

# "OUTWITTING THE HUN"

By Lieutenant Pat O'Brien

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CHAPTER XVIII—Continued.

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I beckoned to the chauffeur to go with me up to the office, as I had no money with which to pay him, and when he got to the consulate I told them that if they would pay the taxi fare I would tell them who I was and how I happened to be there.

They knew at once that I was an escaped prisoner and they readily paid the chauffeur and invited me to give some account of myself.

They treated me most cordially and were intensely interested in the brief account I gave them of my adventures. Word was sent to the consul general and he immediately sent for me. When I went in he shook hands with me, greeting me very heartily and offering me a chair.

He then sat down, screwed a monocle on his eye and viewed me from top to toe. I could see that only good breeding kept him from laughing at the spectacle I presented. I could see he wanted to laugh in the worst way.

"Go ahead and laugh!" I said. "You can't offend me the way I feel this blessed day!" and he needed no second invitation. Incidentally it gave me a chance to laugh at him, for I was about as much amused as he was.

After he had laughed himself about sick he got up and slapped me on the back and invited me to tell him my story.

"Lieutenant," he said when I had concluded, "you can have anything you want. I think your experience entitles you to it."

"Well, consul," I replied, "I would like a bath, a shave, a haircut and some civilized clothes about as badly as a man ever needed them, I suppose, but before that I would like to get a cable off to America to my mother telling her that I am safe and on my way to England!"

The consul gave me the necessary information and I had the satisfaction of knowing before I left the office that the cable, with its good tidings, was on its way to America.

Then he sent for one of the naval men who had been interned there since the beginning of the war and who was able to speak Dutch and told him to take good care of me.

After I had been bathed and shaved and had a haircut I bought some new clothes and had something to eat, and I felt like a new man.

As I walked through the streets of Rotterdam breathing the air of freedom again and realizing that there was no longer any danger of being captured and taken back to prison, it was a wonderful sensation.

I don't believe there will ever be a country that will appear in my eyes quite as good as Holland did then. I had to be somewhat careful, however, because Holland was full of German spies and I knew they would be keen to learn all they possibly could about my escape and my adventures so that the authorities in Belgium could mete out punishment to everyone who was in any respect to blame for it. As I was in Rotterdam only one day, they didn't have very much opportunity to learn anything from me.

The naval officer who accompanied me and acted as interpreter for me introduced me to many other soldiers and sailors who had escaped from Belgium when the Germans took Antwerp, and as they had arrived in Holland in uniform and under arms, the laws of neutrality compelled their internment and they had been there ever since.

The life of a man who is interned to a neutral country, I learned, is anything but satisfactory. He gets one month a year to visit his home. If he lives in England that is not so bad, but if he happens to live farther away, the time he has to spend with his folks is very short, as the month's leave does not take into consideration the time consumed in traveling to and from Holland.

The possibility of escape from Holland is always there, but the British authorities have an agreement with the Dutch government to send refugees back immediately. In this respect, therefore, the position of a man who is interned is worse than that of a prisoner who, if he does succeed in making his escape, is naturally received with open arms in his native land. Apart from this restraint, however, internment, with all its drawbacks, is a thousand times, yes, a million times, better than being a prisoner of war in Germany.

It seems to me that when the war is over and the men who have been imprisoned in Germany return home, they should be given a bigger and greater reception than the most victorious army that ever marched into a city, for they will have suffered and gone through more than the world will ever be able to understand.

No doubt you will find in the German prison camps one or two faint-hearted individuals with a pronounced yellow streak who voluntarily gave up the struggle and gave up their liberty rather than risk their lives or limbs. These sad cases, however, are, I am sure, extremely few. Nine hundred and ninety-nine out of a thousand men fighting in the allied lines rather be in the front trenches,

fighting every day, with all the horrors and all the risks, than be a prisoner of war in Germany, for the men in France have a very keen realization of what that means.

But to return to my day in Rotterdam.

After I was fixed up I returned to the consulate and arrangements were made for my transportation to England at once. Fortunately there was a boat leaving that very night and I was allowed to take passage on it.

Just as we were leaving Rotterdam, the boat I was on rammed our own convoy, one of the destroyers, and injured it so badly that it had to put back to port. It would have been a strange climax to my adventure if the disaster had resulted in the sinking of my boat and I had lost my life while on my way to England after having successfully outwitted the Hun. But my luck was with me to the last, and while the accident resulted in some delay our boat was not seriously damaged and made the trip over in schedule time and without further accident, another destroyer having been assigned to escort us through the danger zone in place of the one which had been put out of commission.

When I arrived in London, the reaction from the strain I had been under for nearly three months immediately became apparent. My nerves were in such a state that it was absolutely impossible for me to cross the street without being in deadly fear of being run over or trampled. I stood at the curb, like an old woman from the country on her first visit to the city, and I would not venture across until some knowing policeman, recognizing my condition, came to my assistance and conveyed me across.

Indeed, there was a great number of English officers at home at all times "getting back their nerves" after a long spell of active service at the front, so that my condition was anything but novel to the London bobbies.

It was not many days, however, before I regained control of myself and felt in first-class shape.

Although the British authorities in Holland had wired my mother from Holland that I was safe and on my way to England, the first thing I did when we landed was to send her a cable myself.

The cable read as follows: "Mrs. M. J. O'Brien, Mombence, Ill., U. S. A. "Just escaped from Germany. Letter follows."

As I delivered it to the cable dispatcher I could just imagine the exultation with which my mother would receive it and the pride she would feel as she exhibited it among her neighbors and friends.

I could hear the volley of "I told you so's" that greeted her good tidings.

"It would take more than the kaiser to keep Pat in Germany," I could hear one of them say.

"Knew he'd be back for Christmas, anyway," I could hear another remark.

"I had an idea that Pat and his comrades might spend Christmas in Berlin," I could hear another admit, "but I did not think any other part of Germany would appeal to him very much."

"Mrs. O'Brien, did Pat write you how many German prisoners he brought back with him?" I could hear still another credulous friend inquiring.

It was all very amusing and gratifying to me and I must confess I felt quite cocky as I walked into the war department to report.

For the next five days I was kept very busy answering questions put to me by the military authorities regarding what I had observed as to conditions in Germany and behind the lines.

What I reported was taken down by a stenographer and made part of the official records, but I did not give them my story in narrative form. The information I was able to give was naturally of interest to various branches of the service, and experts in every line of government work took it in turns to question me. One morning would be devoted, for instance, to answering questions of a military

nature—German methods behind the front line trenches, tactics, morale of troops and similar matters. Then the aviation experts would take a whack at me and discuss with me all I had observed of German flying corps methods and equipment. Then, again, the food experts would interrogate me as to what I had learned of food conditions in Germany, Luxembourg and Belgium, and as I had lived pretty close to the ground for the best part of seventy-two days I was able to give them some fairly accurate reports as to actual agricultural conditions, many of the things I told them probably having more significance to them than they had to me.

There were many things I had observed which I have not referred to in these pages because their value to us might be diminished if the Germans knew we were aware of them, but they were all reported to the authorities and it was very gratifying to me to hear that the experts considered some of them of the greatest value.

One of the most amusing incidents of my return occurred when I called at my bankers in London to get my personal effects.

The practice in the Royal Flying corps when a pilot is reported missing is to have two of his comrades assigned to go through his belongings, check them over, destroy anything that it might not be to his interest to preserve, and send the whole business to his banker or his home, as the case may be. Every letter is read through, but their contents is never afterwards discussed or revealed in any way. If the pilot is finally reported dead, his effects are forwarded to his next of kin, but while he is officially only "missing," or is known to be a prisoner of war, they are kept either at the squadron headquarters or sent to his banker.

In my case as soon as it was learned that I had fallen from the sky, it was assumed that I had been killed and my chum, Paul Rancy, and another officer detailed to check over my effects. The list they made and to which they affixed their signatures, as I have previously mentioned, is now in my possession and is one of the most treasured souvenirs of my adventure.

My trunk was sent to Cox & Co. in due course, and now that I was in London I thought I would go and claim it.

When I arrived at the bank I applied to the proper window for my mail and trunk.

"Who are you?" I was asked rather sharply.

"Well, I guess no one has any greater right to Pat O'Brien's effects than I have," I replied, "and I would be obliged to you if you would look them up for me."

"That may be all right, my friend," replied the clerk, "but according to our records Lieutenant O'Brien is a prisoner of war in Germany, and we can't very well turn over his effects to anyone else unless either you present proof that he is dead and that you are his lawful representative, or you deliver to us a properly authenticated order from him to give them to you."

He was very positive about it all, but quite polite, and I thought I would kid him no more.

"Well," I said, "I can't very well present proofs to you that Pat O'Brien is dead, but I will do the best I can to prove to you that he is alive, and if you haven't quite forgotten his signature I guess I can write you out an order that will answer all your requirements and enable you to give me Pat O'Brien's belongings without running any risks," and I scribbled my signature on a scrap of paper and handed it to him.

He looked at me carefully through the latticed window, then jumped down from the high chair and came outside to clasp me by the hand.

"Good heavens, lieutenant!" he exclaimed, as he pumped my hand up and down, "how did you ever get away?" and I had to sit right down and tell him and half a dozen other people in the bank all about my experiences.

I had been in England about five days when I received a telegram which, at first, occasioned me almost

as much concern as the unexpected sight of a German spiked helmet had caused me in Belgium. It read as follows:

"Lieut. P. A. O'Brien, Royal Flying Corps, Regent's Palace Hotel, London:

"The king is very glad to hear of your escape from Germany. If you are to be in London on Friday next, December 7th, His majesty will receive you at Buckingham palace at 10:30 a. m. Please acknowledge."

"CROMER."

Of course, there was only one thing to do and that was to obey orders. I was an officer in the army and the king was my commander in chief, I had to go, and so I sat down and sent off the following answer: "Earl Cromer, Buckingham Palace, London: "I will attend Buckingham palace as directed, Friday, December 7th, at 10:30."

"LIEUT. PAT O'BRIEN."

In the interval that elapsed, I must confess, the ordeal of calling on the king of England loomed up more dreadfully every day, and I really believed I would rather have spent another day in the empty house in the big city in Belgium or, say, two more days at Courtrai, than to go through what I believed to be in store for me.

Orders were orders, however, and there was no way of getting out of it. As it turned out, it wasn't half as bad as I had feared—the contrary, it was one of the most agreeable experiences of my life.

## CHAPTER XIX.

I Am Presented to the King. When the dreaded 7th of December arrived, I halted a taxicab and in as matter-of-fact tone of voice as I could command, directed the chauffeur to drive me to Buckingham palace, as though I was paying my regular morning call on the king.

My friends' version of this incident, I have since heard, is that I seated myself in the taxi and leaning through the window said: "Buckingham palace" whereupon the taxi driver got down, opened the door and exclaimed threateningly:

"If you don't get out quietly and chuck your drunken talk, I'll jolly quick call a bobby, blip!"

But I can only give my word that nothing of the kind occurred.

When I arrived at the palace gate, the sentry on guard asked me who I was and then let me pass at once up to the front entrance of the palace.

There I was met by an elaborately decorated and equally elaborately decorated personage who, judging by the long row of medals he wore, must have seen long and distinguished service for the king.

I was relieved of my overcoat, hat and stick and conducted up a long stairway, where I was turned over to another functionary, who led me to the reception room of Earl Cromer, the king's secretary.

There I was introduced to another earl and a duke, whose name I do not remember. I was becoming so bewildered, in fact, that it is a wonder that I remember as much as I do of this eventful day.

I had heard many times that before being presented to the king a man is coached carefully as to just how he is to act and what he is to say and do, and all this time I was wondering when this drilling would commence. I certainly had no idea that I was to be ushered into the august presence of the king without some preliminary instruction.

Earl Cromer and the other noblemen talked to me for a while and got me to relate in brief the story of my experience, and they appeared to be very much interested. Perhaps they did it only to give me confidence and as a sort of rehearsal for the main performance, which was scheduled to take place much sooner than I expected.

I had barely completed my story when the door opened and an attendant entered and announced: "The king will receive Lieutenant O'Brien!"

If he had announced that the kaiser was outside with a squad of German guards to take me back to Courtrai my heart could not have sunk deeper.

Earl Cromer beckoned me to follow him and we went into a large room, where I supposed I was at last to receive my coaching, but I observed the earl bow to a man standing there and realized that I was standing in the presence of the king of England.

"Your majesty, Lieutenant O'Brien!" the earl announced, and then immediately backed from the room. I believed I would have followed right behind him, but by that time the king had me by the hand and was congratulating me, and he spoke so very cordially and democratically that he put me at my ease at once.

He then asked me how I felt and whether I was in a condition to converse, and when I told him I was, he said he would be very much pleased to hear my story in detail.

"Were you treated any worse by the Germans, lieutenant?" he asked, "on

account of being an American? I've heard that the Germans had threatened to shoot Americans serving in the British army if they captured them, classing them as murderers, because America was a neutral country and Americans had no right to mix in the war. Did you find that to be the case?"

I told him that I had heard similar reports, but that I did not notice any appreciable difference in my treatment from that accorded Britshers.

The king declared that he believed my escape was due to my pluck and will power and that it was one of the most remarkable escapes he had ever heard of, which I thought was quite a compliment, coming as it did from the king of England.

"I hope that all the Americans will give as good an account of themselves as you have, lieutenant," he said, "and I feel quite sure they will. I fully appreciate all the service rendered us by Americans before the States entered the war."

At this moment I asked him if I was taking too much time.

"Not at all, lieutenant, not at all!" he replied, most cordially. "I was extremely interested in the brief report that came to me of your wonderful escape and I sent for you because I wanted to hear the whole story firsthand, and I am very glad you were able to come."

I had not expected to remain more than a few minutes, as I understood that four minutes is considered a long audience with the king. Fifty-two minutes elapsed before I finally left there!

During all this time I had done most of the talking, in response to the king's request to tell my story. Occasionally he interrupted to ask a question about a point he wanted me to make clear, but for the most part he was content to play the part of a listener.

He seemed to be very keen on everything and when I described some of the tight holes I got into during my escape he evinced his sympathy. Occasionally I introduced some of the few humorous incidents of my adventure and in every instance he laughed heartily.

Altogether the impression I got of him was that he is a very genial, gracious and alert sovereign. I know I have felt more ill at ease when talking to a major than when speaking to the king—but perhaps I had more cause to.

During the whole interview we were left entirely alone, which impressed me as significant of the democratic manner of the present king of England, and I certainly came away with the utmost respect for him.

In all my conversation, I recalled afterwards, I never addressed the king as "Your Majesty," but used the military "sir." As I was a British officer and he was the head of the army, he probably appreciated this manner of address more than if I had used the usual "Your Majesty." Perhaps he attributed it to the fact that I was an American. At any rate, he didn't evince any displeasure at my departure from what I understand is the usual form of address.

Before I left he asked me what my plans for the future were.

"Why, sir, I hope to rejoin my squadron at the earliest possible moment!" I replied.

"No, lieutenant," he rejoined, "that is out of the question. We can't risk losing you for good by sending you back to a part of the front opposed by Germans, because if you were unfortunate enough to be captured again they would undoubtedly shoot you."

"Well, if I can't serve in France, sir," I suggested, "wouldn't it be feasible for me to fly in Italy or Salonica?"

"No," he replied, "that would be almost as bad. The only thing that I can suggest for you to do is either to take up instruction—a very valuable form of service—or perhaps it might be safe enough for you to serve in Egypt, but just at present, lieutenant, I think you have done enough anyway."

Then he rose and shook hands with me and wished me the best of luck, and we both said "Good-by."

In the adjoining room I met Earl Cromer again, and as he accompanied me to the door seemed to be surprised at the length of my visit.

As I left the palace a policeman and a sentry outside came smartly to attention. Perhaps they figured I had been made a general.

As I was riding back to the hotel in a taxi I reflected on the remarkable course of events which in the short space of nine months had taken me through so much and ended up, like the finish of a book, with my being received by his majesty, the king! When I first joined the Royal Flying corps I never expected to see the inside of Buckingham palace, much less being received by the king.

## CHAPTER XX.

Home Again. That same day, in the evening, I was tendered a banquet at the Hotel

Savoy by a fellow officer who had bet three other friends of mine that I would be home by Christmas. This wager had been made at the time he heard that I was a prisoner of war, and the dinner was the stake.

The first intimation he had of my safe return from Germany and the fact that he had won his bet was a telegram I sent him reading as follows:

"Lieut. Louis Grand: "War bread bad, so I came home."

"PAT." He said he would not part with that message for a thousand dollars. Other banquets followed in fast succession. After I had survived nine of them I figured that I was now in as much danger of succumbing to a surfeit of rich food as I had previously been of dying from starvation, and for my own protection, I decided to leave London. Moreover, my thoughts and my heart were turning back to the land of my birth, where I knew there was a loving mother who was longing for more substantial evidence of my safe escape than the cables and letters she had received.

Strangely enough, on the boat which carried me across the Atlantic, I saw an R. F. C. man—Lieutenant Lascelles.

I walked over to him, held out my hand and said "Hello!"

He looked at me steadily for at least a minute.

"My friend, you certainly look like Pat O'Brien," he declared, "but I can't believe my eyes. Who are you?"

I quickly convinced him that his eyes were still to be relied upon, and then he stared at me for another minute or two, shaking his head dubiously.

His mystification was quite explicable. The last time he had seen me I was going down to earth with a bullet in my face and my machine doing a spinning-nose dive. He was one of my comrades in the flying corps



The King Had Me by the Hand.

and was in the fight which resulted in my capture. He said he had read the report that I was a prisoner of war, but he had never believed it, as he did not think it possible for me to survive that fall.

He was one of the few men living out of eighteen who were originally in my squadron—I do not mean the eighteen with whom I sailed from Canada last May, but the squadron I joined in France.

As we sat on the deck exchanging experiences, I would frequently notice him gazing intently in my face as if he were not quite sure that the whole proposition was not a hoax and that I was an impostor.

Outside of this unexpected meeting, my trip was uneventful.

I arrived at St. John, New Brunswick, and eventually in the little town of Mombence, Ill., on the Kankakee river.

I have said that I was never so happy to arrive in a country as I was when I set foot on Dutch soil. Now, I'm afraid I shall have to take that statement back. Not until I finally landed in Mombence and realized that I was again in the town of my childhood days did I enjoy that feeling of absolute security which one never really appreciates until after a visit to foreign parts.

Now that I am back, the whole adventure constantly recurs to me as a dream, and I'm never quite sure that I won't wake up and find it so.

(THE END)

## Just a Flower.

Here comes a market basket filled with meat, potatoes, turnips, onions, cauliflower and radishes, a substantial supply for the hungry household, but peeping out from these varied table needs is a flower, blooming from a little pot down among the potatoes. What a world of melody its happy presence impels! There is a soul in that family desire sure enough. We looked at the good woman who carried the basket and saw in her countenance something fairer than appetite; a sense of beauty that put a smile on her face and a goodness in her heart. That was a sign of the love that she had for her family responsibility; somewhat to grace the table and lend a charm to the family life. Amid the dull necessities of life she had planted a little flower. What radiance it would bring to her modest household, and how God would thank her for it!—Columbus Ohio State Journal.

POST OFFICE TELEGRAPHERS. No. of Telegrams

For Postage Stamp.

TO: Earl Cromer, Buckingham Palace

FROM: I will attend Buckingham Palace as directed Friday Dec. 7th at 10:30. Lt. P. A. O'Brien

12 words in the message. 6 cents.

10. The Name and Address of the Receiver, if NOT BY TELEGRAPH, should be written in the Space provided at the End of the Form.

Lieutenant O'Brien's Answer to Summons of King George.