



405 B

"NANZIG"
 (R.E.I.C.H.R.)

EDWARD G. RANKMORE

BRITISH PRISONER OF WAR 15065

KRIEGSGEFANGENER 15065

STALAG XX B.

TO:- THE WAR OFFICE

Through:- (?)

RE. LIEUT. J. BOWSTED 2nd Btm. Ser. Hrs.

Sir,

I feel that it is my duty to draw attention to the conspicuous courage and devotion to duty displayed by the above mentioned officer on the 11th June 1940. No senior officer witnessed these proceedings but I believe that my statements could be verified if this case should be investigated.

On the 11th June 1940 communications were severed between 2nd Btm. The Dragoon Highlanders and Brigade H.Q. Lieut. Bowsted, as Liaison Officer attached to B.H.Q., was allotted the task of 'investigating the situation'. Using a small truck Mr. Bowsted and I set off from B.H.Q. in a North Westward direction (B.H.Q. was at this time several miles south and slightly east of St. Valery). Travelling towards Le Havre we unexpectedly came under machine-gun fire outside the village of St. Riquier(?) We were brought to a halt by the remains of one of our anti-tank guns, which had apparently been bombed by the enemy. Acting very coolly Mr. Bowsted took stock of the surroundings and returned to report the matter to Major Mackintosh Walker, whom I

believe was in command of the nearest detachment of British troops. We then went into St Valery, reported to the Brigade Commander, and left the truck. Setting off on foot towards the village of Le Tol we came to a small detachment of the R.A., with two anti-tank guns facing north. The captain commanding these men and a 2nd Lieut. of the R.A. offered to accompany us across their front. Making use of what cover was available we advanced along a hedge-row until we came to a large expanse of open ground. At this point we came under enemy observation. Six enemy tanks turned in our direction and opened up on us with machine-guns. The captain was shot through the stomach and Mr. Boursiad was wounded in the thigh. The artillery officer and I tried to get the captain back to safety, but, owing to the nature of the ground and the constant machine gunning of the enemy, this was very difficult. Mr. Boursiad thereupon went back to the gun positions and returned with men to help with this task. During the remainder of the day and night Mr Boursiad kept on at his job; although I requested him to go to the field hospital and have his wound attended to he was quite satisfied with the rough dressing I had put on. Mr. Boursiad, by his bravery in the face of the enemy, set an example to myself and to all with whom he came into contact. Sir - etc. etc. Edward G. Rankmore

COPY OF LOG (12TH JUNE TO 20TH JUNE 1940.)

12TH JUNE 1940.

EMBARKATION :- Immediately after French troopship had been put out of action by enemy artillery.

POSITION :- Approximately two miles east of St. Valery.

SHIP :- Ship's boat from the French troopship.

CREW :- 6 Englishmen 7 Frenchmen.

STORES :- 6 Oars. 1 Hatchet 1 Revolver - no ammunition
1 lifebelt 1 Pail. 1 Tank full of biscuits. No Water *1.

When the troopship was put out of action six small boats, including our own, attempted to put out to sea. The enemy opened up on us with machine-guns, trench mortars, and artillery of a heavy calibre. The other five were very quickly put out of action. One of these was a ship's boat, or pinnace of our navy, manned by four sailors. We were machine-gunned from several different angles, but, although the boat was hit many times and our oars middled, none of the crew were hit. The trench mortars also did no damage but the heavy guns were more dangerous. A shell burst at the side of the boat and five men were blown overboard; - four Englishmen and one Frenchman. The Frenchman sank at once. Two Englishmen hung on to the lifebelt but a further shell from the shore finished them off. The other two Englishmen were

*1. A WINE BOTTLE WAS FOUND LATER IN A FRENCHMAN'S BOTTLE.

managed to drag on board again but they both died of their wounds a few hours later. The shore batteries kept on shelling us until we were out of range several hours later. I believe that thousands of pounds worth of ammunition must have been expended in the attempt to blow us out of the sea. The boat was nearly always half full of water and badly buckled by the explosions, consequently our pace was very slow. Over and over again the boat seemed to assume odd angles and we would be soaked with the spray from shell bursts. Eventually we managed to get out of range with the loss of five men killed and one wounded. Two oars & the lifebelt lost. We bailed out with the pail and then moved westward in the hope of meeting a British boat. When darkness came we were within a mile or so of a British battleship but we lost it in the dark. Later on we saw flares but thought they might come from enemy patrol boats so shifted our oars and remained quiet. Terrible night. Have no clothes except a shirt which is cooking wet - bitterly cold. Noises of bursting shells and machine guns in my head for several days. Hallucinations - can see trees all around me and keep slipping my oar in grass. Glad when day breaks. Am still confident of getting back to dear old Blighty.

13th JUNE 1940

No sign of British Boat. Plenty of aircraft passing over the Channel. We see some bombers attacking a boat which is just over the horizon.

Bury the two dead men, -

ALBERT EDWARD RUCK R.A.S.E.

JOHN CONNELLY 1st Bn. BLACK WATCH.

God rest their souls and comfort their dear ones at home. Amen

14th JUNE 1940

Still no sign of British boat. Position is now in mid-channel. We see land at dawn equally clear north and south.

The other Englishman, - Kenneth Batten R.A.F., was as elated as I when we could actually see England. We could not persuade or bully the Frenchmen into making for England however. There were six Frenchmen on the oars and I was the only Englishman. Kenneth Batten had been wounded by a shell burst and had one arm in a sling. Very thirsty. Rains a little during the day. We try and collect some rain water but are not very successful. Plenty of biscuits but we can't manage to eat them. Our throats are dry and swollen as well as our lips. Even the sight of the biscuits makes us feel as though we want to be sick.

15th JUNE 1940

See several objects which look like the conning towers of submarines several miles away (learn later that they may have been emergency rafts or used by the Germans Luftwaffe)

Sight British ship's boat 'Alcantara' - Belfast. Tie up to her and search for water. No water. More biscuits.

Sleep until next morning.

16th JUNE 1940

Abandon the 'Alcantara'. It is too big for us to manage. Tide seems to carry us in close to shore. Make landing on quiet part of beach. Kenney and I go in search of water + obtain this from a pond in a meadow. Six Frenchmen vanish. Hide in cave on the beach. but sharpnell out of Kenney's back with an old razor. Blade which we find. Find dead bird on beach - species unknown to me - size of a gull - black feathers - pluck it & eat it in half - eat my half - tasted delicious - like tough elastic, but rather moisty and antique. Kenney could not manage his at all. Collect some old rags and rocking from off the beach with which to clothe myself. Weather has been very cold and my feet

were very tender when walking over the shingle and climbing the rocks.

Despite hours of hard work cannot relaunch the boat. Break another two oars in an attempt to lever it down to the water. Tide goes out again. so have to pack in and sleep for the night.

17th JUNE 1940.

See an old Frenchman scavenging on the beach. Obtain some clothes from him and an old bucket and go scavenging myself. Enter village of Grand La Plage and obtain some bread and a bottle of water. German patrol passes but are not suspicious. Work hard all day in order that the boat will be ready for the tide. When the tide comes in it is still an hour to go for dark. Rather risky to push off before dark but had to chance it with the tide. Ward luck - the German patrol see us. It is a heavy boat, being armour plated, and needing at least a man to each oar. We try and get away but can't move quickly enough. Several shots were fired, but apparently at random or more hit us and the range was very short. We have nothing with which to fight except the old hatchet. We are prisoners - but we tried hard. God's will be done!

BRIEF NARRATIVE . ESCAPE & CAPTURE . 16th-19th Nov. 1940.

Ever since being taken prisoner I had been thinking of making an escape. The main difficulty was food for the journey, - the Stalag daily ration of one fifth of a small loaf and a litre of thin soup (nearly always potato) was barely enough to keep a man alive.

Early in November, when on a working party of eighty men collecting the potato crop of a farm at Bischofsdorf, near Braunsberg, I met other men with ideas similar to mine.

We made a party of five - Sgt Richardson R. E.,

Sgt Durie R. E.,

Sapper Parker R. E.,

Spl. Croft. C.M.P.

& myself - Pl. Rankin Seaforth Highlanders.

Our plan was to get to the coast, steal a small fishing boat, cross to Sweden, abandon the boat, get into touch privately with a British consul, or, failing this, to cross country to the North Sea and steal another boat from there.

By November 25th we had saved up six loaves of bread, which we considered would be sufficient for our purpose.

Two days before the date planned for our escape I stayed in bed, feigning sickness, for the reconnaissance by daylight which we

decided was necessary. (Owing to the fact that we left our billets every morning before day-break and returned after dusk we had not been able to survey our immediate surroundings.)

We were billeted in an upstairs room with five small barred windows. Using an iron bar from the fire place I managed to loosen one of the window bars and leave it in such a way that it would be unnoticed but could be removed very quickly. Nothing more could be done except to gaze out at the farm buildings, making mental notes of distances, doors, windows etc.; we had spent several nights in watching and listening but had not learnt very much.

The time fixed for our escape was ten o'clock on the evening of the 26th November. (We had fixed the time owing to the fact that the civil watchman went into an outhouse and set loose a huge dog shortly after ten o'clock every night.)

On the night in question it was dark and stormy, ideal for our purpose. We made a rope out of blankets, removed the loose bar, made the rope fast and passed down to the ground. Everything was quiet: We had been afraid that the dog might be loose before we could get out but every one got safely to the ground in less than five minutes. We were naturally rather excited. The few minutes we were standing waiting for the others to descend seemed like hours. We

half expected shots to ring out but were very thankful that they didn't. Sgt. Richardson plainly remarked that it was like escaping from the Bastille and we agreed with him.

Skirting all the outbuildings we cut off across-country in a north westerly direction. About ten minutes after we left we heard a commotion from the farm. The dog was barking and a couple of shots rang out. (We have since been given an account of what happened following our departure. One of the guards found our blankets hanging from the window before the man with whom we had made arrangements to pull them back had managed to pull them in. A lot of shouting followed and then half-a-dozen guards stampeded into the room with bayonets fixed and demanded an explanation in the usual get-man manner. They went round the room rousing the chaps from their beds by pushing them with their bayonets and hitting them with the butts of their rifles. One chap was knocked unconscious before he had time to rise from his bed. ^{RE. DOWNY 6TH SEPTEMBER} Roll was called and it was found out that five of us were absent. Then followed the usual kind of blustering and bullying. The dog was shot ^{in mistake} because it hadn't barked at us. All the blankets were taken off the remainder of the men and they were kept without food or any fuel for the fires for two days.

Most of the night was spent in trying to get information from the men, but this was a fruitless effort on the part of the Germans. Next day innumerable brown-shirts, black-shirts, green-shirts etc. etc. kept coming and going, and all having a lot to say. Nothing more was heard by the men for two days and then it was given out officially that we had been caught, two of us being killed and the other three wounded. Sgt. Major Enticknap of the R.E.'s was the D.O. in charge of the party and he was given the job of making the announcement to the men. (He met him sometime later and he was as surprised as anyone to meet us again in the field) Continuing our journey as quickly as possible we kept on until we came to the main road and then headed north. Owing to the fact that I had rubber heels on my boots I went in advance about twenty yards, so that I could give warning of anyones approach. Keeping well in to the side of the road we made good progress. When anyone passed along the road we dropped into the ditch and remained still; this was not very often however as it was a stormy night and not many people were about. Our only indication of direction was by the wind. When we started out the wind was blowing from our left. We naturally had our direction at the start through having made notes of it by the sun and the stars

during the few weeks we had been there. So long as the wind was bringing rain we did not think it would change very much. Therefore we had to make sure that the wind was blowing against our left cheeks every time we took a new road or crossed country.

I got a bit of a shock when I almost bumped into a sentry-house in the dark, but we soon got used to surprises like these as we passed quite a number of military barracks and police stations during our journey.

Shortly before dawn we entered a large wood and slept for a few hours. On waking we could hear hoards from some distance away. We thought of wolves and felt rather uncomfortable, but we were unmolested for the rest of the day. Our food for the day was a slice and a half of bread for man and a mouthful of water but we were not very hungry. It gave us a grand feeling to know that we were free men and that we might be on the road for home.

We were glad to start when dusk came. It had been very cold and impossible to sleep after the first few hours. It was fairly easy going once we got on to the road again. We were travelling very light; my own kit was composed of a small towel which I was wearing as a scarf, a piece

of soap in one pocket and a bible in the other. The bread was carried in two army packs, which we took turns in carrying. Again we made good progress and covered about thirty miles before we stopped a little before dawn.

The day was a repetition of the previous one; we slept from sheer exhaustion for a few hours and then lay shivering with the cold for the rest of the day.

All the time that we had been on the journey the weather had been stormy and we had never even caught a glimpse of the stars or seen a sun-rise, as we were getting rather worried about our direction. It was not raining so continuously now and we were afraid that the wind had changed.

There was no way to check our course so we just had to start off again in the evening with the wind always blowing from our left. We didn't feel so fit now as when we had started but we kept plodding along, all through the night. If our direction was right we should not be far from the sea. In three nights we estimated that we had covered over a hundred miles.

At daybreak we were about a mile or so from a wood and had to pass some farm buildings to get there. A man and a girl were outside a cow-shed with milk-pails so Sgt. Richardson and I approached them

while the other three made for the wood.

The man and girl were surprised to see us but they were not at all inquisitive as to who we were, or what we were doing. He had a good long drink of milk each and the girl went inside and brought us some sandwiches. He thanked them and went away, joining the other three in the wood. It was unfortunate that Vire had been seen but we hoped that the farmer would do nothing about it. Once inside the wood we went through the usual procedure of making a shelter from the wind and rain, with branches which we broke off the trees.

This task was almost completed when I was confronted by a uniformed policeman with a revolver. I was so surprised that I could do nothing except stand there and stare. The 'polizist' had a lot to say but I couldn't understand half of what he was saying. I caught the words - "SPRECHEN DER DEUTSCH" and replied "NEIN, NICHT SPRECHEN DER DEUTSCH" then continued to stare at him. He was entirely alone and we could have overpowered him quite easily. I asked the others what we should do with him, but they decided it wasn't worth the risk. It was only a small wood and if anyone had come to look for the missing policeman it

would have finished things for us. We had been long enough in Germany to know that any violence on our part would mean certain death for all of us. After a bit of discussion we agreed to go with him to the station.

The police-station was in a large village on the main road, and I think that the whole population of the village was congregated there to see us brought in. We were taken into a warm room and within two or three minutes we were all fast asleep.

When we awoke there were several more people in the room. A young lady was sitting at a table, opposite a man wearing a fur-collared overcoat. Fur collars were only worn by people who were too 'well off' to work, judging by what I had seen, so I instinctively classed him as 'rich'. Our visitors proved to be the Baron Knigge and his secretary, who had come to act as interpreters and question us as to who we were and what we were doing in Pommern. They were very friendly and sympathetic people. The Baron was interested in sport and had a great respect for England as a sporting nation. When our statements had been taken the Baron arranged for us to be taken round to his house and fed. He

had the best dinner we'd had for six months, and coffee with milk. He also had a good wash and shave each and we felt almost human again.

Before we left, the Baron and his secretary came to say good-bye, and we were given a parcel of food and cigarettes each.

Several hours later German soldiers came to take us back to Thorn to stand trial and punishment for our escapades.

"THE HOUR OF MAN"

"NOTHING TO OFFER BUT BLOOD, TOIL, TEARS AND SWEAT"

I SAY TO THE HOUSE, AS I SAID TO THE MINISTERS WHO HAVE JOINED THIS GOVERNMENT, I HAVE NOTHING TO OFFER BUT BLOOD AND TOIL, TEARS AND SWEAT.

WE HAVE BEFORE ALL OF US AN ORDEAL OF THE MOST GRIEVOUS KIND. WE HAVE BEFORE US MANY, MANY LONG MONTHS OF STRUGGLE AND OF SUFFERING.

IF YOU ASK WHAT IS OUR POLICY I WILL SAY IT IS TO WAGE WAR — WAR BY AIR, LAND AND SEA, WAR WITH ALL OUR MIGHT AND WITH ALL THE STRENGTH THAT GOD CAN GIVE US, AND TO WAGE WAR AGAINST A MONSTROUS TYRANNY NEVER SURPASSED IN THE DARK AND LAMENTABLE CATALOGUE OF HUMAN CRIME. THAT IS OUR POLICY.

IF YOU ASK US, WHAT IS YOUR AIM? I CAN ANSWER IN ONE WORD — VICTORY. VICTORY AT ALL COSTS, VICTORY IN SPITE OF ALL TERRORS, VICTORY HOWEVER LONG AND HARD THE ROAD MIGHT BE, FOR WITHOUT VICTORY THERE IS NO SURVIVAL — AND LET THAT BE REALIZED — NO SURVIVAL FOR THE BRITISH EMPIRE, NO SURVIVAL FOR ALL THAT THE BRITISH EMPIRE HAS STOOD FOR, NO SURVIVAL FOR THE URGE AND IMPULSE OF THE AGES THAT MANKIND SHALL MOVE FORWARD TOWARDS ITS GOAL.

I TAKE UP MY TASK IN BUOYANCY AND HOPE AND I FEEL SURE THAT OUR CAUSE WILL NOT BE SUFFERED TO FAIL AMONG MEN. I FEEL ENTITLED, AT THIS JUNCTURE AND AT THIS TIME, TO CLAIM THE AID OF ALL AND I SAY, "COME, THEN, LET US GO FORWARD TOGETHER IN OUR UNITED STRENGTH"

EXCERPT FROM P.M.B. SPEECH 14TH MAY 1940
(W. ENUREHILL)

"WE SHALL GO ON TO THE END"

WE CANNOT FLAG OR FAIL, WE SHALL GO ON TO THE END. WE SHALL FIGHT IN FRANCE, WE SHALL FIGHT ON THE SEAS AND OCEANS, WE SHALL FIGHT WITH GROWING CONFIDENCE AND GROWING STRENGTH IN THE AIR.

WE SHALL DEFEND OUR ISLAND WHATEVER THE COST MAY BE. WE SHALL FIGHT ON THE BEACHES, WE SHALL FIGHT ON THE LANDING GROUNDS, IN THE FIELDS, IN THE STREETS AND IN THE HILLS.

WE SHALL NEVER SURRENDER, AND EVEN IF, WHICH I DO NOT FOR A MOMENT BELIEVE, THIS ISLAND OR A LARGE PART OF IT WERE SUBJUGATED AND STARVING, THEN OUR EMPIRE BEYOND THE SEAS,