

# Some Reminiscences of Ten Years ' Ago.

Paper read by Lawrence A Wingfield, M C , D F C ,  
before the Institution in the Lecture Room of the Junior  
Institution of Engineers, 39, Victoria Street, London, S W 1,  
on 13th April, 1926 Dr A P Thurston, D Sc , M B E , etc ,  
in the Chair

THE CHAIRMAN, in calling upon Mr Wingfield to read his paper, said

LADIES and Gentlemen, it is not necessary for me to introduce to you our Lecturer this evening He is very well known as the Honorary Solicitor of this Institution

The subject of his Lecture is to be " Some Reminiscences of Ten Years Ago

I am keenly looking forward, myself, to a most interesting lecture on the most wonderful time of our history, and I now have very much pleasure in asking Mr Wingfield to give us his Lecture

Mr WINGFIELD then read his paper, as follows

Mr Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen, I am going to talk about some of my experiences of a period, which people might in many respects, as our Chairman has done, describe as wonderful, but which can only properly be regarded as the greatest tragedy of any age It is not, however, with the causes or motives involved in that cataclysm that I am proposing to deal

My only justification for lecturing to you at all is that I am really here as a " stop-gap," a fact that your Chairman omitted to mention, and it is because of that, because the War is the only subject upon which I can make any remarks at short notice, that I propose to inflict my experiences upon you I am going to tell you if I can, a little of the feelings of a prisoner of war in Germany during the war, without touching at all on the horrors of warfare, and will endeavour to throw a little light on a prisoner of war's life Before coming to that, however, a little introduction is necessary

I am going to tell you a little of the Squadron with which I served in France, not of the general routine of work there, but the impressions and amusements that one managed to extract from it

I (like so many others, in those early days of the War to end Wars, filled with enthusiasm to "do my bit") plunged into the maelstrom which engulfed us all, as soon as the military authorities would have me

I always had been interested in flying long before the War and therefore I early sought to join the R F C

In August, 1915, I was posted to a battalion of the Royal Fusiliers at Dover. There was an R N A S Aerodrome close by, and during the fortnight wherein I was at Dover, as it was known I was awaiting a transfer to the R F C, every time an aeroplane crashed, I had to endure the tactless remarks of my comrades in the Infantry, who invariably took a delight in pointing out to me what was in store. In due course I joined the R F C and learnt to fly. I will pass over the period of training. In January, 1916, I went out to France to No 12 Squadron, then at St Omer, whose function it was at that time to look after General Headquarters. As General Headquarters was situated 25 to 30 miles behind the Line, and there were at that time few or no enemy aeroplanes capable of carrying out an effective raid, the life of the Squadron was not over hard. We did have one or two raids and rumours of raids, but the rumours were more frequent than actual raids. On one occasion the alarm was given and amidst great excitement the officer on duty (myself) had to ascend into the chill morning air and give chase to an aeroplane, which was said to be attempting to bomb General Headquarters. Anti-aircraft shells were bursting in all directions and the excitement was intense. After careering about for three-quarters of an hour, without seeing anything of the bold raider, I returned to the aerodrome to learn that the hostile aircraft had been shot down. Judge of the dismay and disgust of the Anti-Aircraft gunners on finding that their bag was an R N A S officer from Dunkerque who had lost his way in the morning mist and flown low over the town of St Omer, thus causing the alarm. Their remarks were only equalled in pungency by those of the R N A S Officer himself.

In February 1916, the Squadron went South to Avesnes-le-Conte (west of Arras) where we were engaged on every branch of aircraft work. Our activities included Bombing, Artillery Observation, Reconnaissance, Photography, a fairly wide sphere of activity. Then there were the odd jobs, such as "Strafing" kite balloons, and even occasionally acting as escort to other squadrons. We were equipped with B E 2 C 's, not exactly the machine best suited for so varied a sphere of activity. So far as I was concerned, the life lasted not unpleasantly for about six months.

The life of the Flying Corps always seems to me to be the ideal life so far as life during war time can be said to be ideal. You are comfortably housed or "huttet" at a distance of some 15 or 20 miles from the frontline. You have all the advantages of civilisation in the way of decent mess and baths. After your day's work is finished, you get your rest in comfort, and it is even possible to organise amusements and sports.

By comparison with the Infantry the Flying Service exists in luxury

On our Aerodrome at Avesnes we had wooden huts to live in, a tennis court, and a couple of full-sized iron baths, so that you may truly say that we had "every modern convenience"

That lasted, so far as I was concerned, until the 1st July 1916, on which date a special job fell to my lot. I had to go to St Quentin, a large town then about 35 miles on the German side of the lines, there to "lay" a couple of "eggs" on the Railway Station. The "eggs" to be carried were large ones, weighing 110 lbs each full of TNT and I had to carry two. That in a "2C" meant that all superfluous weight had to be sacrificed. No Observer could be carried, and even the weight of a machine gun would be an unjustifiable load. I ultimately decided to take a machine gun (Lewis) though it proved to be rather a disadvantage than otherwise. It was fixed in such a position that I could not readily use it, whilst its weight reduced my rate of climb. I had been informed that I was to be escorted all the way and back by a squadron of DH 25's, but in fact, the escort failed to materialise. At the appointed time I started off. Arrived at the line I awaited the escort. As it did not appear in sight I gave up waiting and proceeded over the line. The wind was SW, about 30 m p h. I arrived at St Quentin and dropped my bombs at the Railway Station. I observed a column of smoke arise to a great height. On the way home, I met a Fokker monoplane and that was the end of the story. (As most of you will remember, the BE 2C was completely outclassed by the Fokker in performance, and in addition the Fokker was armed with a machine gun firing, by means of interrupter gear, between the propeller blades.) It took the Fokker about 15 minutes to shoot me down, but I do not think there was at any time during the encounter much hope of my getting away from him.

I spent the next 15 months of my existence as a prisoner of war in Germany. On my arrival on terra firma which I achieved without personal injury I found myself on a Parade Ground. My machine and I were immediately surrounded by German troops, and I found myself amongst gentlemen, who knew Brighton and London well, and who were all questioning me as to the condition of these places—did I know them?—had they suffered very much through the war? and so on. I was able to reassure them on these points.

At this juncture there arrived upon the scene a small car containing three German officers, one of whom was in mufti, the other two being in uniform. The car and the contents belonged to the German Air Force, and the gentleman in mufti turned out to be the Commandant of a squadron stationed hard by. This officer apologised to me most profusely for being in mufti, but remarked that I had not sent notice of my intention to call. He went on to say "We have been running along the road firing at you like anything" (The car I then saw had a machine gun mounted in the centre, which I had not previously noticed.) As I expect you realise, a machine gun fired from the ground is quite ineffective against aircraft flying at any height over 1,000 feet. I had been flying at about 5,000 feet. I expressed my regret therefore that my attention had been so centred on the Fokker, who shot me down, that I had had no time to notice any machine gun on the ground.

A guard was placed in charge of my aeroplane and I was invited to get into the car and was then driven by them to their Squadron Headquarters situate some eight miles north west of St. Quentin. The officers were housed in an old French chateau, and I was very impressed by the condition of the chateau. The gardens were beautiful, all the flower beds in bloom, the lawn mown and everything tidiness itself. I was ushered into a large dining room, oak-panelled, which contained a large table laid for afternoon tea. I was invited to seat myself next the Commandant and take afternoon tea. I asked what they proposed to do with my aeroplane and was informed that the "2.C." was considered so ancient and, at the same time a survival of such historic interest that they proposed that it should be handed over to the proper authorities to put into the Berlin War Museum, as a relic.

I was particularly impressed, not to say overwhelmed by the punctilio with which I was treated by my captors. Each Officer as he came in, clicked his heels, and in the doorway saluted in the German manner. Possibly this was no more than usual politeness, and was intended for the "Commandant." With characteristic British conceit I imagined that the salutes were intended for me: I may have been wrong. I asked the Commandant if a note might be dropped upon the English side of the lines, so that my relatives and my Squadron might have news of my whereabouts. I did not need to tell the Commandant the number of my Squadron or its situation. Such was the efficiency of the German Intelligence that he already knew it, but he said "I will have a note dropped on to No. 4 Squadron Aerodrome at Albert. A statement which betrayed a fairly good knowledge of the position of the Squadrons. I know that at a later date a German aeroplane did drop a note, and that the note eventually reached my Squadron.

When tea was finished the Commandant said "I am sorry that you must now go. You have to go into St. Quentin and after that into Germany, but you will be well treated there, have no fear." I cannot say that the subsequent treatment was always good, and on some occasions it was far from it; but I firmly believe the Commandant to have been under the impression that it would be. As I left the Squadron Chateau the car which was to take me to St. Quentin was drawn up to the steps of the chateau. The whole Squadron had been paraded on the terrace, and as I got into that car, somebody called them to attention. So they stood, two deep the whole breadth of the chateau. I felt more like a General inspecting his troops, than a prisoner of war in the hands of the enemy.

On the way to St. Quentin we passed their aerodrome, and as I had never seen a Fokker aeroplane close to, I asked if I might be allowed to do so. Immediately they stopped the car, and we strolled across the Aerodrome to where a Fokker was standing on trestles in the machine gun butts. We only restarted when I was quite satisfied.

I am sorry that time is too short for me to describe in greater detail the kindly treatment which I received at the hands of that Squadron. They were kindness itself.

Arrived at St Quentin, I was handed over to one of the Staff intelligence officers, but he did not, as I expected, press me for information. He did not ask me the name of my Squadron, who were my parents, my squadron commander, or my birthplace. He told me these things. Dazed by this prescience, I was shortly carried out and taken to the local gaol. This is the only time I have been in "Gaol" as yet and I do not recommend St Quentin Town Gaol to anybody. It is a biggish place—and the sanitary arrangements are primitive in the extreme. The cells are far from commodious, the bedding meagre, the lighting mediæval and the food inadequate to a healthy stomach. I was only three days there. On the third day myself and about forty other officers and men, also inmates of the gaol were taken off to St Quentin Station to go back into Germany. I think I mentioned that my instructions on the 1st July were to bomb St Quentin Station. Apparently I had been successful in doing so, and the explosion had done the station no good, it was obvious that a considerable expenditure upon glass panes would be required to restore its former beauty. Although three days had elapsed the Railway Transport Officer in Charge, as I suppose he would be called, was on our arrival still stamping about and displaying every symptom of emotion at the damage that had been done to the station. I was standing in the company of the only other member of the Royal Flying Corps in our party, a man rather older than myself. Evidently the R.T.O. desired vengeance upon the author of the outrage which had been committed on his station, but was in doubt which of us was the guilty party. I did not enlighten him. At any rate, he clearly suspected my companion rather than myself. He was shouting, stamping his feet, and raving at us without being able to make us understand much more than that he loved us dearly and, finally, in an access of passion, he turned and tried to snatch the bayoneted rifle of one of our Guards with obvious lethal intent. Happily, the stolid sentry was not used to having his rifle seized in this way by his officers, and, I am pleased to say, would not let go. The ensuing tug-of-war recalled the R.T.O. to some sense of dignity, and meanwhile the Officer in charge of us managed to pacify him. In the end the R.T.O. contented himself by confiscating such food as we had with us, and entraining us in a 4th class carriage with Senegalese troops. The officer in charge was clearly frightened of this R.T.O. who was his superior officer, and could raise no objection. Thus we started off from St Quentin, but when we had journeyed for about an hour, our officer stopped the train and transferred us to a 2nd class compartment. While I have profound respect for the Senegalese, I must say that that particular compartment was already too full, and the atmosphere denser than I care for, for those reasons I was not sorry to leave it. Late the next day we arrived at Mayence and were conducted to the prisoner of war camp, an old fortress on the top of a hill overlooking the town. There were some 500 prisoners of French, Russian and British nationality in this camp.

About a fortnight later a small party of about 50 prisoners, 10 or 15 being French priests, and of whom I was one, were sent to Neuburg in the South of Bavaria to what had no doubt formerly been some nobleman's hunting box or chalet. There was already a good number of prisoners there. The food provided was not too bad, but the camp was rather overcrowded, having

regard to the available accommodation. A further fortnight later all the British were again moved, this time to Rosenbad Kronach, in the North of Bavaria, where I spent the following nine months.

Rosenbad Kronach, was an old Napoleonic fortress, so fortified that escape was very difficult and so far from any frontier as to render escape from the country virtually impossible. At any rate, nobody attempted to get away during my stay. Even a short description of the life and daily routine of a prisoner of war is scarcely possible having regard to the limited time available. There were, however, certain features of that life which were common to all camps. I think the prisoner of war suffers most from the feeling that he is utterly useless both to himself and to his comrades at home. Moreover, without work of some kind to occupy his mind, he is in grave danger of mental atrophy. It was a pitiful sight to observe the mental condition of men who had been prisoners as long as two or three years. They became listless and nervous, not taking the least interest in the actions of their fellow prisoners, and often unable to concentrate to the extent of reading books. Obviously it was necessary to find some occupation, and we usually took advantage of the opportunity afforded by the presence of other Nationals, and would adopt a French or Russian "professor" (as they term it) to teach us his language in exchange for instruction in ours. Then as to physical exercise, whenever possible, we used to make a tennis court or a hockey pitch, or if that was impossible, we would go in for running and organised games. We used to order our day so far as possible, so that the time might not seem too long. Cooking became one of the fine arts. The principal events of the day were the morning and evening roll-call, and the meals provided which we supplemented with the food received in parcels from home. The quality of the food provided by our captors varied, but always downwards, and as time went on and the food got scarcer in Germany owing to the blockade, so our rations became less and less, until ultimately we were really dependent on our parcels from home, for maintenance. Hitherto it had, I think, been the considered policy of the German Government to intermingle prisoners of war of all nationalities in the hope that racial differences might lead to disputes. If this was the object, it did not succeed, for the different nationals learnt to fraternise. A change of policy was now decided upon. In April 1917, all the English at Rosenberg were sent to Crefeld where there was a camp, situate about 15 miles from the Dutch Frontier. It was a long train journey. Just as we arrived at Crefeld Station, there was a great commotion, caused by a party of British officers who jumped the train, as it was stopping, and bolted down the line. They were hotly pursued, but managed to get away from the town, one or two of them actually succeeded in getting right away to Holland.

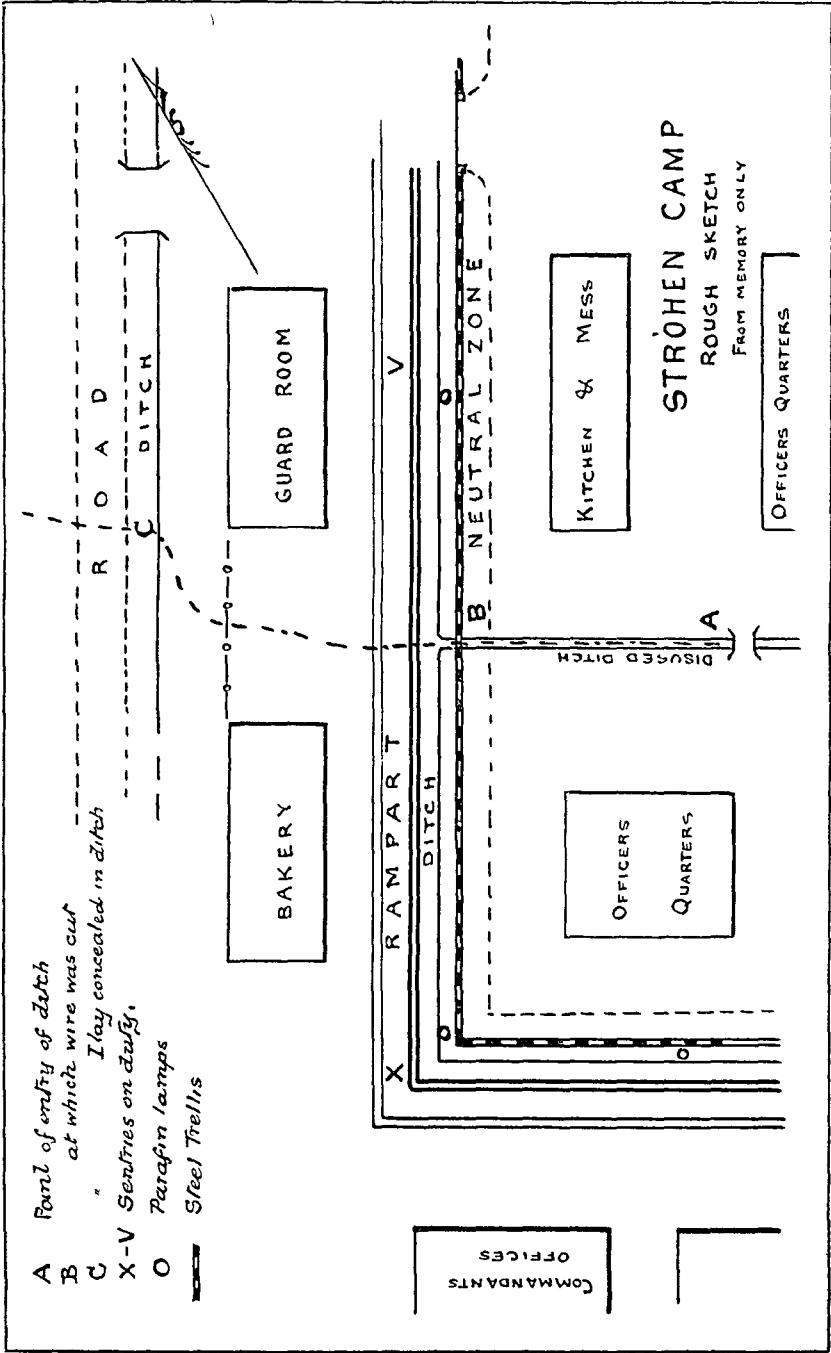
Crefeld was a very large camp as camps went, and contained I should say some 600 officers of all nationalities. Prior to the war it had been the barracks of a Cavalry regiment. Rumour said that the regiment was ordered to the Russian front on the outbreak of hostilities, but that the train which bore them omitted to stop at the frontier, with the result that the entire regiment was taken prisoner by the Russians.

Life in the camp was very well organised, there was a magnificent orchestra and concerts were frequently held. There was a very good dramatic society, and I saw a production of Shaw's "You never can tell" which was quite the best amateur production I have ever seen. I hear that the officer who acted as dress designer to the cast has now taken up designing professionally and now draws a four figure salary in the States. Once by way of amusement we got up a Proportional Representation Election, with the object of giving the theory a test. Such things as letters, parcels from home, hockey, tennis and so on were the "Candidates" and we voted which we preferred. The result of the election was that letters from home came out an easy first, beating parcels by quite a large majority of votes, which seems to indicate that we suffered most in being separated from our dear ones. The process of segregation from our allies went on, and shortly after our arrival all the French and Russians were removed to other camps while fresh contingents of British were continually arriving.

About the middle of May, 1917, our German captors claimed in some way to have discovered, whether through correspondence passing from officers in the camp to England, or otherwise I do not know, that there was a scheme afoot for a general escape. As I previously mentioned the camp was only 15 miles from the Dutch frontier. The idea was that the camp gates were to be bombed by raiding British Aircraft. Through the breach so made the whole personnel of the camp would be able to get out, and of nearly 800 officers many at any rate would be able to make the short distance to the frontier and get into Holland. Personally, I do not think much of the scheme, because the structure of the camp was such that there was only one spot where bombing by aircraft would be likely to effect a satisfactory breach, and also because it would have been possible to rush up local troops so quickly that even if a sortie were successfully made the journey of those 800 concerned would have resulted in a massacre.

However, the plan having been discovered, the guards of the camp were quadrupled, machine guns were posted at every corner of the camp, and arrangements made to split up so large a body of British officers as soon as possible. The consequence was that one half of the prisoners were removed to a place called Strohen. The rest went to Shwarmstat.

Strohen camp was situated on a sandy moor. The village of Strohen is about 90 miles from the Dutch frontier, and 30 or 40 miles from Bremen. Unlike Crefeld, where we were housed in a cavalry barracks, at Strohen we had only huts. The camp was surrounded by steel trellis work about 9 feet high, topped with barbed wire.





Of all available methods of escaping from a camp, tunnelling was by far the most unpleasant. You usually had to dig with an improvised tool, lying full length on your side, and scooping the loose earth past your face on to a tray. The tray was manipulated by a string. When it was full your confederate at the end of the tunnel hauled it out, and when it was emptied you hauled it back. Owing to the virtual impossibility of obtaining any proper material for pit props and for boarding up the roof and sides, your tunnel usually fell in on you, or worse, fell in behind you. Many were the ingenious contrivances invented for the purpose of ventilation of the tunnel. Pipes had to be made, usually of American cloth purchased at the camp Kantine and carefully rolled and sewn. Then the atmosphere in the tunnel was unbearably hot, even though, as was generally the case, it became half full of water. But the greatest difficulty of all was to dispose of the loose earth removed from the tunnel, which was usually clearly distinguishable by its darker colour. Furtive figures would be seen scattering it by handfuls over the ground at night in the hope that it would have dried by the following morning. Ceilings would suddenly collapse under the weight of too heavy secretions of this tell-tale earth. The lot of the tunneller was indeed a hard and unpopular one. Personally I never gave tunnelling as a means of escape a second thought.

The whole of Strohen camp was illuminated by incandescent lamps fixed on high poles at intervals of 50 yards or so and nobody was allowed inside the neutral zone under penalty of being fired on forthwith. But curiosity is so great amongst human beings that if an officer were to be seen lying on his stomach wriggling towards the trellis-work, with an eye on one or two of the sentries, a pair of wire cutters in his hand, and one or two bundles and haversacks festooned about him, you would be certain to get ten or more people who would come and stand and gaze at him as if he were doing it for their amusement. If therefore, you had any idea of attempting to get away from the camp, you had to take great care to keep your idea to yourself.

Many were the ingenious ways of escaping employed. One man concealed himself in a laundry basket and got out of the camp that way, another man made himself a complete German soldier's uniform, even to the belt and bayonet, the latter being gilded with the gold foil collected from cigarette butts.

The plan of escape which had been evolved between a brother officer, Lieut B Robinson and myself, was this. Running across the camp was an old dis-used gully which time and rain had shallowed, but which still provided cover to a man lying full length in it. The drain crossed the neutral zone, passed through the wire, and ended in the ditch. Upon the other side of the ditch was an embankment along which the sentries patrolled and from which they had a good view down into the camp.

First of all, an escaping kit had to be prepared. This consisted of goods of small bulk, such as Oxo cubes, milk tablets, and so on, matches, chocolate, squares of congealed methylated spirit for cooking and spare socks and shoes for the march. So as not to appear like a Christmas Tree when bearing this assortment

I had made large pockets on the inside of my tunic. In there I concealed everything required for a week's march, plus maps, and compass without presenting an unduly bulky appearance. Such things as maps, of course, were contraband and not easily procurable as they were liable to confiscation if found. Malted milk tablets and Oxo cubes were usually obtainable from England by parcel post without difficulty. The maps which I had, and which are at present in the Imperial War Museum, were tracings of those belonging to a brother officer in the camp, and how he had procured them I do not know. It is the fact that many curious articles arrived from England, despite the strict censorship to which prisoner's parcels were subjected, and the constant barrack searches made by our captors never succeeded in unearthing all the battery of wire cutters, files, compasses and maps which undoubtedly existed in the camp. Such things would arrive concealed in false bottoms of bully beef tins, etc., so that in time you could obtain the necessary outfit for an attempted escape. The wire cutters used by us arrived in a cake, which I am told is a wonderful instance of the truth of Napoleon's maxim that a soldier fights on his stomach. The outstanding difficulty of the "getaway" was that it would take us three or four minutes at least to cut through the wire, provided that it could be accomplished without interruption and consequently we had to wait until the two sentries who ordinarily patrolled the embankment were both standing still at the opposite ends of their beats. The attempt was to be made after dark on a wet night. My friend and I waited for a fortnight, without obtaining favourable conditions when we found that another officer had in view exactly the same plan as ourselves which was to approach the wire by wriggling along the drain. We therefore came to an agreement with him that he should be the first to enter the drain and cut the wire, and we would signal to him by a pre-arranged series of taps upon a china plate how the two sentries were behaving. This method of signalling was adopted, because we proposed to use the kitchen window as our vantage point and because, amidst the general noise of the camp, it was less likely to attract attention than whistling or using lights. At length our patient waiting night after night was rewarded. It was a very dark night, raining hard, and the sentries were still. At about 9.0 p.m., Somerville, our third confederate, entered the gully and crawled along it to the wire. He cut through the wire and crawled through the hole he had made without making a sound. In some miraculous way he managed to pass, running, through the zone of light into the darkness surrounding the camp, without being seen by either of the sentries.

We gave him four minutes start and then Robinson and I entered the gully at a point about 75 yards from the wire. We began to wriggle along on our bellies keeping one eye on the sentries. When they moved we waited. Unknown to us we had been observed by brother officers in the camp, and two of them, seeing what was happening, and being all ready, had entered the gully behind us. Wriggling seventy-five yards on your face, in mud and water, clad in a raincoat and encumbered as we were is fairly exhausting, and I was fairly tired when I reached the wire. When, therefore, my coat caught in the loose strands of wire, I stuck, but the chap behind me, with herculean strength, seized hold of my legs and shot me through the hole like a cork from a bottle. The resultant noise attracted the attention of the two sentries who came up at the double. I have an impression of

scrambling over the embankment, and of the fleeting figures of my comrades receding into the darkness. There was much noise and shouting as the whole of the camp guard, numbering about twenty, turned out. There were so many that those who had rifles could only fire with difficulty. I was still rather exhausted from my crawl and thinking that discretion was the better part of valour, I took cover by diving into another ditch nearby. I stayed as nearly as possible below the surface of the water, with only my head out, for three quarters of an hour. The guards continued to fire in all directions in the pitch dark, which chiefly endangered themselves. The bugles sounded throughout the camp, and the roll-call was taken, all while I was lying in this ditch. My most vivid impression of that time is the wish for some means of taking a photograph of myself, because I am sure that a more unhappy looking object would be impossible to find.

After about three-quarters of an hour in the ditch when the commotion had died away I got out and made away across the moor.

After getting away from the camp, I stopped and took stock of my stores, (I had already left my light raincoat before I even got out of the ditch, because it was so wet), and found that my matches and cigarettes were spoilt, also my compass would not work. It was a home made one, consisting of a card swinging upon a gramophone needle. Ordinary steel needles were magnetised by rubbing on a steel razor and mounted on the card. The whole was encased in a cardboard pill box, and although it was intact apparently, it proved defective owing to its immersion in the ditch. As for my clothing I had taken all the stuffing out of my cap, and removed my rank badges, and painted over my buttons with Chinese ink. For the first two days I attempted to avoid roads and go across the country. In a dry country this would be all right, but the country in this neighbourhood was very low lying with much water about, and if you attempted to leave the roads, you got into trouble. Thus I wasted a great deal of time through stumbling into back gardens and arousing dogs by the hundred or getting soaked by falling into streams. At the outset of my journey, therefore, I did not cover any considerable distance. I very soon discovered that the best plan for keeping warm during the day was to take cover in a barn, I only travelled at night. Hay in Germany is invariably kept under cover in barns, so I would find a good stack and bury myself about four feet down in it, which would keep me very warm, without in any way interfering with breathing. Towards the end of the second night, after having been soaked by the rain, I took cover in the straw of such a barn. I had not been there long when I heard voices, and found to my horror that someone was removing the straw. The voices turned out to belong to French soldiers, prisoners of war. I should explain here that it was only the prisoners of commissioned rank who were shut up in Lagers or camps. The men were usually employed on some work not connected with the war, such as farming, and this, of course, was a much happier existence than confinement for the men. Realising into whose hands I had fallen, I confessed my situation to the men, and they proved most anxious to assist me. They took me back with them to their quarters, and found me a place of concealment up in a loft. So here I was, back again in a prison camp, although not as a prisoner. I stayed with them (so far as they knew) two nights to recuperate.

They were naturally very anxious to get rid of me, as they, of course, themselves were in danger by my presence. I say "so far as they knew," because at the end of the two days they saw me off down the road, equipped by them with a clay pipe, 3 lbs of the strongest tobacco I have ever come across, and quantities of provisions, but actually I returned back to the same place again unknown to them immediately afterwards, as the weather was too bad to proceed. I thought I might just as well stay in such a good place and was actually there three days and nights. In this way I got through the Sunday, the day when all Germany takes to the country, a dangerous thing for me as meaning increased possibility of an encounter with someone.

It took me four days more to get to the Dutch frontier, travelling always at night, in stages of approximately twenty miles. The journey was more or less without incident, as I very seldom met anybody. The French prisoners had given me an old great coat, to replace the rain coat which I had lost. In appearance I resembled nothing more than an animated scare-crow. I had five socks in my possession, of which I wore two on my feet, two on my hands as gloves, and one round my neck, and I used to change them over occasionally to dry them when wet. Where possible I followed railway tracks, rather than roads, as naturally they were deserted. One had, of course, to avoid being run down by passing trains. It was usually quite safe to pass through the main streets of villages at night after 9.30, because, owing to the shortage of fuel and oil the inhabitants retired early. Near the frontier the villages were patrolled, and greater caution was necessary.

On the 8th day after leaving Strohen, I came to the river Ems. The time was about 10 o'clock at night, and I went down into the marsh and reeds which fringed the East bank and was looking for a narrow place where I might swim across when a man came up behind me and said something. Not speaking the language I do not know what he said, but as he waved his arms and his revolver, I thought I had better stop. As I appeared so dense he said "Do you speak French," and I explained in that language that I was an English officer, a prisoner of war. He said that he could help me. Also that he was an Alsatian, and could show me where to cross. He told me to follow him, keeping fifty paces behind him, and if I saw anybody coming to slip into the wood and hide, until they were gone. In my excitement I did not inquire his name, and unless this lecture should come to his ears there is no hope of my being able to find him, and express my gratitude. He led me about a quarter of a mile, and then said "There you are," and there the river was only about 100 yards wide. I went down to the water's edge, found a plank of wood and tied my clothes on to it with my puttees. I asked him if there were any patrols on the opposite bank, and he said "No." The object of having Alsatian guards near the frontier, was not so much to keep the prisoners of war from escaping as to prevent the Germans themselves from creeping through into Holland. It was certainly lucky for me I met him. I swam over pushing the plank in front of me, dressed on the far bank, and started off west again. I got lost once or twice during that night, because whereas hitherto I had been keeping to the roads, now there was no road and no landmarks of any sort. No stars were visible, my compass was out of action and I steered roughly westward by the direction of the wind,

which I guessed to be coming from the South-west. Sometimes I imagined I saw patrols on the marshes when I would proceed forward on my hands and knees, but actually I cannot say that I saw anyone. About 2 o'clock I arrived at a new canal in course of construction, and presumed that I had arrived in Holland, so I went and knocked up a farm-house to see if this was so, and the farmer told me it was Holland. He welcomed me in, to share their breakfast with his family. We all gathered round a large frying pan and were equipped with forks with which we helped ourselves to a kind of bubble and squeak, the best meal I ever tasted.

That, Mr Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen, is the end of my story, and I trust you will forgive me for my shortcomings as a lecturer when I again remind you that I am acting as a "stop-gap" on this occasion.

CHAIRMAN Ladies and Gentlemen, I am quite sure you will agree that we have had a most interesting lecture. A page of life, that is more interesting than any fiction. All of us, who went through the war, looked forward to hearing accounts, filling in the gaps, when we got back. It is so seldom, however, that we are allowed the privilege of hearing from our fellow combatants, what they went through. I think we must congratulate our lecturer, not only upon his contribution to the maintenance and freedom of England, but for the extremely British way in which he carried it through. Our lecturer tries to lead us to suppose that it was quite an ordinary affair, but we know quite differently from that, and can picture the ordeals which he has described. I feel sure that you will all join with me in extending our thanks to the lecturer, for his most interesting and gratifying account of his experiences.

I hope some of you will now recall some recollections of your experiences, and join in.

There is one little thing that perhaps our lecturer could tell me, and that is, what happened to my Christmas dinner in 1915? It was at B, near Albert, a beautiful goose and a Christmas pudding, but the night before, I was shifted, and I have always wanted to know what happened to my Christmas dinner?

Mr WINGFIELD Without actual knowledge, I would willingly bet you that somebody ate it, and with great gratification. That it might have been lost is a thought which does not bear contemplation!

CHAIRMAN I put it to the meeting to show their appreciation of the very interesting lecture. Those in favour of a very hearty vote of thanks, to signify same in the usual manner. (Applause)

Mr WINGFIELD It is extremely good of you to have listened to me this evening, and I am exceedingly gratified by your forgiveness of the presumptuous way in which I have come forward and talked of my experiences when there are millions who have stories to tell infinitely more interesting, and actions to their credit infinitely more meritorious than anything I can relate.

Mr Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen, I thank you very much for your appreciation.