

Nymegan Diary—1964

Prison Service Team, 3rd out of 670

The Team

Leader L. J. HAYWARD (P.E. Specialist, Rochester)

Members

K. L. BONES
(Officer P.E.I., Wormwood Scrubs)

M. HOLMES
(Officer P.E.I., Pentonville)

W. KINTON
(Officer P.E.I., Morton Hall)

G. S. MATHIE
(Officer P.E.I., Hull)

E. C. SMITH
(Officer P.E.I., Maidstone)

Diary of Events

Sunday, 26th July

All met at Pentonville Prison 5.0 p.m. After an excellent tea adjourned to the Officers' Club. The team in good spirit and there joined by members of Pentonville staff, Mr. Fairn, Mrs. McCorquodale, Mr. & Mrs. Healey, for a send-off party—no speeches.

Caught the 11.0 p.m. train from Victoria for Dover and the cross channel ferry.

Monday, 27th July

Boarded a very full boat at 12.30 a.m. Little room for luggage, less for sitting down, we had in any case decided to sleep rough this night to save expense. "Big Jock"

Mathie soon had his head down on the hard deck—woken by a kindly sailor and told that the deck was wet.

After enduring three hours of Boy Scout singing in the best 'Little Brown Jug' tradition, finally landed at Ostend *en route* to Nymegen, reached at 2.0 p.m.

As soon as we passed through the station barriers we were conscious of the atmosphere—one charged with excitement and anticipation. As we made our way from the station to the reporting-in point we had a feeling of being part of something really big—something that the people of Nymegen had been looking forward to for a

long time. The streets were full of gay folk, flags fluttered on all sides, temporary stands and barriers were already in position and the whole place swarmed with photographers and television equipment.

Once booked in we made our way to the "Internaat Jonkerbous," a school run by Brothers for backward children. This was to be the team's lodging during the four days of the march. There was some anxiety when it was found that the school was five kilometres from Nymegen and that our starting time was to be at 4.30 a.m. the next day.

Slept soundly until 6.0 p.m. then to Nymegen for the opening ceremony and the march past held in the Sports Stadium.

What a spectacle! The stadium was packed, standing room only. Whilst waiting for the Opening Ceremony the large crowd was entertained by Youth Groups marching, performing sequence exercises and gymnastics.

Then came the start of the ceremony—the entry into the stadium of the first military band, the combined bands of the 4th and 5th Hussars, then the band of the Surrey Regiment followed by a third and finally by the band of the R.A.F. Each band was greeted with equally heartwarming enthusiasm by these gay, likeable Dutch people. Then came the hoisting of the flag of each country represented in the March; a rather long drawn out affair since the hoisting of every flag was accompanied by the

appropriate National Anthem.

The climax of the evening was the march past of all teams. At one stage the arena was a mass of humanity dressed in every type and colour of uniform one can imagine. The popular teams, to judge from the applause, were the Metropolitan Police (complete with helmets) the Israeli Army (complete with tambourines and female cheer leaders) and the Dutch Army, Navy and Air Force teams.

Tuesday, 28th July—1st day

A 2.30 a.m. rise, last minute adjustments to socks, boots, laces, track suits, then breakfast—a depressingly small one by British standards—bus to Nymegen and the difficulty of finding the way in the darkness to the starting point.

By the time we had checked in, received our identity cards for the day and found our place in the team order of departure it was 4.30 a.m. and time to set out on what was to be the most gruelling, mentally and physically exhausting, four days of our lives.

We were behind the Metropolitan Police and accordingly received a great deal of applause—what was left over after the very popular "Bobbies" had gone by. We didn't mind that one bit, it gave us encouragement. Through the town, over the river Waal and into the country in the direction of Arnhem. A short rest after 14 kilometres, a check for blisters and off again in the early light of that Tuesday morning on the second stretch.

After 20 kilometres we found the pace of the police too slow and set out on our own, striking a much faster pace. This took us past the Dutch Police and Military teams, French teams and German Army teams until at the end of a further 20 kilometres we stopped for a drink near the military rest camp outside Elst. Our feet were sore but free of blisters.

The third and last leg was soul destroying; 15 kilometres over rough roads and cobbled streets with the super-structure of the Waal bridge (the means of re-entry to Nymegen) towering high above the flat countryside and never seeming to get any nearer. We eventually reached it and, crossing over with an American Infantry team, who seemed as physically shattered as we were, we reported in, nine hours and ten minutes after starting out.

We were the second team across the finishing line on that first day.

Our immediate problem, however, was to get from the finishing point to our hostel, about five kilometres and a twenty minute bus ride away. With some difficulty we got to the bus stop, waited ages for a bus then, in best continental fashion, had to stand all the way.

Once at our hostel we stripped, had a shower, burst our blisters and slept until tea time.

By 7.0 p.m. we were able to talk fairly rationally about the day's experiences. By 8.0 p.m. we had decided that:

- (i) The team was suffering from dehydration, having had no food and one drink during the day's march.
- (ii) The pace on future days would be kept to a steadier rate.
- (iii) Any offers of liquid refreshment along the route would in future be gratefully accepted.
- (iv) There would be more than one stop on the day's march.
- (v) Everyone would be in bed by 8.05 p.m.

Wednesday, 29th July—2nd day

Out of bed at 2.30 a.m., gentle pressure with finger and thumb to test the very sore spots, a few steps to test those not so sore. Surprise at the improvement on the previous night's condition.

At 4.15 a.m. we were once again at the start line greeting old friends of a day's acquaintance, finding our team position and making final adjustments to socks, boots and laces. By now some 1,300 competitors had fallen by the wayside as we struck out, again behind the Metropolitan Police, through Beuningen (7 kilometres) and Ewijk (10 kilometres) where we left the police enjoying tea, milk and soft drinks served from the back of an estate car which had accompanied them from England. Further on, a short stop for milk (half a litre each man) and then we were heading for Druten (20 kilometres).

By now we had become very friendly with a Police Inspector

from Wakefield who, at every large town and at points along the route, would call to us "Still six?" or "None away?" to receive a chorused reply "Still six." We came to look forward to this and it was a great morale booster. By this time we were beginning to be recognised as the six man team by competitors and crowd alike.

The last 12 kilometres we had some difficulty. Our feet were very sore. 'Tearaway' Smith had an enormous blister; the pride of the march, Bill Kinton, was in trouble with his knee; our leg muscles were tightening up (the legacy of the fast pace on the first day) and had it not been for the provision of salt tablets by an Army medical orderly, whose own team had dropped out, we should have been in a sorry state.

We finished that day the third team to cross the finishing line.

That night big Jock Mathie massaged the German team sharing our lodgings and this broke the ice with them; up until then they had kept very much aloof. The fact that we seemed to make a good recovery after the night's rest was largely due to the efficient massage given to us by Jock Mathie after each day's march. He worked hard on our tightened muscles and sore limbs for over an hour each evening, entirely disregarding his own tiredness.

Thursday, 30th July—3rd day

The usual 4.30 a.m. start with everyone feeling stiff but surpris-

ingly fit after the hard second day. The police were not at the start with us as we struck out at a good pace followed by an Army group.

Picking our way, expertly by this time, over the cobbled roads we marched 14 kilometres to the first military camp where the officer in charge put all the facilities there at our disposal—cheap milk, salt tablets, First Aid, etc. A short break and we were off again heading towards the hills. Holland was not so flat after all! We could see the road winding away into the distance like a ribbon, sometimes long stretches before it dipped out of sight into a valley, at others creeping over the top of the nearest hill and then over the one beyond. The road was full of marching men like a huge multi-coloured caterpillar winding into the distance.

This was a hard day, tedious and very hot with the sun beating down. Tempers rather frayed, we began to get unreasonably annoyed with the sight and sound of each other, and for a time anyone who spoke got his head snapped off. Bill Kinton's knee was again giving him some pain, Les Hayward's right sole was badly blistered and 'Tearaway' Smith's blister was giving trouble—he had not been able to break through the hard skin to burst it; however, to see a solitary Dutchman go past at an alarming rate—in clogs—brought us to our senses and we pressed on.

We shortly caught up with a team of French paratroops singing what

we took to be the French equivalent "Ball of Kerriemuir," except that there seemed to be twice as many verses. This we found an ordeal, Les Hayward remarking wearily "I don't mind them singing if they'd only sing like Welshmen"

The crowds on this day were growing very much larger; there were some beautiful girls lining the route and children would give us water and walk along holding our hands. At one stage Jock Mathie had one little girl holding tightly to each hand and a third one on his back, with the rest of us two each—the crowd seemed to love this sort of thing.

We were 7th team to cross the finishing line that day. If we could get out of bed in one piece the fourth and last morning, and if our feet and knees held out we were home and dried.

Friday, 31st July—4th day

This was the big day. From the very start the crowds were out in vast numbers and military bands were everywhere.

The day's march seemed to us the longest yet, but still throughout the day we felt very little pain from tired muscles or blistered feet, carried along by the feeling that here was to be the climax of four day's hard effort and that the goal was finally in sight.

We struck a good pace with Keith Bones and Chippy Holmes stepping it out in the front files. We were able to help a member

of one of the police teams that day by carrying one of their team whose knee would no longer bear his weight—the cumulative effect of jarring the joint over the past three days. Nymegen seemed a long way off, but we finally reached the huge pontoon bridge spanning the river at Grave. This had been erected by Dutch engineers specially for the occasion.

The final march in is hard to describe adequately. The last six kilometres reminded us of the Mall on Coronation day. Specially constructed eight-tiered stands lined both sides of the route, children ran out into the road with huge bunches of flowers.

We marched in, the first team in the final parade, to the accompaniment of cheers and clapping. Through the streets and past the saluting base filled with Staff Officers of all Nationalities. The Commandant looked surprised not to see an Army team appear at this stage but seemed a little reassured to see the Union Jacks on our track suits.

The last few steps to the final check point, the award of a shield for a successful team effort and then the Nymegen medal given to each of us.

It was all over. It had been hard going at times but we'd learnt a lot about the march—and about each other. We hoped, too, that perhaps it had done something for the Service.

Let's send another team next year, let's make it a bigger one and let's make it another team prize.

Notes on the March

(a) The team's final placing in the March was 3rd out of some 670 teams. The position being calculated on an overall time basis.

(b) There is no question that in terms of training our men had very much less in the way of organised courses than other competitors. The Army teams, for example, had been training over a continuous period of five months prior to the event.

(c) A formal letter of appreciation was sent to Officer P.E.I. Mathie by the German team as a

result of his ministrations on their behalf.

(d) A number of points arose in connection with the reaction of the body to sustained marching, fatigue and dehydration. One man, though of slim build and in a good state of physical fitness at the beginning of the march, lost one stone in weight over the four days. Another sustained severe bruising round the knee joint brought on by having to adjust the length and frequency of his natural pace to fit the overall rhythm of the team (competitors were required to march as a team and keep in step). This bruising occurred in the cases of shorter men and of those above average height.

L. J. H., M. H. and A. H.



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