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Subject... 1st. Aust. Division. 1st. Field Co., A.E. 30-10-16 to 6-11-16.

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		[Mr. L.H. Barry]	10.2.82.		
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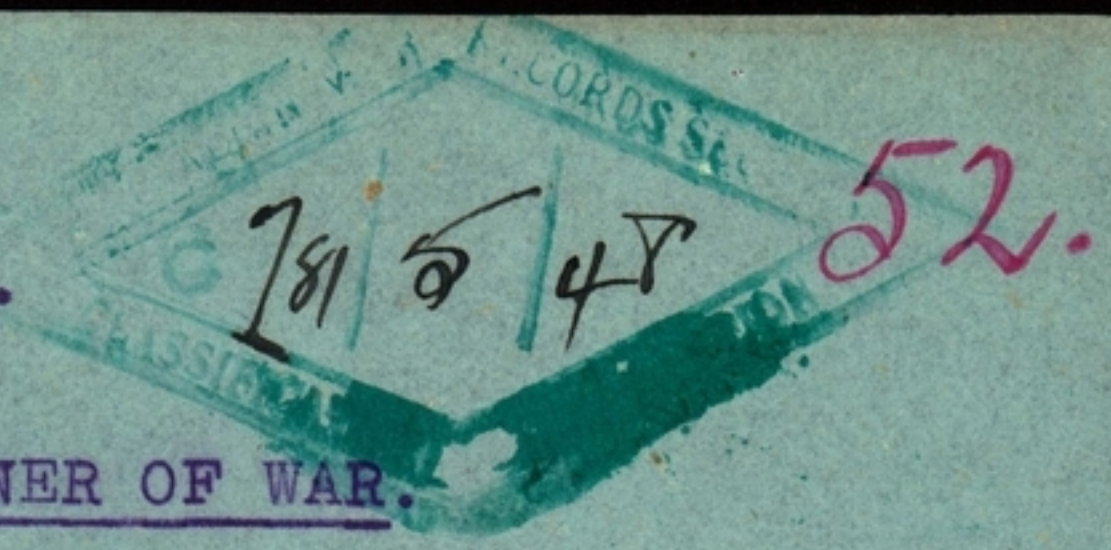
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1st Field Company, Australian Engineers.



THE PALM LEAF

SUPER STRONG

CONFIDENTIAL.STATEMENT BY REPATRIATED PRISONER OF WAR.

Administrative Headquarters,
 Australian Imperial Force,
 "B" Records Section.

March 1, 1918.

Reg. No. 2378.
 Rank. Private.
 Name. BARRY L.H..
 Unit. 1st Field Coy., Australian Engineers.

CIRCUMSTANCES OF CAPTURE.

- (a) Date Nov. 4 1916.
 (b) Place. Near Bapaume. (Somme).
 (c) What happened before Capture.

There were four parties of eight men apiece of the 1st. Field Company Australian Engineers, engaged in straightening out the line in the vicinity of Bapaume. That town was still in German hands and was three or four Kilometres away from us. There was an infantry fatigue party - of, I think, about 40 men - attached to each Engineers' section. I was attached to the fourth of these Engineers' sections the one on the left, as we faced Bapaume. This party swung right out forward, our job being to dig and consolidate a machine gun position. It was about 12-30 midnight, when we advanced, and it was our first night in that locality. My party of engineers was being covered by a covering party of infantry bombers. The enemy saw us coming and, in the neighbourhood of the enemy lines, the bombing party was very sorely pressed. At that time and place I was wounded receiving two splinters of grenade in my right lung. Whether the grenade that hit me was a German grenade or one of ours, I cannot tell, for they were "mixing it" pretty freely and I was right in the midst of it. Two of our chaps passed me, going back. But I let them go on without calling them, imagining my own wound to be merely a slight one. I discarded my rifle and equipment, all except my water bottle, and endeavoured to make my way back to our own lines. But on each occasion that I tried, I collapsed on the way, owing I suppose to heavy internal bleeding. I made several attempts during the night but eventually had to give up. I lay out there all night. At dawn I could distinguish a line of trench about 30 yards ahead of me. I did not know whether it was ours of the enemy's. The night had been dark and dirty and I felt very weak. Furthermore I realised that my wound demanded immediate attention. I determined to "chance it" - whether the line might be our own or "Fritz's" I crawled to the line somehow and staggered into a portion of the trench that was untenanted. I lay there for a few minutes until I had "got my wind" Then I went round a traverse and immediately "cannoned" into a number of Germans. They were "Standing To" in the early morning. I was immediately rushed by one with his bayonet fixed. But he pulled up before he actually reached me, having apparently noticed that I was unarmed and wounded.

What Happened Immediately after Capture.

The Germans did not molest me. But I collapsed in a faint. I have a hazy recollection of being carried to a machine-gun dug-out in the German support lines. There my wound was dressed and bandaged by a German ambulance man. I rested there all that day - Nov.5. At about 7 o'clock in the evening two stretcher bearers carried me into Bapaume accompanied by an armed German soldier. At Bapaume my wounds were dressed by a German Doctor, the first I had seen. A horse-ambulance took me to Rubecourt. We passed two German dressing stations on the way and my wounds were dressed at each of them. I rested for a month at Rubecourt in a French church that had been transformed into a field lazarette. At the end of a month, when I was fit to travel, I was sent along to Cambrai, being conveyed there by motor ambulance. I remained there a week and was then taken, in a hospital tram, to Dartmund, in Germany. The hospital at Dartmund is a big one. There were some wounded Englishmen there but no Australians.

I remained at Dartmund for two months - from December till the end of January 1917. During the whole of that period the food supplied to us was quite insufficient, and my wounds received no attention whatever. My experience has been that the further away I was taken from the German front line, the worse treatment I received - in the way of food and hospital succour.

"My Worst Spin in Germany"

From Dartmund I was sent to the Prisoner's Camp at Dulmen. I remained there till March 20, when I was sent out "on commando" (i.e. on "fatigue"). This marked about what was "my worst spin" in Germany. Practically with no clothes on my body and no food in my belly, in company with six members of the 2nd. Australian Tunnelling Coy., I was set to work in a forest, felling and dressing timber. An old chap named Dickson is the only one of those six Australian Tunnellers whose name I can remember. The German doctor ordered me to do this work though I was deplorably weak from dysentery and the German doctor knew it.

Abortive Attempts at Escape.

I was at Dulmen when Pitts and Choate - now here in England I understand - effected their escape from "commando". There were two attempts made at escape, and Pitts and Choate eventually managed to get clear away. I made the attempt with both parties, but had no luck. I must have been "the Jonah". Owing to my weak condition, and a sympathetic German doctor, I was given the soft job of House Orderly. I tidied up about the house while the others went out to heavy work on the railway lines - navvying and fettling. After a month "on commando" I received my first Red Cross package. This was in April I received a number of back packages also, and their contents, with the soft job I was on, enabled me to recuperate wonderfully.

We went through this "on commando" routine for six months - till Sept.30th. We were being paid 80 pfennings (8d.English) a day. Our quarters had in pre-war time been quarters for railway workers. Electric light was on throughout and there were hot water baths on the premises. The railway people offered to increase our wages on a sliding scale, up to a mark and a half a day. (1 mark=100pfennings)

But on September 20 half a dozen of us attempted to escape. Those who made the attempt were:- Charles Cunningham, McArthur, Choate, Thomas and myself. We scaled through a window at 11 p.m, slid down a lightning conductor and reached the yard. We got through the 10 feet barbed wire fence and walked to Dusseldorf railway station. Choate did the talking for us and we got across the Rhine by train. We then divided into two separate parties working independently of each other along the road. I was with Choate and Pitts. We had no compass but had procured a map from some sympathetic German woman. The other party eventually got over the frontier but we were all taken at Kalden Dirchen, a German garrison town on the Dutch frontier. We were dressed as civilians in clothes we had improvised out of our

prisoners' clothes. We were recaptured by an out-post on the main road. The first day out we had been severely questioned by a German gendarme but we humbugged him into believing that we were Belgian workmen. This was at Grevenboich. But this time the out-post asked us for our passes. Of course we had none, and were taken to the Guard-Room. There we were closely interrogated and eventually it was found out that we were escapees. We were sent to Aachen to the soldiers' Gaol, and remained there three or four days. In this prison there were six German soldiers who had deserted from the Flanders Front. It was in September about the time of the big "stunt" on that front line. Several of them wore Iron Crosses. They told us it was not cowardice that had caused them to desert; but they could not see the force of losing their lives for the sole benefit of hungry German capitalists. They told us that a good many deserted every day. They had come into Germany to avoid the electrified wires guarding the Belgian-Dutch frontier. In the prison the German authorities seemed disposed to be more severe upon them than upon us. We were both given the same food.

From Aachen we were sent to Burgsteinfurt, in Westphalia. It was a camp for Prisoners of War and we were put into cells. But we only remained there two days, when we were sent to Munster I. The camp at Burgsteinfurt was broked up - staff and all going to Munster I, There we put in three weeks in the "Strafe Barracks". The German authorities allowed biscuits and hot tea to be sent in to the English prisoners from the British Red Cross Camp Committee.

While we were in there the whole of Block A and also the prison were burnt - gutted entirely. The French and the English Red Cross Committees - particularly the former - lost a large quantity of biscuits and other comforts through the fire. Two days after the fire we were sent to Munster III Camp. Here the treatment in the Strafe Barracks was abominable. For three days our "ration" was a small piece of German bread, a litre of quite uneatable "soup" to four men, and no coffee. The soup was a genuine German mystery. I cannot tell you what it was made from.

A "Tommy" Sergeant named Middleditch, of the 1st. Suffolks, was in charge of the Red Cross Camp here. But he would not succour us in any way. The only help we got was from what we got smuggled through on the quiet. We suffered about five days of this "Starvation Strafe" and were then put to do some time in small cells. Here we worked the "Russki" orderly to do what smuggling we wanted. We had received 14 days' Strafe for our attempted escape. Then we were sent back to our same old "commando". We arrived there on October 29. Of course I had lost my "soft job" as House Orderly.

We later on made another attempt at escape. It was the time Pitts and Choate managed it. There were six of us and we worked in parties of two. We got across the Rhine as before. We never in the course of our cross-questioning we were subjected to, told the authorities that we had got across the Rhine by rail, fearing that they would immediately put up close restrictions and so make it harder for others to escape. This time an old broom-maker who had found us hiding in a wood, put us away. Armed Germans appeared, carrying revolvers. We were first taken to Neuss and then to a prisoners' camp at Limburg. There we were kept 12 days and we received first class attention from the local Help Committee. Limburg is the place where Roger Casement made his mad attempt to form an Irish Brigade out of captured Irishmen. I was told that in the local cemetery there are the graves of 70 Irishmen who died from the treatment they received after they "turned down" Casement's wild scheme. We were well treated at Limburg.

For the second attempt at escape we did our 14 days' in Munster III. Our experiences were about the same as before. I spent both Christmas Day and New Year's Day "in clink". Eventually I obtained from a "Tommy" N.C.O. at Munster III. a document in which he stated that he had seen me suffering from epileptic fits. That helped me to get to Aachen on exchange. At Aachen the Germans "rubbed us up the right way" We had a splendid reception from the Dutch people and the "Zeeland" carried us across from Rotterdam to Boston. At Boston we immediately entrained for London, reaching St. Pancras on 23rd February 1918.

Signature:

Sapper L. W. Barry
no 2378

6. 10. 16



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