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The Experiences of R. R. S. Martin as a Prisoner of War in Germany.

Book II

The G. Staff received a plentiful supply of potatoes & these formed their staple food. To the P's. the issue was less plentiful. In the early days – Apr. & May – once a week was the limit. Later after a complaint made to the Chef-Artz by the Brit. officers about the quality & quantity of the food issued to the P's. – the issue was increased to two & even three times weekly. We never ran short of potatoes however. The R. P's. stole enormous quantities from the heaps & exchanged them with the Br. & Fr. P's. for white biscuits & even for rations of G. bread. The P's. also who were employed in the camp, cookhouses kept their friends outside constantly supplied. The potatoes thus obtained helped very largely to eke out the contents of the "parcels" – to which I shall shortly refer.

Soups.

A very large proportion of the G. diet

consisted of these famous "soups".
No P. will ever forget them. Once smelt, always remembered. There were various kinds, but they were all of vegetable origin & therefore contained a very high percentage of water, which was increased by their "thinness".
Among the commonest I may mention the following:—

1 Sauerkraut. Made from cabbage, preserved in salt & sour smelling vinegar. It is considered a delicacy in G.F. but the preparation served up to the P's. was quite uneatable. The smell from it was terrific. (Major Mc Cracken)

2. Mushroom Soup. Made from all sorts of edible fungi - unpeeled, uncleaned, stalks & all. About 25% sand & dirt & fungi too tough to chew. Literature was published among G. civilians, I believe, instructing them as to the different kinds of fungi they might

safely gather ~~for~~ food.

3. Turnip Soup. Made from turnips boiled down to a watery hash.

4. Bean Soup. Made from beans - skins, stalks & everything. One of the best if it were "thick".

5. "Sandstorm". - Made by boiling a very fine sort of meal in water. Termed by P's. "sandstorm".

6. Bread Soup. Made by boiling pieces of black bread in water.

7. Macaroni. ~~Stewed~~ served once a week at first. Latterly dropped altogether. One of the best soups.

These soups, containing as they did, so much water made men very unhealthy. Men became blown out with them - stout & flabby. They contained no nourishment & so a period of soups produced great weakness. Also they were unsatisfying - allaying hunger only for the moment.

Some of the soups were entirely uneatable – eg. Sauerkraut & Mushroom Soup – & the 3. or 4 Marmites drawn for a Bk. were often untouched. In this case, the orderlies would retain the marmites until night & then, if they could elude the sentries, bury it outside under cover of darkness. They dare not return untouched food to the cookhouse, or the inmates of the Bk. would have been punished for returning their rations.

Other articles served as meals included.

Beetroot. Occasionly served with potatoes. Good & looked forward to.

Herrings – salted & served raw. Too salty to eat thus. We used to boil them.

½ Sausage – Red. About 2" constituted a ration. This was one of the meals served sometimes in lieu of soup.

Beverages were all "ersatz" –

Tea – made from herbs & weeds. Bitter horrible taste. Almost undrinkable.

Coffee – made from burnt barley & burnt acorns.

Cocoa. Origin dreadful. Full of grit & almost undrinkable. Never served to Ps

Tea & Coffee were served without milk. Very little sugar added not near enough to allay bitter taste. Sugar used in the cookhouses was very dark brown, very soft & course. Turned tea quite black.

Milk practically unknown. Patients placed on "milk diet" – difficult to obtain – received a very weak substitute for milk made from a milk powder in lieu. of soups. Their milk diet, containing no nourishment was practically starvation.

A Sample Day's Meals was as follows –

7. am. Bowl of Tea.

9. " Slice of Bread – Dry.

Noon. Bowl of Sauerkrout.

5. p.m. Bowl of "Sandstorm" or A Raw Hering or Piece of Red Sausage.

In these early days an issue of potatoes often signified a G. victory at the front.

The food issued to the G. Staff. was similar in nature but better in quality & quantity & infinitely better cooked & served. That issued to the P's. was vile in the extreme. The food in the Laz. was, if anything, worse than that issued in the Coy. & this remember to sick men. G/T certainly had not the food to give for she was practically a starving country. But what she did give to her P's. was of the worst that she had & I am convinced that this wretched feeding was all part of a cultured system of torture to send as many to the wall as possible. The food did

not assist sick men to recover; on the (~~also~~) contrary. How R. P's. had existed on this feeding from 1914 was a mystery I doubt if Englishmen could have done so Had it not been for the parcels of food sent out to our men from this country I doubt if any Englishmen would ever have returned from G/T. It is of these wonderful parcels I intend to speak next.

Parcel System

Soldiers in France had very little, if any, idea of how our P's. in G.F. fared with regard to food. Certainly while in France I had never heard of food parcels for our P's. On reaching Cassel we were informed by the older P's. that if we could last over the first two or three months we would be alright as we would then commence to receive our parcels after which we would no longer be dependant on the G's.

That all the thousands of Br. P's. in G.F. should be fed from England during the greater portion of their captivity was to my mind one of the great achievements of Br. during this wonderful war. This country did many great things during the war & I think that the organisation which fed these crowds of hungry mouths was not the least

The exchange of these parcels was allowed by agreement between the two countries.

Let me say here that, in my opinion, if it had not been for the food parcels sent out to G.F. very few Englishmen would ever have come back. The parcels undoubtedly saved thousands of Br. lives. & no praise is too great for the unselfish work of the people who laboured on this side. And they were, I believe, mostly ladies.

The organisation was briefly this,— The Central Prisoners' of War Committee in London was the chief controlling factor. They held all the strings. Working under this Comm. were a large number of Sub.- Comm.s one for practically every Reg. in the Br. Army. To the Regl Comms. was delegated the duty of looking after the parcels for the P's. of their own partic. ular Reg. Eg. N. F. Care Comm. looked after N. F.

The work of the Reg. Care Comms. must have been great, for not only had they to purchase goods & pack & dispatch parcels but they had to keep themselves in touch with the location & any subsequent movements of all their P's. in G/T.

Their funds were from two sources.

(1) Government funds
(2) Voluntary contributions from public.

The parcels despatched to P's. were of four kinds.

(1) Personal Parcels.
(2) Clothing "
(3) Bread "
(4) Food "

1. Personal Parcels.– These were only allowed to be sent by the P's. next of kin & were not dispatched by the Comms. One parcel was allowed every 3 mths. The only P.P. that got thro to me reached me in Sept. – 6 months

after capture. There were great restrictions on the articles allowed. Contents allowed were (1) Games.
(2) Sweets
(3) Handkerchiefs.
(4) Bootlaces (mohair not leather)
(5) Shaving material (safety razor only)
(6) Brushes (clothes, hair & boot) & Comb.
(7) Capbadges & shoulder titles, badges of rank, decorations etc.
(8) Cleaning material – buttons polish etc.

No food, clothing, books, papers, or letters were allowed in this parcel.

Clothing Parcels.– These were sent by the Comms. Contents were –

(1) Lt Coat
(2) Tunic & Trousers
(3) Cap.

} Black with brown stripes on Trous. & band on arm

(4) Pair of Boots.
(5) 2 Under Vests
(6) 2 Shirts
(7) 2 Pair Pants
(8) 2 " Socks
(9) 2 Towels
(10) Handkerchiefs.

To lessen danger of pilfering these articles were dispatched in three parcels, so that P's. were sure of receiving some. A further stock of underclothing etc. was sent every six mths. The tunics were plain but the men used to get them altered like the Service Tunic - patch pockets, epaulets, large buttons etc. - by the P's. who followed their occupation of tailoring. (R's., Fr., & Italians) in the Coy. The charge for altering a tunic rose from 6 or 7. marks in April to 20 & 25 in Sept. so great was the demand. Sometimes a R. tailor would do the

job for a tin of bully beef.

I never received any of my clothing parcels tho' I afterwards ascertained that three were dispatched. Thus I had to rely for underclothing & boots on the generosity of those who had received their clothing & who had enough & to spare; also on the Br. Care Comm. in the Camp. So, naturally, when I left G/T. my khaki was in a somewhat disreputable condition.

At all times - both before receiving their clothing but especially afterwards - our P's. in G/T. were very particular about their appearance. Every morning boots were blacked, clothes brushed & buttons & badges polished. No P. would think of walking round the Camp without first "cleaning up". The Brittishers seemed all to take a great pride in this - not only for its own sake but also because it seemed to irritate the

Germans, who never seemed to be able to understand it. The Br. soldier, even in a P.C., loved to be smart — more so, because the G's., who had nothing to polish about their uniforms were consequently slovenly.

Bread Parcels.

Every P. received a parcel, containing two large rolls of bread, every week. The bread was white & of splendid quality. The bread was baked & sent weekly from Copenhagen, Denmark, under contracts with the Central Comm. in London. In the late autumn of 1918 the supply of bread ceased & boxes of biscuits were sent instead, once a fortnight, from Berne, Switzerland. These biscuits were square but harder than the French biscuits. They were baked of white flour. As they were too hard to eat as they were, we used to soak them

& then bake them on the stove. Under this treatment they became swollen & quite soft.

Food Parcels. —

These were sent directly by the Reg. Care Comms., one being dispatched from this country every 5 days. The contents were packed in stout cardboard boxes, well tied & labelled. Everything perishable was, of course, tinned but the contents of these parcels was simply wonderful in their variety & quality. Among the articles included were the following.

(1) Tinned Meats. Eg. Bully Beef, M. & V. Rations, Roast Beef, Mutton, Irish Stew etc.

(2) Tinned Vegetables. Eg. Tinned Beans Carrots, Cabbage, Parsnips. etc.

(3) Soup Powders. of all varieties — mostly Gong Soups. Also such

things as Oxo, Marmite etc.

(4) Pudding Stuffs, - Rice etc. both uncooked & also ready prepared in tins with milk. A large number of "Turban" Puddings were sent out. Also boiled "Parchment" Puddings - various flavours

(5) Tinned Fish - Herrings in Tomato Sauce, Sardines & Pilchards.

(6) Pastes - Ham & Tongue, Bloater etc.

(7) Tea, Coffee & Cocoa.

(8) Tinned Milk - Sweetened and Unsweetened.

(9) Sugar.

(10) Butter (or Margarine)

(11) Jam - Various varieties & Golden Syrup.

(12) Packets of Small Biscuits, (Huntley & Palmer's) - Lunch, Brown Meal etc.

(13) Soap

(14) Cigarettes or Tobacco

(15) Quaker (or other brand) Oats.

(16) Tinned Cheese.

(17) Packets of Dates.

(18) Chocolate

(19) Bacon in packets.

Of course, each parcel did not contain all these articles. Each parcel was supposed to contain sufficient for five days.

A specimen parcel might be made up as follows. —

(1) 1 Tin of M. & V. Rations.
(2) 1 " Bully Beef.
(3) 1 Pkt Rice or Parchment Pudding
(4) ¼ lb Tea
(5) 1 Pkt. Cocoa
(6) 1 Small Pkt Sugar.
(7) 1 Tin Milk - Ideal, Carnation etc.
(8) 1 " Jam or
1 " Margarine.
(9) 1 " Tongue & Ham Paste

(10) 2 Gong Soups.
(11) 1 Pkt of Small Biscuits
(12) 1 Tablet Soap
(13) 50 Cigs. or 2 ozs Tobacco.

The parcels were so arranged as to ensure a sufficient variety. Thus two parcels were never alike.

Organisation for receiving these parcels was necessary. In each camp the Gt. allowed a Comm. for this purpose known as the "Br. Care & Help Comm." It was generally controlled by an Officer, Warrant Officer or Senior N.C.O. who was assisted in the work by a sufficient No. of N.C.O.'s & men termed the Pkt. Staff. The parcels coming from Eng. all came through Holland & entered Gt. usually at Aachen, from whence they were distributed to the various Camps by special

goods trains. On arrival, the mails were unloaded by the Pkt Staff & stored in a Bk. set apart for that purpose – the Pkt. Store. Then commenced the work of distribution, which was enormous, for the parcels had to be sorted out into three lots.

(1) For men in the Coy. – by Bks.
(2) For patients & staff in the Lazs.
(3) For men on "Commandoes". These latter had all to be re-addressed & re-dispatched to their various destinations.

As to the censoring of parcels, they were mostly untouched from leaving Eng. until they reached the camp of distribution, where the censoring, if any, took place. In Cassel Camp, parcels for men in the Coy. were handed to them untouched. Those for the Lazs. were all censored. The reason for this distinction I never discovered.

On reaching the Laz. the parcels were first stored in a room set apart for the purpose from where they were distributed to individuals by an N.C.O. in the presence of a G., the parcel being first opened & all tins containing meats, fish etc. being abstracted. A "chit" was given in lieu of these. The store was opened for a given time each day & on requiring any of his tins, which were retained in store as described, the man repaired to the store with a bowl & his chit. The reqd. tin was then opened in presence of the G. & the contents emptied into the bowl.

The despatches from Eng. Denmark & Switz. were regular but as might be expected the arrival of mails was anything but regular. Thus two or three mails might arrive in a week or two or three weeks might

elapse without a mail. Similarly, a man might receive his parcels regularly every week or he might not receive any for weeks. I remember one man in C. whose parcels had suddenly ceased to arrive. He received none for about a year, then he got about 30 in one mail & nearly 20 in the next.

In addition to the parcels addressed to every individual, large quantities of emergency parcels of both Food & Clothing were sent out to the Help Comm. in each camp for distribution among newly captured P's. or to tide over a period when mails might be delayed. The number of P's. taken in Mar. & Apr., however, was so great that these emergency supplies were very rapidly consumed. Thus, in the first 3 mths the emergency issues of white bread or of tinned stuff we received, tho' ravenously welcomed, were unavoidably

infrequent & meagre.

The average time taken for the parcels to get thro' was 3 mths. My first one reached me after 10 wks., the second after 13. After that they came fairly regularly, the longest interval I was without a parcel being 5 wks. I received in all 37 or 38 food parcels & corresponding Bread or Biscuits, the supply ceasing at the Armistice.

For 3 mths. you lived on black bread, ½. soups & hope – mostly hope.– Then on the regular receipt of your pkts. you could, if you wished, become entirely independent of Bosche food.

Now, the contents of a parcel had to be carefully laid out to last 5 days, but with the addition of a goodly store of potatoes, taken mostly without asking, from our friends the enemy, a suffient diet was easily secured. The fact, however, that a

man might not receive his parcels created a difficulty, to obviate which the men banded together into small groups or "messing schools". This grouping into "schools" was one of the great features of the social life of the camp. During my migrations between Bks. I., X., VI., IV., & VII. in the Laz. I was in five different "schools" varying from 2 to 7 members. One usually acted as cook, the rest taking turns as "orderly man" – unless a R. batman could be obtained. Each school made tables, forms & cupboards for storing the joint contents of the member's parcels. Marmites, for brewing tea, or making stew or boiling potatoes, & frying pans together with mugs, plates, knives, forks, & spoons were purchased at the Canteen. All parcel food was cooked & thus we always sat down to properly served meals. We even boasted a table cloth

– a pilfered bedsheet – & scarcely, if ever, sat down to a meal without it.

Cooking on the stoves fixed in every room was sometimes difficult owing to lack of fuel. So we used to save all the empty parcel boxes for this purpose. Many a meal have we cooked by burning only cardboard.

The advantage of the "Schools" must be obvious. Sometimes, of course, the cupboard was bare, but usually it was fairly well stocked, sometimes to repletion. Almost every mail brought a parcel for someone or other in the school so if one member did not receive any parcels for weeks on end it did not matter much. The parcels of the rest sufficed for all.

In all our "Schools" we had a regular messing routine & as far as possible, regular menus. Our meals were Breakfast 8. a.m.

Dinner noon
Tea 4 p.m.
Supper 8 "

Our cupboard was in a very low condition if we could not manage 4 meals per day. The following is a fair specimen of some of the daily menus we used to manage –

Breakfast	Porridge Tea. Bread or Biscuits & Margarine.
Dinner	Fried Bully Beef or M. & V. Rations. Boiled Potatoes Rice Pudding or Parchment Pudding Tea
Tea	Tea, Bread or Biscuits Tinned Herrings, or Sardines or Paste Jam or Margarine
Supper.	Cocoa Small Biscuits & Cheese

On a few "state occasions" (e.g. someone's birthday) we would have late dinner & manage to turn out a sumptuous repast of 5 or 6 courses.

The G's naturally showed great envy at sight of all this food. It was a P's greatest delight to show a well stocked cupboard or box to an envious G. & to assure him that while there was "nix essen in Deuchsland" there was still "fil essen in Eng". → Turn over to page 170

R. P's. received no parcels & lived entirely on G. food. Belgian P's. were supplied in some cases from Eng. & in others by their own families. France & Italy seem to have had no rational system for Fr. & Italian prisoners were entirely dependent for food & clothing pkts. on their own people.

Canteen –

There were two canteens

in the Camp – one in the Coy. & one in the Laz. They were, of course, under the direct control of the G's. They were a great boon for they were always well stocked with the hundred & one odds & ends necessary to the comforts of every day life, e.g.- cooking utensils, mugs, plates, tooth brushes & tooth paste etc. Food was not stocked except that in the summer months a supply of fresh vegetables could often be had e.g. cabbages, raddish, lettuce.

Money

A special currency was in vogue in the camp. It was mostly paper, there being notes from ½ mark upwards. The smaller values were coins of some base metal. All coins & notes were marked "P. of W. Camp" & were only available in the Camp Canteens. They were useless outside the Camp.

Dressings & Medical Supplies

As in the matter of food the G.P. were also very badly off for Dressings & Medical Supplies. There was a Dispensary in the Laz. which drew its supplies from Stores in Cassel. Each Bk. was supplied daily from the Disp. on presentation of an indent by the N.C.O. or Med. Orderly, i/c, which indent had to be signed by a G. Doctor. The supply issued to each Bk. daily was extremely meagre & quite inadequate & rarely could more than a day's or two days' dressings be relied on.

The supply of surgical instruments & also the supply of antiseptics, drugs & medicines was fair. Many of the medicines were in tablet form & quite a number were substitutes or Ersatz. There was, however, (~~practically~~) practically nothing in the oil line. Eg. while down in Cassel one day on a fatigue for

medical supplies I noted that every "oil" bottle in the fine Dispensary there was absolutely empty.

All bandages were made of paper. They had no cotton wool & used a substitute of paper. It can easily be imagined that for badly suppurating wounds these were totally unsuitable & made dressing a difficult matter. They were very badly off for Gauze while Lint was non-existent. The supply of Gauze was so meagre that we had to cut it up into tiny squares & use it singly. So low did the stock run that in July orders were issued that all used Gauze had to be saved, disinfected, boiled & dried & then returned to the Dispensary so that it could be treated & then used again.

The supply of Dressings was so bad that the no. of patients dressed each day had to be subordinated to the supply for the day. Only the very worst

cases could be dressed every day, those not quite so bad every two, three or four days, & slight cases every six or seven days. It was deplorable & heartbreaking at times. Of medical comforts they had absolutely none.

Thanks to England, however, we were not quite wholly dependent on the G. supply just as we were not dependent on them for food. Large consignments of dressings,- bandages, cotton wool, guaze, lint etc.- as well as of medicines in tablet form & light foods were sent out from Eng. by the Br. Red Cross Society to the Br. Help Comm. of each Camp. From here these stores were distributed for use to the Med. Staffs of the various Bks. The Gs., of course, had nothing to do with them.

Unfortunately, however, these supplies of auxilliary dressings were never near

equal to the requirements tho' they were naturally a great help when they could be obtained. They may have been sufficient before March 1918. but not after

The light foods, however, were a boon. They consisted mostly of Tinned Milk, Cocoa, Glaxo, Ovaltine, Benger's Food, Quaker Oats, Plasmon Oats, & Arrow-root. Also large supplies of Emulsion & Extract of Malt. Many of the patients were unable to touch the G. food (they served up the same concoctions to sick men as to healthy) & must have gone under, had it not been for these light foods, which we prepared for them. These, & then the ordinary parcels, when they came to hand, were great factors in the restoration to health of many of the men. Enormous quantities of these medical comforts were used in our work & were undoubtedly the means of saving some of the more serious sick.

Social Life among Prisoners.

I shall try to touch next upon the different forms of Social Life that prevailed among the P's. Without some attempt at recreation & amusement life, even with regular parcels, would have been dull. First & foremost was the Cinema. A large Bk. in the Coy. was set apart for this purpose. There was a show nightly, admission being from ½ mark upwards. The pictures were changed every week. Naturally, the Cinema Hall was packed to overflowing every night. The pictures shown were all good but were of course, all German. They were all of a heavy type – mostly drama – typical of the people. Pictures of a lighter nature were never shown. The Cinema was run by a Swiss. organisation & the proceeds were applied by them, I believe, to the relief of P's. Certain it is that the G's.

had no finger in the pie. When first commenced it was totally banned by the P's. who believed that the proceeds were going to G. war funds. We used to go over from the Laz. to see the pictures once a week, if possible & it was indeed often a pleasant relaxation to get away for an hour or so from the sick laden atmosphere of the Laz.

Then another Bk. in the Coy. was set aside as a Theatre. Here amateur theatricals were enacted but the shows were mostly given by the Belgians, French & Italians, who were particularly keen on this work. In course of time, they had acquired costumes, scenery & other stage effects & some of the plays given were well worthy of praise. The Russians gave one or two performances. The Br. P's. never tackled a play but they gave two or three variety concerts of the "Pierrot" type so familiar to the

troops in France. An orchestra performed both at the Theatre & at the Cinema.

In addition to these, impromptu concerts were sometimes organised & were held in the Bks, – sometimes in the Coy. & sometimes, for the benefit of the patients, in the Laz.

An attempt also was made at Sport altho' but little was possible. Boxing was fairly popular & as there were some very good exponents of the art among the P's. some ~~excellent~~, excellent contests took place in different Bks., the shows always attracting a large no. of spectators. Football was the only other sport possible, & by far the most popular. The P's. were allowed the use of a field just outside the Camp. The pitch was level but very small. The game was played all thro' the summer months, matches

taking place on the Sunday afternoons. No time was allowed for practice & during the week the field was a parade ground for G. troops. Br., Fr, Belgians & Russians all boasted teams & the Sunday matches were always in the nature of international contests. The Fr. P's. boasted an excellent team which was seldom beaten, but a cup, which somehow or other had reached the Camp for annual competition, was won each year by the Br. team. Hundreds of P's., attended by Posterns & Sentries, attended the games. They were counted on leaving the main gate of the camp, marched down by Coys. & counted again on returning These little outings were hugely enjoyed for they afforded the chance of a breath of pure air & of an hour or two in a grass field.

On a fine summer afternoon, the scene was a striking one, the multi-coloured

uniforms of the crowd making up an animated picture.

Football, however, was exercise limited to the few. For the multitude the only exercise possible consisted of walking round & round the Camp or Laz. Almost at any hour of the day groups could be seen taking these promenades round the Camp. The routes were limited, & barbed wire barred the way in all directions, but much exercise could be got if only you went round often enough. In the Laz. there was much less opportunity to promenade by day, but duties & weather permitting, we generally tried to take a turn or two round before turning in. It kept muscles in order & afforded the opportunity for a chat with your own familiar friends.

The Laz workers, however, had one great privelege over dwellers in the Coy.

For a couple of hours one day a week ~~they~~ they were allowed a walk outside the Camp, under escort of a G. postern. Lists of names & application had to be made in advance to the Bureau. During the summer & autumn months full advantage was taken of this privelege. I generally made the applications but was only able on four occasions to join the parties. Of these four outings, however, I know I have very happy recollections. Out in the sunshine & the country all cares were forgotton & the men were happy as schoolboys. If the postern took us out on the roads or near the outskirts of the town – Cassel itself was out of bounds – we were marched in fours. On two of my walks, however, we persuaded our postern to take us thro' the woods which lay immediately to the south of the Camp & which ran down to the river. Here discipline was relaxed. It was go

as you please & we roamed almost at at will thro' the pine woods. They were delicious moments — oases in the wilderness. In the summer the woods & river bank were carpeted with wild flowers & from these expeditions we returned laden with armfuls of wild flowers, wherewith to beautify our living rooms for the week to follow. Thus, during the summer & autumn, we never sat down to a meal without a jar of flowers to decorate our table.

Cultivation

These walks, too, taught us something of how G/F was reaping all she could from her rich & fertile soil. Every available inch of the country was under cultivation. As in Fr. no space was wasted by hedges. As far as the eye could reach in all directions stretched waving crops of fast ripening grain — mostly wheat — or fields of root crops —

mostly potatoes. The soil was worked to the utmost. Two crops were taken off in 1918 — the first in early July & the second in late Sept. I remember in June over a weeks torrential & incessant rains & wind threatened to totally ruin the first harvest. The Camp was a quagmire but the P's. prayed hard for the rains to continue & the G's. were visibly concerned. But after all, the sun shone once more & two days afterwards all was smiling as before.

All work in the fields was done by women & children assisted by P's. sent on commando. We never once saw a G. toiling on the land. In one way or another, the army had absorbed them all. These women & children toiled from dawn till dark scarcely pausing to snatch a hasty meal. As in Fr. agricultural methods seemed to be very primitive & the huge, lumbering, unwieldy wain with its

labouring oxen was as familiar a sight here as in Fr. The land, however, was very fertile & needed but little aid from the hand of man to yield its increase. But it was obvious that, even with the scant labour available & that mostly female, the G's. were working the ground to the last ounce.

In passing, let me remark that the G's. always seemed to us to treat a woman more as a beast of burden than as a human being. I have seen women toiling along the roads under loads that would have tasked a horse almost. And I never saw a G. treat a woman with the slightest mark of respect.

G.F. like Fr. is a land of orchards & fruit abounded – in orchards & also along the road sides. (~~Occasionally~~) Occasionally we varied & added to our diet by persuading a G. to bring us into camp some luscious apples or pears for

which we would exchange white biscuits, a tin of bully beef or a tablet of soap – a luxury indeed for a G.

One of the main relaxations for the men working in the Laz. was a visit to the Coy. for an hour or so of a night. It was impossible to pass the sentry on the gate without either a pass or a fosten but it was usually fairly easy to get a G. to take you across. Life in the Company was extraordinary & the scene in one of the Bks. there almost baffles description. The Bks. were similar to those I described in the Isolation quarter. They were crowded with P's. of all the allied nations. The overcrowding was awful – 240 bed bunks being crowded into each room. Each man's bed bunk was his living space by day & here he had his meals, wrote his letters, read & otherwise passed the time. Each bed space was littered with the owner's belongings – bedding, table, cupboard, cooking

utensils etc. The rooms were badly lighted (the Camp by the way was lighted by electricity at night), very dirty & infested with vermin – fleas, not lice.

Two small stoves had to serve all this no. for cooking, so culinary operations were always in progress. Various musical instruments would be performing & everywhere card games & gambling. When the "fever" was on them, a gambling "school" would carry on for days & nights scarcely pausing even for meals. In one bed bunk a shoe-maker would be following his occupation – mending shoes for P's. In another, a carpenter would be making cupboards, tables or boxes etc. for sale. The babel of tongues from this cosmopolitan crowd was deafening & generally it was difficult to move about so dense was the throng. Except for the very few

who followed occupations as above & the small no. employed on permanent camp duties (cooks, sanitary men etc.) or on the packet Staffs, the remainder of the men in the Coy. had nothing to do but to eat & "kill time".

Each Bk. of 4 rooms accommodated 1000 men & this no. formed a Coy. The Coys. were numbered I. II etc. & each one was under the charge of a G. Feldwebel & an Eng. W.O. Full rolls of each Coy. – showing the present whereabouts of the men – were maintained in the Coy. bureaus.

"Commando", (~~etc.~~) – At any given time, a large no. of the men in a Coy. would be out "on Commando", i.e. working on farms, mines, factories. All, except R.C.O.'s were liable for this work. It was undoubtedly by means of P's. – largely R's. – that G's was able to carry on much of the internal work of the country. Thus P's & G. women ran

The different nationalities all had their Chaplains or Padrés who were all officially recognised by the G's. & allowed facilities & privelges for carrying on their work. The first English Padré we had was a Sgt., then for a short while we had a Captain & finally, when the latter was (~~repat~~) repatriated in Sept., we got a Pte. who had been acting Chaplain for 4 yrs in a large Camp near Berlin. The latter had refused offers of repatriation, prefering to stay & carry on his work. In attending to the spiritual needs of the multitude of sick & wounded, there was ample scope for the Padré & his assistants. All funerals, of course, were conducted by the padré. Regular Services were held both in the Laz. & Coy. In the Laz. a small room, adjoining the Dispensary, was set apart as a Chapel & here, every

Sunday morning, Service was celebrated. Occasionally services were organised in the different Bks. for the benefit of the sick, unable to attend the ordinary Services. Week night Services were also held both in the Laz. & the Coy. In the Coy. a Service was held every Sunday evening in the Cinema Hall. This place held over 2000 & was usually packed to the doors. The Services were very hearty & a sincere & deeply fervent attitude was predominant in the congregations. The form of Service of the Eng. Church was followed but men of all religious denominations attended & enjoyed the Services. All were comrades in misfortune worshipping together in an enemy land.
It was really wonderful to think that the same prayers & songs of praise were being offered up at the same time in this prison camp & in our churches in

all the farms. A large no. of K's guarded by a handful of G's. would keep a factory going. Some of the Commandoes were good – others bad. On farms the hours were long – often 18 hrs. a day – but the P's. had good quarters & civilian food. Some factories & coalmines etc were similarly good tho' the hours were ~~lon~~ not so long. On Sundays (the G's. observe Sunday religiously) there was liberty to walk out. One of my friends spent his imprison-ment in a saw mill, another (a ex-school-master) in a coal mine. The main object of every Br. P. on commando, however, was to make things as com-fortable as possible for himself & to do as little work as possible for the G's. & many were the dodges to evade work.

The dreaded Commandoes were the Salt Mines. Long hrs. underground, killing work, wretched food & accomm-

-odation & brutal treatment from the guards were the lot of the unfortunates sent to the hells. So bad were they that it was quite a common thing for men to deliberately mutilate themselves to get sent back to Camp & hospital.

Men sustaining injuries or falling sick on Commando fared badly – especially in the Salt Mines. The G's. never troubled themselves to obtain medical assistance & often days elapsed before the men would be sent into Camp. Then it was often too late & scores of lives were lost from this cause.

Men on Commando were paid by the G's. – usually about 5 – 7 mks per week.

<u>Religious Life</u> – In addition to the various attempts to maintain ~~social~~ some sort of social life which I have attempted to describe, the spiritual side was always catered for in the Camp.

far off England. I do not think that I have ever seen heartier services than those Sunday evening services in G/I. The Sunday night following Armistice Day the Padré, on concluding his sermon, said he had a message for his congregation. He displayed a large sheet from the pulpit with the words "Are we downhearted?" The answering murmer that ran thro' his audience was a thing to thrill the heart & to be remembered for ever.

G. censors were present at all Services. Prayers for the King & Royal Family etc. were not allowed but were inserted by the Chaplain immediately after the Armistice.

A harmonium & a large & well trained choir added greatly to the harmony of all the Services held.

<u>Letter Writing</u>. – A few words on this

rather important topic. I have already mentioned how, immediately on arrival in the Camp, we were allowed to send home our first P.C. giving news of our capture & whereabouts. After leaving the Isolation quarters we were given the privelege of being allowed to send & receive letters regularly & naturally it was a privelege highly valued & fully utilised. For writing, special notepaper, envelopes & P.C's. only were allowed, these being on sale at the Canteens. One P.C. per week & a letter of four pages once per fortnight was the regulation amount allowed. All correspondence – both outgoing & incoming – was rigidly censored, a large staff of G. censors being employed at the post office, just without the camp, for this purpose. The first letters from England reached us after about three months, after which they arrived regularly

The average time taken for a letter to reach G/T from Eng. was about three weeks. I found afterwards that all the letters I had written did not reach their destination. I got a P.C. thro' to France but only one letter of several written from Fr. got thro' to G/T. The transit of letters both ways, like the parcels, depended naturally on a host of circumstances, from the energy of the censors to the progress of events at the front – G/T supply of trains depending largely on this latter circumstance. All in all, however, the sending & receiving of letters was well organised, & was wonderfully regular. The receipt of a letter with home news (especially the first one) out there in the enemy land was a red letter event – more so even than in France. All letters both ways ceased at the Armistice, although by a chance mail that arrived in

Dec. I received a letter dated Nov. 12th.

Literature – Books & Newspapers.

One great boon we had in the camp was a fairly plentiful supply of books, which like the supply of dressings & medical comforts, were sent out by the B.R.C.S. These books went round & round & were the means of passing many happy hours for hundreds of P's. In the Coy. a Bk. was set apart as a Library & Reading Room & was well stocked with books of all descriptions – both text books on various subjects & fiction. Personally, in G/T as well as in Fr., I was never able to settle to reading. I generally found the routine of duties & the unsettled nature of the life too distracting. During the summer months, however, when duties in the Laz. became light as so many patients became convalescent, I attempted to fill in spare time by studying French

I procured two textbooks from the town through a G. censor, but only after tremendous difficulty. During this time, I visited the Doctor's Bk. regularly every day to give lessons in English to two of the Russian doctors & was taught Fr. by them in return. In this way, instruction in various subjects – mostly languages – was exchanged between P's. all over the camp. The opportunity in a camp like this for learning languages was spendid if one cared to take advantage – there was constant opportunity for actual practice in speaking. Some knowledge of a second language was a great boon & often indispensable. Often, e.g. I had to converse with a G. thro' a Frenchman who spoke G. Two & three languages were common, & four P's. I knew well – 2 R. doctors & 2 Frenchmen – had during their four years confinement aquired an almost

perfect knowledge of 5 or 6 languages.

Two <u>Newspapers</u> were published by the G's. for distribution among the P's. – references to which some of you may have seen in the public press. One was the Gazette des Ardennes, in French, & the other, in Eng., the Eng.-American News. These contained general & political articles & news of the war – more or less true. Everthing was written of course from the G's. point of view. They were dangerous publications for the obvious purpose of these papers was to cause dissention between the Br. & Fr. Fortunately, however, they entirely failed to fulfil their object for P's. regarded them mainly with amusement. ↻

Our only source of war news at first was what the G's. cared to tell us. Reverses found them silent but victories were quickly published. As small batches of new P's., however, were constantly

arriving from different parts of the front we were kept pretty much in touch with events by first hand information.

During the summer a supply of G. newspapers (the local Cassel paper) was allowed in the Camp & thereafter it was possible to follow daily the course of events as the G. press served it up to a credulous public. The most trivial G. successes at the front were reported with huge headlines & all references to military set-backs were studiously suppressed. The censorship was obviously severe. As the summer merged into Autumn, however, & the tide of war began to roll hopelessly against the Fatherland it became impossible for the authorities to conceal the real ~~possible~~ position of affairs, especially in face of the apparent changing temper of the public & the G. troops. Defeats,

however, were minimised & bad news kept back from the press as long as possible.

E.g. (1) The falls of Lille & Cambrai did not appear in the papers for about six weeks after they occured. We had learned of Cambrai 6 wks before from newly arrived P's. from that quarter.

(2) The great American victory at St. Michiel was dismissed in half a dozen lines & described as a perfectly ordered and previously contemplated evacuation carried out without the loss of a single gun, a single wagon or a single life.

The news had to come out, however, & so we were fully prepared & duly acquainted with the disaffection of Austria, Bulgaria & Turkey & finally with

the Armistice.

Smuggled copies of Allied Newspapers got thro' occasionally - goodness really knows how - probably through bribed censors. E.g. I saw several copies of the French "Miroir" & in Sept. & Oct. four copies of the London Times & a copy of the Morning Post. Naturally they were eagerly, tho' secretly, passed round & filled in many of the gaps in the chain of our news.

Attitude of Germans.—

"How did the Germans treat you?" is a question I have been asked scores of times. To answer this briefly is somewhat difficult for their general treatment of P's. varied so from time to time & was expressed in so many different ways. First, let me say that we saw no deliberately brutal treatment. By 1918 the day of that had passed, but the old P's. of 1914 & 15 could tell

tales that made one's blood run cold — tales that were too often verified by others to have been fabrications. In 1918 the number of P's. was too large, the guards too weak & the ~~the~~ position of G. too insecure to allow of brutal treatment. The general treatment, however, was bad from the point of view of neglect. Matters which could have been improved - such as food, accommodation & sanitary matters - were deliberately neglected by the G's. as much as possible & only the worst provided. The general plan seemed to be that anything was good enough for P's. I have heard the opinion expressed with which I concur, that this neglectful treatment was part & parcel of a deliberate & settled policy the object of which was to send the weak to the wall as quickly as possible. To quote the words of one of the G. Drs. to me, "If they are lucky they live; if they

are unlucky they die." The P's. made by far the greatest part of their own comfort.

In Mar. Apr. & May – when G/F was advancing & things looked rosy for her – the G's were arrogantly hostile to all P's. – especially to the Eng. As we journeyed into G/F even the children spat at the train, shook their tiny fists & shrieked out "Eng. swinerei". The G's. everywhere told us that shortly Paris would be in their hands – & after Paris, then London, – & when that happened, then Eng. could look out. They would make things hot for her & they made no bones about telling us. The Hymn of Hate was very loud in those early days. They seemed to have quite a score to pay off against Eng. & took all sorts of opportunities of venting their spite. E.g. ~~If~~ any trifling thing went wrong in the routine of

a Bk. the "dirty English pigs" always got the blame & threats of "no rations or no bread for three days" would be made. We found, however, that a large proportion of the G. composition is bluff & bluster & that often threats were made & never carried out. This bluster is admirably expressed by a G's. manner of speech – he never talks to you; he always shouts at you.

As things went against them in the war, however, so the attitude of the Bosche gradually changed to us. By the summer he had become tolerant of the Eng. pigs. As they gradually found out that the Eng. were neither dirty nor yet pigs but that, on the contrary, they were capable & methodical in their work, clean & orderly, & that the Bks. were beginning to look better under Eng. orderlies than under any others, they even began to treat us with a certain

amount of respect – as far as a G. can display that feeling. Towards the Armistice they were inclined to be friendly & after the Armistice made open attempts to fraternise with the P's. Generally speaking, however, the Eng. would have none of it & took it for what it was worth.

It may not be out of place here to say a word about the spirit of the Eng. P's. Magnificent is the only word to describe this & if ever in my life I felt proud of belonging to Britain I did so while I was in G/T. Even in the darkest days no one lost hope or, if any did, they would not admit it. To all the boasts & taunts of the Bosche they simply answered, "Wait a while." Englishmen never forgot that they were Englishmen & that the German's were G's. & enemies. Thus the unwritten law among the P's. was to do as little work as

possible for the G's. – when they worked hard, it was for the convenience & comfort of themselves or their comrades. There was always a sort of silent war ~~(maintained)~~ maintained & the Eng. P's. resorted to 101 dodges to evade work & to cause the G's. as much annoyance & inconvenience as possible. The overbearing attitude of the Bosche in their victory days, & their attempted advances in the latter days of the year, were alike treated with open contempt.

Before leaving this account of some of the miscellaneous features of our Camp Life there are one or two points more I find I have omitted & might here mention – Russian Element – There were a tremendous number of P's. on the books of the Camp – about 15,000 I believe – tho' large numbers of these were out on commando. There were three marked classes among them.

(1) The Doctors. — Brilliant doctors & Surgeons & highly intellectual men. I have already mentioned the debt of gratitude that Br. P's. owe to these men. The operating theatre was built by one of the Drs. & his assistants. They were brilliant linguists & were keen on this work. They were very sociable to all classes & always ready to render assistance in any work.

(2) N.C.O's. — These were also of a better class & were all well educated. E.g. R.N.C.O's. employed in the Laz. were all medical students.

(3) The great bulk of the R's., however, were illiterate & ignorant & were in a deplorable condition. They were "the hewers of wood & ~~the~~ drawers of water" of the Camp. Receiving no parcels or letters they had to rely wholly on the Boche food & clothing &

their condition in consequence was pitiable. The marvel was that they had existed for so long. As a result they thieved from the E's. without scruple. The E's. showed them no consideration whatever & regarded them as animals — "Rusky dogs" they called them.

The Russians, however, were good & willing workers & in return for biscuits & food would do all sorts of jobs for more fortunate P's.

Almost every Eng. messing school had its R. batman who kept the room clean & washed dishes & clothing for the members.

They were very fond of music but the tunes they played & sang were always sad. They were also the most inveterate gamblers, I have ever seen & they were possessed of an inordinate love of money. One consequence of this was that they were always trading — buying & selling.

If you gave them food the chances were they would sell it. From P's. receiving parcel food they used to buy up the daily issue of G. bread (from 1 mark to 2½ marks a ration) to sell over at a profit. Thus many of them were possessed of great sums of money.

Miscellaneous Items

(1) Prison Badges. – A Prisoner wore a white badge on left breast showing Army Corps to which Camp was attached, No. of P's. Coy. & also P's Camp No.

(2) Prisoners were allowed to have photos taken a Bk in the Coy being set apart for this. The work was done by two Belgians & they were kept extremely busy photographing P's. by the score.

(3) Mortuary & Cemetery – Mortuary was in south corner of Laz. & the Cemetery on a slope to the south overlooking the Camp. All bodies were placed in Mortuary naked on the stone floor to await P.M.

On a protest from the Eng. Drs. the G's. altered this & later allowed bodies to be placed direct into the rude, plain coffins. A P.M. Examination under G. Dr. was held on every body. At one time I have counted 36 bodies lying there – awaiting burial. Burials were conducted by the Chaplains concerned, assisted by his fellow P's. The Cemetery was well kept – by P's of course. The bodies were buried close together in long shallow trenches – death was rife & space limited. The graves were marked by plain wooden crosses – but scores & scores were nameless. That Mortuary was a place to haunt one's dreams. Many a sad procession have we followed into that hallowed acre on the hillside &, than it, I know of no sadder spot on earth. No war was there. It signified to us the end of hope, the extremity of despair, & the end of the dreams & ambitions of many

a brave soldier.

(4) Discipline – One great advantage we had in C. Camp over many others was that discipline was very lax – I mean, of course, routine discipline as imposed by the G's. To a large extent they left the P's. to organise matters for themselves & the retention in the camp of a nucleus of N.C.O's. to assist the Br. M.O's. in the Laz. & the W.O's. in the Coy. proved very valuable towards this end. In June all N.C.O's. not employed in the Camp had been sent away to another Larger. At times the G's. held parades of Laz. workers or of various sections in the Coy. for different purposes but these were few. The P's. naturally were not very enthusiastic in assisting & usually contrived to convert most of the parades into fiascoes.

In some camps, Officers Camps especially,

I believe, the discipline imposed by the G's. was very severe & life was rendered intolerable by parades from dawn till dark & by the most stringent of camp regulations.

Escapes – No successful attempts had ever been made, I believe, to escape from Cassel. It was too far from the frontiers. In Aug., however, two of our wounded Officers, then recovered, succeeded in getting clear from the Laz. They got five clear days start but were eventually retaken & brought back. Three days cells was the punishment & then removal to another camp. Things hummed a bit afterwards – Bks. being locked at 9.pm sentries doubled etc. In early Sept. a party of 13 Br. Officers, on their way from Bad-Colbay Camp to Cassel to appeal against court martial sentences for various offences against G. law, were lodged in my Bk., No. 4,

then empty, for two nights. They had managed to procure a large quantity of schnapps from the town & spent two lively nights. In spite of doubled guards round the camp 5 of them attempted to get out. They managed to negotiate the first belt of wires then the sentries caught them & placed them under close arrest. The spirit of those officers was great. They feared nothing & were Britons to the core. I think it was one of the best nights I spent in G/F. In their own camp, I believe, they made the life of the Bosche a perfect misery. The same night a Russian who escaped from the lunatic Bk. & got over the wires was caught just outside & clubbed over the head by a sentry. Several old prisoners in the Camp had attempted escapes from other Camps or from Commando

One Belgian, I knew well, Marcel de Backer, had made five attempts & on the last occasion was caught after 13 or 14 dys within 100 yds of the Dutch frontier.

Events towards end of Year.

Having concluded this account of some of the miscellaneous features of our Camp life I must now turn to a description of the events that occurred in the Camp in the late Summer & Autumn.

In Sept. the Lower Laz. was converted into a G. Venereal H. & was filled with some 2000 G. troops. The P. patients were all transferred to the Upper or Main Laz which thus again became filled to overflowing. My own Bk. No. 4 ~~was~~ became filled with Fr. patients.

Most of these patients were convalescent so for a week or two work among them

was fairly light. But in early Oct. there broke out in G/T. that dreadful scourge which devastated all Europe – the Influenza or as the G's. termed it "Grippe." Its deadly work in this country is too well known to all of you. In G/T. among a population weakened by years of bad feeding & whose vitality was thus at lowest ebb, its horrors can only be imagined.

Among the G. civilian population whole families were wiped out. G's. there were on the Camp staff who, within a few days, lost every living soul belonging to them. Then it was that they appealed piteously to Br. P's. for food for which they were willing to pay anything. One G. even went on his knees to a Br. P. to plead for a little rice or milk for his sick wife. The Britisher is grand & terrible in war but, in circumstances

like these he forgives much & is a generous enemy, & I do not know of any such appeal that was made in vain.

Things went no less hard among the P's. & death was once more busy. The early horrors of April & May were revived & from Oct until we finally left G/T in Jan. of the next year the story is one of hopeless suffering – suffering that nearly always ended in that crowded cemetery on the hill. We did all we could to fight the scourge but under such circumstances there was little hope of success against this dreadful disease which was baffling medical science all over the continent of Europe. What drugs & medicines were available we used but the G. & Br. Drs. varied greatly in their opinion as to treatment. The light foods I have already referred to were a great boon now but they were all too scanty.

We were often working from 6 or 7 am until midnight after which working day seven or eight calls during the few hours of sleep that remained was an almost every day occurrence for me. To make matters more difficult for us, the seven Br. M.O's. were at this juncture repatriated & only one Eng. speaking Dr. was left us – Capt. Presber, a A.S.A. M.O. He was literally worked off his feet but was a great soul & never complained.

For weeks & weeks scarcely a day or night passed without one or more deaths The highest no. reached in one day was 34. The Mortuary was constantly full to overflowing & always another sad procession was wending its way among the crosses on the hill.

The effect of the disease among different classes of P's. was noticeable.

The P's. who suffered most were the R's. who from long starvation had no strength to resist the disease. They suffered terribly. Next came the Fr. & Italians who were dependent only on private parcels from their families. The value of the British parcels was shown in the fact that Br. P's. suffered least. Of the Br. P's. those who suffered worst were the older P's. who had been confined & living on the tinned food of the parcels for 3 or 4 yrs Many a Br. P. who had existed thro' all this time went under after the "cease fire" had sounded on the fronts. P's attacked by the Grippe while out on Commando fairly badly. A G. civilian Dr. had to be obtained to send the P. into camp if he thought him too sick to work. The indifference of the G's. & sometimes the difficulty of obtaining medical attention often caused fatal delays.

Sometimes a man would be seriously ill for as far as ten days, before he was sent in to H. Sometimes when they arrived they were in the delirium stage & it was hopelessly late to do any good.

Thus life dragged on during the last 3 mths. of the year, to be broken in Nov. by the excitement of the revolution on the 9th & the Armistice on the 11th.

Revolution & Armistice.

For two months before we had had many indications of these events & were well able to judge of how the wind was blowing.

As I have already mentioned we knew from the G. papers & from what the G's. themselves now began to tell us of how things were going on the western front. Everything pointed to the fact that the Fatherland had reached

the breaking point. Then came the news of the breaking away of Bulgaria, Austria & Turkey. The next to break we knew would be G.F.

There is a limit, I suppose, to human endurance & the temper of the people & of the troops was obviously changing fast. As anticipated often during the war they evidently wished no harm to come to the Fatherland by an invasion of the Allied armies. G. members of the Camp staff said openly that they thought it was time the war was finished. G.F. was no good, they said. There was nothing in the country but paper & soup & the country was finished.

The country was evidently hard pressed for men for in Sept. & Oct. several medical examinations took place among the G. staff of the Camp & all sorts & conditions were combed out & marked for

the front. There was much "wind up" & in some cases the men marked took off home & failed to return.

The sentries even showed the general spirit of discontent &, though they remained on their posts, they commenced to amuse themselves during the lonely night watches by shooting at tins etc. stuck on posts. Some nights the Camp was like a miniature battlefield. Then they extended the amusement to shooting at anyone they saw near a potatoe heap after dark & so for a time it became dangerous to walk about the Camp at night. When least expected a bullet would come whizzing overhead. Within a week they shot several R's. dead & wounded others. The dead were placed in the mortuary & labelled as having died of influenza. This lawlessness was finally stopped

by a series of protests from the British officers.

One day an attempt was made by the authorities to entrain 400 or 500 troops for the front at Oberswehren, a Station about 1½ mls or so from the Camp. They got the men as far as the Station but there they all threw down their equipment & made off home.

The G. troops I have mentioned as being placed in the Lower Laz. were evidently infected with the same spirit of discontent, & also resented being quartered in a P's Camp under guard. They commenced trouble by tearing down & burning the Bk. furniture & fittings, then finally they pulled down stretches of the barbed wire & overturned the sentry boxes. The sentries still patrolled outside but had perforce to turn their backs & see nothing. Through the gaps crowds of these infected

G's. got out & made their way into Cassel – by night at first, latterly in broad daylight. Large numbers decamped altogether & made off home.

Finally for about a week before the Revolution & Armistice we had abundant evidence of the G. evacuation on the W. front by the passing of trains all coming from the front. The main railway line from Frankfort to Cassel ran alongside the camp & these trains ran continually day & night, the evacuation being continued for some time after the 11th. One morning between 7. a.m. & 11. a.m. we counted 16 trains. They were packed with G. troops, or laden with artillery or transport. The troops seemed in great spirits at the approaching peace. The trains were all decorated with evergreens & were all flying scores of red flags longside the G. national

colours. The troops on one train even shouted "Vive la France" & "Vive l'Angleterre" as they passed. Lastly came the news of the abdication & flight of the Kaiser.

Thus from all these various signs we were well prepared for the Revolution & the Armistice when they came upon us. <u>The Revolution</u> – or rather, the little we saw of it – passed off very quietly. It was silent & bloodless. The first indication we got of it on the morning of the 9th was the arrival of the G. Drs. & other officers in the Camp minus their shoulder epaulets which, as their badges of rank, had been torn off. Officers in Cassel who resisted this, had their swords taken from them & broken. Thereafter the authority of the G. officer was at an end. Their rule had been an iron one & the reaction was complete. Previously the men had been

obedient to ~~servil~~, servility; now they utterly ignored their officers.
All saluting ceased & officers were afterwards passed by as though they had never existed.

In the forenoon a party of marines came up from town to the Lower Laz. where they paraded & addressed the G. patients left there. The address was received with cheers, after which the red flag was hoisted over the Bks. The Camp Comm. appeared on the scene & attempted to turn the tide but no one would listen to him & presently they drove the old gem off with showers of potatoes from the heaps – the only missiles handy.

For a day or two before the actual signing of the <u>Armistice</u> rumour was busy & we had several false alarms but each time the jubilation result-

ing therefrom proved premature. Thus when the actual news came about noon on the 11th, it was for the moment discredited. As the truth became known there was general excitement & joy everywhere. The G's. were as delighted as the P's. There was, however, a marked absence of boisterous outbursts. Men trembled with excitement to think that all was now over & that England was drawing near at last. Strong men ~~exch~~ exchanged silent handshakes, with an emotion that was too deep for words. But alas! many there were to whom the great news brought no hope & had no meaning & the sight & thought of these did much towards sobering & tempering our joy.

<u>Conditions after the Armistice</u>

The general condition of things in the life of the Camp changed very much after

the Armistice. The Camp Commandantur became a figure head without power & the work of running the Camp was taken over by a Comm. of the Revolution-aries consisting of N.C.O's. – The "Soldiers & Workers Comm". The immediate result was that things went from bad to worse for there seemed to be many fingers in the pie but no single individual seemed to be at the head of things to organise & direct. So within a fortnight things were in a state of chaos. Some of the men on staff jobs in the Camp foolishly struck work while many of the Laz. workers were sent to the Coy. by the G's. The result was that ere long the incinerators & refuse tips became choked to overflowing. Empty tins & litter of all description were strewn everywhere Then came several days' rain & once

more the camp became a sea of mud & filth. Eight new Br. M.O's. had been sent to the Camp to replace those repatriated & they stated that had the time been summer instead of winter a serious epidemic would have been inevitable Men, of course, were expecting instant repatriation & simply let things slide. Protests to the G's. & appeals to the men from the Drs. & Br Officers affected after some time a slight improvement.

Added to this the Camp soon became crowded to overflowing. Notification had been sent out to the Commandoes to send in the men for repatriation. Hundreds flocked in themselves, having left their Commandoes without notification. The stocks of blankets ran out & sleeping accommadation became improcurable. Men were sleeping everywhere – every Bk was packed to overflowing. The continual

question was "when is the first convoy going home?" Nov. crept slowly away however, & still there was no sign of the expected Repatriation.

One day in late Nov. a disaster befel – which was bad but might have been worse. About noon fire was noticed in the Pkt. Store – the large Bk. where all the parcels were stored while awaiting distribution. Afterwards, things seemed to point to the fact that the G's. had originated the fire. A high east wind was blowing & within a few minutes the building was hopelessly enveloped. Had the wind been west the whole camp must have burned – nothing could have saved it, for all the Bks. were of wood & built in close proximity. Hundreds of P's. were soon on the scene & devoted their attention to saving as many of the parcels

as possible. A large quantity of Fr. stuff & about 2000 Eng. parcels were saved in this manner, but thousands of parcels were utterly destroyed. All the patients in the adjoining Bk. in the Lag had to be moved out into the open. Medical stuff had also to be cleared out of the Dispensary.

A G. fire brigade had been sent for from Cassel but their operations were rendered futile by a mysterious failure in the water supply. They had therefore to let the Pkt. Store burn & confine their efforts to prevent the fire from spreading. Many of them tried to steal what tins of food they could but they were well watched & Br. fists promptly caused them to disgorge their loot.

On the day of the fire, my staff of orderlies in Bk 4 & I were all sent to the Coy. for refusing to obey an order

given by the G. I/c. of the Bk.
Accommodation was impossible in the Coy. at the moment, however, so we simply moved to Bk I & remained there a fortnight undiscovered & quietly assisting in the work of that & other Bks. While here a short but severe illness laid me hors de combat for a few days. Finally the powers that were found us & so we were driven forth to the crowded Coy.

← Read into Page 109

Often they begged for food & constantly offered to buy articles of food for tremendous prices.
It was a serious crime for a G. soldier to interfere with P's. parcels & discipline in the G. army was severe. Hence, the number of mails interfered with was remarkably few. Sometimes it happened, however, & parcels which never reached their owners must often have been stolen en route. The mails which reached our camp about the time of the Revn & Armistice were badly tampered with, - many parcels missing & broken open.
I cannot leave this account of the parcel system without referring to the thousands of unfortunates who were, after capture, kept toiling behind the Boche lines & who, thro' never reaching a registered camp, never received a single parcel. This is one more black mark against Germany.

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The Experiences of R. R. S. Martin as a Prisoner of War in Germany.

Book III

The Russian element in the Camp were becoming desperate & were demanding better food & repatriation. They commenced trouble by burning Bk. fittings & pulling down wire & hoardings. Finally they made several raids on the Bk. now being utilised as a Pkt. Store. To guard the parcels remaining there a number of Br. & Fr. P's. were quartered in the adjoining room & it was here we finally found accommodation. There were no bed bunks so we constructed beds & a table & in a couple of days we had our School going merrily once more. Life was anything but dull here. There was plenty to do. Every morning we held a sick parade & attended to the medical needs of this & adjoining Bks. from the Br. medical supplies. At the same time I kept in constant touch with the Laz. & the Br. M. O's. there & all plans were laid in

case a train should arrive. By day our Bk. was a constant scene of changing & animated humanity. Meals had to be cooked & it was a work of art "to get a place on the stove". By night the Bk. was one great gambling den. The lights never went off & a dozen gambling Schools would carry on from dark till broad daylight.

Food at this time ran very low. After the fire telegrams were despatched to Holland & to other camps in course of being cleared to send on their surplus supplies but much delay naturally occurred before supplies could be got through. For days our School was reduced to biscuits, carefully rationed, & potatoes. Once we saved the situation by coaxing a supply of flour from the cookhouse & making

pancakes. Finally one or two food mails got through but they were all badly tampered with & much had been stolen, a thing that never occurred before the Armistice.

Visits to Town

One other great feature of our life after the Armistice was the granting of liberty to leave Camp & you may be sure we availed ourselves of this privilege on every possible occasion. There was no restriction as to area but a daily pass or the custody of a G. postern was required. Sometimes we used one, sometimes the other, sometimes neither. Many men went off into the town & stayed there for days. Many also went off altogether in an attempt to get through to the Br. lines at Cologne. Some perhaps succeeded; others came back. It was not altogether

wise & was discountenanced by the Br. M. O's in charge of the Camp for orders had been received against this as upsetting any regular plans that were being made for repatriation.

By arranging reliefs on our work in the Laz. we were able to make several trips into the town & while in the Coy. we got down pretty often, - always at night. A twenty minutes walk brought us to ~~Ried~~ Niedershen from where thirty minutes ~~train~~ ride took us to the Konigsplatz in the centre of the town. The recollection of these excursions is one of the bright spots of our life in Germany. To see houses again after so long was truly delightful. We spent hours in exploring the town & in visiting the different picture houses & theatres. At first, the Konigsstraes - the

principal street - was forbidden us, but we paraded it just the same, in spite of one heated encounter with a Revolution-ary Sgts. Afterwards there was no restrictions on our movements - trams & all places of amusement were equally open to us.

Cassel is a beautiful town & many parts are delightfully quaint. There are some fine public buildings & a fine public park. Houses are well constructed & prettily decorated while everywhere gardens & a profusion of monuments help to make up a really delightful town.

Two features were noticeable. There were no slums & absolutely no litter in the streets - features we also noticed in Geissen & later in Mannheim & common, I believe, in all German towns.

On the trams we noticed that the only man who ever volunteered to give

his seat to a woman was the Br. P. The G. simply never thought of such a thing.

The general ware shops, clothing shops & toy shops were well stocked. At Christmas the toy shops were a sight to see. There were crowds of shoppers but prices were fearfully high. Butchers' shops were totally empty, & bakers', with queues constantly lined up outside, nearly as bad. To obtain anything to eat in a cafe was well nigh impossible. Only once did we strike a place where we were able to obtain a tiny cup of "ersatz" coffee & a tiny piece of cake for 1½ marks. Once we went down to the town for the afternoon & evening & had to take our own food with us. After trying a dozen places in vain we finally got it prepared in an eating house

in an obscure street. The Frau did not know how to make tea & we had to instruct her. We gave her what was left for her trouble & she was so delighted that she refused any money payment & pressed on us some pkts. of saccharine.

Once we were accosted in the streets by two English speaking children born of a South African mother. They were too well bred to beg openly but the appeal in their faces for English food was unmistakeable & piteous so we gave them biscuits (fortunately we had some in our pockets) which they received with obvious delight. → Turn to Page 198

The Civilians were well dressed but a remarkable feature was the amount of articles of clothing made from paper. Suits, overcoates, hats and dresses were made often from it.

Smartly dressed ladies wore shoes with wooden soles & paper uppers. The number of things for which the G's. used paper was really amazing – Medical dressings, clothing & footgear, thread, string & rope & sacks are instances of the use to which they put it. I brought back a paper towel which is really a work of art. The shortage of cotton & wool was obvious.

Rubber also was unknown. We saw bicycles with two wooden rims separated by springs in lieu of tyres. Immediately after capture & while still behind the lines we had noted the absence of rubber. Their army lorries were fitted with iron rims. The motor ambulances had a thin band of rubber (or substitute) fitted outside the iron rim in the centre.

Motor cycles were a rare sight. I never saw a motor car – staff officers rode in carriages.

In spite of the shortage of food there seemed a perfect fever for amusements. Theatres & picture halls were crowded every night & it was often difficult to obtain admission. We visited ~~practic~~ practically every picture house & theatre in the town including the Opera House, – a most magnificent building both inside & out. Hotels & the numerous beer houses were also always crowded, especially on Sunday nights when whole G. families repaired there to spend the evening, drinking wine or beer & listening to the music discoursed by orchestras or automatic pianos.

In December Field Marshal Von Hindenburg was in residence at the Schloss of Whilemshohe, the former

residence of the Kaiser, just on the outskirts of the town. I never saw him but one afternoon several of the P's. went up to the Castle & saw him. They described him as grey haired, bowed & care worn. The people, they said, showed him great respect & uncovered as he passed. He was undoubtedly the popular hero of G/F for everywhere, in the shop windows, huge portraits of him were displayed. Nowhere was the Kaiser's name mentioned. "Don't talk of him", they would say. "He is finished & done with so far as Germany is concerned".

In Dec. the Cassel troops returned to the town from the front. Triumphal arches decorated the station approaches & the national & C. flags flew in every street.

The men were welcomed back with great acclamation – almost as victors.

No time on these memorable visits to the town were we molested – except once, as already mentioned, in the Konigstrass. People took no notice of us usually – they were too well used in Cassel to seeing P's. to regard them as objects of ~~curiosity~~ curiosity.

One night we managed to purchase some red, white & blue ribbons. It cost us dear, but we did not mind that. The old lady who served us evidently did not understand our intention but after securing the ribbon we showed her a picture of a Union Jack, whereon she got awfully angry. After this our chief delight was to parade up & down the streets with huge red, white & blue bows stuck in

our caps to the obvious annoyance & ~~[illegible]~~ irritation of all the G's. we passed. They often scowled blackly at sight of the hated colours & muttered things in passing, but could do nothing.

Repatriation.

This had been long delayed – Cassel was one of the last camps in G/F. to be cleared – but it came about ultimately. The various steps in the process were as follows –

(1) Early in Dec: a Br. Col. of the R.A.M.C. got through to the Camp from Cologne. Followed by a number of G. officials he made an inspection of the Camp & expressed himself as thoroughly disgusted with the conditions. The filth & overcrowding of the Bks. in the Coy. simply staggered him. In the Laz. he condemned the H. Bks. & fittings as ~~[illegible]~~ totally

unsuited for their purpose. He sampled the soup being served at the moment to the patients in Bk I. & stated that in Eng. we would not have given it to self respecting swine. He promised to do what he could & proceeded to Wilhemshohe from where he sent a wireless message asking for Br. trains to be sent through as soon as possible.

(2) Roused by this visit the G's. arranged a train early in Dec. which took away about 400 of the Fr. patients from the Laz. The train was unheated, had neither food nor blankets on board & was filthy. The Yankee M.O. Capt. Presher, was deputed to take charge & did so under protest. Before the train ~~[illegible]~~ reached the borders of Switzerland 36 had died on board.

Boche organisation

(3) As the days passed by & still no trains there were loud & angry murmers among the men. The G's. said they could not get the engines. Oh! those weary watchings day after day for the trains that did not come. Nothing more happened until noon on Dec 24th when, unannounced, No 8. Br. Amb. Train ran into the Camp Railway Siding. It had got through from Calais in response to the wireless message but had been long delayed after leaving Cologne. It had on board a full staff of R. A. M. C. Drs., Orderlies, & Nurses. We commenced loading up within the hour. The G's. were completely washed out & were never consulted. Scores of willing hands from the Coy. carried all the Br. cases ~~from~~ in the Laz. down to the train, where

tea was immediately served to them by the staff. A few Fr. cases remaining & Belgian patients made up the complement of the train. In anticipation of the day scores of Union Jacks had been painted on bed sheets or otherwise made. So, at 4 p.m – 4 hrs after arriving – it steamed out with flags flying, to the accompaniment of deafening cheers from the thousands of watching P's. left behind. This was a piece of Br. organisation! Six of the eight Br. Drs. went with this train. This train travelled via Cologne to Boulogne.

Accompanied by a Sgt friend & a couple of orderlies I now went over to the Laz. once more – now empty except for Italian & Russian patients – & we took up our quarters in Bk VII there to look after any patients who might

come in from the Coy. or from Commandoes. Food was now plentiful, so we celebrated our only Xmas Day in G.T. with a jolly good dinner & then went to the theatre in town at night.

(4) On Dec. 26th the G's. sent away a cattle truck transport with about ~~1,000~~ 2,000 of the Br. P's. in the Coy. The men were paraded with their belongings at 1 p.m. in the football field outside the camp. It was a bitterly cold day. One blanket per man was issued. The men were counted & rolls were called again & again. By dark there was no sign of a train & a blinding sleet commenced to fall. The trains did not arrive until 8 p.m., i.e. the men were kept standing there in the cold & sleet for 7 hrs. When the

trains reached the siding the men were marched down, crowded 40 into a truck & about 10. p.m. the trains pulled out in darkness & silence. One of the two remaining Br. M. O's. left by this train. It was another sample of G. organisation. This convoy had a quick journey home & travelling via. Holland reached Hull on New Year's Day.

(5) On New Year's Eve, Dec. 31st, No 26. Amb. Train, which had just finished clearing a camp near Berlin, arrived in similar fashion to No 8. On New Year's Day it was loaded up with the 9 patients we had collected since the departure of No. 8 ~~Train~~ Train, a fresh accumulation of Fr. cases & 400. Br. P's. from the Coy. This train travelled also via Cologne to the Base.

(6) On Jan: 7th another large G. cattle truck transport was sent away through Holland with the remainder of the Br. Fr. & Italian P's. from the Coy.

(7) The same evening a Fr. Amb. Train got through from the Fr. lines & the next day, Jan. 8th, the small party of us who remained were cleared on this train. It also cleared all the Italian & Fr. cases that remained. Since the departure of No. 26. Train 20 patients had collected on our hands, some of them serious. With our departure on this train, there only remained 4 Br. N. O's. to clear up the work of the Pkt. Staff & they were to leave next day by civil train from Cassel. I need hardly say that it was with mixed feelings but certainly

with no regrets that we watched our barbed wire home fade gradually into the distance.

Journey Home

This occupied exactly a fortnight. We travelled from Cassel via. Giessen & Frankfort to the Fr. lines at Mannheim. Here we detrained & were detained for 4 days in the P. camp there, which was in the occupation of the Fr. authorities & was being used as a reception camp for repatriated P's. Here we met the first Eng. speaking Allied troops of the Armies of Occupation, a Coy. of U. S. A. Amb. Drivers, who gave us a right hospitable reception. We were obliged to leave our stretcher cases here 11 in no. with the Fr. authorities & they were immediately removed to Allied Hosps. in Ludwigshaven, across the Rhine.

We were not allowed to cross the Neckar into the town but every day we managed to elude the Fr. Zouave sentries on the Neckar Bridges & so got into ~~Manh~~ Mannheim. One day we were caught clean & turned back but after dark we crossed the river above the bridge in a boat & then celebrated the event by a visit to the theatre. Mannheim is a beautiful town, very clean & splendidly laid out in the junction formed by the Neckar with the Rhine. We tried to get over the Rhine Bridges into Ludwigshaven, on the L. bank, which was in the occupation of the Allies but we found this impossible. One day, in Mannheim we were followed & finally accosted by an Englishwoman who was married to a G. She begged

food of us. For two years, she said, she had not tasted Eng. tea. We returned to Camp & made up a parcel for her from the food we had brought with us for the journey. In Mannheim as in Cassel our rosettes of red, white & blue were again prominent & again seemed to cause annoyance.

After 4 days our depleted band left Mannheim with a large party of Fr. & Ital. P's. for Metz. This journey thro' Alsace Lorraine — that bone of contention between Fr. & G/T. would doubtless have been interesting had it not been so uncomfortable but we were packed 43 in a truck & the Fr. P's. had so much luggage & so many boxes with them that movement was almost impossible. At Metz we parted company with the Fr. & were received by a small Br. party

stationed there for that purpose. Here we received a bath & discarded all the clothing we had carried thro' G.F., receiving a complete new rig out. We spent one night at Metz in the old G. Bks. The station had been badly bombed. Crowds of U. S. A. troops were passing thro', moving up to Coblentz. Our party was joined here by 4 stragglers from Langanoselza Camp. We proceeded next day by civil train en route for Paris via Nancy & Toul. The journey over the original lines & then up the valley of the Marne was very interesting to us, for as far as Chateau Thierry we were able to trace all the evidences of the G. advance. On reaching Paris we were taken in hand by a party of Br. ladies. We

spent two nights & a day in the Fr. Capital & were given a right royal time. Several parties of stragglers arrived during the day from various camps in G.F. & we finally left Paris 180 strong under charge of ~~an~~ a S.M. From Paris we journeyed via Amiens (from near where we had started on our last journey to the line at St. Quentin) & Boulogne to Calais. After two nights in Calais – in tents! – we crossed to Dover & then to No 1. Repatriation Camp at Canterbury. Our reception at Dover & Canterbury was splendid, the authorities there doing everything to make things comfortable for us. Finally, after the necessary med. examination, questionings & other formalities we were sent home on two month's furlough. I reached the north land on Jan: 22nd 1919 – just a fortnight

after leaving Cassel & exactly ten months from the date of my capture.

Conclusion

Thus the evil dream of the last five years has passed from us. Now with days of peace there is time & opportunity to reflect on the things that have been & to all of us who have been out yonder there come at times many pictures of the stirring days & events we have passed through. To me, in moments of reverie, there arise often memories of France with its moments of excitement & danger, of sorrow & of happiness. But to my mind's eye there appears oftener the picture of Germany. Perhaps it is because the experience & the impressions are more recent; perhaps because the prison camp has eaten more deeply into my

soul. Once again I see Cassel with its smiling landscape, & lordly Wilhelmshohe, symbol of the Hohenzollern power that was. Then looms up ever the Camp with its cordons of wire & bayonets, barring its inhabitants from the great world beyond. I see the crowded barracks filled with their crowds of many nations, the movement, the gaiety, the animated & careless life. I see again the squalor & misery, the beds of suffering & death, the silent figures on the cold stone floor & the sad processions wending their way to the hillside. The circle of my friends rises before me, great souls that rang true as steel, & with their faces come again the moonlit nights when we walked round & round the camp & talked of far off England. Lastly

there appears the vision of the barbed wire, emblem of captivity, with the silent figure of a grey clad sentry without, & within a still more silent figure clad in the Khaki of Britain. Ever he gazes out with sad & longing eyes over a sunlit country towards where lies that Island whose name spells "Home" & dreams of the day when the "cease fire" shall sound along the distant line of battle & of the greater day still when "wars shall cease & be no more". He is a great & awe inspiring combination of things, this khaki (~~clad~~) soldier of the motherland. One moment he laughs & jokes & lightly fingers the cards of chance; the next he meets danger & death with the same cheerfulness

& the same confidence. In everything he is supreme. Always he "plays the game" & is British. And this soldier of ours behind the bars has surely drunk deeply of the awful dregs of war. But as he gazes out from his place of captivity there is always hope in his heart. Perhaps the vision of that day I have mentioned rises before him — that day of Tennyson's

"When the war drum throbs no longer,
& the battle flags are furled
In the Parliament of man, the
Federation of the world.
Where the common sense of most shall
hold a fretful realm in awe,
And the kindly earth shall slumber,
lapt in universal law".

← Read into Page 177

Tobacco shops were plentiful & well stocked, for the German is an ~~ove~~ inveterate smoker but their tobacco, like everything else, was "ersatz". The G. mostly smokes cigars or the large familiar G. pipe. ~~Biggar~~ Cigarettes, very small, & thin, & filled with a substitute for the soothing weed, sold for 2d each. For an Eng. "Woodbine" a G. would almost have sold his soul. The tobacco consisted of dried leaves. I tried it once but could not smoke it. Before commencing to receive our parcel we used to smoke tea leaves (obtained from one or two emergency issues of tea from the Help Comm) & dried clover.

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and have <u>not</u> been photographed.

The Experiences of R. R. S. Martin as a Prisoner of War in Germany.

Book I

Distinguished Conduct Medal.

Supplement to the London Gazette dated 14.XI.16

No 53482 Sergt R.R.S Martin.

"For conspicuous bravery and devotion to duty on many occasions when in charge of stretcher bearers, leading them frequently through extremely heavy shell fire to and from the front line trenches, and exhibiting a coolness and courage which inspired confidence in all with him. He never relaxed his efforts until all the wounded had been evacuated."

March 21st 1918! What a red letter date this must surely be in the history of the world. As we look back along the history of man there are many, many such dates which stand out in letters of fire — moments when the fate of nations has been trembling in the balance; momentous, decisive moments that have determined the history of nations for centuries to come. Sometimes it was the setting forth of some frail bark filled with hardy, large-souled emigrants; sometimes the clash of mighty armies; sometimes the stroke of a pen. History abounds with these moments & they are too numerous & too well known for me to attempt to enumerate at length. A glance at our own island story, where such dates are numerous enough, will suffice. We call at once to mind such years as —

55 B.C. When the Roman invader first touched our shores.

1.66.AD. When the Norman's victory at Hastings commenced a new era for England which was to leave its mark on our country for centuries

12.15. When the first great charter of English liberty was wrested from the hands of the unwilling John.

1492. When Columbus made known to the world the existence of a great continent over the Atlantic.

July 4th 1789. When a stroke of the pen severed part of this same continent from our Empire & heralded the birth of the mighty United States.

~~14 When the fall of Constantinople to the Turks threatened the downfall of Christian Europe.~~

1815. When Waterloo freed Europe for ever from the domination of the little Corsican.

I have only mentioned a few, but so we might go on. Such are indeed red letter dates & we read with bated breath of these events, for we know well that our present lot as individuals & as a nation hangs largely on these pegs of history.

And there can be none now who will deny a prominent place on the scroll of history to the 21st of March 1918, for it was on this date that, after 3½ years of unsuccessful striving, the mighty armies of Germany hurled themselves in one last, mighty effort against the line that barred their road to Paris. The ultimate result we now know but we know also & can never forget the fact that for days & weeks the fate of Europe & of the world hung in the balance. I cannot pause to dwell at any length or to soliloquise upon the history made & unmade on

this day but I only emphasise, without comment, the importance to us & to future generations of the events of that eventful morning.

And to narrow down our conception of eventfulness from the world at large to the individual, on how many hearts, & in how many countries, will this date be written in letters than can never be erased? To thousands of individuals this day marked the termination of their part in the world drama. To the Central Powers it marked the beginning of the end, the birth & ultimate death of a last, frantic, forlorn hope; & to the Allies it marked the commencement of a struggle which in the end was to bring a crowning & glorious success, though alas! it was not to be achieved until many days had passed & until many had made the great, supreme

sacrifice for the liberty of the world.

My paper has to deal principally with my experiences as a P. of W. in G. but I intend to touch lightly first upon the circumstances that led to my capture. I was a stretcher bearer Sgt. attached to the 72 F. A., which was one of the Units of the 24th Div. I went to France with my unit & the Div. on Sept. 1st 1915 & had been lucky enough to assist, without misfortune of any kind whatever, in practically all the operations in which the Div. had taken part from the battle of Loos onwards. Until the 21st of March 1918 mine had indeed been a fortunate record. First came the tragedy of Loos in Sept: 15. Then followed a long winter amidst the deathless ruins of Ypres & its death trap of a salient, & then a comparatively quiet spring in the Messines sector. The late summer of '16 found us in the fatal

& glorious area of the Somme woods – Bernafoy, Trones & Delville – taking our part in the terrific storm which had burst forth down there. After these memorable days on the Somme came the comparative tranquility of Vimy & then a long & hard winter spell in the salient of Loos. Following this, we next took part in that second great effort to capture Lens, which attempt was made after the Canadians had stormed the Ridge of Vimy. This was in the early part of 1917. This was indeed a busy year. A short rest after the Lens effort found us in the great battle of Meesines Ridge & when this gigantic burst was done with we moved north again to renew our acquaintance for the second time with the terrible salient of Ypres – & in the summer of 1917 it was truly a spot to be shunned.

July 31st brought the great attack for the ridges & high land which the Bosche had held for so long in this sector. This "push", which ultimately continued until late into the autumn, ended for us in Sept: when we moved again far south – once more to visit those devastated areas of the Somme – our happy hunting grounds of the previous year. Here we spent a quiet winter in the sector before Peronne & in Feb: 1918 received orders to move back for a long ~~un~~expected & much needed rest.

We moved from the forward area back to Aubigny, (N) a small village near Villars Bretoneux & Amiens. There was to be no rest, however, for the weary & our visions of a six weeks holiday were rudely disturbed when, on the second night, urgent orders were received to "go up" once more. It was obvious that great events were again impending – more battles were to come.

Six o'clock next morning saw us in the cattle trucks once more, commencing a journey which ended some days later in the line just to the north of St. Quentin.

Few of us there were, however, who thought that it would be our last "trip up". Those who, a month later, did come back, did so in hot haste.

The line occupied by our Div: comprised a very extended front. Our Brigade was the right hand Brigade of the Div. & had two Batt^n in line. My section having been detailed to deal with their casualties, my Bearer Corporal – Cpl. S. Grimes (afterwards Sgt Grimes M. M.) – took the left hand Batt^n while I took the right, which in case of an attack was likely to fare worse because of the position it occupied.

This position consisted of a heavily entrenched redoubt – Essling Redoubt. – This looked across a valley onto the Hindenburg line, which lay like a great white snake, on the opposite ~~side~~ slope. In the valley between lay a little semi-circle of a doz. or so advanced posts, accessible only by night, & reaching from one end of the redoubt to the other. Midway between the redoubt & the head of the salient of advanced posts lay the dugouts which served as Adv^d Coy. H.Q.'s & as the R.A.P. – these dugouts lying in a tiny depression known as Muguet Wood. There was no sign, however, of a wood. The R.A.P. was an old Boche sap, finely & strongly built, & which looked full out ~~onto~~, onto that chalk line which concealed the gray coated warriors of the Fatherland.

On the extreme left of the Batt^n

front lay the ruined village of Berthancourt. In front of Berthancourt & between the lines, part of No Mans Land, was Pontruet. Pontru was visible further north still & just within our lines, while from the Redoubt, the St Quentin Canal & the town of Belenglise, could be nicely seen behind the Boche line. The towers of St. Quentin on the extreme right were just out of sight.

Behind the Redoubt & seperated from it by a shell pitted valley lay the ruined village of Maissemy, which by virtue of the entrenched defence that lay before it, was regarded as a "strong point" in case of attack. Battn H.Q's were fixed here.

Our plan of evacuating any casualties that occurred was simple. I had a squad of bearers & a runner stationed with the R.M.O. at the R.A.P. As the

distance from here to Maissemy was considerable, about 2 mls. I should think, two Relay Posts were necessary, one of which was stationed in the Redoubt & the other in some old French "75" gun positions in the hollow between the Redoubt & Maissemy. ~~itself~~, A fourth & rearmost post was in Maissemy itself. Casualties in the extreme forward area were conveyed by hand-carry first to the R.A.P. in Muguet Wood & then over the Redoubt by way of the Relay Posts to Maissemy, from where they were conveyed by a single car we had there, through Villecholles to Vermand, to which point also converged the line of evacuation that was being worked by the left Battn. At Vermand were the Section H.Q's & the A.D.S. & from this point cars ran the wounded to the Amb. H.Q's at Poilu & from there to the safe harbourage of a C.C.S.

This little sector which I have attempted to describe was taken over first by the 9 E. Surreys & moving into position with them, I took over immediate charge of the four posts from Maisemy forward. The front was very quiet, ominously quiet, in fact. Nothing ever happened save a little desultory firing on either side. The weather was delightful & we seemed, save for the necessity of constant vigilance, to be getting the rest of which we had been so rudely robbed. Each night I went the round of the posts, returning, usually in the morning, to Maisemy; but while the Surreys were in line our services were only once requisitioned for casualties occurring one night in Berthancourt. Rumours of the coming attack, however, were plentiful & as the days passed by they grew in number & apparent certainty.

Indications of what was expected such as the bringing up of reserve rations were not wanting on our side & when, the Surreys having meanwhile been relieved by the 1st N. Staffs, a reserve boy. came up from Vermand in broad daylight in the afternoon of Mar. 20th & commenced at dusk to dig in & wire on the ridge in front of M. it was almost certain that the long expected attack would soon be launched. We learned the same day too that it was due for 4.30. a.m. next morning, the information apparently having been obtained from some newly captured prisoners. At 10 p.m. or thereabouts that night I left M. for my last trip "up the line", leaving instructions at the various posts what to do in case the threatened attack came off. The night was fine & very quiet. Round the area of Muguet Wood & the advanced posts not a sound broke the silence, — not

even a shell from either side. But it was the lull before the storm. Every man was on the tip-toe of expectation & keenly alert & the uncanny silence of this wierd night added to this nervous state of tension. As the night advanced a thick mist settled down over everything & by 3.a.m. the fog was so dense that, outside, it was impossible to see many yards in any direction. What would the fateful hour & the mist curtain bring forth? And so the hand of time moved on, how slowly it seemed to us, & nerves were all ajar in that anxious waiting for the zero hour. We lay down to rest, fully dressed of course, but expectation was too great to allow of any sleep.

Just before 4.30. a.m. & for the third time that night, I changed the gas guard. Scarcely had we completed the

change when a long, low rumble became audible away on the left & then travelled with incredible swiftness down the line. In a few moments our dugout was enveloped by the hurricane. The rumours & the ~~(phro)~~ prophecies had been true. The shells were coming from beyond the Hindenburg line. Germany's last great effort to break through had begun. The threatened storm, so long pent up, had burst at last.

The hail of projectiles which thus commenced to deluge our advanced & isolated abode was maintained without any appreciable slackening for about five hours. So intense & concentrated was the fire that complete isolation was the result, not of our post alone but of the advanced posts in front of us & of the advanced Coy. H.Q.'s. which also occupied the Muguet Wood depression.

The original plan (which we knew), that in case of attack all these outposts should retire in the Redoubt, was impossible to fulfil & it seemed to us that the Redoubt behind us was suffering as badly as what we were.

Many descriptions have been written of such bombardments but to adequately describe the sensations experienced during such a shelling is, I think, difficult, if not altogether impossible. Only those who have undergone such an experience know what it means. To most of us in that dug-out, however, the experience was by no means new & so the situation was viewed quite philosophically & no one got unduly ~~excited~~ excited. We knew that, while this intense barrage lasted every one would be under cover so far as was possible. So, communication with our

neighbours being utterly impossible for the time being, we smoked and awaited developments.

The Sap we occupied was an old Bosche dugout & was very strongly built, & it was probably to this fact that we owed our safety for, facing the Bosche line as we did, our little home received more than its measure of "Jerry's" hatred. Every little while, a terrific crash overhead signalled another "hit" & then our guttering candles & improvised accetylene lights would leap up & die out. The relighting process became monotonous in its frequency & so our tempers & the King's English suffered in consequence.

In all situations, however tense, hunger makes itself felt & so presently the need for breakfast became imperative. A clear, coke fire had been kept going in the brazier which existed in the

outmost passage. Rations were fished out of sandbags & culinary operations commenced. Water was boiled, tea infused & bacon fried & the anticipation roused by the coming feast relegated to the background for the moment all thoughts of the shells crashing incessantly without. Even here, however, the enemy was unkind & before our chef had quite finished the delicate & somewhat dangerous operation a shell crashed on to the chimney immediately above & brought down our cooking apparatus - a hopeless wreck. In sorrow & in darkness we groped amidst the debris for the crumbs that remained & then retired with the precious fragments into the somewhat greater security of the inner chamber. So with tea, bread & morsels of bacon we sat round on the various bunks & refreshed the

inner man, the while we eased our minds with seathing comments upon Bosche ideas of courtesy.

These were evidently scant, for breakfast came to an abrupt conclusion as a direct hit into one of our two ventilator shafts put out the lights once more & brought masses of the outside world tumbling in on us, in addition to filling the place with noxious fumes.
Almost simultaneously, a ~~series~~, series of resounding crashes from the two entrances demolished the two doors seperating the outer & the inner passages. Hurrying to the exits we found the gas curtains completely blown away & for awhile all our energies were devoted to repairing these to keep out the deadly fumes that now filled our little valley.

So the minutes rolled on. And, as they passed, nerves became a little

strained. What was happening outside? Had the few posts still further forward managed, by some miracle, to retire into the Redoubt & if so, had they forgot our existence? But that was unthinkable. We knew nothing could live in that hell outside, the violence of which was increasing every moment.
There seemed to be no reply from our own artillery. At least we could distinguish none but in the din it was really impossible to tell.

Then came the first development. The screams outside were lengthening & we knew that the barrage was commencing to lift. It was 10 mins. to 9. by our watches.

Now at least was a hope of learning something & so I proposed to go on a little scouting expedition forward to the H.Q. dugouts to see

if we could learn anything. I found a companion in one of the Staffs.— George was the only name we knew him by. Curiously enough, this boy was a Northumbrian – a N/C. boy, so I asked for no better companion. The M.O. agreeing to the proposal we set forth, but the attempt was premature for the fire all around was still so heavy that we were forced to return & wait awhile.

The second attempt brought about the second development & gave us the news we sought, for we were just about to leave the trench outside to try the dash over 100 yds. of open when we caught sight of a Staff., wounded in the arm, running down the trench towards our sap. He was almost speechless from the excitement of his own experiences but he managed to gasp out "Clear out, Sgt, as quickly as you can. Jerry's over." Taking him back

to the sap, we dressed his wound, gave him some tea & learned from him what he had to tell. He said that but a few mins. before his post had been suddenly surrounded by Huns, who appeared without warning from out the mist. One of them fired at him at point blank range. His companions were evidently taken. How he got away he scarcely knew.

A short & hasty Council of War was held between the M.O., his Cpl. & myself. It was brief & we decided to hold on to the post instead of trying to make for the Redoubt which might now have been done. Of course, while there were any men still in front of us, this course of action was our obvious duty. Our patient decided to stay with us & take his chance.

A third time George & I essayed to reach Coy. H.Qs. & get in touch with the people there. Again we failed for as we reached the

open the rattling of M. Guns & the bursting of bombs amongst the dugouts which were our objective, told us that Jerry had got there first. We knew then that the advanced posts had fallen. Before we had time to decide what to do, in fact, almost simultaneously with the advent of the sounds which told us of the progress of events the unexpected happened & fate intervened. Like ghosts out of the fog there loomed up a large crowd of grey clad Huns. In a second they were around us & we were confronted by the uplifted bombs & the levelled rifles of half a hundred Germans.

It is curious how small details impress themselves on the mind in such moments. It needed but a glance to show that these men were probably of Germany's best — picked & well trained storming troops. They were all carrying full pack & equipment

& it was this detail which struck me most & strangely enough, it struck me in a humourous light. I laughed as I turned to George & said, "They're all in full pack, Geo. It looks as tho' they have come to stay".

But they evidently saw no humour in the situation. They were out for blood that morning & it was only the rapid intervention of their officer that saved us from a worse fate than capture.

The argument facing us, however, was unanswerable. It had all happened in a few moments. As the French would have said, "C'est la guerre." We were Prs. of War.

And so, out there beyond the lines, I gazed round on the warriors of the Kaiser & the Fatherland & I knew that for me the war was finished. My share in the great struggle was over.

The dugout was quickly invaded by the

German's & the men having been allowed to obtain any kit they chanced to have there, an escort took us in hand for our journey over the lines. The fire was still heavy in our area but was becoming more & more spasmodic. A very small number of the shells bursting around us were, we noticed, from our own side, which fact we viewed with pleasure as proving that not all at least of our guns had been knocked out. The fog was still as dense as ever & the atmosphere was pungent from the fumes of the long continued battle of the guns. By the time we had crossed the trenched area we were all suffering badly enough from the fumes. Our escort was both useful & amusing. They several times lost sense of direction but naturally no one troubled in the least to put them right.

Useful they certainly were for we should certainly have sampled some Hindenburg

bullets, bombs or bayonets but for their presence. Whenever grey forms loomed through the mist our escort howled loudly in their delightful gutteral gibberish & so warded off the approaching death from their charges.
I really think, however, that their own safety had quite a deal to do with their energetic guarding of us. The loving attentions of the many Bosche groups we ran into only seemed to me to bore & annoy the prisoners, who trudged imperturbably on.

Sensations began soon to crowd upon our minds. First I remember there was a vague idea that Germany was "all out" & that she was employing – as usual – huge numbers. Everywhere we ran into storming parties of anything up to 50 or more advancing seemingly in all directions.

There seemed no end to the numbers. This was not the old "solid formation" attacks of Verdun. It was, as we afterwards learned, the now famous "infiltration" method which so nearly proved our undoing. It was more dangerous than the former for it sought & often found our weak spots.

Another noticeable feature was the great number of machine guns. Every third or fourth man seemed to have one. They were firing promiscuously as they came on & so the messengers of death were flying round in plenty. We could not help remarking that they seemed much better equipped in this respect than our men.

Before we had crossed No Man's Land – in fact, pratically on top of our own advanced posts – we ran into two German light field guns

unlimbered & all ready for action. Behind them signallers were running out wires & – amazing fact – they were pushing forward over this tremendously difficult ground on bicycles. Such rapid "following up" as this by the German artillery & signalling units proved to us – if further proof were needed – that the Germans meant to keep what they took – if they could.

Our numbers had been augmented during our progress by other small groups of prisoners, some whole, some wounded. Just over the original German lines we struck a sunk road – evidently a "collecting post" – for here we were halted for a few minutes & then joined on to the groups already waiting there. There were 50 or 60 of us by this time.

Continually we passed large bodies of Germans with transport, artillery & all the other attendant baggage of warfare moving forward. In the late afternoon we crossed the St Quentin Canal at a point about 2 Kilos. to the right of Bellenglise. Later we passed right through the German heavy artillery, all in the open with scarcely any pretence at concealment, & in full action. The gunners were working like devils possessed & as the heavy projectiles screamed westward we wondered if all was well with the boys.

Just after, we entered Lehancourt. This was another rendezvous for here we made our first real halt. Herded into a large room we were lined up in batches & searched. Pocket wallets with letters & all written matter, together with such things as pocket knives or

other tools were confiscated. There were hundreds to be searched so in the hurry we managed to save some things. I retained my pay book & money, pipe & empty tobacco pouch. So there was but little consolation from that source to be obtained. The confiscated property was packed in boxes. We were told the articles would be returned & that night carried the heavy boxes for miles – but that was the last we ever saw of them.

One thing we noted here. Every cellar & house in the village had its accommodation in men or cases of ammunition painted or chalked up. We learned later from other Prs. that this was also the case in St. Quentin & in all the villages immediately behind the line. It was evident that men & munitions had been

steadily & silently gathered here probably for weeks before. The night of the attack St. Quentin & the adjacent villages must have been packed with men, transport & explosives.

For days afterwards we debated amongst ourselves – Did our people know the full facts? And then, if so, why did they let such a chance slip & why were our guns so strangely silent on the night of the 20th – 21st?

In the evening we were formed into a column some 600 or 700 strong & marched out of Lehancourt, heavily guarded. As we marched out, another big column of new prisoners marched in, & I recognized among them my Cpl. & his men from the Relay Post I had had in Essling Redoubt. I shouted to learn what time they had been taken & the answer told us that,

at the precise moment that the G's had surprised our advanced posts they had also broken through & surrounded the Redoubt. This settled all speculation as to what our chances of escape would have been.

This Cpl. of mine & his men got no further than Lehancourt. From here they went back again & met the fate of so many more unfortunates – they had to "work behind Jerry's lines". I cannot attempt to portray the full significance of this dreadful phrase. Only those who have experienced it know all that it implies. I was spared this fate but I have seen scores of those who were condemned to work "behind Jerry's lines" & I can guess a little of what they suffered – filth & dirt, no billets, starvation hard physical labour, & always the

constant danger of death from British bomb or shell.

The Cpl. & some of the men I never saw again. One of the men I saw after the Armistice in Cassel. He told me they got no bath or change of clothing for three months & that they had had to keep life going on dandelions. The horrible story needs no elaboration & there are thousands like it. When I saw him again he was a physical wreck – a splendid example of the results of German culture!

All that evening & well into the night we marched & as we marched troops passed us by thousands. – Batt^{ns} after Batt^{ns}. & one transport column after another – all going up to the line. It seemed to us they would never end. They were well clothed & equipped & carrying rations – the inevitable "black bread". The transport struck us as being bad & very much inferior to

that of our own army.
Everything on wheels seemed to have been pressed into service. The men seemed resigned to fate; they seemed quiet & subdued & lacked the enthusiasm & the fire of their comrades who had come "over the top" to us in the morning. They only glanced curiously at the passing column of P's. Had they understood all the remarks & criticisms hurled at them from the aforesaid column they would not have felt very reassured at the task before them. Tommy had struck a bad patch; it was his day "off" but he was as irrepressible as ever. My stomach was very empty but I felt a strange thrill of pride that night to think I had been born a Briton.

It was late when we reached Bohain. Other columns converging here brought the strength up to 2000.

It had been an exciting day & a hungry one too for we had tasted nothing since early morning. We were ushered into a huge gallery which just provided accommodation for our crowd of 2000. Every man was dead beat & it was at least a shelter so we doffed our tin helmets, gas masks & boots & "got down to it" on the floor. It was the end of our first day of captivity. The thought of captivity was galling but there was no help for it & so we slept.

Next day we spent at Bohain. In the morning we received half a slice of black bread & a piece of German sausage about an inch long & in the afternoon we were given a small drink of the "ersatz" coffee which later was to become so familiar. It was at least wet & nearly warm. This menu constituted the fare for the day. That night we slept

again in our big hall.

- Next morning we were paraded about 9. a.m., counted & doled out with a thin slice of black bread. We saw no more food that day. At 10. a.m. we moved away from Bohain, heavily guarded. The memory of that day's march & of the night which followed will long be imprinted on the minds of those who took part in it. We marched from 10. a.m. until 7. p.m. with only one halt of some 10. to 15 mins. sometime during the afternoon. We were not even halted while the guard was being changed, which took place as we passed through a village. As the kilos. passed by & the day became unbearably hot a cry went along the column "Stick it, lads, & show them how the British Tommy can march". The pace was fast enough & even the original guard was done up

when they were relieved. Of those 2000 P's. only one man fell out - one officer fainted by the way. As the heat got worse & as hunger began to make itself felt burdens were lightened & tin helmets, gas masks, greatcoats & sundry articles of small kit went sailing away into the fields on each side. I had neither kit nor greatcoat to trouble about.

The villages we passed through en route, were, of course, all French but all crammed full of German troops & showed every sign of the long German occupation. Directions & notices were everywhere printed in German. Cameras seemed to be very plentiful among the Boshe troops & we were often photographed. The French civilian population of these villages was decidedly sympathetic & obviously anti-German. Women constantly ran with buckets of water which they

placed by the roadside, the P's breaking ranks to fill from the buckets any receptical they chanced to have. Some had saved mess tins & mostly all had fashioned drinking vessels from the tin box contained in their gas helmets. This was countenanced for a while & then the Hun showed itself. An order from the O/C. passed down the line of guards, after which every bucket was unceremoniously kicked over & the kindly disposed French women rudely butted away by a sentry's rifle

One such cultured scene I remember well. We were crossing the square of a small village when a French woman & her little boy came out from a side street to watch the passing column. They were a brave couple for the child was openly carrying a toy flag - the tricolour of

France. A mounted Bosche officer seeing them, he rode up & knocked the child down with a cuff on the head, & then took the woman's name. An angry growl ran through the column of helpless P's.

In the early evening we passed Le Cateau on the left & at 7 p.m. reached Landrecies, our destination. Here at least we thought we would get billets & a night's sleep but we were disappointed for we were herded into a large barbed wire compound - our first acquaintance with that delightful abode known as a prisoner's cage.

The compound was large enough to have held five or six times our number & occupied a piece of low lying, damp ground. It was surrounded by barbed wire fencing some 12 ft high & at a ~~distance~~ distance of 10 yds or so there was a second belt.

Armed sentries patrolled between these belts & on the towers at the corners of the cage were placed M. guns & crews. Before dark set in German troops from the town were allowed ~~were~~ into the cage where they mixed freely with & endeavoured to talk to the P's. The object was probably to gain scraps of information & to impress the P's. with the extent of the G. victory. A group of us got into conversation with a G. Sgt. who spoke French. He told us something of the restrictions put upon the French civilians in towns in the occupied area. Their work, we learned, was all conscripted by the G. military authorities for their own purposes; they were strictly rationed by a system of food tickets; & their movements were stringently watched & restricted; e.g. they were forced to be indoors & to extinguish lights & fires at an early hour & they were on no account

allowed outside the town without a special permit from the town commandant. Then the poor, deluded creature told us that the advance had progressed for miles all along the line, that the G's were clean through everywhere & that it was only a matter of a few days before Paris should fall. We also learned the amazing & disquieting news that the French army & its morale were completely broken, that the morale of the British army was nearly as bad & that British resources in the matter of men, money & food were nearly exhausted & that therefore the war would be over before America could get going. All this our poor Sgt seemed honestly to believe. No, he had never been to the front or he might have believed differently. We tried hard to instil the truth of the situation into his mind but he only seemed to pity us all the more for our ignorance. I think it was the awakening

of such minds as his to the truth that eight months later brought about the revolution in Germany.

The night that followed was unforgettable. All agreed afterwards that never even in the trenches had they passed such a hideous night. It was a misty night & the cold was intense. Tired out with the long days march & faint with hunger we felt like sleeping on our feet. In groups of 5 or 6, men lay down on the ground & huddled together without covering, sought to snatch a little sleep. But the cold was too severe & in ten mins. time or so they had perforce to get up & tramp, tramp round until the welcome dawn broke.

In the morning we were taken out in groups to a building opposite & served with a bowl of boiled barley - our first introduction to the famous G. soups. Were it to be put down before you now it would probably turn you sick but to us it tasted better than any meal we had ever had.

Later on in the morning we were taken out again in small parties & marched down the town to the baths. I made acquaintance later on in Cassel & then in Mannheim & in Metz with their system of military baths but I might as well speak of them at this point. Their baths were excellent - better appointed than any I ever saw in France. While we bathed our clothes were disinfected - they certainly needed it. We went first into a tank containing a disinfectant solution & then under hot showers. There were drawbacks to G. baths, though. They had no soap & no towels & so we were thus early acquainted with the absence of fats & fabrics in this victorious country. We had to dry ourselves on our shirts (already steaming from the disinfection) or else dry naturally. I got someone else's shirt, a very dirty one too, but that was a detail. We went back to the compound refreshed if damp.

About midday, as we dozed on the grass, a great event occurred, proving to us that Britain at least had a kick or two left in her. Seven British aeroplanes were suddenly sighted overhead. In the town buzzers & sirens gave the warning to take cover & with the Jerries leading the way everyone, except the prisoners in the compound, complied. The P's gazed skyward & cheered while the planes, ignoring the barking anti-aircraft, loosed a load of bombs in the direction of the station & then leisurely continued their eastward course.

We were afterwards paraded by Divisions & by units & counted again. Jerry was always counting us but never seemed satisfied with the result. He never got the same number twice, the P's scheming subtlety to bring about this result.

The Divs who had been on our immediate right & left were all well represented in our crowd

The Divs represented were the 24th, 18th, 30th, & 61st & it was obvious that the units of these Divs that had been in the line had all suffered severely. Everywhere the story was the same – the surprise had been complete.

About one o'clock we were marched in groups to the Ry. Stn. where we were herded into the waiting cattle trucks that were to take us into Ly. We were horribly crowded, 44 into a truck & after half a loaf of bread per man had been tossed in after us we were locked in. So shortly afterwards commenced the journey by rail. This lasted just on 48 hours. We received no further food on the journey except that, in the middle of the next night, the 24th, we were taken out at Liège Stn. to receive another bowl of barley. Our destination, of course, was unknown to us but we were able to follow the route through the glimpses we got through the gratings of the trucks. We travelled through Southern Belgium via Charleroi, Namur, & Liége & finally entered

Gt at Aix-la-Chapelle, or as the G's call it, Aachen. From here all signs of French life ceased & everything became German. The attitude of the people here was interesting - especially that of the children who ran after the slowly moving train, spitting at it, shaking their tiny fists & shrieking out to the "English swinerie" the interesting information that England was "caput". From Aachen our course lay to Cologne into which we ran just about dusk on the eve of the 25th. We were just able to get glimpses of the world famous Hohenzollern Bridge & of the famous cathedral. In the approach to it we had seen something of the natural beauties of the Rhine valley. From Cologne we travelled on through the night of the 25th & just after dawn on the 26th we reached Geissen. Here we were detrained & marched up through the sleeping town to make our first acquaintance with a

German Prison Camp.

Here we were placed into some large empty wooden barracks where we spent the day. Once in the morning & then again in the afternoon we feasted once more on barley. Then we found a tap where a wash & a shave with a borrowed safety razor which went round I dont know how many faces made us happy once more.

We wondered if Geissen was our ultimate destination. It was not, for at night we were paraded again & marched once more to the Stn. En route, the column was accompanied by children, women & even German soldiers who sold to the hungry P's. small rations of bread & thereby reaped a harvest of the few possessions the British Tommies had managed to retain. Even watches went in exchange for chunks of the staff of life, - even if

it was nearly black & made mostly of sawdust.

Through the night the cattle trucks rumbled on once more.
In the middle of the night we reached the siding of another large Prison Camp We were again detrained & put into the big wooden barracks. A bowl was issued to each man & then after more barley we got down to sleep. We learned from the French cooks – P's. like ourselves – who served out the soup to us, that we were in the Prison Camp of Cassel, which for the neset ten months was to be my home in Germany.

The Prison Camp of Cassel lay at a distance of some seven Kilos. or so to the west of the town of Cassel, in the state of Hessen Nassau. The Camp was built on rising ground & just to the side of the main Ry. line running from Cassel southwards to Giessen & Frankfort. To the west, south, & east stretched a wide expanse of beautiful, undulating & well wooded country. From the highest portion of the camp a good view of almost the whole of the town could be had lying to the E. To the N. & directly facing the camp lay a magnificent & precipitous line of hills, clothed ~~in~~ with woods, on which was situated one of the Kaiser's many palaces, – the Schloss of Wilhelmshohe. Curiously enough this was one of the prisoner homes of Nap. III of Fr. after the B. of Sedan. Above the castle & crowning the E end of this ridge was a tower, surmounted by a colossal figure of Hercules, from whence a cascade

descended into the castle grounds. On the top of this ridge also towards the W. end was a solitary watch tower known as the Tower of Bismark.

Without any doubt, our new home lay in a beautiful setting.

The Camp covered an enormous extent of ground & following the influx of P's. from March onwards its accom^m^adation was severely taxed. The number of P's. on the books of the Camp was 30,000. which number will give some idea of its size. The P's. were of many nationalities & included British & Br. Colonial (5,000 or 6,000), Russian, (upwards of 15,000), French, Belgians Italians, Coloured troops, (including many French Colonials & also our own Indian troops), & later in the summer Americans. With the addition of the German staff the result was certainly cosmopolitan.

The Camp was roughly divided into three portions, viz. the main portion of the Camp which was familiarly spoken of by the P's. as the "Company", & two Lazarets or Hospitals, which were small camps in themselves.

(1) The Company or main body of the Camp was in the centre & was occupied by the healthy & able P's. One portion of this was set aside for the isolation of newly arrived P's.

(2) The main Lazarett or H. was the S portion of the Camp & contained the wounded & more serious sick.

(3) The "Lower Lazarett" was at the N. end & was really a sort of convalescent H to which healing cases were transfered from the main Lazarett before going into the Company.

The two Lazaretts had accom^m^odation for about 2,500. patients each.

The three portions, tho' adjoining, were under quite seperate & distinct

administrations but controlling the whole camp was a German General or "Kommandantur".

My stay in the camp may be roughly divided into three periods & I propose to deal with these in turn - observations on the conditions prevailing in Germany can be made as occasion presents. —

(1) There was the period spent in Quarantine which, in my case, dated from the night of our arrival on March 26th until April 4th.

(2) The Period from April 4th to Nov: 11th when the Armistice was signed.

(3) The period after the Armistice until Jan 8th 1919. when I finally left the Camp for England.

I Period in Quarantine.

Newly arrived P's. were usually quarantined for a periods of 3 weeks but, in my case, it lasted only one.

We were quartered in very large wooden barracks in the Company or main portion of the camp but these barracks were, of course, fenced off with double rows of barbed wire from the rest of the Company & patrols of armed sentries prevented any intercourse between the newly arrived & the older P's. Each barrack was large enough to accommodate 1000 men & was divided into 4 large rooms into each of which 250 men were crowded. The rooms had a "double decker" row of bunks down each side while there were also three rows of similar bunks running down the centre. In Quarantine no mattrasses were allowed, nor even blankets at first.

a large stove, burning coke, at each end of the room provided means of heating.

Life here was soul deadening & monotonous in the extreme. Each day was one long waiting for night when we might try to snatch a little sleep. Even this was almost impossible for without greatcoats or blankets the cold was intense. Men would stay up all night, huddled over the stove until it went out. Then they would tramp round to keep warm. There was humour in the situation too for the talk was mostly of the breakfasts cooked but not eaten on the 21st & men sighed for the bully beef & biscuits, never valued till now, that they had left behind in the dugouts. The monotony of the day was only broken by the serving of meals. At 7. a.m. we received a small ration of coffee, without milk

or sugar, & made of burnt barley. At noon, came a small bowl of "soup", which was simply water which had been flavoured with turnips, cabbage or some other vegetable. This delicacy was repeated about 5 or 6 p.m. At 4 p.m. we received our bread ration, – one loaf of black bread among 10 men. It ran out one thin slice each – dry, of course. This ration had to last until 4 p.m. the following day & so had to be most carefully harboured. On this starvation diet men sickened daily & were taken away to Hospital. At the end of a week I was on the verge of a fever & had a temp. of 104°. We scarcely knew each other, so much like ghosts were we. Occasionly, an extra marmite of soup would be obtained for a room & whenever that happened occurred a scene which I had never thought to see. Men fought like wild animals for an extra helping.

& usually the soup was spilled & no-one got any.

The barracks had open, pit latrines, horribly insanitary, at one end & a common washhouse containing a pump at the other. Even under the pump a decent wash was really impossible as we had neither soap nor towels. One fortunate possessor of a shaving outfit in our room made a small fortune by setting up a barber's shop in one corner.

On the Sunday after our arrival we were each given a P.C. & allowed to write home intimating our condition & whereabouts. Needless to say, this was a privelege highly esteemed & fully utilised as we all knew full well the anxiety that would be caused by the ominous word "Missing" in the brief War Office communications. The cards of course had to be ~~concen~~ censored. They took just over

five weeks to reach England & in most cases they were the first intimation that the people at home had of our whereabouts.

The P's were not interrogated individually, the numbers being evidently too great to deal with. Each man, however, was given a printed form to fill in. Such particulars as Name, Rank, No., Date of Birth, Home Address, Date & Place of Capture, Unit etc. were all duly & accurately filled in as being necessary to identification. Men fought shy, however, of questions about army corps & armies etc. & the information received under these heads must have resulted in some bewilderment to the readers.

Between meals there was nothing to do but to lie about the bunks or to tramp round & round the barrack. This was the only exercise obtainable. The want of food, lack of exercise & inactivity told very much on the men. Worst of all, the excitement was all over & there was now time to

think, – to think of the anxiety of those at home & of the apparently hopeless outlook for the future.

The men were divided into groups of 20, each group being placed under the charge of an N.C.O. – a Sgt. I had charge of one such group. This was a wise & necessary measure for without it everything would have been chaos & all semblance of discipline would have disappeared. By this arrangement, the barracks were kept comparatively clean & everyone got a fair share of the stuff termed "soup."

The N.C.O.'s were paraded on several occasions & addressed by a G. Officer ~~through~~ (through an interpreter) on the necessity of maintaining discipline & on the still greater necessity of saluting all G. N.C.O.'s & Officers. Almost needless to say, this latter command was received with much amusement & was never by any chance, acted upon.

After 3 or 4 days we were taken in groups for baths & disinfection. The baths were good – hot showers – but were marred as before by the lack of soap & towels. Before bathing we had our hair cropped short – so that we were like so many convicts. While we were bathing our clothes were disinfected & on the conclusion of the ceremony we were served out with a shirt, a pair of underpants & a blanket. Naturally we felt great benefit from the bath & change & the blanket rendered the succeeding nights more comfortable & for the first time for a week we were enabled to get off some of our clothing.

On April 4th a convoy of over 800 British wounded arrived in the Ry. Siding which lay just below our quarters so that we saw all the proceedings in full. The arrival of this convoy was a Red Letter Day in the camp & I venture to say that all those who saw it will never forget it. The

wounded were in cattle trucks & were lying on a thin covering of straw. Some of the wounds were of a most ~~very~~ serious nature. These men had been wounded on the first or second day of the attack - nearly a fortnight before - & their first dressings had not been changed. During their long journey in the trucks they had been locked in with insufficient food & without sanitary arrangements of any kind whatever. Several were taken off the train dead. The rest were extremely verminous & their general condition can be better imagined than described. They were conveyed to the barracks in the Lazarett. Medical orderlies being required to look after them, an appeal was made among the R.A.M.C. among the general P's. &, as a result, I went over to the Lazarett that afternoon along with another Sgt & 20 men. This ended my period of isolation & commenced a long period of hospital work.

(11) Life in the Lazarett.

The Lazarett was a small camp in itself, capable of accommodating some 2,500 patients & staff necessary to look after them. There were some dozen large Bks. for patients, each accommodating about 150; an isolation Bk.; Lunatic Bk.; Doctors Bk.; Bureau; 2 Cookhouses; Dispensary; Washhouse & Linen Store; Baths & Disinfector; & two Operating Theatres.

The R.A.M.C. who went over to the Laz; with me on April 4th were distributed for duty throughout the various Bks. As the senior R.C.O. there, the general supervision of this staff fell to my lot, while in addition I was deputed to take charge of one Bk. - Bk. IV - & it was here that the main bulk of my work in the Lazarett was performed.

~~The Bks. were of two types -~~

~~(1) Some were divided into 4 fairly large rooms, Bk IV being of this type.~~

~~(2) The others had only one main ward.~~

All the barracks had 3 or 4 small rooms attached for the Sy. N/C. of the Bk. & for the staff. There were also gents' Latrines, a Bath Room & a Dressing Room.

The Bks. were full of patients of all the allied nationalities but, at first, with the advent of the convoy to which I have referred, many of the Bks. were filled with British wounded. This was so with Bk IV

The whole Laz. was under the control of the "Chef-Arzt" (chief doctor.) His work though was entirely administrative & he was seldom seen outside the Bureau. The Bks were divided into, sometimes two, sometimes three, groups for medical work, each group being under the charge of a Sy. M.O. Their work, however, was merely to supervise & that, very superficially. They made a flying tour of their Bks. at intervals. Sometimes they would come every morning; sometimes they would not be seen for a week.

The actual medical work was left to the medical orderlies attached to each Bk. under the supervision of the M.O.'s who happened to be P's in the camp at the time. At the commencement of my term in the Laz. there were 6 Russian & 2 Italian M.O.'s. & it was on these men that the routine medical work of the Bks. fell. My first M.O.'s in Bk IV were Russians - Drs. Figornoff & Uzam. The Sy. M.O's, however, were usually present & usually assisted at the more important operations which were all performed in the Oper. Theatres.

We commenced work in our Bks. forthwith for there was urgent need, but the remembrance of the first two months - Apr. & May - is still like a nightmare. Wretched food, vermin & lack of many of the requisite medical necessities for relieving the suffering around us rendered our task difficult. Those first two months were

a period of suffering & death – suffering & death such as no words of mine can describe. I thought I had seen something of the sordid side of war in France but I never saw anything there to equal what I saw after the arrival of that big wounded convoy. Many of the wounds were serious & were all in an indescribably filthy condition. The work of dressing, at first, was enough to sicken the strongest – especially on empty stomachs For the first few weeks the R. Drs. were operating day in & day out. A word here about these men. Their work at this period among our wounded was beyond all praise & I can testify that their untiring efforts & unselfish devotion saved scores of British lives.

As soon as possible we evolved a "routine" for the Bk. which was roughly as follows.

(I) Odinary Duties of Orderlies responsible for cleaniness of Bk. (Russian at this time)

7.0. am Bk swept out.
7.30. – First meal – Bowl of "tea".
9.30. – Thin slice of black bread issued to each patient – day's ration.
Noon – 2nd meal. Bowl of "soup".
5. pm – 3rd " " " "

(II) Medical Routine

7. am – Temps. taken
8.30. am. – Dr. made his "round" & marked patients for "dressing".
9.12 – Dressings
3-6. or 7 – —
6. pm. – Evening temps. taken
8.30 – Drs last "round", after which night orderly went on duty.

This was the "routine" we got going in Bk IV & it was adhered to, more or less, while I was there, variations of course being made as occasion arose.

A similar round of duties was established in the other Bks. as well.

As N.C.O. i/c, my own work often finished near midnight & even after that, night calls, in those early days, were frequent.

We found our medical staff hopelessly small for the work of allotting an adequate number of orderlies to each Bk. Much juggling especially was necessary at first to provide night duties for all the Bks. After very much trouble & much opposition from the G's we got our numbers increased by 10 more orderlies — who were sent over to us from the Co. Afterwards, we endeavoured all we knew to get suitable patients, as they became convalescent, retained as orderlies, either ordinary or medical. By this means at the end of about 4 or 5 wks. I had Bk. IV staffed entirely with Britishers.

They were splendid lads, who worked ungrudgingly for the welfare of their sick comrades & I think I am perfectly safe in saying that we worked a transformation & made our own particular Bk. the model Bk. of the Lag. — as far, that is as conditions would allow. This staff was afterwards reduced & several times changed, but the pride in the Bk. & the tradition of cleanliness, good work & regularity thus established was maintained to the end.

By the end of May the most seriously wounded of the Apr. convoy were dead. Those who were going to recover were well on the road. Considering the general conditions, the bad food & the absence of proper treatment, some of the recoveries were really marvellous. A good

heart went a long way. I remember several men at different times who lost heart & without exception they all went under.

Periodically – every three or four weeks – the G. Drs. made a round of their Bks. to "mark out" convalescent patients. Those completely recovered were sent directly to the company; those who were almost well but still reqd some further treatment were transferred to the Lower Laz. This flower of "marking out" was confined to the G. Drs. & was not shared by the Allied M.O.'s, whose work was confined to treatment. The examn accorded each man was usually very perfunctory & the no. marked out depended upon accommodation & the arrival of fresh convoys of wounded prisoners. Often the old wounded had to make way for the

new – sometimes when quite unfit. Men were sometimes marked out to the Coy. with large open wounds. Many were sent out on crutches & I have even seen men sent out on stretchers – only to return of course, in a day or two. This was little short of criminal, for in the Coy. the general conditions of living were worse than in the Laz. In the Coy. the men lay on the hard boards; in the Laz. they had beds. In the Coy. each man had to look after himself & as the men here were supposed to be fit, they were liable to be sent out on "Comando", i.e. to work in mines or factories or on farms.

As the spring & summer progressed fresh batches of wounded & unwounded P's. were constantly arriving. But the nos. were now much smaller than at first – a sure indication to us that the pendulum in France was beginning

to swing back.
These new batches of wounded were always isolated for three days or more (without treatment), usually in Bk I & during this isolation Ly. interpreters endeavoured to glean what information they could by interrogating each P. individually. I am afraid they met with scant success.

As the good weather came to us with June, July & Aug. our number of patients began to decrease, many of them regaining health rapidly. Some of the Bks. were completely emptied — among these being Bk IV. The summer thus brought us a relaxation from the strenuous labours of Mar. & Apr. We were not altogether idle, however, for as far as possible we distributed the staffs of the empty Bks. to assist among those still full. I worked during the two summer

months that my own Bk. was empty in Bk. II which was still full of British cases, — including some 30 or 40 Br. officers — many of them very seriously wounded.

About the end of May eight Br. Drs. had been transferred to the camp, for duty & they took over the work of the R. Drs. who from that time took little further active part in the medical work of the camp. It was, for us, of course, a much greater advantage to be able to work under our own officers.

Before proceeding further with the general sketch of events it will probably be of interest here if I make a somewhat long diversion to touch upon various misc. details, some of which may throw some light upon the internal conditions of things in Germany & of the various aspects of life in a P/W. Camp. —

Accommodation in Lag. — Bks. Beds etc.

The Bks. in the Lag. were of two main types—

(I) Some were divided into 4 fairly large rooms, each with beds for 30. or 40. patients. Bk. IV was of this type.

(II) The others had only one main ward.

All the Bks. had also 3 or 4 small rooms attached. One was occupied by the f.'/c. of the Bk., one was used as a Dressing room & the others were occupied by the Staff of the Bk.

Each Bk. was furnished with flush Latrines & a Bath Room.

Every patient & worker had, in the Lag. the luxury of a bed. These were of various types. There were strong spring beds which were good & very comfortable. These however were in the minority. The majority of the beds were quite unsuitable for patients. These comprised (1) a second kind of colapsible spring bed which sagged

horribly in the centre; (2) a rigid, wooden, single bed, which was very hard & unkomfortable; & (3) worst of all, a low, wooden, rectangular framework, across which were laid a few wooden boards with spaces between them.

Each bed was fitted with a thinly filled grass palliase, 3 blankets, & a part of course sheets which were more or less clean. Soiled bed linen was washed in the Washchere' & clean linen issued from the Linen Store.

Some of the Bks. were built on piles & were fairly well built, dry, fairly warm & well lighted. (Eg. Bks. IV. III. & II.). Others (Eg. Bk. I, VII, X & Saals, I–IV). were the reverse. They were dismal in the extreme, dark, cold &, in wet weather, leaked like sieves. Thus in Bk VII for instance the beds had to be dragged all over the place to escape the rain that came thro' the roof when it was wet.

One of the Bks. (Bk. VI) was entirely occupied by Staff (mostly Russians) employed in the Laz.

Each room was fitted with a closed, circular stove. For fuel, coal & coke were used, but the supply of the former was scanty. The fuel was drawn each day by the Bk. orderlies from the coal depôt. Wood was seldom allowed & the usual thing was to have to start a fire of coke with paper & cardboard saved by the P's. from their parcels.

The Drs. Bk. was well built & comfortably fitted with good beds, tables, chairs, cooking range etc.

Though working in Bk. IV I had sleeping quarters at first in Bk. X, then in Bk. VI & finally in Bk. IV.

Water Supply of Camp & Laz.

This is worthy of comment for it instanced one of the things in which the provisions of the G's. for their P's. was negligent. The water supply of the Camp was derived from those wooded hills to the N. which I have already mentioned—which source also supplied Cassel. The water was good but the supply was so irregular in the Laz. as to cause the greatest inconvenience. Sometimes the water would only be turned on for 2 or 3 hrs. in the day; sometimes for only ½ hr. or so in the early morning; sometimes it remained off altogether for 2 or 3 days at a stretch. The supply was there right enough & we had reason to think that it was often deliberately withheld to cause as much suffering & inconvenience to the P's. as possible. I need not emphasise the absolute necessity of water in such a hospital as ours was. When the water

was cut off in this manner we used to fill our bath & every (~~at~~) available utensil during the hour or so that the supply was on. This had to serve all purposes throughout the day, — washing of patients, soup bowls etc. As there were only 3 or 4 latrines in each Bk. they got into a most filthy condition when water was lacking. In Bk IV. we later overcame this (~~difficulty~~) difficulty by obtaining a large barrel which we filled every night & from which the latrines had to be hand flushed.

Under these conditions the washing of patients was always a difficulty which was increased by the fact that only a couple or so of handbowls were obtainable for each Bk. When the water was off, it was almost an impossibility. When water was available, we evolved a system which was as good as any possible under the circumstances.

All patients who could do so had to go to the bathroom & wash themselves before 9. a.m. After this the bowls ~~of~~ water were taken round to all bed patients by an orderly.

At first we had neither soap nor towels. Soap we had to do without. For towel I commandeered one of the G. bedsheets (after much opposition from the G. ℄ Bk.) & this had to serve the whole Bk.

Bathing patients was more difficult still. The heating apparatus attached to the bath was difficult to get away — with coke it was impossible. Water & coal available, we bathed all patients in turn, — one orderly looking after this duty. By strenuous manoeuvering it ran out one bath every 3. or 4 wks. Generally, when the water was on we could get no coal; when we succeeded in getting coal the water went off.

When water was available the Bks.

were swilled out at least once a week, the G's I/c. being very particular about having this done. Scrubbers & also brooms made of twigs – the only kind used in the Camp – were used for this purpose, the dirty water being brushed underneath the Bks. thro' holes in the floor, – hardly a sanitary proceeding. Bathroom & Latrines were swilled out every day.

Food

There was no doubt that Germany was in a very bad way for food & our experience of the first three months was one of existence on unwholesome & almost starvation diet. The food given to P's. was abominable & I say without exaggeration that in this country we would not have given it to pigs. That enjoyed by the G. personnel of the Camp & by the civilians was better both in quality & quantity. The amazing thing, however, was how they had existed on it for so long. The older P's. told us that they had been in that condition for over 2 yrs. Everything in the food line was produced within the country & all articles of food that had before the war come into G. from abroad were totally unknown. It was obvious that the (~~blocade~~) blockade of the Br. Navy was no myth. G/I had been

strangled in a death grip for 2 yrs. before we went there. In 1918 she was a starving country & when the Armistice came she was at her last gasp. So we had the consolation of knowing that, if we starved, they at least were starving along with us.

Practically all the food they had was of vegetable origin. For some articles, they had attempted substitutes, everything of this nature being termed "ersatz".

The civilians were strictly rationed & had been almost from the start of the war. All food was issued to them by a system of tickets. G/T, evidently knowing what she was up against, had husbanded her resources right from the start.

Meat was a great luxury & was issued only to civilians & troops. None was ever issued to P's. The supply

of cattle & sheep in the country was extremely low & without doubt most of the meat consumed was horseflesh. The ration for 5 persons per wk. — the pre-war ration for 1 person per day.

Bread That issued to P's was dark brown & very bad. Its composition was 60% wood pulp, 30% potatoes & 10% cereals. I was assured of this analysis by a Fr. P. who had been employed for a long time in one of their bakeries. One thin slice of this, dry, was our ration for the day.

The consumption of this bread caused a great amount of diarrhoea & dysentery. A severe attack of the latter occurred in the camp in mid-summer & for about 2 months or more there were an average of over 400 dysentery patients, a large number of deaths taking place.

The Bread issued to the G. staff & to civilians was better in quality. The G.

staff received 1 loaf every 5 days.
In some parts of the country a small supply of bread, approaching white, could be had, but this was a great luxury.

Cheese – A very small ration was issued weekly to G. staff, none ever being issued to P's.

Jam – A fairly liberal supply was issued weekly to the G. staff. An issue of one spoonful per man was made at very long intervals to P's. It was of vile quality & was obviously made from vegetables, coloured & flavoured.

Butter – We never saw either butter or any substitute for it. Germany had (~~practic~~) practically no fats. We once stole some of the vile rancid decoction they used in the camp cookhouses, for cooking. What it was I dont know. The taste & smell were dread

-ful. We tried a thin smearing of it on some bread & I was violently sick afterwards.

Potatoes – These were plentiful & ~~formed~~ without doubt the staple food of Germany during the war. They were cultivated on every available patch of ground, inside the camp as well as out. On being gathered, they were stacked in huge heaps all over the camp & covered with earth & straw, to serve as a supply for the winter & these heaps really proved the salvation of the P's. for they pilfered the potatoes from them regularly & religiously.

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