

1940

2nd/6th BATTALION, EAST SURREY REGIMENT
"PRISONERS' PROGRESS"

In the absence of a Battalion War Diary after the capture of the last British forces fighting in France, the following entries have been taken from 'The Prisoner's Progress', an illustrated diary of the march into captivity of the last British Army in France – June 1940 by Lt. Leslie C. Hunt, 2nd/6th Bn. East Surrey Reg't.

BUCHY

Jun 11th Reached this first camp after march of 25 miles. Found several British Officers here already. Had first meal as a prisoner: lentil soup. First shave for five days. Slept in stable. Prisoners constantly arriving.

FORMERIE

Jun 12th By lorry from Buchy. Slept in a field. No cover. Desperately cold and miserable. Took coats off men killed in action a few days ago. Bowl of pea soup our only meal.

LINIERE CHATELAINE

Jun 13th Marched 12 miles. Torrential rain. Slept in pigsty. Chunks of meat for today's meal. French prisoners brought in in greater numbers every day. Remarkable that German N.C.O.s controlled columns and camps: their officers rarely seen.

ARRAINES

Jun 14th Second and last lorry ride. Camp in open field. Tin hats, knives and all "warlike" articles taken away. To-day's meal: British Army biscuits and cow, killed and cooked by Germans. R.A.F. busy. Flares and bombs in distance.

DOMART ST. LEGER

Jun 14th Marched 16 miles. Rested one day. Had only one ladle of soup in two days, so ate dandelions and tinned potatoes carried from St. Valery. Paid 50 francs for two old sacks to make a coat. Church services. Column about 2,500 strong. Our Doctor Duval assisted at French hospital. Had first real wash in local stream.

DOULLENS

June 17th Marched 12 miles. German rations increased, also made stew from mangolds. Explored rubbish heap, found tin of salmon; ate it! Had hair cut. Doctor "St. Anthony" Duval returned! Hopefully posted cards home. Every day was to bring us to a promised railhead, but it didn't. France asked for an armistice today.

ST. POL

Jun 18th Marched 17 miles. Slept in tarpaulin shelters. First camp for Officers

2nd/6th BATTALION, EAST SURREY REGIMENT
"PRISONERS' PROGRESS"

1940

only. Everyone searched again. Meat and soup from Germans with ample supply of biscuits from a B.E.,F. store. Bought butter, chocolate and wine from villagers. Washed self and clothes. Getting used to marching 20-odd miles a day on a breakfast cup of 'acorn' coffee; our only meal always came at the end of the day's march

BETHUNE

Jun 19th Marched 18 miles. About 3,000 prisoners here. Some British greatcoats and underclothes distributed by Germans. Cooked eggs bought on march, while little girls brought us bottles of tea, and asked for a kiss. Town provided us with two meals of really good vegetable soup. Slept on steps of the grandstand of a running track: Some of us crouched on the porch roof out of the dirt.

LILLE

Jun 20th Marched 3 hours at a stretch without a halt. 22 miles in all. Broiling hot all day. Civilians sold us food and white-heart cherries. French women made evening soup. Slept on straw in crowded schoolyard.

TOURNAI (BELGIUM)

Jun 21st Belgium. Marched 18 miles to civil gaol: stayed two days. Seemed like the 'Ritz' with cold showers, liberal rations and a chance to buy lots of food, drink and toilet articles, such as scissors for much-needed manicure! Posted letters, some of which reached home.

RENAIX

Jun 23rd Marched 16 miles. Crowded camp. Slept on storage racks in disused factory. Usual evening meal, but only cherries and lemonade to be bought. Glad to get away from this dirty place.

NINOVE

Jun 24th Marched 22 miles. Stayed two days in a silk factory: hard-earned rest. Washed clothes and lay in sun while they dried. Bought food from canteen well run by civilians. British far outnumbered by French Officers. Posted more letters.

AALST

Jun 26th Marched 9 miles. Belgian people ignored us. Slept in an overcrowded barracks. Waited in usual weary queues for usual daily meal. Courtyard filled with thousands of pairs of clogs! Many reunions between Officers and men who were thought to have been killed.

ST. NICHOLAS

June 27th Marched 16 miles. First arrivals greeted us with ice cream. Hair cut, shave and shampoo by Belgian barber. Good rations. Civilians set up

2nd/6th BATTALION, EAST SURREY REGIMENT
"PRISONERS' PROGRESS"

1940

stalls for sale of custard pies, fruit etc. Bought tinned food which lasted 'till we reached Germany. Particulars taken on official forms: hoped fervently that we should now be reported prisoners. Slept in very clean barracks. Guards very strict: author was shot at while shutting a window at night.

VALSOORDEN (HOLLAND)

Jun 28th Holland. Marched 18 miles to the long-promised railhead at Hulst. Dutch very kind to us. Thence to Valsjoorden in crowded steam tramway. Broiling hot day. Waited at jetty for 7 or 8 hours. Bathed in sea. Good ration of bread, soup and potatoes.

Jun 29th Sailed on Rhine steamer with about 300 British and 900 French Officers. Very hot. Only one loaf of bread each for a two-day's journey. Other ranks travelled in huge barges towed by tugs. Crossed river Scheldt and entered canal. Bridges destroyed and signs of defensive inundation all around. Hot during day, but very cold at night. Too crowded and cramped to move. No food and hardly any drinking water.

DORDRECHT

Jun 30th Moored at Dordrecht for an hour. Youth and girl serenaded us from canoe with guitar and gramophone. Dutch Boy Scouts brought us cakes and honey – very welcome, and the only food that day.

NIJMWEGEN

Tied up for the night to a string of barges near Tiel. Hungry, cold and dirty.

July WESEL (GERMANY)

Jul 1st Germany. Disembarked. People received us without hostility, in silence. We fed, washed and rested in a public park. Two meals of bread, cheese and coffee. Some prisoners stayed several days, majority entrained for Hemer. No more marching.

HEMER

Jul 2nd Weary day in crowded train. French still with us. Camp in huge partly-finished barracks. 'All modern conveniences'. Quite well fed by Polish cooks. Again searched. Rested 3 or 4 days and then entrained for the last time.

OFLAG VII C, LAUFEN

Jul 7th Arrived Laufen after 2 ½ day's awful train journey, during which hardly any food or sleep. Journey's end – for the present.