# **Rifleman J.D Warburton r/14460**

**11th Kings Royal Rifles**

#### Prisoner of war from

**30th Nov 1917-8th Nov 1918**

**Captured at Masnievers near Cambria on the morning of the 30th of November 1917 I got marched with about 3000 comrades to a place called Courtray and then on to Le. Quesnoy a distance of about 25 miles in one day. Here we stayed in a small but beautiful church, which could hold about 500 men. At the time we arrived at this church which was about 6 o’clock a service** **was being held by the Belgium civilians but they were turned out in the midst of the service by the German sentries to put us in for the night. We had to sleep there the best we could all huddled up together lying on top of one another some even lying on the Alter or in any place where they could possibly squeeze themselves. Most of our lads that was with us were wounded but there was no treatment for them, we was all pocketed together for the night the wounded moaning and shouting all night through. Well we got over the night all right and the following morning we are put in cattle trucks, 50 men to a truck to start for our ride to Germany. We just had a small portion of BLACK BREAD and a substitute for coffee before we set off. The bread itself is a sight to look at being very black and sour and stuff round it like bits of sawdust whilst the coffee is nothing more than burnt barley and burnt oats.**

**Well we start our journey to Dulmun West Germany and we arrive two days later on the 4th of December. We were in these trucks for 48 hours with nothing to eat, drink or smoke. We arrived at Haltern Station about 7 miles from the prison camp at Dulmun and then we had to walk the remaining distance.**

**By this time some of our boys were too weak to stand and with having no food and the Snow on the ground we was perished. Well we arrived at the camp during the night of Dec 4th 1917 and about 500 men are put in a small hut 25 yards long and 10 yards wide until the following morning. We then go for a bath and taken to our Cages where we have everything examined and most of the photographs are taken from you also any article that are liable to cause damage to the sentries. In this case I proved myself one too many for the Germans. I was wearing my shrapnel helmet at the time and I put my photos and a razor inside the lining of the steel helmet.**

**My address at this time is:**

**Rfm J.D. Warburton r/14460**

**11th Kings Royal Rifles**

**Gefangenlager Dulmun**

**13/Westf 48882 Group 3**

**Barrack 14b Germany**

**We stayed at this camp until the 17th of January 1918 and during this period we had been living on a slice of black bread and burnt barley and some cabbage water to last you 24 hours. We had what they call an emergency parcel between two men for X/mas and one for New Year but these only seemed to make us crave for more food. Well everything we had we sold for a slice of the terrible black bread. We sold our books and cardigan jackets just for a slice of this black filth, and went about barefooted in the snow until we got a pair of these big Dutch wooden clogs or canal boots, as we used to call them.**

**We leave Dulmun on the 17th of January 1918 and entrain for Belgium, where to we did not know for the time being. This changed our address but we never went to this camp but we had to address our letters thus:**

**Rfm J.D.Warburton r/14460**

**11th Kings Royal Rifles**

## Gefangenlager

**Friedrichofelde 13/ Wesel**

**48882 427 69th ab Ck5**

**No 1 boy Germany**.

**We never went to Friedrichofelde.**

**Well our time** **at Dulmun was terrible about 200 gram of black bread a day and some cabbage water but worse was to follow. Well we got in the train and departed for Belgium where we arrived at Tournia on the 19th of January the journey again taking us 48hrs with only a slice of bread and some soup at Mons.**

**Well we have had nothing to smoke since being captured 7 weeks ago only burnt tea leaves, bark off trees and fallen leaves wrapped up in newspaper or paper of any description. We had to start work at Tournia (which is just outside the French border) on railways aerodromes etc. when we started work our rations of food altered a bit. We had a loaf to last us 4 days and 1 soup a day. The loaf itself is about 8 inches long and 4 inches wide but it weighed about 4 lbs. We had a terrible time in trying to keep alive, we was eating potato peelings and mangles and anything we could get hold of whilst the sentries wasn’t looking at us. We had to do a lot of shell lifting and it took two men all their time to raise a 60lb shell from off the floor, so you can just imagine the terrible state we was in at the time. There was 2000 of us arrived at Tournia on the 19th of January and in less than 3 months over 500 of these lads died of starvation and dysentery. We kept on as best we could. To get to work we had to pass through the town of Tournia and here I saw the first terms of brutality used by the Germans. When we passed through the town the Belgium civilians used to stand at their doors and some of them would have a slice of bread in their hands. As soon as our lads saw it there was a rush of about 200 men after 1 slice of bread and the German sentries would run at them with sticks, horse whips and even use their rifles and bayonets. On one occasion a young lady was giving us a piece of bread, a German sentry struck her senseless with his rifle. This roused the British blood in us and we rushed at him, but we stood very little chance the weak state that we was in. The sentries loaded their rifles and fixed bayonets and three of our lads were shot down. If we saw a cigarette end lying in the street we would rush out for it at the risk of being shot or struck down by the sentries. On the 5th of March it proved too much for me and I tried to escape but was caught and kept inside the barracks.**

**I was quite used to being knocked about by this time. I escaped work until the 6th of April when 50 of us were sent to a place called Pont a Chin to work on an aerodrome. Everything seemed to change then with only being a few of us together. We got soup every night from the Belgians and a small Belgium loaf every week also, a packet of cigarettes, shirts, socks etc and any little thing they could possibly get for us. The biggest majority of us had worn our shirts for about 3 or 4 months so you can tell how we felt and what these clean shirts meant to us. Twelve of us go to work at a depot where they stored airplane wings benzene for the engines and airplane sheds. Here we had our best time of being a prisoner. There was a German sergeant in charge of us and he used to send the sentry back to the barracks. He treated us very well and gave us cigarettes. After we had been here 3 weeks we got our parcels through from England from the Red Cross Society and what a relief it was to us for if it had been another month without it I don’t think there would have been many of us left alive. They consisted of bully beef army rations beans, biscuits, jam, soap, cigarettes, sardines and sausage. Well we altered after this and got more like ourselves every day for we had 6 of these parcels a month, and 6 a month of biscuits from Switzerland. Just outside where I worked was a small Estamet or Public House as we call them in England and the German Sergeant used to let me go there every day. I got to know the two girls there and they used to give me a bag of potatoes every day. We are practically ourselves again and we get our photos taken on the sly. We were very sorry to leave this place which we did on the 19th of September after being there 5 ½ months. The two girls that I am well aquatinted with cried very much when we left and made me promise to go back there after the war was settled.**

**We left this place and marched to Froidmont about 9 miles away and here we rejoined our company once more. Then things began to get like the old stamp again but we did not stay at Froidmont long as our lads were making a push and driving fritz back. We left Froidmont on the 12th October 1918 and marched back to Tournia a distance of 5 miles. There we had to wait on the station for 12 hours of a train, which came in the following morning. This train took us to Rebaix a distance of 30 miles and it took us a day to do this short distance. We only stayed here 8 days as our boys had got fritz on the run and we marched to Lessines on the 25th of October 1918 where we stayed in a school. We had a few concerts here amongst ourselves, for the Germans weren’t bothering with us as much now. A few of us broke away at night to get food from the civilians but we always got caught when we got back. They could not try us as we were always on the move. Our airplanes used to come over and knock spots out of the German transport. We had only a short stay there however and we had to pull the German transport with us. We were marched all the time and we did about 75 miles in 4 days. However 4 of us break away and the same night we get back to Lessines after being fired at. We met 4 German officers just before we got trough and they told us the armistice was signed and didn’t we give a cheer. We met our boys at Lessines and were well looked after this finishes being a prisoner but I will try and explain a few things. The boys gave us a few old Blighty cigarettes and what a treat they was. Well we can hardly realize that we are free after 12 months of brutal treatment with the Germans.**

**It is a very marvelous thing how the German fighting men have stuck it on the food that they have been getting for so long. The food being little better than ours. Well in fact when our parcels came through from England we were better off. The German boots the tops are made of paper and have wooden heels on. A penny tablet of soap in England would cost him 7/- (35p) if he could get it. Tea £3 for a pound same with coffee and more for cocoa but he cannot get them. When I got my boots through from England a German sergeant wanted to exchange me with his own and give me 300 marks, which is about £13. But I could afford to laugh at him as we were getting fed up with our parcels and the boots were more good to me than his money.**

**I will give you a few insights of the German soldier. After marching for 4 days pulling his transport a distance of about 75 miles with nothing to eat only what the Belgium civilians gave us on the road. The German soldier himself is a well-disciplined man for in the German army a private has to salute a senior soldier. The men of the firing line are a different stamp of men than those who have never seen any fighting and men who have been in the trenches have treated a lot better and with more respect than those who have not seen nothing for they know what the men have gone through midst shot and shell and gas of the enemy. The German who has not seen the line are just the opposite and treat you as dogs, hit you with rifles, kick you and do so much harm to you as they possibly can. But I will not carry on with the treatment by the Germans but I am going to amuse myself with a few passing thoughts.**

**Passing thought No. 14/18.**

**By Rfm J.D.Warburton a**

**Comrade with Rfm J.Waldran of Nottingham a prisoner with me for 12 months.**

**After many months of living under the hands of the Germans I now take up my pen and amuse myself with a few thoughts with the glorious feeling of liberty (In living reality) having now come into the hands of the British boys again to enjoy liberty again and live the borrowed life given to us to enjoy. You cannot tell the joy, which thrills every released prisoner’s heart after a life of suffering and tyranny for 12 months under the so-called “Hulkered Germans”. By the way we are all making our way back to Germany on foot after working hard behind the lines. We have been on the march for nearly a week pulling the German transport as you know Germany is done up especially in transport. Having got to the battle of Waterloo the order to about turn came as we were about to be handed over to our own officers. That day we marched to Lessines where we met two of our patrols. Having reported to our Headquarters, which was in the townhall at Lessines, we have a good rest and plenty to eat real good English food. And many enticing meals given to us by the ever kind and generous hearted Belgium civilians who gave us every welcome and cordial greetings of ((Bon Voyage)) or safe journey to our dear homes and good and dear old England. Which has been our objective for the last 12 months. On we journeyed from Lessines to meet our mates, which were some great distance away. Who came up as soon as the roads were made good for traffic after the Jerry’s usual manner of destroying everything they left behind by mines. By the time the German swine are out of Belgium now shouted at and cussed by the people they left behind. (The Glorious Victors) “I don’t think” went their miserable way dragging their weary legs and tails behind them. We are now waiting to continue our march to the motors, which take us to the nearest railhead where we shall entrain. I may say that we have just had a glorious feed of bacon and white bread and good English tea and plenty to smoke. Our boys received us admiringly again showing the live British feeling of comradeship which is unlike the German swine. How eager our boys are listening to our tales of suffering and harsh treatment by the pigs of Germans. Well worthy of the name of swine’s and how our boys trounced the Germans on learning of their galleous treatment towards us British prisoners of war.**

**Anyhow we are happy and glad now and hope soon to join our dear ones who are waiting our return with outstretched arms to the dear old shores and homes of England so with these thoughts I now conclude my passing thoughts.**

**Mr. J.D.Warburton**

Otherwise a rifleman in the Kings Royal Rifles escaped prisoner of war.

**A slight insight of our treatment.**

**When we went out to work we went out in parties of 50 or perhaps 100. In charge 4 sentries and a Corporal. When we was in our worst condition, when men were dying of starvation we could hardly lift 20lbs or perhaps we would be digging trenches or something like that for about 8 hours a day. We used to draw ¼ of a loaf and some substitute coffee at 6 o’clock every morning and straight out to work eating our bread as we went through the streets. When arriving at our work the Germans used to show us what to do and if we halted for a minute through sheer exhaustion the sentries would strike us anywhere with their rifle or kick you whether you got killed or not didn’t matter to him. We carried this on until between 4 and 5 in the afternoon and then you returned to barracks. When you got a basin of his so called soup and some more coffee but no bread. This had to last you until next morning. When out at work it was all one cry with Jerry “Luce Luce” which means get on with the work, and swine which was one of the Germans best words for us. After we started getting our parcels through from England and got strong again they did not strike us as much for they knew we would turn on them again, but they still called us. When we were at Rebaix making a railway a sentry struck me. Me and my pal set into him took his rifle from him and would have killed him but for some German engineers interfering with us. But they did not report us or we would most probably have been shot. I have had many narrow escapes like this of being killed. There are some Germans better than others but there are no good ones, as we have found out to our cost.**

**A few places I have been to since a.p.o.w.**

**La Vacquerric, Le Quesnoy, Courtroy, Aachen West, Haltun, Mons, Namur, Froyennes, Ramegness Chin, Marquain, Hertain, Masneevees, Fresnoy, Courtria, Wonne, Dulmun, Liege, Tournia, Pont a Chin, Templeuve, Blandain, Orcq, Froidmont, Espelchin, Ath, Maraes Mon Chien, Oligries Bassily, Enghien, Tubize, Mont St Pont, Braine Le Loo, Wandie, Brausmaux, Flemable-Haute, Huy, Java, Willemeau, Rebaix, Lessines, Chislenghun, Marcy, Petit Enghien, St Renelde, Braine Le Chateux, Kasteil Brakel, Jupille, Stellwurk, Amay, Bas-Ohay.**

**Before Capture.**

Balogne, Elaples, Oalais, Au Breale, Wennizeele, Herzeele, Waloce, Paperenge, Elverdinge, Flamintenge, Jpres, Castel, Kemel, Pilkin Ridge, Langernarhe, Zonnenbeck, Zillebeck, Proven, Badagem, Steenbeck, Armenties, St Pol, Frevent, Doullens, Bus, Hebuterne, Sailly, Mailly, Balou, Merecourt, Ribemont Brey, Morlancourt, Mayalt, Brelse, Heilly, Beurre, Vause, Vair, Citidal, Fricourt, Mametz, Ville se Coubie, Amines, Frankvillers, Baizeaux, Warloy, Baillon, Tautencourt, Lavieville, Henencourt, Guillimont, Albert, Bapume, Peron, Roues, La Harve, Harfleur, Nurluu, Heudecourt, Fins, Goozecourt, Villers Plough, La Vacquerrie, Bollezeele, Arneeke, Lessines, Flobecq, Ogy, Ellezenne, Ronse, Ansercoul, Rassuyt, Celle, Sweetghem, Avelghem, Belleghem, Courtri.