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Capt. J.E.Killick, Field Security Officer, Intelligence Corps
89 Field Security Section , 1st Airborne Division

The section would normally be responsible for interrogating prisoners, Nazis etc and examining documents but on parachuting into Arnhem they were rapidly drawn into the general fighting.

When I spoke to Sir John Killick earlier this year he said that this diary had certain typographical errors but I am not aware of the details.

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D.M.Stewart

137467 Capt J.E. KILLICK
Suffolk Regiment/ Intelligence Corps
FSO 1st Airborne Division
1943-44

(Written after Arnhem, in Oflag 79)

Arnhem To Brunswick

A brief and factual account of four days of intense and exciting action - so full of events that it is almost impossible to remember them all - and the dismal and bathetic period that followed our capture in Arnhem and led to more or less permanent establishment as prisoners of war at Oflag 79, Querum, near Brunswick, from which, at the time of writing, we are hoping very soon to be released.

It was a great surprise, like a nasty slap in the face, to wake up on Sunday 17th September 1944, to find that after a long series of planning and cancellations, we were at last about to embark on operation "Market". Most of us had given up all hope of ever taking part in the second front, and hardly took preparations seriously - so Philip Hodgson (Divisional I.O.) and myself found ourselves called very early and having to put the finishing touches to packing our kit in rather a rush. Breakfast was an odd meal - boiled haddock didn't improve our appetites and we were all jumpy and felt nervous in the pits of our stomachs, even the old hands who had been in North Africa and Sicily. To make matters worse, during breakfast the starting time was postponed an hour and we found ourselves sitting about and trying to read the Sunday papers without much concentration. Eventually we could find relief in collecting our parachutes and setting off in a truck for the airfield - myself trying nonchalantly to smoke a pipe, without tasting it much. Our departure was supposed to be a great secret, of course, but somehow everybody was there to see us off, even people in the villages we passed through, which filled us, at least temporarily, with bravado. It was a fine sunny morning and we couldn't have had a more cheerful departure. The airfield (Barkston Heath) was dominated by two apparently endless lines of aircraft formed up for take-off. Some were veterans of North Africa and Italy, with records of parachute drops and supply-dropping stencilled on the sides. There was a short period of activity while we fitted containers in bomb-racks and carried out last-minute inspections and then we were free to lie on our backs in the sun for half an hour to wait for the order to emplane. They brought us round lukewarm tea and crumbling cake in a jeep, but the food was like dust in my mouth, I'd only drunk a little tea, out of respect for my bladder - it is impossible to do anything about the natural necessities in an aeroplane once one has one's parachute on. I was jumping with the 1st Parachute Bn, with the 1st Bde and the brigadier (Gerald Lathbury) was cruising round in his car talking to the men and being cheered with what seemed like genuine enthusiasm. Not that I could raise much positive emotion myself. At last came the welcome activity of putting on chutes and my discomfort began - I am never particularly at ease in a harness, because of my size, but with full operational kit - two haversacks, pistol, sten gun and magazines, grenades, explosives, camera (for document photography), rations, spare clothing, message pad, mapcase all stowed under a jumping jacket and lifebelt I looked like an old cripple in advanced stages of pregnancy and soon developed agonizing cramps in all the wrong places, which got progressively worse the whole way. We heaved ourselves into the aircraft with difficulty - I must have weighed over 20 stone! - and sat down looking at one another glumly like

passengers in a train. Five minutes later, the uncomfortable silence was broken by the starting of the engines and the wearisome taxiing round the perimeter to the take-off point began. The track was lined with little clusters of American ground staff, British drivers and so on and I could see their excited faces through the door as we passed them - it must have been an enjoyable morning for them! The take-off must have been really impressive - the planes roared down the runway in flights of twelve, three abreast and were all in the air within a very short time. The flight is always intolerably dull and it was a bumpy day. We were soon treated to the nauseating spectacle of the sick-bucket being passed up and down, but somehow I remained immune. Our course passed over Ipswich and we crossed the coast at Aldeburgh, which was strangely affecting (I spent my childhood summer holidays in E. Suffolk), though I was unable to recognize many landmarks. The sea was bluish-green and unfriendly and there was a nasty sensation of finality about leaving the land behind. However, we felt safe enough, as the sky was full of Typhoons, Spitfires and Mosquitos and the only sign of a casualty was one glider which had gone into the drink with a broken towrope. We knew we were in for a three hours' flight, but it seemed interminable. At last a member of the crew came out the the cabin in flak suit and helmet and shouted something incomprehensible, and there below lay Flushing with the high conical dunes I had once before seen on my way to Germany. We all craned to see - the Dutch landscape was noticeably different and brought the awful moment nearer by its unfamiliarity. Wide areas had been inundated and whole towns and villages seemed cut off. Civilians and animals were strangely lacking and all we saw was one burning flak ship and one or two forlorn gliders sticking up out of the muddy water. We only knew vaguely where we were, flying parallel to the river, but the seconds ticked by and at about 1400 hrs we turned North and the red light came on. We were already hooked up and now we stood up, my knees nearly buckling under me. For the first time in my life I heard flak - whiplike cracks from a 2 cm position I saw fleetingly, red tracer passing the door and little splinters spattering off the wingtip of the plane to port of us. Then, with a sudden jerk time stopped. No.1 pressed the container switch as the green came on and we were all tumbling out, literally tumbling, in my case - somehow I went out backwards with one arm over my static line, which usually means a dislocated shoulder, but somehow I got away with it and found myself in the old familiar position, with a feeling of intense relief. I came in rather fast for a harmless backward landing in soft earth among some cabbages, exactly in the right place and bang in the middle of the DZ (Renkumer Heide). The drop couldn't have been more perfect - some people landed in trees, but all were well-concentrated. My sten gun fell out of my harness at about 50 feet, but I watched it go down and landed not two yards from it. In the first few hours everything seemed too much like an exercise to be true. Not a German to be seen, no firing, just men casually putting on their kit and walking off the DZ to their RVs. It was an enormous relief to get my harness off at last and wear my equipment properly - even so it was unpleasantly warm. There was so much time to spare that I was even able to cut a rigging line from my chute as a souvenir before moving off. The only reminder of the earnestness of our activities was the heavy rumble of our bombers blitzing a nearby airfield (Deelen) and a long column of black smoke from the town of Arnhem, about 5 miles away. One rather unsettling incident was when some unfortunate man came down with a load of mortar bombs nearby and blew up on landing. But even that couldn't destroy the holiday atmosphere. The twenty of us from our stick struck out on our own warily across country to find Div. HQ. Gliders everywhere - they had landed an hour before us - and again a perfect drop, with very few smashed up. I practised some elementary

Dutch quite successfully on some labourers who were watching the proceedings open-mouthed and we found our RV without trouble. Here we sat down to rest and organize and I reported in at Div HQ, where everybody except my own boss seemed to have arrived safely. Heavy mortaring could be heard on the other side of the wood we were in, but nothing in our direction. Philip Hodgson was there and I told him and my sergeant-major that I was off according to plan to join 1st Bde HQ in Arnhem. (To rendez-vous with Comd Wolten, R. Neth Navy and an SAS Jedburgh team.) An intelligent Dutch doctor, English-speaking, was being very helpful - he came from a nearby Dutch hospital, which had unfortunately been hit with many casualties by our Lancasters in the preliminary bombing. A few very mixed German prisoners were being brought in - rather scared and bewildered as they had mostly been picked up while out for a Sunday afternoon stroll with their girlfriends. I helped Philip to interrogate a few, though it really wasn't my job - it was reassuring to find somebody more scared than myself. Then I had to set off on foot across country to the village of Heelsum, where Bde HQ was to start from. I felt lonely enough at the time and would no doubt have felt more so if I had known how many Germans there were at large in the area. I was incredibly lucky not to run into more of them during my movements of that Sunday night. Coming round one corner on a sandy field path I found two glider pilots and a little knot of Dutch civilians consuming bottles of white wine. I joined in heartily and began to realize that it was now 4.30 and I had had nothing to eat. However, there was no time to stop and I pushed on, feeling hotter and more heavily-laden every minute. I arrived in the village without event, only to find that Bde HQ had already left and was well on its way into the town. The Dutch were all in very high spirits - presenting orange favours for the troops to wear in their hats - all somewhat premature, as events proved. There were none of our troops to be seen, but I found a large German army motor bike, full of petrol and tried to get it going, in some trepidation lest the owner might still be round the corner. However, the only arrivals were some of our own RE (Steve George) with a horse and cart loaded with salvaged equipment from the DZ. With their help I got my bike started and set off on the Arnhem road. I soon saw the first signs of action. Two wrecked German staff cars were lying broadside across the road, their drivers bloody heaps beside them. A disconcerting sight amidst otherwise normal civilian surroundings. A little further on I found a big German signals centre (I realise long since that this was Model's HQ. The Tafelberg Hotel) which had also been shot up. It is my job to search such places, so I went in to find incredible confusion - everyone had left in enormous hurry, a half-eaten meal was left on the table of the officers' mess. The place had been a hotel and the owner arrived back while I was there, excited at having his property back. The house was far too big a job for me to search alone, so after a quick look round, I seized some cigars and 2 Luger automatics and carried on along the road. No more signs of troops or fighting - Dutch people waving and cheering in their gardens, all the way through a prosperous attractive residential quarter. At last I caught up with our people in Oosterbeke, where some slight action in clearing out snipers was going on. One or two wounded men, but nothing serious, although just as I arrived we saw the railway bridge blown up with some of our leading infantry half-way across it. I found Bde HQ here and some of my NCOs, who had already managed to get hold of bicycles and helpful Dutch civilians. I took one of them on the back of my bike and went off back to Heelsum to have another shot at searching the signals station. Road still deserted, though sound of firing could be heard and we passed two of our reconnaissance jeeps going the other way. We found the proprietor and his family busily removing photographs of Hitler and installing themselves in their hotel again. They

showed us all the German offices and we had an hour's joyous vandalism breaking open safes and drawers. We found nothing of great value and hadn't time to do more than collect all the papers etc in one room to be called for later. The proprietor brought us some fair cognac, which went down well and we had a hurried meal from the German mess of bread, butter, sausage and fruit compote while we listened to the British news. By then it must have been eight o'clock, I suppose and was beginning to get dark. We found another German motorcycle for my corporal and then set off back along the unfamiliar road through Oosterbeke. It was tricky driving in the dark and we had to go very slowly, so we only caught up with our own troops very nearly in the centre of the town. My bike had a big hole in the silencer and was shooting out enormous flames, which made me very unpopular in a convoy of jeeps without lights trying to move silently, so I climbed off and pushed it. By some miracle I found one of my sergeants in the dark, but another sergeant and corporal I never managed to contact at all. It was impossible to accomplish anything in the dark, so I resigned myself to drifting along with the column until daylight. We at last got down to the pontoon bridge about 1/2 mile west of the main bridge, our real objective. Here we came out on to the Rhine promenade just as the fun was beginning. Bde HQ was a little way ahead of us in the column and I was with B Coy of 2 Para Bn. Just as we reached a large square on our left, German MGs opened up on Bde HQ party and there was considerable confusion. Half the column was across the square and carried on, but the rest of us remained on the near side, where we spent the rest of the night. I heard later that my missing sergeant and corporal (Arthur Maybury) were killed or wounded in this melee and I have never seen them since. I was stumbling about in the dark trying to recognize somebody or find out what was going on, when two shadowy figures came round a corner. We looked at each other from two feet range before I realized they were Germans and they realized I was English. Then we were both so surprised that we dodged back round our respective corners without firing a shot. Our motorbikes weren't much use to us in these conditions, so we filled the panniers with our spare kit and stowed them away in an alley, hoping to collect them later. Then we settled down for the rest of the night in a house on the corner by the pontoon bridge. Spasmodic firing was going on, tracer from the other side of the river and a wounded German somewhere out on the bridge was making a nerve-racking noise, but we couldn't get out to reach him. Some sort of motor-launch came down the river, firing tracer at us, but we let him have as good as he gave and he went on out of sight having suffered as much damage as we could inflict in the dark. The house we were in had apparently been a German soldiers' hostel. It had been badly hit in the bombing, but was full of wooden beds with straw paillasses. So I slipped off my kit, ate some biscuits and chocolate and managed to doze for an hour or so. Towards dawn things grew quieter and quieter and just before light we decided to push on to the main bridge to join the other party and Bde HQ. I managed to get hold of a civilian bicycle and we pushed on through the deserted streets in the half-light. We crossed the square without trouble and not a shot was fired at me as it grew lighter and lighter, which was lucky as we were hopelessly exposed. We could vaguely see the girders of the bridge above the surrounding buildings and were in the act of congratulating ourselves that the Germans hadn't blown it up when the fun and games began again. Mortar bombs began landing thick and fast in the street we were in and 2cm tracer was criss-crossing over our heads, biting lumps out of the walls. Firing began across a square behind us and a small party was again cut off from us and never rejoined. There was nothing for it but to occupy the houses outside which we were standing, so we dived in and began taking up positions in the windows, knocking out the glass

and making barricades of tables and chairs. However, as we found later, we had in fact reached the main party and chosen very appropriate houses to defend. I was in the police station (Marechaussee), which I should have had to visit eventually in any case. The map overleaf may make things clearer from now on.

There were three policemen 'at home' when we arrived, who claimed to be members of the resistance movement and welcomed us with open arms. Their enthusiasm waned a little when shots started whistling through the building and from then on they donned their steel helmets and spent their time in the cellar. However, they presented me with a bottle of Advokaat, which didn't last me long and I sat down and brewed up a large portion of my 24-hour ration, which I badly needed. Then I looked around and tried to sort out the situation. I was really an individual making my way independently, but it was obvious that I was involved in more than I had bargained for. Eventually I found that I had in my house and the next-door one, 25 officerless men, including a section of B Coy, 2 Para Bn, whose platoon had been cut off behind me, 2 men (Cpl Dick Gray and Sgt Talbot Chambers) of my own, one man from Div HQ who had got lost and tagged on behind me, the Bde corporal cook, several military policemen, signallers and Bde defence platoon (incl L/Cpl Jesse Roberts). So I took command of them and organized the defence of the two houses, becoming more or less part of 2nd Para Bn, which was the only unit to reach the bridge. I must have been one of the last few to reach it, as nobody ever got through to join us later. The Bde Corporal cook was most useful, proving a keen sniper and also managing to brew up very good fruit stews from supplies found in the cellar of the house next door, where a pathetic old Dutch couple were sheltering. They remained there until we left - I never knew what happened to them. Throughout Monday, 18th Sept, life was exciting and pleasant. We had plenty of food and water and all mod. con. in the police station. Some of the men even managed to shave. Our house was four storeys high, the top storey being the police armoury, full of double-barrelled shotguns and ammunition. The house was part of a continuous block, so we only had front and back windows to man. To the west of us there was nobody, but the houses opposite were occupied by glider pilots and anti-tank gunners, so we formed a solid west flank. To the east of us stretched the 2nd Para Bn, occupying the north end of the bridge. The bridge itself was never really occupied by either side, being swept by fire from both banks. The approach road, owing to the height of the bridge, ran up on a green grassy embankment, almost at the height of surrounding second-storey windows and was also untenable, although we managed to dig in on the sides of the embankment. The parallel road on the west was thoroughly occupied by us, however, and a large block of offices, which had been the Waterstaat, were held by Bde HQ. This was the total extent of our scanty bridgehead, which was cut off following my arrival on the Monday and never reinforced until we were all captured on the Thursday. There must have been about 4-500 of us altogether, including, luckily, a troop of 6-pounders and the bns, 3" mortars and Vickers MGs, but also a lot of miscellaneous parties like my own, not really armed and equipped as units. There were little grass islands down the centre of our street (The Eusebiusplein) with trees, in the usual attractive continental style. A forlorn-looking tram stood outside our front door and was steadily riddled with bullets and bomb splinters during the next few days. Our mortars were dug in on the most easterly island and there was an anti-tank gun in the narrow alley opposite us. Monday, as I say, was enjoyable - from our upper back windows we could see half the length of the bridge, the flak tower and a little of the approach road. Soon after we arrived, several German cars and

lorries appeared along various streets, apparently in complete ignorance of our existence. The slaughter was terrible - they were literally shot to pieces by everything within range and remained blazing wrecks with their crews killed. Other Germans obviously meant business though and a little later eight or ten half-tracked armoured cars with 2cm guns crossed the bridge from the south side. We couldn't touch them with small arms fire, of course, but as soon as they came within range of the six-pounders they easily bought it. Altogether at least seven were left burning on the bridge, which was a complete shambles. They were followed up by small members of infantry, who turned tail and went quickly back to the south bank, suffering some casualties. There were no more attempts at crossing the bridge, although German engineers could be seen now and again, presumably trying to alter the demolition charges so that they could be blown from the south bank. We sniped them when possible, but without much success. We saw little of any German infantry from now on. They quickly saw that their best bet was to blow us to pieces with their artillery, which we couldn't reply to. However, our morale was too high then to be adversely affected by the mortaring and shelling - we didn't realize how tricky the situation really was. We were left alone for the rest of Monday morning, except for heavy mortaring of the street, which left us untouched in the houses. Some sensational airbursts occurred when the bombs hit the branches of the trees, but apart from blowing all the leaves off they did no damage. Several bombs burst not ten yards from the house and one even bounced in the road - a dud - and lay there for the rest of the operation! The Germans meanwhile amused themselves shooting with 88mm guns at the various church towers in the town from the South bank, apparently under the impression that we were occupying them. We also thought they might have OPs in them and shot them up to some effect ourselves, so they suffered rather severely.

I spent most of my time on the area steps of our house - a reasonably safe place from which I could see most of the street and was able to watch the arrival of another armoured car at the western end of it, unfortunately in a position where we couldn't possibly get a 6-pounder shoot on it. The rest of the time I spent up at the back windows with a borrowed rifle, sniping at the bridge. Later on during the morning the mortaring died down a little, so I thought it was high time I went and found Bde HQ to tell them what I was doing. I doubled very smartly and with some trepidation across the street, through the alley and into the Waterstaat building through the back way. Everybody there was very cheerful, although the Brigadier himself was missing and hadn't been seen since leaving the DZ. (John Frost was wounded in the legs - so Freddie Gough was in command.) I found no sign of my other two men either and the Bde HQ told me that one had been wounded and one killed during the previous night's fighting - they had met two Germans face to face in the dark, the corporal had gone for one of them with his bare hands and been shot in the stomach for his pains and the other was hit in the shoulder. Both had been left in a civilian house back along the water-front towards the pontoon bridge. At Bde HQ there were about 100 German miscellaneous prisoners stowed away down in the basement with our already numerous wounded and I spent a profitable half hour making them work at digging latrines and carrying in large crates of fruit we had found nearby. They were pathetically eager to please, in spite of the fire of their own mortars and one SS man was genuinely in terror of being shot. From the latter we confirmed that we were up against stronger forces than we expected in the town - elements of both the 9th and 10th SS Panzer divisions (Fruntsburg and Hohenstaufen), which was a surprise after all intelligence reports had said there were no large German units

there. I then went back to my 'platoon' - there was nothing at all I could do in the way of my proper work of field security. It was a case of everybody joining in to form fighting units and the Bde HQ was itself merely defending its own house and doing little else. The wireless to Div. HQ. was only working erratically and we had no information - we could only sit tight and wait for our relief. According to plan the whole division would fight its way into the town to defend the bridge, some Polish parachutists were due to land on the South bank on Tuesday and the British 30 Corps was coming North through Nijmegen and should relieve us within 2 or 3 days. Things were still fairly quiet, so I cooked myself up some lunch. After this I was ordered to take a patrol back Westwards the way we had come to see if we could make any contact with other units of the division coming in and incidentally, from my point of view to see if I could find my two men who had been left with the civilians. An unpleasant task - I set off with a sergeant and six men, walking uncomfortably down the exposed pavements never knowing when fire might open on us from some window or other. The Rhine front itself was impassable, being under fire from the South bank, so we crossed the square at the end of our street very hurriedly and took a right fork, hoping to get through round the back streets. We hadn't gone fifty yards, though, when our leading man, crossing a side street, was fired at by an MG42 from the flank. He wasn't hit, but we were somewhat shaken and had drawn back from the corner to discuss the next move when a German with a Schmeisser walked calmly round the corner, taking us completely by surprise. He let off a quick burst at us, missing by inches and we all tumbled in a heap into the side entrance of a house. We then broke into the house and occupied the windows, not knowing what to expect next, but nothing further happened until the arrival of a little party of stragglers from the west. They doubled across the side street without incident. I reported that there wasn't any sign of any more of our troops coming in. So we decided we had best return before we were cut off ourselves. When we arrived back at the junction of the Eusebiusplein once more there were bursts of tracer from the South bank whistling across the square and we were only able to cross under cover of smoke. However, we managed it safely and had brought a few extra valuable men with us, who were added to my platoon, even though we hadn't managed to contact any of our own units. Although we didn't then realize it, we were already surrounded and none of the attempts to break through to us ever succeeded. It was by now late afternoon and we began to organize for the night. The shelling was becoming more intense and the Germans were beginning the policy they followed till the end - of blowing the top storeys of each house to pieces and setting fire to them with incendiary shells. We ourselves escaped to begin with, but houses all round began to blaze merrily just as it grew dark. In the main most of the 2 Bn was able to remain where it was, though one or two platoons had to change houses. We organized sentries and settled down to get as much sleep as we could. The night was fairly quiet and I dosed down on the second floor on some rugs and slept peacefully. Just before dawn, though, a God almighty racket started in the street outside and our Bren started up from the area steps. I ran to my window and poked my Sten out, but it was almost impossible to see what was going on. There were shadowy German figures in the street - one or two not twenty yards from the front door, on the grass island - and some had come right up to the next door house with a pole charge. One of them was shouting "Surrender! Surrender!" at the top of his voice and others who had been hit were screaming. The noise was enormous, but the whole affair was over in two minutes and the Germans apparently withdrew. Nobody of ours had suffered any damage, but the wounded German was groaning horribly. I shouted to him, but only received groans in reply. I thought of going out and fetching him, but

thought it best to wait until it got lighter and we could see more of what was going on. It was already beginning to brighten and at last we could see more or less what had happened - some SS men had made a fanatical attempt to advance right down the centre of the street. Two had been killed - one with a MG right opposite our front door by a tree and one further away with the wounded man behind him. Things seemed quiet enough, so I decided to go out and fetch the MG, which we badly needed, being short of weapons and ammunition and bring in the wounded man if possible. Throughout the affair both sides used each other's weapons quite impartially, which was somewhat confusing, as they could be recognized by the sound but nobody knew who was firing them. Anyhow, it seemed safe enough to run the 20 yards from the front door and back, so I hopped out of the area steps and across in front of the tram. Rather more smartly than I intended, though, for I hadn't gone two paces when there was a smart crackle of MG42 and the bullets spattered in the street just behind me. Out of the corner of my eye I saw two field-grey figures huddled up against the house wall on the pavement about 50 yards down the street where we hadn't been able to see them from the house. It was a time for instinct rather than thought - I couldn't turn back, so just put on an extra spurt and somehow reached the shelter of the tree without being hit. It was a largish tree, but seemed incredibly small when I crouched for shelter behind it. I felt round it with my hand for the MG42 and extracted it with some difficulty from the dead man's grasp. He was well and truly dead - shot through the right eye. His helmet had fallen off and he was lying on his stomach with a large pool of blood running down into it. But he had a ridiculously tight grasp on his gun and the movement of pulling it away drew two more bursts of MG fire which went each side of the tree unpleasantly close to my feet. These were closely followed by a stick grenade which burst 5 yards away without hitting me. I really thought my last moments had come - there still remained the problem of getting back to the house across the open street. Luckily my nerves were screwed up to such a pitch that I really had no time to think. They threw smoke grenades from the house and with a colossal effort of will-power I got up and ran like the wind round the back of the tram and fell in a heap down the area steps again. I hope I never experience such an unpleasant situation again in my life - when I think soberly about it now it still sends shivers down my spine! The annoying thing was that in spite of all my trouble I found there were only a few rounds in the MG belt. The wounded German we left severely alone after this, of course - he must have been badly hit anyway and probably died during the day, as he gave up making any more noise. The incident didn't seem to affect my appetite much, anyway, as I started off on my second day's 24 hr ration and brewed myself some stew. From Tuesday morning it began to be obvious when no other units from the division arrived that things were not going according to plan. But we still thought 30 corps would reach us from the South and had few worries. Food seemed plentiful - we could eke out our rations with fruit, which would also help now that the town water supply had broken down. Our water bottles were full, too. A very interesting thing was the co-operation of our three Dutch policemen who were continually contacting friends from the resistance movement over the civil telephone, which continued to function. The only trouble was that the information they obtained was hopelessly contradictory and though I outwardly encouraged them, in fact they weren't doing much good. Twice, by some miracle, they contacted officers from our division at the other end - one, the Bde Intelligence officer, who was caught with the Div commander in Oosterbeke and to whom I was able to pass some useful information and the other a platoon commander from 2 Para Bn, who was cut off with fourteen men in Arnhem and was captured soon after. I have since met him as a prisoner.

However, the telephone system didn't last much longer than the water and it was no further use to us from Tuesday on.. Morale was very high, though and it must have mystified the Germans considerably to hear everybody spontaneously give the 1st Para Bde shout " Wahoo! Mahomet! " (a relic of North Africa) and nearly lift the surrounding rooves. During the night several fires had destroyed buildings round us, including a wine warehouse opposite us, but the fires were now only smouldering and although sparks had blown across to us, they did no damage. We pulled down all curtains and inflammable material as a precaution and hoped for the best. The morning was quiet - the Germans seemed to be waiting for more guns to come up, or maybe they were concentrating on the rest of the division, which was now also surrounded West of the town between Oosterbeke and Wolfhezer. During the morning I had to send off a sergeant and ten men to B Coy as reinforcements, as they had had some casualties. This reduced me to twenty men, so I moved them all into the police HQ, for which we were just a comfortable garrison. During the Monday and Tuesday more parachutists had been due to drop, including Poles south of the river, but although we were keeping a close watch we only saw a few Stirlings supply dropping, who were badly shot up and a few German and British fighters. We heard later that these drops had been badly disorganized by weather and flak. The time dragged on and then, about the middle of Tuesday afternoon, the shelling really began again. This time they obviously meant business and in no time houses all round us were blazing. It was obviously only a matter of time before they spread to us, so we reluctantly prepared for the inevitable move. The people in the house opposite us had an amazing escape when a shell went straight into the window they were manning, knocked a machine-gun for six and then didn't explode. A level-headed glider pilot picked it up, red-hot as it was and threw it out into the street, where it stayed harmlessly lying. We managed to stay on till after dark, but by then Coy HQ and the house next door were well alight and we were ordered to move in to Bde HQ. By now all the buildings in the bridge area were on fire and it was as light as day. Firing was still going on up and down the street and crossing was no joke. Smoke grenades were put down and we began streaming across, taking our three unfortunate policemen with us. However, all went well and we all got safely across. My career as platoon commander was now over, as I handed my mixed band over to their respective units and was left to await developments with my own sergeant and corporal. There was a very mixed collection of officers and men in the building, including Tim Beevers, the JLO and the only other officer from Div HQ. I attached myself to him and we were made responsible for a window, which we took turns in watching during the night while the rest of us slept uncomfortably on the cold stone floor. The night was unusually quiet, though the fires blazed merrily and there was no immediate danger in our area. Wednesday morning found us slightly less cocksure - no signs of 30 corps and water very short. We managed to make a hole in a radiator and got enough water to brew some tea and there was plenty of fresh fruit, so we thought we could hold out without much trouble for some time longer. We manned our windows again. I seemed to have lost my Sten gun and acquired a Bren instead and felt distinctly warlike. Not that we saw a German to shoot at from now on - they kept well out of range, but we had plenty of ammunition and had a little counter-attack party all ready, whereby we were going to sally forth (led by Freddy Gough) into the street with two jeeps and a carrier to repel them. Luckily we never had to do so, because J. Killick was one of the types who was going to ride in the carrier! To-day we didn't have to wait so long before the artillery started up and casualties mounted steadily as house after house was hit and the wounded were brought in to the RAP in the basement. It

was distinctly unpleasant to be in such close proximity to the butcher's shop, with the mortuary nearby in the garage where the fruit was stored. Bde HQ itself came in for a fair share of mortaring in the large courtyard at the back of the building where our vehicles were parked. Some shells came our way too and everybody was somewhat shaken when a red-hot 18" fragment of 150mm shell landed with a clatter on the floor of a basement room we were using as a cook-house, without injuring a soul. From now till the end the tempo of life was distinctly faster and the final stages were approaching panic. As the shelling went on our already small perimeter of houses and garrison dwindled until it was obvious that we couldn't last much longer. We heard over the wireless that 30 Corps were due to arrive on the South bank by 1700 hrs, which heartened us all considerably. But five o'clock came and no attack and it began to get dark. The shelling got more intense and we were soon reduced to a mere three houses. Round the bridge for a radius of three hundred yards everything was ablaze and the shells were hitting our own house fair and square. Another nasty blow was to see two Tiger tanks approaching down the road, but after two shots from our 6-pounders (also now reduced in number) they retired and amused themselves by shooting at us from a safe distance. We knocked out two Mark IVs coming along the road from the East of the bridge, but things were getting very nasty. Just at dusk came the beginning of the end - yet another 88mm shell hit us fair and square and the roof caught fire. The house next door was already burning and our last remaining 6-pounder was knocked out by a direct hit with a mortar. Three Tigers came past us within 50 yards, up the approach road and over the bridge - a fearsome sight - and we could do nothing about it as we hadn't even a Piat left. This made one's hopes of seeing 30 Corps sink still further and spirits began to flag. Shells were steadily pounding into our roof and the men began to stream down from the upper floors in something of a panic. I was sent up to sort things out and extinguish any fires - a remarkably unpleasant job. The top floor was a mere shell gaping with holes, through which snipers were putting shots on the off-chance. The place was thick with smoke and phosphorus fumes and I found a healthy fire going in the corner room. To my horror there was a man lying right in the centre of the fire, so I pulled him out. He was burning fiercely with the most odious smell. I tried to beat him out with my hands without success until somebody arrived with a chemical extinguisher and we managed to get the fire under. I slung what was left of the poor devil over my shoulder - he seemed to weigh tons - and staggered off coughing through the smoke and down the stairs. I had barely reached the ground floor when he burst into flames again - phosphorus is tricky stuff - and I dropped him hastily and poured a bucket of water over him. The stink of his wasting flesh is something I shall never forget - his trousers were burned off down to the knees and his stomach was badly burned. His skin and flesh were peeling away and had come off on my clothes and his hands were so far gone that they were like wet putty and the fingers were coming off. And when I looked at him closely I found that he was dead anyway, poor devil. I put him into the RAP and went away feeling deathly sick and trembling with reaction and exertion. Luckily things were moving too fast to give me time to sit around and think of such horrors. A small belfry in one roof was on fire again and I had to go up to put that fire out too. Stragglers were coming in from neighbouring houses now and the scene began to look melodramatically like somebody's last stand. My haversack and spare kit I had dumped in a room upstairs and never had a chance to pick it up again, so I was captured with only the clothes I stood up in and what I had in my pockets. Losing my Leica was a bitter blow (because I had taken a number of "action" pictures), but I was lucky to get away with a whole skin, I suppose. I got right up into the

attic of the house and found a wooden ladder leading into the belfry, which was blazing merrily. I started up the ladder with an extinguisher in some trepidation - there was every chance that I should catch a packet as soon as I appeared on the roof. But I was spared the agony - I had got about 20 ft up when I saw the ladder had been shot clean through and at that very moment it collapsed under me and I fell in a heap, very heavily on my right heel. It was badly bruised and agony to walk on from then on. The extinguisher fell on the floor upside down, struck itself smartly on the knob as per instructions and started spraying uselessly. I tried to reach the fire with it from where I was in vain, so I had to give up and went downstairs again. Here everything was chaotic - the wounded were more numerous than those still fighting and were lying about all over the passages and the stairs. Things were obviously hopeless and on getting down I found that all fit men were baling out with orders to try to get through the town to the rest of the division outside, fighting as units if possible. I had no time to collect my kit, but joined a small party of ten with my Bren gun just as I was. It was still like daylight outside with all the fires and climbing over a high brick wall we set off on a nightmare and unforgettable chase through back gardens. As we left, the few people left in the building were putting out a white flag to ask the Germans to let us get our wounded out safely. We started off with the idea of finding an unburned house where we could sort ourselves out before pushing on - shoving our way through fences, scrambling wildly over walls and hedges as fast as we could go - a wild race in the glare of the fire. Crossing one garden, the man next to me was hit in the hand and I felt a sharp stinging pain in my left buttock. I really thought I had been hit, handed over my Bren to another officer and tried to move my leg. On investigation I could find no blood and in fact had suffered no damage except a large bruise which must have been caused by a spent bullet. We were at last led in through a back door of a house where several other people were waiting for us. I found myself in a muck sweat sitting on the stone floor of the hall and wondering just which way up I was. A major I knew came up and whispered urgently in my ear that my smock was on fire and then I noticed for the first time that I was still glowing green with phosphorus and would show up at long range in the dark. So I reluctantly had to discard yet another item of clothing, which unfortunately had sewn in the lining 1000 francs and a silk map, but I had no time to remove them, as we set off again almost at once. God knows who was in charge of the party - all we could do was to follow as fast as we could, with no idea where we were going, stumbling over a dead German in the garden. We made off back to Bde HQ, for some reason - it was by now thoroughly ablaze. As we arrived under the wall a frantic head appeared over the top of it, shouting "The fighting's over! The fighting's over!", but somebody recognized him as a shellshock case who had been brought in earlier and must have got out of the RAP somehow. Swarming over the wall again, we stumbled down a long dark passage filled with wounded, groaning and shouting as we trod of them. The Germans were about to come in to arrange to get out the wounded, so off we went again at once - to find somewhere to lie up overnight, hoping to get out of the town as the opportunity presented itself. So we repeated our first nightmare trip. Somebody seemed to be organizing the evacuation, but nobody knew exactly which way we were going. I was told to stay at a junction of two narrow alleys to direct people on the route and I seized the opportunity to discard my webbing equipment, stuffing emergency ration and revolver into pockets with other essential kit and jettisoning all unnecessary weight. I was beginning to be pretty tired by now and didn't want to have to carry more than was absolutely indispensable. It was miraculous that in the general chaos we didn't run into more Germans, but

they must have been in almost as much confusion as we were, I suppose. Soon no more stragglers came along and I followed along the route myself and eventually found everybody assembling in a large building which turned out to be a convent school. About a hundred of us were milling about in large army boots, trying to keep as quiet as possible, as Germans were moving up and down the street outside. Luckily they didn't come near the house, although we must have made an incredible noise. The floor was littered with broken glass which crackled underfoot, but desultory firing was still going on, which drowned the noise slightly. It was difficult to recognize people in the dark, but my own sergeant and corporal were there amongst others and I knew various officers. The Brigade Major was in charge and it was reassuring to find that he seemed to have a pretty good grip and we were ordered to wait where we were until the fires had died down and we could move off again in the dark. Shortage of water was serious now for the first time - I had lost my water-bottle, but after tip-toeing about over recumbent forms I found a lavatory with a few drops of heavenly water in the cistern, which revived me for a little while. We found there was a deep cellar down below, unfortunately with a locked door. There was sufficient firing though to risk breaking the lock, so we blew it off, timing the shots careful to coincide with mortar bursts. It was a difficult job, but we succeeded in doing it somehow without attracting attention and all moved down. It was incredibly uncomfortable - a damp concrete floor, parching thirst and all of us packed together like sardines. We daren't shine a torch, but finding another door in the dark a few of us found an adjoining cellar into which we move to make a little more space. This one had basement windows looking on to the main street and we could see the legs of passing Germans, so we didn't dare make a noise of any sort. I was so exhausted that I must somehow have slept fitfully for a little, but we were awakened about 2 or 3 o'clock to find that we were setting off again. A small party had decided to risk lying up in the cellar and the rest were going in parties of one officer and five or six men. Who my party were I didn't see in the dark, nor did I have much idea of which way to go, but by now it was rather a forlorn hope in any case. I think if I'd been able to go off on my own I might have felt more confident (I heard later that one of my own men had been seen dressed as a Dutch policeman) but we couldn't very well leave the men on their own at this stage of the proceedings. In a do or die mood we set off, anyway, down a small dark alleyway which after fifty yards brought us out into the main square round the great church (Grote Kerk). This gave me my bearings roughly, but we felt very exposed slinking along the pavement over the broken glass. Nobody challenged us though, so we pushed on. I decided that the best thing to do would be to find a house to lie up in overnight, still hoping that 30 Corps might arrive next day. We crept as far as we could through ruined buildings and then came to an imposing castellated gateway on the left. I started to lead on into it, but suddenly realized I was going into the prison at the back of Bde HQ, which had previously been occupied by the Germans, so I hurriedly turned back and went on to the far end of the main square. Here we reached a main road - a formidable obstacle to be crossed. There was nothing for it but to make a dash for it, so I ran across as lightly as possible with one man, leaving the rest crouched in a ruined building. We arrived at a wooden fence at the far side, stopped and listened and to my horror I heard German voices on the other side of it. I flattened myself against the fence and gripped my Luger feeling like something out of a Douglas Fairbanks film. The other man, who was unarmed, crouched behind a pillar box. I stood with bated breath and pumping heart for God knows how long and then heard footsteps, so there was no alternative but to run for it. We hopped smartly round the corner into a side-street, followed

by two shattering bursts from a Schmeisser and were then running for dear life. I never saw the other men again - my companion and I dived into the nearest opening and found ourselves in a burned out garage. Here we found an inspection pit full of hot rubble, with the wreck of a car standing over it, so we dropped into this, pulled some rubbish over us and waited. We daren't even whisper to each other - just lay in the pleasant warmth and dozed fitfully. Once or twice we heard footsteps, but nothing came our way and at last it began to get light. Thirst was still a problem, as neither of us had waterbottles, but I thought we could probably hold out all day, by which time relieving troops might have arrived. In the light I saw my accomplice for the first time - a hollow-eyed, unshaven ruffian like myself, whom I didn't know. We were both black to the eyebrows and I have seldom felt dirtier ever since. It was all quiet in the town now, as we were scattered and resistance was over, but the silence seemed odd after the continuous racket of the past few days. I felt dog-tired and was quite content to lie on my back in the muck and look at the small square of sky which was all we could see. I began to feel hungry and although I had an emergency ration, I thought I had better keep it in case worse times were ahead. I amused myself by going through my pockets - not an inspiring collection; the clasp-knife George gave me, two shell dressings, a field dressing, wallet with some French, Dutch and Belgian money, pen and pencils, pipe and tobacco, handkerchief and the small copper horseshoe Mother gave me. I began to feel somewhat destitute, with only a battle-dress to my name! I had barely completed this stocktaking when we again heard footsteps and voices and this time they unmistakably came into the entrance to the garage. We held our breath and made ourselves as small as possible, to no effect - a few seconds later the friendly faces of two SS men were peering at us over the edge of our pit and a machine pistol invited us none too gently to come out. And that was that - for us the war was over!

In a way it was a relief after so many hours of strain, but one didn't realize then the consequences and implications of being a prisoner, unfortunately. We were marched a little way along the street and taken into a house where one or two of our men were lying wounded under an armed guard. I thought it would be a good idea not to use my German until I knew what the form was, so I could raise no objection when I was searched and some of my few remaining possessions taken from me, including my clasp-knife, my army watch (which I managed to recover later), my pistol, of course and for some obscure reason my keys, which was most annoying as they included the keys of my personal kit. However, my wallet with all my money I kept, also my special SHAEF pass, which I managed to burn surreptitiously later. Pipe and tobacco and emergency ration I kept too, so things weren't too bad. After this cursory search I was taken off to the main square, where all our prisoners were being collected - a dismal sight. Nearly everybody had been captured, as far as we could tell. Other ranks were scattered on one pavement and officers in little groups separated on the other side of the road. Many were wounded and bandaged and all had been stripped of their equipment and arms, which had been dumped neatly by the Germans; presumably for their own future use. Several captured jeeps were being driven about by Germans - mostly they had flat tires, but they were obviously very hard up for transport. There was a German HQ in a nearby house and the square was full of SS in brown camouflaged suits, festooned with MG belts and machine pistols. Some looked remarkably unprepossessing, particularly a nasty cat-eyed man who appeared to be in command of the whole battle group, but some were friendly enough and seemed to respect us for the fight we had put up. Our own doctors were also there and the German HQ was being used as a dressing station where the wounded of

both sides were being treated quite impartially. It soon became obvious that I should be much more use as an interpreter and I was more or less ordered to function as such - an advantage in one way, as I was able to get about and see what was going on and occupy myself instead of standing and waiting. I was also able to scavenge surreptitiously amongst the derelict kit and acquired a respirator haversack, a water-bottle, a shaving brush and a buckshee emergency ration, which proved invaluable. But it was a very difficult job in other ways - both sides wanted to transmit impossible requests and orders and it was very tricky acting as intermediary. The job nearly drove me crazy in the end. We were all very hungry and thirsty and my first requests were for food and water, which unfortunately just weren't available. Even the SS themselves hadn't enough, so we stayed hungry and thirsty. Soon we were all moved into the Groote Kerk, where the other ranks filled the pews and the officers were kept in a sort of vestry to await developments. It was an incredibly tedious day and morale began to get pretty low, although we still had vague hopes that 30 Corps might still arrive in time to recapture us. Conditions were pretty foul - sanitation was nil, as the water supply was out and some people were disgusted at having to use a corner of the church itself, though its difficult to know what else could have been done. Altogether I thought we were treated remarkably well, especially in view of later events. There was little to help pass the time, unless one includes the shooting of two Dutch civilians in the square. This did at least serve to damp the ardour of some of the more stupid officers amongst us who were all for taking a strong line with the Germans. It was all very well for them to want to climb on their high horses, but all the unpleasantness recoiled on my head! We were honoured by a short visit from a Propaganda Korps man - a smooth, pleasant, fresh-faced youth, who chatted without appearing to be after any specific information, but who obviously wasn't to be trusted. He got little change out of us and departed after taking a few photographs of demoralized prisoners of war. At last, about five o'clock in the evening, we were again fallen in outside five deep and marched off with a formidable escort of SS men towards the North end of the town. Dutch civilians were now moving about again amongst the chaos in the streets and one or two of them smiled and furtively made the V sign. Apart from the area of the bridge, the town was little damaged and scenes were quite normal, although a state of martial law seemed to prevail. Along one street we passed a lorry load of bottles, which we took to be water - a friendly German handed one or two amongst our men, who were surprised to find it was neat schnapps! Still, I suppose it quenched their thirst a little. After about 20 minutes marching we reached another church, but after some wait the escort found they couldn't get in, so we had to about turn and march off again. Another ten minutes brought us to yet another church, organized as an ARP centre and we were put in here for the night. It was by now getting dark - a few dim candles let the place and we were closely covered by the escort with MGs. Still no food and water forthcoming, but the SS men were surprisingly friendly in sharing out what little they had themselves. I tried my old trick again and was lucky in getting a few drops of water out of a lavatory cistern, which with a piece of emergency ration chocolate just revived me. Then a sort of makeshift search was carried out again in the gloom and as some fools had only carried their escape kit loose in their pockets the SS soon cottoned on to the fact that they were general issue and threatened to give us no food or water unless we handed them over. In face of this I thought it best to advise everybody to hand over anything that wasn't really well hidden and so we all gave up a certain amount, though I managed to keep a small compass myself, which is still sewn under one of my pips. After this we were left to spend the night as best we could, sleeping

where there was room in the pews and on the floor. At least it was warm - too warm for real comfort and I began to feel the nasty inevitable irritation of not having had my clothes off for five days and an unpleasant growth of beard on my face. At about three o'clock we were all awakened again and fallen in outside in the dark and off we went again on foot. We could see from the stars that we were headed approximately north-east, but we didn't really know what lay in that direction. We were feeling pretty weak by now and this longish march was a bit of an effort, although we had little enough to carry. We eventually approached the outskirts of the town and found ourselves in a residential quarter with large houses. (Since identified as VELP). One of these had been taken over as the 9th Panzer Div. PW cage, which we reached just before dawn. It was a largish house, but there were a good many of us prisoners and we had to be packed in like sardines. 70 men were put in the garage alone, which would normally have housed 3 cars. The officers were slightly better off and we were at least able to lie on the floor and doze off again. At last buckets of water were produced for us here from a nearby pump, to satisfy our most urgent need, but our morale was beginning to be very low by now, as we realized our prospects as prisoners. The relief at being safe and sound was over and we were beginning to sink into the dreary state in which life has kept us ever since. The men guarding us were mostly elderly Luftwaffe personnel, but several particularly bloody-minded SS men were in charge. However, we weren't physically ill-treated and by mid-day (it was now Friday, 22nd Sept) our first meal for 36 hours was produced for us - 1/3 of a kilogram loaf with a little butter and cheese. We wolfed it all at once, although it was our ration for 24 hrs - we could hardly be expected to accustom ourselves to semi-starvation straight away, although we have had to endure it ever since. They also produced some foul cigarettes and tobacco for us, which were a Godsend. It was noticeable, though, that the Germans themselves got very little more food than we did, though they of course were more used to it than we were. To us, coming straight from the good living of Lincolnshire, the change was far too sudden. The rest of Friday we spent in tedious boredom in the same house. One of us had been allowed to keep his small pack and had been fortunate in having a lot of personal kit in it, including some cards, so we attempted a not very enthusiastic game of bridge and managed to wash and share with borrowed towels and razors. My day was somewhat harrassing - frequent arguments with the SS NCO in charge, until we both lost our tempers and were very rude to each other. From then on I drew in my horns considerably. The Luftwaffe guards were much more friendly, though and one of them even brought us a welcome pail full of fruit. In fact, although we didn't realize it at the time, our treatment here was much better than what was in store for us. Everybody by now was on the look-out for possible chances of escape, but we were very closely guarded and had to settle down to another night on the floor. One or two more tired and hungry prisoners were brought in, from whom we gathered little except that the rest of the division were still going on fighting, but were in a pretty bad way.

Saturday, 23rd, started off in the same way, but signs of movement started and a detachment of military police arrived to take us away. A comic little interpreter also arrived, relieving me of my duties and started writing out long lists of names and numbers. One major (Tony Deane-Drummond who afterwards was kind enough to give my parents their first news that I was alive.) who had already escaped from a prison camp in Italy, had found a cupboard in which he could hide himself, so he locked himself in with a few crusts of bread and prepared to wait for an opportunity to get away. We have heard no more of him since. I also had ideas of getting away, of course and

thought the best chance would be before I had my name taken. So I took off my cap-badge and having no pips on a smock I had managed to acquire, fell in with a party of 25 other ranks who were already being sent off. We purposely didn't even off and the numbers weren't checked carefully and I found myself being loaded on board an empty truck which was going in the right direction and which had been "hitch-hiked" by the military police. I had vague thoughts of having an opportunity of jumping off and making a dash for it, but luck seemed to show a better way. We were packed in very tightly with only one guard, who was at the rear of the truck, while I was at the front, where there was a large tarpaulin on the floor, which I thought I might hide under. As we went along we watched the signposts carefully and found that we were going along the Zutphen road. This didn't tell me much, as my knowledge of Dutch geography is pretty vague. Civilians were plentiful on the road and again often smiled and waved. Eventually we began to run into Zutphen itself, about 24 kms from Arnhem, so I seized a good chance while the troops made as much commotion as possible and wrapped myself up in the tarpaulin. We stopped once and I heard the driver ask the way to Gefangenen-lager 6, so I knew we weren't far from our destination. We started and stopped again after a short while and I heard everybody jumping out. This was the critical moment, but amazingly enough the men apparently weren't counted and after a pause the truck jerked off again - destination God knows where! So my chance was justified and I was half way to being free. I risked a peep out from under the tarpaulin, but could see we were still in the town, so I lay low till we were outside and then got out to see what was going on. There still seemed to be troops on the road and to my chagrin I saw that my truck was in a convoy and was being followed very closely by another with two men on board. So there was no hope of jumping off as I'd intended - perhaps just as well, as we were doing a good 30 miles an hour, which would hardly have been a comfortable speed at which to hit a hard road. So I got back behind the tarpaulin and made a hole in it through which I could watch the road. The signposts were now pointing to Hengels, which I had never heard of, but it seemed obvious we were headed vaguely back towards the German frontier. Several times the convoy stopped because of Allied fighters and the drivers got out and dived under the trees, but luckily we weren't actually attacked. - It would have been ironical to have been disposed of by one of our own planes! If only it had been dark I might have been able to slip off, but it was still only four o'clock in the afternoon. However, I sat tight and waited - I was rather enjoying my period of semi-liberty anyway. We passed through a fairly large town called Lochem, with German troops and lorries here and there. Many trucks had been abandoned beside the road as a result of air attacks, which was both a cheering and a depressing sight for me. I have since found it distinctly odd to live in a country subject to our own air attacks and not to know whether to be glad or sorry to see them! We moved even faster now and the signs were saying only 5 kms to Hengelo when we suddenly stopped again. I was feeling a bit desperate now and almost ready to chance my arm and run for it, but my spell of luck was over once and for all. The driver had apparently run short of petrol and came round to the back of the truck to fetch a can, which turned out to be under my tarpaulin! I shall never forget the look on his face when he found me! He was only a tiny little man, but he had a pistol and the game was up. How I have cursed since to think how close I was to freedom then; I am certain if only I could have contacted a Dutchman I'd have been clear away, but at the time I found it vaguely amusing. We jumped down off the truck and a little council of war was held to decide what to do next. At last a truck going the other way was stopped and I found myself under the escort of a young SS man going back

towards Lochem. We chatted all the way in a friendly enough manner, but there were no flies on him and he kept me covered with a revolver all the way. We got into Lochem just about dark and set out to find the German town major's office on foot. This was difficult in the dark, but eventually I found myself confronted by an elderly but pleasant Lieutenant in an office with two NCOs and a young woman. The young woman, they later explained, was a Belgian who had preferred to evacuate with them rather than stay in Belgium under the horrors of allied occupation! There was some indecision as to what was to be done with me, but after the SS man had departed there was much telephoning and it was arranged that I should spend the night with a nearby marine land service battalion. I was taken out by the two NCOs and put in a car and we set off - a somewhat erratic journey, as the driver wasn't much good! We passed several sentries into a large camp and stopped at the battalion HQ. Here were several officers and I was told to sit in a chair and wait for the Herr Kapitan, who was very pleasant and polite when he arrived. He explained very forcibly what would happen if I again tried to escape, I was given some lukewarm coffee and taken off to a tiny little bedroom right at the top of the house with a candle. The key was turned in the door, a sentry posted outside and that was that. But my attempt had been well worth it - the house turned out to be a requisitioned hotel and I had a spring bed with sheets and blankets, a wash basin, a chair and a carpet - unexpected luxury. I had a badly-needed wash and fell gratefully into bed, going to sleep in less than five minutes, in complete exhaustion. That was the last I knew until the light creeping round the edge of the blind awoke me and I sat up wondering where the hell I was. By the mirror on the wall I realized for the first time how filthy and untidy a specimen I looked. I tried some more running repairs, having some soap in my respirator haversack and had barely finished when a knock on the door announced the unexpected luxury of breakfast. My morale went right up as soon as I had a hot cup of coffee and half-a-dozen slices of brown bread and butter inside me. I called the sentry and was allowed along the passage to relieve my immediate needs and then returned to the room to sit and wait again. I could see from my window that escape was quite out of the question - there were sentries below my window and a sheer drop to the ground anyway. So I settled to enjoy a little peace and comfort at last, lit my pipe and lay quietly on the bed and thinking how unbelievable the whole episode seemed. Then I started to explore my room - not that there was much to look for and I only found a tattered copy of a German story, which I read until I found to my annoyance that half the pages were missing. I went through my pockets again and was pleased to find that a clasp-knife I had borrowed from the unpleasant SS NCO in Arnhem for cutting bread was still in my pocket. I concealed my wristwatch in the middle of my cake of soap in case anyone should try to take it off me again and went back to waiting. I went for another short walk to the lavatory to relieve the tedium and managed to borrow a novel from the sentry, which helped to pass the rest of the morning. Then a really good lunch arrived and I began to feel very well-disposed towards the German race. A good helping of boiled potatoes and a meat ball, some stewed apple and coffee - I almost began to hope I should stay for some time longer. But my little idyll finished at 2 o'clock, when I was fetched out and taken downstairs to a waiting car. To my surprise, an RAF officer was sitting in the back - a New Zealand pilot officer - but I only had time to say "Hallo!" to him before I was sharply warned not to talk and we set off on a somewhat mournful return journey through the rain to Zutphen. Again no chance of escape - an unfortunate old soldier with a rifle rode on the bumper all the way by way of escort. When I saw the weather I was half glad I wasn't at large crouching in some dripping wood listening for sounds of pursuit. We

soon arrived in Zutphen and after the driver had delivered various letters and messages we were delivered at Gefanfenenlager 6 - a large warehouse down in the Ijssel docks. I was rather worried as to what would be the consequences of my escape, but to my surprise I was quite calmly received and merely pushed inside the enormous barn of a place where about 50 disconsolate-looking airborne prisoners, including some of my former companions, were lying and standing about. There was some musty straw round the wall for bedding and a steaming soup-kitchen standing in the middle of the floor - otherwise nothing but an icy draught. I was surprised to be greeted somewhat offhandedly by the people I knew - but I soon realized why. A very black shadow was hanging over everybody and I learned of another reason why my escape had been well worthwhile. Apparently after I left Arnhem the rest of the officers had all been loaded into a truck in the same way and sent off towards Zutphen. En route civilians waved and so on and one group of schoolchildren went so far as to cheer. This displeased the SS man sitting beside the driver and he stopped the truck and got out to tick them off. Two majors seized this opportunity to make a dash for it, while the rest jostled the sentry so that the wretched man couldn't fire. Unfortunately a truck came the other way just at that moment with an SS man on board who saw the whole incident. He immediately dashed over with a machine pistol and instead of pursuing the two majors, he coolly and calculatingly fired a complete magazine into the back of the truck. Four were killed and eight wounded, including Anthony Cotterill, the writer, who had been with the Bde throughout. Furthermore, the German escort himself was also killed. One of the majors was recaptured at once, but the other got clear away. I wonder if he thinks his escape was worth the price. The situation was very nasty for a time - the SS man must have been fanatical and in a panic when he saw what he had done. Everybody was taken off the truck and preparations were made to shoot the lot of them - they were accused of having killed the escort with his own rifle and things looked very black, when luckily a German officer arrived and managed to act as interpreter - I can't imagine any more unpleasant job, apart from the fact that with my size I could hardly have avoided stopping one of the bullets in the first place. The story made me feel quite sick and impressed me as vividly as if I'd been there in person. How the hell can Germans behave like this? - Some are so bloody nice, even in wartime and yet the occasional mad dog causes all the trouble. The eternal question...

My tenderest recollections of life from this point on are marked by the accent on food. The soup kitchen standing in the middle of the warehouse was full of thick potato soup, to which we could help ourselves at will - the only thing that could raise my spirits at all. Soon after I arrived they started fetching us out one by one and we were subjected to our first attempt at interrogation - rather a pathetic one, by a young blond artillery lieutenant who flashed frequent smiles and chatted in a friendly way about life in Manchester before the war. He was obviously already discouraged at asking questions of a military nature and getting no replies, so he contented himself with writing down our name, rank and number on a large typically Tenton pro-forma and then let us go. This time we were taken to a different warehouse, where all those who had been interrogated were waiting. Identical with the previous one and with a similar field kitchen and equally damp and smelly straw. Here we spent the night, huddled miserably together to keep warm and feeling thoroughly despondent. We awoke to a breakfastless morning and tried to restore circulation by walking in the restricted space available. New arrivals came in now and again and our numbers steadily grew. We chatted to the new boys and managed to get a little more news - not very reassuring - of

the battle in general. I also talked to the elderly German guards a little - they were extremely friendly, but could do nothing much for us in the way of food. One of them professed to be a communist and all said they were heartily sick of the war and wanted to go home. They did give us a few sweets and cigarettes though, which helped a little. The morning dragged on slowly in this manner and at last about one o'clock the familiar field kitchen arrived again, this time with not enough soup to go round ad lib, but very good. An oldish officer also arrived, who proceeded to explain what rations we were entitled to and broke the more or less glad news that we were to be moved on some distance by rail. Communications being what they were we were to be given two day's rations in case we were held up by bombing. This turned out to be two-thirds of a loaf of bread and about an ounce of margarine and nothing could produce more from him. Knowing no better and being ravenous, we ate most of this as soon as we got it, stowing a little in our pockets just in case. We little knew what was in store for us! Soon we fell in outside and were marched off to our train - the first rude shock. 97 of us were herded into 4 cattle trucks, the 13 officers in one and the men in the others. They were completely bare, even of straw and no means of sanitation whatever. I complained at once, but only managed to get a few wisps of straw and a bucket for the officers. The men got nothing. The doors were closed all but two inches, through which the men were supposed to relieve themselves and then wired up and that was that. There were many wounded amongst us who had received nothing but first aid from the SS in Arnhem and had bullets and splinters in them and one man even had a broken ankle in plaster. It made me feel sick when I thought of the treatment their prisoners receive in Britain and Canada - riding in passenger trains with plentiful food and cups of tea. I suppose the elderly officer in charge wasn't really to blame - he was really a Luftwaffe technical official who had only just been given the job of looking after prisoners and German administration was in such a chaotic state that they couldn't even look after their own people properly, let alone us. Personally he was quite charming and gave me his address and asked me to come and visit him after the war. I attempted to find out our destination and although the guards weren't supposed to tell us, one of them whispered that we were going to Oberursel near Frankfurt - the infamous Dulag Luft. (In the German forces, parachutists were Luftwaffe, not Army.) We didn't really give much thought to the journey and prepared ourselves for an uncomfortable two days, but we hadn't organized for quite such a state of chaos on the German railways. To cut a long and very dismal story short, we spent five days in the same wretched cattle truck - bombing everywhere had completely disorganized things and we were lucky if we moved for longer than two hours at a time. We spent hour after weary hour in remote sidings waiting for higher priority trains to pass and crawled across Germany on a journey which would have taken about eight hours under normal conditions. Our two days rations ran out on the first day in most cases and apart from them we had nothing whatever to eat for the rest of the time except one solitary 24 hr ration that somebody (Tommy Haddon - CO Border Regt) had managed to keep - this was somehow spun out between 13 of us so that we managed to have a sip of tea and a spoonful of thin soup each day. The German guards slipped us an apple or two which they picked from trees near the sidings and twice at main stations we had a cupful of soup from the German Red Cross. God knows how we lasted the days. To begin with it was interesting to look out of the ventilations and watch the scenery, but eventually we were too weak to do anything but lie apathetically on the floor. I smoked the little tobacco I had left, which was some consolation and then a kind friend gave me some navy plug he had to spare, but life was indescribably bloody. Once a day we were

let out to relieve ourselves by the line and empty our filthy bucket, but there wasn't a hope of escape, as our boots had been taken away and were kept in the guard's truck. Time meant nothing to us anymore - it got dark at seven o'clock and then we could only lie and try to sleep until it was light next morning, then watch the countryside fitfully or play patience. There wasn't even anything to read and no writing materials even if one had had inspiration to write. I managed to keep a rough diary on the fly-leaf of a book I had in my pocket, which was lucky, as we were too light-headed in the end to remember events coherently. So I had some record of the route we followed - across the Dutch border to Rheine, where we watched a healthy allied air attack, then straight down through the middle of the Ruhr - Recklinghausen, Essen, Dusseldorf and Koln - a dreary succession of heaps of rubble, with a few factories still working here and there. Pale, dismal-looking civilians everywhere, being fed from emergency soup-kitchens and living in temporary wooden huts among the ruins. Many conscripted foreign workers - friendly, but unable to help us - working on the railway damage. Scores of bullet-ridden locomotives and carriages and burned out goods wagons. It was difficult then to understand how the Germans could manage to fight on - people in England can never have any conception of the damage that has been done by our air-raids, badly though London and other places may have suffered. We were halted innumerable times by strafing allied fighters, but we luckily escaped attack. I have heard many stories since of prisoners who were killed by our own aircraft, which seems an unnecessarily futile way to die. Nearly all main lines were blocked and we wasted much time in following obscure detours. From Koln we went straight down the East bank of the Rhine, unfortunately by night, so I was deprived of any glimpse of Bonn or Godesberg. I gather since that Bonn is also very nearly flat - the university destroyed, which depresses me. That night's travelling brought us into Mainz, which had just been raided a few hours before. Complete chaos reigned in the station and jaded civilians shook their fists at us as we passed through and made significant throat-cutting gestures. Here again we were lucky - the prisoners I have since met, particularly American airmen, have been roughly handled by civilians and had stones thrown at them, which is perhaps understandable. Dust was in the air everywhere and there was a continuous ringing of ambulance bells. The journey is really too sordid to describe in any greater detail - on the fifth night we at last arrived in Frankfurt - another desolate heap of rubble - at about nine o'clock in the evening and were given a cardboard cupful of barley soup each. Nothing I have eaten in all my life has ever tasted so good, although God knows I have been hungry enough since. And our morale was raised still further when we moved on to Oberursel the same night and were at last faced with the prospect of getting out of our cattle trucks and into some sort of camp with even the possibility of food. But the crowning blow of all was to arrive there and find that the camp was already full and we would have to go on further! No food was forthcoming and we were condemned to another night's misery in the train. In a way we were lucky, as we learned later from people who did get to Oberursel that they spent four or five days there in solitary confinement without food before a very rigorous interrogation by the Gestapo, before being sent on to permanent camps. So we were well out of that - solitary confinement on top of all our other privations would have been unbearable. However, the train moved well that night and when we awoke in the morning we found ourselves in Limburg. At nine o'clock we were given our boots again and set out to march a short distance from the train to Stalag XII A. This was Sunday October 1st. We reached the camp after half an hour's walk - it wasn't far, but we were so weak that we could barely stagger. We were filthy and unshaven, pale and haggard. The wounded had had no treatment

all the time and the man with the broken ankle was made to march with the rest of us. But it was such an incredible relief to be out of the train at last that we felt slightly less miserable. We still weren't out of the wood, though. It was a miserable drizzling day and although we reached the camp at 9.30, we were kept standing on the parade ground until 2 o'clock, still without food, before anybody took any notice of us. Only one man fainted and he was grudgingly allowed into a nearby tent by the commandant - one of the most unpleasant types I have ever seen. He gave orders in German that if anyone else fainted, nobody else would be allowed to fall out and the first man would be brought back on parade again. A thoroughly petty and unnecessary piece of brutality. It was a bloody business standing with a swimming head as hours passed, but at last things moved. We were taken through a large tent and searched again. A few more personal possessions disappeared and then at last we were taken into the camp proper. Still no food, but we were put through hot showers (lovely agony!) while our clothing was deloused - luckily unnecessarily in my case, though I wouldn't have been surprised if I'd been covered with all the bugs in creation. Clean and feeling slightly civilized at last we were then marched past barbed-wire compound after compound, full of Frenchmen, Poles, Russians and every conceivable nationality until we reached one full of British and American officers. Here we were separated once and for all from the other ranks, who were taken elsewhere to an unknown fate and we were put in with the rest. There were many acquaintances here who had arrived before us, as well as a lot of American officers and we were soon at home exchanging stories and smoking welcome cigarettes. Not that anybody had much to give us - rations were incredibly bad and American Red Cross parcels were grudgingly issued by the Germans at infrequent intervals. We never actually received any ourselves at all, but the senior officer, an American colonel, organized a collection for us and we were able to sit down to our first real food for days - a miscellaneous assortment of bread, biscuits, spam, liver paste and bully beef. Not enough to satisfy us, unfortunately, but then we have very rarely felt satisfied since anywhere we have been. Accommodation was a long single-storey hut, in which the 150 of us occupied one room like sardines. In the same compound were some East African pioneers from Tobruk and some Russians. We were issued with a threadbare blanket a piece and a bowl and knife, fork and spoon. We slept on wooden three-decker bunks, on bare boards, but after our experiences in the train I was amazingly comfortable, cold though it was. The Germans generously gave us a bowl of indescribable soup that evening and for the first time since capture we felt almost human again. Speculation was rife as to our fate - we were only in a Stalag, which is for other ranks and would presumably be sent on sooner or later to a proper Oflag permanently. Some of the Americans had already been at Limburg three weeks and more, though and the prospect of that, though better than that of the train, was hardly encouraging. Comfort was entirely lacking - the latrines were indescribably filthy, there was a tiny space about thirty yards by ten in which to take exercise and accommodation became more and more crowded as new arrivals came in. It was bitterly cold and we had no fires. Food was shocking and we had no Red Cross parcels, though earlier arrivals had been luckier. But they had so little themselves that they couldn't be expected to share with us, so we existed on 1/5 of a loaf of bread, a spoonful of molasses and two bowls of thin soup a day - hardly adequate after our experiences in the train, from which we have never really had a chance to recover since. There was little enough here to relieve the tedium, but life was infinitely better than before, as there were books to read, though the selection wasn't exactly wide. But we measured our days chiefly by food - from 8.30, when we received our bread and molasses ration,

with a bowl of sweet but foul-tasting ersatz tea, to 11.30, when we had a bowl of turnip, pea or potato soup, more or less thick according to whether our helping came from near the bottom of the dixie or not, to 5.30, when we had the same again. Our stomachs were crying out for something solid after our enforced fast and so hunger continued to be a ruling factor. And after the first night, the cold and discomfort of the beds grew worse and worse. However, our luck was with us, for after only four days we were to leave again. We had not yet been registered as prisoners of war and so had no facilities for writing letter-cards or cards, but we were allowed to write on an ordinary sheet of notepaper. Naturally we all seized the opportunity, but I still think myself that it was merely a ruse to see how much information we should give away and I shall be very surprised if the letter ever reached home. As I say, after only four days, during which time accommodation had been strained to bursting and there were 250 of us sleeping all over the floor and in odd corners, we were again fallen in and moved off on foot to another camp. A longish march, but we were by now in slightly better condition. We went across country on fieldpaths, past peasants working in the fields, through a little village and arrived at a small transit camp just big enough for the 100 of us - an offshoot of Oflag XII B, Hadamar. This was a senior officers' camp - a big schloss on top of a hill. (Where among others, was Gen Fortune of 57th Highland Div.) We lived in a wooden building at the foot of the hill, entirely separate from the main camp, which was full of brasshats. But life here took a definite turn for the better - on arrival we were given cups; plates; knives, forks and spoons; sheets, blankets and towels; and found ourselves living in rooms of 16 with double bunks with mattresses and tables and stools. And at long last supplies of Red Cross parcels seemed to be constant - we got 1/2 a parcel a week each from the top camp, who also provided a well-stocked library. German rations were better too - we had boiled potatoes twice a day on a fairly liberal scale and two reasonable meat meals per week. Bread, margarine and sugar daily, jam once a week and cheese occasionally. We were also allowed fruit from outside, which helped tremendously. At last, too, we were registered as prisoners of war and were entitled to send off proper official lettercards. The only drawback was that we still had no permanent address to give, so we knew that next of kin and tobacco parcels and other mail couldn't be sent off in reply. And of course a transit camp hasn't all the facilities of a permanent camp - otherwise we should have been quite content to stay there for the rest of the war. We had hot showers once a week and with 1/2 British parcels feeding was almost luxurious - brews of real tea and cocoa, occasionally porage for breakfast and so on. This is no place for eulogies on food, however! We stayed in this demi-Paradise from October 4th till October 16th, when at last the blow fell again and we found we were to move to a permanent camp near Brunswick. We had no illusions about train journeys this time, but things seemed better organized and we were told four day's rations would be sent with us. So regretfully packed what little kit we had and left Hadamar for the next batch of officers. We had all hoped, apart from the lack of address, for a longer stay there and had certainly spent the most pleasant part of our lives as prisoners there. We had even gone to the extent of organizing lectures, discussions and language classes and so on and although our exercise space was very limited, we had been able to play deck tennis. So we found ourselves yet again climbing into cattle trucks. Very crowded this time, but well provided with straw. The trucks were divided in the centre by a barbed-wire fence with a narrow door. In one half lived the guard and in the other were 24 officers. At night there was barely room for us all to lie down with our legs mixed up in the middle, but at least it made for warmth. The 4 day's rations were

there, too - a very reassuring sight, though they included some incredibly smelly cheese whose odour stayed with us the whole journey. We had a hurricane lamp at night, too, but in other respects the trip was horribly reminiscent of the previous one. It was if anything colder and our resistance after prolonged short rations was lower. Our boots again were removed and as the guards were in the same truck as ourselves there was even less chance of escape. The journey took a very similar form - long hours waiting in sidings and slow crawls on minor side lines through Marburg, Fulda, Gottingen and eventually Brunswick which we reached on 20th October, just as it was growing dark. The scenery provided some diversion again, but hunger was the prominent factor and I personally was unable to make my rations last longer than three days and even then I eked them out with sugar beet and raw turnips pulled from the fields when we were allowed out to relieve ourselves. We had unfortunately left Hadamar without parcels, as stocks had been too short to allow another issue, but we did have a tin or two of coffee and milk from American parcels some of the party had received previously at Welzlar and the guard brought us hot water from the engine now and again when we rewarded them with a little coffee in return - better stuff than they had seen for God knows how long! This journey, though really infinitely better than the previous one, seemed somehow much more boring. We were once brightened up considerably by an attack by Mustangs, when we all had to bale out and take cover beside the line, but otherwise eventfulness was lacking. And so, very, very hungry yet again we reached a siding somewhere outside Brunswick. As a result of raids we couldn't get into the town itself and were afraid we might have to spend another night in the train. But to our great relief and in spite of the dark, we set off on foot for the camp, which was in a village called Querum, just to the North of the town. Opportunities for escape might have presented themselves, but we were all too tired and weak to think about them - it was effort enough to drag ourselves on the longish march through the outskirts of the town, where we were tantalized by glimpses of bread and food in the shops. There were many signs of raids, even in the dark, but the town seemed active and populated enough. The officer in charge of one escort had no idea of the way to the camp and after asking several times, still managed to take two wrong turnings. We were almost dropping when at last we passed through a small village, presumably Querum itself and on through a pinewood where we could see the perimeter lights round the barbed-wire fence of the camp itself. A large illuminated sign announced that we were at Oflag 79 - the barrier was raised by the sentry and we marched into the place that has been our home ever since. No ill-treatment here - the commandant sounded pleasant enough in the dark, gave us a cursory inspection and then we found ourselves in a barrack room for sixteen with the usual double-decker bunks, mattresses and blankets and best of all, a large bowl of hot boiled potatoes and butter, for by some miracle the camp staff had been expecting us and had a meal ready. The joy of having a full stomach again drove all other thoughts from our minds and a wonderful content spread over us as we were surrounded by other airborne prisoners, earlier arrivals, plying us with cigarettes. Journey's end at last! - I slept that night more comfortably and soundly than any night since and awoke the next morning a fully-fledged and permanent "Kriegie". So my odyssey ends - the story of camp life, wearisome and tedious after this saga, can be told elsewhere, mostly in terms of stomach, I fear. Oflag 79 is an anticlimax after these other weeks of hectic living, which were so exciting that they have almost forced me to make this long-winded record on paper in case my memory fails me later when I want to recall what may have been the most momentous period of my life.