# The Fourth Berlin Broadcast

[Official transcript made by the German Foreign Office]

Before beginning my talk tonight - the fourth of a series of five dealing with the five phases of my internment - I should like to say another few words on another subject.

The Press and Public of England seem to have jumped to the conclusion that I have been in some way bribed or intimidated into making these broadcasts. This is not the case.

I did not "make a bargain", as they put it, and buy my release by agreeing to speak over the radio. I was released because I am sixty years old - or shall be in October. The fact that I was free a few months before that date was due to the efforts of my friends. As I pointed out in my second talk, if I had been sixty when I was interned, I should have been released at the end of the first week.

My reason for broadcasting was a simple one. In the course of my period of internment I received hundreds of letters of sympathy from American readers of my books, who were strangers to me, and I was naturally anxious to let them know how I had got on.

Under existing conditions, it was impossible to answer these letters, - and I did not want to be so ungrateful and ungracious as to seem to be ignoring them, and the radio suggested itself as a solution.

I will now go on to my experiences in the Citadel of Huy - the last of the places where we were lodged before we finally settled at Tost, in Upper Silesia.

In putting [together] these talks on How To Be An Internee Without Previous Training, I find myself confronted by the difficulty of deciding what aspects of my daily life, when in custody, will have entertainment value for listeners.

When the war is over and I have my grandchildren as an audience, this problem, of course, will not arise. The unfortunate little blighters will get the whole thing, night after night, without cuts. But now I feel that a certain process of selection is necessary. A good deal that seems to an internee thrilling and important is so only to himself. Would it interest you, for instance, to hear that it took us four hours to do the twenty-five mile journey from Liege to Huy, and that there were moments during the walk up the mountain-side when the old boy thought he was going to expire? No, I thought not.

It is for this reason that I propose to pass fairly lightly over my five weeks' stay at Huy. Don't let that name confuse you, by the way. It is spelled H-u-y, and in any other country but Belgium would be pronounced Hoo-ey. So remember that, when I say Huy, I don't mean "we" - I mean Huy.

The Citadel of Huy is one of those show places they charge you two francs to go into in times of peace. I believe it was actually built in the time of the Napoleonic wars, but its atmosphere is purely mediaeval. It looks down on the River Meuse from the summit of a mountain - the sort of mountain Gutzon Borglum would love to carve pictures on - and it is one of those places where, once you're in, you're in. Its walls are fourteen feet thick, and the corridors are lighted by bays, in which are narrow slits of windows. It is through these, if you are a married man with a wife living in Belgium, that you shout to her when she comes to visit you. She stands on the slope below, as high up as she can get, and shouts to you. Neither can see the other, and the whole thing is like something out of Il Trovatore.

The only place in the building from which it is possible to get a view of somebody down below is the window of what afterwards became the canteen room. Men would rush in there and fling themselves through the window and lie face down on the broad sill. It was startling till one got used to it, and one never quite lost the fear that they would lose their heads and jump. But this lying on sills was forbidden later, as were most things at Huy, where the slogan seemed to be "Go and see what the internees are doing, and tell them they mustn't". I remember an extra parade being called, so that we might be informed that stealing was forbidden. This hit us very hard.

These extra parades were a great feature of life at Huy, for our Kommandant seemed to have a passion for them.

Mind you, I can find excuses for him. If I had been in his place, I would have ordered extra parades myself. His headquarters were down in the town, and there was no road connecting the Citadel with the outer world -just a steep, winding path. So that, when he came to visit us, he had to walk. He was a fat, short-legged man in the middle sixties, and walking up steep, winding paths does something to fat, short-legged men who are not as young as they were. Duty called him now and then to march up the hill and to march down again, but nothing was going to make him like it.

I picture him starting out, full of loving kindness - all sweetness and light, as it were - and gradually becoming more and more soured as he plodded along. So that when he eventually came to journey's end with a crick in the back and the old dogs feeling as if they were about to burst like shrapnel, and saw us loafing around at our ease, the sight was too much for him and he just reached for his whistle and blew it for an extra parade.

Extra parades were also called two or three times a day by the Sergeant, when there was any announcement to be made. At Tost we had a notice board, on which camp orders were posted each day, but this ingenious system had not occurred to anyone at Huy. The only way they could think of there of establishing communication between the front office and the internees was to call a parade. Three whistles would blow, and we would assemble in the yard, and after a long interval devoted to getting into some sort of formation we would be informed that there was a parcel for Omer - or that we must shave daily - or that we must not smoke on parade - or that we must not keep our hands in our pockets on parade - or that we might buy playing cards - (and next day that we might not buy playing cards) - or that boys must not cluster round the guard-room trying to scrounge food from the soldiers - or that there was a parcel for Omer.

I remember once, in the days when I used to write musical comedies, a chorus girl complaining to me with some bitterness that if a carpenter had to drive a nail into a flat, the management would be sure to call a chorus rehearsal to watch him do it, and I could now understand just how she had felt. I don't know anything that brings the grimness of

life home to one more than hearing three whistles blow just as you are in the middle of a bath - and leaping into your clothes without drying - and lining up in the yard and waiting twenty minutes at attention - and then being informed that there is a parcel for Omer.

It was not that we had anything against Omer. We all liked him - and never better than when he had just had a parcel, but what embittered us was that there was never a parcel for anyone else. He happened to have been interned right on the spot where all his friends and admirers lived, while the rest of us were far from home and had not yet been able to get in touch with our wives. It was that that made these first weeks of internment such a nightmare. Not receiving parcels was merely a side-issue. It would have been nice to have had some, but we could do without them. But we did wish that we could have got some information as to how our wives were getting on. It was only later at Tost, that we began to receive letters and to be able to write them.

The few letters which did trickle in to Huy from time to time were regarded by the authorities with strong suspicion. After a parade had been called, for us to watch them given out, their recipients would be allowed a couple of minutes to read them - then they would have to hand them back to the Corporal, who tore them up. And when Omer got one of his parcels, its contents would all be opened before he was permitted to take them away - from the first can of sardines to the last bit of chocolate. I believe this was due entirely to the men who, at the end of the last war, wrote books telling how clever they had been at escaping from German prison camps by means of codes sent by letter and compasses and so on enclosed in potted meat. They meant no harm, but they certainly made it tough for us.

"Tough" is the adjective I would use to describe the whole of those five weeks at Huy. The first novelty of internment had worn off, and we had become acutely alive to the fact that we were in the soup and likely to stay there for a considerable time. Also, tobacco was beginning to run short, and our stomachs had not yet adjusted themselves to a system of rationing, which, while quite good for a prison camp, was far from being what we had been accustomed to at home. We were hearty feeders who had suddenly been put on a diet, and our stomachs sat up on their hind legs and made quite a fuss about it.

Rations consisted of bread, near-coffee, jam or grease, and soup. Sometimes, instead of bread, we would get fifty small crackers apiece. When this happened, a group of men would usually club together, each contributing fifteen crackers, which would be mashed up and mixed with jam and taken to the cookhouse to be baked into a cake. It was always a problem whether it was worth sacrificing fifteen crackers to this end. The cake was always wonderful, but one's portion just slid down one's throat and was gone. Whereas one could chew a cracker.

People began to experiment with foods. One man found a bush in the corner of the yard with berries on it, and ate those - a sound move, as it turned out, for they happened by a fluke not to be poisonous. Another man used to save some of his soup at mid-day, add jam and eat the result cold in the evening. I myself got rather fond of wooden matches. You chew your match between the front teeth, then champ it up into a pulp and swallow. Shakespeare's Sonnets also make good eating, especially if you have a little cheese to go with them. And when the canteen started, we could generally get cheese.

Not much of it, of course. The way the canteen worked was that two men were allowed to go to the town with a guard and bring back as much as they could carry in a haversack apiece - the stuff being split eight hundred ways. It generally worked out at a piece of cheese about two inches long and two wide per man.

When the tobacco gave out, most of us smoked tea or straw. Tea-smokers were unpopular with the rest of their dormitory, owing to the smell caused by their activities - a sort of sweet, sickly smell which wraps itself round the atmosphere and clings for hours. Tea-smoking has also the disadvantage that it leads to a mild form of fits. It was quite usual to see men, puffing away, suddenly pitch over sideways and have to be revived with first aid.

Another drawback to Huy was that it appeared to have been expecting us even less than Liege had done. You may remember my telling you last week that our arrival seemed to come upon Liege as a complete surprise, and that there was nothing provided in the way of vessels to sip our soup out of. What Huy was short on was bedding.

An internee does not demand much in the way of bedding - give him a wisp or two of straw and he is satisfied - hut at Huy it looked for a while as if there would not even be straw. However, they eventually dug us out enough to form a thin covering on the floors, but that was as far as they were able to go. Of blankets there were enough for twenty men. I was not one of the twenty. I don't know why it is, but I never am one of the twenty men who get anything. For the first three weeks, all I had over me at night was a raincoat, and one of these days I am hoping to meet Admiral Byrd and compare notes with him.

Though I probably shan't let him get a word in edgeways. He will start off on some anecdote about the winter evenings at the South Pole, and I shall clip in and say, "Juss a minute, Byrd, jussaminute. Let me describe to you my sensations at Huy from Aug. Three, nineteen-forty, till the day my dressing gown arrived. Don't talk to me about the South Pole - it's like someone telling Noah about a drizzle."Well, now you see what I meant when I said just now that what seems important to an internee merely makes the general public yawn and switch off the radio. From the rockbound coast of Maine to the Everglades of Florida, I don't suppose there is a single soul who gives a hoot that, when I was at Huy, ice formed on my upper slopes and my little pink toes dropped off one by one with frost-bite. But, boy, wait till I meet my grandchildren!

However, as somebody once observed, it is always darkest before the dawn. And, as Methuselah said to the reporter who was interviewing him for the local sheet and had asked what it felt like to live to nine hundred – "The first five hundred years are hard, but after that it's pie". It was the same with us. The first seven weeks of our internment had been hard, but the pie was waiting just around the corner. There was, in short, a good time coming. On September the eighth, exactly five weeks from the day of our arrival, we were paraded and this time informed - not that Omer had received a parcel, but that we were to pack our belongings and proceed once more to an unknown destination.

This proved to be the village of Tost in Upper Silesia.