

Escape Stories are Ten a Penny

THE DIARY OF LIEUTENANT COLONEL (RETD.) R. A. J. NEWMAN FROM 9TH JUNE 1940 TO 19TH SEPTEMBER 1940
ABRIDGED BY AND IN CONVERSATION WITH COLONEL (RETD.) I. G. SWAN

IN 1940 the author, then a staff sergeant, was the RAOC armourer attached to 1st Battalion, the Gordon Highlanders in 153 Infantry Brigade, part of 51st Highland Division and the BEF. After the German breakthrough the Division, separated from the remainder of the BEF retreating towards Dunkirk, fought a long rear-guard action towards the Atlantic ports. It was a time of much confusion, order and counter order by higher authority and the Battalion was forced eventually to surrender near St. Valery-en-Caux.

Dick Newman kept a diary in a notebook intended for sergeants' mess business. His narrative was suitably interspersed with pages of figures and other mess matters so that it seldom aroused suspicion in those who examined his meagre possessions. The original diary exists no more but fortunately a typescript was made on his return home and this is now lodged in the REME Museum at Arborfield together with a collection of identity cards and other documents which were assembled at the time. It is significant that the names of places, and people are in ink on this copy since the original merely contained initial letters or symbols as a precaution against compromise.

It is also worth a literary reflection on the tenacity of the story-teller, who had no pretensions to be a writer, that each evening, irrespective of the privations and excitements of the day, he settled somewhere with a pencil to catch the flavour of being a POW, a soldier on the run, an imposter or merely a man anxious to preserve his right to freedom. Many convincing personal stories from the Second World War have been published in the last 40 years-how many were mainly recall of memory? The authenticity of every detail in this one is in no doubt and the REME Institution is delighted to be able to publish a saga which gives the true flavour of events as they occurred. Dick Newman would have regarded himself then as an ordinary man with the normal fortitude and personal discipline of a Senior NCO in the Regular Army; his attitudes today after more than 50 years as boy soldier, NCO, officer, re-employed retired officer and now gentleman of leisure seem to be the same!

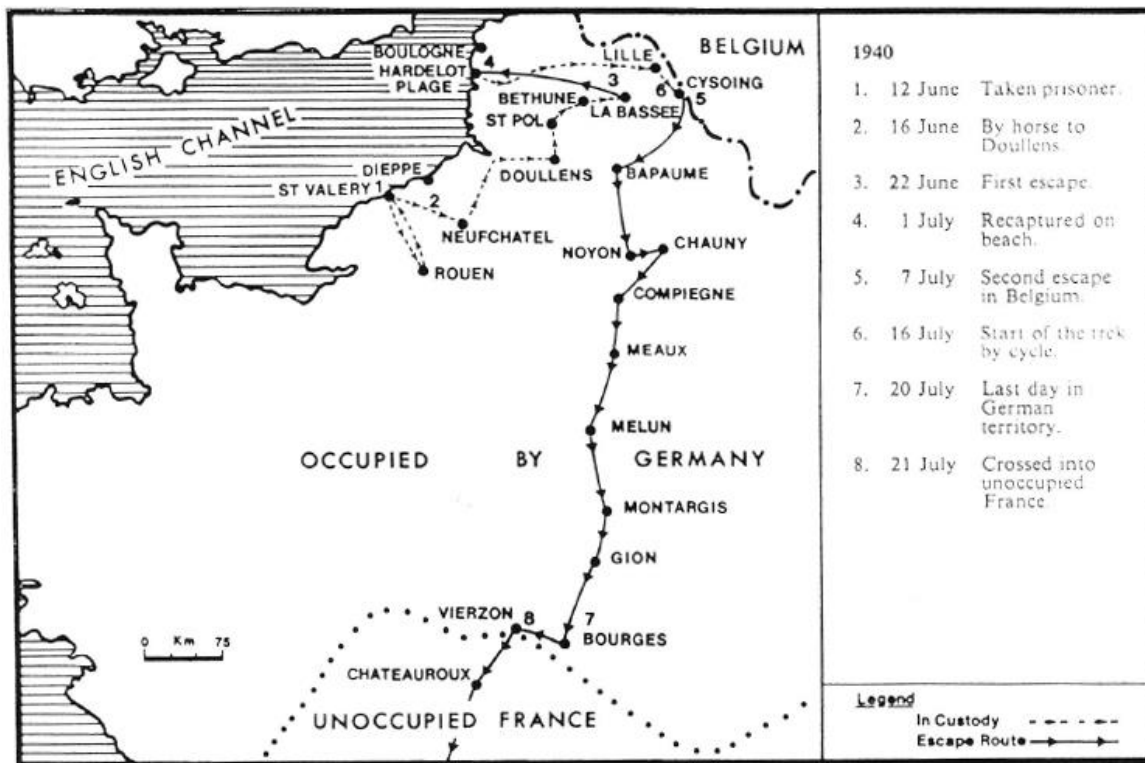
CSM Alexander (Sandy) Moir of the Gordons, who features in this story, was an ideal accomplice and the eventual success of the journey to Marseilles and the several escapes from custody were as much a product of his ingenuity and courage as they were of the diarist. Sandy Moir did not make the leg from Marseille to North Africa because he believed that his knowledge of French was too limited to overcome the perils of security checks, customs, etc., when masquerading as a demobbed Legionnaire. He eventually returned home via Spain and Gibraltar having suffered a deal of privation in Spanish jails. Dick Newman was told by an officer in the Gordons, whom he met in Europe towards the end of the war, that this fine soldier died at Mareth in North Africa; however, a recent check at their Regimental Headquarters in Aberdeen indicates that he was killed at El Alamein on 3rd November 1942 when serving as a company sergeant major in 5th/7th Gordons.

11th June 1940. Near St. Valery. The Gordons have been in action and on the move for over a month now without a spell of rest ... 12th June ... Orders to withdraw were issued early this morning but I don't think all the runners got their messages through to the companies .. A trickle of our troops came through but most of them were already cut off. Our IO went out to see what was afoot and found the whole of the French in the town had surrendered, cutting us off from the port absolutely The Gordons have more or less got together and there appears to be a couple of hundred of us. The Germans say they intend to march us each day right to the prison camps!

These extracts from the early pages of my diary, written near St. Valery a few miles west of Dieppe and some days after the epic of Dunkirk had ended, set the scene for an unusual journey back home. It is about 120 km. from Dieppe to Newhaven; four hours on the packet in normal circumstances. At one time with my fellow escaper, CSM Sandy Moir,

we planned to steal a boat and row the 60-odd km. across the channel which separates Boulogne and the south coast of England. We would have managed it for Sandy was a wizard at night marching with a sense of direction typical of the skill, imagination and tenacity of the pre-war infantry warrant officer. As a staff sergeant with 14 years service boy and man and with most of my man-service with the infantry I also knew a bit about soldiering. Armourers did not spend all their time at the bench, especially in India where I had spent four years with 2nd Battalion The Green Howards including a spell on the North West Frontier in the 1936/37 Waziristan operations. I mention the idea of rowing across the channel only to illustrate how easy such a trip could have been compared with the 100 days and 6,000 km, (3,750 miles) which it actually took me to reach Blighty from Normandy.

Sure enough on 13th and 14th June a motley collection of ragged soldiers were marched and later lifted by lorry the 60-odd km. to Rouen.



The majority possessed only what they stood up in and for the many who needed it there was no medical attention. We depended on the kindness of villagers for food. At Rouen our captors called out those who admitted they were farmers and, thinking this would delay our incarceration in Germany, many stepped forward. Sandy and I had already put our heads together about the chances of escape and had decided that there was no hurry to do so until we neared Boulogne or Calais. The farming task turned out to be the rounding up and later leading of French Army horses. On 15th June some 250 prisoners were back at St. Valery where we rounded up more than 700 of the beasts. In squads of 50 men, each managing about 150 horses, a 4 a.m. reveille on 16th June saw a somewhat disorganised convoy of animals moving east. Four days and some 150 exhausting km. later, in the vicinity of Doullens, the horses were handed over by what had become a bunch of quite competent horsemen who rejoined a marching column of colleagues from St. Valery. Many of them were in extremely poor shape having had less opportunity to scrounge food than those who dabbled in equestration.

20th June. St. Pol. Arrived here about 5 p.m. after a march of over 30 km most of the boys are damned hungry and the sight of a kind old lady with a few sandwiches makes everyone dive from the ranks in an effort to get something. The guards are becoming very annoyed about it and several shots have been fired over our heads; but they will not always fire high. 21st June. Bethune ... thanks to the French Red Cross, hundreds of people were there with food and hot drinks for us and I'm sure we left that halting place happier than for days. I discovered two fellow armourers in the column today,

S/Sgt. Dickenson and Sgt. Jordan, both on boy service with me. Whoever thought that we would land in this mess. 22nd June. Near La Bassee. We got away this morning at a halt near a small wood whilst the attention of the guards was elsewhere. We handed our coats to others but kept the blanket and groundsheet. Our intention is to move due west avoiding towns, coalmines, etc., moving at night only. We have the valuable asset of the compass which I have concealed on each search; that and the scars will suffice. Travelling time will be limited because it is not really dark until 11 p.m. and dawn breaks about 4.30 a.m.

My diary for 23rd to 30th June describes the crossing of the 90 or so kilometres from La Bassee to Harellet Plage, just south of Boulogne. It is a tale of waterlogged clothing, detours, barking dogs, avoiding German patrols, risk of contacts with French families to buy food, the joy of the taste of fresh eggs and beer and the ever urgent quest for more food. The extra ordinary kindness of poor French families who refused payment for food and in one case loaded us with so much that we could scarcely carry it comes through as vividly now as it did when committed to paper nearly 40 years ago. But different tribulations and fears were to come on 1st July. Montreuil sur Mer. Alas we are prisoners once again. We set off at dusk last night and reached the beach a few hundred yards south of the town. The going through the sand dunes and small stunted bushes was hard. There were no boats of any description to be seen so we commenced to work our way carefully along the beach towards Harellet, sneaking past a machine gun post en route. No sign of a boat anywhere and the tide was well out too. We decided to continue along in front of the town because we did not relish

those sand dunes again. Eventually arrived on the beach opposite the parade, creeping along on our stomachs. We heard voices but continued after keeping down for a little while. I am sure we were spotted then because a few minutes later a challenge rang out and a few yards from us on the promenade stood three Jerries all pointing their rifles at us and looking quite business like. Behind us was only the beach and the open sea so not wishing to sign our own death warrant we put up our hands. They gave us a run over for arms and then marched us along the front, making us hold up our hands all the time. They were more nervous than us I am sure. Were taken in front of a young officer who was very drunk and did not have much to say. After another search they put us in a lorry and took us round to a chateau where the Commandant had a look at us. Then locked us up in a stable with two horses and a sentry with a bale of straw as a bed. This morning we were again up in front of the Commandant who was very curious to know how we had managed to roam about the country still wearing our uniform and carrying packs. Naturally we did not tell him we had already been prisoners before. They then sent us by lorry to this barracks. In it are two companies of their troops and also seven of our troops and two officers. They have all been picked up while looking for boats and all have the same story to tell about the lack of them. I wonder what Jerry has done with them all. We are for an interview tomorrow, today being Sunday. As there are only a few of us we have been well fed today and put in a room with a sentry over us, these sentries have been quite decent to us giving cigarettes to those who smoke.

The next six days contained further interrogations and movement from one prisoner collecting barracks to another. In between there were many hours of fatigues, clearing up the mess left by retreating allied units, until we arrived at a medical collecting centre for prisoners at Lille. The Lille area was very familiar for we had been stationed there during the 'phoney war'. On 7th July, in a mixed column of about 500 French, French Colonial and British prisoners, we marched east from Lille when, about 1 p.m., near Cysoing a few kilometres from the Belgian border we were free once again. Shortly after crossing the frontier the column had a halt by the side of the road near a thickly vegetated garden. With a little co-operation from a couple of our troops Sandy and I managed to crawl under the barbed wire fence and in among the vegetation, where we hid for some time. The heavy traffic was continually thundering past going back to Germany with the spoils of looted France. When the opportunity occurred, we re-crossed the frontier and eventually landed at the back door of some very good friends of mine, M. Louis and M de. Louise LeLievre. I had been billeted in this very house for more than three months last winter and had got to know the people very well indeed. Sandy and I are now in the house

of these very kind people who are very pleased to see us and know that we are still alive. There are no Jerries in the village at present so we are going to stay here a few days and form some fresh plans, but at present I am looking forward to a good night's sleep in my old bed.

8th July started with a council of war and the abandonment of any ideas that an escape across the Channel would succeed. We were quite well off for funds as I had drawn several weeks pay before the German offensive, intending to have ten days' leave in the South of France, and for some incredible reason our captors had not confiscated it during the many searches we had undergone. With the help of local inhabitants, many of whom we knew well, we were equipped with civilian clothes, cycles which had been overhauled and even complete with tyre repair outfits, civilian identity cards and a Michelin road map of Northern France sufficient to see us into the Unoccupied Zone. On 13th July an experimental jaunt was made to visit friends (the Mielville family) at the village of Templeuve some miles distant although without identity cards for it was not until 14th July that the photos were returned from the developer in Lille. Clearly we were anxious to be on our way in our new guises of Richard Lebrun and Pierre Boudet. The ID cards were pretty crude and all we could think of for a stamp was an impression of an inverted 1-franc piece and a date stamp; enough, we hoped, to fool the Bosch. We had no knowledge of an escape organisation and it is doubtful that one, well enough equipped to provide proper documents, existed at that time.

The cycle trek started on 16th July and was to last for 19 days averaging some 110 km. each day. Our best day, calculated from the map and signposts, was to be 183 km. which was not bad going considering the interruptions and diversions. Our intention was to get into Spain via Andorra. On 27th July when that attempt failed we moved east to Perpignan hoping to make Barcelona where we knew a British Consul was located. Arrest by the local gendarmerie in a village near Perpignan seemed to spell disaster, especially since we were soon to be in military rather than police custody and 'this damned Oran incident has not improved the Entente Cordiale'¹. But before getting too far ahead with the narrative some of the events in the early part of the ride are worth recounting:

July 16th near Bapaume. Our first day in the open has come to a successful end in spite of numerous scares and anxious moments. Left the house at 8 a.m.; poor Mde. Louise begged us to stay or come back if we encounter any difficulties, but we shall not know about that unless we are caught again. Once we got on the main Lille-Douai road we began to encounter Germans by the score. Trucks, staff cars and motorcyclists were constantly passing, a very creepy sensation at first. I had an acute attack of

¹ This was the destruction of the Vichy-French fleet by the Royal Navy on 4th July at Oran when Petain rejected conditions in a six-hour British ultimatum intended to prevent Germany and Italy seizing the French ships. The Petain Government broke off diplomatic relations with Britain on 6th July but Newman and Moir only knew the French version of the attack.¹

persecution mania, every Jerry appeared to be looking at me very closely and suspiciously. The motorcycle patrols in particular presented a very menacing appearance, with coalscuttle helmets and greenish coloured capes and coats, crouching over their handlebars. As they kept coming up behind us I had the impression that they were slowing down with the intention of stopping to question us. It was just my imagination I guess. After successfully negotiating Douai our confidence increased. We then came to the aerodrome which had been extended to both sides of the road. Here hundreds of German troops were at work and also queuing up by the side of the road for a meal from their field kitchens. A few anxious moments, several looked at us rather longer than a casual glance would warrant, but none made any effort to stop us. There are very few civilians of military age about, that is what makes us a little conspicuous. Passed through Cambrai easily, thanks to the newly erected German signposts. Then stopped at a cafe off the main road, buying a drink to go with our lunch. Continuing, it commenced to rain, and after passing through Bapaume found it necessary to stop again at another cafe. Here we picked up some very useful information about control posts ahead. After a further few minutes it rained so heavily that to continue would, I am sure, have looked odd. Selected the most suitable empty house just off the main road and found a little bedding and beds for the night. Had a very bad scare an hour ago, heard the sound of heavy boots outside the house and then a crash as the door was burst open. Footsteps on the stairs and then the noise of two people rummaging around in the next room. To increase our suspense they left our room until last; then the door opened but instead of the Jerry we expected it was a farm labourer and his son doing a spot of looting. They were more scared than we but tried to convince us that they were the caretakers. Their visit turned out to be an advantage for we sent the lad off to the village for some food while the old man stayed here; the lad came back a few minutes later with a can of milk and a parcel of the biggest sandwiches I have ever seen. During the journey today there has been a constant stream of traffic, either heavy stuff or anti-aircraft units, and of course numerous staff cars. Have covered only 80 kilometres today, but the bad weather curtailed our travelling time.

July 17th, Noyon-Compiègne road... Passed Peronne quite early then ran into a battalion of German infantry on bicycles coming towards us and stretched all over the road. I thought we would never get past them; they were spread out for a mile or so. Crossed the Somme over one of Jerry's temporary wooden bridges at Ham, sentries at each end occasionally stopping people for papers. Another disadvantage is the fact that what little civilian traffic there is is moving in the opposite direction to us. They are the first of the people that fled before the German advance returning to their homes. Poor devils will probably find their homes either destroyed by bombs or shell-fire or, at the very least, looted. Made a detour at Noyon to Chauny to avoid the

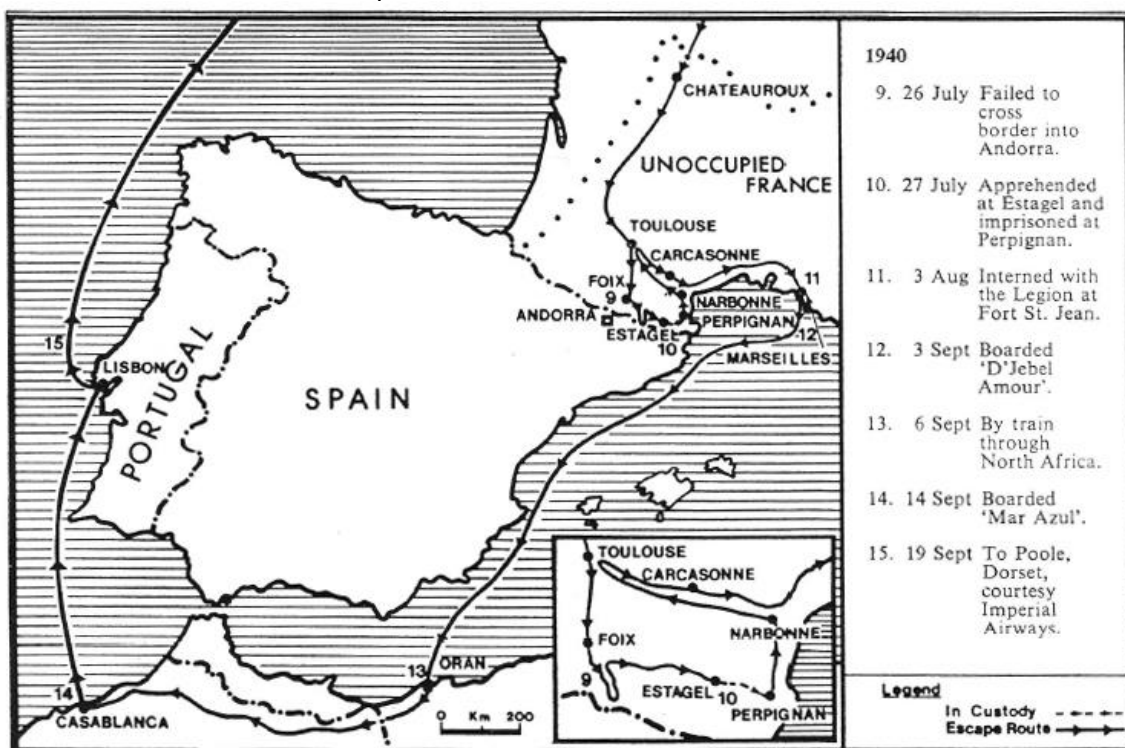
control post of which we heard yesterday. In the early evening we risked stopping at a farm for food and they soon recognised us as British (having had so many of our troops billeted with them). But they took us in and gave us a hot drink and some food also wrapping some up for us to take with us. Whilst in this house another narrow escape occurred. A German NCO accompanied by a woman entered the house to arrange the supply of food to the troops. The farmer had the presence of mind to lead them through the kitchen into another room. There they discussed their business for about half an hour, the woman acting as interpreter. They came out through the kitchen again, said good-day and were off, thank God. Only then did we breathe freely, the woman was from Alsace and of German extraction, I think she would have given us away had she known who we were. After cycling a few more miles we found this empty house on the outskirts of Ribecourt. It is sad to see how this place has been deliberately damaged: chairs, pictures and cupboards wantonly destroyed. When the poor devils who own this house return they will not find a usable article in the place. Covered 91 km. today.

July 20th near Bourges. A good start today, through Montargis on to Gion and across the Loire, the bridge here had only one arch blown out and Jerry had soon repaired that. Gion has suffered badly at the hands of the bombers. The northern entrance to the town was crammed with abandoned cars which were being collected up by French prisoners of war under guard. A scare at the entrance to the town. There were a couple of sentries on duty to examine all papers, they were pretty slack and did not notice us until we were past them. They shouted and blew whistles but Sandy and I cycled like hell round the corner and into the town. The towns themselves are safe enough. It is entering and leaving them that is the difficulty. Continued on to within a few km. of Bourges, turning off to another small farm. Found a bed of straw in a barn and gathered a lot of information from the farmer's wife. She took us for Belgians so on the spur of the moment I said we were proceeding south to collect our families. From her information it appears that the best place to try and cross the demarcation line is at Vierzon. The barrier there is not actually on the edge of the town, neither is it on the bridges, so if we can cross the bridges OK perhaps the barrier may be dodged. If our present good luck continues we should be out of Bosche territory tomorrow. 112 km. today.

July 21st near Chateauroux. Unoccupied France. Set off just after 8 this morning and turned off on to the Vierzon road soon afterwards, entering Vierzon at about 11 a.m. Successfully crossed the bridges and came to a cafe about 20 yards from the barrier. As it is Sunday there were plenty of civilians about which simplified matters. From the window of the cafe we watched the procedure at the barrier. There were three sentries and an NCO on duty. The NCO was examining the papers of all motorists entering the occupied zone, two sentries were checking up on all cyclists and pedestrians entering the zone (streams

of refugees returning to their homes). The third sentry was checking the people leaving the occupied zone, but occasionally allowing a bunch through without stopping them. Plucking up courage (with the aid of a drink) Sandy and I left the cafe, picked up our bicycles, and trying to appear as matter-of-fact as possible we wheeled them towards the barrier. The sentry gave us a casual glance as we approached and signalled us to pass with a wave of the traffic control baton he held. Amazing luck, but there was still another barrier to pass a few hundred yards farther on, this was the French barrier. But they were in such a mess trying to control the people entering the zone that we got through without any trouble. Sandy and I have been acting like a couple of kids since this morning, if we are caught now it means internment which will not be so unpleasant as

there are lots of the French who don't believe the stories that it was Britain that let them down. Were stopped near Chateauroux by a gendarme but the few questions he asked I was able to answer to his satisfaction. At this town we bought a map of the southern part of France, also some food. Food is fairly scarce even here because it is one the main refugee routes. Almost everything eatable has been bought up. Bread and tomatoes are still obtainable and that will suit us. The relief of not seeing a Jerry for hours is almost overwhelming, I never quite became accustomed to the motorcyclists. Have found an empty barn with some straw in it for the night. Today has been our best so far, after setting off expecting to encounter numerous difficulties we have actually done 116 km.



July 26th. Near the Andorra State border. Plenty of adventures today. We were stopped by two gendarmes who asked for our cycle licences. Not knowing there were such things we did not have any. They then asked for our identity cards which we produced, from these they took particulars and informed us that to avoid a summons we must pay 31 francs each for an official looking paper and also purchase a cycle plaque within 24 hours. We paid up and pushed off. How our bluff worked I do not know, our story seemed very weak to me as I told it, and my French was terrible; perhaps they thought it was a northern accent. Sandy did not say a single word, he just handed over his card and 31 francs when I did. Soon afterwards we arrived at Faix obtaining food, and some cigarettes for Sandy. After Faix our climbing commenced, passing through Tarascon, and noticing that the number of police posts increased as we travelled. Entered some really mountainous country pushing the cycles through gorges and between gaps in the rock. The

road, railway and river are constantly crossing each other. Really wonderful country, something like the lower slopes of the Himalayas in the Mussoorie district. Reached Aix-les-Thermes in the afternoon. Carrying on we were again stopped for our cycle licence but the receipt from this morning did the trick. (How the French love papers.) At dusk we reached the village of Hospice-Chalet and here unknown to us was a customs and military post for the Andorra frontier, this was not marked on our map unfortunately. At this point the mountains rose sheer on either side so we tried to barge through the gates saying we were off to Bourg-Madame which was a few miles further on, on the Spanish frontier. But the officials, all of them, military, police and customs would not hear of it, leaving it to the passport officer to explain. He formed the opinion that we were Americans and told us that a whole sheaf of documents were necessary to proceed any further. He advised us to clear off before someone changed their minds about us. Needing no second

warning we soon left the place, coming down a few miles. By this time it was dark so after searching round we found this old shed and have not yet decided what to do next. I think we will turn back and try nearer the coast because to take to the hills with no Spanish money and no knowledge of the language will only result in our capture over there. The Spaniards being pro-Nazi will probably throw us in jail without a second thought. Still, it is very annoying to think that we were within a mile of Andorra and then had to turn back. Covered 98 kilometres today.

July 27th. Estagel ... At five-thirty this evening we reached Estagel, and here our downfall occurred. We were stopped again by gendarmes and we could not bluff these. Eventually said we were Spanish but that was not much use because one of them immediately rattled off a stream of Spanish which left us dumb.

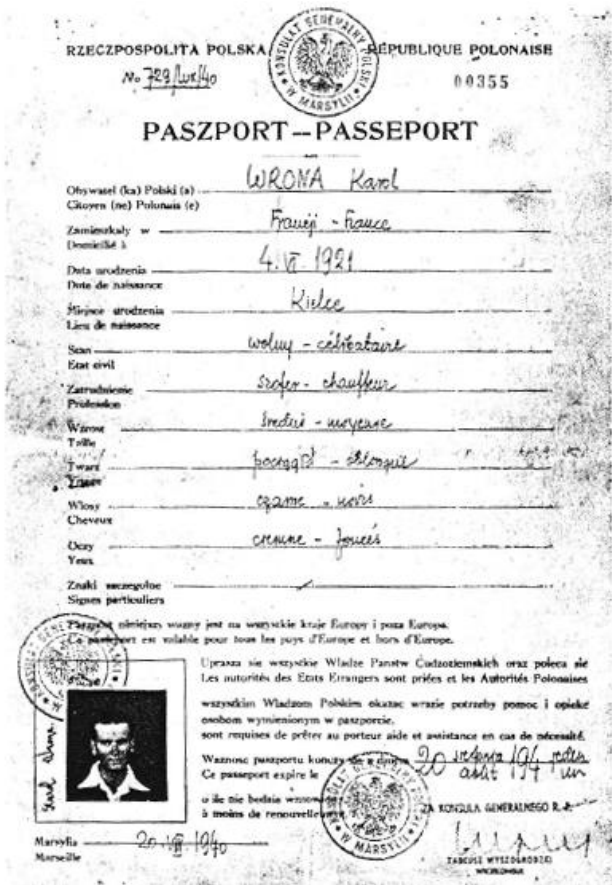
They brought us along here to the local Gendarmerie and jail and we then told them we were British soldiers and what did they intend to do about it. We had the satisfaction of seeing a very harassed sergeant searching through all his books of regulations for instructions as to what to do with us. They gave us a search and simply shook with laughter when they examined our faked cards and the receipt we had for the cycle affair. Had a good supper from one of them and then they locked us up in this cell, almost apologetic in their attitude. Tomorrow we are to be taken to Police HQ in Perpignan. I suppose internment will be our fate unless they jail us for forgery. During our ups and downs today we did 164 kilometres.

The next day the Gendarmerie took us, cycles and all, to Perpignan and handed us over to the military authorities. It was my diary entry on this day which referred to the Oran incident mentioned earlier.

July 29th near Narbonne. We were up before the Commandant this morning, he told us that the position was not too clear as to what he should do with us, but instead of writing away to find out he would give us a chance to get away. On condition that if caught again, we did not mention the fact of being here at all. Of course, he kept our identity cards but returned our money and cycles. Another officer advised us to go to the Portuguese Consul at Toulouse as the Spanish frontier was very heavily guarded to prevent incidents. So many people had tried to get across and all that were caught were thrown in gaol. We started off in the direction of the frontier and had a look round but soon came to the conclusion that the only way to get across was to get rid of our cycles and take to the hills. We decided first to go back to Toulouse and see the Consul there and only cross the Spanish frontier on foot as a last resort. We turned back through Perpignan, later passing through Narbonne on to the Toulouse road.

Here we have a bit of a shack for tonight, luckily we are out of the Department of "Pyrenees Orientales" so if caught again we shall not be taken back to Perpignan to embarrass the Commandant once more. I thought he gave us a real sporting chance, he could do no more. Today we covered altogether 107 km.

Having retraced our steps to Toulouse, where we failed to get a worthwhile steer from the Portuguese Consul, we were advised to try the US Consul at Marseilles. Some good advice from an Englishman (a Remington typewriter rep) and an address of a good friend of his set us in the direction of the coast yet again and by 2nd August we were in Marseilles. The British Consul advised that voluntary internment was the most practical way of furthering our departure from France so we gave ourselves up and were interned in Fort St. Jean, the depot of the Foreign Legion-where about 40 other members of the BEF were ahead of us in their bids for freedom. The next two weeks were spent in recuperation and our knees, swollen like pumpkins after more than 2,000 km. of cycling, returned to normal. The word of an Englishman was still very much respected by the Legionnaires and there was no difficulty in leaving barracks provided we made a verbal promise to the guard to return. Later we were officially allowed out each evening but as we were forbidden by British military regulations to give parole, and the commandant was aware of this, he knew we would abscond if and when it suited us. We learned the geography of the town, watched fellow Brits attempt to escape in various guises, cheered when some succeeded and commiserated with those who failed. On 18th August, thanks to the efforts of two British officers who were taking the lead in devising various methods of escape things moved pretty fast. Six of us were taken to an entirely different quarter of the town and found ourselves with a lot of Poles who have various schemes of getting out of the country and they want a Britisher or two with each party to help things along if they do reach British territory. The scheme is to prepare passports, obtain visas and reach Portugal to commence with. The passport descriptions will be ours except that the ages will have to be under 19 or over 46. as they tell us that no men of belligerent nations. of military age are allowed to leave France. Had to leave most of our possessions at the fort to allay suspicion but our absence will be discovered at nine tonight because I am the orderly sergeant who is supposed to report to their officer that all are present or otherwise. I was sorry to leave the fort without being able to bid Jean and several other good Legion friends adieu. I hope they will not think too badly of us; they knew we would skip if the occasion arose. There is also one other officer here, Flight Lieut V. whose story would fill a book. He was shot down in Narvik, brought to Belgium, where he escaped from the train, then he made his way down south until he arrived here.



Karol Wrona 's Polish passport. This is a genuine document showing him to be a chauffeur and the date of birth conformed to the regulations governing movement of males of military age out of France. The reverse contains transit visas for Spain and Portugal and an entry visa to Shanghai. Before the Portuguese would issue a visa proof was needed of arrangements to depart the country and a reproduction of the American Lloyd ticket from Lisbon to Shanghai, on which a down payment of 200 francs was made, is on the next page.

By 19th August I was Karol Wrona and had a Polish passport to prove it; Sandy, still part of the duo and of the same mind, was also a Pole. The following ten days must have been busy for there was little time to make extensive diary entries. By 26th August transit visas for Spain and Portugal had been added. Because the Portuguese would need evidence of onward travel, an entry visa to Shanghai had also been arranged. China was chosen because visas were easily obtained and, to give added credibility and evidence of intent, a steamship ticket from Lisbon to Shanghai was purchased for a down payment of 200 francs. The last of our needs was a forged Visa-de-Sortie, a genuine one being too risky because of the need to apply personally and the likelihood of being recognised as an internment breaker.

In the meanwhile the Franco-Spanish frontier was closed and the plan to return to Perpignan and cross openly into Spain became impossible. We knew that British soldiers were being apprehended and put into jail so covert entry over the mountains was also impractical and our carefully laid plans were in ruins. The visas we had engineered were only valid for 30 days and unless the frontier reopened we were stuck. The stalemate was broken on 30th August and my diary for that day and the one after tells it all.

August 30th. Something new in line now. Lieut. Hopkins has contacted someone with a scheme that

has been successful in a couple of cases. The scheme sounds good anyhow. The majority of the French army is being demobilised and given a free warrant or passage to their homes, also a sort of bonus of 1,000 francs. 200 francs they draw from the army authorities and 800 francs from the Treasury. Forged demobilisation papers is the scheme. Lieuts. Hopkins and Rae have already obtained a set of papers each. They have been demobbed for a town in Northern Africa which means they are entitled to a passage across the Mediterranean to Oran and a railway warrant to this town. They have to report to a military camp near here, hand over their papers and wait until they are put on to a boat. Today after a conference "Doc" and I decided to risk it ourselves as we both know a little French, enough to pass off as a demobbed legionnaire of some obscure nationality. So off we went and saw the brains behind the scheme; a Hungarian this fellow says he is, but he could be almost anything. Some hours after giving him our particulars he brought along our papers which we completed by adding our signatures and thumb prints. I am now Richard Popoff, Bulgarian and born in Sofia. I have been serving in the "Engage Volunteer Etrangere" (a sort of pioneer battalion composed of foreigners willing to serve France). As I have only been in six months my French will pass muster I think. Doc is Leon Stephanovitch of Rumania. The papers cost us 800 francs each, the

money to pay for all this and the visas on the other scheme was given to us by our very good friends the Poles.

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Voyage de: 1^{ère} Classe de LISBONNE à SHANGHAI
Ticket Class from to

Par Paquebot: à désigner Steamship
Dépôt du: ouvert
Selling

Par Chemin de fer: Railways

Échange contre: Le montant reçu 200,- (DEUX CENTS FRS)
Amount paid

Billet définitif: Solde à payer: suivant tarif en vigueur
Balance to be collected

Signature: AMERICAN LLOYD

N. B. - Voir avis important au verso. - See conditions overleaf.

Sandy does not favour this scheme for himself as he does not speak more than a few words of French, he intends to wait and see if any of the other methods are feasible. All Doc and I have to do now is to present ourselves at the French Treasury tomorrow and draw the 800 francs which we now become entitled to. Both our papers are made out demobilising us for Casablanca.

August 31st. This morning Doc and I presented ourselves at the Treasury and after giving a few particulars and signing our new names we received 800 francs from a very generous Government. Someone will get it in the neck when the day of reckoning comes, I hope to be well away before that day. Just another forgery to my credit if caught. After leaving the Treasury we went to the Camp St. Marthe to report ourselves for a passage on a troopship. Were told there were no boats for a couple of days, but that we could either stay in the camp or report each morning and see if there were any sailings. Decided to report daily instead of staying there just in case anyone from the Fort St. lean comes along. The two officers, we discovered, left this morning early. We have a rendezvous with them in Casablanca in the event of the four of us getting through. I shall never forget swindling the Treasury this morning, I expected to be in a cold sweat but found myself as cool as ever I have been.

Centre de Démobilisation du Canton de Casablanca

Armée: Infanterie Grade: 2^e Classe
Nom: Popoff Prénoms: Richard
Né le: 11 Mars 1912 à: Szekesfehervar (Hongrie)
Nationalité (1): Français de naissance - incorporé - au service de l'Armée Française - libéré le 15 Mars 1940
Billets de famille (2): aucune - none - gré - autre: aucun
Précédents militaires: aucun
Adresse au moment de l'incorporation: Casablanca, Colonne
Professionnel: Cultivateur - N° matricule: 12345
à défaut inscrit dans le registre à la date de son départ de France
Lieu de naissance: Szekesfehervar (Hongrie)
Lieu de résidence: Casablanca
Lieu de naissance: Szekesfehervar (Hongrie)
Lieu de résidence: Casablanca

Signature: R. Popoff

LE COMMANDEANT DU CENTRE DE DÉMABILISATION

Payé la somme de 800 francs à titre de solde fraction de la prime de démobilisation

Subsistance Vues Soutenues

LE COMMANDEANT DU CENTRE DE DÉMABILISATION

Richard Popoff's demobilisation certificate (photo missing) from the Foreign Legion. This genuine form cost 800 francs from a gentleman in Marseilles who purported to be a Hungarian. The cost was recovered, at some risk, by appearing at the French Treasury, some days later, to claim the demob bonus being paid to discharged soldiers. Evidence of this payment is at the top left corner of the reverse and the remaining stamps are control post and customs stamps imprinted during the journey from Camp St. Marthe in Marseilles to Casablanca.

After the Police had looked through some files we were called in for questioning one by one. When they shouted for Richard Popoff I went in, and, in spite of their questions in French, some of which I did not understand, they appeared satisfied that I was Popoff from the camp. They told me to report

straight back to camp and obtain a special paper from my commandant allowing me to journey in Marseilles while waiting for a boat. The pains I had taken to learn my story off by heart have not been wasted. Having bluffed the Marseilles Surété I think the military will be easy. But I shall not be happy

now while I remain in this place. Those couple of hours this morning aged me considerably, how I did nor crack up and give the game away amazes me.

The next morning Doc (2) went to check on the boat timings and returned empty handed. It was my turn to check during the afternoon. To my amazement I found that we were to parade at 5 p.m. It was then 4.20. I dashed out to camp, found a taxi and told him full speed to our hideout, then picked up Doc. Bade a very hasty farewell to Sandy and the others and my very good Polish friends. Dashed off to the camp again and then to the docks, arriving just as the Isoles (men of various units brought together to form one party) were falling in. What a rush, the taxi cost a very precious 50 francs but it was worth it. After falling in and out several times, answering our names and town of demobilisation, we were formed up and marched up the gangway under the watchful eyes of the port officials, definitely the most anxious moment of my life. But as our papers were in order they suspected nothing, thank God. No one I have met speaks Bulgarian, my mother tongue. Am now securely settled up forrard with the Isoles. Doc, who was demobbed as a sous-officer, has a berth in a cabin, I have not seen him since we came aboard. I have been recognised by one of the Isoles who was at the fort, he has been demobbed from the Legion. He speaks excellent English and has told me to talk as little as possible, he will do the talking. The boat is the D 'Jebel Amour and is due to sail at 2 a.m. tomorrow morning. It is growing dark now and I feel more or less secure. I am very sorry to have to split up from Sandy, but he himself thinks he could not manage the language difficulty. I have a great deal to thank him for. Often in the early stages of our adventure it was only his dour Scottish tenacity that kept us going. Sandy will get away somehow, of that I feel certain.

The real dangers of the last three months were now behind me and although a few more lies and impersonations were probably needed and, as yet, there was no plan to move from North Africa to UK, I felt I was set for home. The remainder of the journey was without major incident. The three-day sail to Oran was literally stinking. An all pervading stench came up from the holds where 300 Arab stallions had an uncomfortable time in the Mediterranean heat. This aroma was matched only by the odour of the 6th Spahis (Arab cavalry with French officers and senior NCOs) who owned them. On that journey any smell which was not directly associated with a German, was however elixir enough. Our path was smoothed by a real Legionnaire (3) whom we knew at the fort and was travelling on genuine repatriation after demob. He did most of the talking at checkpoints, customs posts and other barriers. He provided the bribes to get us on to the faster trains across North Africa and somewhere to stay in Casablanca.

2. Doc in the narrative is Lieutenant McCallum, RAMC. He had made an abortive stowaway on 17th August in a coaster thought to be bound for Gib. He was discovered

after an hour at sea and returned to Fort St. Jean where we became partners in crime until we parted in London on 20th September 1940.

3. Although he was a real Legionnaire by the name of Albert Dubert we discovered later that he was Arthur Koestler. author and journalist, who was a naturalised Englishman. He had joined the Legion purely as a means of leaving France for Africa and brought forward his plans through a medical discharge. He was to spend six weeks in Pentonville on arrival in UK before he could prove his identity.

4. Mr. X, I learned later, was Baron Ridiger von Etdorf, German aristocrat, Prussian landowner, German Naval officer, Hitler-hater and, astonishingly, British spy. He was the Mr. Ellerman who organised and ran escape routes in France early in the war and what he was doing in Casablanca I did not discover.

A visit to the British Consul in Casablanca two days later produced emergency certificates and it was good to have some form of British identity. It was prudent however to remain Richard Popoff en route to Bulgaria. In Casablanca we met up with others from Marseilles who had preceded us. Lieutenant Hopkins was in touch with Mr. X (4) and through him space was found on a leaky refugee boat, the 'Mar Azul', of about 250 tons plying to Lisbon. It contained a group of 70 passengers, all refugees of every nationality one could imagine. In my excitement at boarding the 'Mar Azul' on the evening of 14th September I was certain that I had signed my real name on a money declaration form and my alias on numerous other pieces of paper.



Staff sergeant Newman, RAOC, alias Richard Lebrun (French or Belgian), alias Karol Wrona (Polish), alias Richard Popoff (Bulgarian). This photo was fixed to the Visa-de-Sortir authorising Popoff to journey from Morocco to Portugal in September 1940.

So it was an uneasy wait, whilst numerous other procedures took place, until we cleared port. Three mornings later after a rough journey on the open deck I awoke to find the boat at anchor in the Tagus. Later instead of disembarking at Lisbon all the passengers became involved in a haggle with the port authorities which lasted until 9 p.m. The Portuguese were endeavouring to get passengers to complain about the conditions on board but they were so grateful for having been able to make the trip that no-one would say anything other than that it was a fine trip and everything was lovely. At long last I was R. A. J. Newman again and Mr. X joined us in a celebration at the Frankfort Hotel.

The entry in my diary for 19th September is an account of the flight in the airliner Cathay and my reactions to being in England, bound for London and the blitz on an overnight train from Poole in Dorset. I end the story with part of my diary for the previous day. I am 28 years old today ... after dashing about all day, at five o'clock four of us have tickets for the Imperial Airways plane which leaves tomorrow for England. What marvellous luck and what a birthday present.



Forty years on.

Form No. 969

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FOR
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This Certificate entitles the holder
MR R A J NEWMAN
 to a reduction of 10% of the published SINGLE
 FARE for the whole or any one part of a journey
 From : **UK**
 To : **LISBON**
 If commenced on or before **18-9-41**

THIS CERTIFICATE IS VALID ONLY

- For the Holder named (who may be required to produce Passport or other evidence of Identity). It has no surrender value and is **NOT TRANSFERABLE and NOT NEGOTIABLE**
- Between the points, and within the period of validity stated above
- If produced at the time of booking

ISSUED IN CONNECTION WITH A SINGLE
 TICKET AT ORDINARY FARE
 From : **LISBON**
 To : **UK**
 Date : **19-9-41** Service No. **PN66**
 Issuing Station or Agent : **JAMES RAWES**

Part of the stub of the Imperial Airways ticket remaining after removal of the flight ticket for the trip from Lisbon to Poole. James Rawes must have been joking when he offered a 10% discount for a return trip.