

## A PRISONER OF WAR

The hand of fate which had guided Lieut. Fred MacDonald through the most daring air battles to a place among Canada's premier aces had, it seemed, withdrawn its guardianship for a moment, and that moment was long enough for a German bullet to find its mark. Returning from a successful raid over German territory his plane was sighted and brought to earth. In the crash, however, he was fortunate to escape injury, but as he crawled from his wrecked plane he was captured and placed in a German camp. This was an ordinary aviation camp and MacDonald was held here because, as he was an accomplished aviator, he was of great help about the camp, repairing airplanes. At all times he was under a special sentry, even when he was at work; this together with his other hardships laid the foundation of that predominant thought of every prisoner—escape.

Day after day passed and no opportunity presented itself that would favor escape. But he never gave up hope, and as he worked about the camp or sat in his lonely tent he was always waiting for the opportune time that he hoped would mean freedom for him.

One day as the Canadian ace sat in his tent thinking of his pals, and wondering if they knew he was a prisoner, or if they had given him up as dead, he was suddenly awakened from his dream by someone speaking his own language. For a moment he was dazed. Could he believe his ears or was he still dreaming? Had his thoughts carried him away so far that he could hear his comrades speaking? No, again he heard it and looking up he saw standing before him a young German soldier who was speaking to him, and speaking in English. It was a reality.

"Say, what's wrong with you, can't you hear me?" snapped the German.

"Yes—yes," stammered the excited prisoner, "but it was such a shock for me to hear my mother tongue that I couldn't speak for the moment. You see I haven't heard a word of English since I was captured. But how is it I didn't see you before?" asked MacDonald.

"Well I just got here this morning," explained the soldier. "I have been in the line for quite a while, and this is a sort of a holiday. I hoped to get a trip home but we have been so hard pressed at the present time I



don't think it is possible. I expect to be shoved back again in a few days, unless I do something big here, and then for sure I'll get home for a time. I would certainly like to get home. I have been in this muck and mud now since the beginning and was never lucky enough to get back to the old folks."

"But you can't do anything here that would merit a furlough," protested MacDonald.

"Why of course I can. There are many things I could do. I might take down an airplane that would be passing over the camp, like the fellow did who got you, or I might capture a spy, or perhaps I might—". He stopped, as a thought seemed to strike him.

"You might what?"

"I might—I don't know exactly what, but something is apt to turn up, and then I would take a trip home to see Mother, and Dad, and yes, someone else too. But I must get on duty again, it won't do for me to stay too long, but I will be in to-morrow if all is well, because I want to hear something about Canada."

"Sure, come back, you don't know how good it feels to be able to talk to someone," said MacDonald to the German as the latter left the tent.

What a marvellous change had come over the prisoner. His spirit, which had become dormant by the dull, monotonous prison life, was aroused and the sound of his native tongue stirred up the fire of patriotism, which had been smoldering within his breast. However, in spite of all this, sadness and depression would come over him and in their wake the hope of escape and of seeing loved ones would fade and become but a shadow. But Fred MacDonald was not the kind that would be daunted; his intrepid spirit, which had led him to face danger time and time again, brought strength to him in these distressing times.

All the next day as he worked about the camp or sat in his tent, his one thought was on his friend—as he now thought of the sentry—for he was hungry for someone to talk to, someone to whom he might tell his troubles, and someone who might tell him how the war was progressing. Yes anyone would suffice even if it was a German. About the same time on the following day the German again visited his prisoner.



"Gee! I'm glad to see you; it seemed like a lifetime since you were here," welcomed Fred.

"Not so loud, I know how you feel, but you must be careful. I wouldn't want to be caught in here," warned the sentry.

"All right, I'll be careful," Fred assured him, and continuing said, "Here's a thing puzzling me, how is it that you speak English so well?"

"That's a story," said the German. "When I was nine years old I went to Canada on a visit to my uncle who had a big business in Montreal. He took a liking to me, and nothing would do but I should live with him. At first I wasn't in love with it, but later when I learned some English I began to like it. I went to school and later to McGill. Here I spent two years. After my second year I came home during the vacation with the intention of returning, but that was the summer the war broke out and I was caught in the midst of it."

"So you were at McGill," broke in the Canadian, "isn't that strange, I was there myself, we're sort of friends, ain't we?"

"I'll say so," returned the German and he put out his hand to the Canadian who grasped it in a hearty handshake.

"It's too bad, old fellow," said MacDonald, "that we should be fighting against one another; here we are friends and yet you are standing there with a loaded rifle waiting to shoot me."

"No, no, not at all, you have in me a friend and I hope to be able to help you some day. But my visit is up for to-day and I must be going," and with that the German left MacDonald to himself.

The Canadian now went about his duties around the German camp with more heart, but it was very hard on him; everything he heard was in German and everyone looked on him with contempt. It was agony to him, and he longed for the time when he would be away from the sight of the Germans and everything German.

Each day now without exception MacDonald's new acquaintance visited him, and with each visit the German was becoming so friendly that Fred began to doubt the old saying, "Never trust an enemy."

Early one morning, sometime later, Fred was told he would be moved to a regular prison camp that night.



He received the news with regret, for he knew he would be separated from his friend. However, he had some consolation in the hope that he would meet some old friends who would also be prisoners.

Later the same morning as MacDonald sat brooding over his troubles, he heard someone behind him and turning he saw his German friend crawling into the tent. Thinking this rather strange, as he had never been visited before in this way, and so early, he curiously asked, "Why do you come at this time and in this manner?"

The German putting his finger to his lips motioned MacDonald to be silent, then in almost a whisper said, "We must be very careful as the guard is only a short distance from us." Stopping for a moment he continued, "I heard you were leaving to-night so I came in to have a last talk with you, because perhaps I wouldn't be able to come this afternoon when I am on duty."

"That's what I thought myself and I feared I wouldn't get the opportunity to thank you for the great solace you have given me by your visits."

"Oh never mind me. I was only too glad to find a prisoner here. That's what worried me at first, you see I expected to be sent to a prison camp, like the one you are going to, but at the last moment I was ordered here and this being a regular war camp I never expected to meet a prisoner."

"Why did you want to go where there were prisoners," asked the Canadian.

The German was confused and for a moment was silent. This was unperceived by MacDonald.

"I—you see," muttered the German, "I thought I might meet someone from Canada and hear something about it; you know I have a warm feeling for Canada although I am fighting against her."

"That's extraordinary, indeed, but why did you join the army when you knew Canada was on the other side?" inquired the prisoner.

"I joined at the beginning, there was no choice for me, I was German born and couldn't escape, and then I wouldn't be a deserter, so I had to go through with it. But I hope some day to help her by...." He suddenly stopped, listened for a moment, then leaning toward the prisoner whispered, "What do you say if I help you to escape?"



MacDonald's face lit up with joy. Escape at last! Then just as quickly the expression vanished.

"What's the trouble, I didn't think you would be afraid?" said the German with a tone of regret.

"Don't say that. No Canadian was ever afraid, but I don't want to get you into trouble."

"Never mind me, I will come out of this better than you," assured the German.

"Better than I?"

"I mean they will never suspect me and besides I have a lot of influence here."

"Well, if everything is all right with you, I will make the attempt. What time do you propose?"

"When I am on guard would be the logical time because it would be too dangerous at any other time, and besides there won't be many around then," replied the German who showed increased interest since MacDonald accepted the proposed escape.

He then gave further directions and as he was about to leave MacDonald said, "Some day I hope I will be able to show gratitude for this."

"Forget about it," returned the German abruptly, and as he crawled out he muttered something inaudible to the prisoner.

Impatiently MacDonald waited for the time when his deliverer would take his place before the tent. He tried to sleep but all was in vain. Finally the awaited moment arrived, and the prisoner heard his German friend relieve the sentry on duty. But now the waiting began all over again. Only this time it was worse. Straining his ears he listened as the big German passed to and fro, each time expecting him to walk behind the tent, as this was the signal they agreed upon. Time and time again he could have sworn he heard him moving toward the rear, but no, there he was always out in front. The suspense was terrible! Would he ever go?

MacDonald was not alone in his thought. Before the mind of the other flashed the same "Would he go!" But it was much different, it was more than a thought, it was a struggle. A struggle that only men dare to attempt—a moral struggle. Back and forth the sentry paced, unconscious almost of what he was doing, all the while wrestling with the greatest mental contest of his life.

"Shall I do it!" thought the German, "Shall I kill



him? Shall I walk behind there and give him the signal that will send him to his death and me to my home? What is it to him anyway, perhaps he'll never get home, and didn't that letter say my poor Elena was sick, perhaps dying. I must see her. It is years since I beheld her sweet face. She is calling me for I heard her last night, she wants me. Maybe I shall never see her again, and here is my one chance. I must take it. I shall give him the s... No I can't. It would be murder. He is like me, a soldier away from home, away from friends,—more than friends—he is away from the little boy he raved about. Shall I make that little fellow an orphan? Shall I cause him to face life and this cruel world fatherless? Bring sorrow into that little family for my gain, my own selfish gain? No I can't, I can't.—Oh! that cry again, she is begging me to come, she is calling for me. Oh! God what shall I do? Must I do it! His wife—My betrothed.” Still undecided, and with faltering steps he almost unconsciously walked towards the rear of the tent.

Fred saw the shadow of the German soldier slowly and silently move behind the tent. “Now is my time,” he thought and dropping to his knees he crawled beneath the tent. There was no one in sight when he emerged and the only sound audible was the tramp, tramp, of the sentry as he moved away. The Canadian waited for a moment then slowly moved toward the border of the camp. What was that behind him? He stopped.

“God! What have I done!” cried the German half aloud. “What have I done?” he thought. “Did I walk behind the tent? I don't remember, I am in a daze. But—but, there he is. The prisoner is escaping. I can't let him escape. I must stop him. It is no longer *me*, but the Fatherland,—my duty.”

The German, knowing the prisoner was escaping and realizing now that it was his duty to shoot him, immediately took his position along the route he told the prisoner to follow. Ready to shoot, the sentry waited.

MacDonald had paused to listen, he had heard no sound, all had been silent; and moving on he was soon at the border of the camp. “Which way did he say?” he asked himself. “The right, I think. I wonder? Yes it was.” And at once he started in the direction opposite to which the German instructed him.

Five minutes passed, then another five minutes.



Where was the prisoner? The sentry started back to the camp. The tent was deserted; the prisoner was not in sight; he had escaped unnoticed to the German. Falling to his knees the relieved German soldier uttered a prayer of thanks to his God that his selfishness had not caused another soldier's death.

L.J.C. '31

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### LATE AUTUMN

The earth is brown and sere, and hard with frost.  
The trees are stripped of leaves and all are bare.  
The lovely verdant garments, which they wear  
In summer days, are scattered now and lost.  
The harsh December wind howls o'er the mead,  
The birds are hurried in their southward flight.  
The seas are rough and angry with the might  
Of winds, which bend each tree like some frail reed.  
It seems destruction; but, as to the mind,  
Comes the immensity of nature's plan,  
One sees that all these changes are designed  
As favors and as benefits to man.  
For 'tis God's way. 'Tis His all pow'rful will.  
Nature obeys, and hastens to fulfil.

D.M. '32

