

"OUTWITTING THE HUN"

By LIEUTENANT PAT O'BRIEN.

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(Concluded from last week.)

SYNOPSIS.

CHAPTER I—Introductory. Pat O'Brien tells of his purpose in writing the story of his adventures.

CHAPTER II—Tells of his enlistment in the Royal Flying Corps, his training in Canada and his transfer to France for active duty.

CHAPTER III—Describes fights in which he brought down two German airplanes and his final flight in which he was brought down wounded within the German lines and was made a prisoner of war.

CHAPTER IV—Discovers that German hospital staff barbarously neglected the fatally wounded and devoted their energies to restoring those who might be returned to the firing lines. Witnesses death in flight of his best chum, Lieut. Paul Hanes.

CHAPTER V—He is taken to the officers' prison camp at Courtrai. There he begins planning his escape. By great sacrifice he manages to buy and hide away two daily rations of bread.

Every other morning, the weather allowing, we were taken to a large swimming pool and were allowed to have a bath. There were two pools, one for the German officers and one for the men. Although we were officers, we had to use the pool occupied by the men. While we were in swimming a German guard with a rifle across his knees sat at each corner of the pool and watched us closely as we dressed and undressed. English interpreters accompanied us on all of these trips, so at no time could we talk without their knowing what was going on.

Whenever we were taken out of the prison for any purpose they always paraded us through the most crowded streets—evidently to give the populace an idea that they were getting lots of prisoners. The German soldiers we passed on these occasions made no effort to hide their smiles and sneers.

The Belgian people were apparently very curious to see us, and they used to turn out in large numbers whenever the word was passed that we were out. At times the German guards would strike the women and children who crowded too close to us. One day I smiled and spoke to a pretty girl, and when she replied, a German made a run for her. Luckily she stepped into the house before he reached her, or I am afraid my salutation would have resulted seriously for her and I would have been powerless to assist her.

Whenever we passed a Belgian home or other building which had been wrecked by bombs by our airmen our guards made us stop a moment or two while they passed sneering remarks among themselves.

One of the most interesting souvenirs I have of my imprisonment at Courtrai is a photograph of a group of us taken in the prison courtyard. The picture was made by one of the guards, who sold copies of it to those of us who were able to pay his price—one mark apiece.

As we faced the camera I suppose we all tried to look our happiest, but the majority of us, I am afraid, were too sick at heart to raise a smile, even for this occasion. One of our Hun guards is shown in the picture seated at the table. I am standing directly behind him, attired in my flying tunic, which they allowed me to wear all the time I was in prison, as is the usual custom with prisoners of war. Three of the British officers shown in the picture, in the foreground, are clad in "shorts."

Through all my subsequent adventures I was able to retain a print of this interesting picture, and although when I gaze at it now it only serves to increase my gratification at my ultimate escape, it fills me with regret to think that my fellow prisoners were not so fortunate. All of them by this time are undoubtedly eating their hearts up in the prison camps of interior Germany. Poor fellows!

Despite the scanty fare and the restrictions we were under in this prison, we did manage on one occasion to arrange a regular banquet. The planning which was necessary helped to pass the time.

At this time there were eight of us. We decided that the principal thing we needed to make the affair a success was potatoes, and I conceived a plan to get them. Every other afternoon they took us for a walk in the country, and it occurred to me that it would be a comparatively simple matter for us to pretend to be tired and sit down when we came to the first potato patch.

It worked out nicely. When we came to the first potato patch that afternoon, we told our guards that we wanted to rest a bit and we were allowed to sit down. In the course of the next five minutes each of us managed to get a potato or two. Being Irish, I got six.

When we got back to the prison, I managed to steal a handkerchief full

of sugar, which, with some apples that we were allowed to purchase, we easily converted into a sort of jam.

We now had potatoes and jam, but no bread. It happened that the Hun who had charge of the potatoes was a great musician. It was not very difficult to prevail upon him to play us some music, and while he went out to get his zither I went into the bread pantry and stole a loaf of bread.

Most of us had saved some butter from the day before, and we used it to fry our potatoes. By bribing one of the guards, he bought some eggs for us. They cost 25 cents apiece, but we were determined to make this banquet a success, no matter what it cost.

The cooking was done by the prison cook, whom, of course, we had to bribe.

When the meal was ready to serve it consisted of scrambled eggs, fried potatoes, bread and jam, and a pitcher of beer which we were allowed to buy. That was the 29th of August. Had I known that it was to be the last real meal that I was to eat for many weeks, I might have enjoyed it even more than I did, but it was certainly very good.

We had cooked enough for eight, but while we were still eating, another joined us. He was an English officer who had just been brought in on a stretcher. For seven days, he told us, he had lain in a shell hole, wounded, and he was almost famished, and we were mighty glad to share our banquet with him.

We called on each man for a speech, and one might have thought that we were at a first-class club meeting. A few days after that our party was broken up and some of the men, I suppose, I shall never see again.

One of the souvenirs of my adventure is a check given me during this "banquet" by Lieut. James Henry Dickson of the Tenth Royal Irish Fusiliers, a fellow prisoner. It was for 20 francs and was made payable to the order of "Mr. Pat O'Brien, 2nd Lieut." Poor Jim forgot to scratch out the "London" and substitute "Courtrai" on the date line, but its value as a souvenir is just as great. When he gave it to me he had no idea that I would have an opportunity so soon afterward to cash it in person, although I am quite sure that whatever financial reverses I may be destined to meet, my want will never be great enough to induce me to realize on that check.

There was one subject that was talked about in this prison whenever conversation lagged, and I suppose it is the same in other prisons too. What were the chances of escape?

Every man seemed to have a different idea and one way, I suppose, was about as impracticable as another. None of us ever expected to get a chance to put our ideas into execution, but it was interesting speculation, and anyway one can never tell what opportunities might present themselves.

One suggestion was that we disguise ourselves as women. "O'Brien would stand a better chance disguised as a horse!" declared another, referring to the fact that my height (I am six feet two inches) would make me more conspicuous as a woman than as a man.

Another suggested that we steal a German Goth—a type of airplane used for long-distance bombing. It is these machines which are used for bombing London. They are manned by three men, one sitting in front with a machine gun, the pilot sitting behind him and an observer sitting in the rear with another machine gun. We figured that, at a pinch, perhaps, seven or eight of us could make our escape in a single machine. They have two motors of very high horse power, fly very high and make wonderful speed. But we had no chance to put this idea to the test.

I worked out another plan by which I thought I might have a chance if I could ever get into one of the German airdromes. I would conceal myself in one of the hangars, wait until one of the German machines started out, and as he taxied along the ground I would rush out, shout at the top of my voice and point excitedly at his wheels. This, I figured, would cause the pilot to stop and get out to see what was wrong. By that time I would be up to him, and as he stooped over to inspect the machine, I could knock him senseless, jump into the machine and be over the lines before the Huns could make up their minds just what had happened.

It was a fine dream, but my chance was not to come that way.

There were dozens of other ways which we considered. One man would be for endeavoring to make his way right through the lines. Another thought the safest plan would be to swim some river that crossed the lines. The idea of making one's way to Holland, a neutral country, occurred to everyone, but the one great obstacle in that direction, we all realized, was

the great barrier of barbed and electrically charged wire which guards every foot of the frontier between Belgium and Holland, and which is closely watched by the German sentries.

This barrier was a three-fold affair. It consisted first of a barbed wire wall six feet high. Six feet beyond that was a nine-foot wall of wire powerfully charged with electricity. To touch it meant electrocution. Beyond that, at a distance of six feet, was another wall of barbed wire six feet high.

Beyond the barrier lay Holland and liberty, but how to get there was a problem which none of us could solve and few of us ever expected to have a chance to try.

Mine came sooner than I expected.

CHAPTER VI.

A Leap for Liberty.

I had been in prison at Courtrai nearly three weeks when, on the morning of September 9th, I and six other officers were told that we were to be transferred to a prison camp in Germany.

One of the guards told me during the day that we were destined for a reprisal camp in Strassburg. They were sending us there to keep our airmen from bombing the place.

He explained that the English carried German officers on hospital ships for a similar purpose and he excused the German practice of torpedoing these vessels on the score that they also carried munitions! When I pointed out to him that France would hardly be sending munitions to England, he lost interest in the argument.

Some days before, I had made up my mind that it would be a very good thing to get hold of a map of Germany, which I knew was in the possession of one of the German interpreters, because I realized that if ever the opportunity came to make my escape, such a map might be of the greatest assistance to me.

With the idea of stealing this map, accordingly, a lieutenant and I got in front of this interpreter's window one day and engaged in a very hot argument as to whether Heidelberg was on the Rhine or not, and we argued back and forth so vigorously that the German came out of his room, map in hand, to settle it. After the matter was entirely settled to our satisfaction,



I Confiscated the Map.

he went back into his room and I watched where he put the map.

When, therefore, I learned that I was on my way to Germany, I realized that it was more important than ever for me to get that map, and with the help of my friend, we got the interpreter out of his room on some pretext or another, and while he was gone I confiscated the map from the book in which he kept it and concealed it in my sock underneath my legging. As I had anticipated, it later proved of the utmost value to me.

I got it none too soon, for half an hour later we were on our way to Ghent. Our party consisted of five British officers and one French officer. At Ghent, where we had to wait for several hours for another train to take us direct to the prison camp in Germany, two other prisoners were added to our party.

In the interval we were locked in a room at a hotel, a guard sitting at the door with a rifle on his knee. It would have done my heart good for the rest of my life if I could have gotten away then and fooled that Hun—he was so cocksure.

Later we were marched to the train that was to convey us to Germany. It consisted of some twelve coaches, eleven of these containing troops going home on leave, and the twelfth reserved for us. We were placed in a fourth-class compartment with old, hard, wooden seats, a filthy floor and no lights save a candle placed there by a guard. There were eight of us prisoners and four guards.

As we sat in the coach we were an object of curiosity to the crowd who gathered at the station.

"Hope you have a nice trip!" one of them shouted sarcastically.

"Drop me a line when you get to Berlin, will you?" shouted another in broken English.

"When shall we see you again?" asked a third.

"Remember me to your friends, will you? You'll find plenty where you're going!" he shouted another.

The German officers made no effort to repress the crowd, in fact, they joined in the general laughter which followed every sally.

I called to a German officer who was passing our window.

"You're an officer, aren't you?" I asked, respectfully enough.

"Yes, what of it?" he rejoined.

"Well, in England," I said, "we let your officers who are prisoners ride first class. Can't you fix it so that we can be similarly treated, or least be transferred to second-class compartment?"

"If I had my way," he replied, "you'd ride with the hogs!"

Then he turned to the crowd and told them of my request and how he had answered me, and they all laughed hilariously.

This got me pretty hot.

"That would be a d— sight better than riding with the Germans!" I yelled after him, but if he considered that a good joke, he didn't pass it on to the crowd.

Some months later when I had the honor of telling my story to King George, he thought this incident was one of the best jokes he had ever heard. I don't believe he ever laughed harder in his life.

Before our train pulled out, our guards had to present their arms for inspection and their rifles were loaded in our presence to let us know that they meant business.

From the moment the train started on its way to Germany, the thought kept coming to my head that unless I could make my escape before we reached that reprisal camp I might as well make up my mind, as far as I was concerned, the war was over.

It occurred to me that if the eight of us in that car could jump at a given signal and seize those four Hun guards by surprise, we'd have a splendid chance of besting them and jumping on the train when it first slowed down, but when I passed the idea on to my comrades they turned it down. Even if the plan worked out as gloriously as I had pictured, they pointed out, the fact that so many of us had escaped would almost inevitably result in our recapture. The Huns would have scoured Belgium till they had got us and then we would all be shot. Perhaps they were right.

Nevertheless, I was determined that, no matter what the others decided to do, I was going to make one bid for freedom, come what might.

As we passed through village after village in Belgium and I realized that we were getting nearer and nearer to that dreaded reprisal camp, I concluded that my one and only chance of getting free before we reached it was through the window! I would have to go through that window while the train was going full-speed, because if I waited until it had slowed up or stopped entirely, it would be a simple matter for the guards to overtake or shoot me.

I opened the window. The guard who sat opposite me—so close that his feet touched mine and the stock of his gun which he held between his knees occasionally struck my foot—made no objection, imagining no doubt that I found the car too warm or that the smoke, with which the compartment was filled, annoyed me.

As I opened the window, the noise the train was making as it thundered along grew louder. It seemed to say: "You're a fool if you do; you're a fool if you don't—you're a fool if you do—you're a fool if you don't"—and I said to myself "the noes have it," and closed down the window again.

As soon as the window was closed, the noise of the train naturally subsided and its speed seemed to diminish, and my plan appealed to me stronger than ever.

I knew the guard in front of me didn't understand a word of English, and so, in a quiet tone of voice, I confided to the English officer who sat next me what I had planned to do.

"For God's sake, Pat, chuck it!" he urged. "Don't be a lunatic! This railroad is double-tracked and rock-ballasted and the other track is on your side. You stand every chance in the world of knocking your brains out against the rails, or hitting a bridge or a whistling post, and if you escape those you will probably be hit by another train on the other track. You haven't one chance in a thousand to make it!"

There was a good deal of logic in what he said, but I figured that once I was in that reprisal camp I might never have even one chance in a thousand to escape, and the idea of remaining a prisoner of war indefinitely went against my grain. I resolved to take my chance now at the risk of breaking my neck.

The car was full of smoke. I looked across at the guard. He was rather an old man, going home on leave, and he seemed to be dreaming of what was in store for him rather than paying any particular attention to me. Once in a while I had smiled at him, and I figured that he hadn't the slightest idea of what was going through my mind all the time we had been traveling.

I began to cough as though my throat was badly irritated by the smoke and then I opened the window again. This time the guard looked up and showed his disapproval, but did not say anything.

It was then 4 o'clock in the morning and would soon be light. I knew I had to do it right then, or never, as there would be no chance to escape in the daytime.

I had on a trench coat that I had used as a flying coat and wore my knapsack, which I had constructed out of a gas bag brought into Courtrai by a British prisoner. In this I had two pieces of bread, a piece of sausage and a pair of flying mittens. All of them had to go with me through the window.

The train was now going at a rate of between thirty and thirty-five miles an

hour, and again it seemed to admonish



"I Pulled Myself Up, Shoved My Feet Through the Window, and Let Go."

me as it rattled along over the ties. "You're a fool if you do—you're a fool if you don't. You're a fool if you do—you're a fool if you do. You're a fool if you don't."

I waited no longer. Standing upon the bench as if to put the bag on the rack and taking hold of the rack with my left hand and a strap that hung from the top of the car with my right, I pulled myself up, shoved my feet and legs out of the window and let go.

There was a prayer on my lips as I went out, and I expected a bullet between my shoulders, but it was all over in an instant.

I landed on my left side and face, burying my face in the rock ballast, cutting it open and closing my left eye, skimming my hands and shins and straining my ankle. For a few moments I was completely knocked out, and if they shot at me through the window, in the first moments after my escape, I had no way of knowing.

Of course, if they could have stopped the train right then, they could easily have recaptured me, but at the speed it was going and in the confusion which must have followed my escape, they probably didn't stop within half of a mile from the spot where I lay.

I came to within a few minutes and when I examined myself and found no bones broken, I didn't stop to worry about my cuts and bruises, but jumped up with the idea of putting as great a distance between me and that track as possible before daylight came. Still being dazed, I forgot all about the barbed wire fence along the right of way and ran full tilt into it. Right there I lost one of my two precious pieces of bread, which fell out of my knapsack, but I could not stop to look for it then.

The one thing that was uppermost in my mind was that for the moment I was free, and it was up to me now to make the most of my liberty.

CHAPTER VII.

Crawling Through Germany.

The exact spot at which I made my desperate leap I don't know. Perhaps, after the war is over, someone on that train will be good enough to tell me and then I may go back and look for the dent I must have made in the rock ballast.

I have said, I didn't stop very long that morning after I once regained my senses.

I was bleeding profusely from the wounds caused by the fall, but I checked it somewhat with handkerchiefs I held to my face, and I also held the tail of my coat so as to catch the blood as it fell and not to leave tell-tale traces on the ground.

Before I stopped I had gone about a mile. Then I took my course from the stars and found that I had been going just opposite to the direction I should be making, but I could not go back across the track there.

Heading west, therefore, I kept this course for about two and a half hours, but as I was very weak from loss of blood I didn't cover very much ground in that time. Just before daylight, I came to a canal which I knew I had to cross, and I swam it with everything I had on.

This swim, which proved to be the first of a series that I was destined to make, taught me several things.

In the first place, I had forgotten to remove my wrist-watch. This watch had been broken in my fall from the air, but I had it repaired at Courtrai. In the leap from the train, the crystal had been broken again, but it was still going and would probably have been of great service to me in my subsequent adventures, but the swim across the canal ruined it.

Then, too, I had not thought to take my map out of my sock and the water damaged that, too.

Thereafter, whenever I had any swimming to do, I was careful to take such matters into consideration, and my usual practice was to make a bundle of all the things that would be damaged by water and tie it to my head. In this way I was able to keep them dry.

It was now daylight and I knew that it would be suicidal for me to attempt to travel in the daytime. My British uniform would have been fatal to me. I decided to hide in the daytime and travel only at night.

Not far from the canal I could see a heavily-wooded piece of ground, and I made my way there. By this time I

had discovered that my left ankle had been strained in my leap from the train, and when I got to the woods I was glad to lie down and rest. The wound in my mouth had been opened, too, when I jumped, and it would have been difficult for me to have swallowed had not the piece of bread, which was to serve for my breakfast, got wet when I swam the canal. I found a safe hiding place in which to spend the day and I tried to dry some of my clothes, but a slight drizzling rainfall made that out of the question. I knew that I ought to sleep, as I planned to travel at night, but sore as I was, caked with mud and blood, my clothing soaked through and my hunger not nearly appeased, sleep was out of the question. This seemed to me about the longest day I had ever spent, but I was still to learn how long a day can really be and how much longer a night.

When night came I dragged myself together and headed northeast.

My clothing consisted of my Flying Corps uniform, two shirts, no underwear, leather leggings, heavy shoes, a good pair of wool socks and a German cap. I had a wallet containing several hundred francs in paper money and various other papers. I also had a jackknife which I had stolen one day before from the property room at Courtrai, where all the personal effects taken from prisoners were kept. For a day or two I had carried a knapsack, but as I had nothing to carry in it I discarded it.

I traveled rapidly, considering my difficulties, and swam a couple of canals that night, covering in all perhaps ten miles before daylight. Then I located in some low bushes, lying there all day in my wet clothes and finishing my sausage for food. That was the last of my rations.

That night I made perhaps the same distance, but became very hungry and thirsty before the night was over.

For the next six days I still figured that I was in Germany, and I was living on nothing but cabbage, sugar beets and an occasional carrot, always in the raw state just as I got them out of the fields. The water I drank was often very rank. One night I lay in a cabbage patch for an hour lapping the dew from the leaves with my tongue!

During this period I realized that I must avoid meeting anyone at all hazards. I was in the enemy's country and my uniform would have been a dead give-away. Anyone who captured me or who gave information from which my capture resulted might have been sure of a handsome reward. I knew that it was necessary for me to make progress as fast as possible, but the main consideration was to keep out of sight, even if it took me a year to get to Holland, which was my objective.

From my map I estimated that I was about thirty-five miles from Strassburg when I made my leap from the train, and if I could travel in a straight line I had perhaps one hundred and fifty miles to travel. As it was, however, I was compelled to make many detours, and I figured that two hundred and fifty miles was nearer the extent of the journey ahead of me.

In several parts of this country I had to travel through forests of young pine trees about twelve feet high. They were very close together and looked almost as if they had been set out. They proved to be a serious obstacle to me because, I could not see the stars through them and I was relying upon the heaven to guide me to freedom. I am not much of an astronomer, but I know the Pole Star when I see it. But for it I wouldn't be here today!

I believed it rained every night and day while I was making my way through Germany and Luxembourg.

My invariable program at this stage of my journey was to travel steadily all night until about six in the morning, when I would commence looking around for a place wherein to hide during the day. Low bushes or woods back from the road, as far as possible from the traveled pathway, usually served me for this purpose. Having found such a spot I would drop down and try to sleep. My overcoat was my only covering, and that was usually soaked through, either from the rain or from swimming.

The only sleep I got during those days was from exhaustion, and it usually came to me towards dusk when it was time for me to start again.

It was a mighty fortunate thing for me that I was not a smoker. Somehow I have never used tobacco in any form. I was now fully repaired for whatever pleasure I had foregone in the past as a result of my habits in that particular, because my sufferings would certainly have been intensified now if, in addition to lack of food and rest, I had had to endure a craving for tobacco.

About the sixth night I was so drowsy and exhausted when the time came for me to be on the move, that I was very much tempted to sleep through the night. I knew, however, that that would be a bad precedent to establish and I wouldn't give in.

Continued next week.

"What," said the lady who does her own marketing, "is the price of these chickens?"

"A dollar and a quarter a piece, ma'am," replied the market woman.

"Did you raise them yourself?" asked the lady.

"Oh, yes, ma'am. They were only a dollar ten last week," was the reply.

Mr. Gotham—I see the smallest cows in the world are found in the Samoan Islands. The average weight does not exceed 150 pounds. They are about the size of the merino sheep.

Mrs. Gotham—Do you suppose, dear, that is where they get the condensed milk?