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Eight American Writers Arrested

Tribune Correspondent Cables Account of His Capture by Germans and How He Was Saved from Being Shot as English Officer.

This war has been the end of war correspondents. Of several, that came near being true in every sense of the word. The trouble was that, unable to obtain credentials, they tried without them to see the fighting, and in consequence were arrested.

No prejudices or favouritism was shown. Every army in turn arrested every correspondent. I was arrested by the Belgians, the French, the Germans, and even by the Dutch. But by the time we reached Holland I was so sick for sleep that all I remember of that journey is Gerald Morgan dragging me out of the railroad carriage, handing me my tickets and shaking me into wakefulness. When we reached the gangplank of the English boat at Flushing he exclaimed, "Thank God, we're now free from arrest." I asked, "Have we been arrested?" "For two days," said Gerald, "you were taken across Holland by that gendarme who carried your valise."

Throughout my broken slumbers I had thought the gendarme was a railroad porter, and it had struck me as curious that in Holland all railroad porters looked exactly alike.

The American correspondent who first scored an arrest was Captain Granville Fortescue, who lives in Washington, and who, during President Roosevelt's administration, was military aide at the White House. He served in the Cuban war with the Roosevelt rough riders, and rose to the rank of captain in the regular army. With the Japanese army in front of Port Arthur he was our military attaché. When the present war started, Fortescue and his family were in Brussels. He was the first man to see any fighting and get his stories back to New York.

With the Belgian army he was very popular and, banking on this, when the French arrived at Namur Captain Fortescue walked to meet the French general, saying genially to him: "Welcome to our city." To this the French general answered: "Who the devil are you?" And, not being satisfied with Fortescue's reply, the general, in accordance with the rules that the French War Office has laid down, ordered him to Paris under arrest.

Fortescue protested that all his clothes were in his apartments in Brussels, and asked that he be permitted to return to that city, giving his word of honor to send out no information concerning what he had seen. At the expression, "word of honor," the French general injudiciously sniffed. Even more injudiciously Fortescue then told him that he wanted him to know that his word of honor was as good as that of any general in France.

But the last word went to the general. It was, "You are under arrest." Fortescue replied, "You are on Belgian territory and cannot arrest me." "Then," said the general, "I will arrest you on French territory." And surrounded by French bayonets Fortescue was marched across the border.

Legally arrested and for three days locked up in the scullery of a roadside inn, he was then taken by plainclothes men to Paris and led before the chief of police, who said a mistake had been made and offered to give Fortescue an ample apology. Not being able to

clothe himself in an apology, Fortescue returned to London to refit. He arrived there with no heavier luggage than a pair of military hairbrushes.

On August 17 four more American correspondents fell into the advancing tidal wave of Germans. Their intention was only to paddle in the fringe of the wave, but it moved too quickly. They were John T. McCutcheon, of all our cartoonists if not the foremost certainly the most human; genial Irvin Cobb, a rival humorist, representing "The Saturday Evening, Post"; Will Irwin, of "Collier's Weekly," and Arno Dosch, a Socialist of the Harvard school, representing "World's Work."

In a taxicab they went from Brussels to within three kilometres of Louvain, where the chauffeur refused to venture further. But he promised to wait for them while they visited the city on foot. They arrived in the public square of Louvain, which a week later was reduced to ruins, and, at the invitation of a Jesuit priest, who had visited America, sat in front of a cafe and refreshed themselves. Suddenly six Belgian soldiers ran past them, and at the entrance to the square they saw Uhlans in pursuit.

Led by McCutcheon, experienced in many wars, they retreated in good order in the direction of the taxicab, only to find that the taxicab driver had not waited to collect his fare, and, also in good order, was falling rapidly back upon Brussels.

Rising like gray ghosts from the wheat fields was a skirmish line of Uhlans. They paused; there was a hurried change of tactics, and, under fire both from Belgians and Germans, they returned to Louvain. There they surrendered themselves to the officer in command. They explained that they were American correspondents who had lost touch with their transport.

"But," said the German officer, "correspondents are not permitted with the German army." "We know that," said Cobb, "but here we are. What are you going to do about it?" The German answered by placing them under detention in their hotel, in front of which for three days they sat around little iron tables playing dominos and watching miserable Belgian citizens led past them to execution. Undismayed by this experience, which caused them to miss the entrance of the German army into Brussels, on August 23 they again set forth to seek other adventures, their numbers now increased by the presence of John O'Connell Bennett, the "Chicago Tribune's" former dramatic critic; Harry Hanson, of "The Chicago Daily News"; Lewis, of the Associated Press, and Maurice Gerbault, of "The Chicago Daily News." Irwin and Dosch next day returned to Brussels, bringing word that Gerbault had been taken by the Germans as a suspected spy, chiefly on account of his nationality, and also because, against all our warnings, he would insist on taking photographs, which by every army in this war is forbidden.

When I left Brussels on August 20 these correspondents had completely disappeared, until this morning, when a telegram arrived from Hanson, dated from Brussels. The others are probably with him, but wherever they may be they are safe. Dosch and Irwin, who came back, report the Cobb, who is of heavy proportions, was arrested by all the Germans entirely as a humorist. He can take a joke as well as make one, and wherever they went all the villagers lined the streets, and their laughter shook the tiled roofs.

His clothes having failed him, Cobb had remodelized in the garb of a Belgian peasant, and his appearance filled all who saw him with delight. Secretly, he was unhappy because he carried on his person much gold, to which he objected strongly on account of its weight. When last seen by Irwin, he was threatening, rather than carry the rich man's burden further, to throw it into the next wheat field.

The fact that word of him has not reached London need cause no anxiety. By this time he and his companions have returned to Brussels, or, like Hanson, have crossed the border to Holland. But even should they wish to communicate their safe arrival, there is no way by which they could get word out of Belgium.

Communication is at present shut off even from our American Minister, Brand Whitlock. He is both an admirer and friend of Cobb and McCutcheon and may be relied upon to guard their interests in the same manner in which, since the war began, he has protected and assisted every American who has applied to him for aid. Incidentally, the administration is to be congratulated in having at this crisis a minister in Belgium as efficient as the distinguished ex-mayor of Toledo, and a representative as experienced in diplomacy as his secretary, Hugh Gibson. They form a working team which could not be improved upon.

Starts Out to See Some Fighting.

My own experience with the Germans was most disagreeable. It was danger without excitement, adventure without one pleasant thrill. It was reported in Brussels, on August 23, that the night before there had been fighting at Hal, a town ten miles from the city, and that the French were advancing from Enghien, a town ten miles further south. With Gerald Morgan, I drove to Hal, and finding there had been no fighting there, continued on foot toward Enghien. We kept to the main road, down which the German army, commanded by General von Kluck, accompanied by the Grand Duke of Holstein, was proceeding in unbroken column. They had frequently stopped us, but as our papers gave us permission to visit the environs of Brussels, always allowed us to continue.

We appreciated that the environs could not stretch much further than Hal, and that at any moment some officer also would appreciate that fact and order us back. Morgan very wisely decided to return before he was sent back under guard. I continued on foot to Enghien, spent the night there, and at 6 the next morning started south, hoping when the German column finally clashed with the French to be present. I made no effort to conceal my papers, and walked with the column when asked concerning my papers, and talking freely with the officers.

I thought I was on the road to Soignies, but to embarrass the Germans the Belgians had destroyed the signposts, and by mistake I took the road to Ath. This for me was unfortunate, as it was down this road that a German army corps was being sent at double-quick to strike the British left. The success of this maneuver depended upon secrecy, and as soon as I appeared I was placed in the ranks of an infantry company and told that I must remain with it until the general commanding examined my papers.

Was Kept At "Double-Quick" Five Hours.

For five hours we marched at double-quick, and from that and the obvious excitement of the officers, I saw that they were planning a surprise. About noon I was placed in an automobile and sent forward to where Count de Schweren, commanding the seventh division, was seated by the roadside with his staff. They examined my papers and pointed out that I was far outside the limits that my pass permitted me to go.

From the circumstance that my passport had been made out in London and that the photograph affixed to it showed me in khaki uniform, they decided that I was an English officer detailed as a spy, and that when captured I was endeavouring to get through their lines to Tournai and warn the English of the flanking movement, which, it was hoped, would surprise them and roll up their left flank upon the French centre. I explained that our army regulations required war correspondents to appear in khaki, and asked if they supposed that our ambassador in London would issue a passport to an English officer. They replied that it would be easy for an English officer to deceive the ambassador.

I then urged that I had seen no more than everyone in Brussels for the last four days had seen in the streets.

“You have seen enough in this road,” the chief of staff said, pointing to the officers of the staff, “to explain what we are trying to accomplish. It is enough to justify us in shooting you now.”

Gets Third Degree From German Generals.

Fortunately, General de Schweren decided that the matter was of such importance that it must be brought before his superior officer, the general commanding the army corps. They said they would not reach him until midnight, and the chief of staff assured me that the highest general would then surely order me shot. All of the staff spoke English, and in turn put me through the third degree. After consulting together, they would again come at me with fresh questions, intended to trap and confuse. This cross examination lasted three hours.

Some were convinced that I was an American, who, through ignorance, had stumbled upon their secret. Others argued that the possession of the secret was the only point to be considered, and that to protect themselves I must be put out of the way. It was all as cold blooded as a game of bridge.

I had to do a lot of thinking, and to think very fast. I offered to pay 500 francs to any peasant they would send on a bicycle to Brussels with a note from me to Brand Whitlock. I wrote a note to him, which I intended they should read, in which I addressed him in terms which apparently proved we were very old friends. As a matter of fact, I had met him only since coming to Brussels. But I knew he would understand. I offered that, if within five hours the American minister did not come for me in his own automobile and prove the truth of my story, they could, instead of waiting until midnight, then take me out and shoot me, thus relieving themselves of my presence by five hours.

He Takes a Chance On his Life

As I hoped, they opened the letter and apparently were impressed by it. In any event, it created what lawyers call a stay of proceedings.

They continued to take me south in automobiles, passing me on from one officer to another, until we reached a little town called Ligne. There they locked me in a room with a stone floor and stone walls, apparently built for the purpose. Into this they threw bundles of wheat, and placed a guard at the door, ordering me to keep it open. Every time I moved that sentry raised his automatic.

I worked out a plan which I hoped would act as a sort of injunction. It was that they should return me to Brussels by the shortest route, that if I were found off that route I was to be shot, and that unless within two days I reported to the military governor of Brussels, I was to be shot.

I outlined this plan to Major Alfred Wirth, who lives in Bernburg, on the Saale River. He was friendly toward me, but apparently thought I had little chance, as, whenever he visited my room and sat down beside me on the stones, his eyes would fill with tears. That was discouraging, but his feelings certainly led him to aid me.

At 10 o'clock an electric torch, strapped to the chest of an officer, flashed in my eyes and woke me. The officer ordered me to accompany him at once to the commanding general. His manner persuaded me that the general had decided against me. We drove to a beautiful chateau, set far back in a magnificent park. It was filled with officers, and automobiles were coming and going at great speed. I heard them say, “The English are coming.” And their manner toward me now became even more unfriendly.

A Lift in An Auto Saves Him

After an hour the chief of staff brought me my papers and my knapsack and told me that, under certain conditions, I was free. The conditions were those I had outlined to my friend, Major Wirth. He had carried them to the general. There is no question but that it is due to his offices I was not left lying in a field.

The passport given me ordered me to proceed by a stated route to Brussels. The distance was fifty miles, and as it was necessary to walk, they calculated on my making twenty-five miles a day. The pass stated that unless I reported by midnight on August 26, I was to be shot as a spy.

I started back at 3 that morning, but in the darkness was challenged so often that, although time was precious, it seemed wiser to delay until day came. Then, when it was light, I had walked to beyond Ath, when by a most fortunate stroke of good luck, I obtained a seat in an automobile in which a kindly old German general was going to Brussels.

On arriving, instead of reporting to the military governor, I at once reported to Brand Whitlock, and he instantly conveyed me, unwashed and undusted, to the Hotel de Ville. There he explained that I was reporting not because the pass ordered me to report, but in spite of that fact. And he demanded that from the pass the word spy be removed.

They accordingly wrote upon the pass that I was a friend of the American minister, and a correspondent well known to him, and that I was no spy. To that they affixed the seal of the German government.

It was a very close call.