

"OUTWITTING THE HUN"

By LIEUTENANT PAT O'BRIEN

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LIEUTENANT O'BRIEN NEARLY STARVES AS HE CRAWLS THROUGH GERMANY AND LUXEMBOURG.

Synopsis.—Pat O'Brien, a resident of Momence, Ill., after seeing service in the American Flying corps on the Mexican border in 1916, joins the British Royal Flying corps in Canada, and after a brief training period is sent to France. He is assigned to a squadron in active service on the front. He engages in several hot fights with German flyers, from which he emerges victorious. Finally, in a fight with four German flyers, O'Brien is shot down. He falls 8,000 feet and, escaping death by a miracle, awakes to find himself a prisoner in a German hospital, with a bullet hole in his mouth. After a few days in the hospital, he is sent to a prison camp at Courtraid. After a short stay there he is placed upon a train bound for a prison camp in Germany. He decides to take a desperate chance for liberty. He leaps through the open window of the car while the train is traveling thirty miles an hour.

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 Courtraid. 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 Courtraid, 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 Straasburg 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



"I Found Myself Right in a German Back Yard."

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 repaid 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.

I plugged wearily along and about 11 o'clock, after I had covered perhaps four miles, I sat down to rest for a moment on a shock of brush which was sheltered from the drizzle somewhat by other shocks which were stacked there. It was daylight when I awoke, and I found myself right in a German backyard. You can imagine that I lost no time in getting out of that neighborhood and I made up my mind right there and then that I would never give away to that "tired feeling" again.

In the daytime, in my hiding place, wherever it happened to be, I had plenty of opportunity to study my map, and before very long I knew it almost by heart. Unfortunately, however, it did not show all the rivers and canals which I encountered, and sometimes it fooled me completely.

It must have been about the ninth night that I crossed into Luxembourg, but though this principality is officially neutral, it offered me no safer a haven than Belgium would. The Huns have violated the neutrality of both, and discovery would have been followed by the same consequences as capture in Germany proper.

In the nine days I had covered perhaps seventy-five miles, and I was that much nearer liberty, but the lack of proper food, the constant wearing of wet clothes, and the loss of sleep and rest had reduced me to a very much weakened condition. I doubted very much whether I would be able to continue, but I plugged along.

CHAPTER VIII.

Nine Days in Luxembourg.

I was now heading northwest and I thought that by keeping that course I would get out of Luxembourg and into Belgium, where I expected to be a little better off, because the people of Luxembourg were practically the same as Germans.

One of the experiences I had in Luxembourg which I shall never forget occurred the first day that I spent there. I had traveled all night and I was feeling very weak. I came to a small wood with plenty of low underbrush, and with out a thick clump of bushes which was not in line with any paths, crawled in and lay down to spend the day.

The sun could just reach me through an opening in the trees above and I took off all my clothes except my shirt and hung them on the bushes to dry in the sun. As the sun moved I moved the clothes around correspondingly, because tired as I was I could take only catnaps.

That afternoon I awoke from one of these naps with a start. There were voices not a dozen feet from me! My first impulse was to jump to my feet and sell my life as dearly as I could, but on second thought I decided to look before I leapt. Peeping through the underbrush I could just discern two men calmly chopping down a tree, and conversing as they worked. I thanked my lucky stars that I had not jumped up on my first impulse, for I was apparently quite safe as long as I lay where I was.

It then occurred to me that if the tree upon which they were working should happen to fall in my direction it would crush me to death! It was tall enough to reach me and big enough to kill me if it landed in my direction and as I could only see the heads of the men who were chopping it down, I was unable to tell which way they planned to have it fall.

There was this much in my favor: the chances of the tree falling in just my direction were not very great and there was more than an even chance that the men would be wise enough to fell it so that it would not, because if it landed in the bushes the task of trimming the branches from the trunk would be so much harder.

But even without this feeling of security, there was really nothing else I could do but wait and see what fate had in store for me. I lay there watching the top of the tree for more than an hour. Time and time again I saw it sway and fancied it was coming my direction, and it was all I could do to keep my place, but a moment later I would hear the crash of the men's axes, and I knew that my imagination had played me a trick.

I was musing on the sorry plight I was in—weak, nearly starving to death, a refugee in a hostile country, and waiting patiently to see which way a tree was going to fall, when there came a loud crack, and I saw the top of the tree sway and fall almost opposite to the place where I lay! I had guessed right.

Later I heard some children's voices and again peering through the underbrush I saw that they had brought the men their lunch. You can't realize how I felt to see them eating their lunch so near at hand, and to know that, hungry as I was, I could have none of it. I was getting tempted to go boldly up to them and take a chance of get-

ting a share, but I did not know whether they were Germans or not, and I had gone through too much to risk my liberty even for food. I swallowed my hunger instead.

Shortly afterwards it began to rain and about 4 o'clock the men left, I crawled out as fast as I could and scurried around looking for crumbs, but found none, and when darkness came I went on my way once more.

That night I came to a river and as it was the first time my clothes had been dry in a long time, I thought I would try to keep them that way as long as possible. I accordingly took off all my things and made them into two bundles, planning to carry one load across and then swim back for the other.

The river was quite wide, but I am a fairly good swimmer and I figured I could rest awhile after the first trip before going back for the second bundle.

The first swim was uneventful. When I landed on the other side I drank till my thirst was quenched and then swam back. After resting awhile I started across a third time, and with my shoes and several other things firmly tied to my head. Just about ten feet from the opposite bank one of the shoes worked its way loose and sank in about eight feet of water. There was nothing to do but finish the trip and then go back and dive for the missing shoe, as I could not go on with a single shoe.

Diving in my weakened condition was a considerable strain, but I had to have that shoe and I kept at it for nearly an hour before I eventually found it, and I was pretty nearly all in by that time.

That was the last time I ever took my shoes off, for my feet were becoming so swollen that I figured if I took my shoes off I might not be able to get them on again.

This stunt of crossing the river and diving for the lost shoe had consumed about three hours, and after resting some fifteen minutes I went on my way again. I had gone nearly a mile when I came to another river, about the same size as the one I had just crossed. I walked along the bank awhile, thinking I might be lucky enough to find a boat or a bridge, but after walking about half an hour I received one of those disappointments which "come once in a lifetime." I found that this river was the one I had just swum!

I had swum it on the bend and was still on the wrong side. Had I made only a short detour in the first place I would have avoided all the annoyance of the past three hours and saved my strength and time. I was never so mad in my life at myself as I was to think that I had not paid more attention to the course of the stream before I undertook to cross it, but as a matter of fact, there was really no way of telling. The river was not shown on the map at all.

Now I had to cross it, whereas before I could have turned it. I walked boldly into the water, not bothering to take my clothes off this time, nor did I ever bother to take them off afterwards when swimming canals and rivers. I found it was impossible to keep them dry anyway, and so I might just as well swim in them and save time.

All the next day I spent in a forest, to which my night's travel had brought me about 5 o'clock in the morning. I kept on my way through the woods until daylight came, and then, thinking the place would afford fairly good concealment, I concluded to rest until night.

The prospects of even a good sleep were dismal, however, for about the time the sun's face should have appeared, a drizzling rain began and I gave up my search for a dry spot which would serve me as a bed. Some of the leaves were beginning to fall, but of course there was not enough of them to form a covering for the ground, and the dampness seemed to have penetrated everywhere.

I wandered around through the woods for two or three hours looking for shelter, but without any success, for, although the trees were large, the forest was not dense, and there was practically no brush or shrubbery. Consequently one could get a fairly clear view for some distance, and I knew it would be unwise to drop off to sleep just any place, or someone would surely happen on to me.

Once I came very near to the ends of the woods and heard voices of men driving by in a wagon, but I couldn't make out just what they were, and instinct told me I had better not come out of the woods, so I turned back. Here and there small artificial ditches had been dug, which at a dry season might have cradled a weary fugitive, but now they, too, were filled with water. Once I singled out a good big tree and large branches and thought I might climb it to it and go to sleep, but the longer I looked at it the more I realized that it would require more energy than I had in my present weak and exhausted condition, so didn't attempt that.

Finally I chose a spot that looked a bit drier than the rest, concluded to

take a chance on being discovered and threw myself down for a nap. I was extremely nervous, though, throughout that whole day, and would scarcely get settled into a comfortable position and doze off for a few minutes when, startled by some sound in the woods, I would suddenly awake.

After what seemed like a year or more, night finally came, and with a "dud" sky, low-hanging clouds and still more rain. There was not a star in the sky, of course, and that made it very bad, because without the aid of the stars I had absolutely no way of knowing which direction I was going. It was just a case of taking a chance. I probably would have been better off if I had simply picked out a place and stayed there until the weather improved, but naturally I was impatient to be on my way when each day without food only lessened my strength and my ultimate chances of reaching the frontier.

So I left the woods and struck off in the direction which I thought was north. I hadn't been at all sure of my bearings the day before, and as it had rained the sun failed entirely to help me out, but I was almost sure I had the right direction and trusted to luck. That night I found more rivers, canals and swamps than I ever found in my life before, but I had the good fortune to stumble on to some celery, and after my diet of beets it surely was a treat. Perhaps it's unnecessary to add that I took on a good supply of celery and for days I went along chewing celery like a cow would a cud.

Along towards morning, when I supposed I had gotten in a fairly good lap of my journey—perhaps seven or eight miles—I began to recognize certain objects as familiar landmarks. At least, I thought I had seen them before and as I traveled along I knew positively I had seen certain objects very recently. Off at my right—not over a quarter of a mile—I noticed some fairly good sized woods and thought I would go over there to hide that day, because it looked as though the sun was going to shine and I hoped to get my clothes dry, and perhaps get a decent sleep. I had this celery and a large beet, so I knew I would be able to live the day through.

Finally I made my way over to the woods. It was still too dark in among the trees to do much in the way of selecting my quarters for the day and I could not go a step farther. So I waited on the edge of the forest until dawn and then set out to explore the place, with a view to finding some nook where I might sleep. Imagine my disgust, and discouragement, too, when an hour or so later I came upon the exact place where I had spent the day before, and I realized that all night long I had been circling the very woods I was trying to get away from. I think perhaps I had gone all of a quarter of a mile in the right direction, but then had lost my bearings entirely, and daylight found me with nothing accomplished.

The sun, however, did come out that day, and I welcomed its warm rays, as they, perhaps, have never been welcomed before. I was very tired—just about all in—but I spent a better day in the woods than the previous one.

That night the stars came out; I located my friend, the North Star, and tried to make up for lost time. But when one is making only seven or eight miles a day, or rather a night, one night lost means a whole lot, especially when each day keeps him from freedom. Such ill fortune and discouragements as this were harder to endure, I believe, than the actual hunger, and the accompanying worry naturally reduced my weight. At times I was furiously angry with myself for the mistakes I made and the foolish things I did, but I always tried to see something funny about the situation, whatever it might be, that relieved the strain of habit and helped to pass the time away. I think if a man is overburdened with a sense of humor and wants to get rid of it, this trip I took would be an excellent remedy for it. Right at this time I would have welcomed anything for a companion. I believe even a snake would have been a Godsend to me.

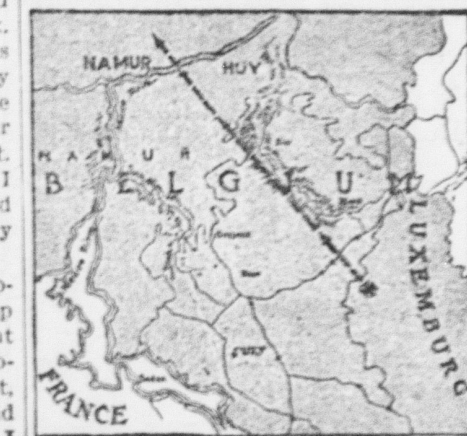
With a name as Irish as mine, it is only natural that I looked for goats along the way, thinking that I might be able to milk them. There are very few cows in this country, and the opportunities for "milking them" fewer than the cows themselves because they are housed in barns adjoining the homes and always alertly watched by their fortunate owners. I did hope that I might find a goat staked out some place in the fields, but in all my travels I never saw a goat or a pig, and only a few cows. Several times I searched nests for eggs, but somebody always had beaten me to it, as I never even found so much as a nest egg.

There was no chance of getting away with any "bullying" stuff in Luxembourg. I knew, because the young men have not been forced into the army and are still at home, and as they are decidedly pro-German, it would have been pretty hard for me to demand anything in that part of the country. It was not like taking things away from old men and women or robbing

people that could not stop me if they chose to do so. I thought at this time that I was suffering about the worst hardships any human being could ever be called upon to endure, but I was later to find that the best of my journey was made along about this time. There were plenty of vegetables, even though they were raw, and these were much better than the things I was afterwards compelled to eat or go without.

We frequently hear of men who have lived for a certain number of days on their own resources in the woods just on a bet or to prove that the "back-to-nature" theory still has the merits and will still work. My advice to some of those nature seekers is that if in the future they wish to make a real good record, try the little countries of Luxembourg and Belgium with a slice of Germany thrown in.

I suppose that during this experience of mine I made many mistakes and traveled many unnecessary miles which one with a knowledge of woodland might have avoided and I failed to take advantage of many things which would have been quite



Map Showing the Progress O'Brien Made in Passing Out of Luxembourg into Belgium. The Heavy Dotted Line Shows the Course of That Part of His Journey Toward Holland.

apparent to one who knew. It must not be forgotten, however, that I did not undertake this adventure voluntarily. It was "wished on me." I simply had to make the most of the knowledge I had.

At about this time blisters began to appear on my legs and my knees swelled. In addition I was pretty well convinced that I had lost the sight of my left eye. I hadn't seen a thing out of it since my leap from the train.

When I imagine the villainous appearance I must have presented at this time—my unhealed wounds, eighteen days' growth of beard and general haggard and unkept visage—I think the fear I felt about meeting strangers was perhaps unwarranted. The chances are they would have been infinitely more scared than I!

As it was, I was nearly out of Luxembourg before I came face to face with anyone. It was about 6 o'clock in the morning and I was traveling along a regular path. Just as I was approaching a cross-path, I heard foot-steps coming down it. I stopped short, stooped over and pretended to be adjusting my shoelace, figuring that if the stranger turned into my path he would probably pass right by me. As luck would have it, he continued on his way and never noticed me at all.

After that I frequently noticed groups of Luxembourg peasants in the distance but I usually saw them first and managed to avoid them.

On the eighteenth day after my leap from the train I crossed into Belgium. It had taken me just nine days to get through Luxembourg—a distance which a man could ordinarily cover in two, but considering the handicaps under which I labored I was very well satisfied with my progress.

CHAPTER IX.

I Enter Belgium.

I have said it was about the eighteenth day after my escape that I entered Belgium, but that is more or less guess work. I was possibly well into that country before I realized that I had crossed the line.

About the third day after I figured I was in Belgium I started to swim a canal just before daylight. I was then heading due north in the direction of the German lines. I was just about the wide into the canal when I heard a German yelling violently, and for the first time I knew I was being followed.

O'Brien reaches Belgium and, facing starvation, he risks capture by going boldly to a Belgian home and asking for aid. With an improvised weapon in his hand, he is prepared to go to any extreme in order to get food. Read about this exploit in the next installment.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

A Canon's Daughter, Probably. From an English story: "Come and have some tea," she cordially boomed as she passed.—Boston Transcript.