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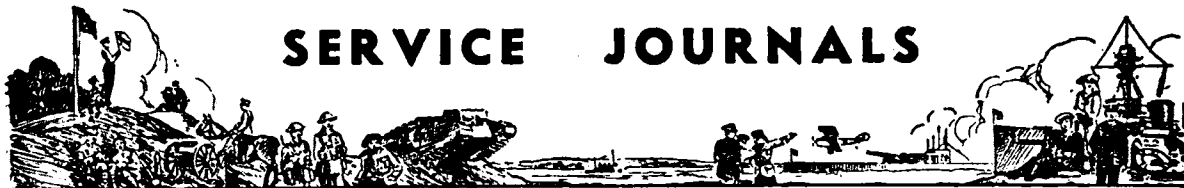
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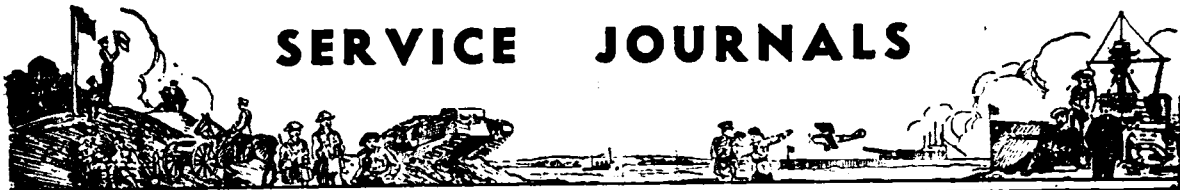
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*EXPERIENCES AS A PRISONER OF WAR, JUNE 15th
TO AUGUST 30th, 1941*

IMMEDIATELY after I was captured I was taken to an officer seated at a table in the middle of the town of Quneitra. Here my equipment was confiscated and my pockets searched, but not very thoroughly. After I was wounded, I had torn up all incriminating documents, of which I found I had quite a number. On the whole I think I preserved my incognito throughout my time as a prisoner, though many intentional and unintentional attempts were made to find out my regiment.

After this mild search I was taken to a first aid post and passed fit to go to hospital without further dressing. I was then taken into the mess that the French officers had established in a house in the town and given a very welcome meal. It was a great blessing throughout the next few weeks that I could make myself understood in French. The officers of this French tank regiment, and the few of a Circassian Cavalry regiment were quite charming and absolutely first-class fellows as soldiers and as men. I had thought the French Army was a decadent institution. These Vichy French proved to me that that was quite untrue, for these men were virile and good by any standards. I was received with great courtesy. Their Colonel, whose name was Leconteux, had not shaved for several days—shaving seems to be considered unimportant in the French Army—but he was a fine fellow. They wanted to know whether we had been about to attack Saa Saa the night before—only from mere curiosity, not to get information out of me. We agreed that it was a miserable fratricidal sort of war, between ex-allies and ought never to have been necessary. Two other things I remember also ; their Colonel told me to eat as much as I could because the further I went back from the front line the worse I would be treated ; he knew, he said, because he had been a

prisoner in the last war. The other thing was when I was moved to drink his health in beer. I said "A votre sante mon Colonel," and this seemed to strike him oddly, and he muttered to the others with him, "Autrefois on disait." I am sure that the rest of his unfinished sentence was "A l'entente cordiale." This was the first of many indications that the French are our allies still in spirit and that the entente, though dormant, is very deeply rooted in the heart of the nicer type of Frenchman, in spite of the bitterness against us that one sees in their papers. All the time I was with the French, people kept coming up to me and saying, "Avez vous vu un seule Boche en Syrie ?" They thought the only reason we had invaded was because we thought the country was full of Germans. I had to explain our real reasons and could usually convince French O.Rs., but their officers were usually harder to convince. I had to undertake this argument so many times that I became very tired of it, but I always felt it was important to tell them the truth. I set out to disseminate as much anti-Axis and pro-entente propaganda as I could and there was a fertile ground for it. I had no trouble over the anti-Axis stuff, as the French hatred of all things German seems to be one of the few constant factors in European affairs.

I could count easily on the fingers of one hand the number of Frenchmen I met who were bitter and anti-English. These few were really unpleasant and had a vanquished and catty mentality. They wanted Germany and England to wear themselves out while France recuperated so as to be able to recover her former hegemony. They said that the entente had done nothing but harm to France, that France had always been a junior partner, forced to follow every turn of our policy, that this war against Germany was quite unnecessary and France hadn't wanted it ; and that if we won the war it would be merely the victory of the Communists and Freemasons in France, and they would be forced to have Daladier and Blum again. French papers are full of this kind of nonsense, but most Frenchmen got no further than an indignant sorrow in their feelings towards us. They were damned if they were going to have their country

invaded by anyone in this brusque fashion, even by their former allies. And Petain, to whom they were very loyal, had told them to fight, so they fought very gallantly, and I think honourably.

After the meal I was taken to an A.D.S. at Saa Saa, where about 100 wounded were lying in rows under the olive trees. It was night now, and the wounded got very cold. There was one French doctor who was doing splendidly, treating our wounded and theirs quite impartially, calling them all his "enfants." I did what I could as interpreter for our wounded. Eventually ambulances arrived, and we loaded the wounded on board. I travelled in the leading one, with the body of a French captain at my feet, a not very brave Frenchman with a broken thigh in the top bunk, and beneath him a young British soldier with a bullet in his head, quite unconscious, but struggling to get out. It was a nightmare drive; when we got to the outer defences of Damascus, they fired a machine gun over our heads; this was too much for our Indo-Chinese driver, who immediately laid down on the floor, and the ambulance sailed into a ditch. We got to Damascus Hospital at last. Two of the wounded were dead when we got there.

This hospital was under-staffed, and so no washing was done. It was soon covered in gore, and the wards stank with the appalling smell of wounds gone bad. I did a good deal of interpreting and liaising for our wounded, who could not get their simple needs satisfied. But first of all I was glad to have a long sleep as I'd had practically none for three days; and I was also glad to get my clothes off. Though it was 24 hours after I was wounded, my cardigan was still wet with blood.

This hospital was a gruesome place and an unpleasant memory, but I do remember one oldish sister who worked from dawn to dusk for us. The other sisters were Syrians, Greeks and a few French. I was there for about a week. One day the French evacuated the city because the Indians had reached Mezzeh, but they returned a few hours later. One day before we finally captured it, all the less badly wounded were moved out by train. I thought of escaping, but had had a temperature

of 104 degrees the day before, so did not feel fit enough. The train journey was long and we were thankful to get to our next hospital—a converted hotel at Suq el Garb, on the hills above Beirut.

I was a fortnight in this hospital. The doctors here did well by our wounded, operating on them before they operated on the French wounded. I was able to walk about, and was joined by a certain Major Middleton-Stuart, the Brigade Major of one of the Indian Brigades. We discussed escape but decided to wait until the Australians were nearer Beirut. We could hear the guns in the distance. It was here that one first became aware of guards. They were mostly Madagascans, who are the nearest thing to an ourang-outang I've seen among men, and are without intelligence. The food was very good there, and throughout the hospital period we ate exactly the same as the French officers. One was not made to feel one was among enemies. The French officers were very nice to us, and once when we were walking in the grounds one of them spoke to a guard who was following us rather closely and made him keep a more discreet distance—a kindly thought that was much appreciated. The Red Cross, in the shape of a French lady, came to see us one day and brought us three packs of cards, without which we should have surely gone mad later on.

On about June 28th, we were all moved out of the hospital at Suq el Garb; the majority were taken to Beirut Hospital, but Major Middleton-Stuart and myself, being now no longer hospital cases, were taken to a barracks that was acting as a transit camp for prisoners of war. Here we were thrust into a basement room with barred windows too high to look out of, and the door was locked and barred behind us. We were in this hole for three days, under the care of a French R.S.M., who was one of the few unpleasant types we met. He showed a fiendish satisfaction in locking us up and treating us as if we were criminals. We had to bang on the door if we wanted to get out for any reason, and usually had to bang for several minutes before he came along. We were allowed to walk round the barrack square for an hour a day, for exercise.

While we were there we were interrogated by an intelligence officer. When I would not give the name of my regiment he did not press his questions. Two other officers who had joined us—one a Lieut.-Colonel of a Light A.A. regiment—took the opportunity to do some intensive propaganda in favour of an Armistice, and this had some success as this colonel had two interviews subsequently with General Dentz, who was obviously fishing for an Armistice. When we left Beirut next day, the colonel stayed behind to continue the discussions. This was excellent news for us, and we felt confident that the Syrian War would be over shortly and we would be back with our regiments in about three weeks time.

One night while we were there, Beirut was raided by the R.A.F. In our underground room we felt very safe, though there was a tremendous noise of guns and bombs going on. The planes came in very high then dived; we could hear them zooming down till they were quite low, and could tell they were Blenheims from their noise. The moral effect was considerable, but it would be interesting to know if the bombing of Beirut had any military effect on the campaign.

We left Beirut by train for the prison camp at Idlib. We were escorted by three gendarmes. Numerous opportunities of escape presented themselves, but we did not take them as we thought the war would be over in a few days. Afterwards we cursed ourselves for not making an attempt. We left the train at Aleppo and were taken to Idlib by bus. Here we met all the Fusilier officers again, and many others. The camp was quite well run and comfortable, but there was a miserable small space for exercise, and we found most of the prisoners there very lethargic, spending most of the day on their beds. The Commandant was most unpopular as he was a stickler for the letter of the law—he had been howled down once by a crowd of disgruntled officers. His Adjutant was one of the best type of Frenchmen, and a friend to us; he would do anything for us but let us out. But he could not manage the Commandant. However, in spite of this, Idlib was by far the most comfortable prison camp I was in.

H

That night, a party of about twenty to thirty officers was taken off mysteriously by bus for an unknown destination. Great was the speculation about it among the others. The next night all the rest of us—fourteen in all—left in a similar manner. We drove to Aleppo, and then on past it. Those who favoured the idea that we were going to be flown to France now got the upper hand. In due course we reached Aleppo Aerodrome; a French Air Force officer came and talked to us; he had been with the R.A.F. in France, so was very much on our side. The bus drove out on to the tarmac and pulled up beside a large transport aeroplane of ancient vintage. Here we were invited by this officer to descend one by one and “be easy with ourselves,” to use his happy phrase, and then climb into the aeroplane. This we did, and the machine then started up, rumbled along the flare path and took off.

I was at first a trifle perturbed to see flames shooting out of the exhaust, and the exhaust pipes themselves glowing bright red in the darkness, but being ignorant of aero engines I thought it must be all right. We flew on through the night. Just after dawn one engine coughed several times, and then stopped altogether. We now saw a long, barren, mountainous island below us, and the plane circled and landed on an improvised landing ground. A Fleet Air Arm officer with us recognised it as the Italian island of Scarpanto in the Dodecanese, just north-east of Crete. We were destined to spend nearly a month on this island, and it was a month that ranks as easily the most unpleasant month in my life.

We were pleased to see on the landing ground about a dozen German aircraft of all types damaged and abandoned, the results of the battle of Crete and of bombing raids on the island. There was no flying going on from there at the time, and there were no Germans there either. It had been a hive of industry during the Crete show, as several squadrons of Stukas and Messerschmitts had used it, and the survivors of the destroyer “Hereward” had been landed there, but it was now all quiet again.

The crew of our plane rolled their cigarettes, stuck them in the corners of their mouths and set to work on the offending engine. It was clear to the most ignorant onlooker that the maintenance of this engine had been grossly neglected. The French seem to be against the maintenance of mechanical vehicles. After much shaking of heads, the motor was declared to be "foutu." We prepared ourselves for a short delay on this island till the French could send over another plane. For days we listened for the sound of aero engines, and the noise of a passing Savoia would bring us out to look ; but the expected French plane never arrived. Presumably the Italians did not want any more French planes landing on the fortified island, and possibly they hoped to take us out, of the French bag and pop us into their own. Though the latter is doubtful, as we were to have landed at the Italian occupied cities of Athens and Salonica. Prisoners of war spend most of their time in idle talk and speculation ; we had plenty of material for this. We could find out nothing about our future, and questions resulted in nothing but snubs. This uncertainty about the future was, I think, the worst of our troubles in Scarpanto. The alternatives were terribly different—either repatriation in a week or so, or imprisonment till the end of the war—perhaps three or four years—in an Italian prison camp.

The French crew and the three gendarmes who were our escort were almost as close prisoners as we were. They were soon as eager to get away from Scarpanto as ourselves, but would not bestir themselves to try and put an end to the delay. We were put into a rude stone hut near the landing ground ; there were hammocks of sacking in it, a plain table and benches. This was our home for about a fortnight. On the second day the Italians brought along rolls of barbed wire and wired us in. They made an enclosure about the size of half a tennis court, for exercise. After three or four days, as a result of our continual requests, they dug a latrine in one corner of this enclosure. The Italians have no idea of sanitary arrangements, and must have high casualties from dysentery if they take no more care of their own latrines than they did of ours.

We were now under Italian guards. Their clothes and appearance were a constant source of amazement. The first sentry we had was clad in an old patched tunic, mauve cotton shorts, no socks, and boots that an English tramp would long ago have discarded. His bayonet was brown with rust all over, and his equipment had never had a touch of polish or dressing. On his head was a tattered side hat, and on his face a vacuous and cow-like expression. This was a typical example, only slightly worse than average, of the Italian soldiery we got to know so well. I would also like to record the sentry who was guarding us one evening in the following manner: he was comfortably seated in a position of rest on a rock, with a water bottle filled with wine in his lap, singing happily to himself, with his rifle propped up on the barbed wire about five yards away. In these circumstances, one developed a contempt beyond my powers of description for the Italian Army and all its works. And the more contemptible were the soldiers who watched over one, the more deeply humiliating one found it. One sight of these sub-men leering at one over the barbed wire was enough to turn a man's stomach.

We ate rather worse than the Italian soldier, and that meant very badly for an Englishman. For breakfast we had a cup of coffee, except when they forgot to bring it. At 11.30 and at 18.30 we had two "big" meals, consisting of macaroni or rice cooked in salt water, followed sometimes by a small portion of bully beef. Macaroni could be of several bores, of which Mark I (.22) and Mark IV (.5) were the commonest. The mainstay of the diet was a small loaf of bread, which one made to last 24 hours. We were always hungry and I never thought that I should ever eat dry bread continually and with relish. The diet was enough to live on, but not enough to keep up one's energy, and one became very lethargic. But it was a point of honour with us to shave every day and clean our shoes if we had any polish, so as not to become slack and lose morale.

While describing our troubles, I must mention the fleas, which made life one long itch. I have never seen so many. The island crawled with them. I used to take off my clothes three times a

day and de-flea them. I always found three or four, and my best catch was eight. One used to see some people glaring steadily at their bare legs, and catching the fleas as they jumped up. I was soon bitten all over to such an extent that they gave me an injection, which did have much effect. Their medical orderlies were very competent, and came down regularly to dress our wounds. They had excellent medical supplies.

The military commander of the island came down several times to see us. He was a major of the 9th Regiment of Infantry (Fanterie), whose H.Q. is at Rhodes. He was a tall plump man of the pseudo-Mussolini type. He talked more and to less effect than anybody I've ever met. We used to put our simple requests to him through a long line of interpreters. Our senior officer—Major Middleton-Stuart—spoke to me in English, I translated into French to one of the gendarmes who translated into Spanish to one of the Italians, who told the military commander in Italian. The latter then usually went off into a long tirade with much arm waving, and the answer to the question was usually evaded. Finally he would bow, and salute, and scrape, and take himself off in his appalling car—the only private car on the island.

Our more immediate liaison officer was an oldish Italian captain called Sar, of a very nice civilian type. He became quite a friend later on, and is one of the few Italians I would not like to shoot. He moved us about a mile to another stone house, where we spent the remaining days of our stay on the island, and where we were better off than in the first building, mainly because there were no fleas. We also received a ration of wine here, which was a great boon. The enclosure was slightly larger. We used to take exercise by walking round and round it for 45 minutes every evening—a boring proceeding, resembling the behaviour of tigers at the Zoo, for whose feelings I now have a lively appreciation and sympathy. The only snag about the new place was the sanitary arrangements, which were even worse than before. Three of us contracted dysentery.

We had a small French-speaking Italian as orderly. He was a cheerful little beggar, and probably a fairly typical Italian soldier, which gives some significance to his answer when we asked him if he didn't find it dull on Scarpanto; he said he did, but by being here he avoided having to do any fighting.

As time went by, our hopes of continuing to be French prisoners fell. One day our escorting gendarmes were taken away by plane; our speculating committees placed a gloomy interpretation on this. We began to think of escaping. It would be easy to get out of the enclosure, but very hard after that. We made great plans to take over the aeroplane we would be taken away in by a mid-air *coup d'état*. It seemed a very workable proposition. But eventually we were taken away by boat, so the scheme did not come off.

We were taken off by lorry to the island's port, where we boarded the little 500-ton steamer "Fiume" which supplies these Dodecanese Islands from Rhodes. A good many Italian officers and men were on her, and some of the officers came to talk to us and were quite good fellows. After a nine-hour journey we reached the town of Rhodes. Here there were a few German seaplanes, but otherwise nothing of importance. We were taken off in a lorry to a barracks and put into a barrack room with fine beds and sheets. We were very pleased at this, but the elation did not last long. An Italian colonel came to see us, and told us that we were now Italian prisoners. This dashed our hopes, and we knew we would be prisoners till the end of the war, unless we could escape, and we had to make the best of it.

We were ten days on Rhodes. On the whole they were not unpleasant. We were well fed and had a few books. On Scarpanto we had five books and three packs of cards only, so had been terribly bored and had spent most of our time playing bridge. On Rhodes we were given a young and over-conscientious Sottotenente (2nd Lieut.) as liaison officer. He paid us the same pay as the equivalent Italian rank. My income was 1,035 lire a month—about £7. About half of this was deducted for messing. We ate the same food as their officers. By

British standards, there was not much of it, but it was well cooked. We even had the aristocratic spaghetti sometimes instead of the vulgar macaroni.

There were two badly planned attempts at escape by junior Fusilier officers while we were there. They were both failures.

The only result of these attempts was to tighten up the guarding arrangements, which became very irksome. Our room had two doors and two sentries were put at each. When one went to have a shave, a moon-faced sentry came with one and stood at one's elbow to see one didn't jump out of the window. This was very annoying. At night, the light was left on, and every hour the sentries clamped up and down the room changing over. This noise, assisted by swarms of mosquitoes and an unpleasant stuffiness, made sleep difficult and many officers used to sit up playing patience till about 1 a.m. Once or twice a day we were allowed out into a War Memorial garden to walk about. The idle population of the barracks used to come and lean over the wall and watch the animals at their exercise. Fortunately a meal took place about that time and they went off to queue up for it. It was issued in the open, not in a mess-room, and they sat about on the ground or on walls eating their macaroni out of mess tins.

We made attempts to use our money to buy fruit and wine, but after the escapes our Sottotenente was in such a frenzy that he would not speak to us. He was always in a state of extreme agitation, but these escapes brought him to the verge of idiocy. We once heard him exhorting his N.C.Os. in a voice which rose to a shrill scream. Like all Italian officers, he would never take responsibility himself; the simplest request had to be referred to the highest available authority.

We were glad to leave this island. We sailed on a 7,000-ton ship called the "Italia," with one other ship, and an escort of one destroyer and from one to three aeroplanes. As sailors, the Italians betrayed an extreme respect for the British Navy, never venturing out into the open sea, but hugging coastlines all the time.

We were extremely well treated on board the "Italia." We had first-class cabins, a lounge and a space on deck ; the food was excellent and we experienced again the luxury of afternoon tea, coffee and jam for breakfast, and a white tablecloth neatly laid. The steward treated us as if we had been English travellers in peace time, and the guarding was discreet and untroublesome. There were a good many Italian officers and men on board, and more got on at each port of call ; they were mostly going on leave to Italy. The dress of the officers on board was peculiar and diverse. The O.C. Troops, who aped Mussolini with more success than any other Italian we met, used to affect a bathing dress for his leisurely constitutional waddle in the mornings. The oddest case we saw was an officer wearing white vest and pants, black jack boots and one spur. Other varieties of dress were tunic and bathing trunks, breeches and boots and pyjama coat, or simply pyjamas and dressing gown. We sailed from Rhodes at dusk one evening.

Next day we nosed through the *Ægean* Islands and in the late afternoon rounded Cape Sunium and put in at Piræus. The docks were a shambles, all the buildings on the quayside being gutted. Nevertheless, there were many ships there, among which we noticed a Portuguese and a Yugoslavian. All the small Greek boats had Nazi flags on them, but we did not discover whether this was due to a German order or not. The Nazis were evidently standing no nonsense from the Greeks, as a notice on the quayside said " Anyone found smoking here after dark will be shot immediately." There were also several notices in English and other traces of our recent occupation, such as a number of Ford and Morris lorries being driven about by Germans. This was the only place where we saw any Germans.

The following afternoon we sailed again, but went no further than the mouth of the Corinth Canal, where we anchored for the night. Next morning we passed through the canal. It was so narrow that we bumped the side several times on the way through. The Italians were evidently in occupation of this part of Greece. We saw more signs of the fighting there, such as a number of fresh graves, probably of parachutists, on the tow-

path, the wreckage of a Hurricane and a Dornier inextricably entangled, and the remains of a Morris truck that had been driven over the precipitous side of the canal cutting. After the slow passage through, we sailed down the Gulf of Corinth and put in for the night at Patros. There was a surprising amount of Axis shipping in this small harbour. The following day we sailed down the gulf and at night slipped across the Straits of Otranto. From here we sailed up the Italian coast to Brindisi, which was our destination.

We were taken off the ship in a lighter, put on to a lorry and taken to a barracks where we were all made to have a shower in a large wooden bath house. The Italians kept peering in, presumably to see what the Inglese looked like in the nude. After the bath we were taken about twelve miles out to a big transit prison camp at a village called Tutturanno. Ten thousand Greeks had been here shortly before and the place was dirty. There was a very large force of guards, all reservists; their officers were quite a pleasant type, most of them having fought on our side in the last war. We left the following evening with a small escort and boarded a train at Brindisi. This took us all the way up the East coast. We had good 2nd class seats, and were very fortunate, as many Italians, including army officers, had to stand in the corridor. As we had a seat to spare, we invited one Air Force officer into our compartment. We argued about the war, but they were intractable. Like all Italians at that time, they thought that Germany was irresistible and that they had backed the winning side.

We bought a paper at one station, and read that General Dentz had been interned in Palestine. This gave us great satisfaction, but as we were now firmly Italian prisoners, I did not see how it could affect our future.

Eventually we got out at a small station called Castel Sangiovanni, where we were the objects of great curiosity to the inhabitants. We then travelled with Italian civilians in a public bus to a little village called Pianello. These civilians were not at all hostile, but rather seemed delighted to see us. From the village we walked for an hour up to the top of a hill, on which

was the castle of Montalbo, our permanent prison camp. It was in a delightful situation ; the country around was hilly, wine-growing and agricultural land, probably being the northern foothills of the Apennines. The castle was over 1,000 feet above sea level. From the upper windows you could look right across the huge expanse of the plain of Lombardy, and in clear weather could see the snow-clad peaks of the Alps. Milan was about forty miles away, but we could not see it.

The castle had belonged to a cardinal, and parts of it were very old. The ground floor rooms were gloomy, but the dormitories upstairs large and pleasant. We had good beds, and the food, eked out by what we could buy at an excellent and well-stocked canteen, was sufficient. We were able to buy chocolate, cheese, biscuits, soap, condensed milk, clothing, and many other things, and at that time (mid-August) Italy was evidently not running short of essentials, though everything was very expensive. The only trouble at this camp was the mediæval nature of the sanitary arrangements ; there were only two water taps for the seventy odd inhabitants, so the morning shave was in itself a war.

We now began to try to make ourselves as comfortable as possible and generally got the place organised for a prolonged residence. I wrote home for books, warm clothes and other necessities. We elected committees for games, house management, etc. I was made librarian and busied myself with my embryo library of ten books and with plans for getting more from the Red Cross and the American Embassy. It was well to keep one's mind occupied, as the future was a gloomy prospect.

The best thing about Montalbo were the walks we were allowed to go, accompanied by a young sergeant-major who spoke English and did all he could for us, with a few sentries and perspiring red-faced Carabiniers. We used to meet a lot of the country people on these walks, and they were delighted to see us, and treated us as if we had been English tourists in peace-time. The war did not seem to have touched them deeply, and in their natural good-heartedness they did not seem to realise we were at war with them. Thus one farmer's wife talked

with us for a long time and gave us a big helping of apples ; another showed us how spaghetti was made, and a third allowed her children to show us how to play a form of bowls.

The only compulsory parade we had at Montalbo was the evening roll-call, attended by the Commandant, a lieut.-colonel of sour aspect (but a reasonable man whom we respected), a captain of the same type, and an American-speaking Sottotenante, whose priggish behaviour often goaded us to the contemplation of violence. The senior British officer counted us, called us up and reported to the Commandant, being careful to salute as he did so. They were most punctilious about saluting, and made us reciprocate ; their captain always saluted Major Middleton-Stuart most respectfully, and in turn was pleased if when he came into the room the subalterns bowed to him. This mutual courtesy is, I think, very right and proper in a prisoner of war camp.

On the whole, we were always treated very correctly by the Italian officers. The older ones always showed us great courtesy, and were undoubtedly gentlemen in behaviour. There are four types of Italian officers : First, the young, bloated, overfed type ; these were unpleasant and lacking in masculinity. Secondly, there are the pseudo-Mussolinis, who strut and waddle in an insufferably pompous way. Thirdly, there are kindly old men of civilian type like Captain Sar of Scarpanto. The last and most formidable type is that to which the Commandant and Captain at Montalbo belonged. They were lean men with dour, lined faces ; they suggested either ascetic cardinals of the Roman Church, or unscrupulous statesmen of the Machiavelli type. But none of these types seemed to me to be natural soldiers. The rank and file I have described earlier ; they were mostly of the country bumpkin type—a species of low mentality, entirely unfitted for war.

After we had been at Montalbo for ten days, we were told to pack our things as we were leaving in three hours' time. Our feelings were indescribable. I dared not think that we were going to be released and free again. But what else could it be ? We were not long in doubt, as there was an urgency

about our travels which we had never known before. We said goodbye to the Commandant, took train at Castel Sangiovanni, and in a special reserved coach, were rushed out of Italy into France. We passed through Genoa at night so could not see what damage the Fleet had done there. Next morning we arrived at Mentone, which is now the frontier town. Here there was an assembly of about twenty high Italian officers, each with a cap that tried to be more tall and yellow-covered than the others. Among them was one French officer, soberly dressed, but we realized at once that this was the first natural soldier we had met since we fell into Italian hands. We got on with him as if we were still allies, and agreed thoroughly in despising the Italians. "The taller one's hat," he said, "the better soldier one is." Here our belongings that had been confiscated at Scarpanto were returned to us. I received back 200 Palestine mils and my telescope. I later discovered that the telescope, which had been damaged before I was captured, had been repaired and cleaned by the Italians, an amazing fact. Their behaviour in this respect shows a very high standard of honour. I think that the way a nation treats its prisoners of war is most important, and is a test of how civilized it is. I admire the Italians in this way, and it is only as soldiers that I despise them.

We then crossed the frontier into France, and drove all day in a bus, through all the Riviera towns to Toulon. A launch was waiting for us on the quay, and a 14,000-ton steamer, the "Colombie," was all ready to sail. Our embarkation was watched by members of the Italian and German Armistice Commissions. Five minutes after we got on board, the ship sailed. We passed long lines of French warships lying idle, and so out into the open sea.

There were no other passengers on board, except our guard of one officer and four O.Rs. of the Chasseurs Alps. This guarding was merely nominal, and to all intents we were free already. We heard a lot of most encouraging news about pro-British feeling in France, particularly in the Occupied zone. For instance, I asked our steward whether they ever listened

to the London radio, and he replied with great emphasis, " En France Occupee, on n'ecoute *que* Londres . . . *QUE* Londres ! " On the other hand, the food shortage hits them very hard ; perhaps this merely stimulates their thoughts of revenge.

There were two other ships with us in convoy. All were going to pick up Vichy troops for repatriation. As we were neutral, we sailed with all lights on. In the Straits of Messina we had to keep in our cabins, but the portholes were not shut and we were able to see an Italian cruiser which had been torpedoed by a British submarine, and was down by the stern. When we were off Crete, a Junkers 88 flew over and inspected us, but did not attack. Next morning we passed Cyprus, and the day after landed at Beirut. We were received by the President of the Armistice Commission and other senior officers, and after a short speech of welcome, were taken off to the Normandie Hotel, where, after our first proper breakfast for three months, we sat down with a number of Intelligence officers and told them all we could think of. Next day, the Army having paid our hotel bill, we departed on leave for Cairo. At first it was hard to realize we were free, and that the sentry with a fixed bayonet was no longer walking behind us, but in a surprisingly short time the freedom and the luxuries of ordinary life ceased to seem miraculous blessings, and our three months' Mediterranean cruise and conducted tours round enemy countries began to have the quality of some impossible dream.

*Owing to security reasons the name and regiment
of the Author cannot be disclosed.*

