

Arthur's remarkable flight

2

Portugal

the journey

This was on the 30th. of June and I was lucky enough
to be able to immediately change into French civvies, as
given a frightful old man, who was the last person
to return to captivity.

28th. August 1976

Captain D. Rollo,
R.A. Manning & Record Office,
Foots Cray,
Sidcup,
Kent

Dear Captain Rollo,

I am engaged in re-writing a book about my capture at St. Valery-en-Caux in June 1940, my escape near Lille, and the journey as an evade across enemy-occupied France, the infamous Line of Demarkation, so-called Unoccupied France, over the Pyrenees, prison in Madrid, and then our Embassy there. Thence to Lisbon for five months working for Intelligence and then home to U.K.

Hitherto I have thought it too personal a document to be of value to military history but my friends in the Royal Horse Artillery Association who have read the manuscript are urging me to send it in to the Battery.

Below is a synopsis for you to get an idea of the book and to say if it might be acceptable. Also enclosed is a copy of the Author's Notes which give my reasons for writing the book.

I voluntarily enlisted in B/O Battery, 1st. Regiment, Royal Horse Artillery, in September 1939 when we went to France, attached to the Fifty First (Highland) Division in April 1940 and joined them in the Maginot Line. I was a L/Bdr. i/c O Battery's Advanced Observation Post -- which was actually located between the Maginot Line and the Siegfried Line, an interesting position.

Then our hurried journey back across France to positions S.W. of Abbeville, some fighting there and the hasty 'Strategic Retreat' through Dieppe to St. Valery-en-Caux. The description of the night of the 11th. of June (1940) and the actual capture on the morning of the 12th. I think you will find quite vivid, more from an observer's point of view rather than from the military angle.

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

speaking reasonable French,

This was on the 30th. of June and I was lucky enough to be able to immediately change into French civvies, be given a frightful old bicycle and to begin the long journey to return to Woolwich. *to U.K. via South of France, Spain & Portugal.*

By taking devious routes avoiding large towns, with adventures some of which were amusing and some not so funny, I contrived to cover the 4000 miles of enemy-occupied France and arrive at the infamous Line of Demarkation, near Chalons-sur-Saone in September.

Crossing the Line was very dangerous as it was a belt of country 3 to 5 miles wide, patrolled by Jerry night and day, and if you were found there without a permit to live in the Line, you were yanked back into a concentration camp in Occupied France. However, I managed to get across and not be caught. *the Germans*

On arriving in so-called Unoccupied Zone (the Germans were in civvies) one had to pay for everything so, not having more than about 2,000 francs on me, I surrendered myself to the French Deuxieme Bureau in Macon and they gave me lodging in the local barracks. *One day* The Colonel at the barracks asked if I would go and see him in his office and when I went in he cleared everybody out and locked the door. I sensed at once that he was a fifth columnist. He wanted me to set up escape routes for other British évadés -- of course giving him the names of those working the scheme! -- so I made a specious bargain with him that if ever I had an escape route planned right back to England, I would let him know. Oddly enough he seemed satisfied and always kept on good terms with me socially. *Then*

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

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

I was stuck in Marseille till January 1941 when I made the acquaintance of a Spanish exile -- a contrbandiste- whose job it was (and very lucrative) to take men on the goat tracks over the Pyrenees into Spain and then return with goods back to France. He agreed to take me and a friend for 50,000 *£00 in francs* francs payable in instalments as we went.

With the help of several local people and an American cousin (America was not in the war then) I managed to raise the money. We went to Perpignan, took a taxi to the foot of the Pyrenees and started to climb a rock-strewn path throughout a black night and then laid up during the day. It took us four days and three nights to get down into Spain and to be put on a train for Barcelona, where we got temporary travelling documents from the British Consulate -- with Portuguese visas but no Spanish visa. We went on by a slow train to Madrid but just before we arrived there we were picked up by a train police control and carted off to prison.

After a week we were released, on the 9/2/41, and I at once contacted the Military Attache in the Embassy who asked me if instead of being taken down to Gib. and so home direct, would I be willing to go to Lisbon to work for some branches of M.I. I agreed and worked in Lisbon for five months when I became so ill psychologically that I asked for a flight home and arrived in U.K. on the 6th. of July 1941.

There are ³² ~~38~~ Chapters in the book *(and about 85,000 words)* and the first five (all lengthy ones) deal with military affairs, i.e. up to the actual escape, the rest being what happened afterwards. But they are very representative of the experiences of many thousands of British evades who were given shelter, sustenance, and means of escape by the supreme bravery and generosity of Dutch, Belgian, French, and Spanish people.

at the end -----
~~I would much appreciate your comments.~~

Yours very truly,

I would be obliged if the above information is of interest to you for, say, serialisation. If so, I would be glad to send you a typescript of the book.

After that came the long tramp as P.G.W.'s through Germany, the Somme, Pen-de-Calais, Belgium, Luxembourg, to Paris, just outside Lille, where I escaped in rather an original manner.