

3rd. April 1978

Blackwood's,
32, Thistle Street,
EDINBURGH, EH2 1HA

Added 19/4/78

See letter to
Woman's Own 19/4/78

Dear Sirs,

Seeing your advertisement in the Scots Magazine I thought I would let you know that I have written a book about my escape from the Germans in 1940 when I was a member of the 1st. Regiment, Royal Horse Artillery which was then one of the regiments in the famous 51st. (Highland) Division. *The book is really a documentary as all the events mentioned actually took place - truth is sometimes stranger than fiction.*

Several publishers have already been approached but they all say the same thing in different ways. They all like the M/S immensely and think it is an unusual, compelling, and very human document. BUT it contains no sex, virtually no violence, and only a small love interest and ^{the} feel that any book that is published nowadays must have some or all of these elements in it.

The narrative opens with the fighting near Abbeville in early June 1940, the hasty, hair-raising 'strategic retreat' to St. Valery, the sinister events of the night of the 11th. of June, and a full description of our capture early on the morning of the 12th. of June.

After that came the long tramp as P.O.W's through Normandy, the Somme, Pas-de-Calais, Bethune, Armentieres, to Loos, just outside Lille, where I escaped in a rather original and amusing manner.

This was on the 30th. of June and, speaking reasonable French, I was lucky enough to find a helpful Frenchman who gave me a complete set of civvy clothes (he was a coal-lorry driver) and a frightful old bicycle and thus I was enabled to begin the long journey to U.K. via the South of France, Spain, and Portugal.

By taking devious routes avoiding large towns, with adventures some of which were amusing and some not so funny, I contrived to cover the 400 miles of enemy-occupied France and arrive at the infamous Line of Demarcation, near Chalos-sur-Saone in September.

The Line was a belt of country 2 to 3 miles wide and crossing it was very dangerous as the Germans patrolled it day and night, and if you were caught there without a permit to live in the Line you were yanked back into a concentration camp in Occupied France. However, I managed to get across safely.

In the so-called Unoccupied Zone (the Germans were in civvies) one had to pay for everything, so not having more than about 2,000 francs on me, I surrendered myself to the Deuxieme Bureau (Intelligence) in Macon and they arranged for me to live at the local barracks. On parole, but quite free to go anywhere in the town. One day the Colonel at the barracks sent to ask me if I would go and see him in his office. When I went in he cleared everybody and locked the door. He said that he was sure that I would like to work for my country and proposed a crack-brained scheme to go and find other evades and get them away to England. I listened in silence wondering what he really wanted. At last it came out. I would of course pass on to him the names of the men I was getting out and the names and addresses of those working the scheme! Then I knew he was a fifth columnist. So I made an equally specious bargain with him that if ever I had an escape route planned right back to England (this was quite impossible) I would let him know. Oddly enough he seemed satisfied and was always on good terms with me socially. (After the war he was shot)

Then some friends in the town told me of a French evade who had just gone to stay with his aunt in Marseille. By an incredible coincidence he turned out to be a friend of mine living in London, so I went to Marseille and he found lodgings for me. This was October 1940.

At this time Marseille was an incredible place, the Mafia were in great force offering bogus escape schemes, but I soon learned that if money was asked for in advance then the scheme was phoney. Other British evades were arriving every day and were looked after by the French in the Fort St. Jean on the Vieux Port. At one time their numbers were over four hundred.

I was stuck in Marseille till January 1941 when I made the acquaintance of a Spanish exile -- a contrabandist -- whose (lucrative) job was to take men on the goat tracks over the Pyrenees into Spain and then return with goods back to France. He agreed to take me and a friend for £200 sterling in francs, payable in instalments as we went.

With the help of several local people and an American cousin (America was not in the war then) I managed to raise the money. We went right across southern France from Marseille to Perpignan and one pitch black started to climb a rock-strewn path and laid up hidden during the day. The weather was like late spring. It took us three days and four nights before we were put on a train for Barcelona, where we went to the British Consulate and were given temporary travelling documents, with Portuguese visas but no Spanish visa. We went by a slow train to Madrid, but just before we arrived there we were picked up by a train police control and carted off to prison.

3rd. April 1973

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After a week under the most appalling conditions we were let out, on the 9th. of February 1941, and I at once contacted the Military Attache at the Embassy who asked me if instead of being taken down to Gibraltar and so home direct, would I be willing to go to Lisbon to work for Intelligence on escape schemes. I agreed and worked in Lisbon for five months. I gradually became so ill mentally that I asked for a flight home and arrived in U.K. on the 6th. of July 1941.

There are about 85,000 words and 33 Chapters in the typescript.

The narrative is representative of the experiences of many thousands of Other Rank evades who were given shelter, sustenance, and means of escape by the supreme bravery and generosity of Dutch, Belgian, French, and Spanish people and I have written it as a tribute to these people.

At the end there are some Notes covering the visit of my wife and myself in 1951 to retrace the same devious routes I took in 1940. And to personally thank upwards of a hundred people who had helped and guided me.

If the above synopsis is of interest to you and you would consider publication or serialisation of the book, I would be glad to send you a typescript of the book.

Yours very truly,

After that came the long tramp as P.O.W.'s through Normandy, the Somme, Pas-de-Calais, Belgium, Ardennes, to Loos, just outside Lille, when I escaped in a rather original and amusing manner.

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