

Volume 2 Section 354-07**Life as a Prisoner of War****22820 Lance Corporal Sidney William Page****Introduction**

Sidney William Page was born 4th June 1898 and enlisted as a regular soldier in the Royal Berks as 22820 3/5/1916 giving his age as 18 years 11 months when he was in fact only 17. His occupation was given as clock jobber. He was posted to the 3rd Battalion, then at Victoria Barracks in Portsmouth for training.

Eventually he joined the 5th Royal Berks in France and was with C Company as a Lance Corporal when he was captured by the Germans at the battle of Cambrai on November 30th 1917 along with 120 others men of the 5th Battalion. At the same time his chum, Pte F J Painter (202175) was captured and they formed the nucleus of a small group who stuck together and looked after one another, an essential prerequisite for survival as a POW. He tells of others who were not so fortunate who committed suicide.

His account, which follows, gives a very detailed picture of life as a Prisoner of War. In particular it tells of the work they had to undertake and the way they interacted with the Germans. For most of the time he was in camps in Belgium and it was evident that the Belgians were not suffering as badly as the German civilians. They provided the British prisoners with extra food and when the parcels began arriving the British were very well fed in comparison with their captors.

He eventually escaped with Pte J Bray of the 12th Kings Liverpool Regiment and turned up at the British lines just as the Armistice was being signed. His laconic comment to the effect that if had known this was happening he would not have bothered to escape is a fitting conclusion.

He wrote this account while at Bicester in late 1918 and dated it 1/1/1919. The following March he was seconded to the Ox and Bucks as part of the expedition to North Russia. He was awarded the White Star of Russia but as the Bolsheviks eventually triumphed he never actually received it.

During the Second World War he served with the Pay Corps having rejoined in 1938 in anticipation of the war and reckoning this was a better position than having to go back to war in the infantry.

He died 5th May 1974

**The Account**

The Account is typed on 36 pages and begins with his capture at Cambrai. His first camp was at Dülmen near Dortmund in Germany but he was soon moved to a camp near Tournai in Belgium, no doubt because of the acute shortages of food in Germany at the time.

We have slightly rearranged the paragraphing and introduced some headings but otherwise it is exactly as he wrote it back in 1918.

Capture 30/11/1917

The 30th November 1917 will be a day to be remembered by some thousands of English soldiers who were in the line on that day, several divisions including the 12th, 20th, 29th and 55th fell into the none too gentle clutches of Jerry as we were in the habit of styling our hunnish foes. I was one of the unfortunates. At about 7.30 am on the above day the Germans had broken through our line at some point unknown to me, and had taken our front

line trenches and had advanced in some places back to even our large guns, but the support lines had been passed and remained occupied up till 3.00 pm in detached parts of the line although quite cut off from any help. I was in support, and at 12.45 pm, our ammunition having quite run out, we perforce, had to surrender to a crowd of Jerries who came over to us shortly after.

I was with a party consisting of two subaltern officers and about 20 men. We took off all our equipment and left it in the trench together with our rifles and bayonets. The only thing we were allowed to carry was a haversack containing our gas helmets. After filing out of the trench one by one, we were sized off into pairs, and were given a long pole and a waterproof sheet with which to improvise a rude stretcher.

Carrying a German

My companion and I were directed to remove a wounded German who lay groaning in a sunken road, which was still under shell fire. We got him out with some little difficulty, his weight being as near as I could estimate, about 15 stone. We carried him, with very short halts, for the sentry in charge of us would not let us stop for more than about three minutes, until 7 pm that night, walking with him in all, roughly 20 kilometres. This was very hard work, and by the time we arrived at the dressing station where we dumped our patient, I at least, was ready to drop with fatigue, and my shoulder ached for weeks afterwards.

The first Cage

At the dressing station we found some more of our fellows who had been taken the same day, we all fell in, and were counted about sixteen times the Germans counting us many times to make us seem more if possible. There were about 200 in the whole party. After the counting ceremony was over, we began a lengthy march and at about 11 o'clock pm we arrived at the cage in which we were to pass the night. In the cage were many more prisoners altogether about 2000. The cage was merely a large grassy field fenced with barbed wire, and which contained no shelter of any sort. In this we tried, quite unsuccessfully, to rest during the night. It was very frosty and much too cold to sleep.

Six of us would lie down together for a quarter of an hour, and then walk about for an hour to try and get warm again. We had no overcoats, or extra clothing of any sort, and our only head gear was our steel helmets. When we lay down very close together we would take turns to lie on the outside each thus taking his turn to keep the others warm. Several tubs of water were brought in during the night by way of refreshment.

Le Quesnoy

The next morning we were all lined up in our respective battalions, divisions etc, and marched out of the cage under a multitude of posterns, almost as numerous as ourselves) who also had their bayonets fixed. The first to go out were given a quarter of a dark brown loaf, which was very sour. After a few hundreds had marched off, the bread ration was reduced to an eighth of a loaf, while the last two hundred got no bread at all. I was one of the unlucky ones at the rear. After a march of some ten kilometres we arrived at a small railway station, where we were accommodated in cattle trucks, and moving off at 2 o'clock in the afternoon we arrived at 6.00 pm at Le Quesnoy. We walked from the station a short way down

the road to a large boat factory, where we stayed the night. The place was too crowded to allow us to lie down, so we sat down back to back with our knees up and spent a very uncomfortable night that way. All things come to an end however, and in the morning we were given a bowl of coffee between two and a loaf between eight. The coffee, which was an infusion of burnt barley, was hot, which is about all that can be said for it. The bread was exceedingly heavy and very sour, and the colour of dark brown paper. As we received these delicate comestibles we filed out into a garden and were not allowed into the hall again until everyone had received his portion.

Into Germany 3/12/1917

At 11 o'clock we lined up again and were given a bowl of sauerkraut, which, hungry as we were, we could not possibly eat. Soon after this, I saw a party lining up at the gate and went with my chum to join it. When there were 500 we were marched up to another cage and joined a larger party who had been there all night. We were inspected by an officer, and if anyone was seen not standing to attention, a big fellow who looked like an under officer, went over to the delinquent and punched him, frequently knocking fellows down.

It was here that we first heard ourselves called by the extremely polite name of "shwinerei Englanders". After the inspection we marched off to the station and got into the cattle trucks which were to carry us to Dillmen. The doors of the trucks were closed and locked (each truck holding 50 men). About 5.00 pm we started on our journey, the train like all continental varieties, proceeding at a crawl. The journey was uneventful enough, as we were locked in the whole time, we could not see much.

After we had crossed the German frontier, we came to a snowy region, and it began to get very cold. At 4.30 pm on Tuesday Dec 4th, the train stopped at a small station named Haltern, and here we all got out. After standing about for an hour and a half during which time 'We 'Were being continuously counted, we moved off through the village. The residents did not take much notice of us, but they were all very amused by the kilts of a few Scotchmen 'Who 'Were with us.

Dülmen Camp 4/12/1917

The snow here was very deep. We marched for about a mile and arrived at the camp of Dülmen. As we filed through the gates 'We were each given an iron spoon, and 'We then went into a large hut. A supply of bowls was brought, and instead of giving them out one to each man, the German, merely threw them at us and we had to scramble for them. When we were all in possession of a bowl each, we filed out of the hut one by one, and received a ladle of pea meal soup, which, being the only food ye had had since the previous Friday except an eighth of a loaf, went down very well.

After soup we returned to the hut where we stayed the night. The following morning we received two thin slices of bread each and a bowl of hot coffee, the bread being the total amount of the days ration, except a bowl of so-called soup. After breakfast, parties of 40 were taken out and all their clothes fumigated. My chum and I got away with a party at about 11.00 am and after our clothes were fumigated we were taken away to huts. Each hut held 60 men, the beds being lengths of cocoanut matting in double tiers, slung in the fashion of hammocks.

Attached to each hut was a smaller room, to accomodate 8 men in which the A.C.O's of the party lived.

The camp was divided into groups (groupes) No's 1, 2 and 3, and the groups into separate compounds and the whole was fenced round and subdivided by barbed wire fences, outside of which the sentries were placed. Electric arc lamps were placed on tall standards at one corner of each compound. All the huts were lighted by electric lights, and heated by stoves burning coke. Each compound contained 5 huts which in turn were divided into two parts A and B respectively thus, one side of a hut would be 11A and the other side 11B, each part holding 60 men as before stated. Each compound then, contained a complement of 680 men including all A.C.O's.

In the afternoon we went to the stores where our steel helmets were taken away, and we got in return 2 small rags dignified by the appellation of blankets. We were also searched, and our pay books taken away. A great many fellows 'Were also relieved of their pocket books, photographs and letters. When this ceremony was concluded we were free to return to our huts. My hut was 14A Gruppe III.

At 5.00 pm we were served with a mealy concoction humourously named soup and immediately afterwards we were paraded for roll call. The routine one day was much the same as another. Reveille was at 6.00 am when a bowl of so-called coffee was issued. At 8.00 am we were all paraded for roll call which ceremony occupied about half an hour. When the number was found correct, we were dismissed and allowed to return to our huts. Soup was issued at 11.30 am, and it was fetched from the cook-house by two orderlies, appointed daily. The majority of the fellows would line up for the soup at about 10.00 am, to make sure of a good place in the line. Those who were first served, generally managed to get another issue before all the soup was gone. At 4.00 pm we were served with bread, the two thin slices before mentioned. After the bread had been issued we were counted again and, as soon as we returned to our huts the soup was fetched and issued.

The First Parcel 6/12/1917

On Thursday December 6th, we were greatly excited and pleased by the issue of an emergency parcel between two. The parcels consisted of four ½ lb packets of biscuits, three small tins of nestles milk, two ½ lb tins of cheese ½ lb tin of dripping, three tins of beef, small packet of tea, ¼ lb of cocoa. These were issued at 6.00 pm on Thursday evening and by 9.00 pm the same night, all that remained of my parcel was the packet of tea and ½ the tin of dripping. The tea we smoked between us (my chum and I) with the exception of a small brew which we made in a milk tin.

During our three weeks sojourn in Gruppe III we were paraded ten times in front of the medical officer, six times for inoculation, thrice for vaccination and once for medical inspection for fitness, all of which I evaded, except one inoculation and the medical inspection. We had nothing to do to pass the time away, most of the time indeed we used to lie in our hammocks and talk about food and our favourite dishes.

Christmas 1917

On the Thursday preceding Xmas day we moved to Gruppe II. Here the arrangements were identical with

those of Gruppe III, with the exception of the bread ration which was one thick slice instead of two thin ones. An emergency parcel between two was supplied on Monday, Dec 24th, but I had none left for Xmas day. our Xmas dinner consisted of a bowl of watery soup in which was boiled a few black pigeon peas, a spoonful of fish was also issued. The fish was strongly impregnated with ammonia, I think that ammonia had been pumped into it to prevent it going rotten. It was almost impossible to eat it, as the ammonia rose into the nose as soon as it was put into the mouth.

In Gruppe II, I was in a bunk with seven other lance-corporals. We were ostensibly in charge of the hut No 10B, we each took turns to act as orderly corporal, which duties consisted in taking two men to fetch the soup, bread and fuel and to issue the soup to the inmates of the hut. All the inmates of the hut seemed obsessed with the idea that we were swindling them out of their proper rations and being half mad with hunger, we had the utmost difficulty in controlling them. We managed to keep them from actual violence, but whenever, or in whatever manner we served the food out, there was always plenty of grousing, and threats of raiding the bunk. We had to keep a close watch on them or someone would be sure to 'do the double' and in the case of the bread this was serious, because it meant that someone would have to go without. One could hardly blame the poor fellows, for in the throes of hunger, one hardly knows ones own actions, it is the hardest possible task to keep any thing eatable for even a minute.

Every alternate morning we had to do camp fatigues, and any of the fellows who had the chance would run off to get out of the work and of course the posterns would run after them to catch them and some mornings it would be 11 o' clock before they were all ready for work. It was laughable to see the chases round the huts, the pursuer brandishing a long bayonet and the pursued dodging in and out and gasping for breath.

To pass the time away we made a set of dominoes out of a card-board box, and we would play dominoes all day long. 'Tip it' was also a favorite game with us. We also made a set of draughts from some cardboard.

The third and last emergency parcel was issued on Nev Years eve. In the bunk we sat up till midnight, singing songs and spinning yarns, and at midnight we all joined hands and sang 'Auld Lang Syne' and wondered what they were doing in Blighty.

On the Move 17/1/1918

In this way we managed to exist until January 17th when we were to "stand to" to go away. Previous to this about a day, we were given each a pair of wooden clogs Dutch pattern, an old overcoat with a brown armlet on the left arm and small round cloth cap, without a peak. From our own packet store we were each given a small piece of yellow soap. In the evening of this same day January 15th when the orderly corporal went to draw bread for our hut he found that someone had anticipated him and that our bread had already been drawn. We made a search of the hut, and of all other huts in our compound, but we could not find the bread. After we had made inquiries we searched out the camp commandant and had the utmost difficulty in persuading him to issue more bread.

On Thursday Jan 17th we were given two days rations of bread, and paraded for roll call, and about 3.00 pm started off for the station to proceed to our then unknown

destination.

The snow was still hard on the ground, as indeed it had been for all the six weeks we were in Germany, and it was still freezing hard. The short march of about a mile to the station was soon negotiated, and after a short delay we got into third class carriages and started off about 4.30 pm. In the train I cleared up what was left of my two days ration, and then wondered how I was going to last out for two days with no more food. There was no cause for worry however, for we were well fed on the journey. We had three issues of excellent soup, and three turns of bread and coffee so far our part we began to wish that we were always travelling. The good treatment on the journey seemed to hold out better hopes for the future than we had held before and we thought we were lucky in leaving the rotten Dillmen camp behind.

On the way we were held up by several troop trains, and to some of the troops we sold our soap, and all odds and ends that they took a fancy to. My chum and I got for our soap a loaf and a half. We did a bit of swindling on this transaction, in this manner. Our soap was rather a large piece being two issues in one. When we showed the German the large piece he offered us a loaf for it, and while he was gone to get the loaf we cut the piece in two, and gave him half the original piece after we had got possession of the loaf. In this way by dividing the soap up into two pieces again we got nearly three quarters of a loaf more. My putties went for three quarters of a loaf, and my chum got half a loaf for his cap badge. I will here mention what I forgot to write earlier that we flogged or sold any articles that we possibly could, for food. A wrist watch I had in my possession I sold for ten marks, a white loaf, two packets of biscuits and a lemon pudding, a silver cigarette case went for five marks and four packets of biscuits a cardigan jacket fetched two army ration biscuits and two thick slices of bread, a Swan fount' pen and a tube of sohel ink refills, for fourteen French bread biscuits and my shirt and boots together realized a loaf of bread and three marks. For my cap badge I got two cigarettes.

There is always a great sale for soap amongst the Germans, as their own soap is a dry sort of article very much like monkey brand which will not lather at all.

Tournai 19/1/1918

On Saturday morning, Jan 19th, we came to the end of our journey. We marched from the station to a large cavalry barracks where there was ample room for the 2,000 of us that had arrived. We reached there at 5.00 am in the dark, and it looked very much like a huge prison. As soon as it was light we had a walk round and found from some theatre posters on the walls that we were in Tournai, Belgium. My chum and myself soon discovered the only garden in the place, and raided it, from which we got three red cabbages, and fourteen leeks. The cabbages and leeks went down very well together, but I think after we had eaten them we were hungrier than before.

We did not get any food until 4.0' clock that same day when we were served with a bowl of horse-lean soup, and after that we had a loaf between three and a bowl of coffee.

The next day we were on parade nearly all day, the officers of No's 1, 2, 3, & 4, coys were busily sorting us out. I found that I was in No 1 coy, and that my number was 320. We all had our own numbers to put on our

caps, a small stencil cut number was given us. and if found not wearing it we were liable to punishment. Outside the barrack walls were some Belgians gardens, and they often threw over small swedes and turnips, and we used to scramble for them. In a few days No's 2 & 3 coys moved away to other Kommandos, and then we did not have to wait so long for our soup. There were two cookhouses working, one for No's 1 & 2 coys and one for 3 & 4. If no. 2 coy got to the cookhouse before us we often had to wait for an hour and half before we were served and then often enough the soup had to be watered to make it last out.

The First Working Party 23/1/1917

The first working party went out on Wednesday, Jan 23rd. One hundred men went out to some cement works about three kilometres away from the barracks. Of course I was one of the party. My chum and I were lucky in being in the rear, and on the way through the streets we received all sorts of eatables from the Belgians. Dodging the posterns, we would run out of the ranks right and left, and Belgian women would give us slices of bread, swedes, and all sorts of eatables, while from the men we got tobacco and cigarettes. They were not allowed to give us anything or even to speak to us, the punishment if caught doing so was ten days imprisonment, but they did not mind that. They were very glad to be able to do anything for us.

On our march we made great friends of a boy aged about 13 years. He ran home and reappeared about ten minutes later with a parcel of bread and lard and some tobacco, as he was leaving us he gave both of us a penny each. The work we had to do was to pile up some sacks of cement ready to be carted away. Nine out of every ten we ripped open so that as soon as it was carted away the contents would fallout.

We worked at this until 4.00 pm and went back to barracks, in a different direction from which we came. This was done to prevent us seeing the same civilians that we had passed in the morning. We had a change of scene the next day instead of going to the cement works we went in the opposite direction, 200 went to Froyennes distant from the barracks seven kilometres, and 200 went to Marquain which was eight kilometres from the barracks.

Froyennes 24/1/1918

I went to Froyennes, and there we started digging trenches, and worked until 1 o' clock when we finished and went back to barracks. Those who went to Marquain were not so lucky, they had to work until 3.00 pm, and the work was much harder, making roads was what most of them had to do. We all had to wait for our soup until the whole coy was in. After soup we had our coy no' painted on our arms and on the breast of the jackets. This was to prevent any of us 'doing the double' on the rations. If we got in amongst another coy we were identified by the large No 1 on the armet and breast of the coat. For a few days we had all our, food such as it was, issued in the evening, and being so hungry, we usually cleared the lot up at once. This left us with absolutely nothing to eat for the next 24 hours, so we were pretty hungry by the time the next lot came along. The first Sunday we were in Tournai, the Belgian relief officials brought us some soup in, but there was not enough for the 2,000, and because of this, added to the disgraceful exhibition we made by rushing for it so much, the officer of the battalion forbade them to bring it in

again.

Marquain 25/1/1918

My first day at Marquain was on Friday, Jan 25th. That is a day to be remembered, because when I eventually arrived back at the barracks at night it felt as though I had no feet left. My boots were worn out, and I had to wear my clogs to work, and a march of eight kilometres in such things as those for the first time in my life did not produce a very comfortable sensation. As all the roads are paved with cobbles, they are not very good for marching. When I got to work I had to push a wheelbarrow full of clay over a wide ploughed field, across which was placed a narrow plank for the wheel to ride on. I had to keep this job up until 3 o'clock in the afternoon, the clogs insisted in sticking in the mud, and the string with which I had tied them on was continually breaking. Added to this was the discomfort caused by the rim which came across the top of the foot, and which soon wore all the skin off. And wheeling a heavy wheelbarrow is pretty hard work on no food.

By the time I got to barracks that night I was just about ready to pack up all my troubles, and find a nice quiet corner to die in. I never allowed those sort of sentiments to possess me very long, and after all it was not a bit of good being miserable, as it did not add to one's material comfort and only infected others and made them morbid.

When we lined up in the morning it was usually a great trouble to get fellows in the centre of each four. All wanted to be on the outside rank for the purposes of 'scrounging' if a man was on either of the outer ranks he could easily run out and take any article offered by the civilians. They were very brave some of these Belgian women, The posterns would chase them into their houses and knock them about with rifle butts, but the next day they would be there again just as the previous day.

Shot at

An exciting event occurred after we had been out for a few days. The under officer and posterns were in the habit of carrying thick sticks with them to keep us in order and one day, when we were marching back from the aerodrome, one fellow rushed out of the ranks to take a piece of bread from one of the civilians. One of the posterns made a rush at him and started knocking him about with a stick. At this our man got enraged and taking the stick from the postern, retaliated in the same fashion. All the others drew their bayonets, and one of them shot at our man, The shot entered his stomach and out into the thigh of another man. All the civilians were very frightened, the women and children screamed, and all the other posterns got the "wind up", as they thought that we should mutiny. The fellow who was shot in the thigh was taken to hospital in a lorry, while the original aggressor, who was wounded in the stomach, was made to walk home with us and was taken to hospital two days later. He spent three months in hospital and when he was well, was sentenced to fourteen days imprisonment and three months in a discipline camp.

The Discipline Camp

The discipline camp was situated about eight kilometres away from Tournai. and all those in the camps round about who were too refractory to be dealt with in the ordinary way were sent there. I have not had personal experience there, but from those who have been there we got accounts which did not say much for it. The

prison in which we were to be confined occasionally, for most absurd offences was the civilian peace time prison. It was practically always full up with prisoners of war, and civvies who had transgressed in some trifling way. In fact so many things were 'verboden' that it was hard to tell when we were doing wrong.

Kain

Late in January a 'Kammando' of two hundred men from No 1 coy went to a village about eight miles from Tournai which was named Kain. On their way through the town an officer stopped the party and soundly rated. Aeroplane Bill (as we called the underofficer) and his satellites for carrying sticks and ordered them to throw them away there and then, and forbade them ever to carry sticks again. They obeyed, looking very sheepish the while, and since then. I have never seen a postern take a stick out, while in charge of a party.

The party at Kain had a better time than we at Tournai, they had plenty of soup and bread from the Belgians, and had not so far to walk to work. Their work was to make a training ground for the German troops, dig trenches, fit up rifle ranges, and such like. We still carried on with digging trenches and working at the aerodrome at Marquain. I got into trouble one day while working there. I was using a stamper to stamp flint into the road we were making. and while I was working away I broke the handle. I applied to the 'jerry' in charge of the job, and he supplied me with another and soon afterwards the handle of that broke too. When the German saw the second one broken he started swearing at me, and I told him "Nix essen nix arbeit" meaning that as I was getting no food I intended to do no work. He took me along to the officer in charge, and he merely took my number and threatened to report me, but I heard nothing more about it.

Antoing 21/2/1918

On Thursday, February 21st, a party of twenty-three, of which I was one, went to Antoing a small town eight miles north of Tournai, to join part of No 2 coy who were billeted there. In all, the party in the billet numbered one hundred. The billet was an old concert room, adjoining a convent, and would ordinarily have held about fifty people. We had to sleep anywhere possible. Four of us slept together on the stage. Plenty of wood wool was served out to us which made sleeping a little more comfortable, but in a few days it was running over with body lice. Here we always had a 'chat hunt' about four times daily, and managed to kill thousands between us, but in an hour or so they were just as bad as before.

The work of our party was to go round to all the disused cement factories in the vicinity, and to clear up all the old iron and wood we found lying about. Occasionally, when we had a decent postern in charge of us, we would work in shifts. Twelve would work for half an hour and the other twelve would make a fire with the old wood, and we sat round the fire for half an hour at a time. One of our jobs was to fill a large hole in the floor of the factory, and we were following our usual method, of working in shifts one day and along came the sergeant who was in charge of the 'Kammando'. When he saw us sitting round the fire he went off, like a ginger beer bottle that has been shaken some. Of course we had to put the fire out and resume work. When we got back at dinner time we were issued with only half a ladle of soup, and the postern was packed off to another Kommando. The rest of the coy used to work at the railway station, filling up trucks with

clay and ashes, and packing stones under sleepers. very often we went out on 'buckshee' jobs, and after walking for about eight or nine kilos, find nothing to do when we arrived there.

One such day we had a long walk along a canal bank for ten kilos. The day was very frosty but dry and we started out at eight o' clock. We arrived at our destination about ten, after wandering out of our course to visit an old sugar factory to see if anything was to be done there. When we got to the village we were bound for the only thing we did was to move a pile of bricks 'Which job took us about two minutes. It was a job that anyone man could have done by himself in ten minutes. They are great organisers the Germans. That way of doing things is typical of a good many other things they do. As regards counting, we considered ourselves very lucky if we were counted correctly within three tries. Usually we had to stand on parade, while the 'jerry' in charge of us paced up and down counting us as many as twenty times. After he had counted us, he would usually stand engaged in some abstruse calculation which occupied him for ten minutes or more. While at Antoin, we would turn our spare time on parade to the very useful purpose of picking 'chats' off our neighbours coats and heads, and they would do one good turn for another, and perform the like kindly office for us. 'Doing the double' on the soup was what interested my chum and myself more than anything during our stay at Antoin.

A Belgian lady, seeing my chums bowl was not very large, had very kindly given him another larger one, telling him to dump the small one. He having an eye for the great use that two bowls could be put to, omitted to dump the small bowl, but kept it hidden in his bed. When we came in from a working party he always contrived to be first at the cookhouse, while I took his coat in and brought out the 'buckshee' bowl. By the time I got to the door he was back from the cookhouse with one bowl of soup which he handed to me, and I gave him the extra bowl. I used to dump the first bowl of soup inside the door, in a recess, and then lined up on the end of the others and got my own soup while my chum got another bowl. When we got in we divided the extra soup, and often had the temerity to indulge in a chuckle over our ill gotten buckshee. The chuckles came to an abrupt and painful end one day, just before we were due to leave Antoin. The jerry cook caught us in the act of substituting one bowl for another, and instead of the usual surreptitious cackle after dinner that day there was a heart-rending sound of groaning, and profuse swear words, a feeling of deep animosity against all jerries, especially cooks, pervaded us two unfortunates. We went without soup all that day, but even that, after a while could not deprive us of the unholy feeling of satisfaction, which we felt when we thought of the way we had done the jerries.

A spoonful of salt was issued every day when we got coffee at five pm. This we used to put in the coffee, and then imagined it was soup. It is hard to put into words what it feels like to be hungry. One of the effects is to feel discontented with everyone about, as though, they were responsible for it. It turns men into snarling wild animals, akin to ravening wolves. We were always wanting to fight someone, and yet we were really too weak to do anything of the kind. One scarcely ever heard a civil word spoken, except among 'mucking in' chums. Even chums would usually fallout at least once a day, when two fellows were 'mucking in' anything belonging to the one belonged to the other and vice versa. The fruits of 'scrounging' expeditions was invariably shared evenly

between the twain. When I was first out in the morning, and picked up a quantity of cigar or cigarette ends, I always put it or them away, and shared later with my mate. Nothing came amiss to us, once we were out. Odds and ends of paper, for cigarette papers, cabbage stumps, potato peelings, fag ends, stinging nettles, anything we had a chance of picking up, went into that universal repository, the lining of my overcoat. Cabbage stumps were a luxury because in them we had something to chew at, but we did not turn up our epicureanly inclined noses at grimy spud peelings. Stinging nettles were most delicious when boiled, and I would strongly advise anyone who is at a loss for cabbage at any time to give them a trial.

Cooking Hedgehogs

Once, while at the cement works, a Welshmen who was one of our party found two young hedgehogs. He covered them thickly with clay, and put them in the centre of our fire. We kept a roaring fire up and when the clay was baked hard, he took them out. As he took off the clay the spines and skin came along with it, and they smelt delicious. The smell did not lie either, for 'Then he gave me a portion I thought I was eating young chicken. It was certainly one of the most tasty morsels I have ever eaten.

I made a knife about this time, with a strip of sheet iron I found amongst the debris in the factory. I tied two short pieces of wood on either side binding them strongly with some twine. Then my chum and myself took turns at sharpening it on a piece of slate. It was a long job but by the end of three weeks, after sharpening it every day, we got a sort of edge on it. True it struck at 'jerry loaves', but it wants a good strong knife at any time to make an impression on them. We were quite proud of this knife of ours, and as imitation is proverbially the sincerest flattery, we were awfully flattered some weeks later by seeing a whole host of these improvised knives making their appearance.

Pay Day 11/3/1918

March the 11th was a day to be remembered, for on that day we were first paid. Only the members of No 1 coy were paid, and we each received the munificent amount of 2 marks 40 pfennig. When ye got that we immediately felt our immense superiority over No 2 coy, but when we started showing it, we soon got taken down, as they were in numbers, four to one against. The Belgians brought soup in to us twice a week at Antoin. Sometimes we had soup, and sometimes haricot beans boiled up with small pieces of bacon. They also brought us caps, shirts, socks, pipes, cigarettes, and spoons. These were issued by the interpreter who belonged to No 2 coy and so fellows of No 1 never had a chance at all.

Every evening at 6.00 pm they brought in comestibles for the sick, and if there was any over the interpreter got it for himself in this manner. All the extra stuff he would get together, and call for order. When order reigned he would tell us what he had over, and tell the fellows to come up for it one at a time of course every man in the room rushed at him simultaneously, each trying to be in front of his neighbour. Then the interpreter would calmly say, "There now you see what an impossibility it is for me to dish this little bit of stuff amongst you crowd, there is not nearly enough to go round the whole, and since you make such wretched hooligans of yourselves by rushing, you shant have any of it, I will eat it myself" and suiting

the action to the word he soon disposed of the buckshee delicacies. This scene happened every night, and if by any great good chance any man other than a sick one, got any thing extra, it was not the interpreters fault, he, poor man, tried his hardest to keep us on the good path, and to refrain from rushing and making beasts of ourselves, and incidentally to eat all the extras himself.

There was always great hatred between the members of the two different companies. This really happened because we unknowingly erred against their unwritten laws when we first arrived at Antoining. As we got into the billet for the first time, a Belgian brought a sack of white bread and gave to us, and we, marvelling at our luck, and feeling at peace with the world at large, began to turn our attention to the bread. When we had it nearly all shared out, the interpreter came out, and nearly had apoplexy when he saw upon our doings. He ordered us to put all the bread back, as it appeared it was a daily gift to the billet from the local soup kitchen. Needless to say we politely but firmly declined to give back the bread, once we had our talons on it. Then, men of No 2 coy, came out, came, saw and tried to conquer, but it did not come off, and in the midst of the tussle the underofficer came out, and when he learned what the squabble was about, he straightaway went to the soup kitchen and told them they were to bring no more bread to the 'swinehund gefangeners'.

Of course when the main party of No 2 came back from work, and learned of the loss of their bread, relations became very strained between us and we always were hostile to them until we left. Some of our methods of trying to get extra soup, would have exercised the risible faculties of a mere onlooker, one who was not hungry. Some of us would be first, on the chance of getting a fuller ladle, and some would fall in last, because it was thicker. Those who wanted to be first would rush to get there, and those who fancied the last place would loiter and dawdle about, on most flimsy pretexts. Those who were first had the chance of lining up again. Those at the other end if they saw enough in the copper, would ask for some extra, on the plea that he was last man, and as there were no more to come could he clean the copper out. Oh, we were most polite to the cooks. they were, in our eyes omnipotent, and our manners to them, when they were in power would have done for a London drawing room. In each cook house were two of our own fellows and one jerry. and our two country men we usually considered the most lucky men on the face of the earth. They were allowed as much soup as they wanted, and what better prospects could a hungry man want than those offered by unlimited soup, even if it was not the best?

Fish and Ammonia

Even now I can vividly remember our disappointment over one dinner. It was unanimously voted the best dinner we had had, or were likely to have for that matter, but it was spoilt by the introduction of a superfluity of the ammoniated fish, before mentioned. The cooks had a large quantity of fish on their hands, and to prevent it from going bad, they stick the whole lot into the soup, which was a very thick concoction of white meal. That dinner was always known as "that ere good dinner as was spoilt by the fish", and even to the present day we mourn it as a dinner we might have enjoyed but for the fish. We never seemed to make up for the loss of that dinner, somehow, we always, in our calculations, seemed to be one behind.

The first Saturday we were at Antoining, we had the finest

scrounging day we ever had. That day is one of the very few days of my experience as a prisoner, on which I can look back without regret. Indeed when I look back to it the remembrance brings a warmth to my heart. It was on a Saturday as I have said before, and we sallied forth from our billet at the usual hour of eight pm to seek fields fresh and pastures new. Our destination was a village about twelve kilometres away, and our job when we got there, was to lie on the grass and spin yarns with the two very fatherly old posterns. We struck oil on our way there, for we had to pass through several villages, and the villagers came flocking to us with arms full of bread, tobacco and cake. The posterns agreed to halt us outside each Village, if we would, on our side, give them some of the spoil. Of course this chance was too good to miss, so we told the posterns we would give them some bread, and they accordingly let us stop just outside each village for about ten minutes. The village population turned out in force and brought us food in plenty, in some cases they even brought soup in buckets. We lost our way and went through another village which received us the same way as the others had done.

When we arrived at our halting place we shared out our gains, which, amongst the twenty two of us amounted to something like a loaf and a half each and about eight or nine ounces of Belgian home grown leaf tobacco, to say nothing of cold potatoes and beef, and odds and ends of cake, which, along with the soup was accounted as buckshee, and of no value.

As it was a very fine day we enjoyed the rest, lying on the grass, which was the only work we did, and at 1 o' clock we started back, for home, shaking hands with ourselves, telling one another how fortunate we were in having such an outing. The old posterns were very decent, trying to tell us after the manner of their kind, that their sole sympathies and thoughts were for us, that they were Saxons and therefore our brothers, and that they hated all officers and capitalists. In fact every German soldier I have come in contact with up to the present, seems to have a fanatical hatred of all capitalists and officers.

They had certainly run a risk in allowing the village people to bring us gifts, for, had an officer come along, he would have sentenced them to three months imprisonment. When we got back that evening we lost no time in telling the rest of the Kammando of our good times. They turned green with envy, and one and all muttered something about, 'some blokes as all the luck'.

The Cement Factory

One of our jobs at Antoining was to clear out an old cement factory to make stables for jerrys transport horses, and while doing this we were under the supervision, and working with some Belgians. Often one of us would smuggle off to a latrine where perhaps a Belgian would find us and put some tobacco down to be picked up by us. The whole district around Antoining is full of cement factories, some of which are still working, the manager, managing the business for the Germans, being in most cases the former owner.

Wez 12/3/1917

On Tuesday March 12th all No 1 coy (20 now 3 having gone in hospital) left Antoining, not before we had given the place a thorough cleaning out, and burnt the lice infested wood wool. The whole of No 2 coy had gone to

the baths at Tournai to have a bath and have their clothes fumigated. We had to stay behind and clear up for them, and then go on to a different camp at the village of Wez. After we had cleared up, we set off fortified by the thought of a loaf which the corporal had given us for clearing up. On the way we had several pieces of bread, and I got two marks from a boy.

When we arrived at Wez, we were not allowed to go within thirty yards of the rest. 'The rest' were the other part of our own coy which had been at Kain and three hundred of No .3 coy. The reason we were not allowed to go near them was because we were so fearfully lousy ~ and they ~ having been recently fumigated and bathed, were spotless compared with us. They all shouted at us the news, and praised the new camp (Wez) in such glowing terms, that we all felt sorry we had not been able to come before. One fellow told me that my bowl was much too small to hold the issue of soup, so fearful of losing even a little drop, I borrowed a 'drumming up tin' from him, and armed with that, I felt better. When I came to draw the soup which was sauerkraut, I found that the proportions of the ladle had been grossly exaggerated, and that my bowl would easily hold the lot.

Getting rid of lice

Immediately we had had soup, we were marched off down to Tournai for a bath and fumigation, that, when I got it, being the first wash, I had had since I was captured. My hair was cut at the same time, and that was the first time it had been cut since the 17th of November 1917, so you may guess, I had some fine locks by that time. They were shaved right off. with some close cutting shears. It was very fine to get a bath after being a stranger to soap and water for such a time, and although the soap at the baths was nothing to shout about, the hot showers worked wonders. The baths were really well arranged, and we went through exactly the same process as the German soldiers. We went first into a room heated with hot air, and stripped naked, hanging our clothes over a hanger on which was printed a number. Then we marched boldly forth into another room in which were the showers. The door was shut and the water turned on, and we revelled in the unaccustomed heat, for about ten minutes. After this we walked out into another small room where we got a towel, a pair of wooden clogs, and a pyjama suit. Afterwards we were painted underneath the arms, and between the legs with a solution guaranteed to kill all chits in quick time. If it did not kill the chits it ought to, for the smell of it nearly killed me outright.

Then we sat down in another warm room to wait for two hours while our clothes underwent the process of fumigation. When they were ready we waited for our own numbers, and when they were called out we claimed them and dressed. Oh, the luxury of that bath. Little boys who are not fond of ablutions should go for four months without a wash of any sort, and I will guarantee, that they will never kick up a shine when asked to wash again. I felt wonderfully, bucked after that wash, and the back of my previous quests was in itself a great boon. I have been lousy in the trenches, but never like I was then. The lice were simply everywhere, I did not go for a moment of the day or night without an itch somewhere on my anatomy. After the fumigation however, there was a pleasing absence of that sensation. It was much better too, to have the hair off. Certainly my head was cold, but the lightness compensated for that, for my shock of hair was very heavy, previously.

After the bath we started back for Wez. We were bucked

by the thought of having some Belgian soup when we got there, as they were in the habit of getting it every night there. After the long dreary walk we thought that some soup would do us good. When we arrived there, however we had nothing but a bowl of coffee, as the soup was not enough to go round for the lot, so our joyous anticipations were dashed to the ground, and we were speedily disillusioned.

At Wez all the sanitary arrangements were much better, and we could get plenty of water for washing. As there was no work to do, we had daily inspections of boots, clothing etc, and we were inspected every morning by an underofficer, to see if ye had washed. If we had not performed our matutinal ablutions by the time we fell in for coffee, and bread, we were deprived of our coffee, and had to wash before we received our bread. Needless to say, it was very rarely anyone received this punishment, as we were only too glad to have the chance to wash. We also had to wash our underclothing here- Hot water was supplied, and one section per day did their own washing. A section comprised fifty men, and each was under a command of a bombardier or senior lance corporal. We worked the coy in sections for the fair distribution of buckshee soup. Each section took turns to line up each day for the extra soup, and woe betide any man who did not take his proper turn. Here, in the mornings instead of the usual coffee, we often had a mealy liquor, something like a very thin pea-meal soup, which was a decided improvement on the coffee.

Sometimes at night, the sisters from a convent close by brought us small rolls of bread, and when we left they presented us each with a pic portrait of some part of the school they were in charge of.

Tournai again 16/3/1918

We left Wez on Saturday March 16th, the whole of No 1 coy going to Tournai, and the party of No 3 coy to a destination unknown to us.

The weather during March was very fine, and sunny, and the spring flowers came out in abundance. When there was no work to do, we were to sit outside the billet, in the yard, all day, and bask in the warm sunshine. It was quite hot, the day we went back to Tournai and the march along the dusty roads made us very thirsty. However, the officer in charge, opened his heart to us, and let us all stop to drink at a wayside pump. It was such actions as these, that impressed us favourably, with different officers, and no matter what No 3 coy officer did afterwards to lower him in our estimation, he was always regarded as 'decent' merely because he allowed us to drink when we were thirsty.

We found the rest of our company at Tournai, and we were thus up to the full complement again. A few fellows had died in the meantime, from diarrhoea, dysentery, dropsy, and the like, and several had committed suicide, as they could not stick the hunger and privations. Blood disorders were very frequent too, and it was nothing to see fellows literally smothered with boils.

A party of one hundred went from Tournai late in March and about ninety of them were killed by shells from our own guns. They were sent to repair roads etc, and frequently were within range of our own guns.

The Belgians had recommenced bringing soup in at night in Tournai, and every night after work we paraded to receive it. There was no rushing however, we had all learnt by long and painful experience that it was the best

policy to take it quietly, and trust to heaven and good luck for ones own share. There was usually plenty to go round but no buckshee. The 'dollmachers' (interpreters) used to put their own out first, and naturally we were deeply interested to see how much they had but they did not get anymore than us. Some of the others would try and agitate us by saying the dollmachers were having two helpings but they were usually showed down. In all crowds one finds men of this sort.

Froyennes

No work was forthcoming until we had been back to Tournai for a week. There we started on a 'hell of a job' at Froyennes. The work was very hard railway navvying. We had to make a siding to carry Red + trains to a large hospital situated just outside Froyennes. The hospital had been previously a large monastery, and was placed just at the railhead. For the first part of the job we had to dig out the cutting for the siding. Then we had to carry up the heavy sleepers, two men to a sleeper. The long rails came next and they were the worst of all. About twenty men were the maximum who get underneath the rail, and even with that number carrying, we were almost born to the ground by the weight of it. After we had the rails fixed we had to pack underneath the sleepers, flints, ashes, and quarry offal. The weather during this period was very cold, and mostly wet and muggy as well. The R Es in charge of the work carried sticks to coerce us if we did not work well, and the officer was conveniently blind to this, he was really as big a ruffian as his subordinates. We had to work very hard and often I have felt so sick, through working on an empty stomach, that I could hardly stand. Yet if we ceased work for an instant, one of the jerries would come along to investigate, with a stick handy, ready to administer correction. Even if one of us was really ill, we were allowed no latitude.

I have seen fellows fall down in a faint, but instead of helping him to get over it they would kick him unmercifully. If we attempted to help, we were treated in the same manner. The hours of working on this job were from 7.30 am till 3.00pm. This was the time we had to work, and no rest was allowed at mid-day. To get there at the proper time in the morning we had to get up about 4.30am. If we allow an hour for getting properly out of the billet, and another hour for messing about on parade, that gave us an hour to walk to work, distant seven kilos from Tournai.

Bread and coffee was issued in the morning, but there was no chance of 'doing the double' on the bread this time, as it was issued on parade. We lined up in fours and each file received a loaf which was to eat up between the four.

On parade

Parading was always a long job as each four tried to get together every morning so that each individual could take his turn in cutting up the loaf. Perhaps two would get out on parade half an hour before their two mates and they would let no one else take the places. The jerry corporal would come along and lash about to make them get in fours, and then there was a pandemonium. All would eventually get in fours, after much swearing and raving on the part of the jerry in charge, and then he would begin counting. The least thing would put him off his count, and knowing this we had many a laugh, merely saying a number to him as he proceeded along the ranks. As he walked along the ranks he counted out

loud. Of course we could hear him counting, and when he got some way along say to seventeen in the second hundred someone would say twenty one, (in German of course), and he, instead of carrying on with eighteen, would say twenty two, and when he got up to twenty five, the end of the hundred, he would be all wrong in his calculations, and have to start again. This necessitated our longer wait on parade, but we did not mind anything that brought jerry discomfort.

Again, we were not allowed to smoke on parade, and every day invariably, the interpreter would be called for, to tell us we were not allowed to smoke. We nearly drove our gefreilin (lance corporal) mad through misbehaviour of this kind. He would see a column of smoke arising from one end of the parade. Only to see it when he got there, some more in another place. If he managed to catch someone with a 'fag' on the go he would box his ears, or smack his face. He was only a short chap and to see him reaching up at some of our tall uns was most ludicrous. In this way we managed to keep very cheerful.

Our officer used to stand on parade and choke us off for hours at a time. Often, when he worked himself up into a rage, he would go black and blue in the face. All the answer he got was a titter all along the ranks. Then he would want to know why we did not treat him with proper respect, like we treated an English officer. If he caught one laughing or speaking on parade he would sentence him there and then to ten or fourteen days 'clink'. The punishment for going sick without a cause was for the first offence five days, for the second ten days, and for the third, fourteen days, and three months at Fort Flenes the discipline camp.

Clink

One chap got five days for going sick with the toothache, and because the doctor would not pull it out, he was punished. Several fellows got imprisonment for minor offences, e.g. one for laughing at the underofficer, and one for smoking whilst marching through the town. While on the march we were not allowed to smoke until we got well outside the town, or city I should call it. When we got beyond the precincts sacred to 'officers' we were allowed to indulge in a smoke, such as it was.

My first taste of imprisonment was for a period of five days. My views regarding the fashion of my hair, did not coincide with the officers and as the officer was used to being obeyed in all respects, he wished my hair to be cut as he wanted. On the last Sunday in March we were all paraded for hair cutting, and anyone who failed to have his cut, was threatened with 'clink' unfortunately for myself, I decided that I did not want mine cut so I dodged round the corner of the barrack and in at another door. The next morning we all had to uncover and show our craniums to the officer, and he pounced on me, as soon as he saw me. So 320 was awarded the period of five days strong arrest, for having had the most audacious cheek to defy a satellite of the 'all highest'. I could not go in straight away, so followed, three days loitering about spare, broken only by a visit to the baths for bath and fumigation. When at last there was room for me, I went into the civilian prison about five minutes walk from the barracks. I was only allowed to take a towel and soap, no blankets or overcoat being allowed. It was not so bad in there, I had nothing to do but sleep in a dark cell, having half an hour's exercise each day by way of relaxation.

The warders were Belgians, and the bread was also of the variety used by the civilians. Our issue was a quarter of a loaf per day and a thin soup at 11.00 am. After, at

night, when all the jerries were cleared off, the old warder would bring an extra piece of bread into me, cautioning me to say nothing about it to anyone. Sometimes too, when there were no officers about, he would open the shutters of the cell and let the light in. On the whole, I enjoyed my stay in clink, as it was a period of uninterrupted rest. I should think it would be pretty cold in winter.

A chum of mine got fourteen days for pinching a loaf. He was going upstairs when they were unloading bread at the store, the store was on the first landing and as he passed one of the fellows handed him a loaf. He could not conceal the loaf as he had his jacket off, and in one hand he was carrying a pair of boots. As he got to the top of the stairs he met China, (one of the storemen), coming down. When China saw the loaf he made a dive for my chum, took the loaf away and gave him a severe thrashing. He then took his number, and the next day he went away to 'clink' for fourteen days.

Good Friday 1917

One of the most miserable days I ever spent as a gefangener was Good Friday it should be marked for ever as Bad (most decidedly bad) Friday, and probably one of the worst fridays in my existence. On the night preceding, some person or persons unknown had broken into the bread store and confiscated forty-five loaves. To punish us for this outrage which we were quite innocent of, (or at least the majority were) they issued a loaf between six. A sixth of a loaf was not much, and added to that we had no coffee in the morning. As the day was very wet and bitterly cold, we missed the coffee very much. We had to work that day until four o' clock. The work was to unload a twenty-five ton truck of slag between two. Every two men had a twenty-five ton railway truck of quarry offal, or heavy slag, and until they had unloaded it they were not allowed to go home. It rained hard all day, and by the time I got back that night, I was wet through to the skin, and nearly mad with hunger. The soup that day was merely dirty cabbage water, in which was boiled a little ammoniated fish. The only redeeming feature was the Belgian soup, which came in just after six, and we fell on it like a pack of ravening wolves. A man loses all his self respect under the effects of hunger, and does things that he would blush over in his saner moments. Never was that Belgian soup so welcome as it was on that Good Friday.

On Easter Sunday the Belgians brought us gifts of socks, boiled rice, and some kind of maize cake. The socks, I am sorry to say were in many instances immediately 'flogged' to the posterns for bread, or money, but the rice and cake were eaten up at once. We lingered daintily over the cake which was sweet, and therefore strange to our palates, which were strangers so long to anything tasty.

Bread and Groceries - 12/4/1918

A few days after Easter, our officer stopped the Belgian soup from coming in, and we heard later that it had been stopped all over Belgium. We missed it very much in fact, I really think that it was only that that had kept us alive so long, for we should never have survived on German rations, and worked as well. However we were not to be in such a bad way for long, for on April 12th, our first grocery packets came through. We also had our first letters from home on that day. It was good to hear from home. That alone would have bucked us tremendously,

but when we saw the parcels we were like men possessed. They were not issued on that day, but the next day all that had been sorted were issued. I got three in the first issue, and my chum had none.

Bread had also been sent from Switzerland but it had been accumulating since the 15th of December, and the whole of it was quite mouldy. We did have a feast that night. My chum and I between us cleared up three parcels, one tin of dripping, (which we eat with a spoon), one tin of sausages, two lb tins of army rations, a pot of jam, and half a pound of margarine. Added to this we brewed about two quarts of tea, and two of cocoa. After this tuck in we both laid on the bed, felt ill and sick, and could not stir hand or foot for three hours. I was bilious for days afterwards but it was worth it. We hardly knew which to start on first, it was all so good. It was fine to feel full again, and to think that we had done with the haunting spectre of hunger. The worst part of all was to see all the mouldy bread. There was a very large pile, tons in fact, and every scrap of it was unfit to eat. It seemed so rotten to waste it after we had been hungry so long, but the doctor ordered it to be thrown away. He said we would all be dead inside a week if we ate any. It was given to the horses in the 'pferde lazarett' (horse hospital).

Sleeping Accomodation

The sleeping accommodation began to improve about the beginning, of April. Previously we had been sleeping on ornamental tiles, or cement floors, with nothing underneath, and only our small blankets and overcoats to cover us. Early in April we were given straw sacks, and later, small iron cots, to hold two men. The palliasses were a great improvement, we were much warmer at night, and as the nights got warmer, we could take some of our clothes off. Another thing which was improved later, was latrines. They were a great scandal before. When we had 2000 men in the barracks, there were only four latrines, and seventy per cent of the men were suffering from diarrhoea and dysentery. Later, were put out four wooden tubs, which we could use in addition to the latrines.

Rumours

The camps were hot beds of rumours, which would arise from most unexpected sources. Always we were getting fresh rumours, sometimes about the war sometimes about packets. Hindenburg, was assassinated twice, while the Kaiser and Crown Prince have been dethroned and committed suicide respectively, times out of number. We rarely had any war news, except when the Germans were advancing, and when they were getting on so well in April, we had nothing but the news of their successes dinned in our ears.

Escaping Work

One of our jobs at that time was to hump ammunition for big guns, unload it at railway sidings, etc; I did not fancy this job, so I went sick for three consecutive days, to evade the job. Each day I was marked 'duty', and on the fourth day, the doctor apparently got fed up with me, so he shoved me in clink for fourteen days. When I came out after doing my time, the job was finished, so I did not hump ammunition after all.

Taunting the Germans

We made all the jerries wicked by making ostentatious display of the delicacies we received in our parcels. They

only had their ordinary rations, viz, two thirds of a loaf, and a bowl of soup per day, with an issue every night of jam, or as they term it 'marmelade'. All their preserves in the way of jam are called 'marmelade'. When they saw our veal pates, biscuits, bacon, and other choice eatables, too numerous to mention, they became very envious. It was no good them telling us that England was 'Kaput' any longer, if they did, ye merely told them to go and have a look at our packet store.

Building a Railway - April 1917

All through April we worked on making a light railway loop-line from outside the village of Froyennes to the hospital at the railhead. This covered a distance of three kilos, and it was built all across a marsh. When we had finished this a hundred men were sat on stretcher-bearing to help his Red + with their work. The Red + trains were coming in every day, simply packed with wounded. We had to carry first of all our own countrymen who were wounded and prisoners. These were sent down from the line in ordinary trucks, but he was so pushed for accommodation, that he had to send jerries in trucks as well. From our own fellows we tried to glean as much information as possible, but it was not very comforting, and many accounts differed widely.

Bombed by the British

During this time ye had air raids frequently, Tournai station was bombed many times. One day while we were stretcher-bearing our planes came over and bombed the station. There were three hospital trains in the station at the time each one was full. We were busily engaged in emptying one at the time, and I was carrying a very fat Hun who was groaning and kicking up a deuce of a row. As soon as he heard the bombs however, he stopped groaning, got off the stretcher, and ran for dear life, with his shirt tails flying in the wind. He did not get far, for he stopped a bit of shrapnel in the head. The bombs caused great destruction amongst the Germans, but very strange to say none of us were touched. This happened in many air raids, later in the summer, when we were raided twelve and fifteen times during the twenty four hours our barracks was never touched, although houses were blown up all round it.

The barracks, I may not have mentioned before, were in peace time, the barracks of 'Le 1re Regiment de Chasseurs a Cheval', and were, while we were billeted there, used as a 'Pferde Lazarette' or horse hospital, and also as a sort of half-way house to the line for the German soldiery. Our planes were very fond of dropping pamphlets when they came over. The only one I managed to see, which was typewritten, in French, told us not to worry about the push that jerry was then making, as he would come back ten times faster than he went forward, soon. That cheered us up a great deal, because we began to think that jerry was having every thing his own way.

A Fowl Deed

A party started work at the aerodrome again at Marquain. I went up there one day, and I had to dig a small refuge against bombs near to a farmyard. As I was engaged in this work, I saw some hens close by in the farmyard and I walked along to them, and, separating one from the rest, drove it into a corner, and cut its head off with my spade, I wrapped the end of its neck in some straw, and put the body in the lining of my coat, and then covered

up all traces of the 'fowl' deed. When we got home that night my chum and I had a fine feed. I boiled the chicken for about an hour and a half, but it was very tough and stringy, owing to my having boiled it too fast. It did not matter how tough it was, it all went the same way.

Feeding the Horses

Soon after this I cut my finger and going sick I was allowed light duty. Then the veterinary surgeon in charge of the horse dock wanted some men to assist in the stables, and all light duty men were put on this job. I did not mind that job at all. The work was easy, and we had not to walk to work. Also, (a very great consideration) we could pinch plenty of melasse,' a sort of brown sugar. This melasse was mixed with the horses corn, and when we fed them we could take all the lumps out and appropriate them. In this way I managed to 'scrounge' about half a hundredweight of sweetness. It was fine for sweetening tea or cocoa, and for mixing with rice or oats it had no equal. I was on this job for a month, and was then cast forth again into the cold world to work with the rest.

The Big Hole - Summer 1917

Our one great grievance in the summer months was "the big 'ole at Marquain" ~ This big hole which, when finished was to be a dug out, it was situated just in front of the office of the aerodrome. The offices, naturally, were always thronged with officers, and men in authority, and as the hole we were digging was immediately in front of them, we, when working there, were always in a most conspicuous position. If we were unlucky enough to 'click' that job, we always groaned in agony of spirit for 'we knew that, for that day at least, we should get no rest. As soon as one stopped work he was spotted by a nasty tempered little sergeant major, who would shout at him, from a window commanding the whole position. The word they use to tell you to get on with the work sounds very much like "loose", and a ceaseless repetition of "loose loose", becomes very monotonous.

The hole we had to dig was about 20ft by 24, and about 26ft deep. We were working on it altogether for about five months. When we had finished digging, and had it ready for filling in with cement, all three sides fell in, literally pushed in by the weight of the earth thrown out of it. We had to start digging again and the finishing of the job was delayed for about six weeks. We were not overjoyed by this occurrence, but we were not particularly sorrowful, because of the mortification of the engineers in charge. "The best laid plans of mice and men gang aft agley" ye ken, and the plans of these engineers were no exceptions to the rule. They had the 'wind up' about our bombing raids, and were anxious to get the dug out ready as soon as possible, but we were not anxious in the same degree to help them, and when we left Tournai in September it was still in the process of construction.

Pinching from the Germans

A party of twelve men was sent to the detention camp at Fort F1enes for pinching ladles from the magazine at Vaulx. They took the ladles for the same reason that. we all took any thing we could lay hands on, and the officer in charge of the magazine reported them. The punishment was three months in a discipline camp. We always felt justified in 'pinching' anything that belonged to the Germans. One of the things we took most of were spiritus stoves, equivalent to our tammy cookers. There

were great numbers of them in the stores at Vaulx, and we took them because they were very handy for us to do our cooking. We were able to use them in the billets, and they did not cause smoke. For an English cigarette the Belgians would bring us as many as we wanted.

We were frequently searched after working at this magazine, but our favourite dodge was to take the spoil some distance from the magazine before it was time to come away, and pick it up as we passed, on the way home. When we had been working at the aerodrome for some time, we were put on other jobs. In this way by getting the 'entree' to the aeroplane sheds we were able to do all sorts of damage. In the dinner hour when the mechanics were away, we would creep in the sheds, and let the petrol out of the tanks, refilling them with water. It was most amusing to watch them trying to get the engines going, sometimes they would be hours finding out the trouble.

Disarming the Bombs

We often had to do bomb humping. All weights of bombs were used from 1000 kilogrammes to 10. A kilogramme is 2lb 3oz. When preparing for a night raid, the bombing planes were loaded with their complement of bombs at about 2 o'clock in the afternoon. Everything was put right, and the plane was quite ready for the journey after it had been loaded. Whenever we saw a chance we would get into the shed or marquee, and take the detonators out of the bombs. Naturally when it was time to get off, they never troubled to look at the bombs, and when they dropped them over our lines, they fell without doing the least damage.

Pont a Chin

At Pont a Chin we had an interesting conversation with a sergeant in the German flying corps, who had been awarded the first class iron cross, for bombing London. He was one of the first to attempt this, and raided it early in 1915. Late in 1915 [1918?] he went out in a large new bombing plane on a raid, his objective being a rest camp at Boulogne but he never returned. Nemesis has probably overtaken him. He was a very decent sort of a chap though, and when he was in charge of a job he did not worry himself whether we worked or not.

Our job at Pont a Chin was to unload barges of cement, and gravel, and also we had a barge full of road cobbles. Several of the fellows fell in the canal one day. The stage leading from the barge to the bank fell in, carrying with it three fellows who were standing on it at the time. We got them out without difficulty, and the bargee lent them some civilian clothes to go home in, while he dried the wet ones. Frequently we used to sleep all day while on this sort of work.

The German Guards

Some posterns too, would not care if we worked or not. Especially good in this way were young posterns who came from the Kaserne. The Kaserne was a rest camp for invalid soldiers, or those who were recuperating from illness. They were required to do a certain amount of training daily, and occasionally they came as posterns to us for a few weeks. We always thought we had 'clicked' if we got these fellows.

When doing bomb dumping, one of this species would be in charge or a party of twenty and when we got to the

scene of 'arbeit' we generally committed ourselves to slumber instead of work. Some of these chaps spoke English, and insisted on talking to us instead of letting us work. Nine out of every ten was in possession of the iron cross, either first or second class but one and all looked upon it with contempt. They would not degrade themselves by wearing it they told us, but that it was compulsory. The first class is a silver cross inlaid with black, the silver showing only round the edges, and is worn on the left side close to the hip, the second class, I have not seen, but the ribbon of black and white is worn on the breast in fashion of our army, or else in the third buttonholes.

Our ordinary posterns were of the landsturm, and were mostly old and very miserable with a great hatred of the swinerei, Englanders, and of all things English. This was aggravated by the Naval blockade as their wives and children in Germany were dying or starvation every day. Things were so bad in Germany in 1918 that all food and provision shops had to be guarded by armed soldiers, to prevent the civilians raiding them. These old posterns were very keen on getting old treacle tins to send their jam and butter issues to their 'lieber frau' in Germany. Some of them would even starve themselves, and save most of their bread and sausage to send to feed their starving children. To prevent them using our tins we usually cut them to pieces before throwing them in the refuse hole, but when they discovered it they threatened to prevent us bringing wood home to do our cooking.

Concerts

As we began to get well fed we used to take a greater interest in life, and to pass away the time in the long summer evenings a concert party was formed. On the whole we got up some very decent shows. The officer did not like to see us amusing ourselves, and did all he could to mess the job up, without expressly forbidding us to carry on. One Saturday evening just as we got into full swing, he called for a working party, and just from sheer malice took all the 'artistes', some of whom were dressed up for their various characters. We had very little material from which to make our fancy dresses, but an old blanket made a good skirt, while a red handkerchief was unequalled as a headdress.

Tournai - Summer 1918

There is nothing much to say about our doings at Tournai during the summer months. Each day was practically the same as its predecessor. Usually we did not work on Sunday unless anything special was required to be done. As for the work days, we got to work at 7.00 am and finished at 5.00 pm, and when we were back at night we did what cooking we required or amused ourselves in some other way. In June anyone who wished could go the swimming baths three times a week. I quickly availed myself of this opportunity. We went immediately we got home from work. This was kept up until about the middle of July, and then it was discontinued owing to an outbreak of fever. This fever was not fatal, but it made most of our chaps helpless for two days. I did not get it, although my chum with whom I was sleeping had it severely. Anyone who went sick at this time was treated for fever if he had it or not. An amusing case was one in which a man went sick with sore feet. The doctor did not look at his feet, but gave him a pill to cure headache, and told him to lie in bed for two days. We were always on the look out for anything in the eating or smoking line, or

anything for that matter whether useful or otherwise. I found a rhubarb plantation once, and pulled all the stems worth cooking, which I took back with me, and cooked at night, sweetening it with melasse, which I had previously procured from the stables. For a cake of soap or a packet of English tobacco the Belgians would exchange as much as four pounds of potatoes or onions.

We were very glad to be able to get potatoes, as they helped us out with our parcels, and made them last much longer. The Germans would give us even more for cigarettes, but the potatoes were usually taken from the Belgians, and we did not encourage them, besides we wanted the cigarettes ourselves.

Bachy - September 1918

Towards the end of September we started on a new job at Bachy. Bachy is a village some fifteen kilometres from Tournai, and we always went by train. Here we had to make almost a new station, about seven sidings being laid. We had only been working here for two days, when we moved to Froidmont. This was on the 19th of September.

Froidmont 19/9/1918

Here we were billeted in an old leather dying works, and tannery. Russians had previously been in occupation, and the place was in a most filthy state. We soon cleared it up and made it presentable, and fit for Englishmen to live in.

We continued to take the train to work every morning. The driver often stopped the train to go out into a field and steal potatoes.

While working here we always had so much to do, and when we had finished we could lie down until everyone else was finished. The task was to dig one spade depth across the track previously marked out, to the width of three metres. The track itself was about four metres in width. There was great competition amongst us all to get finished first. Our champion diggers were a small, insignificant Yorkshiremen, with muscles like whipcord, and a long cockney, who was a navy by profession. These two invariably finished an hour before the rest, and of them the Yorkshireman was the most often first. We were getting well advanced with this and had already laid the light railway for carrying the heavy rails and sleepers down when one morning instead of carrying on with the job we had to take up the light railway, and pack it up to be taken away. Two days afterwards we did not go to work and we heard the job was finished. We learned afterwards that the job was given up owing to the German evacuation. We messed about in the billet with nothing to do for nearly a month.

Hospital

I went sick one day because I thought there was some work on. I reported sick with influenza, but they told me I had got disorderly action of the heart and I was admitted to the 'Krankenstube'. The Krankenstube is a sort of temporary hospital attached to the billet, where sick are kept under observation. An inspector of prisoners of war camps came that day, he saw me and said I could walk for an hour a day at regular intervals, but I must not do any work or exert myself in any way. Naturally I was not exactly cast into a slough of despair at his words, but thought I had 'clicked'. This, I thought to myself is just

the job I have been looking for, I congratulated myself on my good fortune, and shook hands with myself for going sick at such an opportune moment. This good fortune did not last long however for we had to move again on the 14th of October to Rebaix and I had to tramp it with the rest, and when I got to Rebaix they had forgotten that I was an 'invalid'.

While we were at Froidmont the civilians all seemed imbued with the idea that the war was finished. One Sunday afternoon as we were marching from the station, every civilian we met shouted "Le guerre finer", and they all seemed very joyful. They would give no explanation of their conduct, but merely assured us that the war was in reality finished. I suppose they thought that, as the Germans were evacuating, the war was necessarily "kaput".

Renaix - 14/10/1918

We moved from Froidmont, Sunday night, October 14th about 7.0'clock. From Froidmont we marched to Tournai station a distance of seven kilos. We remained on the station from 9.00 pm, until 4.00 am Monday morning when we got into third class carriages. We started off at 10.00 am and arrived at Ath at 4.00 pm, moving on to Renaix after dark where we arrived at 8.00 pm. When we got to the billet we found it was a disused sugar factory, without lights or water.

Here we had to sleep on a cement floor for about three days, after which some wooden stages were erected for us to sleep on. The boards of which they were built were green and damp, but did not affect us. In this billet were some more prisoners who had been captured in April. They were living better than us, receiving two loaves among five men daily, while their soup, compared with ours was quite decent. We received no parcels at all while we were here, and we were beginning to feel hungry again, so we were inclined to kick about the grub the other prisoners were receiving, while we were getting only a quarter of a loaf per day.

We had to start another railway at Renaix, and the first day we went out it was raining hard and very miserable, and none of us was feeling much like work, so we decided to go on strike. We all, with the exception of about fifteen craven souls, chucked down our tools, and refused to work. The interpreter explained our grievances to the officer in charge, which mainly amounted to this, that we had decided that we would not work on wet days as we had no where to dry our clothes, and in most cases when our overcoats were wet we had nothing to cover us at night. The officer raved and swore, but all to no effect, so he kept us standing in the field until 2.0'clock and then sent us home.

The next morning when we got to work we found all the engineers had brought with them rifles and bayonets with strict injunctions to shoot any man who showed signs of insubordination. The strike was productive of good results however, for two days later we found that we were to have a loaf between three, and half a loaf one day in seven. The officer had written to our commandant, and he had decided, very wisely, that the strike was the result of months of dissatisfaction, and that more food would put all to rights. The soup too was improved very much, so that we were living almost as well as the posterns themselves.

Lessines 25/10/1918

We only remained here for a fortnight for on the 25th of

October we marched a distance of twelve kilos to the town of Lessines. At Lessines we were billeted in the school attached to a monastery. We were placed in separate schoolrooms, and in the room in which I was placed, there was written on the blackboard "The mans of Lessines! we likes the mans of England". The old priest in charge of the place had apparently written that up there to cheer us. We had no work at all to do here. We slept on the floor but not uncomfortably, for we had plenty of wood wool to lie on. We had plenty a room for concerts for one of the rooms was what was once a large concert hall, with a good stage.

Next to my room was placed the bread store, and in the wall were two large glazed windows very much like portholes. We frequently cast longing eyes through these windows at the bread and sausage in the other room. One day, or rather one evening when the majority of the fellows were at the concert, a party of us broke through these portholes. We did not break the glass but dug all the plaster out from round the frame and took the whole thing bodily out of the wall. Once the window was out, it was easy to get through into the store.

From the store we confiscated twenty loaves, and fourteen tins of sausages, and laden with these, climbed back into our room, and replaced the frame. We had a real feast that night, but the next day, Sunday we were all confined to our room, the corporal having strict injunctions to give us no food until the perpetrator of the crime had been discovered. We did not mind that too much as we had had enough to last us for some time, but at 5.00 pm the same night, one of the fellows got fed up with being confined, and he told the officer about it. We were all released and were given an 1/8th of a loaf, and a bowl of coffee but no action was taken against the offenders, although we were threatened with Fort Fleenes.

Out on the Town

We frequently go out into the town at night while in Lessines on 'scrounging' expeditions. About a dozen of us used to go out regularly every night. The way in which we got out was to get over the wall of the yard. The wall was at least twenty feet high, but in part of it was situated a latrine, the roof of which reared up about half way. We climbed on the roof of the latrine, and hitched a waterproof sheet on to the spikes at the top of the wall. It was nothing to swarm up the rope or sheet which served for one, and when we gained the summit, we waited until the patrolling sentry had passed, and then dropped down. We fell into some gardens, and making our way through these, passed through a large gate, and were in the street.

We had to exercise some caution in walking about the streets but there was really little danger, because of the darkness. We called at Belgians houses, and when we told them who we were they in nine cases out of ten asked us inside to have some food. We had some good feeds with these Belgians, and they invariably gave us some tobacco. Our method of getting back into barracks was much different from the one we employed in leaving it. Underneath the stage was a long passage leading out into the street. A sentry was stationed at the mouth of this passage, and we got into the street near the mouth when it was time to go back, and waited our opportunity to get in. Sometimes the sentry walked backwards and forwards, and if he just stood still outside the passage we generally chucked some big stones down about twenty feet away. When he heard the stones falling he would dodge off to investigate thinking perhaps that someone

was trying to get over the wall. and while he was gone we ran into the passage, and climbed back into the concert hall by the trapdoor.

Escape - 7/11/1918

I soon got fed up with going back again. once I had been at liberty, so on Thursday November 7th finding a kindred spirit I came away for good, determined to get back to Blighty or die in the attempt. I was desperate ye ken.

The only arrangements I made were these. Speaking to a chum in the afternoon I said "Tich, I'm going to nip to night" and "Tich" being agreeable, we "nipped". It was very dark and inclined to be wet, and as the wind was due N. and our objective, Tournai, was in the same direction, we decided to travel by the wind. My companion Pete J Bray, 12 Kings (Liverpool) Regt., was dressed in ordinary prisoner rig being a black suit with a brown armlet on the left arm of the jacket, and brown stripes down the trousers. The cap was the same shape as a service dress infantry cap, only it was black with brown band. My rig was the khaki jacket I was wearing when captured, a pair of corduroy 'Jerry' slacks, and a prisoners cap. It seemed as though we were fated to get away as will be seen in the sequel.

Our first narrow escape was in this wise. Almost as soon as we were clear of the gates an officer came walking along the road flashing an electric torch about all over the place. We had nowhere to hide as all the houses were estaminets full of Germans. We began to get the wind up as we should certainly have been discovered if the light had fallen on us. However when he got within about ten yards of us the battery ran out, and he was so occupied with swearing about the thing that he passed us without suspicion. He looked back at us certainly and hesitated as though about to interrogate us, but we hurried on and he thought better of it and passed on. We were always shaky about passing estaminets, as when we got opposite the door it was almost sure to be opened and a stream of light let out. My khaki was especially conspicuous in the light. Barring these incidents we reached the outskirts of the town without trouble.

The first detached house we came to provided a good base to start feeding operations, as a solid foundation inside, was essential to success. We went to the back door, listened to see if we could hear any jerries inside, and summoning up courage, knocked loudly. The man, an old fellow of about three score years, seemed inclined to turn us away, but his wife, on hearing who we were, insisted on admitting us. Here we had a good supper, consisting of a large plate of soup, and some cold boiled mutton. It did go down well, and bucked us no end. The old chap took us out the back way after supper, and directed us to the nearest route for Tournai. The next house we came to was a farm house, and the farmer was just milking his cows. He gave us a glass of milk quite warm from the cow, and in which he put a new laid egg. We had another good feed here, and plenty of tobacco. Altogether we had eight separate suppers all the first stage of the journey, but it is not worth while relating all about these.

Soon after we had left the last house and proceeded on our journey in the direction in which we fondly believed Tournai to lie, we heard some transport coming up, behind us. We ran across a field to wait for it to pass, but instead of allowing it to get too far ahead we followed it at a distance of about ten yards. We walked behind this for what might be fifteen kilos, the officer in charge riding

backwards and forwards all the time, but not noticing us. One of the drivers shouted something to us, and I replied "ya wohh". That answer satisfied him apparently, for he did not say anything else.

In this way we passed several villages, this evading all the military police. M.P's were stationed on all bridges and in every village. At about 11 o'clock pm, my companion called my attention to a cemetery we were just passing, a-and as we had passed a cemetery on our way out, we stopped to find out which it was. On investigation we found it was the identical cemetery we had previously encountered. Our feelings then, were too deep for words, but when we first got over the shock of this discovery we let rip. Our first impulses were to laugh or cry, we hardly knew which, but we compromised and laughed till the tears ran. Then we began to swear, and we found this easy enough, having had plenty of practice during our internment. Any ordinary citizen would have fallen in a fit had he heard the flow of sulphurous language we let fly. Still never say die, and we started off again, determined never to trust to the wind again, which had led us round in a circle, changing direction from N to E in the inexplicable manner which wind will.

Starting again

The direction we intended to take now, necessitated our crossing the canal which ran through the town. We could not cross the bridge without first giving the two M.P's their quietus, so without troubling them we just took our boots off and plunged in with our boots hanging round our necks. It was easy to swim to the other bank, but while we were swimming I suppose we created a phosphorescent glow, and the sentry on the bridge seeing this, took a pop shot at it. Fortunately the bullet missed both our bodies, but it passed through my pocket lapel. After landing on the opposite bank, without delaying to put our boots on, we dashed off on to a ploughed field, and did not stop until we had put a couple of kilos distance between us and Lessines.

By a stroke of good luck we struck the right road this time, and made the most of it. We had to stop once or twice in hiding, owing to the presence of Germans in our vicinity, but we were not discovered. As we were passing some old brick works, my mate remarked that it was a good place to hide. For no accountable reason we went there to hide, and as soon as we got there we heard a horse's harness clanking further along. It was a transport horse which had got into a ditch, and was in difficulties. We could not hear it while we were walking, and yet by this strange impulse we hid in the brickfield, and thus escaped running into this party.

Again, later, I plucked Bray by the sleeve and told him to stop and listen. I could not hear anything while walking, and yet something, indefinable, told me to stop. When we stopped we could hear, very faintly carried on the breeze, the sound of tramping. We waited, and presently along came a crowd of drunken German soldiers probably returning to their billets after a debauch. Nothing else of any note happened this night, and about 5.00 am just before it began to get light we came to a village and prowled round on the look out for a billet to pass the day in. We found a small coal shed in the yard of one place, and broke in. It was too cold to sleep, but as soon as the people were stirring we decided to speak to madame and ask assistance.

I was just going out to speak to her when I heard someone coming. I stepped back into the 'hole', and

peeped through a crack in the door to investigate. It was a German corporal, come to fix up some billets for men, and horses who were coming on in about an hour. When he had gone we went out and asked the woman if she could put us up for a day. She said that was impossible, as the Germans would be there all day. She gave us some bread and butter and a cup of coffee, and told us the only safe place for us would be in the wood which was about half a kilo from there. We ran off across the fields, which were all flooded to the depth of two and three ins. In the wood it was almost as bad but we managed to find a bit of rising ground, on which we made a couch of fir boughs, gleaned from the surrounding trees. It was raining heavily and it kept up nearly all day but we were pretty dry under the heavily foliated fir trees, and it was quite dry on our couch. We took our socks off and tried to dry them by putting them under our arms inside the jacket, but it was not very effective.

The German transport was passing on the road within thirty yards of us nearly all day, but we were effectually concealed by the undergrowth. Towards midday, I accosted a Belgian farmer, told him we were hungry, and he brought us two thick slices of bread and a slice of fat raw pork each. He brought us the same again at night as soon as it was dusk, together with a bottle of hot coffee.

As soon as it became dusk we started off on our journey again, and met nothing for two hours, and then we nearly ran into an infantry patrol, who saw us. We ran off over a field, but they started searching a small wood, opposite evidently thinking we had gone in there. I wonder they did not shoot at us, but probably they thought we were civilians on a poaching expedition or something like that. We met with no more opposition, evading all patrols, we saw them before they did us. We walked along by the railway for sometime. and then they started going up. By this we knew that the Germans were evacuating.

Each sleeper on the railway was connected with a large bomb, which, when the jerries were far enough back, were fused by an electric current. These bombs made us feel windy. and we soon cleared out of the vicinity of the railway. The best thing we saw was a barge bridge which went up when ye were almost underneath it. About 6.00 am the next morning we met an old civvy to whom we told our tale of woe. He escorted us to a large hay loft where he concealed us for the day. An eighteen pounder gun. and an anti-aircraft gun took up a position just outside the barn in which we were concealed, and the Belgian brought us food right under the noses of the gunners, but they suspected nothing.

By looking through a chink we could see them at work, and they were firing almost continuously all day. In this precarious position we slept as peacefully as if we were asleep in our own little beds. It was very warm in the hay, and we revelled in the unaccustomed luxury of a soft couch. We remained here for two days, loth to depart from such a good billet.

The guns went back the first day, so we were left in peace for one day. At 7.00 pm that night we started out again, and walked for hours but we saw absolutely nothing. We asked a Belgian on the road, in the early morning, what had become of the Germans, he replied that he was not sure but he thought they had evacuated.

Back in the British Army 11/11/1918

This cheered us up some, and we made on faster than before, not halting when day light came. we walked until I, at least, felt like falling down asleep in my tracks, but

the thought of getting away kept us going somehow, and about 10.00 am we met a cavalry patrol of our own M.M.P. They halted us, inquired who we were, gave us all the cigarettes they had between them, and directed us to Frasnes, to the 74th Divisional H.P. We reached Frasnes at noon, only to hear that an armistice had been signed and that hostilities had ceased at 11.00 am. Of course we did not mind hearing that, but we both said that we should not have troubled to escape if we had known it was coming off.

The divisional general interviewed us, and after interrogating us told us to write home. We wrote our letters home and then he took us into his kitchen and told the cook to give us anything we wanted, and not to spare the mess. He also told us to be there at 8 pm and he would give us some dinner. After a feed we went to sleep, and slept till 7.00 pm, we went back to the Generals mess so as to be in time for dinner. The Town Commandant procured us a civilian billet, and for the first time for nearly eighteen months I slept between white sheets.

The Roles Reversed 12/11/1918

Early the next morning the T.C. handed us over to the A.P.M. who put us in charge of a civilian prisoner who had been serving in the German army as an interpreter during the war. We had to hand him over to the corps A.P.M. at Tournai. We walked for a few kilos and then saw a motor lorry which we boarded, and in an hour we were in Tournai. We excited a great deal of comment amongst our men, they generally mistook us for civilians. One of the remarks we heard was this, "What the ell's that bloke, looks like a bloke as stands outside a picture palace" Occasionally we saluted officers and they, returning the salute said "Bonjour". We got to Tournai, and handed our prisoner over the A.P.M. (Assistant Provost Marshall), and were sent off to the M.P. headquarters. We spent the rest of the day in visiting our old haunts. The civilians were very glad to see us, but would not let us pay for anything. Several of them gave us small souvenirs. We spent two days in Tournai, but the A.P.M. was not sure what to do with us.

Lille

We soon got fed up with waiting about for him, so we came away "on our own!", an boarded a motor lorry which carried us to Lille. We remained in Lille two days, wandering about and exploring, and then a crowd of others came in who had been released, amongst them being some of my own company. They were glad to see us. They thought we were dead, as the officer of the company had told them previously that two English P of W had been captured about ten kilos from Lessines and had been shot. Apparently they had missed us at 11 pm, four hours after we had effected our escape and just about the time when we discovered we had been travelling in a circle.

They caught some men getting back into barracks after a 'scrounging' expedition, and calling the roll had found that two were missing. They only found out exactly which two the next morning when they had the roll call conducted in the proper manner. Probably they only told the yarn about two being shot, to make the others fearful of escaping, but they did not succeed for several more got away two days after us.

Calais to Dover 14/11/1918

From Lille, we all travelled down to Calais in an ambulance train, and from that time we were put in the charge of the Red +, and treated more or less as invalids. We reached Calais on the 14th of November Friday, we were dished out with a complete set of new clothes, and on Sunday we set sail for Blighty, reaching Dover at about 3 pm. We were the first boat load over from France to Dover, and we got a wonderful reception. Every syren and hooter in the place shrilled its loudest, and every boat in the harbour which was in possession of anything capable of creating a noise did its best to add to the din. The Prince of Wales was on the quay to receive us, and when the speech-making was over we boarded motor lorries, and rode off to North Fall camp. In two days our passes were ready, we were paid £2.00, and on Wednesday morning we all entrained to our respective destinations, on two months furlough.

Sidney Page's account ends here, but he went on to write two short items about extreme hunger and rumours

Effects of extreme hunger

The effects produced by extreme hunger are of two varieties. The first stage is an all absorbing acrimony of temper, combined with a raging agony inside, akin to toothache or rheumatic twinges. During this stage one becomes nearly crazy, while being incapable of coherent thought or united action. This, by the goodness of providence, lasts only for a few hours, and then comes the real hunger. This is certainly painful to some extent, but it is quite a different sensation to that previously experienced. It is a dull aching pain, which leaves one physically sluggish and inert, but which does not impair the activity of the brain to any extent.

The memory, on the contrary, is most active, and one is able to recall almost anything with the least possible effort. One is able to think consistently, but the usual digest of ones thoughts, is the food one has had, or is likely to have again. When there is nothing to do, one just sits and thinks about food, more especially of the suet pudding variety. A suet pudding seems to be the one food that is of any value, probably because it is so satisfying. My greatest ambition was to sit once more in front of a suet or beef steak pudding, an aspiration to which I did not attain during my captivity. Not content with thinking about eating all day, one must need dreams of it by night. As before, in ones dreams, suet puddings figure largely, with this difference that in dreams one seems to be actually partaking of the feast, while in ones waking moments. one must be satisfied merely by thinking of it.

Men become as ravening wolves when they are truly hungry. They lose all self respect and decorum, and if there is anything eatable to be seen, they will fight like wild beasts for possession of a morsel. Cabbage stumps become coveted luxuries, and raw potato peelings are welcomed and devoured with avidity. It is almost impossible to save a piece of bread to eat later, once one is in possession. If ones own self cannot be trusted how much more impossible is it to trust anyone else. It is no crime to steal food, except from one who has only the same portion as oneself. Even when we were all served alike at Dulmen, we had to, keep a very close watch on our bread, or eat it as soon as it was issued, or it would mysteriously vanish, no one knew where.

Rumours are always prevalent in prison camps. Ladies
 The Drawing Rooms and prison camps are notably hotbeds of
 The Great War - Sidney Page

Our camp was no exception, although we were not often idle, we had little else to do except talk when the days work was done. Having no definite news of the war we had to manufacture some, and this we did with alacrity. Just set the least whisper going and in a few hours it would come round again, magnified out of all proportion to its original form. The subject most productive of rumours was parcels. We encountered these rumours immediately we arrived at Dulmen, and continued, I believe, until Armistice day.

The old hands at Dülmen, told us that we should receive a packet every five days. Naturally we thought that this applied as soon as we arrived at the camp, and an issue of a parcel between two the first Thursday we were there lent colour to this illusion. We soon discovered the true state of the case. We had to wait at least 8 weeks for the first packets to come through, even in a camp in Germany, and in all, it was nearly five months we waited.

Rumour was always busy with them, and we were expecting them every day until they eventually arrived. "Any rumours about packets" became one of stock phrases. According to report a truck of packets was in

the station every day, and we were so fed-up with false accounts that we would not believe they were in until we actually saw them.

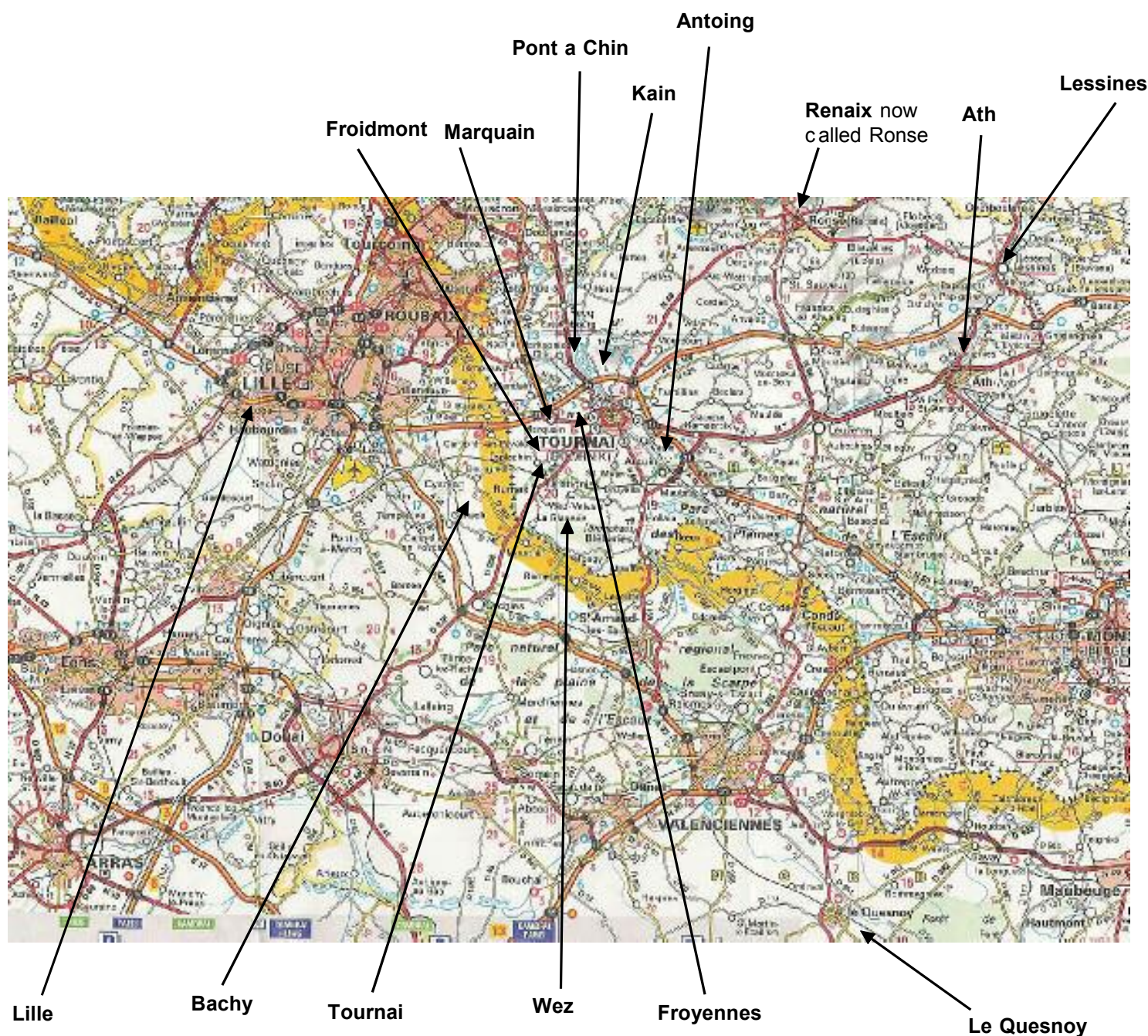
As regards the war, innumerable reports floated round. Sometimes the Allies star was in the ascendant, and sometimes jerry was winning. Hindenburg was assassinated twice to my knowledge, and the Kaiser died several times.

It would be futile to write of the extravagant reports of all sorts which we received, but it may be taken for granted that every occurrence received its full share of publicity, through the medium of rumours.

Acknowledgements

We are grateful to Mr David Page for bringing this account to our attention and allowing us to reproduce it. David is Sidney's son and has many fond memories of his father. However like many veterans of the Great War it was a subject not to be spoken of and it was only after he had died that this remarkable document saw the light of day again.

Places named in the text



DÜLMEN is a German Army Camp about 35 Kilometres NNW of Dortmund in Germany
HALTERN is asimilar distance from Dortmund but NW



CAMBRAI is off the map but located about where the star is above