

Meanings of Military Service

Learning Resources KS3

Transcript of Account of L/Cpl. Loman's Escape from German Hospital in Belgium

The Following is a short account of the experience of No.4147 L/Cpl. Loman, "A" Squadron 9th Lancers, who, after having been wounded on August 24th 1914, in the retreat from Mons, was captured by Germans, but made good his escape from a German Hospital in Belgium, and eventually succeeded in reaching England.

"Subsequent to the charge by the Regiment on the 24th of August at AUDREGRIES, whilst on the retreat I was hit in the back by shrapnel, and taken prisoner by Germans belonging to the 36th Foot Regiment. Owing to my wound I was put into a German Hospital at WIHERIES, where like myself there were about forty other British soldiers, including a Colonel of the Cheshire Regiment.

I was in this Hospital four weeks and a few days during which time a plan of escape had been thought out by the Colonel of the Cheshires. Whilst the sentry was having his breakfast on the morning of the 25th of September, twelve of us including the Colonel escaped over the walls of the Hospital. We immediately broke up into parties of twos and threes, the one in which I was being composed of Sgt Rothwell and Cpl. Chapman of the Cheshire's, and myself. One of those who escaped, Bombardier Wiseman, R.F.A, 117th Battery, was unable to continue the flight on account of his wound, and sought refuge in the house of a civilian in the village, and he was still there a month ago, being tended by a Belgian Doctor. Amongst those who remained in the hospital were Sgt. Barnard, 9th Lancers, wounded in the left foot, Cpl. Datlen, 9th Lancers, wounded in the chest, Pte. Ackehurst, 9th Lancers, wounded in the left foot, with two toes missing, Pte. Barlow, 9th Lancers, taken off the field sick, and Pte. Dodd Cheshire Regiment, unwounded. There were also some men from the Norfolk Regiment.

Whilst in Hospital, Belgian Civilians having heard that it was our intention to try to escape had contrived to smuggle in civilian clothes for us to put on, and it was thus dressed that we escaped. Having got clear of the Hospital our party made headway for a large forest about a mile distant, where we hid for about five to six weeks, being

fed by Belgian Civilians, who brought food to us at night. Having learnt of our escape, the Germans made search for us and stated that if any attempt was made by the inhabitants to assist us they would kill them and burn the villages. In spite of these threats however, the Belgians still brought us food, but we heard from some of them that three of their number had been killed whilst attempting to succour us.

On one occasion the Germans sent a party of men about a hundred strong to search the forest, but notwithstanding this did not succeed in capturing us, although once whilst I was separated from my companions and surveying the situation from a tree-top, a party of six Germans passed underneath.

The next morning I came across Cpl. Chapman, who had in turn become separated from Sgt. Rothwell, and we decided to try to get through the German lines back to our own. Accordingly the next day we set out and crossed the French frontier, but found it was impossible to break through the German Lines, although we were then only about 1000 yards distant from our own. We therefore had to return, and duly arrived at a farm house where we had something to eat. A party of about 6 Germans visited the farm house whilst we were eating and we had to escape through the back window, and then we made our way to a small village called DOUR. There I was taken ill, being attended by Dr. D-----. From this village we proceeded to MONS, walking part of the way, and taking the tram at BOUSSU as far as MONS; there were three German soldiers on this, car, but as we were continually passing German sentries on our way, this was no novelty. We were able to pay our way, as a farmer gave us 10 francs, and we were continually receiving money and aid from civilians.

At the terminus two Officers were stationed with an escort, asking for passport, but we managed to get through by pushing our way to the midst of the civilians. I may say that the tram route ends at MONS station, and this accounts for our being able to mingle with the rush from the Station as well as from the cars.

We made our way to the centre of the city; picquets and sentries were to be seen in every street. I was informed that there were about 5000 soldiers all told, mainly young men of about 16 years old.

Whilst in Hospital it had been arranged that if we were unable to get back to our own lines we were to make for MONS and enquire at a certain ----- shop situated in the poorer part of the city. We accordingly went to the address we had been given by the Colonel of the Cheshires, and entered the shop, 10 yards from which a sentry was posted. We got into conversation with the young Belgian lady who was staying with the proprietors of the shop, and who spoke very good English. She took us to a ----- house, where we were given a good supper and a night's rest. At 7.30 the next morning, in accordance with instructions left by the Colonel, who had already passed through, we started out with the intention of reaching Brussels, where the Colonel had friends. A Belgian civilian went with us as guide and accompanied us all the way to Brussels. Sentries were also stationed on the outskirts of MONS, but nevertheless, we managed to get through. The first day we walked about 25 miles, and eventually arrived at a village called TUBIZE, where we stayed the night putting up at the house of friends of the guide. The following morning we started off again at 7 o'clock, passing a sentry on the Main Railways we made our way to the Canal that runs through TUBIZE to BRUSSELS, and walked along the side until we reached the capital, passing numerous sentries on bridges and railways. Having in our possession the

address of an English lady in Brussels, a friend of the Colonel, we proceeded at once to her house; we were hospitably received by Miss C-----, and put up for the night. The next day our guide, Monsieur A. D---, after receiving our most grateful thanks, returned to Mons. Miss C----- told us that we should have to stay in her house until she could provide us with another guide, but as she found some difficulty in getting one she endeavoured in the meantime to obtain a Belgian Passport from a certain lawyer, but this was refused. Amongst other things she told us that the Colonel had arrived and left again, but that she had learnt he had been taken prisoner before he was able to get clear of Brussels.

According to the plan of escape mapped out by the Colonel whilst in Hospital, we were to endeavour to get to Antwerp and from thence Holland and having done this to pose as British Civilians, and thus get a passport home. At last on the 23rd January Miss C--- informed us that she has secured a guide. We were taken by her on a car through Brussels and at a certain place we alighted and entered a café. Having ordered three beers, Miss C----- placed the half of a card on one of the tables. Some minutes later a man entered and upon noticing the half card on the table, placed a corresponding half beside it. This manner of procedure must have been arranged by correspondence, as the guide was unknown to Miss C-----. Just outside the café there was a kind of outpost of Germans, who appeared to be billeted in the next building to the café.

After wishing us goodbye, Miss C----- left us in charge of the guide, who conducted us to a small village south of Antwerp. From there we had to cross the river Schelde which we did by appropriating a boat. Having crossed over we went to the right, but found that the Germans were asking for passports, so we had to turn on our tracts, and try to get round the left, which we succeeded in doing. We passed through Antwerp, and on our way came across three German Cyclist Patrols. One of the officers of the last patrol stopped our guide and asked for passports; whilst he was talking to the guide we walked on, the Officer taking no notice. The guide satisfied him as far as he himself was concerned, and afterwards caught us up. We continued on our way and arrived at 7 o'clock at night at a village about four miles from the Dutch frontier. We found however, that the way was barred by a strong infantry patrol, and had to return to a Public House; we went through this house and out through the back door, crossing some fields on to another road. After walking for about three miles and a half we came very close to the frontier. About $\frac{3}{4}$ mile from the frontier a large number of Germans was billeted in a Public House, but we eventually got past them, and after passing through several gardens and orchards we came to within 20 yards of the German sentries who were posted on the frontier. One of them upon hearing us approach challenged us, but not receiving a satisfactory answer fired three shots in our direction, but happily without success. We ran as fast as we could for about 20 minutes until we were sure that we were safe on Dutch soil. At this juncture Cpl. Chapman was taken with cramp in both legs, and the guide and I had to carry him between us. Eventually we arrived at an Inn and went inside to get a drink. We had only been there about half an hour, when one of the Dutch Military Officers came and told us that he would have to take us prisoner as he suspected that we were British soldiers. He took us away to the Military Barracks, where we passed the night, the guide staying at the Inn. The next day we were taken before the Colonel, but we told him that we were English civilians, I stating that I had been a brewer's assistant at Bavay in France for the last nine months, whilst Cpl. Chapman said he had been a

labourer at WIHERIES. Fortunately the Colonel believed us, but sent us to another town where we had to go in front of a Captain, of course, repeating our story to him. This officer however, said that unless we were out of Holland by 8 o'clock the following morning we should be imprisoned and kept in Holland until the end of the war. He then let us go.

From this town we made our way to the British Consul in Flushing, arriving at about 6p.m. the same day. Mr F.C.B. Wood the British Consul made us very welcome, giving us tea and a free passage to England with passport (the latter now in my possession) and 6/- each for our pockets, and told us that there was no fear of our being taken prisoner as we could leave Holland at once. He saw us on board a "Zeekand" boat at 9.30, and wished us goodbye. The ship sailed at 8 o'clock morning, and arrived at Folkestone at 4.30p.m. the same day, where we reported ourselves to the Colonel in charge. After explaining our case to him, he sent us to Shorncliffe, where we were for two days attached to the Northamptonshire Regiment. On the 15th February I received a railway warrant to Tidworth, and reported at Orderly Room at 4p.m. Cpl/. Chapman proceeded to Birkenhead to join the depot of his Regiment.

Whilst at the British Consulate at Flushing I met a gentleman whose name was, I believe, Captain Drooner, who told us he was an officer of the 9th Lancers."

Account of L/Cpl. Loman's Escape from German Hospital in Belgium.

From Francis

dated 2 Nov Boulogne

allied Base Hospital

My Dear Family,

Got it again! But am not much the worse. I arrived here yesterday and I missed last night's boat by one. I've had a nasty fight on the 31st when the Germans attacked our trenches the native troops on both sides fled and the Germans got all round, I found myself shot at front flank and rear, then the coalboxes began and played hell, my squadron suffered very extremely so did all the cavalry my regiment lost 8 officers, 4 in my squadron Payne Gallwey killed. I don't know how many men but a lot I have seen hit by a fragment of a 'coalbox' and have 2 holes which hurt a great deal but only because the pieces are still inside, in my thigh high up and in my riding muscle. I cannot walk and had to be carried out. I spent one night in a very comfortable train and am now here and bar two small holes I am very fit, hale & hearty. I am worse hit than last time but feel better. We have had a hard time. Basil Blackwood is also wounded my poor Regt. has again suffered and my squadron has lost 4 officers out of 5 who were together of 30th and I cannot say how many men. Those high explosive German shells are bot cricket. We badly want men out here.

Best Love – I expect to be home in a day or two – yours

Francis

Collection of 'How To' letters, c.1918.

Pages 1-5 of 11 transcribed

Rear Guard

(1) Principles.

Doesn't matter what method they are carried out. A Rear Guard is one of the most important duties for an officer to study, as the conduct of a rear guard depends for its success almost entirely on the character, determination, skill and energy displayed by its commander.

In all great retreats in the past, the figure that has stood out has been the commander of the rear guard who by his boldness and aggressive methods has inspired his troops with confidence and courage.

The first thing a commander must do is make up his mind to fight, and not only to hold his ground, but to make your enemy realise that you're looking for a chance to give him a staggering blow.

Moore, Crawford, Ney, Wellington, Napoleon, Jackson. Moore's talents and firmness alone saved the British.

Nap. "At last I have an enemy worthy of my sword."

(2) Object of.

Is to relieve the pressure from a retreating force, to enable it to reform – collect itself, and recover moral.

A Rear Guard carries out its object best by compelling the enemy's troops to halt and deploy for attack as frequently and at as great a distance as possible. This is done by taking up successive positions which the enemy must attack or turn.

A.	B.	C.
0	0	0

A rear guard of a large force is retiring via A. B. C. The enemy deploy and attack A.

If the rear guard retire to B. the enemy without reforming – advance deployed attack B. But if the rear guard retire to C. five miles or more, the enemy must reform column of route – march. Then deploy again and attack C. All this takes a great deal of time, and it is time that a retreating army wishes to gain.

Each time that the enemy's dispositions are nearly complete the rear guard moves off by successive retirements to the next position – and – Each party cover the retirement of the next by its fire.

The retirements must be carried out with method and deliberation.

(3) Duty of.

1. To show was strong a front as possible to the enemy.
2. To make sure of good lines of retreat.

(4) Method of Conducting for Small Parties.

The same principles applied in an advance guard are applied in a rear.

Retirements are made by successive bounds to rear. In open country retirements by small forces are made from hill to hill. In enclosed country retirements are made from bend to bend of the road.

(5) How to Dispose Troops.

When pursuit is not close, a rear guard should be disposed in the same way as an advanced guard reversed, - but patrols must be left to keep touch with the enemy.

If pursuit is vigorous – you must stand your ground, and prepare to hit back. I always advocate dividing your force in two – or $\frac{1}{2}$.

Either sections, troops or squadrons or regiment.

A. part holds its ground, with other B. Part retires – takes up position, so that it can cover the retirement of A.

A. then retires through B. and takes up a position concealed so as to cover B. and so on.

The result of this is that you can never be caught on the run – you keep a firm front – and give as great a display of force as you can. In making these retirements you must begin to choose your next position from your last position. By this means you will see what your position will look like from the enemy's point of view, and the successful Leader always takes into consideration as to what will influence the leader opposed to him. All the difficulties are not on your side.

Retire outwards in open country so as not to mask the fire of troops covering your retirement. Remember that every moment separates you from the main body – and watch your flanks to see you cannot be cut off. If you are cut off work your way round.

Advance Guards.

No troops must ever move through a country in which it is possible the enemy may be encountered without being preceded by an advance Guard.

Object of

The object of the advance guard is

- I. To prevent the main body from being surprised.
- II. To give it time to deploy for action.
- III. To ensure that the main body is never caught in a defile.

Duty of

- i. Reconnoitre.
- ii. To fight.

The Strength depends on the size of force, length of defiles and time it is expected to resist – rough rule about $\frac{1}{4}$ of force.

General Principles.

1. The advance Guard must always be ready for action and must take the initiative, and seize any favourable ground for the main body.
2. It must never retire.
3. The commander must always have his troops in hand.
4. The adv. Guard is responsible for the protection of the main body the moment the latter commences its march.
5. It must not get too far ahead. EX. Nachod.
6. It must not be too close. Ex Rouvaal.
7. It must advance in bounds.
8. It must always have something definite to hold on.
9. The commander must always have his mind made up what he will do in case of attack.
10. The commander must send out patrols to keep touch with troops on flank.
11. The adv. of main body must not be delayed, and troops men with in same numbers brushed aside.

“Study the map very carefully and note the general nature of the country, with special reference to:

- (i) Tactical features running at right angles to the advance, and especially those affording good artillery positions.
- (ii) Tactical features outside the general line of the advance which will require to be reconnoitred.
- (iii) Obstacles in the shape of woods and steep hills which are likely to impede the advance.

- (iv) General run of the roads: whether parallel or at right angles to the line of advance.

Decide whether the line of advance of the main body can be covered by means of centre and flanking parties. Or whether picqueting must be resorted to.

Determine on the "Main Bounds" for the Advanced Guards. The ideal "bound" is to a strong tactical feature with good communications to flank and rear. "Main Bounds" should if possible be from three to five miles apart. The commanders of the different advanced positions of the Advanced Guard must arrange for intermediate "bounds". These should seldom be more than a mile to a mile and half apart. It is a definite rule that after each "Main Bound" advanced parties must communicate with the support, and when possible with parties to the right and left.

Reconnaissance

Information regarding the enemy's dispositions and the features of the country is absolutely essential for success in war.

Information required by the commander must be got by hook or by crook, and it must get back to the commander in time for it to be of use to him.

Before going into principles there are two remarks to make. A patrol consists of 2 parts (a) a leader and the men of patrol, (b) all classes of patrols if called on to make good any particular feature should act on the same principle. A leader should use the men of his patrol as circumstances demand.

A leader is accompanied by men to enable him to carry out his mission i.e.

- a. To prevent him falling into an ambush.
- b. To enable him to defend himself against enemy patrols.
- c. To enable him to send messages.

A patrol should move as concentrated as possible but the leader must suit his formation to the country.

Principles.

Reconnaissance is the service of obtaining information. It is divided under three headings: -

- (1) Strategical
- (2) Tactical
- (3) Protective

1. Strategical Reconnaissance means the discovery of armies and concentration areas and has passed from Cavalry to Aeroplane.
2. Tactical Reconnaissance is also passing to aeroplanes but often information must be gained by Cavalry. Misty weather may render aeroplane reconnaissance impossible.
 - a. Tactical reconnaissance is the gaining of information both of the enemy's disposition (when armies are close to each other) and of ground in order to furnish the Commander with information on which to base his tactical plan.
 - b. In order to consider clearly the principles on which reconnaissance should be conducted, it is necessary to define the different systems that may be used. There are two systems:
 1. Reconnaissance for Information.
 2. Reconnaissance for protection and warning.
 - c. There are three types of reconnaissance which differ essentially from each other in the methods by which the same object- information – is obtained. They are called
 - A. Contact
 - B. Independent
 - C. Protective

Musketry Notes

1. Tendency to dismount too soon and in many cases scouts do a dismounted reconnaissance when a mounted one should be done.
2. An advance should always be covered by Scouts unless the enemy is in full retreat when risks can be taken and troop leader himself go on and select fire position.
3. On coming into action it is best to dismount even numbers first and then reinforce. The reinforcements should if necessary take over the ammunition of the Nos. 3 before they start.
4. Covering Fire must always be given to assist any movement whether it be reinforcements or other portions of the line but at the same time commanders must fully realise that covering fire cannot always be given, and this fact must not prevent units pressing forward to the attack. A rapid advance in Cavalry Dismounted action is essential.
5. A. In Attack you want to save time so reserve fire as long as possible.
 In Defence (ramparts) you want to waste time so open at long range. Except a rearguard against cavalry when fire should be reserved.
 B. The description of difficult objectives such as a fold in the ground without distinctive features necessitates the employment of some system. All Section leaders should master the clock face system of directing.
 C. Fire unit commander must pick up some prominent features in his sector of ground and describe target, give range and rate of fire.
 D. Choice of background, avoid new cut grass, avoid unnecessary movement especially officers.
 E. Close grouping of collective fire favours.
 a. The production of maximum fire effect against dense formations.
 b. The observation of results.
 c. The maximum effect when sighting has been verified by trial shots or otherwise.
 F. Fire artificially distributed in depth is called searching fire. Fire distributed laterally is called distributed or sweeping fire.
 G. In attack concentrate for decisive effect; distribute for neutralising effect.
 H. In defense distribute in open ground concentrate on sheltered avenues of approach.
 I. Fire slowly when enemy is halted. Fire rapidly when enemy is in movement.
 J. Men must get up and lie down quickly.
 K. Importance of control in order to break off action and take advantage of mobility.
6. On the command "Retire" the troop will invariably wiggle back till out of sight, and this will always be done in retiring from a position under fire, but when the enemy has vacated a position and is on the run, secrecy is no longer essential and the command "Mount" can be given when all rise up and get to their horses as quickly as possible.
7. Leaders must differentiate between the occasions for the use of Rapid and Ordinary rates of fire.

8. When "Cease Fire" is ordered all safety catches must be over. The command cease fire should invariably be given before movement.
9. If the Nos. 3 are brought into the firing line, they should be sent back first to render horses mobile before the remainder retire.
10. The duties of observers are: -
 - (a) To look for signals or commands from Squadron Leader.
 - (b) To keep a look out for the appearance of fresh targets.Care must be taken not to sacrifice the one for the other, which there is a tendency to do.
11. Troops detached to right or left must be very careful to maintain signalling communication with squadron leader, and also to be on the look out for signals from him.
12. In a retirement always send someone back to select next position and at any rate do not order a troop or section back without explaining to the leader the position you wish him to take up. Care must be taken that horses when led, whether by mounted men or men on foot are led in the proper manner.

Grooming

The following system of grooming will be carefully adhered to in every Squadron.

Squadron Leaders are responsible that every Officer, N.C.O. and man is carefully instructed on this system and that all horses are groomed in the manner indicated.

- (1) Sponge out the eyes, nostrils, dock and occasionally the sheath.
- (2) Groom the head, legs and pick out the feet. The coronets must be polished as a man polishes his boots. This will produce a healthy hoof.
- (3) Start grooming the body commencing at the hock. To groom properly the man must:-
 - (a) Stand well away and so get the whole weight of his body onto the brush.
 - (b) Work the brush with a circular motion against the hairs. The curry comb should not be held in the hand but laid on the manger or other place and only used very occasionally
 - (c) Brush the coat over with the hairs and finally wisp to give final polish.
- (4) The mane and tail can now be done. They must be carefully brushed out lock by lock. The comb must never be used on the tail, and only on the mane when the mane is being thinned.

It may be noted that men may be encouraged to brush their horses tails whilst the latter are feeding, as even restive horses will then stand perfectly quiet.

To Pass A Horse

Run the hand over the horse against the hairs, and see that no dirt comes off the fingers.

Pay special attention to those parts most likely to be neglected. :-

- (a) The hocks,
- (b) Between the forelegs,
- (c) Under the belly and between the thighs.

Any feeling of grit shows the horse is not clean.

Manes and tails must be carefully examined. To do this. :-

- (a) Run the fingers through the hairs to see that they come through easily.
- (b) Examine the hairs carefully to see that none are curling round one another.