

# "Outwitting the Hun"

By LIEUTENANT PAT O'BRIEN

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## AFTER WEEKS OF HARDSHIP O'BRIEN MEETS A FRIEND WHO OFFERS TO HELP HIM ON HIS WAY.

**Synopsis.**—Pat O'Brien, a resident of Momence, Ill., after seeing service in the American Flying corps on the Mexican border in 1918, 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 Courtral. 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 35 miles an hour. His wounds reopened by the fall, O'Brien almost literally crawls through Germany and Luxembourg, traveling at night and sleeping by day, living on garbage and raw vegetables stolen from gardens. He is driven almost to desperation by hunger and, reaching Belgium, he risks detection by going in the middle of the night to the home of a Belgian family, where he obtains the first cooked food he had tasted in 18 days.

### CHAPTER X.—Continued.

The knack of making fire with two pieces of dry wood I had often read about, but I had never put it to a test and for various reasons I concluded that it would be unsafe for me to build a fire even if I had matches. In the first place, there was no absolute need for it. I didn't have anything to cook nor utensils to cook it in even if I had. While the air was getting to be rather cool at night, I was usually on the go at that time and didn't notice it. In the daytime, when I was resting or sleeping, the sun was usually out.

To have borrowed matches from a Belgian peasant would have been feasible, but when I was willing to take the chance of approaching anyone, it was just as easy to ask for food as matches.

At the second place, it would have been extremely dangerous to have built a fire even if I had needed it. You can't build a fire in Belgium, which is the most thickly populated country in Europe, without everyone knowing it, and I was far from anxious to advertising my whereabouts.

The villages in that part of Belgium through which I was making my course were so close together that there was hardly ever an hour passed without my hearing some clock strike. Every village has its clock. Many times I could hear the clocks striking in two villages at the same time.

But the hour had very little interest to me. My program was to travel as fast as I could from sunset to sunrise and pay no attention to the hours in between, and in the daytime I had only two things to worry about: keep concealed and get as much sleep as possible.

The cabbage that I got in Belgium consisted of the small heads that the peasants had not cut. All the strength had concentrated in these little heads and they would be as bitter as gall. I would have to be pretty hungry today before I could ever eat cabbage again and the same observation applies to carrots, turnips and sugar beets—especially sugar beets.

It is rather a remarkable thing that today even a small turnip, raw or cooked, makes me sick, and yet a few short months ago my life depended upon them.

Night after night as I searched for food, I was always in hopes that I might come upon some tomatoes or celery—vegetables which I really liked, but with the exception of once, when I found some celery, I was never so fortunate. I ate so much of that celery the night I came upon it that I was sick for two days thereafter, but I carried several bunches away with me and used to chew on it as I walked along.

Of course, I kept my eyes open all the time for fruit trees, but apparently it was too late in the year for fruit, as all that I ever was able to find were two pears, which I got out of a tree. That was one of my red-letter days, but I was never able to repeat it.

In the brooks and ponds that I passed I often noticed fish of different kinds. That was either in the early morning just before I turned in for the day, or on moonlight nights when the water seemed as clear in spots as in the daytime. It occurred to me that it would be a simple matter to rig a hook and line and catch some fish, but I had no means of cooking them and it was useless to fish for the sake of it.

One night in Belgium my course took me through a desolate stretch of country which seemed to be absolutely uncultivated. I must have covered twelve miles during the night, without passing a single farm or cultivated field. My stock of turnips which I had pilched the night before was gone and I planned, of course, to get enough to carry me through the following day.

The north Star was shining brightly that night and there was absolutely nothing to prevent my steering an absolute direct course for Holland and liberty. My path seemed to lie through arid pastures. Far to the

east or to the west I could hear faintly the striking of village bells, and I knew that if I changed my course I would undoubtedly strike farms and vegetables, but the North Star seemed to plead with me to follow it and I would not turn aside.

When daylight came, the consequence was I was empty handed and I had to find a hiding place for the day. I thought I would approach the first peasant I came to and ask for food, but that day I had misgivings—hunch—that I would get into trouble if I did, and I decided to go without food altogether for that day.

It was a foolish thing to do, I found, because I not only suffered greatly from hunger all that day, but it interfered with my sleep. I would drop off to sleep for half an hour, perhaps, and during that time I would dream that I was free, back home, living a life of comparative ease, and then I would wake up with a start and catch a glimpse of the bushes surrounding me, feel the hard ground beneath me and the hunger pangs gnawing at my sides, and then I would realize how far from home I really was, and I would lie there and wonder whether I would ever really see my home again. Then I would fall asleep again and dream this time, perhaps of the days I spent in Courtral, or my leap from the train window, or the Bavarian pilot whom I sent to eternity in my last air fight, or my tracer bullets getting closer and closer to his head, and then I would wake up again with a start and thank the Lord that I was only dreaming it all again instead of living through it!

That night I got an early start because I knew I had to have food, and I decided that rather than look for vegetables I would take a chance and apply to the first Belgian peasant whom I came to.

It was about 8 o'clock when I came to a small house. I had picked up a heavy stone and had bound it in my handkerchief and I was resolved to use it as a weapon if it became necessary. After all I had gone through, I was resolved to win my liberty eventually at whatever cost.

As it happened, I found that night the first real friend I had encountered in all my traveling. When I knocked timidly on the door, it was opened by



"You Can Hear and Talk If You Wish—Am I Not Right?"

a Belgian peasant, about fifty years of age. He asked me in Flemish what I wanted, but I shook my head and pointed to my ears and mouth intimated that I was deaf and dumb, and then I opened and closed my mouth several times to show him that I wanted food.

He showed me inside and sat me at the table. He apparently lived alone, for his ill-furnished room had but one chair, and the plate and knife and fork he put before me seemed to be all he had. He brought me some cold

potatoes and several slices of stale bread, and he warmed me some milk on a small oil stove.

I ate ravenously and all the time I was engaged I knew that he was eyeing me closely.

Before I was half through he came over to me, touching me on the shoulder, and stooping over so that his lips almost touched my ear, he said in broken English: "You are an Englishman—I know it—and you can hear and talk if you wish—am I not right?"

There was a smile on his face and a friendly attitude about him that told me instinctively that he could be trusted, and I replied: "You have guessed right—only I am an American, not an Englishman."

He looked at me pityingly and filled my cup again with warm milk.

His kindness and apparent willingness to help me almost overcame me, and I felt like warning him of the consequences he would suffer if the Huns discovered he had befriended me. I had heard that twenty Belgians had been shot for helping Belgians to escape into Holland, and I hated to think what might happen to this good old Samaritan if the Huns ever knew that he had helped an escaped American prisoner.

After my meal was finished, I told him in as simple language as I could command of some of the experiences I had gone through and I outlined my future plans.

"You will never be able to get to Holland," he declared, "without a passport. The nearer you get to the frontier the more German soldiers you will encounter, and without a passport you will be a marked man."

I asked him to suggest a way by which I could overcome the difficulty. He thought for several moments and studied me closely all the time—perhaps endeavoring to make absolutely sure that I was not a German spy—and then apparently deciding in my favor, told me what he thought it was best for me to do.

"If you will call on this man" (mentioning the name of a Belgian in a city through which I had to pass), he advised, "you will be able to make arrangements with him to secure a passport, and he will do everything he can to get you out of Belgium."

He told me where the man in question could be found and gave me some useful directions to continue my journey, and then he led me to the door. I thanked him a thousand times and wanted to pay him for his kindness and help but he would accept nothing. He did give me his name and you may be sure I shall never forget it, but to mention it here might, of course, result in serious consequences for him. When the war is over, however, or the Germans are thrown out of Belgium, I shall make it my duty to find that kind Belgian if I have to go through again all that I have suffered already to do it.

### CHAPTER XI.

#### I Encounter German Soldiers.

What the Belgian told me about the need of a passport gave me fresh cause for worry. Suppose I should run into a German sentry before I succeeded in getting one?

I decided that until I reached the big city which the Belgian had mentioned—and which I cannot name for fear of identifying some of the people there who befriended me—I would proceed with the utmost precaution. Since I had discarded my uniform and had obtained civilian clothes, I had not been quite as careful as I was at first. While I had done my traveling at night, I had not gone into hiding so early in the morning as before and I had sometimes started again before it was quite dark, relying upon the fact that I would probably be mistaken for a Belgian on his way to or from work, as the case might be. From now on, I resolved, however, I would take no more chances.

That evening I came to a river perhaps seventy-five yards wide and I was getting ready to swim it when I thought I would walk a little way to find, if possible, a better place to get to the river from the bank. I had not walked more than a few hundred yards when I saw a boat. It was the first time I had seen a boat in all my experiences.

It was firmly chained, but as the stakes were sunk in the soft bank it was not much of a job to pull them out. I got in, drunk to my heart's content, shoved over to the other side, got out, drove a stake into the ground and moored the boat. It would have been a simple matter to have drifted down the river, but the river was not shown on the map and I had no idea where it might lead. Very reluctantly, therefore, I had to abandon the boat and proceed on foot.

I made several miles that night and before daylight found a safe place in which to hide for the day. From my hiding place I could see through the bushes a heavy thick wood only a short distance away. I decided that I would start earlier than usual, hurry over to the wood and perhaps, in that

way, I could cover two or three miles in the daytime and gain just so much time. Traveling through the wood would be comparatively safe. There was a railroad going through the wood, but I did not figure that that would make it any the less safe.

About three o'clock that afternoon, therefore, I emerged from my hiding place and hurried into the wood. After proceeding for half a mile or so I came to the railroad. I took a sharp look in both directions and seeing no signs of trains or soldiers, I walked boldly over the tracks and continued on my way.

I soon came upon a clearing and knew that someone must be living in the vicinity. As I turned a group of trees I saw a small house and in the distance an old man working in a garden. I decided to enter the house and ask for food, figuring the woman would probably be old and would be no match for me even if she proved hostile. The old woman who came to the door in response to my knock was older than I expected. If she wasn't close to a hundred, I miss my guess very much.

She could not speak English and I could not speak Flemish, of course, but nevertheless I made her understand that I wanted something to eat. She came out of the door and hollered for her husband in a shrill voice that would have done credit to a girl of eighteen. The old man came in from the garden and between the two of them they managed to get the idea that I was hungry and they gave me a piece of bread—a very small piece—which was quite a treat.

The house they lived in consisted of just two rooms—the kitchen and a bedroom. The kitchen was perhaps fourteen feet square, eight feet of one side being taken up by an enormous fireplace. What was in the bedroom I had no way of telling, as I did not dare to be too inquisitive.

I made the old couple understand that I would like to stay in their house all night, but the old man shook his head. I bade them good-by and disappeared into the woods, leaving them to speculate as to the strange foreigner they had entertained.

From the great density of the population in this section through which I was now passing I realized that I must be in the outskirts of the big city which the Belgian had mentioned and where I was to procure a passport.

Village after village intercepted me, and although I tried to skirt them wherever possible I realized that I would never make much progress if I continued that course. To gain a mile I would sometimes have to make a detour of two or three. I decided that I would try my luck in going straight through the next village I came to.

As I approached it, I passed numbers of peasants who were ambling along the road. I was afraid to mingle with them because it was impossible for one to talk to them and it was dangerous to arouse suspicion even among the Belgians. For all I knew, one of them might be treacherous enough to deliver me to the Germans in return for the reward he might be sure of receiving.

About 9 o'clock that evening I came to a point where ahead of me on the right was a Belgian police station—I knew it from its red lights—and on the other side of the street were two German soldiers in uniform leaning against a bicycle.

Here was a problem which called for instant decision; if I turned back the suspicion of the soldiers would be instantly aroused and if I crossed the road so as not to pass so closely to them they might be equally suspicious. I decided to march bravely by the Huns, bluff my way through and trust to Providence. If anybody imagines, however, that I was at all comfortable as I approached these soldiers, he must think I am a much braver man than I claim to be. My heart beat so loud I was afraid they would hear it. Every step I took brought me so much nearer to what might prove to be the end of all my hopes. It was a nerve-racking ordeal.

I was now within a few feet of them. Another step and— They didn't turn a hair! I passed right by them—heard what they were saying, although, of course, I didn't understand it, and went right on. I can't say I didn't walk a little faster as I left them behind, but I tried to maintain an even gait so as not to give them any idea of the inward exultation I was experiencing. No words can explain, however, how relieved I really felt—to know that I had successfully passed through the first of a series of similar tests which I realized were in store for me—although I did not know then how soon I was to be confronted with the second.

As it was, however, the incident gave me a world of confidence. It demonstrated to me that there was nothing in my appearance at any rate to attract the attention of the German soldiers. Apparently I looked like a Belgian peasant, and it could only work things so that I would never have to answer questions and thus

give away my nationality, I figured I would be tolerably safe.

As I marched along I felt so happy I couldn't help humming an air of one of the new patriotic songs that we used to sing at the air-drome back in Ypres.

In this happy frame of mind I covered the next three miles in about an hour and then came to another little village. My usual course would have been to go around it—through fields, back yards, woods or whatever else lay in my way—but I had gained so much time by going through the last village instead of detouring around it and my appearance seemed to be so unuspicious that I decided to try the same stunt again.

I stopped humming and kept very much on the alert, but apart from that, I walked boldly through the main street without any feeling of alarm.

I had proceeded perhaps a mile along the main street when I noticed ahead of me three German soldiers standing at the curb.

Again my heart started to beat fast, I must confess, but I was not nearly so scared as I had been an hour or so before.

I walked ahead, determined to follow my previous procedure in every particular.

I had got to about fifteen feet away from the soldiers when one of them stepped onto the sidewalk and shouted:

"Halt!" My heart stopped beating fast—for a moment, I believe, it stopped beating altogether! I can't attempt to de-



Last Photograph Taken of Lieutenant O'Brien Before His Capture. With Him Is His Chum, Lieutenant Raney.

scribe my feelings. I thought that the jig was up—that all I had done through and all I had escaped would now avail me nothing, mingled with the feeling of disgust with myself because of the foolish risk I had taken in going through the village, combined to take all the starch out of me, and I could feel myself writing as the soldier advanced to the spot where I stood rooted in my tracks.

I had a bottle of water in one pocket and a piece of bread in the other, and as the Hun advanced to search me I held the bottle up in one hand and the piece of bread in the other so that he could see that was all I had.

It occurred to me that he would "frisk" me—that is, feel me over for arms or other weapons, then place me under arrest and march me off to the guardhouse. I had not the slightest idea but that I was captured and there didn't seem to be much use in resisting, unarmed as I was and with two other German soldiers within a few feet of us.

Like a flash it suddenly dawned on me, however, that for all this soldier could have known I was only a Belgian peasant and that his object in searching me, which he proceeded to do, was to ascertain whether I had committed the common "crime" of smuggling potatoes.

The Belgians were allowed only a certain amount of potatoes, and it is against the laws laid down by the Huns to deal in vegetables of any kind except under the rigid supervision of the authorities. Nevertheless, it was one of the principal vocations of the average poor Belgian to buy potatoes out in the country from peasants and then smuggle them into the large cities and sell them clandestinely at a high price.

To stop this traffic in potatoes, the German soldiers were in the habit of subjecting the Belgians to frequent search, and I was being held up by this soldier for no other reason than that he thought I might be a potato smuggler!

He felt of my outside clothes and pockets, and finding no potatoes seemed to be quite satisfied. Had he but known who I was he could have earned an iron cross! Or, perhaps, in view of the fact that I had a heavy water bottle in my uplifted hand, it might have turned out to be a wooden cross!

He said something in German, which, of course, I did not understand, and then some Belgian peasants came along and seemed to distract his attention. Perhaps he had said: "It's all

right; you may go on," or he may have been talking to the others in Flemish, but at any rate, observing that he was more interested in the others than he was in me at the moment, I put the bottle in my pocket and walked on.

After I walked a few steps, I took a furtive glance backward and noticed the soldier who had searched me re-join his comrades at the curb and then stop another fellow who had come along, and then I disappeared in the darkness.

I cannot say that the outcome of this adventure left me in the same confident frame of mind that followed the earlier one. I was sure I had come out of it all right, but I could not help thinking what a terribly close shave I had.

Suppose the soldier had questioned me! The ruse I had been following in my dealings with the Belgian peasants—pretending I was deaf and dumb—might possibly have worked here, too, but a soldier—a German soldier—might not so easily have been fooled. It was more than an even chance that it would have at least aroused his suspicion and resulted in further investigation. A search of my clothing would have revealed a dozen things which would have established my identity and all my shaming of deafness would have availed me nothing.

As I wandered along I knew that I was now approaching the big city which my Belgian friend had spoken of and which I would have to enter if I was to get the passport, and I realized how now essential it was to have something to enable me to get through the frequent examinations to which I expected to be subjected.

While I was still debating in my mind whether it was going to be possible for me to enter the city that night, I saw in the distance what appeared to be an arc light, and as I neared it that was what it turned out to be. Beneath the light I could make out the forms of three guards, and the thought of having to go through the same kind of ordeal that I had just experienced filled me with misgivings. Was it possible that I could be fortunate enough to get by again?

As I slowed up a little, trying to make up my mind what was best to do, I was overtaken by a group of Belgian women who were shuffling along the road, and I decided to mingle with them and see if I couldn't convey the impression that I was one of their party.

As we approached the arc light, the figures of those three soldiers with their spiked helmets loomed before like a regiment. I felt as if I were walking right into the jaws of death. Rather than go through what was in store for me, I felt that I would infinitely prefer to be fighting again in the air with those four desperate Huns who had been the cause of my present plight—then, at least, I would have a chance to fight back, but now I had to risk my life and take what was coming to me without a chance to strike a blow in my own defense.

I shall never forget my feelings as we came within the shaft of light projected by that great arc light on the faces of those three guards as we passed by them. I didn't look directly at them, but out of the corner of my eye I never missed a detail. I held a handkerchief up to my face as we passed them and endeavored to imitate the slouching gait of the Belgians as well as I could, and apparently it worked. We walked right by those guards and they paid absolutely no attention to us.

If ever a fellow felt like going down on his knees and praying I did at that moment, but it wouldn't have done to show my elation or gratitude in that conspicuous way.

It was then well after 11 o'clock and I knew it would be unsafe for me to attempt to find a lodging place in the city, and the only thing for me to do was to locate the man whose name the Belgian had given me. He had given me a good description of the street and had directed me how to get there, and I followed his instructions closely.

After walking the streets for about half an hour, I came upon one of the landmarks my friend had described to me and ten minutes afterwards I was knocking at the door of the man who was to make it possible for me to reach Holland—and liberty! At least, that was what I hoped.

O'Brien is promised help in getting across the frontier to Holland, but just as he is rejoicing over the prospect of early freedom, he is rudely awakened from his dream. Read about it in the next installment.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

#### Wood Grapple Saves Work.

The handling of logs by means of a crane equipped with a good grapple is not only more spectacular than the old method, but it effects an immense saving in labor and has made it possible to pile logs to a great height. Similar outfits are used in handling ties, posts, pulp wood, etc. The grapple is made like a clamshell bucket except that the scoops are replaced by curved steel tines, in the grasp of which a large number of logs can be held at once.—Popular Mechanics Magazine.

The Roman catacombs are 530 miles in extent, and it is estimated that something like 15,000,000 dead are there interred.