WORLD WAR ONE

1914 ---------- 1918

CANADIAN EXPEDITIONARY FORCE

1914-----1915

PRISONER-OF-WAR IN GERMANY

1915-----1918

INTERNMENT IN HOLLAND

1918

RETURN TO ENGLAND AND CANADA

FINIS

AUTHOR: THOMAS BRAMAH DIPLOCK

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AN EXPLANATION

I think a few observations are necessary before attempting to understand the attached ramblings of a young man brought up in the days when we, in all the Commonwealth countries, were very proud of our title "The British Empire" and spoke with pride over the fact that we were part of an "Empire" on which "the sun never sets".

Taking this fact into consideration, you will perhaps realize that the odd verse and comment in this narrative is very much closer to the "Victorian Era" in our history and is somewhat outdated under modern standards and conditions.

It must be borne in mind that the majority of these ramblings were written some sixty years ago.

It has never failed to amaze me that a comparatively small population living on an unproductive Island were able to achieve the prominence they reached during their long and eventful history is one of the marvels of any country's historical record.

That it could not last into the modern era must have been apparent to many but let it never be forgotten what "The Empire" achieved in bringing order and justice to many nations and peoples of the world.

In the brief description I have given of the early days of "The Great War", from personal experience, I would like to dedicate my remarks and verses to the bravery and fortitude of the Service men and women of Great Britain and the Commonwealth in the Navy, Army, and later to the Air Force in the earlier days of our history and in the Great War "when the Foe was at the Gate".

Whilst the number of those who can recall the days of the "Great War" has greatly diminished, there are many who remember the dread days of the "Second World War" when once again Great Britain and the Commonwealth stood alone for several years before the German onslaught and by so doing saved the World from being over run by the Nazi Regime of blood and murder.

This last great sacrifice cost the British and Commonwealth tremendous losses in human life and materials which have altered the pages of history but earned for them immortal glory "in this their finest hour".

- T. B. Diplock

1914 --- 1919

MEMORIES OF THE EARLY DAYS OF THE 1st CANADIAN DIVISION
and
A PRISONER-OF-WAR IN GERMANY

Since my childhood days I had been interested in military matters and on leaving school I had enlisted in the Duke of Connaught's Own Rifles a militia regiment stationed in Vancouver, B.C. a few years prior to the outbreak of World War 1 on August 4th 1914.

By attending military classes during this period in addition to regular training I received my Certificate of Sergeant.

It was inevitable that on the declaration of war, practically the whole Regiment volunteered for over seas service.

> On a day, a day remembered many many moons gone by
> War clouds broke o'er many nations, bringing all the world to strife,
> Bringing death and bringing sorrow, bringing honour, bringing shame,
> All for just "a scrap of paper" Belgium to her promise true.
>
> England with her mighty Navy, Belgium with her few stout hearts,
> France with all her faults was with us, Russian masses in the East,
> Beaten Servia, still unconquered, Montenegro with us too.
> Italy ceased hesitating, the Rising Sun was in the East.
> Like a lion with cubs around her went Britannia to the fray
> Calling to her distant brothers far away across the sea
> Far away but not forgetting their Imperial loyalty.
> "Your Sovereign and your Country need you", can you fail to
> hear the call"?
> Fail? What we your kinsmen? Why we are with you one and all
> With our lives and with our produce, with our treasures, with our all.

It was a glorious sunny afternoon on the 25th of August 1914, that a long train of waiting carriages stood at the platform of the C.P.R. Station, Vancouver, B.C. Outside this imposing edifice the streets of the City presenting a remarkable scene as thousands of citizens strove to get a glimpse of the Vancouver contingent to join the First Canadian Division which was to assemble in the East at Valcartier, Quebec.

Just three short weeks before the whole world had been rudely awakened by the news of Germany's violation of Belgium neutrality with the consequent result of a clash with the forces of the British Empire who had guaranteed such neutrality.

We were soon settled in the cramped quarters of a troop train and commenced our long six day journey across Canada to the famous camp of Valcartier, a short distance from Quebec City.

On the morning of September 1st, our train came to a standstill and we realized that we had arrived at our destination. As we detrained, we were amazed at the huge extent of the camp and the thousands of tents stretching as far as the eye could see. As we marched off to our allotted area to the strains of military band for the first time we heard "It's a long way to Tipperary" which became the most famous tune of the Army.

The re-organization of all military units was one of the first of our many duties as we became numbered Battalions of the Overseas Division.

This brought us to thinking of the next stage in our travels via over the Atlantic Ocean.

Britannia: in these dark days of fearful war
How marvellous thy strength, thy power to endure
How splendid thou standest among'st the Nations of man
Empire of a world's domain, thine arms the span.

Britannia: thou lion of proverbial power
How wonderful thy faith in this thy greatest hour
Mother of those cubs who ever gather near
To aid thee with their growing strength when danger is near

Britannia: what thou hast thou wilt as surely hold
Sons of a bulldog race enduring and bold
Many a Nation jealous of this thy foremost place
Bear the scars of thy grip in conflict of the chase.

Britannia: may that great heart of thine forever feel
For those who give their all for Empire's weal
That in thine arms they ever more may rest
Found faithful ever more for thee; death their test.

Britannia: o'er whose wide plains the sun may never set
Stir up thy peoples' thoughts lest they should e'er forget
Amidst the careless life of this our modern day
The birthright that is ours; with price to pay.

Britannia: encompassed by thine own great silent fleet
Those grim grey shapes that stay the bold invaders' feet
Creating an Army new when war for months had been
Shows the history of the world a sequel to this scene?

Britannia: may we e'er thank God who claim thee as their own
Who claim the grandest heritage this world has ever known
Whether of the Motherland or Britons e'er the sea
Faithful to the same old flag, the symbol of the free.

We gave little thought to the dangers of our ocean trip knowing that we would have the protection of the British Navy. In the meantime, apart from re-organization of all units we commenced vigorous training exercises, drills, route marches and rifle practice being some of the duties that kept us busy from morning to night.

The camp had been excellently laid out with plenty of pure water available, electric light everywhere, and a rifle range which ran along the base of the hills where over 1,500 troops could be accommodated at the same time. Considering that the war was then only a few weeks old, great credit is due to the courage and foresight of the leaders of Canada's War effort.

I cannot describe it better than in the words of Max Aitken (later Lord Beaverbrook):

> "War came upon us without warning, our people were essentially non-military, fearing no aggression from a peace-loving neighbour and largely ignorant of the imminence of German aggression. Yet in seven short weeks, Canada created the first apparatus of War. In that period we assembled an army, which a few weeks later was to save Clais on the battlefield of Langemarck, in the Ypres Salient. The proposal to raise 20,000 men had been accepted by the British Government. In less than a month over 40,000 were available. Within two months of the outbreak of War Canada had concentrated, armed and sent to Europe an Expeditionary Force of 33,000 men".

CANADA a nation, surely no idle boast?
One vast Dominion stretching from coast to coast
Having within its bounds all that God could give
To make its people greater and teach them how to live.
Miles of rolling prairies, mountains that pierce the sky
Thousands of lakes and rivers all in our country lie.
Far in those silent places where man has seldom trod
The perfect works of nature, the good gifts of our God.
Forests of fir and hemlock, cedars of wondrous span
League after league we see them awaiting the coming man.
Mountains that teem with minerals, rivers that bear her gold,
Who can count her treasures, can they e'er be told?
Rushing mountain torrents, lakes like mirrored glass
Towering peaks above us divided by the pass.
Snow that has no measure, great glaciers in sight
Below the endless forest wrapped in shades of night.
To this land of silence with natures gifts in store
Came the great white master to the Eastern shore
Built his mighty wigwams by the river side
Came with ships and treasurers, wealth he could not hide.

Harnessing mighty rivers, boring her hills for gold
Felling her lofty forests, disdaining her awful cold
Building her wondrous railways, laying the strips of steel
Crossing the prairie oceans doing a work that is real.
Tunnelling through the mountains, bridging the great ravine
Over the Rocky Mountains the marvels of earth are seen.
Out to the blue Pacific far on that Western shore
Linking the coasts together, opening wide the door.
Progressing ever onward, building a nation new
Love of our country binding, Canada's part in view.
Dropping the axe and the hammer, leaving the desk and the plow
Hearing the call of their Country, "Your Sovereign needs you now"
Out to the fields of Flanders paying the price of fame
Side by side with our brothers bearing Britannia's name.
These are the men from the mountains, sons of the Prairie seas
Far from the silent places, those endless rows of trees
Holding the shattered trenches, keeping the flag on high
Sons of the great North Country your valour shall never die.

Military training of every description continued at a stepped up rate at Valcartier with both night and day manoeuvers which kept all ranks busily engaged and built up a physical fitness for the job that lay ahead. Rumours of an early withdrawal from the Camp were very prevalent and we were all expecting our orders almost every day. At last the great day arrived and we commenced our removal from Valcartier to Quebec by trains which had been assembled for that purpose.

THE CANADIAN ARMADA

Quebec was shrouded in twilight's gloom as we marched along the dock
With the lights of the grand chateau above which the stars commenced to mock
At length we came to the transports' side with "VIRGINIA" painted there
And slowly filing aboard our ship we felt the river air.
We walked her decks an hour or so and watched them ship the freight
Then tumbled down to our berths below, we travelled then in state.
With morning light we left the dock and steamed a bit up stream
Past the sight of "Wolfs" last fight when Empire was a dream.
We anchored there above the town ready to depart
And watched the mail come aboard, watched them with eager heart.
During the day the River filled with the great slate coloured fleet
Giants of every line were there their rendevous to keep.
Hundreds of spots of khaki covering every ship
Waiting for the signal to commence our ocean trip.
As the lights came twinkling out once more and dusk was drawing near
Slowly each ship began to move and away went a hearty cheer
Slowly we drifted past the town, a pall of smoke o'er head
The whistles blew, the bells rang out, enough to wake the dead.

Flags were dipped in salute, ashore, sirens shook the night
As we left the Fort of old Quebec, defenders of the Right.
For two whole days we steamed ahead in a river miles wide
Past the spot where the "Ireland" sank, where many Canadians died.
To Gaspe Bay we came at dawn, the light had hardly come
And as we looked about our ship the sight there struck us dumb;
Dozens of ships on every hand we saw through the hanging mist
Vessels from every port were there their powers to enlist.
Cruisers from Britain's Navy, the watchdogs of the sea
They too lay around us "THE ARMADA OF THE FREE".
Just as the sun went down once more to sleep in its ocean bed
The signal flashed to every ship; "Form single line ahead".
In stately rows the fleet moved out from the shelter of the Bay
Every ship now looked alike covered in navy grey.
In lines of three we steamed ahead three cruisers in the van
Thirty-two merchant ships were there "with the men who will and can".
The greatest fleet in all the years to leave the new world's shore
Having on board an army greater than any before.
Canada's contribution the first that she could make
An army complete in everything, Canada's name to make
To stand by the Mother country in this her hour of need
To fight in the fields of Flanders that Belgium might be freed.
For two more weeks we steamed ahead in three long lines of grey
Looking all for the sight of land where old Britannia lay.
At last one day the shout went up "Land on the starboard bow"
Then what a rush to see the shore where Atlantic rollers plow.
All day long with land in sight we steamed through a choppy sea
Destroyers around us everywhere, seaward and to lee.
Plymouth Hoe came next in sight, where famous Drake once played
An "Armada" comes in sight once more, one that is not dismayed.
Slowly we draw toward the docks as the lads commence to cheer
Handkerchiefs are waving now as the crowd begins to hear.
Cheer after cheer then rends the air, the bands we hear them play
"Land of Hope and Glory" and "The Maple Leaf for Aye".
Long after dark the songs keep up, the ships are lit so bright
As we lay at the dock of old England's shore and gaze into the night
We think of those we left behind, from us an ocean's span
And thank our God He brought us here, and now let us play the man.

Following the arrival of the First Canadian contingent at the historical old harbour of Plymouth, little time was lost in unloading the many ships at the docks and entraining the troops for the famous training grounds of the British Army at Salisbury Plains.

Our pre-conceived ideas of the British Isles received quite a shock when we saw the extent of those rolling miles of prairie with not a habitation in sight. The little villages were tucked away in the valleys which ran through the Plains. Their thatched roofs and smoke blackened beams were a constant source of interest to us. The buildings no doubt, dating back many hundreds of years and inhabited mostly by elderly women with all the abled bodied men gone to join the Navy and Military services.

The Division was fairly well scattered over the Plains in different camps such as West Down South, West Down North, Bulford, Pond Farm etc. We were "housed" (using the word rather loosely) in bell tents which had obviously seen much prior service judging from their condition and they were far from rain proof.

Weather conditions became very severe as Winter approached and the constant cold winds that blew across the Plains with the heavy rain or sleet, made living conditions very unpleasant. There were no provisions made to dry our constantly wet clothing. Training in earnest commenced soon after our arrival on the Plains and was carried out under most adverse weather conditions which all added to the discomfort of the troops. In December several of the Canadian battalions were moved into hastily constructed huts on Lark Hill. Although this was some improvement from the leaky tents, we still suffered from the cold winds and draughty condition of the poorly built huts.

The heavy and constant downpour caused the surrounding rivers to overflow their banks and flood the neighbouring villages and small towns, in some cases to a considerable depth with planks laid on barrels as the only means of movement.

As a result of these appalling conditions, a great deal of sickness became prevalent in many of the camps. Pneumonia and the deadly disease of spinal meningitis took a heavy toll amongst the troops and many a Canadian sleeps in some little English churchyard having given their lives for their Country just as truly as those who later made the supreme sacrifice on the fields of Flanders.

In spite of all these unhappy circumstances and many difficulties a spirit of cheerfulness prevailed amongst all ranks and training for the great task that lay ahead was carried on vigorously by day and night.

On some Sundays, when weather conditions permitted, a party of three or four of us would visit the nearest village and would be invited into the thatched cottages by the elderly women and for the princely sum of sixpence (about ten cents in our money at that time) would be treated to muffins and strawberry jam with a cup of tea. They all expressed a desire to know something about Canada and I am afraid in some instances some "tall tales" were told which might have been applicable about one hundred years ago. Many were somewhat puzzled by the fact that we had come so far away from our homes to join their people in the War.

With the coming of the New Year, hopes and expectations were high with the knowledge that in a very short while the First Division would be saying farewell to Salisbury Plains (without regrets) and proceed to take its place with the British troops who were so gallantly holding the line "over there".

The final inspection by the King and Lord Kitchener took place in early February, and all indications pointed to a move from our present quarters in the not too distant future.

The review by the King and Lord Kitchener was rated as a great success and provided an imposing sight to those who were privileged to be present. The whole Division assembled at a chosen spot far out on the Plains and formed up opposite the saluting base. On the right were the cavalry and artillery and then the three brigades of infantry with the departmental corps.

This was one of the few occasions when we saw our whole Division on parade at the same time and it was with feelings of great pride that we watched these splendid troops perform so well before their King.

the Infantry battalions marched past His Majesty in double fours in perfect alignment with the other branches of the Division also making an excellent showing.

His Majesty and Lord Kitchener in a special order of the day, expressed their great satisfaction with the appearance, discipline and training of the Division.

THE KING'S REVIEW

Why do you polish so brightly, making the old look new
Your Maple Leaves and buttons too shining upon the dew
Your uniforms you're brushing bringing the cloth to view
'Cause the King, the King is coming, Canadians to review.

Months of Salisbury's slush and mud wetting us through and through
Back for the short noon hours rest, Gee. How we eat the stew.
Training us night and morning, say, do you think we'll do?
'Cause the King, the King is coming, Canadians to review.

The life is hard but we love it, all but the grumbling few
And they are soon forgotten in the rush of things to do
We leave next week for Flanders, Canada's name in view
'Cause the King, the King is coming, Canadians to review.

During the course of our rigorous training program on Salisbury Plains, all of us in due time were granted "leave" that magic word, that meant a marvellous release, for a short period, from the cold and wet of the Plains, to the comforts of City life.

The British civilian population received us most hospitably and many opened their homes to us and did everything they could to make us forget for a while the conditions under which we had been living for the past few months. The British newspapers had kept them informed of the floods and severe cold during the greater part of our training period by many articles and pictures.

Many of our English friends expressed surprise at our neat and clean appearance after hearing of the mud and floods on the Plains. We solved this problem for them by explaining that most of us had acquired knee high gum boots so that when we left for our leave train at Amesbury, we wore our gum boots and put our brown boots and puttees in our haversacks which we changed into at the station. I might explain that the Canadians wore brown boots instead of the British black army boot.

It was only natural that with so many Canadians arriving in England for the first time that the great majority headed immediately for London.

London: that vast metropolis that stretches out into the surrounding Counties on all sides, was an enticing spectacle to so many, here in the early days of the war could be found all the pleasures and entertainment so sadly missed on the wind swept plains of Wiltshire at prices which amazed us in comparison with the costs for similar services and goods in Canada.

London: steeped in history, containing some of the oldest and grandest of ancient buildings and monuments, Westminster Abbey, St. Paul's Cathedral, The Tower of London and many many more so well known to us from the days of our childhood and the pages of history.

London on the Thames

When first I saw London its thousands of streets, I marvelled at all it contained. It seemed that the world sent a tribute of all, the healthy the sick and the maimed.

Its millions of people who pass night and day, the world's nationality bear. The roar of the traffic, the great City's life, what joy and what sorrow are there. The Strand, the Embankment and all they contain, their richness and splendour we see.

The powerful motors that pass in the night, a Duke or perhaps an M.P.
His Majesty's Palace, the homes of the great, the world's very centre is here.
What beautiful carriages drive through the Park, A general or maybe a Peer.
Then I saw the East End and Petticoat Lane, the slums and the dirt and the poor
I saw the old market carts driving along, and marvelled at London the more.

The wonderful buildings, its elegant streets, a Queen she must ever remain.
"The ugliest City" in all the wide world, that poet continued his verse
Her squalor and slums, their darkness and dirt are surely the great City's curse.
Oh, London: I see the whole at your feet, the homage of earth you receive
The Gem of an Empire, the centre for all, thy wonders we cannot conceive.
The Abbey, St. Paul's and the Tower I've seen whilst I've roamed in their sombre light
The glorious history of England comes back with the shrines of her heros in sight
The men who have died in the field or at home, their power and splendour we know
They sleep in the Abbey, the glorious dead, while the years all their greatness show.

And then with a shock came the great war of wars and Britain was soon in the fray
Old London was filling with men in khaki whil'st thousands were sailing away.
Great London in wartime; I saw in the night the streets that were once light and gay
They now were all darkened from aerial attack, in the sky flashed a searchlight's ray.
And on the Embankment beside the old Thames, stood a gun with muzzle in air
Whil'st ever about us from morning till night the spirit of War hovered there.
I remember the posters calling for men awakening the nation to life
Reminding them all what their duty must be, the part they must play in the strife.
But London in wartime and London in peace, her wonders must ever remain
Now calls to her children far over the sea: "To arms for your Empire again".

Memories of happy holidays and carefree days amongst friends and relatives in various parts of Britain remained with many of the troops as further preparations were made for the next and vital move to the Continent of Europe. Many looked back on those months which had elapsed since the arrival of the First Canadian Division on the ancient soil of Britain, their thoughts were no doubt mixed with the remembrance of the hard training and physical suffering endured over the long Winter and the hope of an early move to the scene of action in France and Belgium.

No doubt many were also thinking of the wonderful hospitality of the people of Britain which became so evident on every leave we enjoyed away from the rigours of the Plains. The intense interest of the British people in Canada and the life in this country was encountered everywhere. Questions were asked as to the opportunities still existent for those who wished to leave "the old land" and seek a new home in Canada. I am afraid that many tall tales were told by some of the Canadians of the wonders of the new world and the vastness of our thinly populated country. Stories of the great North Western regions with their teeming forests and mountains of minerals awaiting development were recounted with various degrees of accuracy.

No immigration agent could equal the enthusiastic propaganda which was so lavishly spread amongst the people of Britain as to the opportunities awaiting the British people in the Dominion across the seas.

It was very evident from our earliest contacts with our hospitable hosts that their general knowledge of Canadian life was sadly out of date. So much was this the case that they seemed ready to believe many of the wildest yarns related by some of us which might have been applicable some fifty or a hundred years ago.

In spite of all this, there was a real desire to do our best to persuade many of our British friends to consider a new start in life in Canada where they would be assured of a hearty welcome. Many new friends were made and a large number of addresses were exchanged during our stay in the Motherland.

Have you seen our great Dominion, have you seen that land so new?
Filled with all the gifts of nature o'er the seas awaiting you.
Canada; the land of promise, land that needs the men that care
Land of Hope and Land of Glory, why not come and have your share?
Come and see our Nova Scotia nearest to the Motherland
Offspring of that other Scotland, waiting there with outstretched hand
P.E.I. her nearest neighbour, would you see their island home
Sons of sturdy stock you'll find them on the land or o'er the foam.
Then go West to 'old' New Brunswick sons of Royalist's blood are here
See her mighty pinewood forests in whose shadow lurk the deer.
To the North another Province, French Canadians here you'll find
Great Quebec the largest Province, last of France, that's left behind.
By the shores of great Lake Erie old Ontario you meet
Centre of Canadian commerce, where our Governor has his seat.
Leaving all the East behind you as you further Westward go
Coming to the Prairie Ocean, where our people reap and sow.
Halfway o'er our vast Dominion, Manitoba land of wheat
Where the fertile earth rewards us, where our modern farmers meet.
Further West and still the Prairie reaches like an endless sea
Fair Saskatchewan the Province, granary of the world to be
With Alberta just beside her, land that's waiting there for you.
Here we leave the rolling Prairies as the mountains come in view.
Towering ranges all about us, rushing torrents, endless trees
Westward to the fairy Province, Province of the Western seas.
Gateway to the great Dominion by the blue Pacific's shore
Words cannot describe her beauties, with the mountains as her door.
Should you doubt her glowing splendour then we ask you come and see
Come; and then all doubts will vanish at the wonders of B.C.
So we have our nine Divisions, bound in one Dominion grand
Partners in our mighty Nation, side by side we ever stand
With our two great Northern Regions where the gold is largely mined
Come and share with us our treasures - a place amongst us soon you'll find

On the evening of February 9th 1915, the Canadian Division commenced the move from the various camps on the Plains to Amesbury Station where special trains awaited us for the run to Avonmouth (near Bristol) our port of embarkation.

On leaving the comparative comfort of the third class English railway carriages we embarked on tramp steamers and cattle ships which our sense of smell convinced us had only recently discharged their former passengers. Accommodation was non - existent as the troops were packed aboard to the full capacity of each ship. We made the best of our sleeping quarters amongst the cattle stalls, making use of any hay or straw that had been left behind. We consoled ourselves with the thought that this stage of our journey to the French coast would be of short duration. Our consolation would have been short lived had we known that our odoriferous quarters would be our home for a full five days.

After a wide swing around Lands End we headed almost due South which started the usual round of rumours that we had been diverted to Straits of Gibralter and then on to defend the Suez Canal. On the second day out, we swung sharply East into the Bay of Biscay which is famous for its choppy seas and soon claimed many victims to the agonies of seasickness. On the third day we arrived at the mouth of the river Boire on which is situated the important French port of St. Nazaire.

Owing to the limited dockage available, many of the ships had to remain anchored in the Bay, awaiting their turn to proceed up the river.

Following two very unpleasant days of rolling and pitching, in the open waters of the Bay, living on a diet of bully-beef and hardtack, we had to put up with a continuance of these conditions for another two days of seasickness etc., before receiving instructions to proceed up the river to the docks of St.Nazaire.

It was with a feeling of relief that we once again felt the comfort of walking on solid earth.

A short march brought us to the Railway Station where we found trains of freight cars awaiting us with the famous sign on each "Huit chevaux-40 hommes". We were the "40 hommes" although it appeared that our transport officers paid little attention to the prescribed limits and crowded us in like sardines in a box with barely room to find a place to sit or lie on the floor.

At last, when the authorities considered that they had packed in every last man, we moved off and commenced the last stage of our journey to the front. The trains proceeded at a crawl with frequent stops at side lines to allow fast passengers to pass. Many of us took advantage of these stops to run forward to the engine and beg for hot water from the engineer to make "tea" to soak our hardtack in which made them a little more palatable.

Large groups of civilians greeted us with cheers as we passed through several small towns and villages. For the first time we saw quite a number of French troops dressed in their quaint uniforms of red trousers and blue great coats buttoned up the front and with their red and blue caps. How sadly out of date they looked after the khaki of the British and Canadians and the field of grey of the Germans.

Following a tiring trip of some fortyeight hours, we eventually arrived at the small town of Strazeele which bore the signs of previous German occupation where we detrained and marched to our alloted billets mostly in the barns of nearby farms.

As we proceeded along the country lanes to our various billets, we became aware of a low rumbling sound as though we were listening to a distant thunder storm. This was a sound we were to become very accustomed to, the almost constant artillery duel of the Western Front. At last we had arrived "within the sound of the Guns". The next few days were spent in a general limbering up process after the confinement of the ship and train trip. Route marches into the surrounding country were followed by a general inspection of the whole Division by the Commander-in-Chief, Sir John French, accompanied by a large staff. The day after the inspection final instructions were issued and the Division commenced its move to the Front Line.

The Canadian troops were now fully equipped for action and each man was heavily burdened with a web-packsack, containing a blanket, change of clothing, shaving and cleaning kit and other personal objects for which space was available. Haversack containing rations etc., Ross Rifle and bayonet also entrenching tool. Marching some twenty to twenty-five miles over the rough roads and cobblestones was a good endurance test for Canada's new Army.

After an all day march, we arrived at the ruined village of Ploegstreet in the early hours of the evening, and were assigned to billets in some of the buildings still standing, although badly wrecked by shell fire. During our march to our forward position, we had seen many small towns and villages in ruins from shell fire. It was a pitiful sight to see what had been comfortable homes with the roof blown off and the skeleton of the walls outlined against the sky. One wondered what had become of the former inhabitants. Had they escaped before the terrible destruction overcame their village or were they overwhelmed and destroyed in the awful holocast of modern war?

The noise and flash of gunfire was now very close to us as the trenches were only a mile or two from the village, one could plainly hear the rattle of machine gun fire and the occasional crack of a rifle shot as some sniper tried his luck.

I should explain that this part of Belgium was low lying, and a lot of it marshy and wet, so that to some extent, we experienced conditions somewhat similar to those we had been through on Salisbury Plains. With the frequent heavy rains we again lived in a sea of mud. The worst feature of this was the difficulty in digging trenches which immediately filled with water. We consequently had to fill sandbags and build up a parapet in front of us which at least gave us some protection from rifle fire but was soon blown to bits when the artillery opened up. All repair work had to be done at night as the German trenches were only a short distance in front of us.

Our first experience of the trenches was at Ploegstreet when we went in at night with the 1st East Lancs, a British regiment who gave us many useful tips on how to make life bearable in the trenches. We had great difficulty in understanding them as their broad Lancashire dialect was beyond us. Never the less, we got on with them famously and thanked them for all their help. After a few days in the trenches we returned to Ploegstreet for a few days rest.

We left shortly after and marched to Fleurbaix some twenty miles away where we were assigned a section of the front line for which we were responsible. Here again, all movements towards the trenches had to be made at night, and the whole area was a sea of mud with the huge shell holes full of water and some you could swim in. All rations had to be brought up from the reserve bases and it was often the job of my platoon to carry out this job. It was pitch dark except for occasional gun flashes so it was not unusual for one of our party to fall into a shell hole carrying a load of rations or tin of hardtack.

Snipers on both sides were very active and any one showing any portion of his body over the parapet or in some weak spot in the sandbags, was liable to be hit. We had our first casualty in my platoon when one of our men, whilst opening a tin of the famous "apple and plum jam" raised his head too high and was caught by a watching sniper in the German trenches. He died instantly, from a gunshot wound in the head.

We had been particularly warned of the danger of spies operating from the village as there were still several families of Belgians still living in some of the half-wrecked buildings although the village was shelled by the Germans on several occasions during our stay there. Information was passed to the Germans by means of coloured washing hung on clotheslines.

After four or five days we were relieved by a Canadian Battalion from our own Brigade, the 5th Battalion, who had originally been designated as cavalry and had "Western Cavalry" on their shoulder straps. As they came into the communicating trenches, they were greeted by our chaps with "Hello Mates, where's your horses".

The four infantry battalions in our brigade (the 2nd) were the 5th, 6th, 7th. (1st. B.C. Regt.) and 8th (the Winnipeg Black Devils). We relieved each other when our spell in the trenches was up and we took up reserve positions in the village or town on which we were based, until our turn to return to the trenches came up.

Speaking of the activities of the German snipers, we were all very sorry to hear that our own Colonel had been a victim. It appears that as he was a famous rifle shot, having represented Canada at Bisley on several occasions, he liked to do a bit of sniping himself and was unfortunately spotted by a German sniper.

On the morning of the 10th March, a great bombardment of the German lines was carried out by the massed guns of the British and Canadian artillery. It was the largest artillery preparation that the British had attempted up to that time. The ground shook beneath our feet as the crash and roar of the artillery fire continued for several hours. At the conclusion of the bombardment, British and Indian infantry on our right went over to the assault of the German lines. The story of the battle with its heavy losses and bitter disappointments is well known. In the meantime, we kept up a heavy rifle fire on the German trenches hoping to mislead them as to where the next assault might take place. Had the British assault been a success the Canadians might have had their first opportunity to attack the German positions on a large scale.

Several casualties were suffered by the Regiment including our Company Commander, Major Rigby, whose loss was deeply felt by all ranks.

Toward the end of the month, we were withdrawn to Estaires on general reserve for a brief period and had the delightful experience of visiting a brewery which had been converted into a bathhouse. From there we marched to the half ruined town of Steenworde where we remained for a few days and were inspected by the British general commanding the 2nd army, of which we were a part.

On leaving Steenworde, we marched through the famous half ruined town of Ypres which formed the base of the huge salient that had been driven into the German lines by the British during the first battle of Ypres. In the evening we passed through a country of almost endless shell holes and churned up mud taking up our positions on the left of the British Troops with the French Turco troops on our left. The trenches were in a deplorable condition in a sea of mud with considerable repairs necessary to the parapet which had been destroyed by German shell fire. This meant the endless job of filling sandbags and building a new parapet. All work had to be done in darkness owing to the closeness of the German trenches.

I might state that in taking over these trenches, we did so from a French regiment who had apparently accepted these deplorable conditions without making much effort to improve them. The troops who were assigned to keep watch and constantly observe the German trenches for any signs of attack were equipped with periscopes so that they could see without exposing themselves to any watchful sniper. We were mostly standing in a mixture of mud and water and the so-called dugouts in the rear of the trench were not much better, so that our feet were almost constantly wet. These conditions brought on a disease which became known as "trench feet" and incapacitated many of our men.

In spite of the use of large quantities of chlorine and lime, the stench in and out of the trenches was a constant reminder that this ground had been fought over many times with little time given to proper burial of the dead. After a five days tour of duty, which on the whole, was fairly quiet except for the occasional artillery duels and frequent rifle fire, we were relieved by the 8th Battalion and billeted in farms and half wrecked barns which were known as the front line reserve.

On Thursday afternoon the 22nd of April, we were in our billets, an old barn not far from the front line trenches, when we noticed a peculiar yellowish smoke cloud rolling over the trenches held by the French Division to our left, at the same time enemy artillery fire increased in violence and particularly on that portion of the front line which was now hidden from our view behind the bank of yellow smoke.

Shortly afterwards we received word to be in instant readiness to move as the Germans were attacking the French Division holding our left flank. It appeared however, that Head Quarters had no idea of the disaster that had really overtaken the French Division. It was not until sometime later in the afternoon that we heard particulars of the dastardly attack under clouds of gas (contrary to the Haig Convention) which had the most appalling effect upon the whole French Division. Large numbers were apparently asphyxiated in the trenches whilst others seeking escape were overcome in the dugouts by the poisonous fumes.

Unfortunately, quite a large number of their troops happened to come from North Africa and as in the case of nearly all natives highly superstitious. This unknown death which suddenly overcame them was too much for their sorely tried nerves, which had also been badly shaken by heavy shell fire, so they gave way to panic and dropping their weapons fled for the rear towards Ypres, leaving a huge gap in the front lines to our left flank.

This situation was immediately taken advantage of by the massed German troops who poured through the gap in our lines in an endeavour to cut off the British and Canadian troops still holding the remainder of the salient. This would lead to the capture of Ypres and from then on there was little to stop them from the capture of Calais and establishing a foothold on the coast.

These occurrences had resulted in leaving the left flank of the Canadian Division in the air and the Germans consequently turned their gas attack over our lines and attempted to roll up our lines and attack us from both front and rear. After desperate fighting against overwhelming odds, and although suffering from the effects of the gas, the Canadian troops with some assistance from other battalions, managed to hold on, although at the cost of heavy casualties.

In the meantime, things had not gone well on other parts of our line and the 3rd Brigade had to withdraw to cover St. Julian, leaving further gaps through which the enemy attempted to get to our rear. Three of our Companies from the 7th battalion were sent up to try to fill some of these gaps. One Company being left to assist the 8th battalion who were having a hard time maintaining their positions. No time was available for the construction of trenches in our new position so we dug holes where possible with our entrenching tools behind hedges and awaited the advance of the enemy. During this time and the following day, we were subjected to heavy artillery fire and St. Julian was reduced to a pile of rubble.

German aircraft directed the artillery fire well out of the range of rifle or machine gun fire. We looked in vain for any sign of our planes but they were apparently busily engaged elsewhere. Our own artillery had been withdrawn for some distance and were unable to give us any assistance and all communications with our Headquarters had been cut. The German infantry followed up the support of their guns and opened a heavy rifle and machine gun fire on our feeble defences, resulting in a large number of casualties. The new salient that had been caused in our receding lines were so lightly held by the available troops that the enemy taking advantage of this situation, made their appearance on our two flanks and commenced an encircling movement on the remains of our three companies.

I had another lucky escape when a bullet cut through the front of my clothing down to my vest so that I presented a most unmilitary sight with my tunic, shirt and underwear hanging down in front of me. It left only a small burn on my chest. By this time we were entirely outflanked by the skillfully handled German machine guns of which they were well supplied.

Our position soon became untenable and we were ordered to attempt a retirement to reserve positions in our rear. The one machine gun with us had now been put out of action and we had to rely on rapid rifle fire to prevent the masses of the enemy from overwhelming us. It was then that the Ross rifle failed us, although we had trouble previously. The overheating of the rifle, together with the grains of dirt or sand getting into the breech caused the bolt head which had a screw action, to jam so that the bolt could not be withdrawn and we were accordingly obliged to use our entrenching tool handles to hammer the bolt back. Under these conditions our return fire was almost ineffective and the enemy continued to advance from all directions and continued to sweep our positions with both rifle and machine gun fire.

An attempt was made to continue our retirement toward the rearward positions and we were soon scattered over the fields seeking shelter from the German fire in the numerous shell holes which covered the area in parties of four or five. By crouching down in our shell hole we could see the grass around us being cut by the German machine guns. Several of us were suffering from the effects of the gas and I suppose general exhaustion from lack of sleep and the fact that we had had little to eat over the last two or three days and it was now the 24th of April.

As the machine gun fire was lifted, the next thing we were aware of was a horde of grey clad troops standing over us with fixed bayonets and yelling their heads off in their strange guttural language. We stood up and dropped our almost useless rifles and awaited our fate. There is no doubt in my mind that these brutish looking troops would have run their bayonets through us had it not been for the frantic gestures of an officer waving a revolver in his hand and driving his men back at the same time, beckoning us to come out of the shell hole where we were immediately surrounded by a large number of the enemy and driven off toward the German lines accompanied by kicks, rifle butts and pricks of the bayonets. The Germans seemed to be in a great state of excitement and hustled us toward their lines as fast as they could drive us, fearful perhaps of any attempted rescue by reserve forces which unfortunately, we did not have.
We were all so stunned by the sequence of events of the past few hours that I don't think we realized that for us the war was over and that we were now Prisoners-of-War with an unknown future ahead of us.

A PRISONER OF WAR IN GERMANY

1914 ----- 1918

In thinking back to that tragic moment in our lives from my own recollections, we did not at that time realize the catastrophe that had befallen us. I can only account for it by reason of our physical condition, exhaustion and the after effects of the gas that had been released by the enemy over our lines just prior to the general assault. Added to all this was the failure of our rifles at the crucial point due to the jamming of the bolt action. These all combined to emphasize the hopelessness of our position.

As we stumbled and fell in the muddy fields, our guards continued to hustle us toward their rear trenches with shouts of "Rouse" and English Swinwhund etc., as we passed over their trenches, which were filled with men, we were greeted with laughter and jeers, blows from rifle butts and bayonet pricks. We all received some nasty bruises before this ordeal was over and we continued to be driven to their reserve positions. It became very apparent as we saw these reserve troops how greatly they had outnumbered us.

We were a sorry looking lot, most of us had lost our caps, we were covered in mud and soaking wet from lying in the shell holes. My uniform, shirt and underwear were hanging down in front of me from the enemy bullet that had enfiladed us when in our last entrenchment. We eventually arrived at a tree lined road and surrounded by our guards, continued our stumbling progress in a Northernly direction. We begged for some conveyance for our numerous wounded, but were driven back to our lines by rifle and bayonet.

We had not proceeded very far along this road when with a terrific crash our own artillery opened up cutting branches from the trees and causing heavy casualties amongst both the Germans and the Prisoners-of-War. We were not allowed to help our wounded and were driven at increased speed along the road to get beyond the range of the Canadian and British artillery fire. After what seemed an unending time, we eventually arrived outside the danger zone.

Our road to the rear led us through the battle-scarred countryside of Flanders, passing ruined villages and empty shells of what once had been happy homes. At last, we arrived at a fairly large village filled with enemy troops who laughed and jeered at us as we passed, some spitting in our faces and others taking kicks at us. We were then driven into the village church which was empty and had evidently been used to stable horses. We staggered into the church and fell on the floor in utter exhaustion.

However, we were not left at peace for very long before crowds of German troops came to have a closer look at us, several of them noticed our badges and had soon torn them off some being in such a hurry, that they ripped the whole shoulder strap off. One of our chaps asked a guard if we could have some water and he promptly picked up a bucket containing some dirty water and threw it in his face.

After a few hours of blessed rest, we were hustled outside and formed up on the roadway to continue our journey. Our mounted escort this time consisted of the famous German Uhlans, who carried lances very similar to those used by the British Lancer Regiments. We soon left the village behind us and marched for several hours - I would estimate that at this time they had picked up some 100 to 200 British and Canadians including a few French. After some time, some of us started to lag behind hardly able to drag ourselves along but were soon driven back to our places by a smart prick from the lance of one of our escort.

At last we saw that we were approaching a town of some size, which we afterwards found was Roulers and soon we were marching along its streets which were lined by German troops where we received the same treatment of jeers and laughter with a kick to make us realize that we were Prisoners-of-War.

We arrived at the main town square and were halted facing a large hotel which we assumed was the German Military Headquarters for the area. Several officers were standing on the steps and balconies laughing and pointing toward us. There were apparently quite a large number of Belgian civilians still living in the town and once in a while we could spot a child peeking at us from behind the closely drawn curtains.

As we stood in the square, a young civilian shouted something to us and waved his hand. He was immediately seized by several military police and dragged over to the steps of the hotel where several officers were standing. One of them, a large brutal looking man, shouting something at the civilian, and then struck him on the head and face with his heavy riding whip. He was then hustled away by several police up a side street where we could hear his screams for mercy, until all was quiet.

After being harangued in German by, I presumed a Senior Officer, who at times almost screamed at us, we were marched off to a large building, evidently an old school and hustled into bare rooms where we more or less collapsed on the floor. At last our fortunes changed for the good and some humane officer allowed us to visit the pump in the yard an few at a time, under an armed guard. I don't think anything could ever have tasted more delicious than the cold water from that pump. We returned to our school room and throwing ourselves on the floor went into a sound sleep utterly worn out from all that we had endured since that memorable April 22nd 1915.

We awoke the next morning to the familiar shouts of our guards, our bodies sore and aching from our ordeals of the previous days and after sleeping on the hard board floor, feeling that we had just been through some horrible nightmare which was soon dispelled as we glanced around the bare room and the huddled figures of our comrades. Gradually, the whole of the tragic day came back to us and we thought of the months or even years of captivity that lay ahead of us.

We received permission to visit our good friend the pump, and stripping to the waist we did our best to wash off some of the grime and dirt with which we were all covered. We all felt considerably better except for the pangs of hunger as we had had nothing to eat since our last hurried snack in the trenches just before the final attack commenced. However, about an hour after some of our guards arrived with slices of a black bread, made mostly from potatoes with much of the skin left on. We each received a slice which seemed delicious to us, together with some liquid which they had the nerve to call coffee. We found out later that it was made form boiled acorns, and had quite a bitter taste.

We were in no mood to critize and only wished that the slices of black bread might be increased, but this was not to be. During the day we were visited by several officers who shouted at us in a language that didn't sound very polite that we were all "swinehunds" etc. etc. One or two of the officers could speak a little English. They were apparently particularly irate that we were Canadians and told us that we had no right to be in the war as Germany had no quarrel with Canada and had never done them any harm. They pointed out that their enemy was England with whom they were fighting, and that we had only ourselves to blame for being in our present position and that Germany would win the war anyway.

Some of us tried to explain that Germany was not fighting England alone but the British Empire, but this explanation didn't seem to make any sense to them, and they refused to believe that we were not all conscripted and forced to come overseas. We remained all that day in the school house and received a slice of bread and "coffee" three times a day. We all felt the immense benefit from being able to rest over this period although the floor was not the most comfortable of beds.

That evening we were ordered out of the building with the usual guttural shouts and formed up on the roadway outside our building with a strong guard on either side with fixed bayonets. We marched through the darkened streets of Roulers toward the railway station. I think we all felt a little sorry to leave our school house where we had at least the chance for a brief rest, and better still something to eat and drink. We noticed several of the poor inhabitants watching us from behind drawn curtains.

After a short march we arrived at the railway station where we found a train with a number of cattle trucks into which we were hustled, or I should say packed, until there was hardly room to stand up and it was impossible to all sit down. Following some considerable delay the train started with a jerk which didn't effect us as we were too tightly packed to fall down. As the sliding doors on both sides had been closed we were in complete darkness and after a few hours the air became stifling and we had difficulty in breathing. The only ventilation that had been available was a wire screened opening at the top which had become filled by dust and dirt.

As time went on the situation got worse and several of us climbed on the shoulders of our comrades and attempted to clear the wire screening or pull it away from the wall. We were only partly successful in this endeavour but at least a slight amount of air came through the openings we had made. We all took off our tunics and loosened our clothing to help us in breathing. We were all suffering from thirst and one or two fainted. I am thankful to say that our wounded had been taken away from us whilst at Roulers and we hoped were receiving medical attention. As they never would have survived our present conditions.

After what seemed to us several hours our train came to a stop and our guards slid the doors open and we were able to breath the fresh air. We all shouted for water and a short time later pails of water were brought to us and slices of black bread, we found out later that we were at Cologne and when leaving caught a glimpse of the spires of the famous cathedral. We were fortunate in attracting the attention of a passing officer, who could understand at least some English, and explained to him the terrible lack of air when the doors were closed. Luckily for us he seemed almost human and ordered the doors to be left partly open with two guards to ride in the truck with us. Although this increased our crowded conditions, we were so thankful for the fresh air that we were willing to accept these conditions.

After leaving Cologne, our route took us through a prosperous looking farm land with large fields and numerous cattle grazing in the luxurious grass. Occasionally, we passed through small towns and villages but continued our train trip for several hours. It was well after dark that our train eventually came to a stop and we saw the brightly lighted station platform with the name "Giessen" displayed and came to the conclusion that this was the end of the railroad trip.

We were not left for very long before the familiar shouts of "rouse" etc., and the appearance of large numbers of guards with rifles and fixed bayonets who soon had us out on the station platform where we found difficulty in standing due to the cramps in our legs from being so long in the packed conditions of the cattle trucks. With the aid of the odd rifle butt, our guards soon had us lined up and commenced a procedure that we were soon to become very accustomed to - "the famous counting game".

This counting contest was carried out by the non-commissioned officers under the supervision of their officers. It provided us with the first bit of humour that we were later to enjoy on so many occasions as invariably the counters arrived at different totals which caused an uproar from the officers who were standing watching the procedure. We later learned to make it more difficult for them by slightly shifting our positions in the lines, which often led to counting the same person twice.

Apparently they arrived at a satisfactory total after quite a long delay and we marched out from the station, closely guarded on either side, into the streets of the town of Giessen, where we could discern large crowds of troops and civilians who greeted us with the usual jeers and laughter accompanied by the odd kick as we marched through the streets of our future "home".

The streets seemed to be poorly lighted as we could see little of our surroundings and we were soon marching up a fairly steep hill on a tree-lined road in the countryside. We continued our march for approximately another half hour until we saw some brightly lighted barb wired fences on our left and guessed quite rightly that this was our future place of residence. On arrival at the main gates of the camp, we marched by a large number of troops, evidently the camp guard. The whole area was brilliantly lighted and we seemed to be surrounded by barbed wire fences running in all directions.

When the gates were closed we were halted and again went through the counting competition. We could see that the camp was divided into a number of compounds surrounded by barbed wire fences and containing a number of long, low wooden buildings. We were driven through a narrow gate into one of these compounds and then into one of the buildings which were our barracks. The building was entirely bare and we sank to the floor and asked our guards for water. Some of our men were allowed to go with a guard and brought back pails of water with which we quenched our thirst.

We were all near a state of exhaustion and in spite of the hardness and dirt on the floor we were soon soundly asleep. And so we passed our first night as Prisoners-of-War in Germany. We were awakened by our guards by the usual "rouse" and directed outside into the small yard or compound which was surrounded by barbed wire and the customary count and then allowed to roam around our yard.

We made full use of the two taps available and had a good wash, minus the soap. On our return to our barracks, we were issued with the usual slice of black bread and the so-called "coffee" which we thoroughly enjoyed after our long fast. At the conclusion of our meal, several officers and "feldwebels" (German N.C.O.S.) with lots of saluting and heel clicking to each other. A German officer asked in English for anyone who could speak German. Several stepped forward and were appointed as interpreters to the different companies to which were to be assigned.

By this time several officers and feldwebels(German N.C.O.) had arrived and following much saluting and heel clicking the Prisoners-of-War were divided into a number of parties and the senior officer (a Captain) informed us through an interpreter that we were to proceed to different Companies or compounds. Each group had an officer, a feldwebel and several N.C.O's with, of course, the guards and an interpreter. The party I was with was then marched off along the barbed wire road to a different part of the camp which was quite a size and must have covered several acres. When we arrived at Company No. 6 we turned into the narrow gate and directly into the barracks, which was partly occupied by French troops.

Our Company officer then handed the interpreter a long list of possible offences with the punishments for any infractions which sounded quite severe. Individual particulars of each prisoner were then recorded on cards and taken to the Company offices. Each man was shown his sleeping place and issued with a bowl, knife and spoon, two blankets and a towel. We also received a palliasse, which was of sacking material and led out to a building nearby where we filled these sacks with straw. There was only a limited amount of straw so the ones that got the most straw into their bags got the most comfortable beds. We returned to the barracks and laid these palliasses in rows on the floor in the places originally allotted to us. The barracks was furnished with several large tables and benches where we could eat our meals etc. The two blankets to be folded and laid tidily on our beds.

We had little to do with the former occupants of the other end of the barracks who were French, who didn't show a very friendly interest in us and as few of us could speak French and none of them seemed to be able to speak English, so we didn't have very much in common.

We were then paraded outside in our compound which we noticed was separated from the other companies by a double fence of barbed wire with sentries patrolling in the space between. I omitted to mention that when our particulars were recorded, we were required to turn out our pockets and hand over any money we possessed for which we were given a receipt. This was later replaced by "Kriegsgefangener" paper money which was only good at the little canteen run by the Germans in the compound with a very limited amount of goods available for sale. The best was a cup or a glass of apple juice. It tasted somewhat like a weak English cider, but I don't think had any alcoholic content.

Each Company had its own kitchen which was staffed by French Prisoners-of-War under the supervision of a German N.C.O. By noon we were all feeling very hungry and welcomed the sound of the gong which required all Prisoners to line up with their bowls at the cookhouse. The stew or soup as they called it, was contained in a large vat. It turned out to be a very watery soup with a lot of cabbage and the odd piece of meat, which they all claimed was horsemeat and was stringy and tough. It could hardly be called satisfying for hungry men.

Shortly after finishing our meal, we were all paraded in our Company compound and brought to attention on the arrival of our Company officer. Through the interpreter, the Captain called for all senior N.C.O's to step forward. Several of us did so, both British and Canadian. The interpreter took particulars of the date of our appointment as Sergeants and I was somewhat surprised to hear my name called out as being responsible for the part of the barrack occupied by the British and Canadians. I was given a list in English of the duties which consisted in maintaining proper discipline, seeing that the barracks were kept clean and tidy, beds rolled back to the walls, with

blankets neatly folded on top. Maintaining a roster of all fatigue parties, changeable weekly. Cleaning and raking the gravel yard, and other such like chores. Very similar to that in an English or Canadian barracks.

As a prerequisite for these duties, the next senior Sergeant and myself were given a cubby hole of a room to ourselves at the end of the barracks where there was just room to lay our beds and had a small table and benches. We were also provided with writing materials for making out lists and notices to pin on the board in the barracks.

In addition, the other sergeants and myself took turns in parading the troops and having a brisk march round the enclosure for an hour or so in the morning and afternoon. No one objected to the exercise which was necessary to keep us in good physical condition. I must say that up to this point we had no complaints as to our treatment by our guards apart from a little roughness once in a while through our ignorance of their language. These few months of our early imprisonment were too good to be true especially after what we had experienced when first captured.

"PRISONERS OF WAR"

Who are these who pass us by, pass us with measured tread?
These are the race who span the globe, a passerby once said
Why do they march so straight and true when they're on parade?
They're always so in uniform, it's how their Empire's made.
PRISONERS' OF WAR you say they are, come how can that be?
Are they ever as proud as this over across the sea?
These are the men who change the map making it almost red,
Many a comrade sleeps of theirs, sleeps amongst the dead.
Britannia's Sons they call them, swinging along the street
These are the men of Ypres and Mons, men of the great retreat
Ten to one the enemy strove to break that single line
Time and again they hurled him back, shuddering to the Rhine.
"Contemptible Army of Britain", he called it in disdain
They fought with odds against terrible might, and these are what remain.

Men from the far Dominions, the Britons o'er the sea,
Bound in the bond of brotherhood, the bondage of the free;
Shoulder to shoulder marching with the men from the Motherland
Always uniting together when either should need a hand.
Over two years of suffering the foeman's petty spite
Far from the comfort of those they love, longing to join the fight.

Britannia's Sons they pass you by their eyes see far ahead
They see the grand old flag unfurl covering all their dead,
They see the days that lie beyond when all is peace once more
An Empire born to rule the world touching on every shore,
Bound together by bonds of love that war can but cement
Having one King, one Flag for all, an Imperial Parliament.

Britannia, remember these sons of yours away across the foam
Far from the comfort of those they love, far from the place called home
Remember the part they played in the days when things were looking bad
When only one long thin line was there and not a reserve to be had
The grand old army of Britain is nearly gone 'tis true,
But Kitchener has filled the gap, creating an army new.
And now he has gone to his last long rest and sleeps in an ocean bed
There's many a Briton will deign to follow the path that his footsteps led.

If we listen with fare to the ocean's voice, in fancy we hear him yet,
"Stand to your arms Britannia's Sons,Britain must not forget"
In stirring strains the cry rings out from the hero's poor dead lips,
And Britons respond with the shout for men, as the ocean stirs the ships.
Follow the course he mapped for us before he fell asleep
Mourn his loss when peace has come then truly let us weep
Weep, for the loss of what he was the greatest of our great
Who woke old England just in time, when the foe was at the gate.
So when this war is of the past and the remnants have come back
Remember the warning our hero gave and never let us slack
To make our Empire mightier yet with one thought for us all
To build that structure stronger still so that it cannot fall.
Who are these who pass us by, pass us with measured tread?
Silently they march along never a word is said,
Britannia's Sons they call them swinging along the street
These are the men of Ypres and Mons, men of the great retreat.

We had two feldwebers who supervised our camp taking it in turns, one whose name I forget was a huge Prussian type who was always shouting at us, the other was a stout old retired soldier with a huge black beard, his name was "Sank". He would have made a wonderful Santa Clause if his beard had been white. We received a pleasant surprise when we were issued with two post cards and a letter form for each month. There was very little space for writing and of course, they were all subject to censor before being mailed. However, it was a great relief to be able to let the people at home know that we were now off the missing list. Our days passed with little to vary them until the great news arrived that some parcels had arrived for us and were held at the railway station for censor. I was told to detail a party to proceed under guard to the railway station to collect the parcels and bring them to the camp on push carts. A duty for which there were plenty of volunteers.

I decided to accompany the party in order to see how the parcels would be handled and the actual number of men that might be required. Several armed guards paraded with us down through the town of Giessen which we really saw for the first time. It seemed a pleasant little town well kept, with clean streets, and sidewalks and comfortable homes all with their gardens mostly in vegetables although with some flowers. We were marched into a building on the station platform which had several tables arranged in the centre with two or three German N.C.O.'s standing around. The parcels were stacked at the end of the room and our party was required to bring the parcels, one at a time, to the tables for examination by the censors. Some of the parcels were in poor shape, and had broken open with contents of packages spilled in the package. We repaired these to the best of our ability and then retied the parcels and placed them on a pushcart after they had been stamped by the German censor.

When the cart was pretty well loaded, we pushed it outside and through the streets up the hill to the camp. We found it quite hard going up the hill as the camp was approximately a mile or so from the town. The parcels were then unloaded and stacked in a small shed near the Company office. The names of those on the parcels were then checked and they were notified to come for their parcels after being verified on the lists. Needless to say, there was great joy in the camp that night as those having parcels generously shared their contents with others who were not so lucky. I think I was one of the lucky ones to receive a parcel.

Following this initial experience, a regular parcel fatigue party was set up and they all eventually had a turn once or twice a week, depending on the number of parcels which arrived. All paper and cardboard from the parcels was carefully saved for fuel. I should explain that the barracks were equipped with small iron stoves about fifty feet or more apart, which were used only when the Winter weather set in. The fuel supply was very limited even at that time, and of course none was available in the other times of the year. Hence, the paper and cardboard to cook or warm our food from our parcels. The parcels were truly a Godsend to us as we found that we received little to appease our hunger from the rations supplied to us by the Germans, which was gradually becoming more watery every day and the one slice of black bread didn't go very far.

I neglected to mention that during our short stay at Roulers some of the men found they had some safety pins and very kindly pinned up my tunic and other clothes which had been hanging down in front of me since our capture. Shortly after our arrival in Giessen, one of the men turned out to be quite

a tailor and having procured some needles and thread at the canteen he did a good job of sewing all my clothing where it had been cut by the German bullet when they enfiladed our trenches.

Shortly after the great news of the parcels a new party of British Prisoners arrived at our barracks after they had moved out some of our French friends. Amongst the prisoners was a British regimental Sergeant Major, who of course was greatly senior to me in rank. Sergeant Major Want was a fine type of the regular British Army and made no fuss over the barrack arrangements. I naturally could not continue in my position as the Barracks Chief and handed over my duties and responsibilities to him. The other senior Canadian Sergeant moved out of the cubby hole and Sergeant Major Want and I, as his assistant, took over.

There were often long gaps between the arrival of parcels when we had to rely on the camp diet of watery soup and a slice of black bread with the so-called coffee. Although we stretched out our parcels to last as long as possible, the periods between were pretty strenuous and as I have said, the "soup" contained little of a nourishing content. At last we complained to the Company Captain of the condition of the German ration and our near starvation unless we received our parcels which could not be relied upon. Through the interpreter he advised us that he regretted they were unable to improve or increase the rations due to the fact that the British fleet was blockading Germany, preventing any foods being imported and that not only us but the German civilian population were suffering accordingly. We were at least cheered by the evident efficiency of the British fleet.

About this time, we noticed an evident despondency amongst the guards who became more abrupt in their general treatment of us.

Most of the guards and officers were either men who had been wounded or were considered too old for the hard life of trench warfare. There were one or two exceptions where two German clerks were employed who were quite young and appeared to be physically fit. One spoke excellent English with an American accent. He told me he had lived in the States for several years. Our Captain of the Company who had been quite decent to us and several of the more active guards were replaced by older men and we were told that the others had gone back to the active army in the trenches. This and other signs all pointed to a shortage of manpower and heavy losses at the front. Our only news of happenings outside was from freshly arrived prisoners or occasionally a British newspaper hidden in the false bottom of a parcel. All referred to the fearful losses in the deadlock of trench warfare. We were told that the two young clerks in the office were the sons of wealthy manufacturers of war materials, whose fathers had made substantial donations to the war funds.

Slowly the days, weeks and months went by with little to relieve the deadly monotony of our captivity, until one day we were called out on a special parade with the new Captain and his feldwebels present. The N.C.O's were told to form a separate group and the Captain announced that all private soldiers were to be sent out of the camp to work on farms, the salt mines and other employment which would relieve the food shortage in the camp etc. They were all commanded to be ready to leave the camp early next morning. Owing to the Hague Convention, the N.C.O's were not compelled to work outside the camp, unless they wished to volunteer, but would be used for camp chores.

This came as quite a shock to us and especially to the private soldiers and again emphasized the general shortage of manpower in Germany. The use of our men would release a great many Germans for service at the front. It was a sorrowful day the next morning when we said goodbye to our troops and wished them luck in their new environment. We all realized that the chances of escaping to Holland or Switzerland were only possible from outside working parties especially the farms. With only N.C.O's occupying the barracks, we were assigned various chores around the camp. No improvement in the quantity or quality of the rations was noticed.

The camp authorities then decided that we were having too easy a life and that the two marches in our compound were not providing us with the sufficient exercise. Discipline of a very strict nature was introduced and we were kept on the parade square for longer periods each day marching round our little compound. This, we were told, was to give us the necessary exercise to keep us healthy. After several days of this we would be halted and the Captain would ask for volunteers to go out to work. Needless to say, there was no response. This procedure continued for some considerable time and we were told that life would be very uncomfortable for us if we stayed in the camp.

Our marching periods were extended so that we commenced right after our breakfast until noon and continued after a short rest until the evening meal. Only those who were on camp fatigues were excused these parades. After nearly all parades we were asked the usual question as to volunteers for work outside the camp. We had to march strictly at attention with no talking allowed and an armed guard standing in the centre of the square to note any infraction of this rule. We were frequently visited by our Company Captain who stood watching proceedings.

I had neglected to say that prior to these happenings when we had some leisure time to ourselves, I had been working on the composing of several verses dealing with the early days of the war and the sending of our first Canadian Division to England and its training on the plains of Salisbury. Needless to say, no further time was available to continue this pursuit under the conditions which now prevailed.

Our "Exercise" as the Germans called it, continued without any let up in its length or severity until our senior N.C.O., Sergeant Major Want arranged an interview with the Captain of our Company and requested that we be informed why we were being subjected to this unwarranted punishment. The Captain expressed his surprise at any suggestion of punishment and merely stated that as we were not prepared to work outside the camp we were being given this "exercise" to keep us in good health. He also wished to know if there were any volunteers for work?

It was then that the German ingenuity asserted itself and on the next parade we were addressed by our Company Captain, who informed us that as a further result of the naval blockade of Germany by the British fleet, that the Germans were short of leather and therefore unable to repair our boots which were rapidly wearing out under the constant marching on a gravelly yard.

Instructions were then issued that all N.C.O's were to turn in their boots which would be held in storage and we would be issued with wooden clogs. These clogs were freshly made from green wood and had not been properly dried out with the result that they were clumsy, and uncomfortable and only allowed us to shuffle along which action was painful as the wood cut into our insteps. If we raised our feet the clog fell off. We tried stuffing rags into the front edge of the clog but it wasn't much help as it would not remain in position. One could hardly imagine a British Army regular Regimental Sergeant Major trying to maintain some degree of dignity shuffling along in a pair of these clogs.

Our "exercise" then continued although at a necessarily slower pace and in a very unmilitary manner. The morning and afternoon shuffle around the yard continued day after day, in all weather, with the frequent enquiry as to volunteers to go out to work. Not one N.C.O. gave way under this pressure and I am proud to say that during all this long test of our endurance, the British and Canadian N.C.O's stood up to their ordeal. Our spirits were greatly raised by the arrival of the first mail with letters from our loved ones at home. It was pathetic to see quite a number of British N.C.O's who didn't receive any mail. Perhaps their loved ones had been lost by bombing attacks on the British Isles or they had been on a ship lost at sea.

Up to this time there had been very few actual cases of brutality or violence by our guards but their attitude changed as the months went by and apparently the war was not going in their favour. I remember one instance when a number of newly arrived prisoners largely private soldiers, were warned to parade for a working party early the next morning. They were a bit slow in getting out and when they were counted it was found that one man was missing. This set off a great "hullabaloo" with feldwebels and guards shouting their heads off. The alarm bell was rung at the guard house near the gates and in a few moments a squad of fully armed troops came charging into our barracks with fixed bayonets upsetting tables and benches and generally wrecking the whole place. In the meantime, the missing soldier had joined the ranks having paid a visit to the latrines. Having taught the "Englanders" that they must not trifle with German commands, the squad withdrew to the guard house. Apart from a few bruises and bayonet pricks inflicted on those who happened to be in the barracks and a few sprained ankles from jumping out of the windows to escape the wild charge, we did not suffer any serious injuries.

The new prisoners who were often in a pitiable condition, for whom we did what we could, told us of the terrible and bloody fighting in the trenches and the huge losses of men on both sides. Little advantage was gained by either side and there seemed no end to the continued slaughter. Any hopes we might have had for our early release were pretty badly shattered by this news. We were also told by some of the prisoners who returned briefly from outside work that a number of our men had been imprisoned in the fortress gaol at Cologne for refusing to work in munition plants being contrary to the Hague Convention which the Germans so often quoted.

It is diffiuclt to remember the many incidents that happened in proper sequence. I think that it was in our second year of captivity that the Red Cross started sending us a parcel a month, which in addition to the parcels received from our families, were a great help in providing us with a change in diet from the little we now received from the German ration. In addition, the Red Cross sent us books and magazines (which were duly censored) and also parcels of clothing of which we were in dire need.

We received underclothing and shirts, also socks etc. They also sent jackets and slacks of some dark material which we were not permitted to have until the Germans had cut out a piece from the sleeve of each garment and inserted a different coloured material. This we were told was to prevent the garments being used to represent civilian clothing in any endeavour to escape.

I mentioned previously that we carefully preserved all paper and cardboard from our parcels. This we used to provide heat for our cooking. I remember one of our favourites being heated over the stove was called "fish cakes" and consisted of flour made from crushed hardtack biscuits, a tin of sardines or anything else available which with a little dripping were rolled into pancakes and fried over our stove. As the attitude of our guards changed and discipline tightened up, we were told that the stoves were not to be used for any cooking. This meant that when we were all prepared to cook our meal we had men posted at each entrance to the barracks to warn us of the approach of any of the guards. With the exception of our old friend Sank, who just winked his eye and allowed us to carry on.

Prisoners who had attempted to escape from the farms where they were employed and had been recaptured and brought back to the camp where they were placed in isolated cells in complete darkness on a bread and water diet for periods of from two to three weeks. They came out looking like ghosts and in a terribly weakened condition. Needless to say we did our best to get them back to normal health by contributing a goodly portion of our parcels. Attempts to escape from the camp were made but met with no success. We commenced to dig a tunnel from the underneath flooring of the barracks nearest to the outside fence. Several boards were loosened so that they could be raised after the guard had made his last inspection of the night. Although they were liable to revisit at any time during the night, however, we had watchouts on both entrances. A little progress had been made and the dirt was spread out under the barrack room floor. Suddenly, one day, a German N.C.O. with a number of guards marched into the barracks to the exact spot where we had loosened the boards, pulled them out and of course, saw the start of the tunnel.

As several of us did not belong to that barracks, we hastily withdrew to our own but unfortunately, the regular inmates were forced to do punishment drills and their parcels withheld for a period. We were told that one of the Belgians living in that barracks had informed the Germans of our efforts to dig a tunnel. Personally, I do not think it could ever have been finished owing to the great distance to the outside fence.

I think it was about this time that a great change in our fortunes took place due to the inspection of the Camp by the American Ambassador to Germany. It must be remembered that America was not at war with Germany, at that time. Mr. Gerard, the American Ambassador, arrived at our camp accompanied by the Camp Commandant and a large staff of officers, all dressed in their fancy blue uniforms wearing spiked helmets. Mr. Gerard requested that he be given the opportunity to speak to the senior British or Canadian N.C.O. We suddenly realized that our normal march in clogs around the compound had been cancelled for that day. We now saw why.

Sergt. Major Want of the British Army acted as representative for all the British and Canadian Prisoners-of-War. When asked by Mr. Gerard if he had any complaints of the treatment we were receiving from our German captors, he immediately showed him the clogs we were compelled to wear and the long hours we spent each day shuffling around the yard and the discomfort and pain caused by the clogs cutting into the instep and the number of men with badly infected feet etc. The Camp Captain explained that all the men in this barracks were N.C.O's who had refused to go outside the camp to work and they were only being given a certain amount of exercise for the good of their health. Sergt. Major Want pointed out that this was a punishment drill with the object of forcing us out to work contrary to the Hague Convention.

This statement was strenuously denied by the Camp Captain who explained again that the only reason we were wearing the clogs was due to the inability of the Germans to provide the leather necessary to repair our army boots. Sergt. Major Want again stated that this was untrue and that he could produce plenty of witnesses to prove that we had endured a painful punishment drill with the object of forcing us to volunteer for work outside the camp and that at frequent intervals we had been halted when the Camp Captain called for volunteers for work. I was standing quite close to Sergt. Major Want and heard Mr. Gerard say in a low voice -"Don't worry Sergt. Major, I know these people".

A few days after this episode we were ordered to turn in our clogs and reclaim our army footwear. What a feeling of relief it was to once more be able to walk in reasonable comfort. The German explanation of this was to the effect that Mr. Gerard had promised to interview the Red Cross and try to induce them co-operation with the British Army authorities to forward a supply of army boots to take the place of those which had been worn out. The former all day marching was stopped and we had a march around the yard about twice a day under our own N.C.O's. We were all very grateful for what Mr. Gerard had been able to accomplish and could only summise that the Germans at that time did not wish to antagonize the States and bring them into the war.

For the next few weeks things seemed to have returned more or less to normal and with the great help of our parcels, reading material and games from the Red Cross, we did our best to pass the days of our long captivity. For a period I took a job in the parcel office at the railway station working with the German N.C.O. in charge checking the list of parcels with the names of the prisoners in our camp. The German N.C.O. was quite a decent little chap who thought the war was terrible. I would say from his appearance that he was of Jewish extraction. He had learnt a little English and with my little German, we managed to converse remarkably well. He told me that after the war he wanted to go to America or Canada and was always asking questions as to employment possibilities in either country, I told him that I didn't think Germans would be very popular.

We must have been well into the second year of our captivity when on a particularly pleasant morning some of us were taking a stroll in the yard when we spotted what looked like an airship very high above the camp. One of the British N.C.O's who was with us, who was of Irish descent, said that it was a Zepplin as he had seen one over England on a bombing raid. As the aircraft seemed to be coming lower, our friend the Irishman, who had quite a flow of language, let out a string of Irish curse words and said he had put a curse on the Zepplin. By this time quite a number of our men had gathered in the compound to watch the airship which seemed to be circling the camp and coming considerably lower. We then noticed a number of men in the field just outside the camp fence. It was only when the Zepplin had come so much closer that we became aware of its huge size and that it stretched along the whole length of the camp. As it approached the ground, numbers of ropes were dropped to the men waiting in the field which they fastened to great stakes driven into the ground.

The main cabin by this time, was only a few feet off the ground and rope ladders were lowered by means of which several officers alighted on the ground and were greeted by the camp commandant and a number of his staff. They all shortly drove off to the officers quarters, leaving a strong party on guard. By this time our noon hour meal was due and we adjourned to the barrack to dig into our parcels and decide on our menu. Lunch over several of us went out in the yard to look at the immense size of the Zepplin which seemed to tower at least three or four hundred feet above the camp buildings. About this time we noticed quite a change in the weather, the sun had disappeared and great black clouds were moving rapidly across the sky. The wind started to rise and thunder could be heard in the distance with occasional flashes of lightning. The wind increased in strength and we could see that the immense area of the airship, which was broadside on the wind, was beginning to feel the strengthening gusts of wind which was putting a tremendous strain on the ropes and stakes which were holding the craft to the ground. As the storm increased, heavy rain commenced to fall but nobody went inside, we were too anxious to see what the effects of the storm might be on the mighty Zepplin. There were now a large party of men trying to tighten the ropes and make others more secure. The wind seemed to come in great gusts and with this pressure on the huge envelope, ropes started to pull up the stakes at the one end and allow the ship to rise a number of feet off the ground and then crush down again. This action loosened or broke the ropes in the centre and soon almost half the ship was rising high in the air and then crashing down on the ground, held by the remaining ropes at the far end, and crushing to splinters the cabin and gondola. We could see through the rain and wind that several men were thrown out by this action. The strain on the remaining ropes was too great and with a terrific roar the whole airship rose into the air and buffeted by the wind went careening across the countryside tearing off great pieces of fabric as it struck the trees in its path. By this time it seemed to be bent almost in half.

I imagine that practically every prisoner was out in his compound and all were waving their arms and cheering their heads off. This didn't last long before a strong guard armed with rifes and fixed bayonets charged into the compounds and drove us to the barracks. Needless to say, there was great excitement over the whole camp. I was told that the quiet Irish Sergt. was to be heard to say that he put a very strong Irish curse on the Zepplin so was not greatly surprised by the results.

We never heard what the loss of life amounted to but we did hear that the airship was a new craft just completed and this was a trial run preparatory to being put into service to drop bombs over England.

On our way to the parcel office the next day we noticed several trucks and farm carts bringing in pieces of fabric and other parts of the great airship. I should have mentioned that within an hour of the storm the rain and wind dropped and the sun was shining!

After the excitement of this episode, we settled back into our regular routine doing our ordinary daily marches under our own N.C.O's or working on different chores. I had spent some time at the parcel office assisting the German N.C.O. with lists etc., but returned to the camp and carried on the ordinary routine.

Although we considered that we had won the first round in regards to going outside the camp to work with the great help of Mr. Gerard, the Germans still had an ace card up their sleeve. The Camp Captain attended one of our parades and again explained to us the hardship suffered by the German and others from the British blockade. He stated there was an extreme shortage of vegetables and that this would further reduce our rations.

There was nothing in the Hague Convention to prevent the N.C.O's being used to assist in providing the camp with fresh vegetables and arrangements had been made to prepare a piece of land which was available some five or six miles from the camp for the purpose of growing our own vegetables. He ordered us to be ready to proceed to this location leaving our camp at eight o'clock the next morning.

We discussed the situation in the barracks and came to the conclusion that the Germans had once again shown their ingenuity and that there was little we could do at that time other than to carry out these orders on the basis that we would actually be doing work for the good of the camp which the camp Captain had so cleverly pointed out.

The next morning we left the camp under a strong guard and marched out into the country which is very pretty with fields and clumps of trees making a parklike appearance. Following a march of approximately five miles, we came to a different looking country which had obviously not been cultivated and was rather barren looking. Parts of it were quite hilly with marshy lowlands. We were eventually halted on a hillside looking down into a small lake and could see evidence that some attempts had been made to fill in the lake from the higher ground.

The chief feldwebel explained through the interpreter that it was the intention to carry on this work and eventually create a vegetable garden in the area now filled by the lake and marshy ground. The absurdity of the whole scheme was apparent to everyone as without the use of heavy earth moving equipment the effect of anything we could do with our small party using wheelbarrows and shovels would be negligible unless the Germans figured that the war would last at least another ten years. Our hopes of ever seeing a vegetable garden to provide the camp were completely eradicated and from then on we treated the whole affair as a spiteful joke on the part of the camp officials.

There was a fairly large shed on the property which was unlocked by the feldwebel in which were stored a considerable number of wheelbarrows, shovels and other equipment. The guards spread themselves around the rim of the high ground so that they could see the whole area. We were then formed into small parties and allotted to various locations around the lake and the high ground above.

Each party being provided with shovels and a number of wheelbarrows which were to be filled and wheeled down to the lake and the contents dumped into the marsh which surrounded the lake. As the marsh was filled up, we were provided with planks to allow the wheelbarrows to reach the water, where the contents were then disposed of.

We were not unduly harassed by the guards and as the weather was fine, we actually quite enjoyed the exercise and change of occupation knowing that we were engaged in a game of "loves labour lost". We broke off for a lunch which we had brought with us and for a brief rest period. Following the afternoon session all tools and wheelbarrows were put back in the shed and carefully locked up by the senior German N.C.O. and we marched back to our barracks in time for our evening meal.

This futile operation continued for quite a lengthy period with the lake showing little reduction in size and the vegetable garden about as far away as ever. After two or three months a civilian engineering outfit was apparently consulted and resulted in the laying of a light track leading from the high ground down to the lake with side tracks leading to different parts of the lake. With the tracks they provided, heavy metal dump trucks which would run down the grade and be switched to the different tracks leading to the lake. Our job was to shovel the dirt into these dump trucks and unload them at the side of the lake where the soil would be shovelled into the water. One of our men was responsible for setting the switches, on the instructions of the N.C.O's so that the contents of dump trucks could be directed to different locations around the lake.

As I have explained previously, these trucks loaded with dirt came down the fairly steep grade at a good rate of speed. By arrangements with the loaders, when a particularly heavy load came down the hill the switchman set the switch half over so that when the truck hit the open switch it jumped the track and tore out quite a section of the track and finished upside down with dirt scattered in all directions. There were shouts and yells from the N.C.O's and guards from which we could distinguish the well known "dumbkoff Englander" and "swinehund" etc. etc. Luckily for us they apparently considered the accident was caused by our clumsiness. This proved to be the case in many other situations of a similar nature.

After our success with the dump trucks we began to consider what other difficulties we could cause our captors. Needless to say the switchman was taken off his job and given a shovel. The guards were scattered at some distance from us and didn't pay us very close attention so we found that at quitting time it was quite easy to slip a shovel into the water and cover it over with dirt. This was later extended to wheelbarrows although a little more difficult. The trick was to wheel a full load of dirt out on the plank leading into the lake and let the whole thing go into the water as the water was a few feet deep and the wheelbarrows were of metal, it quickly sank out of sight, as we gathered up the other tools to take up to the storage shed and return to our camp after a good days work.

These depredations continued for some time when the opportunities were favourable until the shortage of shovels and wheelbarrows became too noticeable to the feldwebel in charge, as the shed was locked up each evening before leaving and there was no apparent break-in during the night. For a time, he put the blame on the surrounding farmers but no evidence was produced that this was the solution. We came to the conclusion that it was only a matter of time before they would begin to suspect us of some complicity and that it would be better to let sleeping dogs lie, for a while. We still had great satisfaction in thinking in days to come of the discovery that would be made, should it be possible to drain the lake.

In the meantime, we carried on with our useless task and came to realize that we were now entering our third year of captivity with no sight of a cessation of hostilities in sight. It was about this time that rumours started to go round the camp that the British and Germans were working on an arrangement for an exchange of prisoners who had been in captivity for three or more years. This to be by way of an equal number from each side being transferred to Holland on an agreement that the Dutch Government would be responsible for our neutrality. Like all rumours, we didn't pay much attention to it as it seemed too good to be true.

In the early part of this narrative I omitted, to some extent purposely, as may be realized, any mention of the horrible discomfort and suffering we all had to endure from the time we entered the trenches due to the infection of lice on our bodies and in our clothing. The contaminated soil in which the trenches were constructed no doubt, was the first cause of this condition but the lack of proper washing facilities or change of clothing all contributed to increase our suffering. It is true that on some of our days off we were taken to old brewery buildings where showers had been installed, but our clothing still was contaminated.

One must admit that the Germans, in spite of their brutal behaviour at times, were very much more interested in cleanliness than our Allies the French. Soon after our arrival in Giessen, we were taken in parties to buildings where warm showers had been installed and large heated ovens in which our clothing was placed which had the effect of killing the lice. We were later taken at fairly regular intervals to the showers and thus able to keep ourselves reasonably clean.

The war had now reached a stage when I think the Germans realized for the first time that they might not come out on top and this was reflected by the despondent look of the N.C.O's and guards. Our Camp Captain only visited us at infrequent intervals and then only for some special parade or inspection. I well remember one such parade for inspection, when all prisoners were instructed to bring with them the eating utensils supplied to us apparently to see that they were properly cleaned etc. The Captain dressed in his full dress uniform with spiked helmet and sword etc., called the Senior N.C.O. toward him and enquired if all prisoners were on parade which was answered in the affirmative by the feldwebel. We had a few French troops with us at that time and they also were on parade as usual, wearing their long overcoats. Just at that moment there was a clatter on the barrack room steps and down came two more Frenchmen wearing their clogs. The Captain, letting out a roar, no doubt of German curses, drew his sword and made a rush at the feldwebel who immediately turned and made off at his best speed and was able to keep out of range of the deadly sword. In the meantime, the whole parade let out yells of laughter which were quickly subdued by the guards standing nearby. I have no idea what happened to the German N.C.O. but we were kept standing to attention for over an hour due to our laughter at what could only be described as one of the most humorous incidents of our captivity. One could only wish for a camera to record the incident. I have no doubt that only in a comic opera could such an incredible happening occur.

Although most rumours are naturally disregarded, in some cases there is a basis for them and to our amazement this proved to be the case as those prisoners who were approaching their three years of captivity were called in to the camp office and dates of our arrival at Giessen were checked with their records.

The prisoners who qualified were then officially advised of the agreement made between the British and German Governments with the co-operation of the Dutch Government who were responsible for our neutrality whilst the Agreement was in effect. We were advised that as soon as satisfactory arrangements had been completed, we would be transported to the Dutch border and handed over into their care.

The news of this exchange came to us as a great shock and it was some time before we could realize that our days of captivity were approaching an end. At the same time we could not help but feel great sympathy for those we would be leaving behind who did not qualify by reason of their insufficient period of captivity.

It was a month or more before we received any further information or instructions when we were issued with wooden boxes in which we were instructed to place any personal belongings we wished to take with us, subject to inspection. Luckily I had acquired an army haversack from one of the later prisoners and placed in that copies of the verses I had written whilst in the camp, in addition to several small items which I valued. I soon filled the box provided with many souvenirs collected and given to me by other prisoners. I had actually learned to embroider and had completed one or two belts from materials purchased at the small canteen in the camp. For a brief time, we had a few Russians quartered in the camp and I purchased some quite unique souvenirs from them.

It must have been in the later part of March 1918, that we received orders to leave for the railway station early next morning, placing our boxes on push carts from which they were loaded on the train. I think our old friend Sank was quite sorry to see us go. It was a sorrowful parting with our own comrades, and we were loaded with addresses of friends and relatives to whom we could write when we arrived in Holland. I think we travelled all day before we arrived at a border town the name of which I do not remember. We were escorted by our guards to an empty barracks which at least had bunks and given our usual ration of black bread and "coffee".

By this time, we were in such a state of suppressed excitement that we didn't worry about rations or anything else except the actual crossing of the border and getting out of Germany as fast as possible. We turned in any of the paper prison money still in our possession and were given Dutch currency of an equal value, we had to accept whatever rate of exchange they employed.

Under guard we were taken to the railway track and found our boxes had been thrown out of the baggage car and were lying around in all directions. After careful search, I could not find no trace of my box and complained to the German N.C.O. who showed no interest but agreed to take me to the officer in charge of our party. I explained the situation to him but although he said that an endeavour would be made to trace the box he did not hold out much hope for its recovery.

Our party was paraded to the station platform and following a brief discussion between the German and Dutch officers we lined up and a double count made by both German and Dutch N.C.O's. Finally, after signing of documents we were marched across the platform on to Dutch territory to the cheers of a large group of Dutch civilians who had come down to greet us.

We were then given an official welcome by a representative of the Dutch Government who trusted that we would enjoy our stay in their country. We each received an envelope with "Welkim" and in a card in English advised that we could now advise our relatives and friends that we had arrived in Holland.

The card said, in part, that "Your many Dutch friends will be happy to make you feel at home and concluded with 'Long live the British Empire'" - I am glad to say I still have the envelope in my possession.

In the preceeding pages I have endeavoured to the best of my ability, to give a true record of the life of a Prisoner-of-War in Giessen Prison Camp - in doing so, I realise that these conditions did not necessarily prevail at the many other Camps throughout Germany. In a wonderful reunion with many men from our Regiment, I came to the conclusion that we were very lucky in being assigned to Giessen in the first place, also that so many of us spent the three years of our captivity in the same camp. I have not referred to the brutalities that occurred in our own camp, as they were the exception rather than the rule as apparently they were far more commonplace in other camps.

The Germans with whom we came in contact over those many years,generally were an odd lot and their mental processes hard to follow. They made agreements and referred quite frequently to the provisions governing the treatment of Prisoners-of-War and then used all sorts of subterfuges to get around the fulfillment of these agreements as contained in the Hague Convention.

An example of this was the issuance of the clogs and the forced daily marches with the object of forcing us to volunteer for work outside the camp in which they were entirely unsuccessful. The latest of course, was the absurdity of filling in lakes to make vegetable gardens to grow vegetables for the good of the Prisoners.

Unfortunately, many of our men could not stand up to the lengthy captivity and suffered physically and mentally during those many long years. Several were taken away from the camp, we hoped for medical attention, but we held out little hope for those mentally affected. We were unable to obtain any information as to their condition. I personally lost a great friend of mine from this affliction.

In respect to our guards, I do not think any of us who were in Giessen for any length of time will ever forget the many kindnesses of old "Sank" who did all he could to help us over the many petty irritations we had to put up with in our ordinary camp life. On the other hand, we could not easily forget the rough often brutal, attentions of "Snell" our other senior N.C.O. Truly a remarkable contrast.

Perhaps the comprising and writing of several verses, mostly on the early days of the First Canadian Division, helped to keep my mind active and get away from the daily grind. I was also very fortunate in generally being in excellent health perhaps due in part, to the help received from our captors in providing us with plenty of physical exercise.

Our most unexpected transfer and internment in Holland came as a great shock to those of us who were eligible, and brought an end to our status of Prisoners-of-War in Germany.

I hope to conclude this pamphlet by a brief reference to our life in Holland and the conditions effecting our internment.

INTERNMENT IN HOLLAND

MARCH - NOVEMBER 1918

AND CONCLUSION

Following a long and noisy reception by the large crowd gathered at the border, we were ushered into a Dutch train to proceed to our place of internment which turned out to be the capital, Den Haag, of The Hague, as we knew it, perhaps the most beautiful City in Holland. We were several hours on the train and at each town we passed through there were crowds at the station to wave and shout out "Welkom". On our arrival we were addressed by a Dutch official who, after extending a further welcome, advised us we would now be under our own officers who would be responsible for our general conduct, etc.

Under the guidance of these officials, we marched through a residential area of The Hague until we arrived at a row of three storied apartment buildings which looked to be of quite recent construction. The Canadians were separated from the British troops and formed into Companies under the command of our own officers with a number of Sergeants and Corporals attached to each Company. We could not maintain our original Regiments as the numbers were very different, there being far more of some Battalions than others.

Each Company detailed working parties for the kitchens and housekeeping in the apartments besides other duties taking it in turns each week. Passes were issued to go down town during the day, and I think up to 9 p.m. when not on duty. Route marches were to be held to keep us in good shape. Later we received pocket money from our pay from England up to a limited amount.

There were street cars available close to our apartments, which ran down town or if one preferred, it was only a walk of some three miles or so. We soon found that Holland suffered from a great scarcity of most goods, including food, and that without our parcels we would be on a fairly strict diet. Their main food which seemed quite plentiful, was cheese, which was very good but somewhat monotonous. Bread was in short supply but was very good, being mostly of a whole wheat variety. We found that the downtown stores showed a shortage of saleable goods and these were at a very high price.

The Hague, as I have said, is a very beautiful City with numerous parks etc., and tree-lined canals running in all directions where a variety of barges were constantly on the move. Apparently these barges, some of a considerable size, were the main carriers. Many of them provided a home for the family and numbers of women and children were frequently observed doing their household chores including washing with clothes hanging on lines all over the barge. They were all very friendly and waved to us as they went by. The canal system of Holland is a very important part of their transportation throughout their whole country.

Although Holland is a monarchy with the Queen's palace facing right on the street, I would think they are very democratic in their general outlook. They are overshadowed by Germany and in some degree, somewhat fearful of being taken over by their powerful neighbour. (As happened in the Second World War).

A few miles North of the City, along the sea, was the famous seaside resort of "Schevengen", with its miles of sandy beaches and beautiful promenade from which frequent exits led to the beach. On the landward side the promenade was lined by many elaborate cabarets, casinos, cafes etc. Far beyond our limited financial means. Later in the summer months, we were allowed to go to the beaches and enjoyed a swim and sun bathe on the sands. It was truly a very beautiful spot.

The only alcoholic beverages that were available in our price range were rum of which they seemed to have a plentiful supply, and a light form or beer or ale. In spite of our financial restrictions, some of our chaps managed to get a bit inebriated and had to be helped back to our apartments. Others overstayed their leave periods and reported back after regulation hours.

As a result of these lapses of discipline, I was appointed by the Commanding Officer as head of a military Police Force of about ten men to be responsible for the behaviour of the Canadian troops. One of the prerequisites being a twenty-four hour pass, which I still have in my possession.

It was only a matter of a few weeks before we had all settled down to our new surroundings and after three long years of barbed wire it was a wonderful feeling to be able to stroll out from our apartments without any restraint other than the ordinary parades under our own officers and usually a march out into the surrounding country. As the Spring approached the weather improved and we were able to admire the early flowers in the gardens and parks, also along the banks of the many canals.

In the meantime, the army authorities had provided new uniforms, caps and boots and a tailor's shop was set up where we could be measured for our new uniforms so that in a short time we once again presented a smart military appearance which duly impressed the Dutch, who had only seen us in the rather ragged outfits we were wearing when we crossed the border.

I made numerous enquiries as to the whereabouts of the box of souvenirs which had been lost when leaving Germany and received considerable assistance from the British Legation. After several months it became evident that the box had been stolen possibly when lying along the railway track where we crossed the border or by one of the Germans on the train. I was very sorry to lose this box of souvenirs which contained some quite unique articles, such as children's shoes in different colours made by the Russian prisoners we occasionally met, the ingredients being mostly from the German black bread. I was lucky in being able to retain the verses written whilst in the Prisoner-of-War camp which the Germans didn't seem very interested in. I spent quite a lot of time re-writing these verses and also making notes of the main happenings whilst we were Prisoners-of-War in Germany which I hoped might give me sufficient material to write a pamphlet on our return home. I have only recently, after all these years, almost completed this task.

As the summer approached, we were given the use of football fields in some of the parks, and could carry on various field exercises. A committee was formed to prepare a Gala day on July 1st, Canada's birthday. A lot of work was done in preparing for the various events by both the officers and other ranks. We also received considerable assistance from the Dutch authorities.

A large crowd of Dutch civilians and of course, nearly all our troops attended. The weather was fine and a very full program had been arranged. One of the most amusing I remember, and still have pictures of, was the donkey race for officers who had a difficult job getting their mounts to go in the right direction or in many cases to go at all. A carrot tied to the end of a stick and held over the donkey's head was tried with some success. The whole day was voted a great success and the Committee suitably thanked for a good show.

During the whole of our stay in Holland we followed as closely as possible the progress of the tremendous struggle which was still continuing on the Western Front. We obtained our information from what we could make out from the Dutch newspapers and from the many civilians who could speak quite good English. It was about this time that the Germans launched their largest and last offensive against the Allies which constituted the British (including the now four Canadian Divisions), the French and to a lesser extent, the newly arrived American troops. The Germans made considerable advances through the Allied lines and losses on both sides were very heavy. Fortunately, the German advance was at last halted by the bringing up of reserves who not only drove the Germans back to their original positions, but continued their advance so that a large portion of the German army was on the retreat.

We were, of course, greatly cheered by this later news and I think that the Germans now realized that the end for them was approaching as they had no wish to continue to fight on German soil. In their rapid advance and equally rapid retreat, they had lost immense quantities of war materials, including a great deal of artillery, etc.

In spite of this more favourable news, the war dragged on and we almost gave up our hopes for an early finish but were very thankful that we at least had our liberty and were living amongst a friendly people. Summer was soon gone and then we entered the darker days of Fall. I think it must have been in these early days of November that we first heard the rumour that Germany was asking for an Armistice and then came the almost unbelievable news that all fighting would cease at eleven o'clock on November the 11th, 1918. The scene at The Hague was chaotic and people gave vent to their feelings in a surge of relief. All night passes were issued and troops and civilians were dancing in the streets to all hours of the night and early morning. The news was so stupendous that I think for a while we were all more or less stunned and couldn't grasp the reality of the situation.

The next few days passed in discussions as to what we were going to do on our return to Britain and Canada. Some time previous to this about a half dozen of us, some with farming experience and more without, had tentatively formed a large farming venture to be operated in the Peace River country at that time recognized as excellent farming country.

We drew up a constitution and necessary by-laws to govern the rights and privileges of the original members. By pre-emption, and the special soldiers' grant, we would each be entitled to 320 acres, or ½ a section which would be pooled to form one unit. Our initial expenses for machinery etc., to be met from a fund of from $5,000.00 to $10,000.00. I still have in my possession the original draft of this venture. I am sorry to say that on our return to Canada the scheme fell apart as many of our members took other employment or got married with wives refusing to have anything to do with such a project, known as Ypres Unity Farms Ltd.

By this time, we were all anxiously awaiting instructions as to our transfer to England. We were informed that as the North Sea was heavily mined a clear passage through the mine fields would have to be undertaken by the British minesweepers. This operation, a highly precarious one, took several weeks to perform and even then the clearance of all mines could not be guaranteed, a rather unpleasant prospect for the British ships sent over to Rotterdam to pick us up.

At last we were given instructions to pack up our personal possessions as the Army had provided us with haversacks and rucksacks in which we were able to pack most of our personal belongings. Those who had been lucky enough to get their boxes out of Germany had them shipped by freight to addresses in England.

In a few days we were saying goodbye to our many Dutch friends and left The Hague for Rotterdam, the big seaport not far from us, where we boarded a troop-ship and shortly after left for our trip through the minefields. We spent most of our time on deck watching for mines and occasionally saw one bobbing about amongst the waves. However, it proved that the British minesweepers had done a good job and after what seemed a short trip, we arrived at the seaport of Hull. We were taken to a shed on the docks and given a wonderful welcome and loads of sandwiches, cakes, tea etc. A band played all the familiar songs of the War including, of course, Tipperary and Pack up Your Troubles etc., etc.

At last we left by train for one of the many new encampments and were assigned to our quarters with clean comfortable cot beds, and plenty of opportunities for showers and a good clean up after our trip. It was hard to realize that at last we were back in England, after a period of over four and a half years for most of us. We were too tired to think about it that first day and sank gratefully on our beds and were soon fast asleep. We awakened to a full realization firstly that the War was over and secondly that we were safely back in England. For quite a time, these two great happenings were mainly in our thoughts and formed the basis of most of our conversation. We were given ample meals, in fact they still seemed to think we were starving. Individual cards were received from the King and our own Governor General, welcoming us back home.

There was a fair sized theatre quite close to the camp where travelling companies presented excellent musical comedies which were well attended by the troops. We also discovered that the "WAACS" (Women's Auxiliary Army Corps) were in a camp close by and it was quite the usual thing to see the British Tommies bringing their WAACS to the theatre. They were a smart looking outfit but were strictly off bounds to the troops. After a few days of easy living and lots of rest periods, we were presented with two months passes and railway transportation. We received orders to report to our own Regimental Base at the conclusion of our leave. The Headquarters of the 7th Canadian Battalion (1st British Columbias) was at Seaford on the South Coast.

It was a sad day when we all said goodbye to our former fellow Prisoners, and left by train for our various destinations. I had decided to go to London to stay with very old friends of our family in response to several invitations received whilst in Holland. I was given a wonderful welcome and they like everyone else, seemed to think that we were still starving from our experience in the Prisoner-of-War Camp in Germany, and shortage of food in Holland. Whilst I was still there, I had the great joy of meeting my younger brother who had followed me overseas in a later Division and then transferred to the 7th Battalion (1st B.C. Regt.) and had been on duty at our base at Seaford on the South Coast. He had been twice wounded and given his commission in the field for meritorious work and also earned the Military Medal, for the single handed capture of a German machine gun. It was a wonderful reunion.

He had to return to his Headquarters after a few days where we agreed to meet. In the meantime, my hosts treated me to wonderful tours of all the old buildings etc., in London besides going to numerous excellent shows at the dozens of theatres of all kinds in London. Unfortunately, even two months passes very quickly under such conditions and I had to say goodbye to my most gracious hosts and leave for Seaford to report to our Base. After being once again reunited with my brother I found that there was a great spirit of unrest amongst the troops, who were all anxious to get back to Canada.

As a repatriated Prisoner-of-War, I found that I was placed fairly high on the list of those awaiting available ships, which were in great demand. My brother had been detailed for duties in connection with the demobilization and shipment of the troops back to Canada, so expected to be staying over in England for some time.

In February, I was moved to a camp at Ryll in Wales, not far from Liverpool. After a further wait there, we were eventually crowded in to a troop ship which had been originally used to bring Canadians to England during the War. Tiers of bunks had been erected in the hold of the ship and ladders had to be used to reach the higher bunks. It was certainly not very comfortable accommodation, especially as we were restricted to two meals a day of a rather doubtful quality and lacking in quantity. It was certainly a direct reversal of the conditions when we came to England with the First Canadian Division. However, although there was a great deal of resentment of the way we were treated after our services had been given to our country, we were all so overjoyed at the thought that we would shortly be home amongst our loved ones, that the discomfort of our trip was soon forgotten.

We landed at the Port of St. John as the River was still frozen and ships could not proceed to Montreal. We then left by train for Montreal and transferred to a train on the main line and started our long trip to the Western coast. We received warm welcomes from many of the towns and cities we passed through until eventually we arrived at Vancouver, and were met by a large crowd, including our families and friends with whom we were once again united after an absence of nearly five years.

I was discharged on March 9th 1919, and so ended an episode that would carry many memories for the rest of our lives.

THE RHYMES OF A P.O.W.

THE REMNANTS

What a day of days it will be to us, the day that we come back
Greeting the ones we love so well, looking for those we lack
As we gaze in the eyes of her we love and read all the sorrow there
We'll thank our God for our safe return and all His loving care.
A day of sorrow, a day of joy for those we left behind
Scanning the crowd as we leave the train for a face that they cannot find
One whom we left on the field of fame, a bullet had pierced him through
He died in the arms of a comrade there leaving his love to you.
The men who come from the valley of death marching along the street
Those who met the enemies rush after the great retreat,
The years of parting over now, back to their homes again,
The First Division to leave our shores, these are what remain.
Can we forget the absent ones in the joy of our safe return
The comrades who have paid the price, our victory to earn
Lying alone in that terrible land, the land that has cost so dear
Giving their lives for Empire's sake, dying without a fear
No: - we can never forget them the Army of the Dead
We see them in our memories still, the men of whom 'tis said,
"These are the sons of Britain", and Britain will never forget
The men who gave their all for her that her banner might firmer set.