

The Extracts that follow are all taken from a draft series of chapters focussing on Wally Pearce and found among Wally's papers. We do not know who the author was nor whether it was finally published.

'We reached our destination, a small village in France, where the people, quiet, undemonstrative, mostly grim of face, turned out to gaze at us, there was no mistaking the resentment that showed on some of the faces.

The camp lay just outside the village. Light rain was falling when we arrived and continued to fall heavily at times for a whole month. Our days were spent digging trenches against attack from the air, making gutters to run the water from the tents and in guard duties at night, our only pleasure the NAAFI, our worst enemy mud which we relentlessly but always lost the fight.'

'Our day-to-day lives were spent in sea of mud so a good laugh was all that was left to us to enjoy and was perhaps the best antidote to a burst blood vessel. Many of the things we had to do were irritating, frustrating and purposeless and the time would been better spent teaching us how to subsist like wild animals or how to fight without weapons or bullets for what we had got. At least that's how it worked out for us. We used to mount a full quarter guard complete with drum and bugle, boots highly polished and plenty of brasso. The parade was held on a strip of coconut matting laid on the mud, and as the bugle called the new guard on parade, those going on duty had to be carries from their tent by two men detailed for the job and placed on the matting ready for inspection. On the command "To your duties and dismiss. Right turn and quick march" and march it was, after all that "bull" straight into six inches of mud and that was goodbye to four hours of "spit and polish".'

'At the commencement of our effort to reach the coast and freedom I had advised the lads with me to write a letter home as it might be increasingly difficult if not impossible to do so as time went on, and chance whether they could be given into friendly hands who would see they got to England. I thought of y mother and remembered that I had not followed the advice I had given to others. What could I ;have written? Could I have told her how we were beibg hunted like animals, how we stole to exist when we could and that we went for days without being able to sleep. Of this fear-strickenland when you had to steal even water, for that was the only way you could get it. No better leave her with her hopes that I might be safe and on my way home'.

'A blinding flash of white hot pain seared through my unconscious being. As I struggled to emerge from the slumber I was in, the kick was repeated and so great was the pain I could hardly breathe. I awoke to find myself staring down the muzzle o a sub-machine gun and hearing a voice that said in perfect English 'For you the war is over, I shall be in London for Xmas and Ishall seduce your Queen'

‘Our numbers grew and grew with succeeding days as small groups were constantly rounded up. Eventually the RAF paid us a visit and machined us instead of the Germans, injuring and killing many of us. The bodies were deposited at the roadside fields without ceremony and we moved on.’

‘One night at the end of a days march, the guards turned us into a group of small fields. There must have been between 20 and 30 thousand of us and of many nationalities, British, French, Dutch, Belgians and many others. During the day my pal and I had managed to break away from the column on the blind side of the guard and into an empty farmyard and in a crumbling old hen house we found a chicken still sitting on its nest. Before it could utter a squwak my pal seized it, broke its neck . Hiding it under our clothes we rejoined the column. Now we set about preparing this for our supper and in order not to attract attention from the guards, we scooped a large hole underground – using an old penknife and our hands – waiting until the guard had passed before collecting twigs and small wood from the hedge bottoms and in the hole we placed our fire and chicken. It ought to have worked, but although hot we ate it raw.’

‘...out of the stillness of the night came a note of music, the sound of a mouthorgan and the wheezy notes that coaxed out the music of Abide with me. Languages and faith were forgotten as every voice joined in singing the words of that beautiful hymn.’

There is a lot more in these chapters but I think these are selections which might be worth including in Uncle Wally’s ‘objects.’

They spent three days and nights crammed 80 into cattle trucks which were designed to hold a maximum of 12 cows. They ended up in Thon POW camp. Uncle Wally was put to work on the land and he tells how the local Polish people took very grave risks to leave little packets of food and cigarettes on the roadside the POWs were marched along to work. The prisoners used to carry sticks with a pin fixed in the end to pick up the items without the guards seeing.