

Volume 2 Section 354-06**Life as a Prisoner of War****Major A S Turner**

The China Dragons of June 1919, December 1919 and April 1920 contained the serialised account of an unidentified officer in the Royal Berks. It describes both his time in several German POW camps and also his experiences as an internee in Holland. However we may identify him as Major A S Turner of the 1st Battalion who was captured when he was enticed onto the bridge at Maroilles in September 1914.

**EXPERIENCES OF A PRISONER OF
WAR IN GERMANY.****THROUGH THE GERMAN LINES TO
TORGAU.**

In recounting my experiences, as a prisoner in the hands of the Germans, throughout a period of captivity which lasted for over forty months, it is my wish to be scrupulously fair to our opponents, and to tell the story of my experiences, exactly as they happened, neither suppressing the good, nor exaggerating the bad points of the treatment I was called upon to undergo. And if my narrative may seem to be of a rather personal nature, it must be remembered that my experiences were precisely those of hundreds of other officers.

I do not consider it within the scope of this article to give any description of the operations which led up to my being taken prisoner. It must suffice to say, that on the night of August 25th, 1914, I found myself, somewhat dazed from the combined effects of the butt end of a German rifle, which had come in contact with my chest, and an English bullet, which had grazed my face, being dragged along a road outside Maroilles, between two German soldiers, and alongside the dead body of their Captain who had been shot through the heart.

Directly we were inside the outpost line I was searched, but nothing was taken from me, except my sword and knife—the latter was given as a prize to the soldier who had knocked me down. I was next taken to the Headquarters of the Prussian Regiment, which was in a large house in the village. Here I found a number of officers, twenty or more, at supper, and was invited to join them. They were quite civil, several speaking to me in English, and their Colonel, a tall, smart-looking man, called to me to come and sit next to him, and assured me that everything they had was at my service.

After a pipe and a chat, I was sent away in charge of two sentries to a stable, where I was to pass the night with some soldiers. I had not been there many minutes, however, when a fusillade broke out from our side of the river (it must have been the battalion attacking the bridge-head) and several bullets passing through the walls of the stable, a hasty stampede took place, the sentries hurrying me along the road, amidst a shower of bullets, till we reached the shelter of a wall, behind which we spent the remainder of the night. Shortly after daybreak came the first disagreeable experience of my captivity. ' A German sergeant came up and put some questions to me about the positions and numbers of our troops. As I declined to answer he struck a violent blow at my face, which, if I had not dodged, would have knocked my teeth down my throat. My sentries remonstrated with him, and he presently withdrew, growling out curses. A little later I was summoned to appear before the General, who I found standing in a clearing outside the station, surrounded by officers. Up to now, wherever I went I had been accompanied by two sentries holding me tightly by the wrists, but from then this course of treatment was discontinued, and they merely walked alongside me. The General looked me over, but beyond asking my name he did not speak to me, and I was marched off to the station, where I remained in the waiting room for some hours. The sentries shared their break-fast of coffee and butterbrod with me, and were very grateful for a little tobacco which I gave them. Both of them seemed very decent fellows, one—the man who had knocked me down overnight—wanted to cover me with his great coat, but as he was shivering himself, I wouldn't accept it. I was sorry not to be able to offer him a drop of whisky, but my haversack and the rest of my equipment had been left in the stable when we bolted out of it, and I never saw it again.

The other soldier checked the curiosity of some young soldiers, who were hanging about outside by chivvying them away, and secured me from any annoyance by hanging some strips of carpet over the windows. Several officers looked in during the morning, but all were perfectly friendly, the seniors usually shaking hands and chatting for a few minutes, and the juniors saluting respectfully.

A N.C.O. who honoured me with a visit was less agreeable. I had permission from the officer who had placed me there to smoke as much as I liked, but this did not seem to suit the sergeant, for he called out to the

sentries : " What does that schweinhund mean by smoking ? Take his pipe and throw it away." I explained that I had the Herr Hauptmann's permission, on which he was obliged to content himself with verbal abuse, which was something to this effect : " You-----schweinhund ; we're going to kill all your countrymen and all the French, Russians and Belgians too." Before each substantive he inserted an adjective, which he used with the prodigality of an English bargeman. The morning did not pass without incident. A battery was presently established behind the station and started to bombard Maroilles ; then a regiment of infantry passed at the double, and the rattle of musketry soon showed that they were hotly engaged. A stream of wounded were soon trickling back, amongst them the Colonel who I had sat next to at supper the previous night. He died shortly afterwards. By degrees the firing ceased, and about noon the march was resumed, first in a northerly direction through the forest, then east towards St. Quintin. I was put in a cart with some slightly wounded Germans. After we got clear of the forest some English aircraft came over us and were fired at but without doing them any harm. At 5 p.m. a halt was made for dinner and in a moment the camp cooks, which every battalion was provided with, had everything ready. They seemed to be amply provided with both food and wine. I was taken charge of by an English-speaking Captain of a Saxon regiment (the 70th I think it was), who conducted me to the Officers' Mess, which was established in the corner of a field. I was received with the utmost courtesy, the officers all rising and shaking hands, and the CO. insisted on making me a present of an English soldier's great coat which he was wearing. It was almost a new one and lasted me throughout the whole of my captivity, and, needless to say, I frequently had occasion to feel grateful for the Major's kindness (a Major in the German Army commands a battalion). I had an excellent dinner in, I must admit, most pleasant company, and when the march was resumed the Captain who had first spoken to me found me a place in a more comfortable and less crowded wagon. At about 10 o'clock we stopped for the night, and I slept in a farm house with my hosts of the dinner hour, about ten or twelve of us, in one big room, but there were enough mattresses to go round. We marched at daybreak-----August 27th.

Up till this time I had not seen another Englishman but I soon had a companion in the person of Colonel Stevenson, K.O.S.B.'s, who had been severely wounded in the neck. To make things more comfortable for him I volunteered to get out and walk, and this was permitted, so I marched for some hours in the ranks of the 70th Saxons. A little later, a lot of English, mostly K.O.S.B.'s, joined the column. With them was one officer, Major Gray, Royal Irish Fusiliers. At every halt I had a crowd of Saxon soldiers around me, examining my uniform and asking questions, but never a disrespectful or uncivil word the whole time. They all expressed the utmost admiration for the British Army,

and thought it must be a fine thing to belong to it, to travel about and see the world, and get so many opportunities of active service, and all appeared anxious to be hospitable, proffering flasks (filled with something which tasted like very good cherry brandy), cigars and food with the utmost liberality. During one halt I found myself just outside a French café, and managed to buy a bit of soap and a towel and have a wash. I saw Saxon soldiers drinking at the café but they paid for all they had. I learnt subsequently that German soldiers on active service are allowed, apparently, to purchase liquor when they have the chance, but are liable to the severest penalties for drunkenness. From what I saw of our opponents on the line of march, I judged both their marching powers and march discipline to be excellent. The officers were seldom, if ever, called on to interfere, and the utmost punctuality was observed, especially in the early morning. If food or water was to be given out, there was no undue crowding or scrimmaging. Every man had his fair turn ; those who got water at the first halt standing aside at the second. Their food was excellent, and there appeared to be plenty of it, and the camp cooks rendered good service. The weight carried by the soldiers was about the same as in our army, but the uniform, particularly the greatcoat, struck me as being less warm and durable. Even the officers were glad to avail themselves of any English great coats which were picked up. They laughed at us for carrying razors. The men certainly did not seem to be superior to ours in physique, but they mostly seemed intelligent and cheerful. I was surprised, so early in the war, to find comparatively old men in the ranks, e.g. one of my sentries was 45, had finished his service completely, and come up as a volunteer.

The N.C.O.'s were mostly young, according to our ideas. I spoke to two of their Coy.-Sergt.-Majors, and found that they had not got ten years' service between them. All spoke very highly of the English, whom they considered the most formidable of the three nationalities that they had encountered, and they praised especially our entrenchments. The French, they said, were only inferior to us in the wildness of their shooting.

But to resume my narrative—dinner was eaten this time in column of route. One of my sentries found me a spare mess tin, and I was given more than I could eat, but found no difficulty in getting rid of what I didn't want. Shortly after the march had been resumed, the CO. and one of his captains came to me with the offer of a spare horse, and for the remainder of the day I rode in company with an officer who was half English—he had been born in the City and his mother was an Englishwoman. I heard from him of another German officer who had been educated at Oxford. At 7 p.m. we halted for the night, when Colonel Stevenson, Gray and myself were put into a cottage with a couple of German officers. The outbuildings were occupied by our men. The inhabitants had all bolted, but we found plenty of food in the house, and the officers—very good fellows

both of them—got hold of some wine, so we did pretty well. The Germans certainly carried out their advance on very systematic lines. Every village, hamlet or cottage even was thoroughly searched, and all civilians capable of bearing arms were seized and marched off, and everything likely to be of use was impounded.

August 28th. We were off at daybreak, but only-for a short distance. Hitherto, we had been with the German advance, but now we were to turn our faces towards Germany. First, we were halted at a church, and told to go inside and sit down, and presently an excellent meal was given us from the camp cookers, and the Saxon soldiers, who were guarding us, handed round their flasks and cigar cases, and chatted civilly with the men. On leaving the church, greatly to my regret I saw the last of the 70th Saxons. What were to prove the two best days of my captivity had been passed amongst them. I experienced nothing but kindness and hospitality at their hands, and they were, in my opinion, a regiment which would have been a credit to any army.

We were now taken over by a special escort and informed that our immediate destination was I,e Cateau. We were, of course, ignorant of the fact that a battle had taken place there on the 26th. I was called upon to undertake the role of interpreter, and to explain to the men that instant death would be the result of any attempt to escape, or, indeed, of the smallest infraction of discipline. Two carts were provided ; the O.C. escort—a stout elderly officer who looked as if his fighting days were over—and Colonel Stevenson occupied the first one, Gray, myself and an Unter-Offizier were in the other at the tail of the procession. As we approached Le Cateau we began to see traces of the fight—abandoned valises and equipment, some dead horses in the fields, an overturned Transport wagon, etc., and presently we passed a dead English corporal lying in the grass at the side of the road. A little further on there was another dead man. Then, coming to the top of a rise, we came in full view of the battlefield. The hastily constructed trenches, right and left of the road, were a grand but silent testimony to the fighting power of the "Contemptible Little Army," as were also the fields in front of them. The trenches were full of our dead ; in many of them their defenders had died to a man, and corpses were scattered about the roads and between the trenches. On the right of the road I saw a broken machine gun, surrounded by dead ; their faces, in many cases, had been covered with grass or haversacks laid over them. On the left, about six hundred yards off, were the guns of an abandoned battery, also thickly surrounded with dead. I met their Major, Nutt, at Torgau. He had a most miraculous escape, a bullet going clean through his "neck, without touching any vital part.

Our position did not look to have been a good one—the ground was too undulating to admit of a good field of fire, but, nevertheless, the foe had suffered very heavily. Forty-eight hours had elapsed since the last shot was fired ; all the wounded had been removed, but the

Germans were still searching the fields for their own dead, half a dozen of whom I saw laid out at the side of the road, whilst away to our right a cart full of dead Germans was making its way towards two enormous circular pits, where the soldiers were being buried ; the officers were mostly buried on the outskirts of the town, their graves being marked with wooden crosses. On arriving in the town, every house seemed to hang out a Red Cross flag, many windows were shattered, and some houses on the outskirts of the town were knocked to pieces. . I saw several parties of English prisoners in the street. Presently we separated, the Colonel and Gray were sent to hospital and I went with the men to what was to be our quarters for the next three days—a small church with a little bit of yard, about twelve yards each way, running down to the street. About 160 of us in all were crowded in here, mostly English; there were some French soldiers and a few civilians.

Besides myself, there were four subalterns^—Upton, 20th Hussars ; Butler, Manchesters, Le Grand and Bream, Intelligence Corps, and three French officers. The conditions were horrible, sanitation was not even attempted. The state of the place before we left it must have been a great source of danger to the town, as well as to ourselves, but although we mentioned it to every German officer who visited us, medical officers included, they remained absolutely callous.' Sleep was rendered impossible, on the last two nights at all events, by myriads of. Flies. The Unter-Officier who had accompanied us on the march, was in charge (he was a University man with Honours in Classics), and he certainly did what he could for us—he kept a corner for the officers, got us some chairs to lie on, and allowed the officers to go out in the town, for three-quarters of an hour daily under escort, and tried to plead our case with his superiors, but quite without success. We were locked in from 8 p.m. till 6 a.m. During the daytime we were allowed in the yard. We were well fed ; the Germans gave us coffee and biscuits in the morning, and a good feed of meat and vegetables at dinner-time. The French Red Cross came twice a day, bringing soup or tea and bread, and the inhabitants brought in bread, butter, jam and even cans of beer.

The churchyard was littered with the debris of the battle, and I was glad to observe a good many spiked helmets amongst it, judging by the way that most of them had been battered about I should imagine that the heads inside had had a pretty bad time of it. From the debris, I extracted a haversack, and as there was a draper's shop just opposite I was able to leave I,e Cateau the owner of a clean shirt, socks and handkerchiefs. On the morning of the 29th there was a civilian fatigue party to bury our dead. Several officers asked permission to accompany it, and collect the identification discs, but this was refused. Later in the day I saw the guns of the deserted battery brought in.

All the time we could hear the bombardment of Maubeuge going on. The German guards posted over us

were civil, and always ready to execute commissions for us, in exchange for a riodeest pourboire. On the morning of August 31st we were ordered to march to Cambrai, a distance of about 15 miles. About 35 officers, mostly R.A., Suffolks and K.O.Y.L.I.'s, were assembled, besides a number of men. Before starting we were each given about a pound of bread and a small piece of raw bacon, and at the halfway halt we had a good feed from the camp cooker—the last square meal we were to get for four days. Although we were going to Germany, it was a great blessing to be once again in the fresh pure air of Heaven, and out of the pestilential atmosphere in which we had passed the last three days (some men had endured it for five days). I had about as bad a sore throat as I ever remember, and it took me some time to get rid of it. We passed some gendarmerie en route ; they wore very showy green tunics. I heard stories of their having ill-treated prisoners and slashed them with whips.

At Cambrai our escort was replaced by Landwehr men in blue uniform, and we were kept waiting outside the station for about three hours, during which time we were freely baited and insulted, and even threatened with violence, by the Landwehr men and other low class soldiers, mostly, I think, of the Land Transport service. Some of us appealed to passing officers but they only laughed. At last the end came and we were marched into the station and entrained, third-class I think, and rather overcrowded ; usually two of us stood, taking it in turns, so as to let the others get a nap. The journey was a very slow one ; we took 24 hours getting to Brussels, where the Belgian Red Cross were allowed to give us some bread—nothing further had been given us by our captors. The Germans appeared to be making good all the ground they had won ; entrenchments and obstacles were in the course of construction everywhere, and rivers of troops were flowing to the front.

On September 2nd we entered Germany and passed through Cologne. Here and at other stations the German sentries were liberally supplied with everything, and food and water were given to the French and Belgian prisoners, but the cry of "Nichts fur die Englandern !" was to be heard at all stations, . accompanied frequently by insulting remarks and behaviour. We were glad when the train moved on. The sentries behaved well, and would get us water when no one was looking. Towards evening we stopped at a station, where there was a canteen, and we were allowed, on payment of two francs each, to have a meal of coffee, black sausage, bread and cheese, and those who had water bottles got them filled. The next morning, September 3rd, we were given a buttebrod with a shaving of sausage, and a very small cup of coffee. This was the only food that the Germans gave us during the whole of the railway journey.

At 10 o'clock the following night we reached Torgau. I had nothing to eat that day except a strip of raw gherkin given me by a sentry and a few crumbs of stale bread scraped out of my pockets. My throat was little better,

my mouth and lips badly swollen in consequence of a continuous diet of bread and sausage, and I was so cramped from the over-crowding in the train that the first steps were a matter of considerable difficulty.

The men were separated from the officers at Halle ; at Torgau we found the streets crowded by a mob, which, except that it comprised a large percentage of soldiers, reminded me of the Falls Road during the Belfast riots, with this exception—we couldn't defend ourselves. The distance from the station to the fortress was quite short—just a few hundred yards along the river bank—but by a refinement of cruelty we were marched right through the town. On issuing from the station the mob greeted us with groans and howls of execration. Nor was this all—they spat on us, threw mud and stones and even struck us with, sticks, and a French officer, already slightly wounded, was badly bruised. We passed a building which appeared to be a sort of Club. The balcony was thronged with well-dressed women who shook their fists, shouted " Schweinhunds ! " at us, and seemed to incite the mob to further outrage. Our escort consisted of an Unter-Offizier and 14 old Landwehr men. The former certainly exerted himself to protect us, and to rouse the somewhat apathetic men under his command. It was with a feeling of intense relief that, after crossing a bridge, and passing through a gateway, that we heard an iron gate clang behind us. We were inside a German prison, but, at all events, we were safe from the German mob.

The description of Torgau belongs to the next chapter. Before closing this one, however, I will mention that they gave us no food that night and no breakfast the next morning. At one o'clock a meal was served of pork and pickled red cabbage, followed by some greasy-looking stewed plums, but I have never sat down to dinner with a better appetite.

PRISON CAMPS IN GERMANY. TORGAU.

We found ourselves inside a semi-circular yard, whose diameter was formed by a thick, loop-holed stone wall—one of the outer walls of the fortress and containing the guard house—the circumference by a one-storey range of barracks. We were quickly pushed into the barrack rooms, and told to lie down and go to sleep. The cots were mostly on the cabin system, i.e. one over the other; they were only furnished with' a mattress and bolster, but as the night was warm this didn't matter. It was a great relief, after what we had gone through, to be in clean surroundings, and able to lie down at full length. The next morning we found the shower baths in working order, and I was glad both of that and of a shave. There was a canteen in barracks, which was fairly well supplied with refreshments, underclothing (of a rather flimsy quality) and the usual canteen etc., but at present it was not of much use to us, as they would only accept

German money. I managed to borrow two German pennies from Major Peebles, Suffolk Regt., and breakfasted on a cup of coffee and a butterbrot. Later in the day a money-changer came in, and at, I dare say, a considerable profit to himself, exchanged both English and French money.

We were the second party to arrive at Torgau. There were more arrivals shortly, and soon we had over 100 English officers, including 5 C.O.'s and 4 senior Majors. Then the French came in swarms from Maubeuge. Bruckenkopf (bridgehead), as the fortress at Torgau is called, was built in the days of Napoleon I., and was utilised as a prison during the Franco-Prussian War of 1870-1; one of the three French Generals brought in from Maubeuge had been here as a subaltern. Life at Torgau was not too bad. At first we were only allowed the use of the courtyard, but after a few days the drill ground behind the barracks was thrown open. This was large enough for two football grounds and some tennis courts—we managed to start these games presently; there was also a skittle alley, and for a time we were allowed on the ramparts, from which we got a good view of the surrounding country, could watch the German Reservists at drill, and the schoolgirls trooping past, singing, obviously by order, "Deutschland uber Alles!" as they passed the fortress.

The barrack rooms were fairly comfortable; they were supposed to hold 11 men apiece, but we rarely had more than 7 or 8. For each cot a good-sized cupboard was provided with a shelf and a lock-up drawer, pegs for coats and a couple of earthenware basins. I used the smaller one for ablutions and the larger one for washing clothes, for at first we had to do everything for ourselves down to peeling the potatoes. Later on we were allowed some of our own men as orderlies, in the proportion of one to every six officers, on condition that we paid for their messing, and this arrangement was maintained throughout the whole period of captivity. Meals were not eaten in the barrack rooms, outside each there was a small alcove in the passage furnished with tables and forms. There was a capital bath room, furnished with showers only, but this is an advantage where the numbers are large. The barrack warden in charge, who had held the appointment for thirty-five years, was quite one of the features of the place, an old grey-bearded man wearing mufti, with a uniform red cap. At first he was disposed to speak to us in the tone which he presumably took when addressing German recruits, but he soon became quite affable, and there was nothing he would not do for us, no forbidden article that he would not procure from the town and smuggle into barracks, provided that he was well paid for it. It was even said that "after dark" orgies could be indulged in at his cottage, which was situated in a quiet corner of the fortress. This was probably true, for I heard later on that he had got the sack, which he undoubtedly well deserved, for he was a first-class old scoundrel, but he had been of great service to us.

By arrangement with the British Government we were allowed to draw £5 per month, about half of which was stopped for our rations. We were, I think, given fairly good value, according to the state of the markets, and money in those days would purchase most things. A second canteen was established on the drill ground and communications opened with local tradesmen and laundries.

English books were got from Dresden, footballs and tennis requisites also; these were much appreciated, for the only amusement available, hitherto, had been physical drill and washing our clothes. We were allowed to read German newspapers. There was a chaplain amongst the prisoners, the Rev. B. G. O'Rourke, who soon organised an excellent service, for which we were allowed the use of one of the storerooms. A present of altar linen was received from the Rev. W. S. Swayne, Vicar of St. Peter's, Cranley Gardens, whose son was also a prisoner. I used to read the lessons sometimes.

Breakfast was at 8 a.m. We had all to be clear of our rooms by that hour. Roll calls were held at 9 a.m. and 5 p.m. lights out at 10 p.m. Lock up varied with the seasons.

Our great anxiety was, of course, to let our friends at home know that we were alive. It was some time before communication by letter was established, but fortunately a suggestion was made by the Commandant that we should subscribe to the German Red Cross at Torgau. We all jumped at this, and gave cheques on condition that they were passed through as quickly as possible. I put a line on the back of mine, asking the banker to communicate with my people, and they heard through this on October 9th that I was alive. I and a great many others had been given up as dead, and our obituaries had appeared in the papers.

Towards the middle of October, communication by letter was established. And parcels began to arrive. At first we were only allowed to write one postcard a week, but things improved, and latterly a letter could be written every Saturday and postcards on Wednesday. Both were kept for ten days before being despatched, and censored both in German and England.

Now a few words about the Commandants, of whom we had three. The first, Lieut. Kleinstuber, had been Sergt.-Major of the Torgau Regt., and was promoted to a commission on the outbreak of war. He was quite a decent fellow and had the advantage of being a soldier. He conversed freely with the prisoners, and under him friendly relations were established between ourselves and our guardians. I often used to talk with one of them, a civil engineer, who was medically unfit for the front. Presently, however, Kleinstuber was sent to the war, and his place was taken by Capt. Braun of the Reserve—a postmaster by profession I was told. He was a man of a very different stamp, who treated his soldiers in a harsh and tyrannical manner, forbade them to hold any intercourse with the prisoners, forbade us to address him

under any circumstances, and insisted on us being closely inspected on parade, to see that we were clean and properly dressed. But his special delight lay in composing insulting circulars to the English, in which he usually compared them unfavourably with his own countrymen, and a specimen of which I give herewith :—

"Every day applications from British officers reach me which are so entirely without justification that it is not worth my while to take any notice of them. Officers appear still not to realise the fact that, as prisoners of war, they have not so much rights as duties. They are not to take up my time with the expression of foolish wishes.

"If this state of things, which betrays a certain bumptiousness on the part of British officers, does not cease, I shall take the opportunity to put in charge of each room a French sub-Lieutenant risen from the ranks, and I shall further apply that a proportion of your Allies, the Russian officers, may share your rooms.

"This order of mine is to be posted up in the British quarters. Will you please, Colonel, report to me in German the fact that these instructions have been obeyed. " (Signed) Braun, Captain,

"Officer i/c Prisoner's Depot."

This was supposed to apply to an application made by the Medical Officers and Chaplain to be returned to the seat of war, in accordance with the provisions of the Geneva Convention. All applications had to go through Colonel Gordon, V.C., the Senior British Officer, and he was very particular as to what he passed on; Capt. Braun left us in November, and his place was taken by another

Reserve Officer, a lieutenant. He had been travelling valet to some English nobleman, and was a great improvement on his predecessor. Things went smoothly under him up to the finish.

As the number of prisoners increased, the store sheds were utilised as quarters, and some wooden huts built on the drill ground. The French got hold of some musical instruments and started Sunday concerts. We formed classes with the French for learning each other's language. One death, unfortunately, marked our stay at Torgau. At the end of September, Major Yate, K.O.Y.L.L., escaped from the fortress, but it cost him his life. He disappeared one Saturday night, and the next afternoon we heard he was dead. How he died exactly we never knew. He had a distinguished record of service, and was much missed, for he was a splendid linguist, and used to translate the German papers to us.

Towards the end of November rumours got about that the English would shortly move on. This soon proved a reality, and at 2 p.m. on the 27th, we were paraded and marched off. This time, we were taken to the station by the shortest route, and were let depart in peace. A few small boys shouted, " God damn England ! " but that

was all. So Torgau came to an end.

BURG..

At about 10 o'clock on a cold frosty night we detrained at Burg, after a cold journey in third-class carriages. A crowd was waiting to see us, and greeted us with a hostile demonstration, but there was no spitting or actual violence. We had to walk about a mile, along a country road, deep in half-frozen slush, carrying our belongings. I had my portmanteau in my right hand, a basketful of mess property, plates, knives, etc. in my left, a tin bucket of jam slung over my forearm, and my greatcoat pockets stuffed with more articles of mess equipment. The barracks, which were quite in the country, were two long rows of buildings, about 15 yards apart, the total length a little over 100 yards.

On getting inside we were first counted to make sure that no one had escaped en route, and were then told off to our rooms, which were cold, but the beds were more comfortable than at Torgau. We were given a meal, consisting of very watery sausage, a slice of bread, and a cup of tepid tea, and sent to bed.

There is not much to say about Burg, as I only remained there ten days. It was the first station at which we met our Russian Allies. One of them was a boy of 12, who appeared to have been employed as a sort of powder monkey. They were very pleasant companions, and usually spoke French, but had a great objection to open windows, or to entrusting their clothes to the mercies of a laundress.

I was in an upstairs room, from whose window I could see the troop trains passing. The Commandant, who, as usual, was a Lieutenant, seemed to look on us in the light of defaulters, for he was always blowing his whistle, at the most inconvenient times, on which we had to double off to our rooms, and stand to our beds till we had been counted, which usually took at least an hour. On one occasion he entered a room where an officer, Colonel Bond, K.O.Y.L.I., was reading his Bible. The Colonel rose, placing the Bible on his bed, whereupon the Commandant kicked it off, and said that if he found a prisoner laying anything on his bed again he would give him a fortnight's cells (at Torgau, no objection had been raised to this practice). The matter, however, came to the ears of the G.O.C. of the garrison, and he insisted on the Commandant apologising.

We were deprived of our razors (I have a receipt for mine) and sergeants were sent round our rooms in the morning to see that they were in proper order. The bath room accommodation was limited, and only admitted of a bath once a week. The food was better in quality, but inferior in quantity to Torgau.

However, there was a canteen, and also a tea shop in barracks, and both well supplied, but just before I left Burg orders were given that we were not to be sold any tea, white bread, cake, pastry, jam, butter, pepper,

sweets or preserved fruits. At the tea shop the waitresses were of a superior sort to the usual canteen women, and much more obliging ; one of them was kind enough to get me a blanket and a pillow, both very useful, which she got in the town and smuggled into barracks. I was willing to pay her liberally for the possible risk she ran, but she would accept nothing. Indeed, German women, as far as I saw, were usually harmless and obliging to prisoners.

Early on December 7th, in torrents of rain, we marched back to the station, and after waiting a long time outside were at last entrained in fourth-class carriages. These are like luggage vans with benches along the sides. It was not a very long journey. About 2 p.m. we reached

HALLE,

about the worst of the five prisons I was in. It was a large factory, with a dirty yard', partly paved with cobble-stones, and containing a large and ever-increasing refuse heap. The main building, in which we had our meals, was a large hall, with a couple of stoves, and a canteen at one end. It was dirty and rat-infested. We were not, as in other prisons, charged for messing, but purchased all our food at the canteen. Weekly bread cards were issued. Soup, of the resurrection type, could be obtained at dinner and supper time at a cost of a penny per plate. A hot dish (usually rancid pork and pickled red cabbage) was always available for lunch, and cost sixpence. Coffee at breakfast only. The only other things available were biscuits, cheese, minerals and rollmops—a small lump of pickled fish.

We were greatly overcrowded in the dormitories. There were 34 in mine—only 2 other Englishmen—and we were not allowed to sleep next to each other. I don't think we should ever have put more than 20 soldiers into a room of that size. My next door neighbours were a Belgian and a Spahis (Algerian Native Cavalry). The beds, needless to say, were packed very close. The mattresses and bolster were filled with a mixture of straw and shavings, but one good warm rug and a part worn blanket were issued to each of us. Electric light, just over my bed, was kept burning all night. At first I used to blindfold myself in order to sleep. Visits by the sentries were frequent at all hours of the night. Parade was held in the yard ; the officers in charge were not over punctual, and frequently kept us standing for a long time in the cold—it was a very severe winter. One of them took it into his head to make his division salute, according to the German method, and continually had them paraded for this purpose. This officer was subsequently posted to Torgau, where he indulged in the habit of peeping into the rooms through the keyhole ; the Commandant heard of it and insisted on his removal.

On the far side of the yard was an ablution room, containing half a dozen tin basins, and a shower bath with about the same number of sprays. Warm water was rarely procurable in the latter and never in the

former. There was a very salutary rule. Every officer was required to take a bath once a week, and also to produce certain garments for the laundry every Saturday. This probably saved us from an outbreak of jail fever.

As regards recreation, the yard was not much of a place to walk in, particularly in wet weather, when it became the sea of black mud, and we were never allowed to stand or linger anywhere in view of the road. Books were plentiful, and as at Torgau some of our Allies possessed musical instruments.

Nor were we entirely without religious advantages. Mr. O'Rorke had remained at Burg, but a German pastor, Professor Dobschatz, came to us every Sunday and conducted a service in English. He was a conscientious and well-meaning man, but his ministrations failed to arouse much interest. There was a man cook in the canteen, who had been at a hotel in England, and liked it better than his own country. Through him we were enabled to obtain some plum duff for Christmas, which gave us a little variety, for we were not allowed to receive any parcels of food. They were taken and put into stores. About Christmas time smoking was forbidden.

In March, a visit of representatives of neutral powers was announced, and " inspection fever " broke out to some extent. I think the visitors represented America, Spain and Sweden. Out of a multitude of complaints, the following were selected by the Senior Officers to be laid before them :—

- (1) Overcrowding in the barrack rooms.
- (2) Withholding parcels of food.
- (3) Stoppage of smoking.
- (4) Continual overhauling of ourselves and our belongings by civilian detectives.
- (5) Constant and unnecessary interference by sentries.
- (6) Soldier prisoners employed by us as orderlies, though paid and fed by us, were continually being taken from their legitimate work to do fatigue work for the Germans.

The visit of these gentlemen worked wonders. Smoking was at once restored, and the other things came in time. The canteen was better supplied, and we were soon able to get a half bottle of wine on Sundays. A new Censor was installed, and letters began to arrive. We had received none for over six weeks, not did any that we wrote during that period reach our friends.

In April, I was moved from the over crowded barrack room to a room in the gallery. There were six of us—three English, two French and a Belgian. The room commanded a view of the road, no inconsiderable luxury in those days.

In June, 1916, the Senior Officers were asked if they wished to be transferred to Augustabad, near Neu-

brandenburg. I put my name down, and we were marched off one Saturday night to the station. Things had improved, but I left Halle without any feeling of regret. I heard shortly afterwards that a Russian Officer committed suicide there.

AUGUSTABAD.

We were in third-class carriages, but not overcrowded. Breakfast was provided at a small station, just outside Berlin. We passed the famous drill ground, the largest in the world, and plunged into a region of forests, reaching Neubrandenburg at 3 p.m. The latter is an interesting old town, surrounded by a moat and a high loop-holed wall, with watch towers. It is built at the end of a large lake, the Tollen Zee, and Augustabad is about two miles[^] off, on the north shore of the lake, and on the edge of a large forest. We were lodged in the hotel, much frequented in summer-time by the English, in times of peace.

The Commandant, a Lieutenant who had been badly wounded early in the war, made us a speech of welcome, announcing his intention of doing everything he could for us. It was refreshing to have a real soldier for our Commandant again, after the Landwehrmen and Reservists.

Augustabad was the best of the prisons ; the chief drawback was, that being built as a summer residence, it was very cold in winter, of which more anon. There were about 120 of us in the hotel, which was rather a crowd— four in a double-bedded room and two more in its dressing-room, only two bath-rooms ; the dining-rooms (2) were very crowded, and the bar, which was in a sort of greenhouse, by no means watertight, had to be utilised. It was the only station I was in, where we were allowed outside the barbed wire. There were marches twice a day, Sundays excepted, for two or two and a half hours.

Not more than 40 were allowed on each march. Bathing and football—the latter rather a farce—were permitted. There was a tennis court in the Hotel Compound, and we were allowed to make a second one. Another hotel was presently taken into use, and we were allowed to pay each other visits on Sundays.

Books were soon so plentiful that we were enabled to send some away to the men's camps. Concerts and theatricals were got up in the winter, and, thanks to Major Day, R. Warwicks", and Captain Jervis, Munster Fusiliers, were a great success. Fancy dresses were hired in the town, and some of the young officers were quite a success in the female parts.

I remained here for two and a half years. At first we had French, Belgians and Russians with us, but in the Spring of 1917 it was made into a camp for English only. When we vacated it, it was filled up with Italians. We were very sorry when our Allies left, for their presence gave us an opportunity for the study of languages, and There

were some very nice fellows amongst them.

I then took to working at Mathematics to keep my mind occupied. We got letters and parcels more regularly than elsewhere. Latterly, all tins had to be opened before they were given us. We started keeping rabbits in the garden, and they were a welcome addition to our menu. The winter of 1916-7 was a very severe one. The temperature was often down to 15 degrees below zero, which is as cold as it ever was in Nova Scotia when we were there.

The whole lake was frozen hard, and we were taken out marching on it. For a short time, skating was allowed, then Berlin put a stop to it. The ice did not break up till late in April. As the hotel was only built for summer use we felt the cold a good deal. The central heating in the dining-rooms collapsed, and we had to eat our meals in great coats and gloves. All our tinned food used to come up frozen, and there were other inconveniences to be faced. The first Commandant soon left, and was replaced by a bottle-nosed old Count, who had been a Major of Cavalry. He was a fiery old gentleman, but perfectly straight and sound, and never allowed trumped up charges to be brought against a prisoner. We were sorry when he left—his successor, who lasted till the finish, was far from being an improvement. One of the Adjutants was a very nice old man, who had won the Iron Cross in the 1866 campaign.

Those who needed it were allowed to visit the local dentist, and this was looked on in the light of a treat, though he was far from being a gentle operator. To judge from his methods, I think he must have been the workhouse dentist, but going to him enabled us to see the town. For our walks were confined to the country.

Several escapes took place from Augustabad, but no one managed to avoid recapture, the distance was too great. I will not describe the methods employed.

The first escape was effected by Lieut. Hardy, Connaught Rangers, and two Frenchmen. The latter were caught at once, but Hardy got as far as the sea, and was taken on the wharf. He made several other attempts, and in April, 1918, succeeded at last and got back to England. On one occasion 17 officers escaped, but were all caught. Major Shewan, Dublin Fusiliers; stayed out the longest; it was ten days before he was taken. The penalties inflicted for attempting to escape were not, I must admit, very severe.

One soldier of the regiment, Pte. Checketts, found his way here. He had been wounded on the night of August 25th, 1914, and fell into the hands of the enemy the next day. At first food was plentiful. We had meat every day, butter and jam at breakfast, and extras were always obtainable on payment. Wine, beer and spirits were on sale at the bar. But gradually all this melted away, and no food was to be obtained except the bare rations, which had shortened up considerably. We became more and more dependent on our parcels. Wine and spirits

vanished from the bar, then beer, and only soda and raspberryade were procurable. Butter, jam and honey were no longer issued, meat only three times a week. Mussels were often given as a substitute. I noticed during the walks, that the children looked thinner and paler than of yore, also that the number of people gathering firewood in the forest had greatly increased, and that there was a great shortage of stockings. We could no longer get our boots mended. Things were evidently going hard with the Germans.

There was one suicide whilst we were at this station—a Frenchman hanged himself.

In the autumn of 1917 we began to hear of the negotiations with Holland. Soon we were told that the internment of a number of English had been arranged, and that we should shortly vacate Augustabad. Definite orders came in due course, and on the morning of December 9th our long stay at the latter place came to an end, and we were entrained for Berlin, en route to

HOLZMUNDEN.

Near Hanover. We reached Berlin about 2 p.m. and marched across the town, but attracted absolutely no notice. We went along the famous Unter den Linden and through the Brandenburg Gate, where the Prussians made their victorious entry in 1871, to the Potsdam Railway Station, where the Berlin Garrison entrained for the West front. Here we had some time to wait, but were given a good dinner at the restaurant. A long broken journey brought us to our destination by two o'clock the next afternoon. Holzmunden is a big, grey stone barrack, built in two blocks outside the town, in cold and desolate surroundings. There is a large barrack square.

About 600 officers, all English, were quartered here. The Commandant, Captain Karl Neemeyer, was a German-American, with a bad reputation. Here, I may say, that the weak point of the German prison administration seemed to be, that there was no Central Authority. Every Commandant treated his prisoners just as he liked, and even the subordinate officers interfered with them in a manner which would not be permitted in England. Herr Neemeyer greeted us with the cheering tidings, that as we had arrived after the dinner hour there would be no dinner for us, and that as bread was issued twice a week, and there had been an issue that morning, there would be no bread for us for four days. This didn't matter so very much—lots of officers had bread or biscuit sent out from home, so there was always plenty of ration bread to spare—it was dark and unwholesome in appearance, but had the merit of being very substantial.

To continue— we were shown into a cold and fireless barrack room, and I worked for the greater part of the afternoon, at patching up the rents in my mattress. Roll call was at 4 p.m. Shortly after that we were shut in for the night. The next day, by virtue of my seniority, I

was transferred to what I suppose was a sergeant's bunk, which I shared with the Medical Officer. The beds, as at Torgau, were one over the other.

We experienced very cold weather here. Firewood was only issued once in three days, and then only enough to last for about six hours; I often grubbed about in the snow for splinters of wood to keep the fire going for a few minutes longer; once, to my joy, I found a whole log. The dining-rooms, however, were entitled to a special allowance of fuel, and were usually, though not always, fairly warm. There was a bath-house on the square, but it was always out of order. Hot water could be got from the kitchen twice a day, and I sometimes got a bucket, and had a sluice down in the corridor. At Augustabad they had contented themselves with opening all our tins. Here they had to be emptied out, which involved a considerable expenditure on plates and basins. There was no Censor's Department, and I didn't get a letter whilst I was here.

Bread, as I have said, was issued twice a week. The remainder of the menu was : Breakfast, black coffee; dinner a mess of vegetables, or a sort of porridge and twice a week a very small meat ration. Supper, thin soup or tea and a slice of cheese. Once they gave us jam. I had rather a dismal Christmas as my parcels had gone to Augustabad, and my fare' consisted of rations (it wasn't a meat day), plus a little jam. Four other officers of the Regiment were in captivity here, but I hadn't met any of them before.

At first we didn't know how long we might have to stay at Holzmunden before the arrangements with Holland were completed, and we quite expected that a move would not take place till Easter. Just before Christmas, however, to our joy, a small party was dispatched to Aachen, which is a clearing station for Holland, and shortly afterwards the names of a second party were published, in which I was fortunate enough to be included. I made a will leaving all parcels of food which might arrive for me to a fund for newly-taken prisoners.

On the morning of January 2nd, 1918, we left Holzmunden in a snowstorm. A long, cold and dark journey in third-class carriages, with frequent waits on open platforms, brought us to Cologne at midnight. It was a scene of great bustle, thousands of soldiers passing through. I noticed that most of the railway officials were women. We were told that we had to wait for a train till 6.30 a.m., and were put into a passage under the station, but were soon taken out, and marched through narrow silent streets for about a mile, when we were halted outside a low tavern, called an "All-night Public-house." We were shown into a dirty tap-room with a bar tended by two villainous-looking women, who, however, bustled about and soon got us a rough meal, and as the place was quite warm, we were better off there than in the cold passage. Our train left punctually, and at 8 a.m. we reached

AACHEN (AIX-LA-CHAPELLE).

our last station in captivity. Here, our troubles were over. The Museum, where we were quartered, was close to the station. A gallery, which had been fitted up as a dining-room, was comfortably warmed; there was a good bathroom, the food there was better than anything we had been given for a long time and the officials civil. Several officers had arrived already, including some old Torgau acquaintances; the men, of whom there were about 200, were located in the basement. There was a small yard for exercise.

On the 4th, our last day in captivity, we were marched down to the station in the morning, to have our baggage examined, and in the afternoon a Paymaster attended, to square up our accounts. Reveille on the morning of the memorable 5th of January was at 3 a.m., and we were soon under way for the station, and indulging in third-class carriages for the last time. The train ran close to the frontier for some distance, but it was easy to follow our course on the map, and a big cheer went up from the train, when we crossed the frontier and saw the last of the hated spiked helmets of the frontier sentries vanish in the distance. A few minutes later the train drew up at Venlo. We got out and were handed over to the Dutch Military Authorities. The long nightmare of our imprisonment in Germany was over.

INTERNEED IN HOLLAND.

Space will not admit of my writing a guide book on Holland, or describing our experiences there in detail. Nor will I speak of the cordial welcome that we met with, on arrival at Scheveningen, for that has been described in the papers. I must mention, however, that most perfect arrangements were made for our reception at Venlo, and for the journey across Holland, by the indefatigable Miss Vulliamy, a lady to whom every prisoner who passed from Germany to Holland owes a debt of gratitude, and that we were very fortunate in getting two such G.O.C.'s as Sir John Hanbury Williams and Brigadier-General A. Graham Thomas.

I will pass on to a brief description of our organisation during interment. The officers were quartered mainly in four large, hotels—two of them on the sea front, and a fifth hotel was used for offices, and as a receiving barracks for men arriving from Germany. Some officers were granted permission to live in lodgings, and even to go out in the country. A limited number of officers' wives were allowed to come out, for a period not exceeding four months, on condition that they worked in the canteens, hospitals, etc.

The men were placed in billets, or in some cases in temporary barracks. They were divided into Districts and sub-divided again into Groups, of which there were eleven, each commanded by a Major, who was assisted by one or two captains, and subalterns, according to the

size of his Group. The Groups were formed according to Regiments, i.e., one consisted of men of the mounted services, others of Guards, Highlanders, Naval Ratings, and so forth. Our men of whom there were about 40, were located at Townley Hall—a temporary barracks named after the British Minister, and were in the immediate charge of one of our officers, Lieut. Haywood. Major A. G. Prothero, Welsh Regiment, was the Group Commander, and the Regiments with us all had numbers in the 40's.

No tactical training could, of course, take place, nor is the study of military text-books allowable in a neutral country. We had route marches, church parade, various fatigue parties and physical training; all young officers had to attend the latter. There were some lectures on military subjects, also on Holland and its history, and on various other matters. Educational classes were formed, for both officers and N.C.O.'s, and the latter were allowed to be examined for educational certificates.

For recreation, a large piece of ground, the Tontoonsteling, was handed over to us, and by means of the above-mentioned fatigue parties, we presently had one Rugby and two Association football grounds (the latter was used in summer for cricket); two Hockey grounds and Tennis courts, as well as an outdoor Boxing stage and Bandstand. Wooden buildings soon sprang up on one side of the ground—the first of these was a canteen, commonly called "The Hexham Abbey Hut." It was surrounded with gardens, and consisted of a large hall, with a bar at one end and a stage at the other; there was also a billiard room, two libraries and a tea room for officers. The canteen was under the Y.M.C.A., who did splendid work for us throughout. The "Leader," as he was called, was Mr. S. M. Burrowes, C.I.E., formerly a distinguished member of the Ceylon Civil Service, and a most capable and courteous manager. Many ladies', English and Dutch, kindly gave their services as waitresses and librarians.

Close to the canteen was a second building containing store rooms for games, changing and bathrooms, and caretakers' quarters. Then came workshops, and, finally, a large gymnasium, used on Sundays as a church. In summer, service sometimes took place in the open; many officers attended the Embassy Church at The Hague. Smaller canteens existed in several parts of the town, and tailors' and bootmakers' shops, etc., were also opened. We had our own postal department, ably organised by Lieut. R. Stirling, "A" and "S" Highlanders.

Inter-Group Tournaments took place in all forms of sport, and we played matches with Dutch Clubs, at cricket, Association football and Hockey. The inhabitants did not at first approve of the Rugby game, but are now beginning to take it up. The results of the season's cricket will, I understand, appear in both Wisden's and Ayres' Annuals—the latter from information supplied by me. Sunday is the usual day for matches in Holland—

Dutch cricket teams are not usually very strong. They generally seem to me to consist of about four players and seven others. We had a two-day's Athletic meeting in the summer ; it was a great success. Highland games also took place, but were unfortunately interfered with by the weather.

As regards bounds, we could go about five miles to the North, three to the South and two West of The Hague (The Hague is about two miles from Scheveningen, and easily accessible by tram). Once a month passes were permitted to visit Haarlem, Leiden, Delft, etc. I recommend all visitors who may find themselves in Holland in springtime, to visit Haarlem when the tulips are in bloom. The country for miles round about is then one of the most splendid sights that I have seen. All shops, etc., kept by Germans were out of bounds.

During the riots, which took place in April, The Hague was out of bounds for two or three days, and men were shut up in their billets at five, officers at six o'clock.

I was lucky enough to obtain, at the start, the same post that I had previously held in the 1st Battalion, as O.C. Football and Hockey. I held it till the end of the season, when I handed it over to a former officer of our 3rd Battalion, Major Van de Weyer, Scots Guards. Two former members of the 1st Battalion Football Team were here, Cpl. Hoar and Coy.-Sergt.-Maj. Summers—the latter frequently acted as conductor of the P.O.W. Band. Cpl. Harris distinguished himself in several Boxing Tournaments. In the Inter-Group Tug-of-War, nearly the whole of Major Prothero's Team belonged to the Regiment.

Sergt. Hughes was one of the Gymnastic Instructors. We had two tea parties for the Regiment, one in April, the other on Maiwand day, when we were photographed, and we all signed a message of congratulation to the 2nd Battalion. I heard a lot of regimental news, and got to know, for the first time, of the deaths of Capt. T. R. Aldworth and Lieut. P. N. Garnett. Several other officers of the regiment were here, including Lieuts. Haywood, Holloway, Henley, Olding, etc.

Holland is an expensive country at the best of times, and the influx of English sent the prices up a lot. Most things were cent, per cent, more expensive in November than they had been in January. At one time there was plenty of meat, but soon we were living mostly on fish and eggs—then eggs dropped out. There was a great shortage of bread and butter ; tea for a long time could not be got. Jam was about to be rationed when we left. There was always plenty of vegetables, rice and shrimps. We were not allowed to have parcels of food sent from England, but a large amount of biscuit, 'corned' beef and Maconochie rations were sent over for the use of the men. Holland's (Gin) went up from 4d. To 8d. Per glass during our stay. Advokat (the favourite Dutch liqueur) from 6d. To 4d. ; cake and pastry from 2/6. to 5d. Per slice.

Our men seemed to make friends very quickly with the Dutch girls, notwithstanding the difference in language, and a certain number of marriages took place. Several officers followed suit. England and Holland always appear to have intermarried extensively.

Dutch troops of all arms are stationed at The Hague. The men looked sturdy and workmanlike, but did not seem to be very well drilled—they lacked smartness. The barracks were large and commodious. There is a large review ground, the Malie Veld, but no reviews were held whilst we were there. We were now able to get English papers, and follow the course of the war a great deal closer than had been possible in Germany.

During the spring offensive, when the wind was in the right quarter, the sound of the cannon could be clearly heard at Scheveningen, and after a storm mines were frequently washed up on the beach.

The early days of November were naturally days of considerable excitement for us. We got the news of the Armistice on the evening of the 11th, Sir Walter Townley kindly causing the news to be telephoned to all the hotels directly he received it. All passes outside The Hague were at once cancelled, officers who had permission to live outside were called in, and all ranks were warned to prepare for repatriation. At 6.30 p.m. on Thursday, the 14th, I was warned to embark for England the next day. It had been intended to send married men only by the first ship, but room was found at the last moment for a few bachelors.

We left Scheveningen on the afternoon of the 15th, a large company attending at the station to witness our departure. We went to Rotterdam, and got on board the SS. "Stockport" about midnight. Sergts. Hughes and Smith and Cpls. Ward and Hoar were the only N.C.O.'s of the regiment on board. There was a tremendous crush, officers sleeping in the smoking-room, dining saloon, passages, in fact anywhere they could find room to lie down, nor did the vessel appear to possess any bathrooms. No drinks were obtainable, but what did all this matter ? We were going home.

Before bidding adieu to Holland, I ought to have mentioned that all ranks were much indebted throughout to the kindly offices of the British Embassy. Sir Walter and Lady Susan Townley took a most practical interest in our welfare. They were the first to welcome us when we arrived, and they came down to Rotterdam to see the last of us. Nor must I forget the Baroness de Briennan, who generously placed her beautiful country house, Klingendaal, at the service of officers who were run down and required a change. Indeed, the Dutch were most hospitable to us throughout.

The voyage took till Sunday, as we had to take a zigzag course to avoid the minefields, and anchor all night, but shortly after noon on the 17th we reached Hull, and landed in the presence of an immense crowd, who gave us a real royal reception. After being hospitably

entertained at the offices of the United Fruiterers' Company, we entrained for Ripon, where we spent the night in huts.

On the 18th, after the customary medical inspection, we found ourselves at liberty to return to our homes.