boots began passing and just when we thought they had all gone by and that immediate danger, at least, was past, a pair of boots appeared right at the opening. One foot was lifted and placed on the edge of the planks of the culvert and we could see a big pair of red hands working at the boot, which, from the accompanying cursing in a gruff German voice, must have been causing the wearer some trouble. We held our breath for a few moments and then, to our relief, the foot was withdrawn and the legs disappeared.

We lay in that culvert a good while before we ventured to crawl out again, but after a while everything appeared to be quiet and we knew that, if we were to get back to our own lines at all, the attempt would have to be made shortly so we crawled out again and worked our way over to the side of Mount Sorel where we could still hear battle sounds.

I shall never forget the sight that greeted us there.

A big sloping hollow crossed our trenches at the foot of the incline and this had been the spot chosen by the German engineers for their mine. Now a great mass of German infantry was swarming up this hollow. Thousands of them poured out of their trenches in a dense gray mass, which spread—like a solid substance, rather than as men—over the adjacent ground. As they pressed on the machine guns of the 5th Battalion on the distant slope of the hill were doing terrible execution. At times the gray horde would seem to crumble and melt away and then we could see the ground covered with German dead. But, behind, the stream pressed on, filling the breaches, driven by the officers who could be seen brandishing their revolvers and urging their men forward over the heaps of dead. Some of them went forward in rushes, falling on their faces at intervals and then rushing on again. But most of the force moved on steadily until they came into range of the Canadian machine guns or found the shelter of the wood. Our men were having their innings now and were making up in good shape for the slaughter in the front trenches earlier in the day.

## CHAPTER VI

### IN THE HANDS OF THE KAISER'S MINIONS

IT WAS clear to us, now, that we were cut off, so, in default of anything better, we drew back from the crest of the hill and crawled into a hole close by. For a little time we lay there unmolested but finally, a party came out of a near-by bit of communication trench and began digging a trench for the new position just in front of us. They had only worked a few minutes when, as was inevitable, one of them saw us and came over and stood with his shovel raised threateningly while he called us "Englander Schweinerie" and all the other bad names he could think of. The others heard him and gathered round and a hot argument ensued.

At the time we didn't know any German and so couldn't understand what it was all about. From the gestures, though, we judged that they were discussing what was to be done with us and that some of them were in favour of doing away with us there and then. Two or three of them had their rifles and several times they drew them back with the long, broad-bladed bayonets, as if to stick us, at the same time cursing us bitterly.

By this time we were pretty nearly past feeling. We knew we were almost certain to be killed anyway and we had narrowly escaped death a thousand times already that day so that we were not much affected by the outlook. And probably this indifference was what saved us.



They evidently expected us to cower in the bottom of the shell-hole and to beg for mercy as certainly they would have done in similar circumstances. We were not begging for anything just then, but, paying no attention to their threats, we crawled up on the edge of the shell-hole. There I ordered them off with as great a show of authority as would have been exercised by a German N. C. O., when, to our surprise, they lowered their bayonets, and appeared to regard us with less hostility and new interest. They talked the matter over awhile longer and then one big fellow ordered us—in German, which, by dint of his gestures, we were made to understand—to get back into their trenches. We staggered along, helping one another as best we could, he following with the point of his bayonet about an inch from my back, and keeping up an incessant tirade in his hard, guttural growl.

We noted here that the German trenches were still undamaged. We saw only two dead Germans in the front line and only one spot where their parapet had been hit by a shell. As we passed down we met long lines of men loaded with sand-bags, shovels, machine guns, ammunition, and all sorts of supplies. Scarcely one passed us without a curse, and most of those that were not handicapped by material drew their bayonets back and, I am sure, would have run us through but for our captor who clung to us desperately and who apparently was using his prisoners as an excuse to get out of the battle zone himself. We wore the bright red and black badges on our sleeves proclaiming us bombers. And when the Germans caught sight of these they became infuriated, for they have no love for a Canadian bomber. Time and again I expected to see the



end right there but our guide fended them off and we were forced along.

In and out through a maze of perfect communication trenches we carried on till we came to a lot of concrete trenches and dug-outs which must have been their second line. This spot was densely packed with men and I could not help thinking what terrible work our artillery might have done among these thousands. Instead, all was as quiet and peaceful back here as if there were no war on.

We came to a dressing station where our wounds were roughly dressed. When one of the orderlies pulled the shrapnel splinter out of my brow I was horrified to find myself become almost totally blind. Imagine, if you can, how I felt—a prisoner in the hands of these wanton murderers (as we knew them to be), without being able to see what was happening. I could only see faintly out of the right eye and had to ask or form my conclusions as to what was to come next.

Quite a number of prisoners had been gathered together here and they, like us, were in terrible shape. Most of them were wounded. A few had escaped actual wounds. But everyone was in a sort of stupor from the effects of the terrible bombardment while most of them were half crazy as the result of what they had come through, and everyone was so deaf that we had to shout at each other in order to be heard.

After a little time we were sorted out from the standpoint of our ability to get along alone, Wallie and I being picked out, with a lot of others about as bad, as walking cases.

And in that shape we were started off on what was to be a fifteen-mile march without a let-up.

God in heaven! I shall never forget to the last

day of my life the horror of that march. Those deputed as guides were anxious to get out of the range of the British artillery, particularly since they were all puzzled by the strange silence on the part of our guns, and every moment expected this to be broken in earnest. One or two who could speak a little English asked us repeatedly why our guns hadn't supported us and were not satisfied when we told them simply that we didn't know. Consequently we were driven mercilessly.

Broken, ragged, bloody, and hopeless we staggered along, helping one another when we could. The awful despair and misery which looked out of the eyes of the poor wounded fellows as we were urged along by the guards were too agonizing to be expressed.

A couple of miles to the rear we were handed over to a squad of Uhlans, who sat on their big, lean horses and laughed at us and, in their turn, drove us with their long steel-tipped lances.

We found out by actual experience during this march that the stories of the ill-treatment of the French and Belgians in the occupied territory had not been exaggerated. Dragging ourselves slowly along we passed from time to time through small towns and villages. Again and again in these places the civilians, though apparently almost starving themselves, gathered along the streets and tried to hand us bread, chocolates, cigarettes, and water. We were suffering terribly from thirst, not having had a chance to get a drink since morning, but, with their lances, the guards invariably drove these poor people back or, in some cases, rode them down. They tried to make us believe that these people were trying to poison us.

It was pitiful to see the fear in which the wretched,

half-starved Belgians generally held the Germans. Old women and little children would turn at the sight of a Uhlan and, running as fast as they could till a place of immediate safety was reached, would peek fearfully round the corners, making certain that none of the persecutors was in sight before they would venture even to cross the street. It was very easy to see how these people had been cowed and broken till, now, they were nothing better than slaves.

Through the afternoon and the long summer evening that hideous march was forced on. Time after time I thought I should drop with the weariness and pain of it all. Again and again I thought it would be better to die there than to try to make another hundred yards. But in spite of all the pain and weariness and the horrible feeling of being driven like cattle in an enemy country, there seemed to be among the boys a determination—which afterward became very manifest in the prison camps and which has kept many a man alive—to show these German brutes that we were British and that British soldiers had the nerve and stamina to endure anything without being broken.

Like everything else, that march, which seems like a horrible nightmare when I look back on it, had to have an end. About ten o'clock we dragged ourselves into Courtrai and were placed in a barn for the night. And here was served our first meal by Germans—a small square of black, sour bread, and a bowl of a black, bitter liquid they called coffee. Most of us, too sick and weary to think of eating even though we had had nothing all day, dropped on the floor of the barn like dead men.

Some of the boys were able to sleep; I wasn't. Utterly worn out physically, my mind was still too active, tearing back over the events of that all-too-

terrible day, to give me the needed rest. Added to the other torment my eyes pained me excruciatingly so I sat up against the wall all night.

Such a night I hope I may never experience again. If there be any place on earth, or in the hereafter, where suffering is greater than was evident in that dirty old barn in Belgium that night I pray to be delivered from it. Even the fellows who slept by reason of their physical exhaustion were subconsciously awake and, dreaming that they were in the thick of the battle again, would roll about the floor fighting and kicking in terrible earnestness, until some of their friends, taking pity on them and on some of us, would shake them back into consciousness. All night long a silent, sinister figure of a big, black-bearded Prussian, with his spiked helmet and long, glittering bayonet, making him appear in the half-light as one of Satan's own minions, stalked slowly up and down the barn floor.

Even that night of horrors came to an end and, although we were terribly stiff and sore in the morning, the small amount of rest we had gained sufficed to give us new spirit and we were ready to buck the Germans in any way we could, for when we realized fully that we were prisoners we determined that the fight should be carried on behind his lines as well as in front of them.

This became evident when a few of the boys were taken over quite early and paraded before a bunch of German officers who apparently hoped to get some useful information. They were treated at first to wine, cigars, and cigarettes—a sort of softening process, I suppose—and were then put through a very severe cross-examination as to the number and location of our troops and guns. A lot of satisfaction they got! Our fellows gave them plenty of informa-

tion—such as it was—but apparently they came to the conclusion that not much of it was to be relied upon for the examination was finally given up in disgust and our boys were denounced as fools for coming over to France to fight.

During the morning we were marched farther back and herded into a sunken enclosure or pit close to the Courtrai railway station. About noon we were given a bowl of vegetable soup, and, while it wasn't particularly palatable, we were ready by this time to appreciate anything. Movement was destined to be frequent at that time for, late in the evening, we were loaded in box cars and started on a lengthy and terribly slow journey back into Germany.

The memories of that trip stick also. We were two days and nights on that train, sitting, lying, and standing by turn in those dirty cars without any provision for comfort or common decency and to those of us who were wounded and suffering the journey was inexpressibly painful and tedious. Added to this were the pangs of hunger and thirst. Our rations, en route, were a bowl of thin soup once a day. Coming after the plentiful food we had been enjoying, this was exceedingly scanty. Had we known it, however, even this was considerably more than we were to get later.

We appreciated the fact that we were not disturbed, but were left pretty much to ourselves on the journey. We saw numbers of civilians standing round the various stations as we passed through or waited in sidings, but they seemed to take little notice of us. They all had a depressed and hopeless look and no doubt were suffering too much themselves to think of worrying the prisoners as they did earlier in the war.

One interesting point in that trip, or rather one

which would have been interesting in other circumstances, was the considerable time we spent skirting the huge Krupp plant at Essen when, for hours it seemed, the train ran through long rows of sheds and factories and where we saw thousands of chimneys belching smoke.

Our first experiences in German prison-camp life followed. We arrived at Dülmen Camp early one morning and were herded at once into a big enclosure where we were searched for letters and other papers. We had, however, destroyed all letters and diaries which might have afforded any information so they got nothing from us. I had decided on the way up from the front that it would be better to dispense with the automatic pistol which had been given me on the day we were captured, and so dropped it off the train. It was well that I did, for, had it been found on me in this search, I should certainly have been shot without compunction. Having come so far, more or less safely, we made up our minds that life was worth hanging on to for a while yet. By this time, too, we were beginning to get some life into us again, after the stupefying experiences of that terrible day on the battle front.

Naturally we examined our new quarters with a good deal of anxiety. First, we were impressed by the large number of guards which seemed to be posted everywhere, providing against escape. To this provision was added row upon row of barbed-wire fence, the strands fastened closely and making a barrier about sixteen feet high. The camp was divided into three sections or "blocks" and each of these again subdivided into four, so that the prisoners could be kept from congregating in large numbers. We were placed in Block 3, which was presumed to be set aside exclusively for newly-



arrived prisoners, though there were then quite a number of French and Russians in it who had been interned for some time. Block 2 was occupied by convalescent and crippled prisoners and Block 1 was allotted to men who had been in Germany some considerable time. Many different races were represented. They were allowed to mix freely during the day, here, but were separated—and slept in different barracks—at night.

The camp was built on the shore of a shallow, sandy lake or slough and in consequence the footing was very loose and dry, the sand coming over the tops of our boots when we walked. We were fairly well pleased with the barracks here for they were comparatively new and were clean and dry. We were told afterward by longer-term prisoners that they had been built by the American Red Cross. The beds were made in the form of hammocks of woven rushes stretched on wooden frames and were not so bad when one got accustomed to them—and after the bunks of various kinds we had put up with on the line and in billets in Flanders. For covering we were given two blankets apiece but they were so old and so thin that they gave little warmth.

At first, however, most of our party, being wounded, were placed in a hospital barrack where we were looked after by British and French Red Cross men and by a French doctor, all of whom had been captured some time before. Naturally we got good treatment from them, but we were examined frequently by German doctors who pronounced on our fitness for work and were turned out of the hospital at the earliest possible moment, almost before we could walk straight.

It was very evident that even at this time the Germans were short of medicines and material for



bandages. All the bandages used on us were made from paper, and very poor stuff at that. One thing they did well here, however—the matter of inoculation. I was given seven “doses”—providing against almost every known disease—before I finally passed as “finished”; and they proved exceedingly effective. Had it not been for that treatment we should certainly have been exterminated by cholera which would have been sure to develop amid the conditions we experienced later.

Naturally, too, we were interested in the camp rations. Here also was reflected the lack of supplies in Germany. A review of the daily allowance will adequately illustrate this.

For breakfast we were given a bowl of coffee or cocoa (so-called) or a sort of soup made from bones ground into a fine dust. The “coffee” was merely acorns, burned and ground. The “cocoa”—likewise a very poor substitute—was made from the bark of some tree and was tasteless and devoid of nourishment. No solids were allowed at breakfast, though one was supposed to have saved some of the bread ration handed out the night before.

For the noon “repast” we were usually given a bowl of soup made from ground and dried vegetables. Later I had the opportunity of finding out how this stuff was made. It came to us as a gritty, dirty mess about as thick as gruel, thinner when the supply was not large.

About four o'clock the daily bread ration was served. This was a chunk of vegetable concoction a little less than a third of a pound, supposed to provide solid food for twenty-four hours. The vegetable flour which from this so-called bread was made was mixed with just enough wheat or rye flour to make the mass stick together. The loaves

came out of the oven the same size they went in and the stuff was heavy, sour, black, and bitter—so vile and strong that it seemed to burn our stomachs.

Sometimes we found bits of strong, odorous meat in the soup and this the French cooks told us was dog meat. We usually knew when this was coming for we could see the cooks with white towels tied over their faces to keep out the odour while the stew was being prepared. One day Wallie and I, who had managed to stick together, picked all the bones out of a potful of soup and, sorting them out carefully, managed to piece together the skeleton of a German dachshund. We kept this and brought it out every time "Soup up" was called, hoping to drive some other prisoners away from the soup but with little success.

Supper consisted usually of another bowl of soup made from something resembling cornmeal but with scarcely any body in it, and which, like the rest, was thin and lacking in any nourishing qualities. The Tommies had, for some reason or other, probably because it resembled sand more than anything else, dubbed this "sandstorm." In addition to this we were given half a salt herring once or twice a week. These, too, were often putrid but they were never thrown away.

It will be evident that this allowance, particularly when most of the food was unpalatable and indigestible, was not enough to keep us from starvation. For a time we were in a very bad way indeed. Later, when our parcels began to arrive, this condition was much relieved but for a good while we saw nothing of a parcel of any kind. The French prisoners in our block—who had been there long enough to have had regular communication estab-

lished with their Red Cross and who were in consequence getting more or less regular supplies of food—often took advantage of this to get hold of our great coats, boots, or anything else they fancied, in return for a pittance of food, biscuits, cigarettes, or tobacco. I actually saw one half-starved Canadian boy trade off his great coat for one cigarette and the Frenchman went back to his barracks with his prize, laughing heartily.

The Russians, on the other hand, were different. The fellows in our block then, while almost starving themselves (since no parcels were coming through to them), were very kind to us. They went into Blocks Number 1 and 2 every day to dispose of the swill and to do other odd jobs, and the British prisoners there—who, like the French, had parcels arriving more or less regularly—gave them their German rations, which they shared with us. These British prisoners sent us some of the stuff from their parcels when they could, and while it didn't amount to much, without it most of us couldn't have existed until our own parcels arrived.

I have to shudder now when I think to what depths of misery and degradation the hunger of those days drove us. Every night, when the garbage pails were put outside the kitchen to be emptied, we gathered round and fought for the horrible refuse that was thrown out after the preparation of that vile food. Some of the finest fellows I ever met became like wild beasts at times under such dreadful conditions, and if our parcels had not come along ultimately we would certainly have become cannibals.

While we were isolated for some time after arriving in the camp we were able to exchange signals occasionally, using the regular army code, with the British prisoners in the other blocks. Of course

this had to be done surreptitiously; if we had been caught the penalty would have been heavy. Among others we were a good deal puzzled at one message which came to us soon after our arrival: "Watch old Stiffy." The message was repeated over and over as if to drill it into our memories.

The puzzle was solved one morning, however, when a very strange figure made his way into the camp. He was a German of about fifty years, I should say, and had been afflicted by a paralytic stroke so that every joint in his body seemed stiff. Since he could bend neither knees, neck, nor back, he was forced to shuffle along with a most peculiar walk, much resembling that made famous by Charlie Chaplin. To add to his peculiar appearance he wore a high top hat with his civilian clothes. But if his body was stiff his brain was the very reverse. He had spent years in England, the United States, and other countries and spoke English fluently. With a great show of friendliness he came among us trying to make us think he was a friend and hinting that he was acting under the direction of the Americans to improve our conditions. He was very plausible and probably might have gained some of the information he was looking for had we not been warned. As it was I'm afraid he was "out of luck." We found out later that he was a veteran spy of the Kaiser's personal staff and one of the parasites who made the far-reaching German spy system possible. When our turn came a little later to do the signalling to other new arrivals we changed the name, for one more significant, and signalled the message: "Watch old Charlie Chaplin."

## CHAPTER VII

### STARVATION CONDITIONS IN DÜLMEN

THE starvation of those days was bad enough but worse was to follow. When we were pronounced able to leave the hospital we were taken out every two or three days to work on the prison farm and at other so-called light jobs around the country. Since we were so weak from lack of proper nourishment that we could scarcely walk, this was pretty tough. To avoid work we often tried to hide away in the barracks but the guards were relentless, as we found all German guards to be, and no matter how sick or weak we might be we were dragged out and driven like cattle down the road.

We had made up our minds that the Germans were not going to benefit any more than we could help by our presence in the country, a policy that British prisoners adopted early in the war and have ever since carried out. Our first chance to put this into operation came when we were put to work setting out cabbage plants on the prison farm. When doing this we would pinch the tender plants with the thumb nail just at the junction of the root and the stalk and inevitably after this treatment the plant died. You can imagine how surprised the Germans were the first time this was done, to find the plants, the morning after they were planted, all withered and dead.

When they found they couldn't trust us at this

sort of work our places were taken by the French who pursued a more peaceful policy. Then we were set at cutting heather on the big moors a couple of miles from camp. After cutting, the crop was wheeled on barrows to a big press, there made up into bales, and then shipped away by rail.

Here we got our first understanding of the bad feeling which existed everywhere between the civilians and the military. While we were under guards, the work was managed and directed by a civilian who owned the property and the crop and who drove us mercilessly to get as much as possible out of us. The guards disliked the idea of being under the direction of a civilian and refused in consequence to drive us as he wished, though they were careful to let us know that this was not by reason of any kindly feelings toward us.

The idea of escape had been always uppermost with Nicholson and me ever since we realized that we were prisoners. And this grew with our work on the moors where we were not particularly closely guarded. Had we been strong enough we would certainly have made an attempt then, for we had found by careful inquiry that the camp was in the province of Westphalia about eighteen miles due east of a point on the Dutch frontier. Some of the older prisoners even showed us on a map they had somehow got hold of the exact location of the place, and one or two prisoners in Block 1 who had made an attempt to escape told us of three windmills set in a direct line with that frontier point. After that Wallie and I used to gaze longingly out over the moor to where the first of these windmills could be picked out on the top of a hill some five miles to the west. How we longed and even prayed for the long-promised parcels which would give us the strength at least to



make an attempt to reach the Border. As it was, we had good opportunities for escape, but the carelessness of the guards was easily explained by the fact that they knew quite as well as we did that we hadn't the necessary strength for the undertaking. Attempts, several of them, were to be made later, however. And I kept on trying until success finally materialized.

Aside from the hope of escape, however, we had good news from other sources which helped to keep us buoyed up. Not long after the date of our capture the British and French offensive on the Somme began and every few days a small bunch of new prisoners came in. Invariably they had the same story to tell—that everything was going splendidly but that they had advanced too far and had been cut off. They were very optimistic as to the general outlook and as a result we all expected the war to be over and all of us home in the fall.

It was interesting to see the difference in the condition of the British as compared with the French prisoners on arrival.

The French arrived almost daily and in fairly large numbers. Sometimes whole detachments came in from the same battalion. They usually had their great coats and a large part of their equipment and, in the majority of cases, showed little evidence of having been in a scrap. Most of them were smiling and happy, apparently very well pleased to be out of the war.

On the other hand, very few British prisoners arrived, and these were made up of men from every battalion on the section of the line they had been covering. Many of them wounded, bloody, ragged, and half dead with fatigue, they looked like men who had given every ounce of their strength till they



collapsed. Instead of being content they were invariably depressed and chagrined at their misfortune.

In July about three hundred French Moroccan troops arrived. Wallie described them as: "Real savages, black as the ace of spades." It was rather pathetic to watch them for they couldn't understand why they were shut up in the enclosure or why they shouldn't be fed. Even these fellows had their ideas of escape when they discovered the location of the camp; as we learned a little time later.

One day when I was out with a working party some distance from the camp one of the boys suddenly dropped as though struck by lightning and the report of a rifle from the camp followed. Examination showed that a bullet had grazed his forehead. Fortunately no serious injury was caused and after a little time he came around all right. When we got back to the camp we found that one of the Moroccans had made his escape; a bullet fired after him by one of the guards had accidentally found our party. The black was away all night, but as was almost invariably the case, was caught and brought back later.

We had scarcely expected to meet members of the British navy in the camps, but when we found how cosmopolitan the personnel of the prisoners' camp was, nothing much would have surprised us. In the middle of that summer, shortly after the Battle of Jutland, some survivors who had been picked up when their vessel had been sunk were brought in and placed in the adjacent compound. They were lively fellows, full of mischief as any sailor could be and delighted in tormenting the guards when this could be done with any likelihood of safety.

One day one of these Jackies threw a rubber ball (used by the Frenchmen for some sort of game), and hit a guard who stood on the other side of the wire fence. That was a crime of the deepest dye and the guard accordingly—to use Jack's own description—came into the compound and "raised hell." When he couldn't find the culprit he reported the matter to the commandant. As a result all the sailors were put under punishment and kept standing at attention for hours while attempts were made to get the guilty one to confess. The man responsible wanted to give himself up right away but the others determined to stick together and to "stick it out." In the end, despite protestations, he broke away and proclaimed himself. He was sentenced to stand at attention, under guard, with his face to the wall in a sentry box, for twenty-four hours. But the guard who had made the complaint had to stand and watch him, this provision apparently being made to remind him that he should not trouble his superiors with small offences, but deal with them himself according to the approved German methods.

One thing which humiliated us a good deal in the camps was that we were ordered to salute the "*Unteroffiziers*" (corporals and sergeants) and "*Feldwebels*" (sergeant-majors), as well as the higher officers. The Canadians were not strong on saluting anywhere. We had been in continual trouble on this point in England. But for us to salute a lot of dirty, ignorant, German savages! Well, we did so only when there was no way of getting out of it and were frequently punished in consequence.

One day, just after I had been discharged from hospital, I was wandering round in the compound, half starved and paying no attention to any one, when a loud, harsh voice behind me drew my atten-

tion. When I turned round, there, just outside the fence, was a little, stubby, old German general, his moustache sticking up on either side like horns, waving his highly polished sword over his head and frothing at the mouth with rage. Not dreaming that I was the innocent cause of his excitement I started to laugh and only when he began to make a run for the gate to get into the compound did I realize that he was after me for failing to salute. Discretion, here, was certainly the better part of valour and I was able to get into the barracks and hide away before he got inside the compound.

A few days later a couple of the British prisoners in the next compound were similarly neglectful when this old martinet was around and, to add to the insult, one of our Canadian boys—who was amused at the old chap's excited "barking"—began to imitate him. That was an absolutely unpardonable sin and, in consequence, the whole camp was put under punishment. We were stood in long rows along the fences and everything possible was done to get hold of the offender. In this case nobody sympathized with the chaps who had been so indiscreet because they had well known what the consequences would be and they were soon persuaded to give themselves up. They were sentenced to three weeks in the "black cells" on a ration of bread and water.

An out-of-the-ordinary event while we were in Block 3 at Dülmen Camp was the visit of the American Ambassador Mr. Gerard. The camp was cleaned up previous to his visit and the soup showed a marked improvement for that day. When he arrived we were lined up, four deep, while he talked to us for a few minutes. He told us he had been sent by his Government to see whether he could do

anything to improve conditions for us and to take any complaints we had to make. The all-important question with us just then was food and we complained of the scarcity and quality of the stuff given us, telling him—what he could plainly see himself—that we were starving.

“I will see what I can do,” he said; “but I am afraid you must not expect much. Your parcels will soon be coming and then you will be all right.”

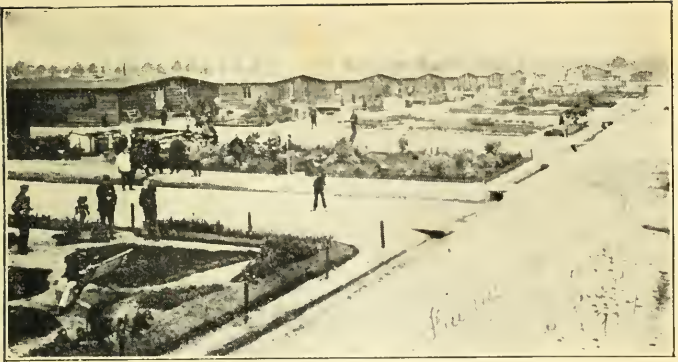
“But we are absolutely starving,” some of the boys insisted. “We will all die if our parcels do not come soon.”

With this, several officers who accompanied him intervened, apparently trying to explain that the food was all it ought to be, considering the circumstances. Mr. Gerard was not allowed to speak to us alone and, I have no doubt, was a good deal hampered, for German officers listened closely to everything he had to say and to any remarks we made, so that any one complaining of ill-treatment might be punished later. After renewing his promise to do what he could he left the camp. Whatever he may have tried to do it had no appreciable result, since matters continued in the same old way. It was obvious that the Germans held both him and his country in contempt and that this visit was allowed only as a matter of form.

A few days later wild excitement prevailed when a load of parcels arrived, naturally stirring up great expectations.

By that time we were so badly off that we often lapsed into a sort of stupor. Nicholson was lying in his hammock, in this condition, more dead than alive, when the news arrived.

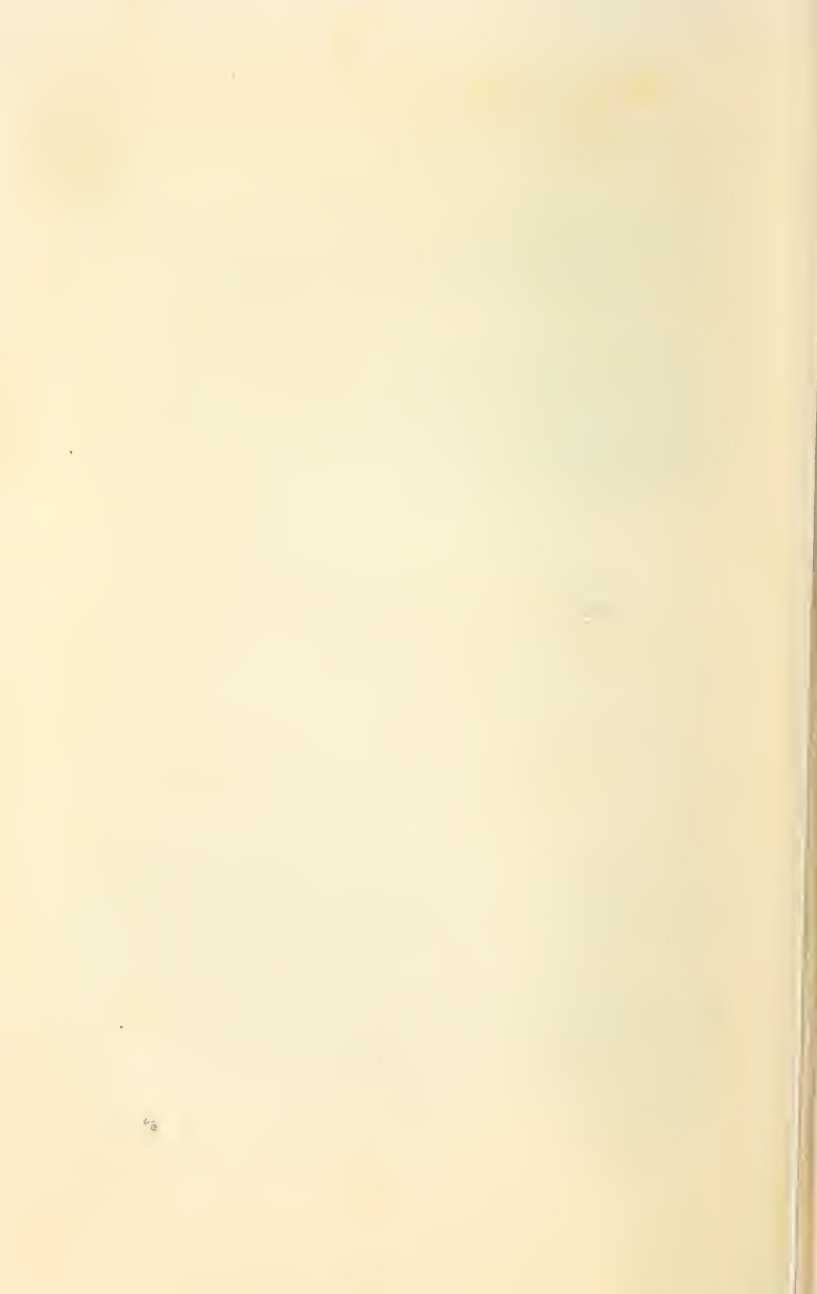
“Come on, Wallie,” I said, shaking him into consciousness. “Come alive, old man. Parcels up.”



One side of a postal sent from Friedrichsfelde Camp



Unloading Red Cross parcels at Friedrichsfelde Camp





At the word "parcels" he sat up, eagerly.

"Anything for us, Mac?"

"I don't know. Let's go and see."

Crawling out of his hammock he made his way with me slowly along toward the fence where a dense crowd was gathering. As we struggled along, we must have looked like a pair of walking skeletons. The delivery wagons were drawn up alongside the fence and we formed a long line, passing the parcels from hand to hand along to the sorting room, every man trying desperately to see the name on each parcel as it passed through his hands while hundreds of hungry, wolfish eyes glared at the bundles of food as though they could look through them.

A couple of hours later tickets were issued to those to whom consignments had been sent. I think it was one of the bitterest disappointments of my life when I found there was nothing for either Wallie or myself.

We dragged ourselves back to our hammocks and lay for hours without a sound. Then with characteristic grit Wallie turned to me and said, hopelessly, as though he didn't believe it himself:

"Never mind, old pal. We've been through Hell together before and come out safely. We'll pull through this, too. We're sure to get a parcel to-morrow." But a good many to-morrows went by before we were favoured.

Things did look up a little when we were moved into Block I and the prisoners there who had had parcels coming for some time gave us their German rations and anything else they could spare. The chaps who could put their pride in their pockets, and systematically begged from the few who had food, got along fairly well, but Wallie and I found it



hard to beg, even in starvation. When nothing else offered we hung around the garbage pails and boxes and picked the best bits from the refuse. When occasionally a piece of mouldy bread was brought to light it was considered a great find.

Such provision as was made for communication with the outside world was meagre and very closely guarded. We were allowed, for instance, to write a postal card once a week and a letter every two weeks. These were held in the camp for about three weeks before being posted, the reason given for this being that it was necessary to provide for the evaporation of any invisible ink which might have been used. Again, there were most careful restrictions on what we wrote. Everything had to be large, clear, and distinct. We could not, under any consideration, make mention of the conditions in the camp—adversely, that is—or complain of the food. Indeed we saw long sentences imposed on prisoners who attempted to get some idea of the truth to their friends. While we might ask for parcels we were not allowed ever to suggest that food was really needed.

Naturally these restrictions gave rise to a good deal of ingenuity to evade them. One lad, for instance, writing home, spoke of the lovely camp, the *kind guards*, and the *good food*, but in the last paragraph made inquiries somewhat as follows:

I say, dad, have you seen my old school chum, *W. E. R. Starving*? I haven't heard anything of him for a long time.

The Germans saw nothing wrong, but I have often wondered what feelings were stirred up in that home when his letter was read.

In one of my own letters home about this time I said:

"This is a most beautiful country. The German people are kind and thoughtful and I am having a splendid time. In fact, I have never been treated quite the same since the summer I spent in *Stony Mountain*. But I do miss poor old Chuck. I am afraid he has been killed. I haven't seen him since the day I was taken prisoner.

The allusion to the well-known Manitoba penitentiary was quite lost on the German censor who probably thought it was a popular Canadian summer resort and that Chuck was a friend. So he was and lived in my mother's pantry. My people at home understood and wrote back that they were sorry about Poor Chuck but thought he might still be alive.

It was not surprising, perhaps, that the first parcels coming to us were anything but what we needed. We never thought of telling our friends what to send, and in consequence they forwarded the same stuff they had been sending on to France—chewing gum, chocolate, candy, fruit, cakes, etc.—and sometimes clothing, books, or perishable food, which last-mentioned was, without exception, destroyed by the guards. They feared that in our starving condition we might have been poisoned by this bad food and any prisoner who was not too badly crippled to do some sort of work was too valuable to be allowed to poison himself.

Despite all these hard and trying things the life of the camp was not without its humours, which helped to keep us from going insane. One source of amusement was Evans's barber shop. "Slim" Evans—a tall Oshawa (Ont.) boy, from the 4th

C. M. R.'s, who was captured the same day we were, and who had been in about every corner of North America and tried his hand at almost every trade—hunted up an old razor from some unknown spot and appointed himself barber for Block 3. There were two or three barbers in other blocks, who escaped other work by looking after the prisoners' tonsorial requirements.

Hearing this news, Wallie and I wandered down to see about getting a shave. Of course we had no other way of getting our faces clean until our parcels later brought us razors and other necessities. "Slim" had set up his "chair"—a board propped up against a table—and had a customer in it when we got there, while a group of five or six, with strained, frightened expressions, watched the wild flourishes of Slim's razor and the awful look of fear and anguish on the face of his victim.

I had grown quite a long, black beard by this time which bristled out on my thin, wasted face like a barbed-wire entanglement.

"Hello, kid," said Slim (everybody was "Kid" with him), when he ran his eyes over my beard; "you're next."

Wallie and I looked on for a while but the first time Slim's back was turned, we slipped out. I visited the "shop" every day after that, to meet Evans's broad grin at sight of my beard, but when my turn was near at hand my courage failed me and I wore my beard till the Red Cross parcel, with a shaving outfit, came along.

Nicholson and I were not alone in our longing to escape. I think the so-much-talked-of initiative in our Canadian boys was as much evident in this thing as in anything else. While the British prisoners were ready to fight the guards they did not display the same

eagerness to get away as did our Canadian lads. Possibly the fact that most of us had been more or less used to the open had something to do with it.

The first attempt we directly knew of among our own boys occurred shortly before we left Dülmen, when some of the prisoners in Block 1 who had been in the camp long enough to get regular parcels and were therefore not so weak from hunger as we were started to dig a tunnel, hoping to drive through under the fence and come up outside. Jack O'Brien—a fine Irish-Canadian lad, whom I got to know better later, since he finally escaped with me—was one of the party. Their plan was all right but they did not figure on the trickiness of the Westphalian sand and, just as they were about to break through one evening, the tunnel collapsed under the weight of a guard whose beat led him over the spot. While the tunnellers were not caught the episode caused a good deal of excitement in camp and a considerable tightening of discipline.

But our stay at Dülmen was drawing to a close. After what seemed a terribly long time a couple of those precious parcels did arrive and we began to look forward to a little relief from the starving process we had been undergoing. Then one night Wallie and I were warned to go out next day with a working party, with about fifty other Canadians. The story ran that we were to work on a farm, and, as we had heard that conditions were better at this class of work than in an industrial plant, we were naturally somewhat jubilant. Our hopes, however, were very rudely dashed.

When we were packing up what little stuff we had been able to get together during our stay in the camp one of the Canadian boys who had been there some time and knew a good deal of conditions, came in.

"Hello, going on *kommando*?" he asked.

"Yes; going on a farm," Wallie answered.

"A farm?" he said; "what a hope!" And he laughed a little, bitter laugh.

And it transpired that this story of the farm was always palmed off on the prisoners so that they would be more ready to leave the camp. When the British prisoners knew what was coming and thought that they were to be sent out to work in some industry—most of which were famous (or infamous) for the conditions of abuse and slavery existent there—they would frequently refuse to go.

When such a case occurred things were unpleasantly exciting around the camp for a while. Usually the guards in their rage would lay about them with the butts of their rifles and kick the poor objectors all over the place. Prisoners of splendid physique—who, singly, would have been a match for half a dozen of the semi-cripples we had for guards—had to submit to this sort of treatment though it nearly drove them mad to do so. To have raised a finger in self-defence would have meant certain and immediate death.

If, as was usually the case, this method of abuse did not prove effective, the prisoners were given a dose of standing to Attention, one of the most-used German punishments. This meant standing stiffly, without moving a muscle, for hours, usually in either the hot sun or the freezing cold. No one who has not been through it can imagine the exquisite agony it entails.

In cases like this an officer was usually called who would select the spot where each prisoner was to stand, and there place him, keeping up a volley of oaths and abuse of the worst imaginable kind. If a prisoner did not move quickly enough to suit him

he was certain to get a blow over the head or face with the flat of the officer's sword.

This attitude of Attention was kept up for hour after hour till human limits began to be reached. After about twelve hours, depending on one's physical condition and the weather, the weakest would faint and would pitch over on his face on the ground. Here he would lie, while the guards walked up and down, every once in a while administering a kick or a poke with a rifle. When the first sign of returning life appeared he would be jerked to his feet and the query "*Arbeit?*" (work?) shot at him. If he said "No" he was stood up in the line again and the whole process repeated. If any one tried to get relief by moving hand or foot he was knocked down with a rifle butt and stood up again as soon as he was physically able to stand. If, as often happened, the prisoners held out more than twenty-four hours the guards would start on the first row and, beginning with the first man, would ask if he was now ready to work.

"No; damned if I will," was usually the answer from our boys.

With this he was knocked or kicked out of the line, hammered into unconsciousness, and dragged away to solitary confinement on a scant bread-and-water ration in dark cells. This treatment was given each man in turn until the remainder, sick with the sight, would give in and march off to work as directed. It was an infallible process, but surely no fiend could invent a more terrible method of carrying out his will.

For various reasons, few British prisoners were trusted on the farms. In the first place, the work could not be carried out in gangs and since it was not practicable to have a guard for each man the chances



for escape were good. Again, it soon became known that the British or Canadian prisoner had a penchant for destroying all he could and for doing as little work as possible. On the other hand, the boys in most cases liked farm work because of the larger freedom it gave them and because of the better treatment which was usually given by the farmers. However, the easier life of the farm was not to be for us. Instead we were soon to know and to experience conditions immeasurably worse than we had known in Dülmen.



## CHAPTER VIII

### INTO "THE BLACK HOLE" OF GERMANY

NEXT morning—August 2, 1916—we were marched out of Dülmen and were destined not to see it again until nearly a year later, and in very different circumstances, when, O'Brien and I, prowling through the country on a dark, rainy night, making for the Border, came out on the crest of a hill from which the bright lights of the camp could be plainly seen. But more of this later.

It was harvest time in Westphalia, as was made evident by hundreds of women and children stooking and stacking the grain in the fields. Able-bodied men were little in evidence. Here and there an old-fashioned thresher was humming away, fed by an old, crippled-up German. Most of the farm machinery we saw was either Canadian or American and at one spot an old McCormick mower sitting by the roadside made us all homesick. Two rows of splendid trees threw their branches over the road forming a perfect arch and where a gap occasionally occurred it was filled with apple trees loaded with green fruit. I suppose the effect was beautiful. But we couldn't see much beauty about it and tramped along sullenly. Scenes of peace and beauty bring no joy to the heart of a slave.

At the station we were herded into an enclosure to wait for the train. In the meantime, two or three trains of German troops went through, miserable,

sullen-looking fellows, who seemed so disgusted with it all that one of the boys remarked:

“They are going to the slaughter and they know it.”

We couldn't help comparing their down-heartedness and quietness with the high spirits of the British and Canadian troops going up to the line. We learned a little later that these fellows were bound for the Somme and understood their feelings. The Somme was always a nightmare to the Huns.

Another contrast was noticeable. A lot of German civilians—old men, women, and children—were standing about the platform. Did they enthuse over their passing troops? Not a bit of it. They simply seemed to take no notice of them.

After a long wait a car was switched in and when we were aboard it was coupled on the end of a long train, which, after another wait, pulled slowly out. We travelled along deliberately till about four o'clock when we were detrained at a little place named Sin Sin and were marched up the tracks a piece to wait for another train. Wallie and I were sitting on the bank when our attention was attracted by the jeers from the other fellows and in a moment the most dilapidated passenger coach I ever saw—black with smoke and coal dust, every window broken, boards hanging loose all along its sides—was shunted down opposite us. Printed on the side in big white letters was the name—“AUGUSTE VICTORIA”—probably that of some German princess, though it meant little to me then. I only wish I could escape the bitter memories of hardship, cruelty, and degradation that that name invariably recalls now.

However, we were soon to find out something about it. It took only a minute, after we climbed

aboard, to switch the car off the main line, and after a short run up a three-mile spur we came into a big railway yard. At first our attention was drawn by two huge skeleton steel towers which some of us recognized as the shaft-head of a mine but before we reached this we came to a queer-looking plant which we afterward learned was designated as the Cokery. It was a great steel platform, probably three hundred yards by fifty, raised twelve feet off the ground on concrete piers, with a row of huge coke ovens down the centre. At the back was a big machine for pushing the coke out of the ovens. A half-dozen "brands" (one oven's firing of coke—eight tons) had just been pushed out on the platform in front. Through a great cloud of steam and gas we saw gaunt figures working like mad. When they saw us they stopped for a moment, staring. But directly a big, red-faced, red-headed German came tearing down the platform and when he found them watching us he flew into a rage and grabbing up a chunk of iron bar he waved it menacingly, while he punctuated his threats with such words as "*Schweinhunde*" and other choice terms of endearment.

Down past a big chemical plant and a brick kiln the train carried us, past the minehead and huge coal sheds, until finally, when we wondered what was coming next, we sighted a long, low barracks surrounded by barbed wire and high picket fences. About thirty yards apart, between the fences, guards were stationed. Another was to be seen in the yard or compound, which was about forty by six yards, part of which space was taken up by buildings which we afterward learned were the jail and other outbuildings.

It didn't take long to tumble out of the cars and a moment later there was a crowd of prisoners around

us asking for news. British, Russians, French, and Belgians were all in evidence but there was only one Canadian—Sammie Woods, of the 5th Battalion.

Then we were lined up in the yard while the guards looked us over, counted us, and asked us all sorts of questions as to our civilian occupations. Say, they must have had a nice idea of what class of Canadians were fighting if they took us seriously. The answers provided, for burglars, swindlers, gamblers, organ grinders, pedlars, and a long list of others quite as ridiculous. A long, lanky German they called Johnston acted as "*Dolmetscher*" (interpreter) and since his knowledge of English was exceedingly limited he had some difficulty in rendering these replies into understandable German.

The long building was divided into six sections and signs over the doors identified these as "*Englander Baracke*" (English barracks); "*Wache*" (Guard Room); "*Russen Baracke*" (Russian Barracks); "*Revierstube*" (Hospital); "*Kokerie Baracke*" (Barracks for workers in the cokery); and, in the farther end, "*Franzosen Baracke*" (French Barracks).

We were taken first to the *Kokerie Baracke* and told off to our beds, but we drew rations (such as we get), and ate what little there was to eat, in the English barracks. So soon as there was room we moved in there finally.

Seeing that we were still half starved and terribly thin we were much surprised when the other fellows gathered round us and began to tell us how well we looked, but when I glanced around at them, and saw the marks of suffering on their drawn faces, I understood. They were perhaps fleshier than we were but their flesh was flabby and colourless and such a world of homesick misery looked out of their eyes that we were forced to wonder at their evident good

spirits. Soon we found the answer. The words: "Be British!" were always slipping out of somebody's mouth. They had used that—as we learned to, afterward—as a spirit-instiller and a cure for hopelessness.

The Germans did everything in their power to keep the prisoners miserable, hopeless, and in despair, so that we shouldn't oppose their plans or try to escape; and, to this end, they told us all sorts of bad news. Everyone in Canada had starved to death—at least, there were a few left but they were getting pretty thin, too. . . . The British navy was out of business and we were always getting beaten on every front.

We regarded all these stories as lies and only believed the rare bits of good news we heard, so the Germans, thinking we would be more likely to believe their dismal stories if we could read them in our own language, introduced a paper into the camp which was printed in English, French, and Russian. The paper first claimed to be an American publication, but when America came into the war, it became neutral. They called it the *Continental Times*, and we called it the *Confidential Liar*.

We used to get a good deal of fun out of this paper, for the editor, with the typical German lack of the sense of humour, had on the front page a big headline declaring: "This paper is published in the interests of Truth." Yet he raved through its pages in bitter German anger, blasting everything that wasn't German, and continually contradicting himself. One editorial was preserved in the camp and was a never-ending source of amusement, but we Canadians had to put up with a lot of chaffing because of it. The Germans generally were surprisingly ignorant, and for a long time refused to

believe that we *were* Canadians, stupidly insisting that Canadians were black.

The editor of the *Confidential Liar* was apparently labouring under the same delusion, and when the first Canadians were captured at Ypres, the editorial in question made its appearance. It said: "We have captured at Ypres a number of Canadians and other coloured troops"; the "other coloured troops" being the French Algerians, who broke and ran when the gas caught them, leaving the flank exposed. He went on to say how fast the Canadians could run and noted: "But in spite of their fleetness of foot, our gallant troops overtook them." The Old Country boys had saved the paper and whenever they thought we needed toning down, read it off to us, and afterward the Canadians were referred to by their comrades in all the camps as "The coloured troops."

We always made the most of the few bright spots that there were in that Hades of suffering.

Everything was arranged and intended to crush the prisoners' spirit—bad food, cruel treatment, all kinds of bad news and false reports. But the boys, with the true British spirit that never has been and never will be broken, made it a point of honour to keep on smiling—or to "Be British," as they called it. Some of them said that the only reason they were able to keep alive was that they were mad all the time. And that was probably more or less true. Under relentless persecution and bitter enmity on the part of the German guards the trace of stubbornness which has caused the bulldog to be adopted as the emblem of British character developed in us till we actually became so stubborn and determined that we would keep on smiling, even though our hearts were breaking, rather than let the Germans think we were downhearted.



When one of the chaps would get into trouble for some actual or (a soften happened) for some fancied infringement of discipline and be badly beaten up and thrown into a dark, stinking cell, to come out—after a couple of weeks on a diet (scanty at that) of bread and water—a physical and nervous wreck, the other boys would have as good a meal as possible waiting for him and would gather round with encouraging words to cheer him up, urging him to “Be British.” Such phrases as “Stick to it, old man,” or “Cheer up, old boy, you’ll soon be dead,” and a good deal of teasing and jollying would revive again the good old fighting spirit and make him feel that it was well worth while to be British.

When we found out that our “Farm” was a coal mine, we protested that we would not work, that we would go on strike. The chaps who had been through it told us, however, of their experiences, explaining how it was useless to attempt such action. In telling what they had endured and suffered they added significantly: “But there are other ways of beating the ‘Squareheads’”—the name applied to the guards by all British prisoners.

“How is that?” I asked.

“Well,” said a husky Scot, “six of us are in jail now, ten are in hospital here, seven at Recklinghausen. Some of us have been returned to Münster and while the rest of us are working we are keeping our work down to the smallest notch possible—so small that the average wage of an ‘Englander’ is from two to six marks a week while the ‘Froggies’ get from twenty-five to forty-five.”

“What? Do they *pay* you?” I asked, in surprise.

“Oh, yes,” he laughed. “They’re very particular about pay and they actually do pay, but—according to the amount of work done. If you work hard



you have plenty of money; if you don't you won't get much."

"I won't get much," I said. And I didn't.

A few hours afterward, however, the fifty Canadians who had come in together were put on mine work and divided up between the three shifts. I was allotted to the night shift and was one of the first to go down.

At nine o'clock we were ordered to fall in in the yard to be counted and were then searched for money, food, maps, compasses, or anything else likely to be useful in an attempt at escape. Then the guards took up positions all around us and marched us over to the mine-head where we all changed our clothes in a bathroom so crowded that we could scarcely move, and, putting on a suit of overalls and special boots supplied by the company that operated the mines, we passed down a long passage to a big room where we drew our lamps. From here we were forced up a steep stairway and down another passage to the mine-head where we were packed into rough cages and dropped swiftly down for eight hundred yards—almost half a mile. It almost made me sick, and turning to an old Englishman beside me I asked:

"Did it make you sick the first time?"

"I don't know," was his reply. "I wasn't conscious when they brought us down here first. We refused to come down but they drove us over with the points of their bayonets and when we wouldn't get into the cages they knocked us senseless with the butts of their rifles and threw us in. The civilians dragged us out at the bottom." This was typical of the treatment generally accorded, so I asked no more about it.

It is perhaps worth nothing that these mines were

opened in 1870 and that the shafts were sunk by French prisoners taken in the Franco-Prussian war. Even then, you see, the Germans used their prisoners as slaves. The mine machinery and methods of operation had never been modernized; many of the methods that were in vogue at that time are being used now. The only up-to-date part of the whole plant was the huge engines and boilers of the power house. Underground everything was antiquated. The work of horses was performed by men while work that should have been handled by machinery was done by horses.

When we reached the bottom of the shaft that first night we were, as you can imagine, in anything but cheerful spirits. We sat about the shaft for an hour and then were taken along into one of the workings about three miles, where our shift started. We were under the authority of civilians and civilian bosses called "*steigers*" (foremen). These fellows always liked to stay up above as long as possible so we had to get down first and come up last. It was arranged that there were always three or four civilians to one prisoner. They considered such an arrangement necessary when they were dealing with the British so that if, as often happened, any trouble developed, the Germans would always be in the majority.

They were a bad lot, these civilians, always ready to get a crack at us—ever ready to take an opportunity to injure us in any way possible. And with all this they were cowardly and treacherous to a degree. If one of them got the worst of an argument with a prisoner he would get two or three others and wait for his victim at a chosen spot. They hadn't enough manliness to think of fighting with their fists, but used a knife, a pit lamp, a club, or a

chunk of wire cable. If we started at them with our fists, as we frequently did in self-protection, they seemed to think we were taking an unfair advantage of them. We did not dare to strike or scarcely to resist a guard—who was a soldier—for we knew it meant almost certain death, but there was little love lost between the guards and the civilians and we could consequently go after the civilians without the same fears as to results. They were always anxious to find out what profession we had followed before joining the army and you may be sure we took advantage of this in every way possible. When, for instance, a chap who was big and husky, told them that he had been a boxer, they usually managed to give him a wide berth afterward.

Perhaps another reason for the fact that we were able to dominate them more or less was that the authorities used any disturbance in the mine as an excuse for fining these civilians heavily. For example, after a prisoner had been badly beaten up, he would be encouraged by one or two of the under-officers to enter a case against the civilians in the "Court of Justice," which, by the way, was a sort of standing joke among us. After a long, tedious trial and a lot of false evidence the civilians were usually fined five hundred marks each. This looked easy for the prisoner, but he was usually told that he was in the wrong also and warned not to let such an affair happen again. The fines went to the "War Chest."

Along the underground road on the way out to the gallery in which I was to work I noticed that a great many old coal seams had been worked out but that the openings had not been closed up again; shortage of labour, as I afterward found out. In most parts the mine was fairly well ventilated but in these old

workings it was very hot and full of gas. In the smaller galleries the supporting timbers were shattered and broken and in many places huge masses of rock hung over the roadway just waiting a touch to bring them down. In some spots the roof was so low that it merely cleared the tops of the cars and we had to walk along behind them bent half-double. At first we pushed the cars with our hands on top, but we soon became cured of this for at the low spots our knuckles got badly smashed by coming in contact with the roof.

Sick and weak, and scarcely able to stand, I was put to work with three old Germans, fixing up the small railway lines. Up to this point I hadn't had an opportunity to learn any German, yet the old savages used to give me my orders in German and also a great deal of abuse when I couldn't understand them. They seemed to think that German was a sort of International language which everybody must know and that I was malingering when I professed not to be able to understand it.

After three days of this I asked the *Steiger* to put me on another shift, and was placed in "*Revier zwei*" (section two). The work was harder here but my friend Nicholson was on the same shift and it was good to be together again. We worked about three days when Flannigan, a young Irish-Canadian, was killed. We were told that the roof had fallen in on him, but we never knew as we were not allowed to see the body. Any one of a dozen things may have happened. In any event, we had all been complaining of the dangerous conditions in the mine and decided to go on strike.

As a result the Canadians in the first shift refused to march out of the yard. They were badly beaten up but still refused to go down to work so they were

stood to Attention under guard. The next shift took the same stand and received the same treatment, being lined up behind us. Finally the night shift came along, too, for a dose of the same treatment. We were all very weak and when we had been standing from early morning till late at night without food or water and unable to move a muscle for relief without being hammered or poked at with a bayonet, we were about done for.

I was the first to go. Suddenly I felt my grip on things slipping and everything went black. When, finally, I came to, in the *Revierstube*, I was very sick and dizzy and was surprised to find myself badly scratched and torn. Two of the British Tommies were with me and they told me that I had pitched over on my face into the barbed-wire fence in front of the line and had hung there for some time. After a time the Germans, anxious lest they should lose a slave, had ordered the Tommies—who had long before learned the uselessness of going on strike—to carry me off and try to bring me back to consciousness.

This was early morning. When I asked for the other boys they told me they were "still sticking." All through the scorching day they stood and if hand or foot was moved for relief the guard was on the spot in a moment to administer the knock-down treatment with the rifle. Two chaps fainted during the day and were only with difficulty brought round again. All through the following night in a drizzling cold rain they stood, too stiff to move. And when daylight broke again they were marched over to the "*Kokerie*" and lined up facing the red-hot coke ovens.

(Of all the tortures employed, that was the most popular and most effective. Placed against the

heat and gas, in his weakened condition, this treatment was invariably too much for even the strongest to stand. In a little time the fumes would sicken him and he would faint, sometimes pitching on his face against the hot oven. One of the guards would then turn the hose on him or throw two or three buckets of cold water over him, giving him a vicious kick now and then to aid in bringing him back to consciousness. When he showed signs of life he was stood in the line again and this treatment was continued until he was ready to give in.)

This time, however, an unexpected incident interrupted the proceedings. The boys had only been standing in front of the ovens a short time when a civilian, who was announced to be the Spanish Ambassador, arrived in the camp. To present a good appearance, I suppose, a guard was sent over to the "*Kokerie*" and the Canadians were taken away and placed in a big shed. While there they talked it over, decided there was no use keeping up the strike under such conditions, and regretfully agreed to give in. When the announcement was made the guards tried to encourage Nicholson and Blacklock, who had been the most determined, to hold out. They wanted to make an example of them. The boys got an idea of their game, however, and quit with the rest.

Poor Flannigan was buried next day and thirty of us were allowed to attend the funeral. It was the saddest scene I think I have ever seen and was bitterly hard to think that the poor chap had gone through so much in the service of his country only to be killed at last in slavery among its enemies.

When we started work again the guards taunted us continually on our failure to stand their punishment. God! Wouldn't I like to have them under similar conditions for a little while. Those fellows were the



cruellest of all the Germans with whom I have had anything to do. They were always in and out of our barracks—morning, noon, and night—to see that no one was breaking rules. The camp was always under punishment, for if any one prisoner committed a misdemeanour the whole contingent was punished. (Of course the offender got his a little worse than the rest.) The idea, apparently, was to make the whole group collectively responsible for the behaviour of the individuals composing it so that we should use our combined influence to keep the individual from breaking out. But the regulations were such that it was almost impossible *not* to break them. We could neither sing, play cards, dance, nor have any recreation of any kind. We couldn't even smoke in the barracks. Those guards used to pop in every few minutes to see what was going on. Some nights they would come in ten or twelve times, turn on the lights and wake us all up by pounding with their rifles on the floor and shouting in their deep, guttural, characteristic German voices.

If they were at all suspicious that anything out of the ordinary was happening they would turn us all out in the yard where we were forced to stand, shivering with cold, while they counted us. It was a great game, that counting; they did it frequently enough: "*Ein, zwei, drei, vier, fünf, sechs,*" and on up they would count till one of the boys in the back row would start to "kid them" in broken German. This naturally made them mad and they would stop counting and try to find the offender, generally forgetting how far they had counted. When this happened two or three times they would try to make up by kicking us in the shins as they went along. They seldom got the count right, but if they had too many they didn't let any go: oh, no.

After a while I was put on the morning shift in the mine again with a young German named Ferdinand and was assigned to "*steinerkippen*." This I found to be one of the hardest jobs in the mine. We had to push cars loaded with rock along little railways out to the end of the coal seams and dump the rock in to occupy the space from which the coal had been removed. To dump those cars we had to put our backs against them and by main strength lift them off the tracks, then back again.

Ferdinand was a strong chap, about twenty-eight, well built, but almost blind, which made military service impossible. He wasn't such a bad chap, as the Germans go, and I got along fairly well with him for a couple of months. When we were pushing those heavy cars up the slopes he would put his mighty back against them and heaving all the time, while I did as little as I could get away with; he would shout in my ear: "*Fest! nur fest! verdammt die Schweinhund.*" (Faster, faster, you damned pig-dog.) In my turn I would growl "*Ja, ja,*" and would grunt as though I were pushing my insides out.

When I got a little used to him, so that I could hold my temper when these vile names came out and could laugh at his savage and indecent jokes, we got along much better and the great savage used to talk freely about the war and its effects on Germany. In many ways he was stupid and ignorant but on some matters he had a good deal of information. One day while we were waiting for some cars of stone I began quizzing him as to rumours I had heard about trouble between Germany and Holland.

"How many soldiers has Holland?" I asked in broken German.

Ferdinand glared at me for a moment and then growled out:

"The ungrateful pig-dogs. They have six hundred thousand. But that is nothing. It's the food. We are starving and we depend on Sweden and Holland." Then he broke out into a rage. "But the swine will suffer. Yesterday I was home and all day long the artillery from Dülmen passed through on the way to the Border. We will punish the dogs who dare to war on Germany."

"But you have lost the war now, Ferd. When you didn't get to Paris or Calais, when you didn't take Verdun, you lost the war."

"Damn the English swine. They are everywhere. The French and the Russians, they don't want to fight Germany, but the English are always at war. They fight like the devil and learn nothing from it."

"We learned to beat the Germans, anyhow," I answered, rather hotly.

"No, no; not yet. In the end—perhaps— We cannot win. . . . But Germany *must* win. . . . But it's the *sea*. You have the sea. On *land* we can win. Against all the world we can win because it is our war and we have nothing to unlearn. There was no other war with us and no other experience for us to forget or old equipment for us to renew. This was the only war with us and we planned and organized. You had to fight according to our plan. The British are soldiers but their generals learned their war in Africa and Asia—in India. They have to forget it and they *can't*. We learned our war in Germany and France. We planned and practised on the ground we fought on and we would have won but for the damned Englander."

This was a fair sample of the conversations we had almost every day, carried on in broken German impossible to reproduce here. He always acknowledged in the end that Germany could not finally win and

told me of his plans to go to Belgium after the war to get away from Germany and to work building up the destroyed cities.

This was typical, too, of the civilians as a whole. They were in a hopeless state of mind and while very rarely any of them would express a hope of winning they were all exceedingly anxious for the end of the war. Some expressed the intention of getting out of Germany. Others would tell us that they would cut the throats of every capitalist in the country, as no doubt they will because they like that sort of work. While they did not seem to dare to mention the Kaiser, we understood that by "capitalists" they meant him and his government, the military class generally.

They scarcely dared to speak freely, even to their own friends, for the German spy system is in operation even among these poor men and no one knew who might be watching him, only waiting for a chance to get him into trouble. If one of these fellows was caught making any disloyal statements or trying in any way to stir up revolution he would be immediately sent off to the front, regardless of his physical fitness. The same thing prevails to a great extent among the German soldiers. Here the informer is rewarded with promotion, and since the non-com. is so much more favoured than the private in the army such upward steps are eagerly looked for. While this system prevails it will be seen what difficulties stand in the way of any revolutionary movement among either soldiers or civilians.

Our hours were certainly no sinecure. When I was on the morning shift we were marched over and sent down in the mine at 4 A. M. From the bottom of the shaft we walked from two to three miles to the scene of our allotted task and then waited an hour

or so for the civilians to arrive. We worked eight hours, marched back to the shaft, and sat around till all the civilians ascended; then we were taken up and were allowed to wash and dress before being marched over to the camp. Usually our working day lasted from twelve to thirteen hours, sometimes longer. For a while the boys who were on the other shifts stayed up at night to have supper ready for us when we came in but the Germans soon forbade this. Two or three times they came in, gathered up all the hot food placed round the fire, and threw it out.

By this time, our parcels were coming through and we were better off in the way of food supply. And while we were mighty glad to get the parcels, we got a good deal of stuff that was of no use to us. At first, packages could be sent in by friends and relatives. Afterward it was taken over entirely by the Red Cross in London and conditions became much more satisfactory. Then we couldn't get word to our people that we were starving; and they sent us the things we had wanted in the trenches such as chewing gum, candy, cakes, fruit, etc. What we wanted now was the "bully" and "MacConachie," which we then considered only fit to build dug-outs with. Then, too, a great many of the private parcels were lost and many were destroyed because of improper packing. Again somebody would try to send a letter, a paper, a map, or a compass, all of which of course were forbidden. If anything like this was discovered the whole parcel system was upset and we all suffered. Again, a few of the boys who belonged to wealthy families or who had friends in England were showered with parcels while some had no home nor friends and consequently got little. The boys were all good to one another and shared up always. I once saw a boy take off his boots and stockings

right in the yard and give them to a prisoner just in from the front, starved and nearly naked. But it was mighty hard on some of us who had to look to the others all the time for enough to keep body and soul together.

One would think that life in that camp would be entirely without relieving instances but occasionally such did come along. West of our barracks was the "*Wache*," or German Guard Room, and next again to that was the canteen or soup kitchen, in which about fifteen sturdy German girls worked. There was no entrance from our barracks but a big window had been cut in the wall on each side, and through this our soup and coffee were passed.

Some of these girls were really fine-looking. Perhaps it was because we had no chance to see any really decent women that made us think so. At first they had no use for the British prisoners. They had been told that England had emptied all her prisons when the war began and that we were all convicts. For a while they would have nothing to do with us but soon the good-natured chaffing of the boys, and the fact that we remained friendly under all their abuse caused them to moderate their views and they even became quite friendly. Often they would open up that window and talk to us for quite a time. Of course we had to be careful that the guards were not about for they were very jealous of any such relations and would stir up a fuss if they knew such things were going on. Some of the fellows even got so far that two or three of the girls agreed to try to escape with them. They were to meet our fellows outside with clothes and food and get over the Border together. Somehow, however, these well-planned affairs never came off. We did hear stories of where such things had been tried at other camps but



never learned of any successful escapes managed in this way.

An interesting story came in from one *Kommando* where two English lads who knew something of German had been placed in the camp office to do clerical work under the supervision of the camp commandant. The officer's daughter, a pretty young girl, came into the office every day and became quite taken up with the good-looking young Englishman. Though they were carefully watched the two must have managed to get together now and again for they finally planned to escape together by way of Holland. The young prisoner was to get away from his guards with his chum and meet the girl, with her chum, at a specified point outside the camp. The plan worked smoothly at first, for the two girls met the young fellows at the appointed place and in the meantime the commandant's daughter had stolen two suits of civilian clothes, as well as the necessary passports and her father's automobile. That was escaping *de luxe*, surely. Everything went well till they got within a few miles of the Border when the boys decided to give the girls the slip and to try to cross "on their own." With their separation from their fair friends, however, their luck seemed to change. One was wounded at the Border and the other was captured and so they were taken back, I suppose to the usual punishment. I have often wondered what that officer said to his daughter when they brought her back. Wow!

## CHAPTER IX

### FREEDOM SHORTLIVED—THE FIRST ATTEMPTED ESCAPE

BEING comrades in distress, so to speak, it was not at all strange that the Canadians soon became very friendly with the British Tommies in the barracks. They were fine fellows, nearly all regular army men who had been captured during the Retreat from Mons, at the time when the little band of "Contemptibles," fighting against overwhelming odds, lost nearly all their wounded by reason of the appalling fact that every man was needed for the actual fighting and none could be spared to carry the wounded back. These fellows had seen service of one kind and another in about every corner of the earth where the British flag floats and strange were the stories they had to tell of experiences and scraps before the Great War.

No stories were more harrowing or biting, however, than those of the atrocities committed by the Germans in the same Mons Retreat. The earnestness with which they were told and the relentless hatred such actions had provoked were evidence not to be doubted of their truthfulness.

One night, for instance, we were sitting around the fire yarning when one of the "Old Boys" came in and cried in a high-pitched, peculiar voice: "Wait for me! Wait for me!" drawing out the words in a long, dismal wail.

I had heard the same thing several times before and was curious. When I asked what it meant a big Guardsman said:

"Oh, that's the 'Cry of Mons.'"

"What's that?" I asked, in all innocence.

"Did you never hear of the 'Cry of Mons'?" was the rather surprised answer. "Well, I'll tell you about it."

"Anything to do with the Angels of Mons?" I asked.

"Angels of Mons? Oh, Lord, yes. It had to do with the angels, all right." Then (after a short, reflective silence): "The angels were there in front of us. Thousands of them. Gaunt, gray angels with spiked helmets, murdering and mutilating as they came. Call them angels or devils as you like. They were the devil's own angels."

"But were there no angels at Mons?" I persisted.

"I saw thousands of devils. They swarmed in every road and field. And because of their murdering I heard for the first time the 'Cry of Mons.'"

"We were fighting a rear-guard action," he went on. "And for days and weeks we were like men in a horrible dream. It was retire and fight, retire and fight, till the orders seemed to come in automatically. And still the gray wolves pressed in on us in thousands. I worked my machine gun till they were almost on top of me and then picked it up and carried it back to a new position and opened her up again. A handful of the chaps would stay behind and hold the devils up till we got the gun away. They were nearly always killed, but men were cheaper than machine guns just then and we had to hold on to it. Outnumbered ten to one, as we were, we couldn't spare any one to bring along our wounded. The poor fellows knew what was in store for them

for they had seen things before and heard the call themselves, so they would try, no matter how they were suffering, to drag themselves after us. When it was beyond them to keep up any longer, the piteous, heart-wringing call 'Wait for me! Wait for me!' would come to us. I tell you, the hardest thing I've ever had to do was to get back with that gun and leave them."

After a minute's thought as to whether to tell the rest he went on again:

"About dusk one day my chum on the gun was hit badly. We stretched him out, only half conscious, at the foot of a tree, and picked up the old gun to move back again. I was glad it was half dark for if he had seen us going I don't think I could have left him. But the gun—I had to save the gun. We hurried away, but he must have heard us and come back to consciousness for as we were hurrying back his voice came to me: 'Hey, Jock! Wait for me!' I turned back, but a burst of rifle fire coming from close to where he lay told me it was too late. One thing remained, to save him from the tortures of those inhuman brutes. So, dropping the gun into position again, I got my sights set just at the base of the tree where he lay and swept the place. Then, grabbing up the gun again, we beat it, just in time, praying in the bottoms of our hearts that the bullets had gone home quick. 'Wait for me! Wait for me!' That cry rings in my ears all the time. I can't forget it and I'll never forgive the barbarian, bastard race that murdered my wounded comrades."

"Did they get you on that retreat?" Wallie asked, after a little.

"No," Jock said. "I was wounded myself a little while after and was sent home to Blighty.

I came back again and was wounded and taken prisoner at Loos. While I was in hospital the first time a young preacher—I won't call him a sky-pilot because sky-pilots are good fellows—who looked young enough and strong enough to be in the army, came to see me and had the nerve to ask me what I thought of the Germans."

"What did you tell him?" came in a chorus.

"*Tell* him?" (bitterly). "I cursed them as the savages and murderers that they are, just as you boys curse them every day of your lives. I told him that I never went to sleep at night before I had prayed from the bottom of my soul for the destruction of the whole accursed race."

"And what did he say to that?"

"That I should love my enemies. And I got up on my crutches and kicked him out of the hospital with the help of a wounded Canuck in the next cot."

"Go to it, Scottie. Give it to 'em hot," a couple of the listeners commented, and the burly, red-headed chap began to get even more forceful.

Just then came the warning: "Square-head in!" We knew that a German guard was coming and made a bee-line for our beds.

Oh, those beds! They were unspeakably dirty and were infested with millions of fleas—great, whopping fleas that came up in our clothes from the mine. We were always in misery from them. Night after night I have sat up in bed, and, running the risk of punishment for doing so, have struck a match and turned my pillow over, to see dozens of them hopping away like grasshoppers. It was quite impossible to get rid of them. During the time I spent in that barracks the straw in the mattress was changed once. The blankets and covering

in which that straw was placed were never changed or even washed in all that time.

No amusement was ever allowed in camp. We learned that there were provisions for the arrangement of sports, concerts, and such things but these provisions were mere "scraps of paper" and seemed to us to have been made chiefly for the purpose of impressing visiting ambassadors. We were even forbidden to play cards but managed to keep at it pretty steadily just the same, and got considerable amusement in gambling with the imitation money they gave us in payment for our work. There was no way to spend this so we did the next best thing.

Poker was introduced into the camp by the Canadians and it very soon ousted all the regular Old-Country games such as Banker, Pontoon, etc. It was no unusual sight to see five or six poker games in progress at once in the English barracks. At first the Germans would rush in and grab the cards and money but we became so adept at hiding such stuff that before a sentry could get from the door to the table everything would have disappeared and nothing would be left as evidence of infraction of the rules. Of course we were searched and of course we all professed innocence while the sentry would go through us. He rarely found anything and would usually stalk out, grunting and muttering to himself.

After a time Wallie and I became more than "fed up" with the continual grind of these slave-drivers and the never-ending torment of abuse we dared not resent, until existence seemed scarcely worth while. We both managed to get into the hospital two or three times by inflicting injuries on ourselves and on each other. Once I persuaded Wallie to push a loaded coal car over my toes, and this smashed



them badly. That put me into the hospital for two weeks. When I came out I "took the fever," and was paraded before the old camp doctor with a red-hot stone wrapped in a handkerchief under each armpit. I got the stones out just before my turn for examination and staggered up before the doctor looking like death and really suffering.

"*Krank?*" he asked, roughly and laconically.

"*Ja, ja, viel, viel krank*" (very, very sick). I explained further, in the best German I could muster, that I had terrible pains in my head, had a sick stomach, and couldn't eat; in fact, I gave him all the symptoms I had ever heard mentioned having anything to do with fever, and I guess a few more.

The old savage snorted in disgust and waved me aside so that my temperature might be taken by a French orderly who was sometimes called on to help him. The thermometer was inserted under my arm, in due time removed, and passed back for inspection. After one glance at it he hustled me off into the *Revierstube* and ordered me to bed, cursing the Canadians all the time for being "*immer, immer krank*" (always sick). When the doctor was gone the orderly informed me with a wink that I had fever very badly, so badly, in fact, that the doctor scarcely expected me to recover. My temperature had already reached the known high-water mark and if it went higher I would be a "goner." I smiled to myself and settled back among the fleas, being pretty well satisfied that I should have at least two weeks more of rest.

How did I manage to keep sick? Well, another little story hangs around that. I had managed to bring in a little German flashlight with me. This I chucked up in my armpit every day about the time I knew the doctor was coming round and this was

kept there till just before Frenchy would take my temperature. I kept it up as long as I dared and when finally the old chap began to get suspicious I simply had to get better and go back to work again.

When I got back I found that the old German *Steiger* I had been working with was also in the hospital so I decided to join the "Sleepers." Some of the boys went down in the first cages in the morning and instead of sitting about, made their way back to an old working and spent the time sleeping, with one of the number on watch. They were wakened again in time to get up with the shift and were able to keep this thing up for quite a while without being discovered. It was decidedly dangerous back there in the old workings with the roof threatening to fall every minute and running the risk of discovery and due punishment by the guards but it meant a good deal easier time and meant also that so much less coal was being mined for Germany.

In the meantime, Wallie and I were steadily planning to escape. Every day, while we walked out through the dark levels in the morning and back in again at night, we talked and schemed. A hundred different plans were discussed but each turned down as impracticable until finally we decided on the boldest one of all. While this proved remarkably successful in getting us out of the camp and away from the guards for a while, it unfortunately led to greater suffering in the end.

Provision against escape, particularly of the British prisoners, seemed to be entirely adequate. The camp was small and well guarded. Our barracks were long and narrow with a wing jutting out from the south side forming an L. The north and west sides were built right up against the main street of the little mining town of Hulls. We were only al-

lowed in a small space to the south of the building, about forty yards long by six wide. The south of this space, again, was guarded by a barbed-wire fence sixteen feet high, closely woven. While there was no electrically-charged wire, as there was at other camps, there was another heavy fence of hardwood palings bolted to iron rails about six feet outside the wire. There were no doors opening from the barracks except to this compound on the south and all the windows were heavily guarded with bars about an inch in diameter. There were guards all round but an extra sentry was always on duty in front of the English barracks. Our British comrades assured us that to try and break out meant certain death, but Wallie and I decided to take a chance.

Since the French, who occupied the east end of the barracks, were a good deal more ready to knuckle under to the guards and were consequently in a good deal better odour with them, we figured that it would be better to make the break in this part of the yard. After long planning we finally decided that our scheme would be to file through the wires about five o'clock some afternoon, and to get away by tossing a rope ladder over the picket fence outside. We had no hope of getting away without being seen but, as Wallie put it, we had to "take a chance on the 'square-heads' shooting straight." Desperate? Yes, I suppose it was. But we were undergoing desperate treatment and were quite ready for desperate measures if they offered but a bare chance for freedom.

The first thing to do, obviously—as the recipe puts it—was to get our file. And here some more long-fetched scheming was necessary. First, I had to go back to work. I had a finger ring which was very

tight and I began fussing and complaining about it. This was kept up till the old German with whom I was working got sick of hearing me whine and brought a file down to cut the ring off. I tried to get hold of the file myself but no, there was "nothing doing." He was wise enough to cut through the ring himself, and, furthermore, he kept it, putting it in his pocket and taking it home.

Finally we "borrowed" a file from a Russian who was making food boxes for the British prisoners. I haven't returned it yet.

We had planned to make our getaway on Sunday, November 2d, and everything was ready so far as we could make it. On Saturday night, however, while Wallie and I were scouting round the yard, as we had been doing for some time, getting a line on everything, we saw the commandant and an old civilian carpenter looking at the fence near the spot where we had intended breaking through. Walking slowly past and straining our ears, we managed to hear just enough to understand that they were planning to put a sentry box there. The weather was getting cold and wet and some protection seemed to be needed. The commandant suggested cutting a hole in the outside fence and placing the box up against it. This seemed a piece of good fortune so we decided to put off our attempt till the hole was cut. This was done on Monday and the box was put in place but we soon saw that they had forgotten to fasten it. Wednesday was a public holiday. These the Germans always kept scrupulously, working a double shift next day to make up. We chose the holiday evening because there were always more men around in the barracks yard on a Sunday or a holiday afternoon and our movements would not be so noticeable.

About five o'clock the French kindled their fires

for cooking along the wire fence. That Wednesday night the wind favoured us since it blew the smoke across the sentry's beat. This led him to stop and turn about halfway down. Then, everything ready, I went over and squatted down by the fence, talking to a Frenchman at his fire and when I saw the guard's back turned, filed away at the wires. I knew the thing had to be done quickly so when the moment came I broke the wire away, crawled through the opening, pushed back the sentry box, and flattened myself against the paling fence until the guard came down and turned again. Say, when he passed he was so close that his bayonet was not more than a foot from my nose. Then came Wallie's turn. He got caught coming through the wire and I thought it was all up with us, for to be discovered in that plight meant death—quick and sure. Since, when a prisoner is caught by the guards of his own camp he is never taken back, but is killed on the spot as an example to his comrades.

In the nick of time he broke free, and crawled through beside me just as the guard came down again. This time he stopped for a minute beside his box, cursing the French for making so much smoke. We were getting the same smoke, a good deal worse, too, but it was a blessing for us. You see that sentry box was tipped out at quite a considerable angle since there wasn't enough room for us between it and the fence, and if he had stopped to step inside or even to look at it we would have been—well, "in the gravy." However, a moment later he moved off again and we were able to get through the hole and push the box back into its place. We had arranged with two of our friends, Jack O'Brien, of the 28th Battalion, and Blacklock, of the Canadian Engineers, to fix up the hole in the wire fence. We have found



out since that they did this so well that the guards were three days in finding where the hole had been made.

We crawled along through a glare of light and sneaked into a big wood pile in the centre of the railway yard. This gave us shelter for the time being while we planned the next move; the first one had turned out even better than we had dared to hope. This place was surrounded by buildings and high fences so our troubles were not yet over. We did wander carefully down toward the main gate but there were a lot of civilians about and we didn't care to risk it. Sneaking through between the "*Kokerie*" and a big brick kiln we crawled in behind a pile of bricks and dug a hole under the fence. Through this, we crossed the railway, climbed over a small mountain of slack from the mine, and came out on a bit of open, scrubby land, the first spot of it all which had not been at least fairly well lighted.

And there we drew our first breath of freedom. My heart felt as if it would burst, and as we silently clasped hands there in the semi-darkness, Wallie whispered, brokenly: "Oh, God, Mac, how good it is!"

But the hardest part was still to come. We knew we had no time to lose, so struck off at a good sharp pace in a northwesterly direction, aiming to strike the River Lippe, a big branch of the Rhine, at the town of Haltern, where the railway crossed. We had a map, a compass, and a few matches but as the stars were bright we scarcely needed to look at the compass. Otherwise our outfit consisted of a few biscuits we had saved from our parcels during the previous few weeks.

As we sneaked silently along, looking behind us occasionally and avoiding every road and farmhouse,



the lights of Hüls and the camp soon disappeared but the glare of the red-hot "brands" of coke, which glowed brightly as they were pushed from the ovens, could be plainly seen for a long distance.

After a little time we reached the river just below the railway bridge but found it pretty wide and so cold that swimming it was out of the question. We were up against the first serious obstacle. Working up along the bank in the willows we came unexpectedly in sight of the long, high railway bridge, and in lack of any better way, decided to climb the third pier, which was at the water's edge, hoping in this way to evade the guard, who, we thought, would most likely be at the end of the bridge on our side of the river.

Stepping cautiously out of the willows in the shadow of the big pier we got within a few feet of the base and began to congratulate ourselves that matters were going well when with a jolt a harsh German voice yelled "*Halt!*" and a rifle went off, seemingly right in my face. It was so close that the bullet carried my cap off my head. We turned and ran while that guard pumped round after round after us as fast as he could load. While it is almost certain that he saw us, his shooting was mighty poor. Perhaps he was about as badly scared as we were. Anyway, the only effect the shooting had was to make us get over the ground a good deal more quickly. Wallie insisted on trying to swim across and slipped into the water, but I had to pull him out and give him half of my dry clothing to keep him from freezing.

We expected a patrol would be sent to follow us up so searched desperately for a boat or anything else which would get us across the river. Finally after about an hour, during which we wandered into

half a dozen dangerous spots, we glimpsed a light on the bank—which looked promising. This turned out to be a lantern in the window of a house just beside a pier. And when we investigated a little further we found a big iron barge tied up to the wharf. We climbed aboard the barge right under the nose of the owners. And it was only a moment's work to cut the mooring ropes and to push off with a long pole we found aboard her. The barge was empty, fortunately, but every move we made sounded to us as if it must be heard in Berlin. We didn't get away any too soon, either, for as the swift current caught hold of us and carried us a little down stream we saw lights begin to dance around on the bank and heard German curses—meant to be exceedingly terrifying but which then affected us little—thrown most heartily across the muddy waters.

We shouted back the advice which seemed most suitable under the circumstances: "Go to hell." And Wallie muttered, as he laboured mightily with the push pole: "It's only a matter of time till they get there, anyhow."

We landed with some difficulty at a safe-looking spot some distance down the river and sent the barge merrily on its way so that it would not tell the story of our trail. Then, making our way cautiously through the low fields along the bank to higher ground, we began actually to travel. We kept going at a good pace till day began to break, skirting villages and farmhouses and sometimes crossing small strips of bush.

One of the big problems was that of finding satisfactory cover when we were forced to keep out of sight during the day. This was thickly settled country. Villages and houses were very frequent,

so much so that again and again we ran onto them without at all expecting it. Further, Germany has gone in very strongly for reforestation and while every bit of swamp or barren land is planted with trees, these are not thick, and are laid out in straight rows, so that they do not furnish very good hiding-places. Imagine wandering through a strange country at night—the darker the better for our purposes—travelling only in a general direction, toward the frontier, only able to look at the map at odd moments and then with difficulty, and not knowing what the next moment was to bring forth. Our nerves were always keyed up to the highest tension and we could almost feel any approaching danger before sight or sound had warned us of it. It was part of our business to find cover so soon as daylight began to appear, and since it was not always possible to find a patch of woods we made the most of swamps, holes, culverts, or anything else that offered.

The nights at that time of the year were long and dark and we were able to travel pretty steadily, although we had to be exceedingly careful. Several times we got into pretty close contact with patrols and also passed within sight of lights which we knew must be those of prison camps.

One of the worst things we had to contend with was the sudden and unwarned attacks of dogs. Prowling around the edge of a town, for instance, or passing in the shadow of a farmhouse, with every faculty on the look-out for danger, it was no small thing to have a lean, hungry cur leap out at us and make the air ring with his barking. We always managed to dispose of these poor brutes with our sticks or by kicking, but our highly strung nerves never got used to these sudden attacks.

We didn't dare to follow the roads, for even during

the lonely hours of the night there was always more or less traffic, and, near the Border, patrols were passing incessantly. On the other hand, the fields were wet and muddy; all of which made mighty tough travelling for such wet, hungry, and miserable tramps as by that time we were. Still the lust for freedom kept our spirits up and we were ready for anything in the way of hardship or danger, so long as a chance remained of getting out of the hands of the devilish Germans. One or two instances will show how exceedingly narrow some of our escapes were. Indeed, after a time narrow escapes became such ordinary events that we didn't think much about them.

## CHAPTER X

### INTO HOLLAND, BUT——!

ONE cold morning, tired and wet and miserable, we stopped at what seemed a sheltered spot at the edge of a bush, to kindle a little fire to thaw ourselves out. The fire was just going nicely and beginning to furnish a little comfort when we heard a rooster's shrill crowing seemingly right beside us. Quickly stamping out the tell-tale fire we listened. Soon another spoke, and in a few minutes crowing came from all around us. It was so dark we couldn't see anything. One way was as bad as another.

So we stretched ourselves out on our wet coats, over the spot where the fire had been, to wait for daylight. Soon voices came out of the mist around us and a threshing machine started its drumming close by. You can imagine that when it got a little lighter we were glad to see a bit of scrub off to one side; to this we made our way as quietly as possible. There we stayed all day. Late in the afternoon a German, with a dog and a gun, came along by the bush and passed very close to us. The dog sniffed suspiciously and ran around where we had entered the patch, giving little, sharp yelps. The man got his gun down and began peering into the bush. We began to wonder what was about to happen. But luck came our way again. Just as we were getting ready to go for this beggar with our sticks a rabbit sprang out from a hole near by

and was off past us, followed, of course, by the hound and the hunter. Since a good-sized reward is offered for the capture of any escaped prisoner and a German civilian has the right to shoot any suspicious characters on sight we were mightily pleased to see him go but just ungrateful enough to hope that he would lose the rabbit.

After five nights of such travel we decided we had travelled far enough north and should strike due west for the Border of Holland. It was largely a matter of guess work. Our map had gone to pieces with the rain. Our matches had suffered seriously from the same cause. Indeed, since we were wet to the skin continuously it was impossible to keep anything dry. Thus on dark nights we were utterly helpless, so far as direction was concerned. We came across an occasional landmark, of course, but over there—as most of us have found out in even a very little travel at home—things look vastly different at night.

Striking west, however, as far as we knew, we concluded from the increasing number of patrols we encountered that we were nearing the Border. We sneaked to within hearing distance of houses which good evidence told us were full of German troops and evaded patrol after patrol and sentry after sentry. From what we heard we judged that the guards must know something of our whereabouts and were specially on the look-out for us. (When any escapes occur the guards are specially warned and given descriptions of the missing prisoners. If they are seen along the way, or leave any traces, this information also is made good use of.) Here, again, travelling was more than usually difficult, the ground being so swampy that it was impossible to get along anywhere but on the roads. Then for four miles from the



Border the roads were constantly patrolled by guards—some on horses, others on bicycles—and sentries on short beats were placed at narrow distances apart. Again and again when a patrol approached we were forced off the road and into the swamps. The guards always stopped where we left the road but did not dare to urge their horses into the swamp. They were pretty certain, anyway, that we would not be able to get over the Border. This worked out to our advantage in an unexpected way, for as these patrols passed along the roads they warned each sentry. He, in his turn, kept his lamp burning, the better to discern us, I suppose, when we came within range. However, this revealed their positions to us and helped us to get around several dangerous spots.

A drizzling rain had started early in the evening which later developed into a terrific storm. After midnight we had to fight our way against a fierce, bitter wind which drove the rain and sleet into our faces and lashed about our gaunt and ragged bodies like a fiend. Starved and nearly frozen we fought off the feeling of misery and despair that almost conquered us again and again and held grimly on, buoying ourselves up with the belief that freedom was near at hand. The storm got so furious that the patrols took cover wherever they could find it, and left the road unguarded, concluding, no doubt, that we also would be forced to look for shelter. But we held on and soon came to a long line of sentries on an old road. As far as we could see their lights shone out in the driving rain and they stamped and swore in their harsh German voices. After a while we found a spot where a ditch ran up into the field, making an opening in the hedge skirting the road. Crawling through the hole on our stomachs,

almost in full view of a sentry's lamp, we wriggled along like snakes till we felt we were a safe distance behind the line and then got on our feet and drove ahead again, keeping to the west, so far as we could judge it.

For an hour we kept moving and not a soul was seen or heard. Our hopes ran high. We felt that our troubles were nearly at an end. Suddenly another long row of lights loomed up in the darkness, and we soon came to another row of sentries apparently much the same as those we had passed. After some little whispered discussion we came to the conclusion that these must be Dutch sentries but rather than take any chance we decided to try to get past them and further into the country before revealing ourselves. Again we got down on our stomachs and crawled cautiously over the road. We were considerably puzzled when we began to meet patrols which forced us again into the swamps, but just about daybreak we passed the last of these, after which we travelled along with less difficulty.

Oh, for a look at that map! If we ever wanted anything it was that. But just then it was out of the question.

Coming into the outskirts of a little town we saw a chance. Getting as closely as we dared to a lighted window we tried to piece together the mass of pulp to which our map had been reduced. In our anxiety we must have gone too close to the window for we were startled by a shrill scream and I caught a moment's glimpse of a rather pretty girl in a lace-trimmed nightdress. As she drew back from the window we slipped away into the darkness.

We believed we had crossed the Border and our spirits rose at every step. Following a well-paved road that seemed to be running southward, and

fighting off fatigue which almost overcame us—half the time spurring ourselves to run to keep warm—we very shortly hit a good-sized town. It was now early morning. We were so sure we were safe that we decided to stop here and ask how far we had come into Holland. Making our way down the main street we met a couple of soldiers in dark blue uniforms, decorated with a double row of brass buttons. They stared at us and we stared back, but the colour of their uniforms reassured us and we kept on. They followed us at a little distance till we came to a railway crossing where several guards were posted. They held us up, asked us a few questions, and then roughly seized us and hurried us off to a big guard room in the centre of the town.

We had been in Holland and, without knowing it, turned around and crawled out again!—passing the German sentries again and thinking them to be Dutch.

Was the irony of fate ever so manifest?

The soldiers we had met outside the town were uniformed differently from the ones we had seen in France. Hence our confusion. If we had only known. If that map—— Oh, if any one of a dozen things hadn't been as it was!

In the guard room we found that we had made our way into the German fortress town of Wesel, about twelve miles inside the German frontier. And we thought we had been forcing our way through that storm into Holland.

Naturally we were about the most surprised, most disgusted, and most heart-broken Canadians in Europe. How the mistake had occurred we couldn't then imagine. We found out, though, later—when one of the boys in camp showed us a map and we looked up the little town of Burlo which we had

passed that night and found the point of Holland which we had crossed extending down into Germany.

Close to the guard room, was a big artillery barracks. All morning the German officers and N.C.O.'s were coming in and out to look at us and they seemed to be greatly amused at our appearance. Huddled in a corner, as we were; completely broken down with cold, hunger, and fatigue; ragged and dirty, with scraggly beards and long, unkempt hair, our misery would surely have awakened sympathy in the heart of any civilized human being. Not so with these fellows, however. Almost every one of them taunted and ridiculed us. One big raw-boned old sergeant-major, with high-top boots, spurs, and spiked helmet, came stalking in, his long sword clanking at his heels. A loose military cape revealed his gaunt frame; his fierce eyes and bristling moustache gave him a most ferocious appearance. When he stood in front of us and took in our desperate plight, a cruel smile spread over his face. The guard roused us roughly to stand to Attention while that old beggar talked to us and—wakened suddenly out of a stupor of fatigue—I imagined for a moment or two that I had arrived in Hell and was about to be interviewed by the devil. After quizzing us for a while as to the point from which we had escaped and why we had come to fight against *Deutschland*, he poured a torrent of bitter abuse on our helpless heads and then stamped his way out, evidently well pleased with himself.

About half-past eight in the morning a guard arrived from Friedrichsfelde *Lager* (Camp), about three miles from Wesel, to take us to the prison camp there. When we started he opened the breech of his rifle, showed us the cartridge with their big, soft Dum-dum bullets, and threatened what would happen

should we attempt to escape. We forced ourselves to laugh at him and told him, in what broken German we could muster, that we had seen thousands of them in France and didn't care a d—n for him or them. Probably our irony was lost on him but it was heartening to get it off, anyway. He raged at us and threatened all kinds of punishment while he drove us like cattle along the street toward the lager.

This was Sunday, and when we arrived in the camp it was out of the question for our clothes to be given the distinguishing stripes awarded prisoners because the tailor's shop was closed. So we were lodged in the German guard room and kept there till three o'clock the following day. Most of the time we had to stand in a corner. If we ventured to sit down one of the guards would rush over and start to kick and abuse us and by that time, as you may imagine, we were almost ready to do anything to avoid further ill-treatment.

A little happier time came next day and hope and courage returned to a large degree, when, after our clothes were marked, we were turned loose in the camp enclosure. Here we met some old friends who gave us a mighty fine welcome, food and clothing, and bucked us up generally. Everyone in the British camp could appreciate what kind of an experience we had been through, and Canadians and Old-Country boys seemed to be in competition as to who could do the most for us. It almost seemed worth while again to be alive.

We found in a few days at Friedrichsfelde that while the camp was a vastly less unpleasant place than the mine lager, the guards there were also characteristically German and made the lot of the prisoners just as hard as was possible. There was absolutely no excuse for this since Friedrichsfelde



Crippled prisoners working in the flower beds at Friedrichsfelde

Cross marks the spot where the Author and his fellow-prisoners were forced to "Stand to Attention" till they agreed to work.





was a Headquarters camp in which the guards had no reason whatever for annoying or abusing the prisoners, but we were not allowed to have any fire in the barracks though the weather was exceedingly cold and wet. Then, to make things worse, every window had to be kept raised. The place was nearly all windows so we might about as well been out of doors. We were forbidden to sit on our beds or smoke in the barracks and were hounded about from place to place all day apparently in an attempt to keep us miserable.

One old German especially troubled us a great deal. He had spent a good part of his life in England and spoke good English, but he hated the British bitterly. He had a little pointed beard, and a very sharp chin which soon earned him the nickname of "Old Chisel-chin."

In the barracks with us was a big Irishman who had beaten up a pro-German interpreter out on a working party, and was awaiting his trial in barracks, because there was no room for him in the cells.

One cold morning we were sitting about the camp half frozen—Paddy on the edge of his bed—when Old Chisel-chin came in. He flew at Paddy and called him everything but a gentleman, but Paddy sat tight and pretended ignorance as to what was the matter, until the old German began telling him how ignorant he and all the British were. "As ignorant as pigs," he shouted. "Any German soldier knows more than an educated Englishman."

Paddy could stand it no longer. Jumping up, he glared at his tormentor, and drawled in his broadest Irish brogue:

"Sure an' it's a d—n liar ye are." The German made a rush at him, but a glance at Paddy's huge fists, doubled up for business, caused him to change

his mind, and he whipped out a book and pencil to take his name and number.

"What is your name?" he shouted.

"Tomlinson," said Paddy.

"How do you spell it?"

Paddy glared in silence for a minute, and then said: "Sure, an' where's yer edycation, yuh square-headed pig?"

We all shouted with laughter, but Old Chisel-chin flew out of the door like a whirlwind, and Paddy was soon on his way to jail between two glittering bayonets.

We were not fated to remain long among these conditions, however, for in a few days a guard arrived from K47—our old and detested home, the mine, and we were soon back again.

We had been away, altogether, two weeks. Naturally the boys all thought we had got away and refused to believe otherwise until they saw us. And you may imagine the sympathy which was extended when they learned of our hard luck and the fateful mix-up at the Border.

Arrived at the camp we were taken into the commandant's office and were asked all manner of questions about our escape—where we got the civilian clothes; what food we had, and how we got it; and so on. To all of which we lied carefully and thoroughly. One question which puzzled us a good deal was a reference to a circus and what part we had had in it. Much to the officer's disgust we denied all knowledge of such an affair, and it was rather peculiar that the only atom of truth we told him was disbelieved.

We found out from the boys a little later that the circus had really been pulled off the night we got away. (When they were never allowed anything in

the way of recreation the only thing was to work something up and spring it out on the sly. The guards would hear the noise and rush in, but if the affair happened to be amusing they sometimes let it go on. If it didn't interest them, the whole camp would get some special punishment the next day, with an extra dose handed out to the prime movers—if they could be discovered.) This time the fellows had managed to dress up a big Scotchman to look like an elephant and a long, lean Canadian as a giraffe, while a flock of smaller animals followed. When the procession waddled out into the yard the sentry was much amused, as were also the other guards when they saw what was going on. Perhaps because they hadn't seen so much meat for a long time. So they let the show continue. Next day, when Wallie and I were missed, the officials naturally thought the affair had been pulled off to engage the attention of the guards while we made good our escape. As a result the "animals" were all arrested and the jail became a zoo for a week or two.

During our interview with the commandant we had as an interpreter a little Englishman, Max Goodman, who was certainly a brick. Some of his history is interesting enough to tell here.

He had been studying in France when the war broke out and had enlisted in the Foreign Legion, where he had been fighting shoulder to shoulder with men of every nationality under heaven, not a few of them Germans and Austrians. Wounded at the Battle of the Marne, early in the war, he was sent to Blighty and came back after a little with an English regiment only to be wounded again and taken prisoner. He had a good command of German and naturally soon found a place as an interpreter. In K47 he had somehow struck up an acquaintance with

"Slim Ella," a rather good-looking little German girl who was on night duty at the canteen. Quite occasionally he stole a march on the jealous and zealous guards and slipped through the canteen window to disappear in the kitchen behind, where he spent the time with Ella while she was waiting to serve soup to the midnight shift. Daring, eh? I suppose it was, but Max was ready for almost anything. After a while he was recalled to Münster Camp and kept up quite a vigorous correspondence with Ella for some time, the letters going back and forth with prisoners going to and returning from the hospital. I was his ambassador once or twice.

The mere reason for his recall to Münster is interesting in itself. If he liked the girl Ella he certainly hated the Germans generally and fought against them so strongly and continuously for the rights of the British prisoners that the guards found him a considerable nuisance and used all the influence they could to get him away from K47.

Once the Münster officials had been persuaded to recall him, those at K47 had no more authority over him. He was waiting for escort when Wallie and I were brought back from our long and disastrous trip toward freedom, and he was the means of having matters made a good deal lighter for us then.

The officer and the guards had openly boasted as to how they would torture Wallie and me if we were caught—that they would fix us so that we would never want to try it again. Max warned them against any such treatment and threatened that he would report them on his return to Münster. Another factor also had something to do with it. The post of commandant at Münster Camp had—till a short time previously—been filled by an old soldier who had himself been a prisoner in France in the war

of 1870 and who had been known on occasion to show some sympathy for the prisoners. This man, by the way, has a son in Winnipeg now. For what was considered his laxity he was recalled and a new man placed who turned out to be a real German. At this time, however, the new commandant's stand on the question of prison camp discipline was not known and since he had jurisdiction over K47 Goodman's threat had considerable effect. As a matter of fact—so we learned later—it was the means of staving off a part of the punishment which had been planned for us.

In any event, after all the evidence had been taken covering our case, a detailed report with our own written statement was sent in to the "Court of Justice" at Münster. A little time afterward our sentence came back and was duly awarded: "Ten days 'black'." What that meant I'll tell later.

In the meantime, Wallie and I worked a few days in the mines. Then they changed us over to the coke ovens, which was to be the worst part of our punishment.



## CHAPTER XI

### SLAVE CONDITIONS IN THE "KOKERIE"

INSTEAD of going to work I joined the Sleepers again but misfortune was my middle name. On the second day, after about twenty-five of us had settled down for a good sleep in an old, deserted working, a pit-lamp appeared in the opening and the light slowly advanced in our direction. Soon we saw a big, black-whiskered old German, with massive, stooped shoulders, come poking along the road examining all the hanging rock and broken timbers. His job was to locate any accumulation of gas that there might be in the mine and to get rid of it by blowing it out with compressed air. He came on slowly till he nearly stumbled over us. There we lay, staring up at him with eyes as big as saucers. But he was a wise old chap. I guess he knew what would have happened had he made any move toward us. He stopped and held his lamp above his head while he looked over the walls and roof but never for a second did his eyes drop to the ground. Then, turning about, he walked slowly back again.

Great excitement prevailed for some time. Some of the boys had been sleeping there daily for months and they were loath to believe that they were at last caught. Most of the fellows decided to go back next day, however. I was suspicious, but while I didn't go to work I went to another deserted working.

Next morning about ten o'clock, after the boys

had nicely coddled down, along came the old German again. This time, though, he had about a hundred and fifty civilians with him, all armed with sticks, stones, pieces of wire cable, and anything else they could lay their hands on in the line. The prisoners fought like wildcats and the civilians had to send up for the guards with firearms. When they arrived of course the boys had no alternative but to come out. Naturally they were all punished and then set back to work again. For a few weeks they kept at it, but soon the boldest of them went back to sleeping and the whole business was played out over again.

Wallie and I were switched to the *Kokerie* shortly after this first fight and our experiences in the mine, bad enough as they had been, were exchanged for something infinitely worse, a slavery such as we never dreamed that man would be called upon to endure in what is termed a civilized age.

Most of the men on *Kokerie* were there for punishment and it was interesting to see that Canada was well represented. Our boys get their share of that sort of thing, all right, whenever it was going. And oh, what a job it was! We had to worry away at it at least twelve hours daily, usually a good deal more, since the work was set in stints. Each prisoner had to load four "brands" of coke, wheeling it from the ovens over a platform of broken steel plates and dumping it into the cars which were run in beside the platform. All this was done amid the hot, poisonous fumes of the red-hot coke, enough in itself to sicken any one. Each brand weighed eight tons so that we had to shovel and wheel at least thirty-two tons of the stuff for a day's work. Every second Sunday we were forced to work twenty-four hours at a stretch, stopping only for meals. In that time we had to load sixty-four tons.

Even the strongest men soon broke down under the work. Imagine what it was to half-starved, miserable beings like us. After a few days our lungs and eyes were burnt with the gases and it seemed as if we could not keep moving another moment. But the guards were on the watch, and if you rested even a minute, there was the devil to pay. Three or four big Germans armed with revolvers paced back and forth along that platform all the time, cursing and abusing us. Often they would grab a shovel or an iron bar off the front of the oven and hammer a prisoner who did not do exactly as they wanted or who stopped a moment to rest.

Soon we played out and couldn't finish our four-brand stint in the twelve hours. Those who hadn't finished were left behind with a special guard, who was peeved usually because he had to stay, and there they were kept till the allotted work was done. Sometimes men were kept at that for eighteen hours a day until they collapsed on the platform. When that happened they were put at lighter work for a few days till they got back into something like shape and then they were ordered back on to *Kokerie* again. Sometimes a prisoner, driven harder than he could bear, or infuriated at his treatment, would go on strike and refuse to work. When a case like this came up the guards would drive the rest of us up in a corner and keep us there with their bayonets while the bosses tied the striker up to a pole with his hands above his head in a sort of crucified attitude and beat him with rope ends. If that didn't break him they would stand him to Attention in front of the red-hot coke ovens. If it was winter the oven treatment was alternated by forcing him to stand to Attention out in the cold without protection. If he moved hand or foot he would be knocked down

with the butt of a rifle until he gave in and went back to work. Every day the guards used to say to us: "You will work or we will kill you." And they came as near the latter alternative as they could without actually doing it. It was punishment that no human being could bear.

We hated the work because we felt that it was injurious to the cause we had fought for. And we knew that in doing such work we were releasing Germans for the fighting fronts. It used to break our hearts as well as our bodies. But, under the conditions, what could we do?

I feel bound to say that, in all this matter of forced labour, the British prisoners kept their quota of work down to the smallest possible minimum. If a German gave us a job and left us alone we would "soldier" or lie down and go to sleep beside it. If our tools were at all breakable we would smash them up. If one of us cut or scratched himself he would always put dirt in the wound in an attempt to induce blood-poisoning. The boys broke their arms, or smashed their hands and feet, or otherwise crippled themselves in some way to avoid work that would help the German cause. Many a man has lost a hand or an arm over there which he has sacrificed for the cause just as truly as if it had been shot off in Flanders.

The jail and hospitals were always full of British and Canadian prisoners and our reputation as bad workmen became so general that on many working parties the owners refused to accept British prisoners and would ship them straight back to the camp if they were sent out. We were fighting a war, against the Germans, in their own territory. And it was a war which caused them no little worry and trouble.

While we knew that the Germans hated us about

as thoroughly as we hated them—because they felt that Great Britain was the nation which was winning the war, and also because they knew that it was largely the British fleet which had so materially cut off their food supply—we felt that by their very hatred itself they showed their respect—in the only way a German can. At the same time, they acknowledged that their prisoners were well treated in England, but they considered that this was only their due; while we, belonging to a savage, uncultured race, were in their opinion not entitled to the humane treatment that is due to civilized peoples.

They did not have the same feeling for the French prisoners. And the reason was easy to find. However the Frenchman may be as a fighting man he certainly caves in when he becomes a prisoner. Ninety-five per cent. of the French prisoners we saw did everything they could to curry favour with the guards and consequently to make things as easy as possible for themselves. For instance, they were largely used in munition plants—something that the British, almost without exception, refused to have anything to do with. Again, they could always be trusted to carry through any work given them and could be left very lightly guarded with little fear of their attempting to escape. Thousands of them were employed at farm work with very few guards—sometimes none at all. If they had left most of our bunch around that way we wouldn't have been there when they came to look for us. Not only that, but there would have been less of the crop in the ground than was there before. For this reason the feeling between the British and the French was not cordial, and the British showed it by holding strictly aloof. On the other hand, the French were usually "in well" with the guards and the officers of the camps and

were able to make things unpleasant for us. All the easy jobs in the big camps—such as those of tailors, barbers, cooks, and camp-fatigue duties—went almost invariably to the French. Again, French N. C. O.'s were nearly always in charge of the camps under the Germans themselves and helped a good deal in maintaining discipline.

Over against this fact it is true that, occasionally, even the British non-coms were not entirely free from reflection in this respect for in some camps British sergeants and sergeant-majors carried on the same duties, assisting the Germans to maintain discipline among the British prisoners. We were game to take all the Germans could give us in the way of punishment for getting into trouble but it galled us mightily to have these men use their authority to force us to obey orders.

One old sergeant was instrumental in getting one of the boys a two-year sentence in a German penitentiary, and had a young Welshman in Münster under arrest when I left there, with a good prospect of receiving a similar penalty.

A few N. C. O.'s also volunteered for farm work rather than amuse themselves in camp where they had nothing to do, and by this they forced a corresponding number of Tommies, who would have been on the farms, to work in the big industrial slave camps.

There were, certainly, a few French who upheld the standards of loyalty, who fought the Germans tooth and nail, and who earned our admiration thereby. But they were few and far between.

An agreement had been reached between the British and the German governments providing that no officers or N. C. O.'s were to be forced to



work—one of the reasons why the officers in their special camps have no knowledge of the hardships suffered by the rank and file. This worked out beneficially for the Germans for there were a great many more German prisoners in England than British soldiers in Germany. In spite of this, however, a working party of N. C. O.'s would be made up and sent to Russia to work behind the German lines. The only excuse offered for this was that it was in reprisal for some alleged ill-treatment of Germans in England. These Russian working parties were forlorn hopes since very few of the poor chaps who were taken there ever came back. Most of them died of starvation and abuse but a good many—so it is said—were killed by Russian fire. One party was driven like cattle from Pola to the front by Uhlans who prodded them along with their lances and rode them down if they lagged on the weary march. To make travel easier, most of them threw away their packs and so, when overtaken by severe winter weather, had neither clothing nor shelter; as a result many died from exposure.

Those who survived also had their terrible troubles. At the camp they had had their parcels to fall back on for food when the German ration was not sufficient to keep life in their bodies. But the parcels were not sent up there and the horrors of cold and exposure were intensified by the process of slow starvation. Strikes and trouble ensued, as usual, many of the men hoping to be killed and thus escape their misery; but while the end came for some, the rest were subdued with the usual tactics. And there, where there was no possible chance of interference by a neutral power, the officials were even more ruthless and cruel than in the German camps. Sometimes they would stand all the prisoners alongside posts on blocks about a

foot high, after which their hands would be tied around the pole as high as they could reach. Then the block was kicked out from under their feet. While they were hanging there helplessly, suffering unimaginable torments, the guards would walk up and down the row and ask each victim: "Will you work now?" If he did not immediately answer "Yes," they would curse him and hammer him in the face or kick him—this treatment being kept up till the poor fellows would give in and return to their allotted task.

The German graveyards were filled with our best and bravest comrades, buried in nameless and despised graves beneath the very ground they had cursed in the bitterness of their hopeless struggle against the inhuman cruelty of their barbarian guards. Broken-hearted and starved, in anguish beyond belief, they died; and their very souls cry out for redress and will know no peace until the ruthless murderers who drove their tortured spirits from their broken bodies and desecrated their remains, shall have been ferreted out, each and every one, and given his just deserts—"an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth"—from the German soldier who committed the crime to the officer who permitted and often directed it, while pretending ignorance, to escape subsequent punishment for himself and his masters.

Thank Heaven that mighty few of our men, privates or N. C. O.'s, consented to take charge of any work or to assume any authority. The few who did we regarded as traitors to their country, to their friends, and to the cause for which we had fought and were still fighting in the only way we could.

When I got back to London, after finally making good my escape, I reported all such cases that I knew of. The same thing has been done by other escaped

prisoners. We are hoping and praying that these few fellows who so traitorously turned on their comrades in their hour of need will be treated *as traitors* and shot—as they deserve to be—when, eventually, they reach home.

## CHAPTER XII

### ANOTHER TRY FOR FREEDOM

AS WAS quite natural, I suppose, it was the usual thing for congenial spirits in the camps to sort themselves out and get together in what was termed "schools" of from three to six who "mucked in"—that is to say, cooked, ate, shared parcels, and generally chummed together. The "school" I was in comprised Nicholson; Private Blacklock, Canadian Engineers; Private John O'Brien, 8th Canadians; Private Freddie ("Toby") Boyd, 4th C. M. R.; and last, but not least, Private George Polly, a sturdy little London pugilist, who was a daddy to us all. We were a pretty bad combination I guess. Some of us were always in trouble. One or other of the six was always in jail—sometimes more than one. This involved a rather serious cutting down of the food ration, with consequent suffering. Finally, however, I hit on a scheme to get food in to the prisoners in the jail. It takes longer to tell about than it took to effect but it is a good example of the schemes we were able to work to evade the regulations.

Many of the German soldiers and guards had smoked British tobacco before the war and didn't much relish their own—to which, of necessity, they had been reduced. We didn't blame them for their preference; the German product certainly was rank. In any event, they used to watch us hungrily

when we puffed away at our English cigarettes which came to us regularly in the Red Cross boxes. It was a very serious offence to take anything from a prisoner, punishable by immediate transfer to the fighting front—something most of these fellows were exceedingly anxious to avoid—so they didn't dare to take a cigarette even if we offered one. The purpose of this rule, as will probably be obvious, was to prevent bribery. However, you can always bribe a German if you go about it in the right way. I picked on an old savage who used to watch us smoking with particularly hungry eyes; and, at every opportunity, and with a great show of friendliness, would offer him a cigarette. The first time he threatened to knock me down, but on each succeeding occasion he became a little less hostile; finally, with a furtive look all round to see that no one was in sight, he took the proffered "fag" and hid it away. So far so good. Every time we had a chance we gave him a cigarette and soon he came to look for them.

Now had come the time to put to the test our far-fetched scheme. One day two of the lads were chucked into jail for one of the usual infractions of discipline. I was sitting at a table in the barrack when our old cigarette fiend came in. I called him over and he came readily enough, looking apparently for the usual box of fags. Then I put it up to him bluntly that he had to take some food in to the boys in jail. He thought I was crazy. He raved around the place till I told him point blank that, if he didn't do it, we would report him to the commandant of the camp for having taken cigarettes from us. He kicked like a steer; but deep down in his heart he knew we would keep our word, and he knew, further, that if we carried out our threat, he would be on his

way to the front in France within a week. Well, the game worked. Finally the old brute gave in. After that, those of us who were ever in the jail were a good deal more comfortable.

I suppose it was a pretty glaring species of blackmail. But we were quite conscientious in believing that the end justified the means.

But it's high time we were getting back to our own experiences in that jail.

The sentence—"Ten days' 'black'"—referred to in the last chapter, and which had been awarded Wallie and me as punishment for trying to escape, meant that we were to put in ten days in the black or dark cells, on a materially reduced ration of bread and water, with no opportunity to communicate with any one either inside or out. When the time came we were pushed into an absolutely dark cell about three by six feet in size with absolutely no furniture or provision for comfort; and beyond being allowed out for a few minutes each night to get what water we needed, we were confined in that space. To shut out the light they corked up all the cracks and we nearly died of suffocation.

It wasn't much wonder that the time passed slowly. We had some consolations, however, though these were neither provided nor anticipated by the Germans. If they had even suspected such things there would have been short shrift for them. We got the added food supply, for instance, through the underground medium of the blackmail plan. The same medium furnished us with matches, so that we were not forced always to remain in darkness. Then, fortunately, we were not placed very far apart and soon found that we could shout to one another when no guards were likely to be around.

I passed a good deal of the time scribbling rhymes



on the cell walls. I would think out a verse, then light a match and inscribe the matter while the light lasted. Incidentally, one of the best of these was written on Christmas Day, 1916, while most of you were feasting on Canadian good things. It is given here—as nearly as I can remember—as I wrote it then:

On the old ramparts at Ypres  
 There's a lone Canadian grave;  
 The spot was fitly chosen,  
 For his heart was true and brave.  
 There, not a sound can reach him  
 But the tramp of marching feet  
 And the shattered walls of Ypres  
 Falling in the street.

Of the first to enter its earthen walls  
 Ere the furious storm had burst  
 Which made of the ancient city  
 A spot on earth accurst,  
 The forlorn grave of thousands  
 Who came with eager feet  
 When the shattered walls of Ypres  
 Were falling in the street.

There when the Germans' murdering hordes  
 Pressed near the old Lille gate,  
 And fiercely blazed the dripping sword,  
 And swelled the Hymn of Hate,  
 The shells came moaning over  
 And struck the old Cloth Hall  
 Whose walls had stood a thousand years  
 But now were doomed to fall;  
 The Algerian line had staggered  
 From the gas clouds in retreat,  
 Where the shattered walls of Ypres  
 Were falling in the street.

Into the gap from the "Land of Snow"  
Young soldiers of the West  
Unfurled to the eyes of an anxious world  
The maple leaf and crest.  
Far-away mothers with mournful eyes  
The glaring headlines greet:  
"The Canadians have saved the day,"  
And the news is bitter-sweet.  
But even yet we can proudly say  
No Germans have set their feet  
Where the shattered walls of Ypres  
Are falling in the street.

When muffled drums stir the countless slain  
To answer the last Roll Call,  
When Flanders fields resound again  
With marching men's footfall,  
From the shattered stumps of Sanct'ary Wood,  
From the battered holes where Hooge once stood,  
From trench and dug-out, crater and mine,  
A wavering, broken, and forlorn line—  
Canada's sons will rise again,  
And hurry with noiseless feet  
To answer the call where they gave their all  
In ruined Ypres' street.

We did have a sort of Christmas dinner that day for when in the afternoon our blackmailed guard came to take us out to get a pail of water, ostensibly to wash our faces, we found the pail full of food. There was something else which promised to be even more of a treat. Mail had arrived while we were in the cells and one of my chums had slipped half a dozen letters addressed to me in among the food. I was so pleased I could scarcely wait till we got back to the cell to read them. And then, when I began to pore over them by match-light, I found to my disgust that they were all six or seven

months old. They had been lost or had strayed all that time.

When we had served our allotted time and were allowed out again we found that because of the Christmas season discipline in the camp was slightly relaxed. At least fewer punishments were awarded and a little more liberty was allowed. For the first time since we arrived in that camp we were allowed to have a concert and a few boxing tournaments. These latter were a great source of wonder to the Germans who never care to fight with their fists. When one of the really good boxers we had in the camp would knock another fellow down—all in the best of humour—they would look on in wonder. Truly it was difficult for them to understand British ideas.

However, even with such diversions, the days and weeks passed slowly by. Ultimately one of the boys worked out an ingenious scheme by which practically everybody got out of working—for a while—and soon the hospital overflowed. It was really a laughable stunt though it caused an amount of suffering that no one who was not there can possibly appreciate.

The Red Cross parcels coming in to us all had plenty of mustard included (thought we needed seasoning for the food we were getting, I guess). But that mustard was made to serve a different purpose. This chap remembered, I suppose, what his mother had done to him when he had had a pain in the region of his stomach in days of old and utilized the mustard in a similar way, though on his hands and feet, and in a stronger solution. Others, seeing the effect, followed suit, and soon there was an abundance of bad-looking sores in the camp. Then an old Imperial soldier went the origi-

nator one better by inventing a salve of salt and soap. As can be imagined, its soothing qualities were not remarkable. Instead, when applied to the mustard sores, it ate in greedily, making the wounds look fearful. Painful, of course; but—so was work. In a few days about thirty of the boys were paraded before the old camp doctor and were sent to the hospital. He said we had "The Plague!" and nobody denied it.

To the officials it must have looked mighty serious. And try as he might the old doctor was unable to find any earthly disease to correspond with it. In the meantime, it kept spreading, as did the alarm, and soon a number of the "plague"-infected prisoners were sent on to the larger hospital at Münster. Now, since it was the hope and aim of every one of us to get to Münster, away from that horrible mine camp, this was all very fine. No solution of the epidemic was found by the surgeons here.

Eventually two specialists, very great men indeed, were brought down from Berlin. They tried a grist of experiments but were apparently as mystified as the others.

In the end the thing was given away by a couple of Russians whom someone had let into the secret. While the Russians were with us they were all right and could be depended on to keep their nerve. However, the Germans finally became suspicious that everything was not exactly as it seemed. They got these two poor fellows by themselves and put them through a sort of exalted third-degree treatment, I suppose, for the secret came out.

Then followed the reckoning. All the "plague"-stricken victims—some of them really suffering severely—were turned out into the yard and set to work stiffly. For a while the hospital was empty,

and to have the jail and hospital empty was very discouraging. But this was not the end. There were the usual "accidents," which sufficed occasionally to put a man back for a time, but this was not wholesale enough to suit us. At a sort of council meeting we discussed different diseases which might serve to secure us admission to the hospital, and finally decided on heart-disease—a malady that no one had ever tried the old doctor with. It was quite a job to create cases of heart-disease wholesale, particularly with the limited pharmacopœia available in a German prison camp, but we managed it fairly well.

How? It is simple enough, when you know how.

Next morning, after they had eaten about a pound of soap between them, six of the fellows were paraded before the doctor complaining of heart-disease. When the other cases were disposed of, and the friendly French orderly I have spoken of before holloed "Next," a big six-foot Canadian stepped out and began to explain his symptoms. With a derisive grin the old doctor grabbed his stethoscope and applied it to the region of the alleged malady. In a second the grin faded and a look of astonishment took its place. He went over him long and carefully and finally, with some concern, looking at him as though he expected him to blow up, stood him aside to be attended to after examining the others. But when they turned out to be similarly affected the old chap seemed to get the key to the situation. He flew into a rage and kicked them all out. When they came back to question the orderly a little later he was very much amused.

"What did the doctor say?" he was asked.

"He says there is nothing wrong," the answer came, "that Englishmen's hearts are all like that. They drink too much whiskey."

So all we got out of that attempt was a bad reputation.

About this time "Slim" Evans again came into prominence by reason of getting mixed up with some civilians in a fight down in the mine in which he was outnumbered three or four to one and rather badly beaten up. "Slim's" case came before the so-called "Court of Justice," and gave us another instance of its workings.

In case a prisoner was ill-treated by a guard he had the privilege of laying a complaint with the commandant, which came, of course, under military authority, since the guards were soldiers. The guards had their own methods of looking after such things. In case of trouble with civilians, however, the prisoner was encouraged to lay a complaint, for reasons which this incident will evidence.

Evans charged the civilians with assault and the *Steiger* (foreman) of his *revier*, who had been one of the main factors in the matter, was brought up for trial. It was not usual even to allow a prisoner to attend his trial but in this case, for some peculiar reason, "Slim" was summoned to attend, and was taken down to the court in another town by Johnson, the interpreter, who also acted as guard.

Now, if the case had gone against Evans, he would have been jailed and the work he would do in the time of his incarceration would be lost. He couldn't be fined because he had no money to pay. So after a lot of argument and a good deal of false swearing on the part of the civilians the Court found the *Steiger* guilty and fined him heavily. "Slim" was also informed—with a beautiful disregard for consistency—that he, too, was guilty, and was severely reprimanded and warned to be more careful in future. The fines went to the War Chest.



See the beautifully planned circle. We were encouraged to report on the civilians. They were encouraged to stir up trouble with us. In the end they were fined. All for the benefit of the state. There's a sample of government for you.

Another rather good story goes with this trial, however. After the trial the interpreter, Johnson, felt called upon to stand treat to the *Steigers* from our camp, and one or two others who had attended the trial. When they resorted to the bar he had, of necessity, to take his prisoner along. "Slim" was equal to the occasion, took his place with the rest of them, and when the "Schnapps" appeared, tossed off his share before the Germans had time to object. Naturally they stirred up a fuss but the Canadian knew his ground, that they were breaking rules to bring him in there, and threatened exposure. He apparently had the best of the argument. In any event, he got several rounds of Schnapps at the expense of his guards.

Incidents like these illustrate various phases of camp life. From some of them we extracted really a good deal of fun. But all the time we were undergoing the terrible strain of slavish work, brutal treatment by the guards, and at times, when our parcels were not regular, an awful, ravening hunger. All of these were operating to break down our mental and physical strength. Any one of them alone was enough to break any man's heart.

It will not be wondered at, then, that I kept planning for another escape. When we had come so near it once it seemed well worth trying again, even though we knew the punishment that was likely to be meted out should the attempt fail.

When Wallie and I came out of jail after the first attempt we were forced back to work on the *Kokerie*

again. The hardships of the trip and the punishment following had affected Wallie seriously, he was not able to keep up to the work here and so was moved for a while to another job. Thus, when determined to have another try at it, and since it did not seem possible to wait for long, as cold weather was setting in, I decided, regretfully, that I would have to go without him. So when I was approached by a big fellow from the Royal Engineers—who, for reasons which will be obvious later, I shall call W. H.—I sized him up and decided to try it out again with him. He had been camp cobbler but had been placed in the *Kokerie* a few days before because of some dissatisfaction with his work. His story was that he wanted to get on the *Kokerie* to have a better chance to escape and he claimed to have two thousand marks in German money. We thought this might come in handy to bribe a guard in case we were caught up on the Border, so the outlook seemed good. After we got away and got up near the Border the story assumed a different complexion and it appeared that he had only two marks which had been given him by an old Russian.

The first thing to do when thinking of escape was to get rid of the marks on our clothing. You see, the clothes which were sent in to us in our parcels were all passed through the censor's hands and were marked before we were allowed to get hold of them. As yet I hadn't received all the honours which were awarded to me later in the way of special decorations and with some little difficulty we managed to get rid of all the marks fairly well except those on our great coats.

The plan we hit on this time, while it was simpler than the other, was at the same time more daring, as its working out will show.

The night of the fatal day—the fifth of January, 1917—we fell in with the other prisoners as usual in the prison yard, to be counted. Sometimes the guards searched us and we were nervous about it because, besides a few biscuits, a couple of tins of bull beef, and a bit of chocolate—these for rations—we had a watch, a compass, and a flashlight. The guards looked us over, but fortunately didn't search us closely. Then, with the guards in a circle all round us, we were marched out on the street and turned the corner toward the *Kokerie*. One old guard had lost an eye and, taking advantage of this, W. H. and I got on the blind side of him. Invariably, as we turned the corner of a big brick kiln next the *Kokerie* we would meet a party of civilians coming back from the day shift. We counted on this and two or three other little things to make our getaway. So you can imagine how anxious we became as we neared that corner. Sure enough, the party was on hand as usual. As previously arranged, just as we passed the last man, two of our fellows whisked our coats off our shoulders and we wheeled like a flash and fell in behind the civilians. The whole thing was done in the midst of the guards who, as we counted, didn't see us and—by its very daring, I suppose—was successful.

There we were, to all intents and purposes German civilians coming off the day shift. We walked right past the guards and the next moment ran practically into the arms of the manager of the plant and three of his foremen. For a moment my heart was in my mouth lest they would spot us, but I walked quickly past and escaped detection. When W. H. saw what was approaching he slipped round the corner of the kiln and came out from the other side. By that time I was busy digging a hole under the fence behind a

pile of bricks. He came along the fence calling to me but fortunately no one heard him. Soon we were under the fence and through, again tasting the joys of freedom. Twenty minutes later, when we were sitting on the edge of a marsh, scraping the mud from our clothes and wringing them dry, we heard the alarm ring at the *Kokerie*. We knew we had been missed.

It wasn't so easy getting away that time; indeed we were nearly nabbed at the outset. The night was bright, with a full moon, and since the ground was frozen hard any one could be heard from a long distance. We trudged along across the fields, avoiding the roads as much as possible, making for the spot where Wallie and I had crossed the River Lippe the time before. Looking back we saw a party of horsemen who we knew were out looking for us and who were only a field or so away. Fortune did favour us here for there was a deep furrow or ditch just about where we were when we saw them. We dropped into this, *pronto*, and they apparently lost us for, though not far away when they went by, they had not seen us drop. When they had disappeared we made for the river again, more anxiously than ever. Very soon we arrived at the spot, but only to find the house flooded and deserted and the barge and wharf both washed away. After hunting around for a while, however, we found two railway ties and these, with a couple of doors from an old building and considerable other rubbish, the whole fastened with hay-wire, formed a raft which we decided would do in the emergency.

At that time the river was in flood and had risen over the flats on both sides till it was fully half a mile wide. As we pushed off into the icy water the raft sank under us until we began to think it was no use. Up to our waists the water rose and then she floated.

and after a good deal of trouble we were able to land near a farmhouse on the opposite bank. At first, avoiding the roads, we tried the fields, but found they were impassable because of the water under the snow which made passage almost out of the question. So we had to come back to the roads.

The country was thickly populated and so we ran continual risk of capture, but there was nothing else to do but to plug along and make the best of a bad job. Of course we got mighty wet getting across the river and there was no chance to get warm or dry again so we plugged along. While we managed to get fairly good cover, it was in bits of bush or out-of-the-way spots, which furnished little or no protection. Time and time again we were tempted to sleep in barns and outhouses but we knew that to do this would be practically courting capture. Toward morning we used to scrape away the snow under a tree and huddle together, hugging each other for warmth. Sometimes we took big chances and made a fire. This was a good deal more dangerous than might be supposed. The bush in Germany being largely the result of a policy of reforestation they are exceedingly careful as to fires, so smoke arising from one of these patches is very likely to lead to immediate investigation. It was no easy matter to get a fire started either, since everything was soaked through with the heavy December rains. When we did get one started we used to dry bundles of sticks which we would carry on to the next resting place so as to have some dry kindling.

In addition to the cold and dampness we began to suffer terribly from hunger and altogether this became too much for W. H., who began to fag and complained that he was "fed up." He proposed all sorts of things, which I knew would be sure to lead

to capture, and I had a hard struggle to keep him moving. But still he would not consent to our separating but protested so strongly that he wanted to keep on that I had to believe him.

We travelled only at night and were continually meeting people. Almost invariably they spoke to us. I answered in the best German I could command—not too good at that—and we would walk quickly past. Sometimes they would stare after us as if they suspected something and then we would change our course or cross the fields to another road. Shortly after starting out one evening, about six o'clock, we passed through the town of Ramsdorf. Several people spoke to us here, but we managed to get through without arousing any suspicion. Half dead with hunger as we were, W. H. wanted to stop at a shop and try to buy some bread but I knew that would be fatal and wouldn't let him.

Next morning we got cover in what looked like a fair-sized bush and started a little fire but soon found out that we were close beside a frequented path. Going farther back I found that we were in a mere fringe of trees surrounding a bunch of farm buildings. It was decidedly dangerous; but we were so cold and miserable that we decided not to move but to take a chance on anybody finding us. Several people passed during the day but happily no one noticed our fire. It is very strange how one can lie hidden that way, almost in plain sight, and yet escape the attention of so many people.

The next morning we lighted our fire on top of a sand hill bearing three or four scrubby pines, the long, drooping limbs of which were weighted down with snow. When it got really light we saw on our right three or four farmhouses in the middle of a good-sized tract of farm land. On the left was a



stretch of moor covered with stunted pines about a foot high. From this direction we heard a loud noise that grew nearer and more distinct as the hours passed and we wondered what it was. About two o'clock, peering anxiously through the snow and sleet, we saw what proved to be a long line of Germans armed with sticks, pans, horns, and all sorts of noise-producers. They were advancing right in our direction, but by this time it was too late to make a move. On the flank of the line, too, were men armed with shotguns.

Were they after us? At first we thought so and wondered the wherefor of the horns and pans. It soon became evident, however, that they were out on a rabbit drive and they nearly caught a couple of rabbits they weren't looking for. They passed within twenty yards of us but were apparently so interested in the hunt that they didn't notice our fire. We breathed a sigh of relief, though, when they were past.

The relief didn't last long. A moment later two figures appeared at the bottom of the sand hill and began to make their way straight toward the fire. W. H. had curled up comfortably beside it but I roused him so as to be ready for an emergency. Inasmuch as there was no other cover near, we decided that there was nothing better to do than await developments. When they came closer the couple turned out to be an old man and a woman. He carried a sack of potatoes on his back while she had a bundle of clothes.

The old man stopped by the fire, eased his sack to the ground, and said:

"*Legoff.*"

"*Legoff,*" I answered, and sat still, not offering further greeting.

In what category they placed us I do not know. However, in a moment the old man picked up his bag and plodded on again, the old woman following.

It had, perhaps, better be explained that "*Legoff*" is a term of greeting much used in Westphalia. We had heard it used frequently in the mines and so were fairly familiar with it. I never heard it definitely translated but I believe it meant something like our "Good Luck."

That night we travelled on roads which bore signs reading: "*Dieser Weg ist Verboten*" (It is forbidden to pass this way), and from this knew that we were getting close to the Border. Through the day the weather changed to warmer and melted all the snow until it was almost impassable underfoot. The rain continued most of the night so that we were in rather parlous shape and needed something to cheer us up. Early in the evening we passed an old windmill that we had frequently heard of and began to dodge patrols again. We were aiming to cross at the spot where Wallie and I had attempted to pass before but missed, and knew we were on the right road this time.

Everything was going along favourably when something seemed to strike W. H. and he began to argue that we were lost. In spite of all I could do he continued to argue and finally insisted on following a broad road running parallel with the Border. I wanted to take to the fields and told him the danger he was running but he kept on stubbornly until a German patrol came down the road. They were interested in our argument, too, and got all around us before we noticed them.

We were in the toils again. Once more our hopes were blasted.

These guards were young fellows who had been

wounded at the front, and then put on Border duty. They used us rather better than we expected after the former experience, even giving us a mattress to sleep on in their billet. Listening to their talk we heard them discuss the reward that would be forthcoming because of our capture. Comforting, wasn't it?

I blamed W. H. for our capture, and I guess I took a good deal of my feeling out on him. I saw then that he had been afraid to try to cross the Border and had worked things so that we would be sure to get caught. He had been up as far as the Border once before with two other fellows, both of whom had been shot when he had been recaptured. He had been pretty badly beaten up afterward and I suppose when the memory of it came back he had lost his nerve.

The guards seemed to be highly amused at my show of temper and apparently guessed what it was about for they kept telling us in German we were twelve miles from the Border. I knew better.

## CHAPTER XIII

### MY DEATH SENTENCE

NEXT morning two guards with a pair of lean and hungry dogs on leash arrived and shortly after marched us off down to the little town of Baurlo. Rather an interesting incident happened on the way down; a middle-aged man on a bicycle stopped and asked the guards if we were Frenchmen. Something prompted me to speak, and I said:

"No. We're Englishers."

"Is that so?" he answered in perfect English. "Good morning, boys," and jumping off his wheel he walked along for quite a while beside us.

"Do your guards speak English?" he asked, and being answered negatively he went on to talk to us.

"Where are you from?" he asked.

"The Auguste-Victoria coal mines in Hüls," I answered.

"Yes, but what part of Britain?"

"Oh, we're Canadians."

"Is that so? Well, I have been in Montreal and Toronto."

"Yes?" I queried. "But what are you? You're not a German?"

"Why do you think I am not?"

"Because no German ever speaks kindly to a prisoner unless he has some end to gain in doing so."

"Well" (with a smile), "I have no end to gain and I am no longer a German. I was born here but I

left Germany and spent twelve years in England and four in the United States. Just before the war I came back on a visit to see some of my people and to compare the British and American ideals of justice and freedom with those here—to see whether conditions were as bad in this country as I had imagined them to be when I left.”

“I hope you are satisfied,” I said grimly. “Why did you stay here?”

“Yes,” came the answer, with a frown. “I am satisfied and I had no choice about staying. I have been trying ever since the outbreak of war to get away, but it is no use. I am forced to stay here and work till the end. Perhaps I shall never be allowed to return because no one will believe that I was not recalled to take a part in this cursed war.”

Satisfied that he was to be trusted we began to ask him questions about conditions on the Border.

“How far are we from Holland?” I asked. “The guards say twelve miles.”

“They are liars,” he answered. “You are only half a mile from the Border. See that bit of bush across there?” (Pointing across the fields.) “That is in Holland. It’s pretty hard luck to get caught so close but you will never get over here. The country is alive with guards all around here. Three hundred prisoners have been caught right where you were. But you are better off than some of them for about thirty have been shot.” After thinking a moment he added: “But once in a while one or two do get through.”

Soon after that we came to the little village where we were to take the train back to the camp and the man left us saying: “Good-bye, and better luck next time.”

Our guards took us to an office where we were

examined by a young officer. He tried to talk to us in English and while we could understand him all right he couldn't make much out of us. Turning to an old interpreter with one eye who was sitting behind a big desk, he said in German: "I can't understand these English swine. They talk through their noses." Then he started to repeat something I had said, trying to imitate my accent and giving a good deal of amusement to the office staff. The guards went out presently to get dinner but nothing was offered to us. We asked the officer for food and he promised with a sneering smile but we knew he lied and were not wrong. We offered money to some, and one chap did seem to try to buy something for us but it never materialized.

Eventually we were put on the train again and were on the way to Münster on the road to *Kommando* 47. On the way, a young guard, one who had marched us down in the morning, was trying to talk to me in German. I was rather surprised when, unable to understand one expression, he broke out into English.

"Where did you learn that?—and why didn't you speak that way before?" I asked him.

"Oh, I don't speak very well," came the reply. "I learned a little English in America. I was two years in New York."

I looked at him sharply; apparently he understood what was in my mind for, before I could speak, he continued:

"No, I didn't come back to fight. I was homesick and came over on a visit in the summer of 1914. I was not allowed to return but had to join the army."

He talked away to me for quite a while and, when he was certain that nobody could hear him, told me how he hated the whole German system, referring



to himself as "a d—n fool" for getting caught. I wondered whether he would report the man who had talked with us in the morning and who had certainly never dreamed that the guards would understand what he was saying.

How closely we were searched on such occasions is illustrated by an incident which occurred on our arrival at Münster. Turned over to the guard room, we were most scrupulously examined, so carefully indeed that a tiny compass—about the size of a five-cent piece—which I had sewn in the tail of my coat and which I thought surely was beyond finding, was brought to light. I stood liable for extra punishment for having this in my possession but was able later to persuade the officer in charge of K47 (to which we were taken back a little later) to have the charge withdrawn on the ground that the compass had been attached to a watch charm sold in the camp canteen. Our money could buy no food, and about the only thing we could do with it was to purchase cheap jewellery sold there or we could use it to get our teeth fixed and it was a good time to get that done, too; we weren't using them very much, just then.

I was commanded to sign a paper declaring how we had escaped and outlining everything we did while on the road but refused to do so unless the officer in question would agree to make a statement in his report to the effect that the compass was only a souvenir and useless. He hated to see me escape the extra punishment but since it would have meant trouble for him had it become known that the article had been sold in the camp he chose the lesser of two evils and I got away with it. (Those statements of escape, by the way, were masterpieces of the world's literature. We were always ready

to tell any number of lies if by so doing we could keep them in ignorance and leave the way open again for the next attempt.)

While we were in the Münster guard room some of the British prisoners passed by the windows. By this time we were pretty nearly exhausted for lack of food and I guess our condition was evident. Anyway, they went to Sergt.-Major Summers, who, after a good deal of trouble, got permission from the camp commandant to send us in some food. The Christmas parcels, somewhat late, were just arriving, and with their customary generosity, they made up a splendid meal out of their parcels and also filled a basket for us to take along next day. Two of them who had been with us for some time at the mines were allowed to come in to see us and when they walked in one shouted:

“Why, hello, it’s the ‘Kaiser’s Guest.’ How in hell did you get rid of all your stripes? Did you hear about Jack Hughes?”

“What’s wrong with Hughes?” we asked.

“He was killed to-day trying to escape. It was on the way home from work and he hadn’t the ghost of a show.”

Then the guards ordered them out and we heard no more of Hughes till later. So another of the gallant band gave his life in trying to gain his freedom.

We were taken back to K47 next day, being marched down to the station with a party of Russian-Poles who had been captured when with the Russian army and were being returned to Poland. They were not destined to stay long, however. Soon afterward the Germans formed the new Polish Kingdom and these fellows were all drafted into a new Polish army to fight against their former allies. When we saw them they were jubilant about getting

home to their families again, but even then they were suspicious as to Germany's intentions. It looked too good altogether to be through with the war.

When the train came along we got into a carriage full of German soldiers returning on leave from the front. We made these fellows stare when, after the train pulled out and we thought it a good time to have a little lunch, we opened the basket given us the day before and pulled out a big loaf of cake, a tin of beef, part of a tin of beans, a plum pudding, and two or three slices of white bread.

My! how those fellows did quiz the guards. They had apparently been led to believe that everyone in England was starving. Soon they began to try to talk to us, pretending to be friendly in order, I suppose, to satisfy their curiosity. I was always on the look-out for information and so met them halfway, to get information in my turn. I gave several of them a little piece of cake each, which obviously they greatly appreciated; one young chap told us that that was the first cake he had eaten since 1916. We managed without quarrelling to exchange views on the war and they told us a little about the fighting on the Somme and at Verdun. They said little about the Somme and mighty cheering it was to us to have them so gloomy about it. They referred to our troops as "English Devils"; one chap said rather humorously that "they were so thick on the Somme that they (the Germans) couldn't kill them"—that "when an Englishman was killed his comrades poured a glass of rum down his throat and he would get up and fight again."

They were quite willing to talk and to answer questions but I could find out little that I wanted to know except the indefinite story about the Somme

fighting. They certainly had a great respect for the Canadians and asked us if we were always used as "shock troops." They also seemed to be greatly interested in the Highlanders and one fellow, who had been at Loos, spoke of the British Guards and was anxious to know how many of them there were. When they asked how many Canadians were fighting we told them there were half a million Guards and two million Canadians. Though some were a little dubious most of them went off muttering and we had the satisfaction of knowing that we had set them thinking about the situation a little more seriously than formerly, anyway.

Our turn to be treated came a little later. When, passing through a station, Red Cross nurses gave them each a bowl of German coffee and a little square of black, bitter bread, they gave us pieces of their bread and, to save the situation, we had to eat it, though it was horrible-tasting stuff, particularly after we had been eating good old British cake. One big chap who said he was from Berlin explained that this was German cake.

Shortly afterward we reached Sin Sin station and were marched up to the camp where we were taken right to the cells. We did have one cheering bit though, for we saw the boys gathered round in the yard as we marched past and they cheered us up as much as they dared. And the sympathy of their sturdy British hearts helped more than they knew.

Knowing from my previous experience what would happen when we got back, I had been preparing W. H., and, considering the part he had played—which I now knew had led to our capture—it was with some satisfaction that I saw a haunted look come into his eyes and listened to the arguments he used in order to keep up his courage. It was

cruel amusement, I suppose; but, considering the circumstances, I submit that it was justified.

However, the worst was yet to come. It was the middle of winter the coldest, the Germans claimed, for a hundred years. The jail was a brick building without a particle of heat of any kind. And those brutes jammed us in the pill-box cells, hardly big enough to turn around in, without a semblance of furniture, dark and stinking with foul air and filth, and to make matters worse, took away nearly all our clothes. And that wasn't all. All was quiet for an hour but I was suspicious, and kept listening. At last stealthy footsteps approached and the outer door of the jail was opened. I could hear the steps of three or four men in the passage. Then came a click as the bolt of W.H.'s cell, farther down the passage, was drawn back. In a moment there was a sharp cry of pain and the sound of a body falling heavily. Then from what I heard I knew that the guards were kicking and pounding him. This continued till long after he had ceased to moan and I concluded that unconsciousness had mercifully come to his help.

I was raging in my cell like a wild animal, throwing my weight against the door in an attempt to break out and to face the brutes in something like a fair fight. But it was no use. Soon I heard the footsteps approach quietly and my bolt was drawn. I had planned to try to charge through the door when it was opened, to make an attempt to get into the yard where I would most certainly have been shot. Thoughts of that had little terrors, for anything was preferable to being kept in that black, stinking cell and to be beaten into the bargain. Thanks to the Red Cross I had a pair of good heavy shoes and for once, anyway, they were well used. Fortunately for

me the cell was too narrow for more than one to get at me at once. Then, while there was a little light coming from the outside, my cell was perfectly dark and they couldn't see me. Every once in a while from the grunts and cries I knew I had landed on somebody. I fought like a wild cat and got pretty badly cut up but it was hard for them to get at me. Finally they got enough, for they shut the door and talked outside for quite a while. Eventually they must have decided to call it a draw, for they went away.

We nearly froze to death that night. It might have been a merciful release. But Providence apparently hadn't so ordered it. There was still more to come.

About nine next morning we were taken out and, just as we were, without food or water, were made to stand to Attention in the snow. The sentry who was specially guarding us kept poking fun at us in characteristically coarse, German fashion.

I knew W. H. was about at the end of his endurance, and so was not surprised when he pitched over on his face, "dead to the world." He lay there in the snow quite a while before the guard would let any one move him, but in the end they thought he would freeze to death, I suppose, so two of our boys were allowed to pick him up and carry him off to the hospital. I was kept out in the cold till about four o'clock when I was allowed, for the time being, to go to the barracks. There the boys had a good meal ready for me and I was digging in heartily while the fellows were all gathered round trying to cheer me up when a guard came for me and marched me off to the camp office. Here the old officer in charge gave me a lecture on prison-camp discipline, working himself into a passion, calling me all the vile



names he could think of, and trying in every way possible to make me cringe. Finally he ordered me to take off my boots and put on a big pair of wooden shoes, telling me that now I had been away twice they didn't propose to be watching me all the time and were going to fix me. He spoke in German, and Johnson, the interpreter, repeated what he said.

"You are always running away," he went on, "and will not take our warning. We punish you but it is no use and now we will kill you with work. Work, work, you must always, ever work."

He ground the words out slowly and harshly from deep down in his throat and I knew it was my death sentence from which only a miracle could save me. Then:

"*Vich! los! Engländer Schwein!*" And I came to myself out in the yard, hobbling along in those huge, rough shoes which hurt cruelly. At six o'clock I was turned in with the night shift on the *Kokerie* and the guards started to keep the old officer's promise. A special sentry was placed over me with instructions to pay no attention to any one else but to keep me going continually.

Thirty-two tons of coke to be loaded on cars on the siding. That was the night's stint. And I was given the worst place and forced to wheel my quota from the centre of the ovens to the crusher at either end over broken and irregular plates. The others travelled from the oven to the cars only, about half the distance and down a slight slope.

Work, work, work! While the sweat poured off my body and my lungs burned and choked with poisonous gases from the hot coke. Work, while the sinister, gray figure of the sentry stalked up and down, ready to pounce on me with kicks and curses if I offered to let up for even a moment. Soon my

back seemed breaking and I could no longer straighten up but drove the huge fork into the steaming coke and lifted the heavy stuff into the barrow. Up and down, up and down, a steady, ceaseless grind, until my head was splitting and I was suffering the torments of the damned. If ever I hated, I did then and I prayed a good many times: "O God, for a chance, only a chance to kill him, come what may." But no chance was given.

Five nights I struggled under those conditions, growing gradually weaker. Then I found a way, hideously painful though it was, to get away from it. That fifth night has a story all by itself, though it largely concerns another of our fellows, who also, thank God, has since escaped from that earthly branch of hell.

Fred Boyd—we called him "Toby"—a young, smooth-faced boy from Fredericton, N. B., who was afraid of nothing and always ready to hold up his end—had been working with the civilians down in the mine, but had got into trouble with the bosses. For punishment, as usual, he was allotted to the *Kokerie*. That night was his first, and he hadn't become accustomed to *Kokerie* methods. When a big red-headed boss came along and kicked him with his rough, wooden shoes Toby promptly knocked the beggar down, giving him a beautiful pair of black eyes. The German scrambled to his feet and made off, blind with rage, and to our surprise did not come back.

A little while after, however, another boss came along and, approaching Toby rather quietly, told him that he was working too hard, that he was to come over to an easier job. Toby wasn't easily fooled and, though he knew he would have to follow, he made preparations by picking up a heavy glass

bottle in which he used to carry drinking water and slipping it into his pocket. He followed the guard down the steps and into a dark corner to a spot where a shovel was sticking in a pile of sand. Three or four civilians were standing around and one of them ordered Toby to begin shovelling. When he stooped they all rushed at him. Like a flash Toby yanked out the bottle and, before they could get hold of him, had laid two of them out. Turning, he ran for the opening. Behind him the old boss, who had kicked him, and who had a gun ready, fired three shots but missed entirely. Coming out from beneath the building Toby ran right into the arms of one of the worst guards. Things looked bad for a moment but the bad feeling between the guards and the civilians proved his salvation and he was protected against further prosecution by that gang. He was transferred to another shift.

About five o'clock next day, while sitting in front of the stove in the barracks, boiling my tea before going back to that hellish work, and appreciating that the end was surely approaching, I was trying to scheme something that would get me out of it. My kettle was boiling away cheerfully when, suddenly, an idea hit me. Grabbing the kettle I poured the scalding water over my left hand. It hurt terribly and all the boys began to cry out in horror. In a moment, though, they saw what was meant and then they said: "Good old Mac. Be British."

Without giving the hand any chance to blister I boiled up the kettle twice more and repeated the dose twice over. Then rushing down to the hospital, I showed my hand to the French orderly, telling him I had scalded it on the *Kokerie*. Even when he dressed it and made considerable fuss over it I had a good deal of trouble in persuading the old German

doctor to let me off work, but ultimately he consented and I went back to barracks. I suffered terribly all night and when the doctor came in the morning and ripped off the dressing he took all the skin and most of the flesh from the hand, so that the cords and bones were almost bare. He said I would lose my hand and I was glad, for that meant that I would be sent back to Münster to the hospital and possibly be exchanged.

My hopes were pretty quickly nipped in the bud, though, for at about seven o'clock, when one of the guards came in, shouting my name and number—and I was expecting to be ordered to get ready to go to Münster—I was marched off to the black cells and kept there all that day. That night one of the French, an interpreter and a splendid fellow, told the guards that if I was not taken out the boys would go on strike and persuaded them to take me before the doctor again. This time he ordered me into the camp hospital and for a few days I had what was a peaceful experience, compared with what had gone before.

## CHAPTER XIV

### TRANSFERRED TO MÜNSTER

IN THE meantime, matters dragged along about as usual with the other boys in the camp. They played cards when they could (which was not often) but at all times they watched the guards as a cat watches a mouse. Most of the Canadians were planning more or less definitely to try to escape though Wallie Nicholson and I had been the only two to try it so far. The Old-Country boys, while trying in every way to render themselves of as little use as possible to the enemy—getting into the jails and hospitals very frequently and all the time “Being British”—were less inclined to fight the conditions than the Canadians and were tending to become somewhat reconciled to their lot, slavery of the worst type though it was. Some of them, in default of anything better, passed their time in knitting belts and sweaters, in all sorts of fancy patterns, which one or two had learned during service in India. One day one of them said to me:

“Poor old ‘Kaiser’s Guest.’ You are always too busy to knit—too busy getting ready to go home—so I’ll knit you a belt.”

He was as good as his word and had it about half done when he was hurt in the mine. It was finished by another English lad and I was able to bring it out with me. You may be sure I shall always prize it as one of my most valued souvenirs.

The French amused themselves somewhat similarly in making fancy picture frames, which they faced with thin bits of mirror. From a round spot in the centre the quicksilver would be scraped to provide for the insertion of a photograph, and wording such as "*Souvenir de Captivité, 1914-1915-1916*" would be scraped out below.

Once in a while a pessimistic Frenchman would show us a frame in which 1917 had been added to the years, but this would precipitate a row at once. Why, wasn't the war to be over in two or three months? Surely. Even as the months and years dragged slowly by it was always the same. The end of the war was always only two or three months away. There was no room for a pessimist in that camp. Bad news was always considered no news; good news was always taken to be true. We never for a moment lost faith in the final victory of the Allies and we cheered one another in every way we knew how. Some of this cheering-up became rather ironical at times, as, for instance, when one of the fellows would say, hopefully:

"Well, the longest war before lasted only a hundred years."

I often heard poor fellows who had endured three years and more in camp say:

"I would rather stay here twenty years, and die here than see the Germans win."

But to revert to my own troubles. While I was in the hospital by reason of my scalded hand an officer arrived from Münster to look into a complaint I had made. And thereby hangs another story which had better be told first.

When W. H. and I had been caught a little time before we had had to make the usual statement as to how and why we escaped. We had prepared a



story carefully beforehand, knowing from previous experience what would likely be demanded and declared that we had gone into the room where we changed our clothes, back of the *Kokerie*, and had slipped out with the German civilians who shared the building with us. We were anxious, you see, to hide the real method, so that it might give us another chance. We had learned that they had not missed us for some time and until the other prisoners had been counted on the night of our escape. The guards believed our story and the statement was accordingly translated into German, copies of which we both signed. These were sent into Münster for our trial, at which, by the way, we ourselves were not allowed to be present. There was still punishment to come to us, and as it was usually about two months after statements were sent in before sentences were promulgated, we had lots of time to get ready, you see. We always anticipated the worst—and got it.

Two days after we had been beaten up in the cells I went to the guards and insisted on seeing the commandant of the camp. Largely because the impudence of my demand surprised them, I guess, I was allowed in to see the old chap who had so strongly impressed the working-death sentence on me. Through Johnson, the interpreter, I told him that I would send a complaint in to Münster about the treatment I was getting and about that beating up. Naturally the old fellow raged, but when I told him that if he wouldn't pass that complaint I would make it to the next visiting ambassador and get him into trouble, or, failing that, would escape and walk to Münster to tell them of conditions, he eventually, with a good deal of bluster, consented to allow the complaint to go through. W. H. was called in and, together, we made a joint complaint in which we

Ye General commanding  
 In the light of a complaint  
 to you regarding the treatment  
 we received from the authorities  
 hereon being returned from prison  
 yesterday (Jan 11th) we  
 were placed in separate cells in  
 the prison where we were being  
 beaten by one of the keepers one  
 using a wooden tub on our heads  
 and body the other kicking us  
 and we were taken from the  
 prison to work in the garden.

Yours faithfully  
 W. H. ———  
 1859. 9. 11.

Statement of complaint made by the Author  
 and W. H. ———, to the officer  
 commanding K47



stated our troubles and asked for an investigation. This was addressed to the General Commanding Münster Camp. It was signed by both, as is evident on the original document, still in my possession.

Now comes the dirty work. The officer refused to accept this joint complaint but declared that we must each make out a document, separately. I made one out, but they got hold of W. H., alone, and persuaded him to withdraw his complaint and to sign a written statement (prepared by them) to the effect that he had no complaint to make, that he had been well treated, and that he believed I had had the same treatment. He also told this time how we really had escaped, thus contradicting our first statement, and finished by begging the general to deal leniently with him.

I never could find out what artifice the Germans resorted to to make him do such a thing; indeed, not till I learned it from the French interpreter a day or two later, did I know what he had done, but I knew that *something* was wrong, for, when my complaint was ready, W. H. refused to put his in.

Since Johnson the interpreter had translated my statement before it was sent on to Münster it was out of the question for me to have any adequate idea of what went in it. So when the officer arrived I didn't know, for a while, whether to be glad or sorry. In any event, I was brought before him in a sort of investigation, with Johnson as interpreter again. I was denied any other interpreter and also, when I asked to have some of the other boys called as witnesses, my request was refused. Finally, Johnson wrote out a statement alleging to be what I had said but which of course he made out to suit himself, and this I was called on to sign.

Then I was asked to name the guards who had

beaten me. This was impossible for I didn't know one of them by name, except Johnson. However, I insisted that I could pick them out, so they took me to the guard room. As luck would have it the ones I wanted weren't there, but when others were brought in I picked out two I had recognized in the streaks of light that night in the jail. These two were brought into the office but both swore that they had had nothing to do with W. H. and me but that we had attacked them. I suppose they were right, so far as I was concerned, for I certainly went for them first when the door was opened. So the investigation didn't amount to much. However, the doctor soon ordered my long-desired release to Münster and I escaped the relentless enmity of my guards for a while.

On a bitterly cold morning in January five or six of us were ordered to fall in with all our belongings on our backs outside the barracks. We were all as happy as kids, for a wound that was severe enough to take one to Münster was welcomed just as a "Cushy Blighty" is by the boys in France. As we marched out of the gate under the watch of two guards, our friends, who all wished they were in our shoes, wished us good luck. Our spirits were even raised further when the guards told us that we would never be brought back, that no more Englishmen would be brought to the Auguste-Victoria mines. We prayed fervently that this might be so.

Arriving at Münster after a short railway trip we were hurried out of the train and station and stood up against a wall outside while a regiment of German soldiers marched past. We could not help remarking the low stature, poor physique, and generally worn appearance of the men, most of whom seemed to be mere youths. The years during which they

should have been filling out into the stalwart men their race has produced had been spent in the mines and factories where they had been overworked and underfed. They formed a very poor comparison with the big Britishers lined up along the wall, even though most of us were gaunt from starvation. While we stood there a big Welsh guardsman beside me whispered:

"I'll bet they're wondering if we are a fair sample of what they'll be up against on the western front."

We had a march of four miles to the camp and just before we reached the yard, inside the main gate, an old *Feldwebel* (Sergeant-major) stopped us and went through our baggage, scattering food and clothing around in the dirt like a mad bull. The French prisoners had brought with them some of the trinkets they had made and these were scattered all over the yard. However, when the old chap was satisfied that we had nothing objectionable we got our stuff into our bags again and followed him to our barracks, a section of the building called the "*Krankenstube*," a sort of semi-hospital. Here I was to stay for about two months, every morning of which I went over to the hospital to have my hand dressed. We were looked after by British Red Cross men and a Russian doctor but also underwent an examination by a German doctor about once a week.

While my hand continued to be painful it did not hinder me from wandering about. And since we were given much more freedom here the life was very much easier. Indeed I have pleasanter memories of Münster Lager Zwei (Renbahn camp) than of any other spot in Germany. It is known to be one of the best camps. The change from the "Black Hole" was certainly a marked one.

It was interesting here to study the prisoner-



population. This was floating, since the men were constantly being transferred to other localities or being sent out as working parties in all parts of the country, while others were coming in from other camps to hospital, or for sentence after some real or fancied misdemeanour. They were a most cosmopolitan crew. Not only was every nation taking part in the war represented but every division of the different allied forces, as well as the different classes of each, were to be seen. The good feeling which existed between all these was remarkable. It was remarkable, also, that after a little time almost any prisoner could talk, with more or less freedom, with any other. Peculiarly, it seems, there had come into being a sort of prison language which was generally dubbed "Gefangenese." This had broken-German as a backbone and was otherwise made up of odds and ends of all the others. It was strange to see and to take part in a conversation with a party of prisoners from a dozen or more different countries, not one of which could understand any of the others had he spoken in his own language, but the members of which were able to converse quite readily in this common language.

While conditions in general were better I suffered a good deal the first two months in Münster from lack of food. The parcel system had been recently taken over by the Red Cross, which supplied clothing, food, smokes, and all our hospital and medical supplies. The Red Cross made only one mistake. They stopped the old system before the new one was working and in consequence a lot of us who had been moved from one camp to the other were without any supplies for fully two months. Those were mighty lean months and most of us lived on Porridge (without milk or sugar) from oatmeal we had saved

up, but they made us appreciate what the Red Cross was doing and how splendidly the system worked out afterward.

Every six months, in addition to our regular food parcels, we would be sent a full outfit of clothing. Some of the British prisoners to whom civilian clothing had been sent out formerly had gathered quite a wardrobe, but in May of 1917 the Germans began seizing all extra clothing, leaving us only a change of underwear and one suit. In some camps they took all the prisoners' boots but one pair per man and in others took all—even to the last one—issuing wooden clogs in their place. Their excuse for all this was that they had nothing to mend these things with. It told us a good deal, however, of how short such supplies were becoming in Germany. In Münster we heard in advance of what was happening and either destroyed our extra clothing or gave it to the poor ragged Russians who had no parcels of any kind coming, rather than let it fall into the Germans' hands. Memorable days in camp were those when our parcels arrived, when the sergeant in charge came in and shouted: "Parcels up!" He would then proceed to read off the names, the number of parcels for each fortunate man, and the time of issue. Everyone would be speculating as to whether his parcel contained bread or biscuits or the long-looked-for tobacco and cigarettes. The fellows would be saying: "I hope it is food, our box is empty"; or, "I haven't had a smoke for a week"; or "I hope it is a bundle of clothes—I am about bare-footed."

When the time came we all formed in line outside the parcel room, which was long and narrow with a door at each end and a counter right down the centre. Behind the counter stood a number of Germans who

acted as censors. The procedure was this: One of "The Parcel Gang," a British prisoner, would pick a parcel from the pile and lay it on the counter, calling the name as he did so. The owner would step forward, take it, sign for it, and then pass it to one of the censors, who would cut it open and carefully examine the contents. This was done thoroughly. For instance, pepper and acids of any sort were confiscated; all food packages, except those in tin, were cut open to see that no forbidden articles, or letters or newspapers, were enclosed. The tinned food was treated separately, being taken to the other end of the counter where it was checked up by another member of the parcel gang. The prisoner was given a check for each tin, with a note as to the contents, while the tins were moved to another building to be held till called for. This tinned stuff was available for a short time every morning and evening. Each tin had to be opened, however, by another censor, who would dig into it to see that the contents were not camouflaged. The food itself was carried away on a plate or dish. The tins had to be left behind, for which there was a special reason. By this time the Germans were running short of tin and were conserving every available atom. These cans were carefully kept piled up, later hammered into more portable shape, and then sent away to be smelted.

The old censor who opened our tins at Münster was certainly no respecter of foods. Everything looked alike to him. He would jam that dirty old knife of his down into a can of herring one minute and then into jam the next. We kicked, but it did absolutely no good.

Despite little annoyances like this, life in Münster Camp was so much of an improvement over what

we had been experiencing that it seemed pretty good. There was very little disturbance here and for a very good reason. The guards were overbearing and no kinder to us than they could help, but there was more incentive here to keep on our good behaviour. If any one stirred up a fuss he knew that he would be sent out with one of the working parties where conditions were much worse. No one wanted to go, so we did everything possible to please the guards. Our work, too, was neither so heavy nor so galling. Perhaps the pleasant part about it was that it was of such a nature that it did not seem to be helping the Germans themselves, but was rather directed toward helping our own comrades. Camp fatigues, work with the mail and parcel gangs, and odd jobs around the camp kept most of us busy, while a few of the boys who had become familiar with German were employed in the camp offices. Here they had an opportunity occasionally to get hold of the German newspapers which they translated into English for the rest of us. We never seemed to find very much news, however.

Another helpful feature was a fairly good library which had been donated by someone in England. Those of the boys who wanted to study any subject outside of the war could usually get hold of any book needed. There were some British papers and magazines, too, but all issued before the war. Several German magazines and illustrated papers also were given us and, although the illustrations in these seemed to be splendidly worked up, we were, naturally, not very much interested.

Sundays we were allowed to play football and from this we drew a good deal of satisfaction. Some semblance to a league was arranged when No. 2 Block (in which I was located) would play against

No. 1. Again a team of British fellows would play a team of French. Rarely the French would win, but when they did there was an enormous amount of excitement. Occasionally there was a chance to play cricket, and several French and Belgian games—the names of which I do not know—were indulged in.

At K<sub>47</sub> we were never allowed to have anything in the shape of a concert. Here it was different. Every two weeks something of the kind was put on and, as can be imagined, out of so large a number of men some very good talent was available. Some of the sketches, usually altogether original, were splendid. For a time a band, made up of players of all nationalities, played at these concerts, but as the band was continually in trouble it was finally dissolved.

Of course we still tended to gambling, whenever it was possible. One of the most popular games in that camp was "Crown and Anchor," well known among British soldiers everywhere. It was forbidden and the owners of the boards were arrested whenever they were caught, but the thing went on just the same. Another chap and I had an experience with a board of this kind which we induced one of the French tailors to make up for us out of a big bandanna handkerchief, though our game was made for a special purpose which may be worth telling about.

All the time I was in the camp the thought of getting away again was never out of my mind. I gradually removed the extra marks from my clothing, and, in this much larger camp with a population many times that of K<sub>47</sub> and where I was less famous (or perhaps, better, infamous), this did not attract the attention it would have done in the smaller one.



EVEN A LITTLE FUN AT TIMES  
British soldier-prisoners taking part in a  
"sketch" in Münster Camp





Whenever a prisoner arrived who had tried to escape I made friends with him and found out as much as I could about all he had heard or seen on his trip.

In this way I became acquainted with a little Belgian corporal who had spent a good deal of time in Germany and Holland before the war and who knew the country well. Besides this, he had picked up much information on an attempted escape. When I confided to him my determination to get out of Germany or die in the attempt, he told me that I would never get across the Border where we had tried before—that it was too heavily guarded; he advised me to work northward toward the great swamps. While these were dangerous, full of quicksands and hard to get through, there was, he said, far less likelihood of trouble with the guards there. This chap made me a compass, something I had long been looking for, out of a razor blade. Foolishly I took it out of the wooden case, in which he had placed the needle, to improve it by putting it into a more convenient steel one and thereby spoiled it.

I was ashamed, after his kindness, to let him know what I had done so was on the look-out for another compass. I ran across a big Russian who had one but wanted sixty marks for it. Now, I had only ten marks, and though I found another fellow who also had ten and who was willing to go in with me, we couldn't tempt the Russian with the twenty marks. Usually necessity is the mother of Scheming as well as of Invention; we tried another plan. Knowing that the Russian was more or less susceptible to the gambling instinct, we had the Crown and Anchor board made, as already noted, and laid for that compass, borrowing the necessary dice from another gambler. That time the scheme didn't work for we ran into hard luck. Soon after we

started, a man came along who bet our board pretty heavy. Luck was with him and in consequence we were cleaned out.

I got the compass that night. But I didn't buy it. My conscience didn't trouble me at all, either.

Some time previous to this it was comparatively easy to get hold of a compass. A tin of bully beef, or almost anything to eat, handed to a civilian with whom we were working would bring along almost anything like this that we needed. They didn't want us to escape, but they were very hungry. That makes all the difference in the world to one's way of looking at things. After a while the guards found out what was happening and everything of the kind in the stores was seized. A close search was also made among the prisoners in the camps, but while there were quite a few compasses in circulation very few were brought to light.

Strange to say, most of the compasses and maps had somehow or other got into the hands of those men who had no intention in the world of trying to escape, either through lack of the requisite degree of initiative or by reason of physical inability. However, they held on to these treasures desperately and made a most decided fuss when—as happened occasionally—they awoke some morning to discover that the treasure was missing. Only a day or so after almost every case of this kind some other prisoner would be missing and we would know that he had only been waiting for a map or a compass to make at all possible his chances of escape.

I had been in Münster Camp about two months and my hand was rapidly getting better when one morning a sentry came along and marched me over to the camp office. Here the *Feldwebel* read a few extracts from a big sheet of paper, which might as

well have been in Greek so far as I was concerned, and when he felt, I suppose, that I had been duly impressed with the importance of the occasion, told me in English that this was my sentence for my last attempt to escape and that I would have to do seven days' "black." I was rather agreeably surprised at the lightness of the sentence but they evidently preferred to have me working rather than in jail, and besides, I expected a quick shift when I came out. As it happened, again my conjecture was correct.

So a dark cell with a ration of bread and water—I think I did have one bowl of soup this time—was my portion for the next week. In the cell next me was lodged a young Frenchman and soon we began talking through the cracks. He was awaiting trial for an attempt at escape. He had tried to get through with a little German girl but without luck. And since he had not yet been sentenced, and also since he was French—we British never received such favours—his friends were allowed to bring him extra food each day. Occasionally, when the guards left the doors open so that we could sweep out the cells, he would smuggle some of his food in to me. That was perhaps the most comfortable week I ever spent in a German prison. The cells here were not only cleaner than those at K47 but, while there was no provision for any comfort, there was a sort of a frame bed, made of two planks raised about two feet from the floor, with strips of narrow boards nailed across them about two inches apart. The first night I put in on this and found it even less comfortable than the floor, but the next day, when sweeping out the cell, I managed to get hold of an old mattress from a pile of odds and ends at the end of the passage and dragged this in. I kept this under the plank frame till the examining officer had made his rounds

—they looked the cell and us over every day, taking no chances—and then used to throw it on the planks and was fairly comfortable till the next day. They discovered this mattress the day before my sentence was up and consequently I had to spend the last night on the bare planks again.

When I came out after this sentence my hand was nearly well and I was put to work at odd jobs around the camp. Sometimes also I was sent with a party to Münster station, about four miles distant, for a load of parcels or supplies, or to haul the empty tins from the parcel room.

Sometimes while on work like this we would meet a party of Russian prisoners coming in. To see human beings in such a state of starvation and abject misery as these poor fellows were in was enough to wring one's heart. Sometimes it took them all day to make the four miles of road from the station to the camp and again, some of them were so far gone that it was out of the question for them to walk and the guards had to bring wagons from the camp to haul them in. Sometimes I had occasion to stay in the *Krankenstube* in the morning when these poor fellows were stripped for the doctor's examination and had I not been hardened to such horrors the sight would have made me sick. There seemed to be no flesh at all on their bodies and the skin hung over the bones in horrible yellow wrinkles. They had been trying to live on refuse and rotten soup of which, to get enough real food matter to keep themselves alive, they had gorged when it was available. In consequence, their stomachs protruded like huge sacks. Their bodies were covered with scars and bruises, the result of kicks and beatings at the hands of the guards. When no manner of punishment could force them to labour any longer

they were turned back to headquarters. Some of them were so far gone that they only lasted a few days after reaching Münster. Others commenced to pick up at once. They told us that in some of the working parties with which they had been their friends were dying at the rate of seven or eight a day.

These poor fellows were allowed to mix with the British prisoners and, since our parcels were coming in fairly regularly by this time, and food was more plentiful, we gave them our German rations and anything else we could spare. In return they washed our dishes and cleaned up for us generally, and soon every British prisoner had his batman, for these fellows did for us just about what the officer's servant does in the army. A "swell dish" for a prisoner of war, wasn't it?

In a way we liked these Russians. While they were exceedingly ignorant they were very kind-hearted fellows and would do anything for one. As a matter of fact, they were a good deal like children, easily driven, and were like putty in the hands of the German guards. So soon as they recovered sufficiently to be useful out they went again. We never knew any to return the second time. "Get everything possible out of them" was the German policy. And in consequence they were worked until they died. This is proven by the well-filled graveyards all over Germany which will be an undeniable testimony to the treatment of starvation and brutality that was their lot.

Even worse suffering was endured by the French and Belgians who were forcibly brought back from occupied territory. In February, 1917, about eight hundred of these unfortunates, slaves in every sense of the term, were brought into Block 3 of the camp. They were not allowed to mix with the other prisoners



and of course had no parcels or supplies coming to them; in consequence, they were dying from disease and starvation like animals. We heard on pretty good authority that an average of fifteen to twenty were dying daily. One day we were told that these poor fellows were to be brought into our block for a bath so we gathered round the bath house with all the food we could spare. When the Germans saw what was going on they placed a guard with fixed bayonets around the bath house and gave orders to shoot any one who attempted to hand over any food.

When these French and Belgians were herded in and saw the food in our hands they broke the windows in the bath house, cutting their hands and bodies and leaning out, begged and cried out most piteously for the food we were so anxious to give them. The guards—inhuman wretches!—laughed and sneered at this and one of them went from window to window and beat the poor fellows back with the butt of his rifle.

When they came out of the hot bath they were so weak that many collapsed in the yard. The guards pounced on these helpless ones, kicking and cursing them; and, because their very soul seemed to be broken by the cruelty and horror of it all, the poor wretches grovelled in the mud, covering and whining. The whole spirit of manhood, apparently, had been beaten out of them.

May God punish us adequately if we ever forget the cruelty, beastiality, unfaithfulness, and murdering spirit of this nation which has sent thousands of our men and women to the bottom of the sea and gloated over it, which has forgotten all the instincts of decency and humanity, and has murdered, raped, mutilated, enslaved, and committed every other crime in the category. When the time comes they

will try to whitewash themselves, and blame their leader, who, guilty though he may be, could never have provided for such a horrible condition of affairs had not the German people themselves been united in a mad lust for blood, conquest, and the ultimate subjection of the world.

## CHAPTER XV

### VARIOUS INCIDENTS IN CAMP AND OUT

OTHER new and rather interesting experiences came my way when with a working party I spent a week at Hilltrup, a little town about seven kilometres from Münster, where a large part of the food supply for several of the camps was prepared. We were not idle that week for, besides what we were forced to do in the factory, we had to march there and back morning and night.

At the factory huge quantities of vegetables—potatoes, carrots, turnips, beets, and others—were piled all round. These, just as they were and without sorting, were put through a big chopper and came out in strips. It made no difference whether or not the vegetables were sound. Rotten and sound—roots, worms, peelings, dirt—all went through just the same. This mess was then shovelled into vats and dried until it was shrivelled up like shavings. Then, when wanted, it was shovelled into sacks and shipped to the various *kommandos*. From this the ever-appearing soup was made.

The flour also was made of the same dried-vegetable mixture—though this was ground up in a little mill near Hilltrup—and just enough wheat or rye added to make the other materials hold together. While the flour was dark it resembled our whole-wheat flour a good deal. And it stuck all right. Since no yeast was added the bread would not rise

# Official Communication

from H. B. M. Consul General for the Netherlands.

June 4th. 1917.

Rumours have reached this Consulate General on several occasions as to complaints made by German prisoners of war in England on the subject of the daily scale of rations allowed to them. These complaints seem to be absolutely unjustifiable as will be seen from the official scale for such rations which was authorized by the Army Council on the 14th May. This daily scale is as follows:

Bread . . . . .	13	ozs.
Meat . . . . .	6	" 5 days a week
Salt-cured Herrings . . . . .	10	" 2 " " "
Tea . . . . .	$\frac{3}{8}$	"
	or	
Coffee . . . . .	$\frac{3}{4}$	"
Sugar . . . . .	1	"
Salt . . . . .	$\frac{1}{2}$	"
Swedes or Turnips . . . . .	2	"
Split Peas or Beans . . . . .	2	"
Rice . . . . .	4	"

This ration may be reduced to 3 ozs. and in lieu of the remaining 1 oz. the following substitutes may be drawn:  
 (a) Maize Meal 1 oz.  
 or  
 (b) Split Peas or Beans 1 oz.

Margarine . . . . .	1	oz.
Oatmeal . . . . .	2	ozs.
Jam . . . . .	1	oz.
Cheese . . . . .	2	ozs.
Pepper . . . . .	$\frac{1}{72}$	oz.
Maize Meal . . . . .	$1\frac{1}{2}$	ozs.

If full ration is not obtainable an equal quantity of rice may be issued in lieu.

When men are not employed on work, the following deductions will be made unless the medical officer advises to the contrary in any particular case:-

Bread . . . . .	4	ozs.
Cheese . . . . .	1	"
Maize Meal . . . . .	$1\frac{1}{2}$	"



and was heavy as well as being black and bitter. If one of us loaded up on it he was bound to be unhappy for a good while. And, besides the usual digestive difficulties, we used to suffer a good deal from heart-burn when we had to eat the stuff.

One morning, on the march down to Hilltrup, one of my friends pointed out the spot, about halfway from the camp, where Jack Hughes had been shot. At this point a heavy bit of bush jutted out from the side of a big canal to within about two hundred yards of the road. When the party had come opposite this, though they were surrounded with guards, Hughes and Bombardier Harkum, of the Royal Field Artillery, had broken away and started to run across the open field to gain the shelter of the woods. Before Jack was ten yards away the guard nearest him dropped the barrel of his rifle and fired point blank at his back and the big soft-nosed bullet tore a hole clean through him. He called out to Harkum: "I'm done," and toppled over. When his comrades went to pick him up they found him dead. Harkum did succeed in getting away but was brought back to camp again after two days' absence.

While at Hilltrup we had a chance occasionally to study discipline as it obtained in the German army. One day, for instance, we saw an officer walking off a bridge which spanned the canal just near the factory when a big army transport, driven by a soldier, came on. The soldier was watching his team and appeared not to see the officer. The latter looked at the private for a moment, then walked over to the wagon, drawing his sword as he went, and struck that chap across the cheek with the flat of his sword—so hard that he knocked him off the seat. The man jumped up and stood at Attention without showing any resentment while the officer stormed



at him at the top of his voice. Then, after taking the driver's name and number, he let him go.

My last day at Hilltrup was one to be remembered. One morning, just as we were falling in for the morning march down to the factory, a German corporal came along and warned three of us to get ready, when we came home that night, to go back the following morning to K47, the "Black Hole." It appeared that in the meantime they had in some way discovered that most of the wounds and burns had been entirely self-inflicted. The origin of "The Plague" had also been discovered and the Germans, naturally, were furious. We could well imagine how we should be treated in the light of all this when they got us back again.

That day ten of us were put to work cleaning the scale out of a big boiler in the engine house. There were no guards in the building but they were stationed around it. I spent most of the day trying to cut a Maple Leaf in a little block of steel, but when quitting time came around, with another chap, a little English prisoner from Durham, I really got busy. Starting in on the big engine over the boilers we smashed everything breakable about it: grease and oil cups, steam gauges, water glass, pumps, all the brass connections, and a double row of rivets round the boiler went the same way—down a hole into the canal. We had just nicely completed the job when the guards came to take us home. As they did not notice anything wrong, we marched off as usual.

Early next morning seven of the ten left for a working party down the Rhine and the other three—the Durham chap who had helped me mess up the engine, another chap, and myself—had our kits packed ready for our return to the "Black Hole."

We knew the damage would soon be discovered so we got together and talked it over. The fellow who had had no hand in it insisted in standing by us, saying that he would as soon be sent to the penitentiary as go to work again. So we made up a simple little story about our day's work in the factory and agreed to stick to this to the minutest particular. Of course no one was to know anything about the damaged engine and boiler.

About ten o'clock the guards came along and hustled the three of us off to jail, being careful to place us in separate cells. Then, in turn, we were taken before a sort of board made up of two or three officers and two of the bosses from the Hilltrup plant. We had to make a written statement of all we had seen and done the day before. They raged and swore at us—tried to bully each one into saying he had done the damage; but all three stuck to the story, as we had agreed to do, and they got no satisfaction. We were hustled into the black cells again and I endured another week on bread and water, being brought out every day to write out another statement. Each day's statement was compared with the previous ones and each time they tried to make us add or retract something. While we were only a week in the cells, we were held in Münster Camp, awaiting our trial, for nearly two months, during which period they moved heaven and earth to find a morsel of evidence on which to convict us. Two years with hard labour would have been the minimum sentence; how much more than that, had they discovered any evidence, it is hard to conjecture.

In a way this played right into our hands; to stay in Münster Camp was just what we wanted. We had nothing to do but to draw our parcels, and

life comparatively was so easy that I became alm st. fat. I borrowed a Highlander's kilt and jacket from one of the famous old 42d (The Black Watch) and had my picture taken. My Belgian corporal friend was so pleased with my get-up in this uniform that he walked around the camp with me all day and wanted to have his photograph taken with me. This, however, the Germans would not allow.

As the days went by I kept on looking for a possible avenue of escape. I walked round and round the camp, watching every move of the guards and keeping my eyes always on the alert for any new opportunity; but nothing seemed to offer. By one or another, every possible plan seemed to have been tried—some successfully, the majority otherwise—but I knew of no plan that had ever been tried successfully the second time. While quite a number of men had endeavoured to get out in one way and another, a high percentage of these had been shot in the attempt; and of those who did escape from the camp nearly all were caught before they reached the Border.

One party dug a tunnel and some of their number escaped, but only two of these got clear out of the country. Some time later a party of French prisoners dug another tunnel but were unlucky enough to underestimate the distance, the tunnel opening up just between the inner barbed-wire fence and the electrically charged outer one. The first man emerged before he discovered the mistake and was trapped immediately; the guard, who had probably heard him, was right on the spot and shot him—as an example to the others.

Again, a big Englishman had made himself a German uniform out of two faded French great coats which were nearly the colour of the German cloth.



The tailor shop in Münster Camp



Housecleaning day at Münster Camp



A cap was made from the black paper in which his parcels had been wrapped, and a set of imitation German equipment from the same material. A bayonet and scabbard (made from black pasteboard) and an iron cross (from a sardine tin) completed the outfit. Decorated with the insignia of a *Feldwebel*, he marched past all the guards and out the main gate, as bold as brass, while the guard sprang smartly to Attention. He was caught a little later, within seven miles of the camp.

Two others hid themselves away in garbage barrels and were hauled outside by the camp fatigue who were supposed to leave the barrels behind a building to be emptied later. On the way down the road, however, the party met a German teamster stuck in a hole with a load of sewer pipe and the guard made the fatigue party give him a lift. The wagon with the barrels was left in the middle of the road. While the party was away a German staff officer came along in his car, was annoyed to find the road blocked, and sent his orderly to see what was in the barrels. Naturally he was surprised when two "Englanders" were uncovered and a merry old row followed.

One other chap had a wonderful opportunity which he was foolish enough not to take advantage of. One day in spring a party was sent down to Münster to unload some barges. They were held later than anticipated and the guards, anxious to get back to the camp, were careless in their counting. One prisoner had crawled in under a pile of empty sacks and had gone to sleep. When he woke up and found no one around he came dutifully back to camp by himself. I would have given anything I possessed for a chance like that.

One day a high dignitary, heralded as an ambas-



sador though I thought he was a German officer, came into the camp to see the Russians. Even then there was talk of peace with Russia and this visit was supposed to have something to do with it. We were not very much interested but that visit led to the telling of a story by one of the boys which illustrates pretty forcibly the German methods during these ambassadorial visitations. This yarn concerned the visit of an ambassador to the three camps around Münster, in the summer of 1915, and was vouched for as being authentic.

Camp No. 1 was visited first. Here the prisoners were in a terrible state of filth and starvation but in preparation for the official's inspection two huge carcasses of beef were laid out in the shop behind the kitchens. The officers told the visitor that the prisoners had been in a starving condition when they were captured but that they were feeding them up on beef like that and expected to save most of their lives. When the ambassador left to visit Camp No. 3, the beef was dumped onto a motor truck and taken over there where it was nicely laid out and a similar story told. The same proceeding followed for Camp No. 2. And when the inspection was over the beef was taken out of the camps entirely and used by the German garrison in Münster.

While I was in Dülmen the Germans had been working with Sir Roger Casement and trying to get his "Irish Brigade" ready for service. They went through every camp picking out all who were or who seemed to be Irish. These men were all sent down to a camp in Central Germany where they were put through all kinds of torture to make them consent to join the "Irish Brigade." Some were tied up to stakes till they died. Many succumbed to the starvation methods combined with the torture, but very

few could be forced to give in, and I believe even these had no intention of taking any part in the Germans' dastardly plans. In our stories around the fire at the camps we heard the particulars of this "Irish Brigade" matter and also of the horrors of the Wittenburg Camp where plague-stricken prisoners were left to die like rats in a trap. Of all the German crimes this one of Wittenburg seems to be the worst—certainly one of the blackest that ever disgraced humanity.

A few of the prisoners who let their minds dwell on this sort of thing and on their own misfortunes, could not be roused out of their despondency, gradually lost their reason, and were removed to a little asylum located just outside the camp. There were said to be about twenty inmates at this time but very few of them were British. However, I did see two fellows taken there—a terrible sight since everything seemed so hopeless. If we had not resolved to be everlastingly cheerful; had we not kept one another out of the dumps, a lot more of us would have gone the same way.

Others who had it worse than we had were some Canadian boys we heard from through a Belgian who had been in the penitentiary with them but had finished his time. Besides other troubles these poor fellows, who had been committed for a term of some years, were not allowed any of the meat or tinned goods coming in their parcels. They sent a message to the parcel staff in the camp to take all this stuff out before their parcels were forwarded so that their guards would not benefit from it.

One feature that helped a little to pass the time was the reading of a couple of small newspapers set up and printed in the camp by the prisoners. One of these, the *Church Times*, was edited by Private

Champion, an Englishman who also conducted a religious service for the British prisoners every Sunday morning.

Gradually the winter passed and the spring came in warm and bright. In May we moved our beds out in the sun every day and lay about the camp until a sudden summons to some to be ready for a working party would set them hustling to get their belongings together and they would shortly be gone again.

On the 22d I remember a party of prisoners, twenty of them, arrived from the front and these were augmented next day by twenty-two others. These were made up of about fifteen Australians, two Canadians, and representatives from different British regiments. Some of them had been through some terrible hardships. One, for instance, had been a prisoner since August, 1914, and had been kept working behind the German lines. His body was covered with marks and scars, the results of abuse, and he was so emaciated that his bones seemed scarcely able to hold together. Some had been captured at Loos in September of 1915 and others at the Somme in 1916. They had never been reported as prisoners because it was pretty nearly certain they would die; if they had been reported the Germans would have had to account for them after the war, so no notice had been sent regarding them until they were sent back to the camps.

When the first party arrived they were put in a separate block but a little later were brought to our bath house for a bath. Our parcels had been held up for a while so we had very little food, but everybody shared up with them and we were able to provide a good hot meal in the bath house and give each a small box of food to take away with him.

I actually saw one of the boys take off his boots and socks and give them to a ragged and shoeless "Anzac."

We were not allowed to talk to the second party because a few of them had been captured only a few days before and had good news to tell of the fighting at Bapaume and Péronne. We managed to send them some food, however, and also to get this good news.

Some time before I had been summoned to the "Court of Justice" and told that the complaint I had laid against the guards at K47 had been found to be false. A warning was given at the same time of the serious punishment that would be inflicted if ever I dared to make another such false accusation.

The day after these prisoners arrived I was again taken, with the two other chaps who had been accused of the trouble at Hilltrup, before the "Court of Justice." This time a bleary-eyed old officer told us that they had gone very carefully into our case but knew that, although they knew we were guilty, they could find no evidence against us. This notwithstanding, we were ordered to leave that same day to return to the "Black Hole."

Six Canadians were to go back in the party and we were all game for an attempt to escape, planning to put the guards "out of mess" and to get away while marching up from Sin Sin station that night. When we arrived at Sin Sin the plan fell through for there a large party of Russians, with a lot of extra guards, joined ours and rendered any such attempt out of the question.

Arriving in K47 the boys all gathered around and we compared experiences. I soon learned that three of my chums—Blacklock, O'Brien, and Sammy Woods—were in the jail, as punishment for trying to escape. They had broken out of the camp all

right but had been caught near the Border. I was shortly taken to the office by the guards who made a fuss because I had taken off most of the marks from my clothing. These were all carefully added again before they let me away. Then I borrowed a book and went out and sat with my back to the jail wall, pretending to be reading, but all the time calling softly to O'Brien who I knew to be in the cell near by. Pretty soon he heard me, and, taking a bit of paper out of a crack he had managed to make between two bricks, we had a long talk. He told me how Wallie Nicholson and Slim Evans had made an attempt to escape but had been caught and brought back, had finished their term in the cells, and were at work again. I managed to smuggle some food in to the three fellows that night but next morning they came out again.

In the meantime, Wallie came back from work and we were as tickled as two schoolboys to see each other again. He was looking pretty thin and worn while I was almost fat from my easy life in Münster.

Next day I was called into the office again, this time to receive a mark and a half of pay which had been due me when I left the camp. They were always very particular to pay us—at first in regular German coinage; later, in money made in each camp from squares of cardboard, or small tin checks. This was handed out on Friday afternoon, when we sometimes had to stand for hours while the miserable snipe who paid us would dawdle about, sometimes breaking off to go for a smoke in the yard. If we did not go for our pay in the regular way we were treated to the usual abuse awarded an offender and finally taken before the commander.

“If you don't come and get your pay,” he would

say (banging his fist on the desk), "you become a slave; and we won't have that in *Deutschland*."

So we had to take it, whether we liked it or not.

They tried a good many schemes, though, to get the money back from us. Sometimes searches of the camp were made and the money seized. We did try to hang on to all the real money we could get, for we could see the possibility of using it in various ways. One time the officials asked for a subscription of three hundred marks to be spent on the graves of McQuarrie, who had been murdered by a *Steiger*, and Flannigan, alleged to have been accidentally killed in the mine. The money was quickly forthcoming. Part of it was, apparently, spent on the graves; but soon another amount was asked for, for the same purpose. This, too, was raised but nothing was done so when they came for a third donation we told them that we would fix the graves up ourselves, after the war.

Another time the commandant sent for two or three of the British prisoners and told them we could have a band if we would collect a thousand francs to buy the instruments. We got the money together but insisted that one of our own number should buy the instruments. He was sent to Recklinghausen, about seven miles away, and brought back the instruments. But an order was issued next day that no music was to be allowed in the camp; the instruments were never used!



## CHAPTER XVI

### OUT OF THE "BLACK HOLE'S" CLUTCHES

WHEN I returned to K47 the *Kokerie* was overstocked with workers and so I was put at odd jobs around the camp until they could start me in again where I had left off four months before. The Germans never forget a grudge and those guards showed me every day that they hated me just as bitterly as they had done previously.

Always on the *qui vive* for an opportunity to get away I kept my eyes open while at this irregular work and one day thought I saw how another effort might be made. I noticed one of the girls who worked in the canteen open a little door in what appeared to be the outside wall of the English barracks and take a couple of brooms out of a little closet or pantry there. This door opened opposite the back gate of the camp but we were shut off from that side by a sixteen-foot barbed-wire fence, and the guards.

When I came in that night I examined the barrack and saw that the little room jugged about four feet into the washroom. Hence my plan—to cut a hole through the wall into the closet, get out through the door, and thence out by the camp gate. I chose Howitt, since escaped otherwise, as a partner, and when the gang came up, at about nine o'clock, and made quite a racket with their supper we began operations. Working away with a knife, in the

intervals when the guard was at the other end of his beat, I managed to get six bricks loosened in the wall, enough to make a passage. So far so good. We planned to remove them at one o'clock that night, crawl into the cupboard, and then, suddenly bursting open the door, grab a pail of red-hot coals (which the girls placed outside to help the guard keep warm), and with this as a surprise, put him "out of mess" and get a free passage through the gate. The plan was good, but——

At one o'clock we were up, with everything in readiness. Stealthily I got the bricks out and was just ready to crawl through when the door of the closet opened a tiny crack and then closed again. Then we heard a faint rustle of excitement among the girls in the canteen. Loud voices in the guard house became hushed and died away completely. *The guard had heard us and was waiting for us!* After an uncanny stillness settled down over the camp I rose from my knees in front of the hole and drew myself noiselessly up by the window. Peering through a scratch in the painted glass I could see the tall angular figure of the guard looming up in the darkness like a horrible bronze statue, with his long rifle levelled at the opening from which he expected to see an "Englander" emerge and no doubt silently revelling over the mess his Dum-dum bullets would make when he did appear.

Quietly I stole away from the window and we hid our map, compass, and flashlight, which had been in readiness for the hoped-for journey, and went back to bed. Half an hour later the guards rushed in and kicked up a great row but couldn't find out who had made the hole.

The next night I was put on *Kokerie* again, on the same shift with Jack O'Brien, who had just come

out of jail. They put us together so as to be able to give us special attention, and since this brought us more scrutiny than we liked we decided that we must get into hospital. We tossed a coin to see who was to try first.

O'Brien won, or rather lost, the toss and next morning when we were pushing railway cars up to the *Kokerie* he shut his eyes and stuck his hand in between two cars as they bumped. Three of his fingers were smashed. I didn't like the idea of repeating that dose, so racked my brains for something different.

Going to bed that night, I wet a handkerchief, tied it round my left arm close to the shoulder, and twisted it up with a stick till all circulation was stopped. In the morning my arm was swollen, discoloured, and paining horribly. The doctor didn't know what was wrong and I didn't tell him, but I was sent, as O'Brien had also been, to do "light work"—which meant loading cars with coal from a huge heap on the ground. Since we were away from the regular guards there, and were better used, it was perhaps worth while. And as we worked we determined that we would make another attempt to get away the next night we were put back on the *Kokerie*.

As this did not happen immediately, and inasmuch as I was getting frantic, I decided to try another method. Recollections of every instance of cruelty and abuse which came to me then made my blood boil and I got to hate the Germans so fiercely that even the sound of their voices made my hair stand. To escape became an obsession that burned in my brain day and night. If I had not at last succeeded I believe I should have gone mad. My heart was breaking; every failure only made me more determined and more stubborn.

In the middle of the week O'Brien and I decided to try to dig a tunnel. With a pocket knife and about six inches of a small saw blade we managed to get a hole in the floor under my bunk and started to dig. We found soon that this was practically impossible for when the barrack had been erected a brick had been left out of the foundation wall here and there, probably to guard against just such attempts, and it was possible to see from outside what was going on. Even when digging I could see the legs of the guards passing up and down outside. Again, the only place we could have emerged was on the main street of the town alongside a street lamp. That seemed to be running too great a risk, so we gave it up. (Some months later, however, that tunnel was put through by three of my chums; and through it they actually got away.)

On Saturday night O'Brien and I were put on heavy work again and we knew the time had arrived for another desperate attempt for freedom. We were working together and when the time came to go to the midnight meal were well behind with our task. The bosses began to hover round us as if suspecting something and ready to start driving us. That decided us.

We had our dinner in the wash house with the guards in the same room, but lying on the floor to one side after dinner we drew up our plans, to be carried out on our return to work.

At about half-past one we formed in fours as usual at the foot of the stairs leading up to the elevated platform of the *Kokerie* and were counted. Everything being all right the two guards stationed on top went to their posts. We followed and the guards on the ground took up their position in a circle at intervals all round the plant.

O'Brien and I followed our guard a little more closely than usual, right at his heels in fact, and when he was about to turn round to take up his position so that he could oversee the platform we dropped over the side down to the tracks below. The other boys, whom we had primed, started a row to attract the guard's attention, and because he was looking round to see what was wrong, he did not miss us—for a time at least. One old guard had his post on the ground just about at the spot where we dropped. Fortunately he was a little slow in getting on the job or we should have landed on top of him. That was one point where fortune favoured us.

The whole yard was brightly lighted but we crawled across it on our stomachs, by great good luck escaped being seen, and stopped for a minute or two at a little hill in the corner—where a few trees gave some shelter—to change our clothes. We had tried to remove the identifying marks but, having found that impossible, had lined the garments with brown cloth from an old civilian overcoat, and now we turned them inside out.

We were climbing the fence on the side opposite the camp and congratulating ourselves that things had gone well so far when we heard the alarm sound! We knew that we had been missed. This was not more than five minutes after we had dropped off the platform; not much of a start, but almost more than we had hoped for. An awful row was in progress on the *Kokerie*; we could hear the guards cursing and shouting and could picture them knocking our comrades about and these latter doing their best to keep the guards busy so as to give us the utmost possible chance.

The outfit we had prepared to bring along with us this time varied little from that previously carried

on similar excursions. Besides a little food, we had—sealed up in a "*Kaffee pullen*," or water can which every prisoner carried—the invaluable map and compass, a small searchlight, and a small tin of pepper. A number of dogs had been provided at K47 for chasing escaping prisoners. We didn't mean to be followed long by these dogs. And soon after starting we took mighty good care to cover our trail pretty thickly with the pepper. When they came along there, sniffing, it would keep them from doing any more smelling for some considerable time. It must have worked for we neither saw nor heard anything of them.

For a couple of hours we travelled along at a good clip and—the ground being familiar—we made good time. A little stream that we crossed seemed like an old friend. I remembered how high my hopes had been when I had crossed it each time before but this time we were determined to get through or to perish in the attempt, and prospects, somehow, seemed brighter.

Daylight came early at that time of the year and since, by reason of that fact, we knew we could scarcely count on crossing the River Lippe that first night, we deemed it wiser when we got within reach of it at early dawn, some little time before four o'clock, to crawl into a small bush, where we started a fire with a few dry sticks to dry our clothes. While we needed this—the morning being chilly—we knew that search parties would likely be scouring the country for us, and so we soon put the fire out.

For some time we lay on the edge of the bush. Then O'Brien suggested that it might be safer further in—so in we went. We had been in the new spot but a few minutes when we heard someone coming. Presently an old German, carrying a double-barrelled



shotgun, entered the bush just where we had been lying and headed straight toward where we now were crouching. Straight as a die he advanced, and as we lay there close to the earth, we were making preparations to give him some severe treatment but feeling that only a miracle could save us. Then, when he was not more than twenty feet away, he turned aside and walked slowly past, looking around as he went by. We were surprised as well as relieved for we could not imagine how he had missed us; but when I got up to take a look round a little later saw that the scrub we were in was so short and thick that the old chap had looked right over our heads.

When darkness settled down again after a quiet day we saw the sky lit up by the lights of a town that we took to be Haltern and we made for it, intending to cross the river by swimming it. Just in the outskirts, however, we found a little old narrow-gauge railway bridge, which had evidently not been used for a long time and which was barricaded with barbed wire and wreckage of all sorts. We managed to pick an opening through this junk and without much difficulty crossed on to the dark, low flats, close beside the town. After a good deal of manœuvring we managed to get through the purlieus, crawling through acres of gardens, and then, in the open, soon put the lights behind us.

When well clear, and everything seemed quiet, we stopped and snapped on our light in order to set a course by the compass. And here I got a surprise. We carefully covered our light when we turned it on the compass and quickly switched it off when we got what we wanted. But the face of that compass remained illuminated for half an hour. After that we never turned the light on except in a pocket. By holding the compass over the top of the light the face

got the necessary illumination and gave us the direction we wanted without running any risk of giving us away. This certainly helped a good deal on that trip.

Striking northward we soon came to a bit of moor with a wire fence running across it. We followed the fence but hadn't gone far when we met another fellow, also following the fence. We saw one another at the same moment. Instantly he "beat it" back his way while we—just as quickly—made off in ours. At the time we had no suspicions as to who it was but, talking it over, later, we concluded that he also must have been an escaping prisoner. No one else could have run so quickly. In any case, we saw no more of him.

The experience I had had in the Canadian bush and in the north country before the war stood me in good stead now and we made excellent headway, shaping our course most of the time by the stars. O'Brien followed me closely and proved to be the very best sort of pal I could have had. He never grumbled or argued but if he thought I was getting a little off the course he would touch me softly with his stick and we would stop and check up again.

The little food we had been able to bring was exhausted the first day and thus we were forced to provide for ourselves along the way. About the only thing available was the seed potatoes recently planted, which we dug up in the fields at night. I happened to have the big red handkerchief, my "Crown and Anchor" game, along with me and this came in very handy for carrying the potatoes. One morning we happened on a good-sized bit of bush and, as the air was laden with fog, we took a chance and lighted a fire and tried to cook some potatoes in an old tin can. We boiled them for hours, but even with

that they were as tough as baseballs and we didn't think it worth while to try that scheme again. I'm sure we ate bushels of those potatoes during that trip; it was only these that kept us going at all.

Leaving this bush we were nearly caught by a man with a gun but we managed to elude him. That night, also, was a memorable one, for we came into a big pasture where one lone cow was lying. Driving her up into a corner I scratched her back while O'Brien milked her. That was a splendid drink, the finest I ever had, and for a moment or two we had some fool notion of taking that cow along with us.

Coming out on a high ridge later we saw the lights of what we knew to be Dülmen Camp, when a host of memories—most of them of a nature to stir my anger—were brought back.

Again, as in the former attempts, we found it hard to get satisfactory cover during the day. We were determined not to be caught again, so took more and greater precautions. Every opportunity was taken. We stayed, on different days, in the long grass and reeds by a creek, under an old culvert, in a bit of bush, or even in a ditch.

One day we were lying on a little sheltered knoll between two farms. I was dreaming I was home and, reaching out my arm for a pillow, gathered in a little porcupine that had strayed near us looking for a warm berth. He didn't make a very comforting bedfellow, and when his sharp quills began to work in I soon realized that I was not at home. So did he.

As we grew more tired and hungry the temptation to follow roads and trails became strong but we stuck stubbornly to the fields. One night we came on the most beautiful bit of road I have ever seen and crossing this near a farmhouse, found two or three big cans of milk set out for the early morning collec-

tion. When we left them, a little later, we could hardly walk; but we were tempted to try to carry one of these cans with us.

For seven nights we plodded steadily along. The seventh morning brought us to a little town in the centre of a thickly populated farming district. The smoke rising from several chimneys as we passed warned us that it was time to be under cover and we looked round desperately. Finally we found a small strip of pine in a hollow close by. It was small and more or less open but it was the best in sight. But though the bush itself was small and open there was in the centre a low, wet hole full of brush and long grass. We crawled in there and lay down.

Very shortly afterward we heard voices; two German girls came into the bush to gather bundles of wood which they then piled up close beside us. We lay as still as possible, but were in danger of discovery every minute, for the girls worked all around us—so close that we could hear every word they said. About noon we were much relieved to hear them say that they had finished. Although they left the bush we decided to stay there—for a while. We knew we were within four or five miles of the Border and were keen on taking no chances. At about one-thirty we were surprised to hear the same girls' voices approaching. This time three of them came and began to work on the other side of us but piling their wood where they had placed it in the morning.

At last they announced they had finished and began to get ready to go away when a deep, guttural, masculine voice from the road caught our attention. An old man who appeared to be the boss was objecting because the girls were going home so early, declaring there was more wood in the patch and that they would have to look for it.

We held our breath as they came back the third time but, after discussing the matter, they sat down by the pile for a while and then went home.

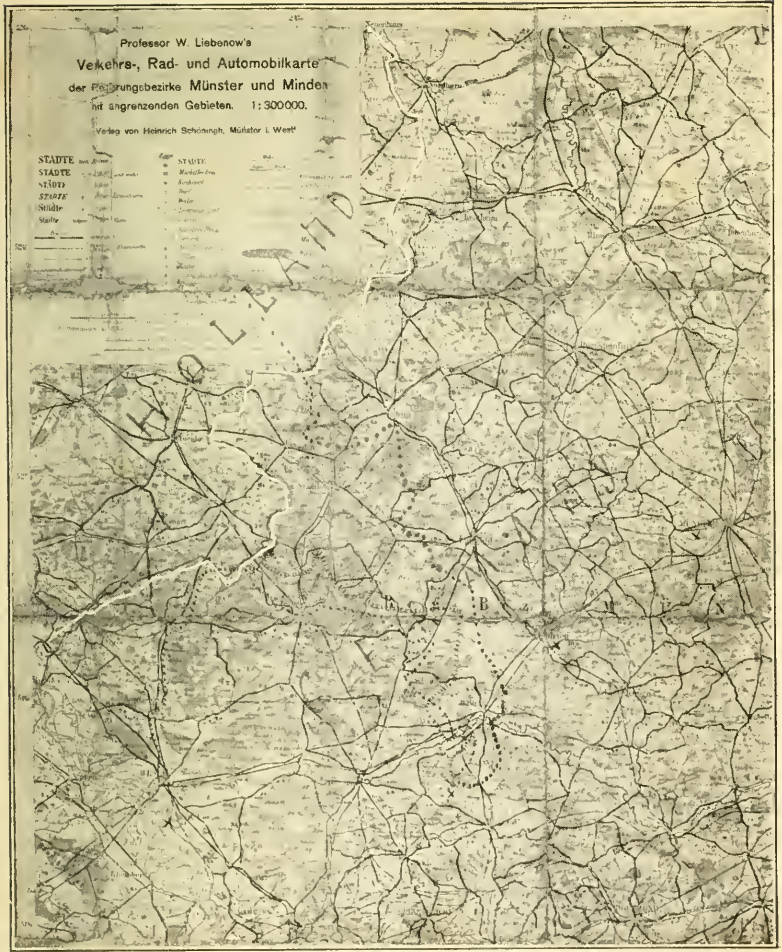
That day I took off an extra pair of trousers I had been wearing and made a pair of moccasins apiece for O'Brien and myself. That night we took off our boots, tied them on our belts, and with the cloth moccasins slipped along as smoothly and silently as a pair of ghosts.

We ran across a herd of cattle the same night and greeted them joyfully. The continued cold, hunger, and fatigue were telling on us pretty seriously and a good drink of milk would have put new life into us. But these cows were all dry.

It will be remembered, probably, that advice had been given me by one or two persons—when telling me how heavily guarded the Border was—to try to strike northward for the big swamps. Wallie Nicholson had been given the same advice and now I determined to act on it. When we entered this region the temptation to follow the narrow trails we crossed frequently was very strong. It was no joke at any time, but was particularly hard, in our weakened condition, to plug along through that slimy mud, never knowing what the next minute might bring, or when the quicksands which abound in that sort of country might engulf us. To follow these paths, however, would have meant almost certain capture since they were scoured by patrols all along the Border. So we worked our way slowly through the stinking mud, picking our path around the worst spots, feeling with our sticks ahead of us and with our ears alert for the slightest sound in the darkness ahead.

The stars shone brightly that night but underfoot it was as black as death and the silence was oppres-





The map which brought the Author out of Germany

White line indicates the Holland Border.  
 Small black dots outline route of first attempted escape.  
 Dots and crosses show route of second attempt.  
 Large dots mark route of successful attempt.





sive. Keeping on till midnight we crossed a trail and had gone only a short distance to the left when we heard a sound like someone moving on the trail. Straining my eyes through the dark, I thought I could distinguish a dim form a little distance off—a guard, probably. We dropped on our faces in the mud to wait for this man (whoever he was) to pass. Just then a harsh voice yelled: "Halt!" and a rifle shot rang out and reëchoed through the swamp. For a few minutes a perfect pandemonium reigned—rifle shots, shouts, and cries of pain, mingled with the angry yelps of half-starved dogs as they, so it seemed, tore at their prey.

We lay still a moment because we figured that this row would attract all the sentries near at hand. Soon we heard several voices apparently trying to get the dogs away from their victim. Then, thinking the time opportune, we got to our feet and, making a slight détour, sneaked through the opening in the guard line, as so nearly as we could estimate it.

We plodded on all through the night across the swamp, and near morning reached a big canal. Following this, we came to a bridge, which, to our surprise, was not guarded, so we stole across and kept on, travelling due west now, as we had been all night.

About daylight we got clear of the swamps and soon sighted a church steeple rising up out of the fog. Coming through a wheat field on the outskirts of a little town, we lay in a ditch just off the road, waiting for the clock to strike. We had a feeling that we were out of Germany but were determined to take no chances.

Several soldiers went by and we strained our eyes to examine them, but in the dim light it was impossible to reach any positive decision regarding them.

They seemed like Germans and our hearts sank again.

Soon the clock began to strike and eagerly we counted the strokes: "One—two—three—four—five—six."

"How many, Jack?" I asked.

"Six, d—n it; only six," he answered bitterly.

Our watch showed it to be only half-past five but we were looking for two hours' difference in the Dutch time, thinking that we could tell from this whether we were in Holland or not. However, the watch was a German production in which we had little confidence. After talking it over we reached the conclusion that we must have crossed the Border in the night.

It was running too big a risk to go making any inquiries but we planned to turn our flash on the next signpost and beat it off again.

When the rising sun began to dispel the fog we sneaked through the fields toward a long row of trees, which, as we expected, bordered a big road. Before we reached this, however, we came suddenly on two men cutting hay but we made off so quickly that we were nearly out of sight before they saw us. They leaned on their scythes and looked after us but made no move to follow—which left us still in doubt.

We passed several women who merely stared at us. We began to feel somewhat confident but even yet were not going to be careless. Coming out on the road to look for signs we saw several people approaching but dodged back into the bush when they came near us until they went by.

The very air seemed different, somehow; laden with peace and good will. We both felt a sort of peaceful contentment which acted like a balm to our tortured spirits and hungry bodies.

Finally we found a sign at a cross roads but to our disappointment it was bare, every vestige of paint having been washed off by the weather. Near by, however, a big, fat old man was spreading gravel on the road, whistling merrily the while.

A fat man, and a cheerful whistle! It couldn't be Germany. So we decided to chance it again.

"He's too fat to run fast anyway," said O'Brien. So we walked up to the old fellow and asked him whether we were in Holland. It seemed an age till he answered, and our eyes must have burned holes in him, we glared so fiercely.

A broad smile slowly spread over his good-natured face and he explained that we were ten kilometres into the country.

Without a word we turned and grasped one another by the hand. There was nothing to say. To know that we were free was enough. To be away from the starvation, the beating, the abuse—the cruelty of those German ruffians—and to know that these horrors now belonged to the past! Forgotten? No. Never while I live shall I be able to forget the sufferings and the mental agony of others and myself in those vile prison camps.

The old Hollander was delighted when he heard our story; he talked and laughed and hopped about on one foot till we almost began to think he, too, had escaped. He insisted on our eating his dinner and making away with a long bottle of milk that he had with him. We wanted to pay him with a little of the money we had been able to bring through but he wouldn't hear of it. After thanking him as best we could we left him and began to drag ourselves along the road toward the little town ahead.

For eight days we had been travelling on very

little food and with our nerves at the highest tension. Now that we knew we were free and safe, the inevitable reaction came on, and for a while we were so weak, sick, and giddy, that we could scarcely move our feet. We were roused out of this semi-comatose condition, however, by a voice speaking in good English. Turning at the very welcome sound we saw a young chap jump off a wheel and come toward us. He was a Dutch traveller and as soon as he knew who we were he congratulated us on our escape and advised us to go at once with him to the police.

"But shall we be prisoners?" I asked quickly.

"Oh, no," was the reassuring answer. "It's the only way to get anywhere over here. They will pick you up anyway."

Soon we reached the little town of Nieder, where everybody seemed glad to see us. We were deluged with good things to eat but were too sick to touch anything.

Soon two huge military policemen rode up and escorted us to the home of their chief, just outside the town. We lay in his orchard for two days, sleeping on soft, clean hay over his stables at night. His kind-hearted wife supplied us with tea and cakes, strawberries and cream, and all sorts of good things to eat; and a bunch of rosy-cheeked Dutch girls, from a near-by factory, often gathered at the fence to talk to us.

We wanted to get our photos taken before we got straightened up but there was no photographer in the town. We were surely terrible sights, but after a wash, a shave, and a haircut, and the donning of clothes supplied by a kind old gentleman across the street, we looked more presentable. My suit, though, was big enough for a whole family and as I

was anything but fat just then I must have cut a comical figure.

O'Brien was better off and, since he was beginning to come alive by that time, began to exercise upon me the spirit his name implies. However, at that time I was feeling so well that nothing could upset me.



## CHAPTER XVII

### BACK TO BLIGHTY AND HOME AGAIN

WE WERE held in Nieder till Monday—that was the 18th of June—and then were sent in a big policeman's care to Rotterdam. Here the Dutch authorities put us through quite an examination in which they asked about the formation of our army; the number of men in battalions, brigades, and divisions; and also as to the conditions of the defences on the German Border. Finally they asked whether we wished to be interned.

It took about a second to tell them just how badly we wanted *not* to be interned so they turned us over to the British Ambassador. He also put us through quite a quiz, among other things asking why it was that so large a percentage of those escaping were Canadians. (We were Numbers 101 and 102 of the British prisoners who had escaped he told us.) Then, finally, he put us up at the Harwich Hotel, owned by Mrs. Francis, a Dutch lady who spoke perfect English and who was exceedingly kind to us, as, by the way, was everyone else with whom we came in contact in Holland.

Naturally one of the first things we wanted was money. We hadn't seen real money for many a day and thought of the amount of pay due us. But that old ambassador was a real tight-wad and put us on an allowance of one guilder each, about thirty-five cents, per day. We soon found a young petty offi-

cer from the navy, however, from whom we were able to get a little. But one day, when we were looking in vain for him around the hotel, Mrs. Francis apparently grasped the situation.

"Come now," she said. "You might just as well tell me what you want. I might be able to help you. In fact, I am sure I can."

I hummed and hawed, for it was a hard thing to confess to a woman that we had no money, but finally she made us own up to it.

"I knew it," she said. "Now when you want money just come to me."

We thanked her but were going on to explain that we had no means of paying her back when she interrupted:

"Never mind about that," she said. "When you are leaving just go to Mr. — [the Ambassador] and tell him you owe Mrs. Francis so much money; he will have to pay." And she laughed merrily.

From that time till we left we had plenty of money though we were down at the office every morning to collect our guilder just the same. And in the end we were able to follow our hostess's advice without any trouble.

For ten days we were wandering around Rotterdam till arrangements could be made for our return to England and during that time we saw a good deal of this old-fashioned city. One morning, while looking for a Scottish tea room someone had told me about, I was passing a vegetable booth in the market when I saw an old woman grab a basket of potatoes and run away with it. The trader made a vigorous howl and a big policeman chased and grabbed the poor woman. As happens in every city, a fuss attracts attention and in a few moments the street and the square were packed with a curious throng, trying to see what was

happening. Everything was blocked solid by the time the mounted police arrived and rode through the crowd, using whips and clubs freely. As soon as the police turned, the people followed them back again and the crush continued. The police battled with that multitude for hours, and several persons were hurt, but I am sure that less than fifty of the whole gathering knew what it was about. Then the evening papers followed it up by headlining a "Great Potato Riot."

Among the daily visitors at the British Consulate were forty German soldiers who had deserted across the Border the week before and were trying to arrange to be sent to England where they knew that German prisoners were well treated. To get their wish they volunteered all sorts of information and were willing to do almost anything. They had realized, you see, that if Holland should be forced into the war their position would be particularly uncomfortable.

At the British Consulate one day I managed to get hold of an official statement of the rations given to German prisoners in England. It is no wonder those fellows wanted to get over there. Compare the food on the list—the original of which is reproduced here—with the rations that were being issued in the German prison camps.

The day before we left Holland a message came up from the British Consul at The Hague asking that if possible we attend a conference of British and German officers in regard to the treatment and exchange of prisoners. We were very anxious to go since we saw the possibility of bettering the conditions of our comrades, particularly at the "Black Hole," but were warned to get aboard the steamer before the time set for The Hague trip and so missed it. At this

conference the Germans thanked the British for their humane treatment of prisoners. But the compliment was not returned.

One stormy morning we said good-bye to Holland and, in a collection of boats of all nations, drifted slowly down the Rhine. The neutral vessels had their colours displayed in a broad band around the hulls but the amount of confidence they had in the German promises to respect their neutrality was evidenced by the fact that they lay sometimes for days at the mouth of the river, waiting for the British convoy collecting up the river, so that they might share in the protection afforded during the trip across the Channel.

We lay off the Hook of Holland for a time and nobody seemed to feel very safe until a dozen dark specks appeared out of the mist, and soon about seventeen light cruisers and destroyers were cutting circles around the convoy, like a school of huge sharks. We got across without incident and safely reached a British port—pulling into dock close beside the liner which had carried me over from Canada two years and a half before.

An orderly met us on arrival and handed us over to the officer commanding the garrison. He billeted us with a company of Royal Engineers pending receipt of orders from the War Office in London and here we were able to get some pretty direct evidence as to the treatment of German prisoners in England. The Engineers were working on a railway line some distance from camp, at the usual wage, of course, of a British Tommy. They left camp in the morning, carried a sandwich for dinner, and marched back again for supper. They told us that the German prisoners on the same job were paid three shillings and sixpence (84 cents) per man per day and enjoyed a hot

dinner which was carried out to them by English civilians. They were rather indignant, and we didn't blame them.

Next day we were sent on to London, and "The Smoke" looked pretty good to us after looping the loop via Berlin. We were still in our hand-me-down clothes and the remarks of the crowd as we passed through the station, at the heels of a big redcap policeman, were anything but complimentary. They evidently thought we were a couple of deserters, caught and being brought back. We were naturally indignant but had to grin and bear it for a few days. That was the first of July and everyone seemed too busy celebrating to look after anything else. We tried everywhere to get uniforms and to get someone to fix us up but all to no purpose, and I must confess that we were rather disgusted with our initial reception in London.

The next week, though, we received lots of attention. I believe we were interviewed by every officer of the army then in England and this occasioned a continual rush from place to place. I became so enraged that I insulted everyone who came near me and I am sure that only the fact that I had escaped out of Germany saved me from years of pack drill.

I spent all of one day in the Intelligence Department of the War Office, and the information I had so carefully gathered in Germany was just as carefully recorded. I was able to give them, from my map, the positions of several ammunition factories and military depots, and I enjoyed the satisfaction of having my report praised as the most thorough and complete, and containing the most useful information yet furnished by an escaped prisoner. From Glasgow I wrote to the Department, a little later,

sending on further information, and received a letter in reply, thanking me for this.

While in Holland I had written a short letter to Wallie Nicholson back in Germany, but, not daring to write in my own name, I penned it as if I were his sister, whose husband was interned in Holland. I only wanted him to see my writing, knowing that this would give him the desired information: I signed myself: "Your loving sister Jean." I had promised, if O'Brien and I got through, to try to let him know how we got along, how the plan to work through the swamps in the north worked out. So I sat down one day in England, when time offered, and wrote him a long letter in which I told him I had just arrived in London from Canada, and spoke of a hunting trip I had taken "Up north" before leaving home. "The same trip," I said, "that you and I took before." Thus, in a roundabout way, I managed to tell him all about it, and I heard from him afterward that the letter arrived safely. Through the information it contained five of my chums were successful in escaping, but poor old Wallie failed again in his third attempt, and I fear is still in Germany.

We were soon in uniform again, and began to feel better, particularly when we were very kindly treated around Canadian Headquarters in London. General Turner, Commanding Officer there, was particularly kind, and told us to come to him if we wanted anything. When we were leaving, he patted us on the back and asked what we wanted to do now. "You may have a job either in England or in Canada; or your discharge," he said. We were both feeling anxious for reprisals, and volunteered for our own regiments again, but he would not listen to this. Ultimately we were sent home without being consulted at all.



A week or two was spent in Bramshott Camp, where we found moral conditions much better than we had experienced around Folkestone in 1915.

From Bramshott we went to Buxton Discharge Depot, and had another glimpse of Germans in an English Prison Camp, and also, to our indignation, something closely resembling a Canadian Prison Camp.

A number of German prisoners were working just then in the stone quarries near Buxton, and one day I had a chance to go up and look at them. No one was allowed near the place without a permit, but when I told one of the sentries that I had just come out of a German Prison Camp, he let me look on for a while. The contrast between conditions here and those that we had endured was astounding. These fellows were all fat and healthy-looking, and seemed to be enjoying themselves. A few were doing a little work; some of them, nothing at all. The guard told me that he had nothing to do with the prisoners, that he must not interfere in any way unless they made some attempt to escape. It was evident that they were well-fed and comfortably housed, and that they were not forced in any way to work, though they were under the direct control of British civilian foremen.

Arriving at Buxton on a cold, rainy night, we were surprised, when marching up to the camp, to meet crowds of soldiers, many of them crippled, walking through the heavy rain to the town; but a few days in the camp solved the mystery. The depot there is a centre where all the crippled and incapacitated Canadians are transferred from the training camps and convalescent homes. Many hospital cases—that is, men who would ordinarily travel on hospital ships—were not included.

In Bramshott Camp, where those of strength and health (Class A men) were being trained for the front, not a sentry was posted around the camp, and only a stray military policeman, who never seemed to have much to do, was in evidence. In Buxton, on the contrary, where practically only sick or crippled men were handled, the camp was heavily policed at all times, and a large number of guards were on duty at night. A high board fence, topped with barbed wire, ran around the whole building, and the sentries prowled around the grounds at night, apparently to get hold of some poor, half-crippled chap who had done his bit, and was now guilty of some slight infraction of discipline.

Conditions in the building itself were similarly surprising. It was a large, four-story hotel, but inasmuch as the lifts were all closed, and the broad, easy stair running up the centre of the building was reserved for the officers and staff, the men had to climb up a little, narrow set of almost perpendicular emergency stairs, which were hard enough even for a healthy man to ascend. The building looked splendid from the outside, and was surrounded by lovely grounds, but the inside was a most barren spot. There was nothing in it except the beds of the men sleeping in the rooms, and since it was housing about twice the number it should accommodate, every hall-way, landing, and corridor was crowded at night with sleepers.

Reveille sounded at six o'clock, and at six-thirty everyone was paraded in front of the barracks. Here the men broke up, to fall in again in front of the kitchen, where some had to stand for over an hour waiting their turn. Breakfast over, they rushed upstairs to scrub up their rooms and make everything ready for inspection. At nine o'clock another parade

was called, and from then until eleven, often afterward, no man was allowed in his room, but had to stay outside, rain or shine, until the orderly officer had inspected the quarters. After eleven o'clock we got our knives and forks and fell in for dinner, again having to stand for an hour or more. Another parade—of uncertain duration—followed at two, and after that the mail was called in the yard. Sometimes, if one wanted his mail, he had to stand out there till five o'clock. Then the camp gates were opened, and we were free till nine-thirty. It was parade after parade all day long, and I was often sorry for the weaker men. I was strong and healthy, and by that time was feeling fairly fit, but I found life in Buxton a hardship, and would certainly much rather have been in France. For the weaker men, who were crippled and ill, it was certainly anything but pleasant.

There was a recreation room, so-called, where about three hundred of the eighteen hundred men in the camp could find standing room, and where about fifty could sit on the bare pine benches to write at the similarly bare tables. The Y. M. C. A. had a small corner in this recreation room, and here was a chance for the organization to do something worth while for the boys who had done their bit, but as there was, usually, very little money among the men—because their books were being balanced and the men, in consequence, able to draw little or nothing—they could purchase but very little.

The Commanding Officer was an outspoken, fair-minded, and (I believe) a fearless man, of the type I would have liked to serve under—in France, but not in Buxton. He seemed to forget that he was in command of a Discharge Depot and that his men were unfit for further service.

Of course, as is customary in the British army, there was a chance to make complaints. Every man, before leaving Buxton, was asked to sign a complaint sheet in which he might state any objections he had to the place or to the treatment he had received. As in other cases, this worked out automatically so that the complaints were very few. If any man made a complaint, it meant that he would likely be held for weeks or months while an investigation was made, and then he would not be likely to gain anything material. So, since everyone was most anxious to get home, the complaint sheets were all "O. K."

However, all these discomforts were soon to be left behind. At last the Great Day arrived, and I was mighty glad to be on board a huge liner, Home-ward Bound.

The sea was smooth and the trip comfortable: the little spice of adventure which was present in the constant fear of a submarine attack provided against monotony. We were escorted across by a much-camouflaged cruiser, which ran like a machine. Search her as we would, even with glasses, not a sign of life could we see on board. I had begun to think she was a phantom ship, but one night that idea was very quickly dispelled when she dropped a couple of targets and began running around in circles while our old boat was shaken with the concussion of her guns.

The same night we passed Sable Island, not inviting in itself, but we knew it was Canada, and so it looked mighty good. Next morning, when I awoke, I felt that the engines were stopped, and heard excited voices on the deck above. Slipping into my clothes, I rushed up on deck, and there, ahead, I beheld the most beautiful sight I could imagine—the Homeland that I had despaired of seeing again.

We were lying just outside Halifax harbour. The

sun—rising like a huge, yellow ball—was giving to the sky, and to the banks of clouds around the harbour, a most gorgeous colouring, while the harbour mouth itself showed up in the centre like a beloved old picture in a beautiful frame. Lying on the rocks at the harbour mouth, shining up white and ghostly through the mist, was the wreck of a big Hospital Ship, a last warning to the war-worn soldiers of the innate ruthlessness of their enemies—and a reminder of the gallant comrades who peacefully sleep in Flanders' fields.

And so Good-bye—and “The best o' luck.”

THE END



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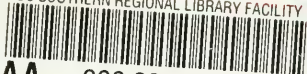


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