

These pages are photocopies of pages from a book written by Lt Col Kenneth F May of the Essex Regiment entitled Toothpaste for the Ass, and published in 1968 by Bracken Press of Hatfield.

In the book, Lt Col May recounts his experiences in Italy as a prisoner of war, his escape from prisoner of war camp near Piacenza after the Armistice in Sept 1943, the 3 or 4 months he spent in Cabanne/Farfanosa, and how he was smuggled by partisans on to a boat from Genoa to Corsica to return to England.

Pages 99 –149 relate his experiences in Cabanne and Farfanosa, where he and a small group of other soldiers received the most wonderful help from local partisans, most notably three members of the Cella family, whom he calls Baccium (properly spelt Bacciun), Wilhelmina, and Angelina (properly Angelino or Angirin). He reached Cabanne from near Piacenza via Ponte d'Olio and Bettola under the guidance of a young man called Eugene Osti, who was training to be a priest and had friends in Cabanne.

Pages 169-71 relate the use of the codeword Toothpaste for the Ass, following their safe arrival in Corsica.

Pages 202-3 are an epilogue, describing the contact Lt Col May had with the Cella family after the end of the War.

Lt Col May was a very close friend of my father and the uncle of a dear friend of mine. I personally knew him very well and had a deep respect for him. He died in the 1980s. He had no children.

If anyone has queries or comments to make on the contents of the book, he/she should get in touch with me either by email at denisons@btinternet.com or by post: John Denison, The Glebe Barn, Old Rectory lane, Pulborough, West Sussex RH20 2AF, England.

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avoided all roads. This was done deliberately, because we knew the Germans kept to the roads whenever they moved about the countryside, and most of the Fascists did as well. In fact we soon found out the form, which was this. The chance of being caught was more likely if we moved into or near a village particularly as the Germans were offering eighteen pounds sterling for every British prisoner of war handed over to them. There was more chance of finding an informer in the villages than amongst the odd hamlets and isolated farmsteads in the mountains. Besides, the Fascists were never popular with country people, and they would not venture far off the beaten track to catch an ex-prisoner.

Most days were fine and we slept in the open on a bed of dry bracken, but we also had some soakers, and then life was not so good. The Ligurian Mountains are largely covered with green beech, which is excellent wood for making charcoal, and this is quite an industry in Italy. The men who cut the wood and stack the charcoal pyres are absolute experts. They build their own little shacks in the mountains and live up there possibly for three or four months. They make several pyres and fire them. Each pyre takes about ten days to a fortnight to burn through. Then a gang of mules comes up and the charcoal is stacked in bundles and taken down to the nearest road, where a lorry is waiting to move it to the wholesaler. Burning charcoal in this way is quite a profitable business, and as one site is exhausted the charcoal burner moves on and repeats the performance but he leaves his shack behind. We found these shacks very useful indeed. Most of them were waterproof, but not all. They varied, some had thatched roofs, whilst others were roofed with tarred felting. The sides were either of thatch bound on tree poles laid the length of the hut, or alternatively they were made of poles, with the crevices packed with moss. When a fire was lighted, the smoke just went out of the door. We soon got used to that, and our clothes rivalled the smell of a Harris tweed. Sometimes the shacks were built entirely of stone with a rough slate roof. Whatever they were, they provided shelter, and the higher we climbed, the more grateful we were to find

one of these homely places. All their locations were known to the local country folk. Snaking all over the Ligurian Alps were endless paths; some were marked by various combinations of blue spots which indicated certain routes. The gradients in many cases were very cleverly made and the going was extremely good and well maintained. These paths were maintained by Fascist forest guards and were constantly used by the country folk; often they were quicker than going by road. What is more important, articles of doubtful origin and content could be more conveniently conveyed from place to place by mountain track than by a main road where any curious eyes could perhaps detect them. The black market was a national racket in Italy. Everybody had a hand in it, but only fools openly displayed the fact that they were engaged in it.

After several delays, we eventually arrived within sight of Cabanne, having cast off the other party after five days trek from the camp. Our priest very prudently did not wish the people of Cabanne to know that we were in the neighbourhood, much less show ourselves in the village, so we stopped in a tiny mountain chapel whilst he went down to the village to find out the lie of the land. During our trek we passed other parties. Sometimes close to and sometimes in the distance. The rule was that we never spoke a word, but the priest went forward and of course spoke in Italian. We never actually met any other British prisoners on the run, though we passed more than one camp containing some, judging by the obvious British blankets airing in the trees. Often we would see little parties of civilians on trek and they were invariably Italian soldiers, self demobilised, avoiding the Germans.

On the last trek into Cabanne it rained steadily and we arrived at a little chapel pretty well soaked, cold and tired. Directly it stopped raining, the priest went off to the village while we waited. It seemed ages before he returned with guides. During the time he was away it poured in torrents. The roof of the chapel leaked like a sieve and we all huddled round the rough altar. How those guides ever discovered a

way up was a mystery to all of us. They brought food and vino, and having wolfed these we followed the guides down. I remember quite distinctly that we literally held on to each other, scrambling down rough water courses by the help of two tiny pocket torches. The track, if it could be called one, linked and doubled back on its course, but the leading guide never faltered. He knew the way backwards, and his name was Baccium. That was his local nickname. He was one of the finest men it has ever been my good fortune to meet. He looked after us until we left the district. There was nothing he and his family didn't do for us, including risking their lives.

After at least an hour's journey we reached level ground and entered the village. The time was about 10 p.m., so nobody was about. We were taken to a big loft in a barn, where we bedded down on some straw having first had a drink and a talk with our guides and some friends in the local cafe — all behind closed doors.

The next morning our priest came to see us, and I could see he was worried. I used to talk a lot to him, and do a spot of interpreting, as he spoke French, and when he was not too excited he could understand my schoolboy French. Apparently his trouble was that his friend the priest in charge of Cabanne, was lukewarm in his enthusiasm, and not at all keen to help prisoners on the run. As we had already experienced, many Italians would give us food and then speed the parting guest. They were petrified that either the Fascists or the Germans would catch them helping us.

Our priest was keen that we should lie up in a house of a friend of his on the outskirts of Genoa, whilst he scouted for information. This appeared to us very vague, and highly dangerous. It looked extremely like walking into the lion's den, so we told him we would prefer to remain in the vicinity of Cabanne. On the previous night, apart from our guides, who we discovered were forming an anti-Fascist cell to carry out sabotage work, we also met in the cafe an Italian who was known to all as the "Commodore". He was a typically thick-set, sharp eyed little man, who talked nineteen to the dozen in

a mixture of Italian and French, making up with hands what he could not put over by his speech. A very good fellow, frightfully keen, but he was after fish — big fish too. He was the scout of an organisation emanating from Genoa, which was terribly keen to contact the Allies, either at Corsica or in Allied occupied Italy. Quite reasonably they considered that a British officer, (and the more senior the better) would be the ideal medium. Well, here was the very thing, a party consisting of a full Colonel, a Lieut-Colonel and two Majors. The other ranks — well, we will look after them. Colonel Gore was six feet four inches, and even I am a modest six feet one inch, so we had found by experience we could "put it over" if necessary. The Commodore's proposition was that we should link up with them, and in due course some of us would be smuggled through somehow to the Allies. From the start they would look after us, hide us, feed us, and continue to do this to those who were left behind. We were to remain in the Cabanne valley, as it was considered safe. A permanent contact would be maintained between "The Organisation" and our party. The chief idea of the organisation was, of course, for one or both Colonels to contact the Allies, explain the aim, composition, and scope of the organisation, and have money sent back to it and also agents with transmitting sets. In other words they wished to form a resistance group, capable of carrying out sabotage over a large area, but not in Genoa city itself. As I have indicated already, they would take care of the party, but they did not promise to get us all out.

We on the other hand said it must be all the party or nothing, but all the officers agreed that if one or two got out and rejoined the Allies we stood a very good chance of getting the remainder of the party out by Allied help, if the organisation would not play. Now we were not in a position to drive a hard bargain. For all we knew a Brigadier might have turned up in Cabanne the next day, and the Commodore would no doubt transfer his affection to him. We had very little money and we were 500 miles from the Allied lines. There were no guides or offers to take us South. In fact, the organisation's

agents had more or less got the scene taped. But we still had a certain hold over them. Colonel Gore knew General Montgomery and had served with him in England. That was a great pull and it did not require much imagination to enlarge on that point. We could sell their stocks very high to the Allies, if they in their turn played up to us and didn't double-cross us, and the first few weeks of being under their care would give a pointer as to their sincerity. In fact we could both be of mutual assistance to each other. We took a vote and we unanimously decided that we should throw in our lot with them.

This of course meant the severance of our connection with our priest. He was determined to go back to his home, where he had already arranged to hide two more officers from our camp. He would not, or he was not asked to join our organisation. In the light of future events I think that it was a great pity that he didn't. As I have said before, it is not always easy to follow the way the Italians reason and nobody offered to explain, so we said goodbye very sadly to our young priest. He was a stout lad, and I hope that one of these days we may meet again under happier circumstances. He certainly put us on the road to safety, and he deserves the highest credit for the job he did for us and to others. I only hope A.M.G.O.T. recognised his very pro-Allied efforts and very suitably rewarded him and his family.

The owner of the barn was a double-crosser. Beware of the Italian who has lived in the United States for years and has returned to Italy to live. He probably left his mother country because she didn't want him, and most likely he left the States for the same reason. As a type he's all out for money and has an ingratiating manner, which rubs one up the wrong way. Because he can say "O.K., big boy" he thinks he is one of us. We remained in this man's barn for about 36 hours and then we disappeared unbeknown to him. It was given out that we had cleared off South, but we were smuggled out and Baccium the guide took us along the road to his house, which is situated in the tiny hamlet of Farfanosa, about a mile up the road from Cabanne. Here we met his

sister Wilhelmina, and his brother Angelina. Their surname was Cella and because they did more for us than any other partisan and entered into our lives for several months to come, I give a pen picture of these three remarkable people who were so loyal, so honest, and so helpful.

Baccium Cella was a typical gamekeeper-cum-poacher. A tall gaunt man he stood over six feet, rugged in appearance, and not a bit like an Italian. In fact, put him in a kilt and he would pass for a highlander every time. He spoke in rather a clipped manner, but had a most engaging smile. Officially, I believe he was a fish custodian of the local river, for what that was worth. He had a house, the odd few cows and owned a bit of land. He knew all the country in sight as intimately as the palm of his right hand. Where the wild pear tree grew, or where a convenient and handy dead tree was lying were always known to Baccium. If any man could hide prisoners in these mountains, which he had known as a boy, it was Baccium. A widower with a small son, he was reticent by nature but as he got to know us so he opened up, and on many occasions entertained us until the late hours. He was a born hunter, an expert woodsman, and very handy at repairing boots, cutting hair and delivering a cow of its calf. In his spare time, which rapidly became his major pre-occupation, he became a partisan and a first class one at that. The hamlet of Farfanosa, consisted of about ten houses all occupied by Cellas, and all relations of Baccium. He was the senior and his word was law. What he said, everybody acted on, but a word about his relatives later. Baccium was the stoutest Italian I met in all my wanderings in that country. Poor as a church mouse as most of them were, but proud and independent. We were extremely lucky to have fallen under his protection. Wilhelmina, his younger sister was unmarried, and in private life was the village seamstress. A tall dark eyed, red cheeked woman, with many teeth missing, poor soul, but with a most engaging smile. She had the brains and initiative of the family, and I feel certain that on more than one occasion she created the urge for action. Baccium on the other hand having got his sister's idea, and it had sunk in, proceeded

to put it into action in a practical way. Wilhelmina took us all under her wing from the start. She soon mastered our names which she pronounced in a sing song way, and completely mothered us. She repaired our meagre wardrobes, dyed our battle dress blue, and when Major Paul had a touch of jaundice, she produced the family recipe which largely consisted of eggs and marsala and soon cured him. On many occasions she would visit us, sometimes by day or in the evening if it did not clash with the preparation of Baccium's supper, and she was indefatigable. On several occasions she climbed up to our final hide-out to give us a message from Baccium. Like most Italian countrywomen she was intensely religious, and irrespective of our religion she prayed for our safe return to our families. She was such a human soul too, and we all described our wives and children to her. She was most interested to know all about them. What age, and how many children? Any photos were eagerly scanned. She was very impressed by the clothes our women folk wore. Being a tailoress this intrigued her, but she always came to one conclusion, and that was that England was a very rich country, and that we must all be very wealthy to be able to afford such clothes and live in such attractive houses. Wilhelmina of course, kept house for her brothers. There was an elder sister too, very timid, who lived with other relations. Wilhelmina was an ardent partisan and loathed the Germans and the Fascists. With true country logic her summing up of the Fascist regime was that they took all and gave nothing in return, and the unfortunate farmer was compelled to sell all his produce to the Government at ruinous prices less a very little allowed for his own consumption. It was very interesting to hear the anti-Fascist point of view from her. Even allowing for the fact that she was bound to be biased, her conclusions all pointed to the fact that the Fascists put all their efforts and goods in the shop windows of the big towns and cities, and the country people came off a very bad second. In fairness to the Fascist regime, one must admit that their construction of roads and their maintenance was excellent. The grid system of electricity had spread its tentacles all over the country, even to

Farfanosa, but then the Government made everybody use it at a price. Railways were well maintained too, and ran to time, but to the poor struggling farmer these apparently generous benefits did not impress him one iota. As the war dragged on everything became in short supply with the result that the Black Market flourished and everybody was out for himself. The Cellas knew most of the answers for producing extra food. They had to if they were to take on the feeding of eight additional mouths. Then there was Angelina, less like his elder brother and sister it would be hard to imagine. He was a wizened looking man with a large mouth and thin lips, with an egg shaped head and rather slit eyes. He was a comical looking fellow in repose, and when he laughed he looked really funny. By nature you could not call Angelina energetic. He loved his wine, and frequently drowned his sorrows and cursed Mussolini and all his tribe in it. His real companion was his faithful ass. Many a time that animal brought him home when he was the worse for wear, either from the local or from a friend's house. Angelina just grabbed a handful of the animal's tail and followed him. The ass always brought him home in one piece. Normally he was the forager of the family. Angelina and his ass covered the country for miles, buying all kinds of commodities. Some of these were for the family, whilst others were sold at a profit. After we had linked up with his family, he spent a lot of time on the road, buying up food for us wherever he could find it. We saw quite a lot of him; he was our most frequent visitor to all our various hide-outs. Sometimes he would come alone after supper, but more often than not he would bring a cousin, by name, Aldo, who also dabbled in the Black Market and specialised in cigarettes. I should say that Angelina was the biggest twister under the sun, but he always played fair with us, and he loyally carried out Baccium's instructions to the letter. Drunk or sober he always turned up. If in the former condition you could bet that his ass had brought him along. Sometimes when he came up to the hide-out one could hear him a good way off talking to his ass. He loved a gossip, and regaled us with lewd jokes about Mussolini. He was a very useful man. Travelling about

the countryside he picked up odd bits of information, and he had that sixth sense or low cunning to simulate drunkenness whilst all the time he was listening intently for any chance remarks. No Fascist would get within an hour's journey of Farfanosa without Angelina knowing. It was usually Angelina who got the lowdown first on everything. These three were our chief outside contacts of the organisation, and were the go-betweens for ourselves and that body. After a few weeks we got to know most of Baccium's relations in Farfanosa and eventually, all of them knew us by name and regularly visited us on Sunday afternoons. It was the "piece de resistance" of the week. They always turned up in their best clothes, old and young, bringing a little gift with them, poor devils. These gifts were made possible by denying themselves. A gift might take the form of a handful of sugar or salt (very scarce in Northern Italy as there was no trade with Sicily), or perhaps a little pot of jam, or a cake made of eating chestnut flour. They all kept our secret, and even when we left, only three out of the whole hamlet said goodbye. It was wiser and safer for them to keep indoors, and though I say it myself, I feel certain they would all have liked to wish us good luck. I can see Wilhelmina now as I shook hands with her, saying with tears in her eyes, "You will not forget us Colonello. We will remember and pray for you all to reach your families." Yes, they were good friends, all of them, and in their simple way, very sincere. Fortunately, the corruption of Fascism had never entered their hearts. There will be many ex-prisoners who will say that they have experienced the same kindly folk when they were on the run. Unfortunately, in a country like Italy these peasants have no voice politically. They are not organised into a political party, and in any case, they are too uneducated to understand politics. Living an isolated life in the mountains, they take an isolated and independent view of life. All they want is to be left alone to carry out the simple farming of their land which their forefathers held. Governments may come and go, and as long as they are not overtaxed, then they do not grumble. Their lives revolve round their immediate families, and their amusements are very simple.

Having arrived at Baccium's house we were given a really good meal. It was hot and there was plenty of it and we washed it down with white wine. His house was on the only main road leading up to the valley, so it was essential that we did not remain there too long. After the meal, we were taken to a barn nearby and bedded down there for the night. As soon as possible we were moved up into the hills about a mile from the road, to a stone hut which had been built many years before by a charcoal burner. It had an open grate, very open, a tin roof which leaked a bit but it was just big enough to house the seven of us. Here we were to spend the next two months. At that time of year the leaves were on the trees, so our hide-out was well concealed. A hundred yards from the hut down a goat track, was a stream which supplied us with excellent drinking water and served for all our washing needs. Invariably Baccium or his brother would bring us up a hot meal in the evening, and in the morning one or two of the guides came up and spent the forenoon with us. This was most necessary as there were several odd parties of civilians using the mountain tracks, one of which went past our hut, and usually they were Italians. On each occasion we remained concealed in the hut, whilst one of the guides sauntered out and spoke to the people passing.

Our life from now on ran to a strict routine. Major Paul became our Quartermaster at the beginning of the trek from camp. He controlled the issue of food and arranged our meals. We were always very hungry, and some of us always wanted more, but he firmly and tactfully refused to exceed

the daily ration, in spite of grumbles. This was essential as we could not lay in a large store of food, and our only "iron rations" were what we had left in our Red Cross food tins. Bread, sugar, salt, milk and jam were brought up regularly by one or more of the guides. It was a stiff climb but they never failed us and we always had sufficient food. One of our constant cravings was for something to smoke. I think one of the strongest smokes that I have ever tackled is the coarse black Italian Cheroot; which believe me, is tough and stings one's tongue, but it is a smoke. The Italian pipe tobacco is even worse, but sometimes it was that or nothing, although occasionally we had some Italian cigarettes of various brands, most of which were purchased on the Black Market.

To ensure that everybody did his fair share of fatigues we had a roster for — cutting up firewood, drawing water for cooking, and filling water bottles. Later on, when we prepared all our own meals, additional fatigues included washing and peeling potatoes. Baccium produced an axe, saw and cooking pots, together with knives, forks and spoons. As time wore on, we accumulated quite a collection of cooking utensils, which, if not up to the standard of the average housewife's equipment, at least enabled us to prepare and eat a meal. Every item purchased was charged up to what we eventually knew as the Organisation. Besides items of food, they bought us tooth paste, combs, razor blades and toilet paper. We thought they supplied very well, considering the difficulties of obtaining the majority of these articles in a tiny village such as Cabanne.

Some of us commenced to pick up Italian, and the easiest way to learn is by daily conversation with Italians. Our guides were very keen to learn English too, so mutual instruction was given, and both nationals picked up some words which were certainly colloquial. Some might even term them as near the knuckle.

It would be unnecessary to give the names of all our guides or outside contacts of the Organisation, other than Baccium's immediate family. Besides the Commadore, who was periodically visiting Genoa, there was the "resident chief contact", at Cabanne. His name was Emmanuele. There were

others too, who came and went. The majority of Italians who belonged to the Genoa organisation or who were outside contacts, were ex-service men. Once the Armistice had been announced, they not being ardent Fascists, just demobilized themselves and disappeared, which was the fashionable thing to do, as witness our Commandant and prison staff of the Gilded Cage. It was, moreover, inadvisable to hang around the home town, as the Fascists in Northern Italy were recruiting a Fascist Republican Army which had all the encouragement from its master, Mussolini, now safely in Germany under Adolph's care. I mention that as it might be wondered why such men as Emmanuele and others drifted into this organisation. In most cases it was out of sheer necessity, plus the fact that they were in sympathy with anything anti-Fascist, though not necessarily with the Allied cause. Any organisation which would help in breaking the regime had their support. Take the case of Emmanuele. Before the war he owned a garage in Genoa, and was quite comfortably off with a wife and family. As a reservist he was called up at the outbreak of war, and in due course found himself driving a truck in the Western Desert. "No good for me I think" so he told us. So the only 'think' was to get out of it. This he did by staging an accident, what is known in the British service as a self-inflicted wound, and having punctured, but not ruined one of his hands, he returned to Italy where he wangled his discharge.

Apparently it is possible to do these things in the Italian Army. In due course Emmanuele returned to the bosom of his family and his garage which was 'no good' too. Petrol was rationed, motoring for pleasure was prohibited, so there was no living to be obtained from that source. Furthermore, the police might come rapping on his door, and ask awkward questions if he was doing no work. Sensibly Emmanuele saw no point in struggling to maintain his garage and he was certainly not wanting to be roped in to join the Republican Army; so that is how he came to join the organisation. The pay or perks fluctuated, and I should imagine that he had to find his own pickings. Judging by his turn out, Emmanuele or his wife must have had a bit of money put aside. He was the

primary go-between for the organisation but not a very reliable one. He was thick set, swarthy looking, with typical Italian features, full faced with a black tooth-brush moustache. He usually appeared in plus fours and suede shoes, and prided himself on his sex appeal. Like many Italians he had the gift of the gab, and although he tried to sell himself to us, I think most of us saw through him. We kept the right side of him until a more reliable contact took over. He was quick at picking up English, and helped many of us to understand his own language, but he was bone idle. However to be quite fair to him, until Jerry Gore left the party, he invariably put in an appearance daily, and went out of his way to fix us up comfortably. He did not exactly hit it off with Baccium, though he respected him, and Baccium frankly told us one day, that Emmanuele was a typical city man who did a lot of talking and produced little to show for it. All the same he was a most amusing liar and if one can believe half the tales he told, a pretty unfaithful husband to boot, but that is by the way. His job was to carry out the organisation's instructions for hiding and feeding us in co-operation with Baccium. Emmanuele was constantly going into Genoa to see the organisation and his family, and he was our sole contact for any up-to-date news. We could never understand why he was allowed to live at Cabanne. He was obviously a city man, his dress gave him away, and he had no tangible reason for staying in a tiny village like Cabanne; as he was continually going away and returning, his movements were bound to cause comment in the village. Cabanne was by no means anti-Fascist. As is often the case the villagers' opinions are frequently formed from the views of the parish priest. We knew he was no friend of allied prisoners of war on the run. In a tiny community, the presence of one stranger is always commented on. It was not as if Emmanuele was an evacuee. We knew that he was a fly bird, and often wondered that the Fascists didn't pick him up in his bed and hold him for questioning. Still, as events turned out, he was never picked up, so I assume he must have invented some cast-iron excuse that justified his presence there. In contrast to him was his cousin, a parachutist, also demobilised

and a native of Genoa. He was one of the bravest Italians we met; he said little but achieved a great deal and was really reliable. He had twice, to my knowledge, brought ex-prisoners of war out of Italy to Corsica. One had to take one's hat off to these fellows because, apart from jeopardising their own chances of survival if caught by the Fascists, there was always the dreadful threat hanging over their heads that the authorities would beat up and imprison their families as well. It was no idle threat for the Fascists were quite ruthless in this respect.

We obtained a pretty good picture from both these fellows of life in Genoa and the average Italian's reaction to this senseless prolongation of the war, with the Fascists abjectly complying with every demand that their master made. Genoa is the largest port in Northern Italy and is very much a cosmopolitan city, the majority of the wealth being derived from shipping and everything connected with it. Shipping, of course, was at a standstill. The skeleton German E boat flotilla and odd Italian destroyer, maintained a very ineffective sea patrol, and the Allied Navy chiefly composed of small craft, could, and did, operate just where it pleased. The big cities like Milan and Turin were getting a hammering from Allied bombers, and though Genoa had not experienced a raid to date, the inhabitants were expecting their turn any day. Food was scarce and the value of the lira was dropping daily, yet the Germans and the Fascists were living on the fat of the land. Unemployment figures were soaring and the city was dead commercially. Many of the unemployed were scooped up into the Republican Army, which was chiefly composed of fanatical youths, but the pay given was quite inadequate to feed a family. The Germans had garrisoned Genoa largely with second line troops, and had erected some quite effective A.A. defences on the heights above the city. All shipping, even fishermen's boats were controlled, and night fishing was forbidden. Inland transport was very much restricted, and the railways were completely monopolised by the Germans. With the exception of one local train a day allotted to civilians the remainder were reserved entirely for the Army. The overall picture was therefore not too good, but the civilians could do

nothing about it except grumble in the privacy of their homes. The Germans with their usual ruthless efficiency had clamped an iron hand on the country's transport and essential services. The Todt Organisation had descended on the country, and combed it of every suitable material for the prosecution of the war, and only the Fascists who worked for the Germans, or the regime, got any pickings or even a livelihood. The ground therefore in Genoa was ripe for planting the seeds of a resistance movement, and for organising the various partisan groups which were known to be hiding up in little pockets in the hinterland, sometimes with Allied prisoners of war like ourselves. In the light of the situation in Genoa, it is not surprising that before long our original appearance in Cabanne was known, and contacts got in touch with us to make use of us and our services.

We had been in residence about three weeks when we were told by Emmanuele that the Doctor and his secretary were coming to contact us. Accordingly, one afternoon a middle aged Italian business man, accompanied by an attractive Italian Jewess, climbed up the track to our hut. We were introduced. Both spoke good English, and she spoke French and German in addition. He was a mining engineer, and at one time was managing director of an Italian firm at Letchworth. He also had a similar business in Milan. Apparently, by virtue of his qualifications, he possessed a permit which allowed him to motor over most parts of Italy, accompanied by his secretary, and under cover of this they were engaged in collecting information for this organisation which was forming at Genoa. He told Jerry Gore and myself roughly what the scope of their activities were, and also how he proposed to employ us. Jerry would accompany the Doctor and travel to Rome, which involved passing through or around Spezia - quite a tricky proposition. I was to go with the Secretary to Genoa, and be smuggled out of Italy in the Doctor's launch to Corsica. In both cases the object was for one or both of us to contact the Allies. Each would go with information, previously memorised, about the proposed action of the organisation. It was then up to us to sell their stock as high as possible to the

Allies. In return they would feed, clothe and shelter the remainder of the party, and render every assistance in their power, in conjunction with the Allies, to get us all out of the country. Their crying need was recognition by the Allies, money, and contact agents. Once recognised they were prepared to, and in fact eventually did, embark on some very useful sabotage. This was the proposition in a nutshell, and when everybody had it explained, it was agreed to accept the Doctor's proposals. His secretary in the meantime, had us measured for clothes, shoes and hats. These we were told would take at least a month to make and procure. The Doctor also gave us five thousand lira for current expenses. In the meantime the Doctor and secretary were going off to procure a wireless transmitting set from a friend in Rome, and would return with everything ready and fixed up. We never saw them again! They were reported to have come to Farfanosa several months later, enquiring for us through Wilhelmina's elder sister, who told them nothing as she did not know them so these two fade out of the story. At one time we heard the Fascists had caught them. Then they were reported in Genoa. Whether they fell out with the remainder of the organisation we were never able to discover. We liked them, and the Doctor appeared resourceful and trustworthy. As events turned out it was a great pity he did not continue to take an active part in the organisation.

This episode was one of many disappointments that we were going to experience before we finally got out of Italy. The Italians take a long time to arrive at a decision. They argue endlessly. Having reached agreement, so much is put into operation, only to be cancelled by some very obvious contingency which was never considered. To us, some of their arguments advanced for calling off a proposition were maddening. It was not always due to fright, though they would rarely take a risk, and always tried to play for safety. Everybody who takes a hand at "the cloak and dagger" racket knows he is for it if he is caught. It is not the game to play with gloves on. Boldness and often ruthlessness is the line to take. In fairness, however, one must remember that, apart

from whatever might happen to them if caught, the Fascists would certainly punish their families.

After the disappearance of the Doctor and his secretary, we were told that a new head of the organisation was coming out to see us. The Organisation embraced all anti-Fascist parties in Genoa. There were reputed to be five parties, of which the Communists were by far the strongest. The head of the organisation was always referred to as Mr. X. He was a well-known surgeon who enjoyed the confidence of all anti-Fascist parties in Genoa; a man of about sixty with a very attractive wife, they had both travelled extensively, in fact, he took great pride in showing his suit made in Saville Row. His great asset was that he was unexcitable. When he had to make a decision he would invariably leave the gathering and go away for ten minutes and think his answer out. A shrewd man, his very real failing was that he tried to centralise everything, and insisted on making the decision on every trivial project. The result was that too many people were continually pestering him for an interview, and that in itself was highly dangerous. Mr. X never knew for certain that his house was not under observation, and also it wasted time, which was most important. The method he adopted for interviewers was very simple and clever. They attended his consulting room as patients, and as such it was very difficult to detect a genuine patient from one of the gang. About three o'clock one afternoon Mr. X arrived accompanied by the head of a similar organisation in Milan, and the Commodore. There was a lot of ceremony and Emanuele and all the other guides were most deferential to him. The man from Milan spoke English fluently. That is why he came. Mr. X having introduced his party, then gave us the latest information. He knew nothing about the Doctor and his secretary. If he did he was not telling us. The journey to Rome was off . . . for it was too dangerous, as all cars and trains were thoroughly searched at Rome, or Spezia, or both. His plan therefore, was to contact the Allies at Corsica, but it was not easy. The Germans had the sea-coast well watched and patrolled. They also had E boats patrolling off shore. Harbours and small fishing ports were carefully watched.

Boats could not just sail from one port to another without a permit. Night fishing was prohibited without a German permit, and then the catch was for German consumption only. Private motor boats had been confiscated. The snag was to find a convenient embarkation point, near a building overlooking the sea, as the organisation had a motor boat which they wished to conceal in readiness for our escape. Prior to this, another boat had been available to the organisation but the Fascists or Germans had ordered it to be pulled right up the shore so that it was not considered feasible to attempt to launch it even under the best conditions.

Mr. X asked Jerry Gore if he would go to Corsica if they could procure a motor boat and crew, and would he want to take me too? The answer to both questions was "Yes". Mr. X also agreed that it would be desirable to send one or more of his agents with us, as they could put their case over to the representatives of the Badoglio Government, whilst we contacted Allied Headquarters. I must say, Mr. X had amassed a quantity of useful information, which included the location of a large amount of the fortifications in and around Genoa, the movement of troops, transport, and small ships, the Germans anti-aircraft defence of the city, and finally the location of the German Commander's Headquarters. The latter, I might add, was well and truly bombed as a direct result of this information. He, of course, outlined briefly the objects of his organisation, and how it could play a very useful fifth column role and help the Allies; especially in disrupting the German lines of communication on the Italian Riviera, besides organising a resistance group inland. He pointed out that Genoa was the largest port in Northern Italy, besides being one of the three big cities in the North. It was desirable and necessary that an anti-Fascist organisation should be formed there, and one moreover, that was prepared to take on an active role. So much for that. We quite agreed, but preferred to suspend judgment until we saw something definite emerging from all this chat and gesticulation. We all agreed that if both sides played ball together we stood a very good chance of getting out of the country, though we realised that it would take

time and we should not all go together. Also we could give the Allies some very useful information, and in return, we felt certain that the organisation would be recognised, and financially helped by our people. In fact we would use all our influence to help achieve their aims.

Mr. X did not like the location of our hide-out and suggested that a new one should be built in a secluded spot, with more comfortable facilities. The organisation would pay, and Baccium with the help of some of his friends was asked to help us build it. In addition Mr. X promised to send us clothes and food, and ordered Baccium to buy up sufficient wheat and other commodities such as macaroni, onions and potatoes, to last a long period. He left in good spirits and promised to return soon with news about the boat.

From the foregoing it would appear that Mr. X was a good organiser, with his finger on the pulse of the movement, and that in all respects he was the ideal man to have at the head of such an organisation. On the credit side we discovered that he enjoyed the confidence of many influential people in Genoa and Milan. He was accepted by all anti-Fascist parties as a man of unblemished integrity whose one aim was to free the country from Fascist domination, and what was equally important, he belonged to no particular political party. The fact that he was a leading surgeon specialist automatically made him a man who commanded respect for his ability and judgment. He was a gentleman, tactful, and always gave a considered opinion, rather a rare attribute for an Italian. Against these, as events turned out, he tried to control the organisation in its entirety. It does not require much imagination to realise that an underground organisation such as this was capable of expanding its usefulness in a variety of ways. It could embrace straightforward sabotage, fifth column activities, the organisation and maintenance of selected groups, and the weeding out of proved partisans with the object of using them either in fresh groups, or posting them to existing ones. In fact the potential value of a well organised resistance group in a city like Genoa was enormous. The area of country that it proposed to embrace contained many ex-prisoners of war; some most valu-

able, such as fighter and bomber pilots. All these could be collected, fed, and passed through the organisation to the Allies — probably to Corsica. As events shaped, my own view was that Mr. X was not a big enough man for the job. He had not the vision, nor the courage, to get the organisation going. If he had really recognised the magnitude and potential of the undertaking, then he should have had an Allied liaison officer to assist him from the start. Possibly he wished to gather all the glory of the effort for himself and his immediate friends. That will never be known. The fact remains that the situation was changing weekly in Genoa, and the Allies were not being kept up-to-date. It was no use continually asking for money from the Allies unless you produced results, and a closer liaison would have tied up the loose ends, and enabled the Allies to appreciate exactly what his requirements were, what he was in a position to achieve, and on that basis advance the cash to put it into effect. Furthermore, some of his immediate collaborators were not the right type. They lacked imagination and courage and gave us the impression that they were really out to feather their own nests. Everybody always appeared to be short of lira except Mr. X. No doubt he held the purse strings for very good reasons, but then if you cannot trust your immediate confederates with the cash, how can you expect to obtain confidence and loyalty. Obviously we were never fully in the picture. Why should we be? These deductions were made as the result of our experience and handling with the organisation. As time went on I had some very definite views and suggestions to put forward, if and when, I reached the Allies.

After we had been about six weeks in our original stone shack we moved down to the new one which Baccium and his brother had built for us. It was sited alongside a stream and only half a mile from Farfanosa. Tucked away in an angle of a narrow valley it was very difficult to detect except from the air. Our only danger was if we showed any smoke. A fire had to be maintained night and day as the place was damp and cold, so we had to be very careful to burn only dried wood during the day time.

The shack inside consisted of a common bed which slept eight comfortably. There were two doors and windows, a stove or "stufa" as it is called in Italian, a table with legs driven into the ground, and some home made stools. The walls were straw but draught proof. Some of us had battle-dress which Wilhelmina had dyed a dark blue; whilst others had been lent clothes by the Cella families. It amounted to sleeping in our clothes with two blankets or rugs each, and with the stove going all night we were very warm and comfortable.

Being so near the village most of Baccium's relatives visited us, chiefly on Sunday; even one old aunt, who was nearly eighty, insisted on making a somewhat hazardous trip along a goat track to visit us. She could speak a few words of English having been born in the United States, but at an early age her parents returned to Italy and settled down in Farfanosa, where she had married a Cella. Our visitors sometimes came in the evening and sat around the stove with us and never came empty handed but always with some small token gift. One luxury which we did possess was an acetylene lamp, which brightened up the place though our blackout had to be complete. Angelina, Baccium's brother, came regularly also another young cousin, by the name of Aldo, who was a very good lad.

Angelina sometimes turned up after having had a good 'skinful' of vino at the "local". When he was slightly intoxicated he really was most amusing, and would tell funny yarns about Mussolini. If we could get a little wine we would insist on them drinking some with us, but they would never eat our food. Whether Baccium had told them not to, we never knew. I prefer to think they all realised how difficult it was to procure food for us, and therefore it was up to them to see that we ate it all. Every bit of food bought for us, apart from Black Market purchases had to be wangled. Everything was rationed in Italy except air and water. Somehow Baccium and his brother had to scrounge enough food for seven, and later eight men daily. We knew there were ways and means, but it had to be done carefully. Also the purchase of all this food had to be

spread over a very wide area, to avoid suspicion. Baccium could not just tack seven people's requirements onto his own family. We thought a lot about this and reckoned that each family must have taken on one of us for the purpose of obtaining extra food. As far as we knew they were never caught and we always had enough. Our diet was bound to be monotonous at times, but it was food, and we were very grateful for it.

Whilst hiding up in the Cabanne area we met several British ex-prisoners 'on the run', and I would like to mention their methods of escape just to show how plucky men are, and what they will endure to regain their freedom. The first was a naval rating who was at Camp 52 at Chiavari. The camp was handed over lock, stock and barrel by the Fascists to the Germans. Several thousand British other ranks woke up one morning and saw that their guards were German, after repeated assurances from their Commandant that he would not hand them over to the Germans. This rating had a pal in the cook-house who concealed an axe in his kit. The camp was evacuated in three parties, in three trains composed of covered goods trucks, all locked, with a keg of water in each. This rating hacked a hole in the floor, dropped down on to the axle, and when the train went through a tunnel he dropped down on to the permanent way, allowing the train to run over him, and so escape. Another, a South African sergeant, unscrewed the ventilator in his compartment and got out, again whilst the train was passing through a tunnel. One day an Australian wandered up to us, he had left a working camp well up in the North. His wanderings led him through several towns, and in one he walked right past a German barracks. A German soldier who could not speak Italian came up to him and indicated that he wanted a light for a cigarette, so the Australian gave him one. On many occasions he was stared at by Germans, which I think is the most trying ordeal to undergo. Every second of the time one must act naturally. The slightest false move or action and you have given yourself away. The mental strain is terrific. I can confirm this in my escapade with the Security policeman at Genoa. It is very hard

to behave naturally without attracting attention when you feel positive that someone has suspected you. However this Aussie was never rattled. He was a typical digger, and he told us he had been a prospector for gold and tin most of his life, and was quite used to living on his own.

One day Emmanuele brought two English ex-prisoners up to our shack. They were L/cpl Jones R.A.S.C., and Private Coope of the Kings Own Royal Regiment. They had escaped from a small working camp in the North and having skirted Genoa, were working down South. By the time they had reached us the wet weather had set in and Jones' boots were in a terrible state. We told them they could stay with us if they liked, and they said they would. I mention these two men as they both escaped with us. Private Coope volunteered to cook for the party and his culinary efforts were varied and successful. From now onwards Baccium therefore had to feed eight hungry people, as Jerry Gore left soon after they joined us.

We had not been very long in our new home when Mr. X paid us another visit. Jerry Gore and I in the meantime had been measured for special suits and had our hair cut properly, and in Jerry's case his beard removed. Mr. X said he had procured another motor boat, but it was considerably smaller than the first, and he doubted if it would hold more than one passenger other than the crew. This meant that I should in all probability not go. The Commodore had decided to navigate the boat, and incidentally, be the representative of the organisation to contact the Allies. In addition, Emmanuele's cousin, the parachutist, was going with him and two others to form the crew. This was a bitter blow for me and I offered to make the journey on foot down South to contact the Allies, on the principle that two strings to one's bow were better than one. This suggestion was turned down. Nobody knew of a guide who would undertake the trek, and apparently the organisations forming in Genoa were not in touch with similar organisations down South, so there was no possibility of my being passed on from one to another, each organisation providing a guide. About a week later Mr. X returned with his Milanese friend, and Jerry Gore changed into a brand new suit complete

with homburg and the other trimmings which made him look like a city gentleman – Italian pattern. On his way down to Chiavari in the car he was briefed with all the available information which the organisation possessed. On arrival at Chiavari he proceeded by train to Genoa accompanied by Emmanuele. For security reasons they got out of the train one station short of Genoa, and from there by tram to a house where Jerry was hidden. Here he remained several days and eventually crossed through the city again by car, and embarked from Voltri, a small watering resort about seven miles North of Genoa. The trip over to Corsica was not without some hair-raising experiences. Due to tide and weather they made landfall at the wrong time of the day, so put out to sea again, when a gale blew up. In weathering this out they ran out of petrol and after much hard rowing made land, and eventually contacted the Allies there, and the Commodore also got in touch with representatives of Badoglio's Government. Then he fell sick with appendicitis, went into hospital, and remained on the island. So the Commodore passes out of this story. The boat was sold and the proceeds given to the crew. The parachutist returned to Italy, and was put ashore by British Commandos. He brought with him a wireless set, and incidentally, the story of the crossing which I have just related.

Perhaps I have a suspicious mind, but I was not altogether satisfied that Mr. X's excuse to me was true, that there was not enough room for two in the boat. As events turned out I was right. He kept me back as well as the remainder of the party, as a lever to get more money out of the Allies. Without telling too much now about our final getaway, I will say that by a combination of circumstances, and a certain amount of threatening on our part, we finally forced his hand, and got away against his wish and intention.

Several of our Italian contacts could not be completely trusted; some Italians enjoy intrigue and plotting and the belief that the Americans paid more than the British gave them an added incentive but I doubt there was any truth in this belief.

After Jerry Gore's departure our contacts began to visit us

less frequently and this was the first indication we had that things were not going too well. Baccium let the cat out of the bag one day to me by saying that the new hide-out had not been paid for, and that he was getting short of money for our food. The latter information we had to drag out of him. This was not good enough. The organisation would have to be made to keep to their side of the bargain and feed us – and not at the expense of Baccium and his immediate relatives. We suspected that they were denying themselves such little luxuries as sugar, jam and salt, for our benefit, and this we could not allow under any circumstances.

One day, Mr. X unexpectedly turned up with his wife, and sent for me. Kiwi came along too as he spoke the language, Mr. X's French was as bad as mine, so we did not get along too well. He brought a wireless set for us to listen in, and also enquired about our Welfare. This was my opportunity to let him have it. I told him Emmanuele had practically ignored us, and that Baccium was short of cash. Up to now, Mr. X had provided Baccium with money through Emmanuele, and I strongly suspected that Emmanuele kept back a tidy bit for himself. I therefore suggested that either Mr. X paid Baccium direct, or he gave me some money on account and I would pay him. Eventually he dealt direct with Baccium, but insisted on giving me 5,000 lira to buy "comforts" for the party. He further promised to send some jam and sardines along, plus some ski-ing caps. We parted very amicably, and he promised to come again. In fairness to Mr. X he did return, and also sent along the provisions. Up to now our only hope of getting away had been from a remark passed by the parachutist who had returned from Corsica. He said he thought it quite probable that we might be taken off by a British M.T.B. as it was not the intention of the Allies to use British ex-prisoners of war with Italian partisans in sabotage and fifth column work in North Italy. If British personnel were to be used they would be special troops or Commandos. Personally I didn't put much faith in this remark. Until something more definite was formulated, it savoured to me of wishful thinking.

As regards our safety, this was nearly a hundred per cent

secure. The villagers of Cabanne thought we had moved out of the valley. Farfanosa, which consisted of practically all Baccium's relatives except one evacuee from Genoa, knew of our hide-out. The evacuee did not, and in fact never found out. Certain other well trusted intimate friends of Baccium also knew where we were in residence, but they kept it secret. We still hoped that Jerry Gore would get a message through, and sure enough events happened with startling rapidity. It must have been about five or six weeks after his departure, and I can remember it quite clearly.

One Sunday morning, without any warning, three British Spitfires appeared out of the blue and made a bee line for Farfanosa. They circled round the village a few times, dropped a small parachute and then flew off. Fortunately, one of Baccium's cousins picked it up, and concealing it under his coat, brought it to me. On opening it up, I found a letter. The gist of its contents was that, if a certain code sign was displayed, in this case an 'M' made with the yellow silk strips enclosed, some more Spitfires would return any time within seventy two hours and drop a petrol tank in which would be money for Mr. X and his organisation, plus some for my party.

It can well be imagined how this type-written message, unsigned of course, electrified us. Three of us rushed out and selected a spot on the spur of a mountain and displayed a yellow 'M'. I went out with this party and saw it pegged out, and no sooner was it out than an old man walked by. He was a stranger to Farfanosa, and I described him to Baccium, who by now had been told the contents of the message. Emmanuele had also put in an appearance, having heard that there was a chance of money being dropped from the skies. Neither he nor Baccium were suspicious of this old man. In fact I think they said he came from Cabanne.

We had just finished our lunch when we heard the familiar drone of planes. Out we rushed, some of us with towels to wave to our people. Sure enough, over came three Spitfires – this time American. These pilots held the air for the next three minutes. The Italians didn't recognise the American

markings and thought they were German. We waved frantically, with Baccium nose to ground, imploring us to take cover. These Americans just did some high speed turning and banking, flying very low the whole time. Finally one straightened up, and flew dead along the main road to Farfanosa from Cabanne at about two hundred feet. When he got near the village he dropped the tank. This was the signal for Baccium, Emmanuele, and several others to get up and rush headlong down the hills to the dropping place. Emmanuele won by a short head, swiped the tank, and brought my package to me.

The original instructions were duplicated, in English and in Italian; Emmanuele kept the Italian copy so he knew that there was money for the organisation, but I never saw it, and I never knew how much was dropped for Mr. X. In my package there were three hundred dollars and either sixty or seventy thousand lira — all in notes of course. Financially we were now well set up, but the Spitfires had attracted a hornet's nest round the tiny hamlet of Farfanosa. We were not to know, but on this very Sunday the Chief regional Fascist Commissioner for Chiavari was out hunting hare near Cabanne. The first three Spitfires made him somewhat suspicious. The last three confirmed his worst doubts. Down he came to Farfanosa and commenced cross-examining everybody. All the villagers told him they thought the planes were German, and they were so frightened they saw nothing dropped. Of course he found the petrol tank, and all he got out of that was a little aviation spirit for his motor bike. Emmanuele told me afterwards that he talked so much that he confused the Fascist Chief and himself. I can picture both of them going at it hammer and tongs with their voices and hands. It is worth a guinea a minute to see two Italians really worked up arguing or explaining something.

That night, unbeknown to us, a platoon of Germans under a major came along at about 2.30 a.m. and ringed Farfanosa with men and automatics. They searched every house and examined every individual's identity card. All this time we were sleeping blissfully in our hide-out, not more than half a mile away. Having combed Farfanosa inside out, the Germans

found absolutely nothing. We heard that they were furious for being dragged out of their nice warm billets at that unearthly hour. The Fascists were livid too, as all they had got was a battered petrol tank. After this comb-out we could not possibly remain any longer in our present hide-out. A very ashen faced Baccium arrived next morning, very early, and moved us back to our old and original stone hut where we remained a few days whilst materials and labour were recruited to build us an entirely new hide-out, further back and higher up in the mountains.

On the evening of the drop Baccium had warned us that we should have to clear out, so we were all packed up and ready to move when he came early next morning. It also meant some high speed work for him and his brother. Between the two of them they destroyed every vestige of our existence in that hide-out. In fact it was transformed into a barn for cattle, and they even put cows in the next evening to complete the illusion.

Looking back on the whole episode, Sunday afternoon was the very worst day to select. The world and his wife were out and about, strolling along the main road, and scores of people saw the six Spitfires, and even the least intelligent individual must have smelt a rat when so many aeroplanes select an insignificant hamlet to fly around. On account of weather conditions it was essential that the second flight was made so soon after the first, for the weather worsened that evening, and remained bad for several days.

Copy of Message dropped by the Spitfires on Farfanosa

Acting on instructions from Allied Force Headquarters a parcel containing money will be dropped by SPITFIRE within the next 72 hours, weather permitting. The drop will be made in daylight and ONLY on the presentation of the ground strip panel set out as follows:

TO FORM THE FIRST LETTER OF THE REPLY
TO THE PASSWORD "GORE"

The SPITFIRES may come in within the next few hours or at any time during daylight, so be prepared to put your panel strip out at very short notice as the aircraft cannot hang about.

Help is coming to you shortly in the form of clothing, boots and food.

You are instructed by Allied Force Headquarters to hand the money dropped to the man you know who helped Colonel GORE to escape. This is an Order. The money in the envelope marked "BRITISH" is for your own use.

The money will be in a metal container attached to a petrol tank.

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We were no sooner installed in our old stone shack when I said it was time to make fresh plans. First of all we must be prepared to split into three parties, each under an officer; I would divide the money up, each individual carrying his own share. It was quite obvious that Farfanosa was suspected of harbouring ex-prisoners of war, and it was more than likely that the Fascists might return to make a more thorough search. It was unfair for us to remain and possibly jeopardise not only Baccium's family but his relatives as well. Therefore it would be better if all three parties could each select some quiet area, preferably some hamlet a few miles away from Farfanosa. Mr. X had supplied us with large scale maps of the valley, so we were pretty conversant with the lie of the country. If any message came from Corsica, either via Mr. X or from the air, then I would let the other two parties know by Baccium and his relatives and then plans could be made for getting away.

When the plan was explained to Baccium he would not hear of it. He had stuck by us till now and he was going to see us safely away. He told us that his elder brother had fought with the English in the last war and would never forgive him if he deserted us now. The elder brother lived in America and Baccium had a great respect for him. His plan was that with some trusted friends he would build another hide-out deeper in the mountains. He knew the ideal spot within a hundred yards of a stream. His family could deliver rations twice a week by mule. He would provide a stove and we could cook our own food, and there were any amount of trees for fuel in

the vicinity of this new hide-out. Emmanuele thought this a good idea too. He also suggested that I should bribe the local police just to make sure that they were definitely on our side. Incidentally, they knew all along where we were, but they never breathed a word. He also arranged for me to meet the local sub inspector of police who was a Badaglio man.

Baccium was so adamant, and would take no refusal that we just had to agree to his suggestion, but all of us after such a tense stay in the stone shack were glad to leave it for the new hide-out. By now it was the end of November, and there were no leaves on the trees. The shack was there for anybody to see from the road, and if any Fascist had taken the trouble to lie up and search the countryside with fieldglasses he would surely have spotted us. Before we left Kiwi and I, with two other ranks, went down the mountain to meet the police inspector. It was a very dark night and there was an elaborate arrangement of passwords. All of us were armed for we were taking no chances of being double crossed. Everything went off satisfactorily. The inspector was a Sicilian, and as his family was in Sicily which was now in Allied hands, he had no fear of fascist reprisals on his wife and children. I gave him a good "tip" and enough for his staff too, and he was most gratified. After this there was no doubt that the police were on our side. He promised to give us the tip-off should the Fascists ever return to search for us, and also, if we were in dire necessity, said he would feed us.

The more I got to know this thickset Sicilian the more I respected him. He played the double game and played it well, ably assisted by his parish priest. Here was an example of two opposites, both engaged in fifth column work and sabotage. Italy was a remarkable country in those days. Soon after this meeting we left for our new hide-out, and in one day we erected a shack in which we could sleep that same night. With a few more days work on it we made it very comfortable. Its chief snag was that it was cramped. It had one entrance, and at either end a bed right across the width of the shack, barely sufficient to sleep four people. It was rather the case of "When father says 'turn' we all turned". In the middle was a small

open space. One end of it housed the stove and our chairs were the ends of the beds. So four sat on either side and looked at the other four. We had an acetylene lamp, which was a great luxury, and the roof was a tarred paper composition, but it did keep the rain out. The walls were sods of turf and the atmosphere was like a Turkish bath when the stove was burning. All our cooking was done on it. Washing, of course, was done at the stream, about a hundred yards away. We lived together for about two months in this tiny shack, and no Fascist spotted us. It was a perfect hide-out and in a sheltered spot. Trust old Baccium to pick a good place. I really believe he knew every tree on the mountain side around Farfanosa. Having taken stock of our new hide-out we decided to organise ourselves in a big way. We were at a higher level than the stone shack, and not so very far from the snow line. Baccium impressed upon us the necessity for getting in a good stock of wood, and he, in his turn, would accumulate as much food as he could. It was a very stiff climb up from Farfanosa, so Angelina's ass was always used to carry up the provender. We reconnoitered the immediate vicinity for trees that were suitable for felling, or which were already dead and down. There was no trouble about cutting them down, as the ground on which our hide-out was pitched belonged to a friend of Baccium's and he had given his permission. We all shared the work, and a roster was drawn up which catered for every fatigue. Although we had no idea how long we should be there, our army training suggested a permanent latrine. We also felled innumerable trees and maintained a good stack of logs. This was absolutely necessary as we had to keep the fire going night and day. The hide-out was so well sited in the tall trees that the smoke was sucked up into the branches and gave no indication of our presence. Our tracks in and out were also well concealed. No one could have spotted the hide-out until right on top of it, and the track up from Farfanosa followed the dried bed of a mountain torrent more often than not, and this in itself camouflaged foot and hoof marks.

The actual shack was built right inside a spinney, about fifty yards in. On the outskirts was a small ledge about fifty

feet below the spinney. This was covered in springy heather and by day it was a sun trap. Picture mountains sloping gently upwards, in places covered with stunted green beech, heather and bracken predominating. Often there would be a cloudless sky and a brilliant hot day, and in the distance, (and usually far below,) could be heard the tinkle of a cow-bell as the animal cropped its way about the hills above Farfanosa. To the right, about a hundred yards away, an ice cold mountain stream jumped down from rock to rock, through small pools to the valley below. That stream was our life blood and it never dried up. At this time of the year most of the autumn tints had gone, and the trees were leafless, but the general view and prospect was wonderful, and the air bracing. We faced south-west and on account of our height we had a glorious view which took in over half a circle. Endless mountains of various shapes could be seen. Sometimes on cloudy days they poked their heads through the cotton wool clouds, whilst others, too small, were only showing their base. Far away to the north more formidable mountains reared themselves to the sky, all with a winter cap of snow, which made them look so majestic. In the valley at our feet, outwardly all was peace. On the hour Cabanne's tinny clock on the church echoed up the valley. We could see a long stretch of the road too, but we also had a particular crow's nest just in advance of this natural lido, from where one could see every possible approach to our hide-out. Baccium had pointed this out to me when we first arrived. No stranger ever passed our way; even all the friends and relations of Baccium were only allowed to visit us in rotation. Quite rightly he was not going to have a mob up there at any one time, and the fewer people who had actually seen where we were the better for them and for us. Furthermore the location was well off the beaten track to Cabanne. It was an ideal spot for a day's picnic, but to be confined there indefinitely was a very different proposition. We were very careful in our walks around our hide-out. It was prudent not to venture too far afield, because it was vital that none of the villagers had any inkling that we were still in the neighbourhood. The peasants who shepherded their cows in

and around our hide-out were either relations of Baccium or else trusted friends. Having had one visitation from the Germans, Baccium and his relations were not wanting a return visit. One could see up and down the valley from our view point, when the sun went down in a blaze of glory, and the shadows steadily lengthened, everything appeared so very peaceful. It seemed hardly possible that this country was at war, much less that there were enemies down in the valley who would be only too pleased to seize us and throw us into a concentration camp. Periodically Germans came up the valley road, usually after food and of course accompanied by Fascists, but they always kept to the road, and never ventured into the hills.

How did we spend our daily life apart from cutting wood, doing the daily chores and washing up? Amongst other things, we had two cribbage boards and two packs of cards, and we played two, three and four handed crib, until we had flogged the game to death. Private Coope was the expert, and one of the cheeriest men I've met. By trade he was a bookie, and he certainly had his wits about him; he could also cook quite well. He introduced us to a famous North country stew which is known as "Scouse" around Birkenhead. He could also play crib and was a born raconteur. I felt rather sorry for him. Grabbed by the Army when he was over thirty, poor Coope was drilled and chivvied about by every Sergeant, until he finally found himself in Tobruk when it collapsed. Then, to add insult to injury his Company staged a break out in lorries, and were guided through the mine fields to freedom, as he thought by a South African Officer. Much to the chagrin of everybody he turned out to be a German dressed in South African uniform, who led them straight to his own people. So Coope's war was a short-lived one. He did not pretend to be a soldier, but he was a cheery, willing companion. He always had a smile, and had bluffed his way down about three hundred miles of Italy, knowing only half a dozen words of Italian, (which he spoke with a most atrocious Merseyside accent), until he and his friend L/Cpl Jones, were brought along to us by the partisans. Jones too, had had bad luck. Like many a

young and newly married fellow he had only seen his wife for just under a month, and was then drafted to the Middle East. After nearly two years he was still hoping to make a break and join the Allies, and so return to his wife. He was only twenty one, but a very reliable young fellow, and he had a very good influence on the other ranks who respected him in spite of being the youngest, and having the least service. Our party finally consisted of three officers and five other ranks and I can say that our relations were at all times harmonious and friendly. After all why not? You cannot live in such close proximity with your fellows and expect to be addressed as 'Sir' every time someone speaks to you. We were all in the same boat, and we were going to sink or swim together. All food and cigarettes were equally shared, and work too. Each of us voted on any proposed project. Anybody who felt that he would like to strike out on his own, and go his own way was at liberty to do so, and take his share of the money. Naturally on questions of policy, and in our rare dealings with Mr. X, the officers took the major part in the proceedings, but we always gave the others a full report. We were always a team and presented a united front when dealing with the organisation. I think it says a lot for the British temperament that we adapted ourselves so easily to conditions as we encountered them. Everyone, at times, had ideas to offer and we all argued and considered them, and if necessary a vote was taken. Only in matters of security did the officers lay down what was to be done. One could not have any indiscriminate wandering about which would endanger our hide-out, or compromise Baccium and his relatives and friends. The only fire we lit was in the stove. Smoke is a frightful give away, and of course whatever instructions Baccium laid down in the interests of security were loyally obeyed by all without question. Very occasionally we went down to listen to the B.B.C. in his house, but it was a steep climb back. In any case Baccium was not too keen on visits to his house after the raid by the Germans. Being on the road with a certain amount of open ground behind, the house was easy to surround, and although the favourite time for the Germans to surround a village was in the small hours of

the morning, one could never be sure who might be snooping about outside. We always entered his house after dark, up a ladder through a first floor window. Care always had to be taken approaching, entering, and leaving Baccium's house; as a few doors away lived the evacuee from Genoa – the only stranger in Farfanosa, and therefore not in the know. Any morning after breakfast might find us indulging in a bath, or a wash and shave down by the stream. It was very dusty in the shack, so we frequently washed our clothes. This would be followed by a sun bathe at our lido, and for those of us who had some "make and mend" to do, here was the ideal spot to do it. Kiwi would usually be reading the latest paper that Baccium had brought up. Although it was completely Fascist it was possible to read between the lines here and there, so he translated and gave us the news. How the war was going down in Southern Italy was discussed daily, and this led to talk of our chances of getting away. After the midday meal some of us would go for a walk, though not too far away, whilst others slept. It was unnecessary to maintain a guard, but we always arranged for someone to remain near the shack in case Baccium or one of his relatives turned up with a message or provender. We never catered for the sudden appearance of a Fascist. Baccium assured us that none of them could get near us without him knowing, and he would always give us ample warning. If it should happen we would disappear to an agreed rendezvous previously selected by him, Baccium removing every tell-tale object in the shack that could possibly be connected with us.

Thanks to the war in Southern Italy and the R.A.F. who controlled the air in our part of the world, I don't think that we ever saw a German plane. I must admit we took no precautions against observation from the air; although washing was dried under cover in the spinney. After tea or even before lunch there were usually a couple or more playing crib or patience. After dinner we nearly all played, and with the acetylene lamp lit, the door closed to keep out the light, and the stove going well, the interior soon became really warm and very comfortable. Beds had to be ready made before dusk,

because it was very difficult to see otherwise, and getting into bed was quite an operation! I know that on my side, my next stable companion was Major Paul, who slept on a lower level than me. Our four seater communal bed consisted of wooden beech poles which had a certain amount of give in them, some more than others, hence the discrepancy in height. On top of these we piled heather, bracken, and dried grass. Quite comfortable for one night, but not for months. Under no circumstances is this composition a substitute for a lilo! On top of all this we laid one of our blankets, and slept in our shirts and pants. I am not very well upholstered, and cannot sleep flat on my back so I found that very careful arrangements were necessary to get comfortable before bedding down for the night. I was accused many a time for emulating an old hen when making my bed, and I cannot deny the accusation. I preferred to get comfortable before 'lights out', than fiddle about in the middle of the night. The last into bed was responsible for stoking up the fire, and the first up for getting it going in the morning. Before turning in, if there was a moon in the sky we always studied its size carefully. We were to become very moon minded in the near future. All the time we remained in this hide-out we never had snow, but experienced some severe frosts when it was essential to keep our stove going throughout the night. Our walls were only sods of earth, and pretty damp at that. It also required a resolute mind to face our ice bound mountain stream. It was no fun breaking the ice, stripping, and having a wash, but we were determined to avoid getting lousy. Once lice got inside amongst the bedding in that warm shack they would multiply at a rate too fast for us to cope, but as it was nobody collected any.

Sometimes the evenings were so quiet one could have heard the proverbial pin drop. Whilst at other times we had continual rain and high winds. Our tar felting roof was fortunately water proof, but it had to be weighted down with logs and sods of turf, otherwise the wind would tear it to shreds. Such then was our daily life in this new hide-out. Naturally, it was monotonous, but we were warmly clad, and had a dry roof over our heads. That means a lot when you are on the

run, and we were very grateful for all that Baccium and his family and friends had done, and were doing for us. Time, obviously was heavy on our hands. It always is if you have little to do and have to spin it out over a whole day but we were still free, and that is what really mattered.

To me those two months seemed the longest of our period on the run. Taking stock of our situation we were bound to admit that the Fascists had pretty strong grounds for suspecting that we were hiding up in the Farfanosa neighbourhood, and although they could not pinpoint our hide-out, there was every reason for them to hope that when the snow came our hide-out would be given away by footprints. Fortunately, this coming winter was going to experience a late fall of snow but we were not to know that. I think all of us felt that with the departure of Col. Gore the organisation's interest for us was on the wane. It is likely that for reasons of which we had no knowledge they were encountering snags, and with their Headquarters in Genoa it was impracticable for them to keep us posted with up-to-date news. From a practical point of view there was probably precious little we could do to help.

Food was still difficult to procure and likely to get worse as winter advanced. If one could form any accurate assessment of the progress of the war in Italy, it appeared that the situation was developing into a stalemate, and that very little activity or offensive action was likely to materialize during the winter months. Being so very far from the actual battle area, one never contacted anybody who had first hand knowledge. The only really comforting sights we experienced were the frequent Allied Bomber "armadas" which often flew over our little retreat on their way to drop their eggs on some vital spot. Judging by the noise of the explosions they must have been pretty potent too. Much wishful thinking was indulged by all of us, each of us expounded his own views and hopes,

which crystalised down to one idea and only one, that the sooner we got out the better, but it could not be achieved entirely on our own.

The situation in Northern Italy was very much Fascist controlled in the towns and cities and in the immediate countryside. Although there were many and varied underground organisations, and pockets of resistance the majority were entirely unco-ordinated. Italians are always reluctant to trust each other outside their immediate environment and on top of the Fascist regime, lurking in the background were the Germans. Primarily, they were there to wage war against the Allies, but they also had to guard their long communications running down the backbone of Italy. In addition to their line of communication troops they called on the Fascists to assist, and they brooked no argument. What was required in any form of assistance had to be produced immediately, refusal or hindrance in any way was dealt with ruthlessly. Compared with other nations who were still under the heel of the invader the Italians were easy meat. From these few observations it will be seen that for Allied prisoners of war to move about the country on their own was distinctly hazardous. Help from partisans or resistance groups was essential, otherwise the odds were that one would be picked up. One always had to remember that any civilian might betray you, either for cash or to ingratiate himself with the Fascists. Of course the real Fascist was out and about everywhere looking for prisoners and hundreds were scooped up during the first few months after the Armistice. Therefore in arguing from the Organisation's point of view it was far safer to keep us in the mountains where we were under Baccium's wing, than to pull us in to Genoa and hide us there in some empty house. Their view, assuming they were being honest with us, was that once they had positive information we could be taken off by the Allies by any method, then they would pull us in to Genoa and get us away. That may have been so. I doubt it. The fact remains that Commanders of M.T.B.'s based at Corsica could not say with certainty, that at such and such a time and place a boat will land to put in a contact, and take off so many ex-prison-

ers. After all the enemy had some say in the matter! Wind and tide too are factors to be considered. Furthermore there are only certain nights in any lunar cycle when the moon is just right for such an operation, and though we were not aware of it, at that time Commanders of M.T.B.'s were not detailed to use their craft solely for rescuing ex-prisoners. Cloak and dagger activities were planned on a much higher level than that. Thus, our feelings were somewhat depressed and unsettled at this period. All of us realised that it was a good move to get Colonel Gore away. At least the Allies knew where we were and in their own good time would use every endeavour to get us away. The question uppermost in our minds was whether they would effect a rescue in time. It is true that we now had money, but boats were scarce and owners were reluctant to sell. In any case a member of the organisation would have to be the medium, and who was that to be? Frankly, Emmanuele did not inspire me with much confidence; with the exception of the parachutist who had taken Colonel Gore over to Corsica and in whom I had the greatest confidence the other members of the organisation were quite unknown to us except for their very occasional brief visits with Mr. X. Our real hopes were pinned on the contents of the message dropped by plane together with the chance remark made by the parachutist that quite possibly we might be taken off by M.T.B. However as we shall see, another person had been thinking on similar lines to us and gradually, unknown to us a plan was being formulated. As I have mentioned, our new hide-out was high up and Emmanuele visited us just once. By this time I was thoroughly fed up with him. I felt certain that he had no intention of helping us to get away, and if I did not tell him to his face I most certainly conveyed it on mine. Whilst we were here two new partisans enter the story. One was the padre of the village, in which the Police Sub Inspector lived. His name was Don Luca Cella, a distant relative of Baccium's. This padre was a very stout little man, a firm friend of the Allies, and he had a lot of common sense. You will hear more of him later on. I mention him now, as it was soon after we had settled into our new hide-out that we were introduced to him through

Baccium. The next was a young man named Conforte. He was one of Mr. X's right-hand men, a typical well dressed city man of Genoa. He not only had a brain but he had guts. The nearest description I can give of his job was Embarkation and Disembarkation Officer to the Organisation. He got Colonel Gore away and many others too. Before the war he was some kind of shop steward or Union leader. He had many friends in the Communist Party of Genoa, although he was not one himself. He undoubtedly had influence in certain quarters and when he came to see us at our new hide-out he obviously had something on his mind, which he was not prepared to discuss in front of Emmanuele. Conforte could not stand the dilatory methods of Mr. X. It was quite obvious to him that the Organisation was not doing all it could, and this was largely due to lack of money. He was angling after coming out with us if possible so that he could obtain money for the Organisation, and incidentally sell his own stock for the highest price to the Allies. Conforte was a peculiar chap. He preferred to work on his own, and make his own decisions. He had not much use for Emmanuele, but he was careful to keep on the right side of Mr. X. He did not say that he had broken with him, but when he made the suggestion to me that I should take him out with us, even suggesting that he would buy a boat, and we would all go together, then I saw that there was obviously a rift somewhere. In fairness to Conforte I must say his name was getting pretty hot in Genoa. It was only a question of time before he might be pounced on. As it was, he rarely slept in the same beds two nights running.

Naturally his suggestion suited our book. We would prefer to go by M.T.B. but failing that by a boat purchased by Conforte. He knew he could count on a certain amount of money from us. He also said he had Mr. X's permission. So I agreed that we should go as soon as possible, and said that I would put up a good case for Mr. X with the Allies to give him more cash. By this time the value of the lire had dropped alarmingly and I felt sure that the Allies did not realise this. To send Mr. X penny packets of a million lire at a time was no good at all. The cost of one lorry was somewhere in the neighbourhood of

half a million lire, and a lorry was essential for their work. Up to now they had hired one which was most unsatisfactory. Quite rightly, money was only going to be paid out on the results obtained, but this Organisation had never got on its feet financially. Conforte thought that if he got to Corsica he could explain all this and he may have been right. He visited us several times before we finally got away, and I must admit that my first impressions of Conforte were very unfavourable. He appeared to be like most Genoese who talk nineteen to the dozen and do nothing. Conforte certainly talked, but he was a go-getter and I give him full marks for the way he helped to organise our getaway.

Early in December the parachutist returned to Farfanosa and came up to see us. His job was to organise a party to collect, hide, and then transport to Genoa certain sabotage stores which were shortly to be dropped by one of our bombers. Here our priest comes into the picture again. He found an open space for a dropping ground, about the size of a hockey pitch far up in the mountains. His friend the Sub Inspector of Police co-operated by patrolling all roads with bribed police, and imposed a 10 p.m. curfew. He then changed into mufti and came up to the dropping ground, and assisted in finding and disposing of the canisters. The parachutist said he didn't want our assistance, as with Baccium and his pals he could do the job. The reader will now see why Mr. X gave Baccium a wireless set. A code message was radioed in the B.B.C. Italian broadcast which said, according to the text, whether the drop was on or not, on a particular night. There were many setbacks and postponements, but one really bright moonlight night we had all just turned in when we heard the familiar drone of a bomber. All of us hurriedly dressed and rushed out to view the dropping ground, some eight miles away from our hide-out, on the opposite side of the valley. Yes, there were the bonfires lit, and three of them were glowing nicely. Along came the bomber – he was a clever pilot, and was an old hand at the game. He must have spotted the flares early on. Over Farfanosa he flew and made his turn well away from us and the dropping ground. This I am sure was done to prevent any-

one connecting his flight with our hide-out or the dropping ground. Round again he came with his engines throttled right back and they hardly made any noise. He actually dropped eleven out of thirteen plumb on or very near the dropping ground. The other two must have jammed in the apparatus, because as he banked they fell out. Fortunately they fell near a friendly village five miles away and some pals of Baccium found them. The pilot continued on his run for miles with his engines throttled back, and when well away from us and the dropping ground he opened up and flew away. We returned to our hide-out full of speculation as to what had been dropped, and we all hoped that whatever came down at least there would be some food and cigarettes.

The following afternoon Wilhelmina came up to us with a message from the parachutist asking for six of us to go out to the dropping ground and help carry some of the packages back to a deep dugout. She was bursting with excitement, and said that Baccium had gone straight out to the dropping ground when he heard the bomber come over and was still out there, having had no food. His brother Angelina had just returned, all in, and was having a meal in their house. He would guide us that evening to the dropping ground. Six of us, including myself, went down that evening and met Angelina with a few friends. The former was very nearly drunk and I am sure it was his ass that guided us to the dropping ground. I cannot say how far that trek was – not short of ten miles I should think. It was up-hill, along goat tracks, and across ravines, over loose stones, and over a few streams. Eventually we found the tiny dropping ground with Baccium and the Padre.

Baccium promptly gave us some American cigarettes, which were the hallmark of luxury after Italian substitutes. There were all the well known American brands including Camels, Lucky Strike, Old Glory, Raleigh, Pall Mall. Then there was real food – jam, fruit, sugar, tinned meats and ration chocolate and even Popeye's spinach. I gather the American Army likes its spinach. So did we. Besides these delicacies there were arms and ammunition, fuses, explosives, and a com-

plete wireless set which was caught up in a tree — in fact all the necessary equipment for a first class spot of sabotage. There were also two good wool-lined airman's suits with boots and gloves, for any poor devils who might have to work in the mountains at snow level, plus a certain amount of other clothing.

The total amount dropped required at least two trips, supplemented by as many mules as we could raise without arousing suspicion. In point of fact we only used two mules, but our band of carriers increased. I have turned my hand to a variety of jobs in my time but it was a new one to me to hump bundles of Sten guns and packets of nine millimetre ammunition along mountain tracks in the small hours of the morning.

Our first trip brought nearly all the food and cigarettes back, of which we took a generous portion. We found no instructions to say how the food was to be distributed, if at all, so we used our own discretion, but a large portion of the reserve chocolate was stored. All the helpers including the priest and the Sub-Inspector of Police were given a generous gift of cigarettes. They were appreciated more than anything else. I must admit that I am now a confirmed smoker of Camels when I can get them. We insisted on Wilhelmina taking a bag of sugar and some jam, and some chocolate for Baccium's small son.

The reader can imagine our return on the first night, each one of us bulging with cigarettes and some decent food. If I remember rightly each had a different brand, at least to start with, and we tried each one before giving our considered opinion as to which was the best. I may have appeared to stress the cigarette complex. That is quite true, but I can assure you that if you are used to smoking English or American cigarettes and you are unable to get them for several months, when you do see them again for the first time, it really is quite an event.

We made two trips to clear away all the stuff dropped. It was all carefully hidden in a well made dugout built into a hillside. In due course the organisation sent a lorry to take all the stuff away to Genoa. Conforte was in charge of this little

operation. In the typical Italian way the driver arrived not knowing what his load was going to consist of. He was taken into Baccium's house and given a liberal supply of wine. In the meantime sufficient willing helpers loaded up the lorry and secured the lot with a tarpaulin. In due course Conforte suggested to the driver that it was time to beat it for Genoa, and to Genoa they went with no untoward incident. I might add that Conforte had a German chit which showed that this lorry was working for the Todt Organisation and that what it carried was for the German Army of Occupation at Genoa. Yes, Conforte knew all the answers. He had that priceless gift too, of a poker face, plus the gift of the gab which enabled him to out talk most Italians, Fascists included, if need be.

In the meantime poor Baccium took stock of the situation and found that it was not good. Conforte left behind about twenty pairs of boots and the same number of American Army blankets. Rather dangerous evidence to have in one's house if the Fascists decided to search the place.

I might add that on the first night some of us made an extra trip to retrieve the two containers which had dropped near another village, and which had been found by some pals of Baccium. Two men found them actually, and it was considered prudent to reward them generously to keep their mouths shut. Even then Baccium considered that too many people were in the "know", and he was not at all keen that further supplies should be dropped near Farfanosa. It was too risky, and too near a part of the country which was partially under Fascist influence. If anyone in Cabanne had an inkling that supplies were being dropped in the valley, then the news would soon reach Fascist ears. As it was, Baccium's relatives quickly heard from their Cabanne friends that they had heard bombers flying over the valley on that particular night. However, it got no further than that, and the Sub-Inspector of Police played up well and scotched any rumours. Of course, all the police were in the know, and were all smoking American cigarettes when off duty. No further supplies were dropped in that area whilst we were there, and we left on 31st January, 1944.

Of course the one item which was not dropped, and which the Organisation wanted badly, was cash. This I feel certain was a bitter disappointment to Mr. X, who by this time was getting very worried over lack of money. As we saw it, the Allies were paying by results, and it would appear that the results were not forthcoming. Hence one day Conforte came out to see us and broached the suggestion that if a M.T.B. did not come along soon to take us off then he would purchase a boat and we would sail to Corsica with him. He felt if he could reach Corsica he could explain the difficulties under which the Organisation was at present working, and that the need for help in the shape of more cash and agents was desperate. He was quite right. A well organised and efficient fifth column resistance movement based on Genoa could do a lot of damage to the Axis. All the sabotage took place well away from Genoa, not inside the city, but to move about quickly and independently, the Organisation must have its own lorry. This, as I have already explained, would cost a lot of money, and would make a big hole in a million lire. The value of the lira by December, 1943 was fantastic. Its value roughly, was a thirteenth of pre-war value and was dropping almost daily. This fact, I felt sure, was not appreciated by the Allies, as I was careful to explain when I contacted the appropriate people. Conforte also had reasons for coming with us. Genoa was rapidly becoming too hot to hold him. On more than one occasion the police had come to his parents' house to catch him. Once he only evaded capture by hanging on to the window sill on the outside, whilst the police searched the interior of the room. Emmanuele also wished to come, with his cousin the parachutist. The latter was game for anything and he never wavered in his intentions, but Emmanuele did.

The Organisation was in wireless communication with the Allies, in Corsica. The contact was, I think I am right in saying, through the Officer in Charge of British Commandos there. He was Major Andrew Croft of the Essex Regiment, and he, incidentally, was the first English Officer I met when I finally reached the Allies. It took me a long time to get his name right. According to the Italian wireless operator his name was

everything but Croft.

The next period, December, 1943 and January, 1944, was the most trying one of all. The first message stated that probably we would be taken off during December's waning moon. This message arrived just about the first of December. We watched the moon every night. Every one of us became an expert moon watcher. We knew a quarter moon, a half moon and every other moon. In fact there was nothing we did not know about the habits of moons. December's moon came and went, and we hopefully pinned our prospects of getting away in January. Meanwhile Conforte had retired to Genoa and the few messages he did send were very non-committal.

Baccium by this time, was getting very worked up. He was thinking in terms of snow, and thinking very hard. The big shot of the Fascists swore that he would catch any ex-prisoners in his region when the snow fell. Not only would he track us down by our footmarks, but also the Italian people who were feeding us. This threat shook Baccium, because he knew the Fascists were dead right. Baccium was therefore very anxious to get us away by the end of January. I might add that long before January much snow had fallen in Southern Italy, but fortunately for us the snow fell late in the North in 1944. So with the liability of eight-ex-prisoners of war on his hands, plus several pairs of American army boots and blankets, poor old Baccium was not feeling too happy over the whole business. We all agreed that he and his family had done more than their share in helping the Allied cause. Besides, his elder sister, (not Wilhelmina), was terribly nervous, and was begging him to get us away from Farfanosa. Ever since the Germans came and searched the village she had began to lose her nerve, until finally one day Baccium put on his best Sunday suit and went off to Genoa to see Mr. X and explain the position. From what we could gather on his return, the interview was very acrimonious. Mr. X accused him of ratting, which was a most unjustifiable accusation to make against Baccium of all people. Baccium retaliated by saying that Mr. X had lost interest in our party generally. As we had thought all along, it was a case of out of sight out of mind. He stressed the approach of snow,

and he must have told all this to Conforte too, who said nothing, but obviously took it all in as subsequent events proved.

January's moon, came, waned, and went, much to our chagrin, and towards the end of the month our spirits were at a pretty low ebb. Suddenly one afternoon, and I can see Baccium now, toiling up the mountain to our hide-out. On arrival he said, "Get dressed, you are going". We could not believe our ears. We packed inside ten-minutes and down the mountain we went for the last time to our original hide-out near the village. Baccium, with his brother's help, removed all our blankets and followed us down. They then produced some more civilian clothes. The three officers had "Gents suiting" and the five other ranks were given mechanics blue overalls. This disguise represented workmen of the Todt Organisation and three officials. We took our revolvers and a minimum of kit, just a small parcel containing shaving gear and cigarettes. Everything else including our blue dyed battle dress we handed over to Wilhelmina to be burned. Angelina and Wilhelmina said goodbye to us behind the hill which screened the road, and with tears in her eyes she said to me "Goodbye Colonello, you won't forget us will you? We will pray that you reach your families safely." I must frankly admit there was a lump in my throat when I shook hands with her and her brother for the last time. Baccium could not face saying goodbye. He just disappeared. When Colonel Gore had left he had broken down and cried like a child. They were a loyal trio, those two brothers and sister. I hesitate to think what our fate would have been if we had not linked us with them. I hope one of these days that I shall be able to visit Farfanosa again and meet them all, and really show my gratitude. On the road we found the same lorry which took away the dropped supplies and one by one we discreetly got inside. Then Conforte put in an appearance and we were carefully briefed by him, through Kiwi, as to our action if the lorry should be stopped or searched. It amounted really to keeping our mouths shut, and Conforte who was in the front of the lorry was going to do all the talking and bluffing. I think at this stage every one of us was bursting with excitement, and could hardly believe that

we were really on our way to freedom. So good old Conforte had really turned up trumps. We found that he had forced Mr. X's hand, as the first indication Mr. X had that we were actually in Genoa and hidden in two houses, was when Conforte arrived back there and told him so. This was Conforte's method of forcing the pace and making Mr. X reach a decision – in this case the one and only decision possible, to get us out of the country and to Corsica.

With Conforte was Emmanuele, and his cousin the parachutist who got in the back of the lorry with us, whilst the other two were in front with the driver. Strict instructions were given that there was to be no talking, but we could smoke.

The plan was to drive the lorry to Genoa via Chiavari, and hide us up in two houses until we could be taken off. The three officers were to go to a small unoccupied flat, and the men to an empty house. Conforte went with the Officers, and Emmanuele and his cousin with the men. This did not please Emmanuele, but as it was not his party, he had to do what he was told for once. The lorry had to arrive before curfew i.e. 8 p.m. Curfew until very recently had been 6 p.m. in Genoa, hence our long delay in getting away. Until now it was impossible to do the outward and return journey and get in before 6 p.m. curfew. Incidentally the time of the curfew varied with the behaviour of the inhabitants.

We started off and left Cabanne with no regrets, and everything was going well when a soldier hailed us for a lift. As it was the common practice to stop and give one, we had no choice. Of course the fellow would be a Fascist, which was distinctly awkward, but the parachutist engaged him in conversation all the time, and he did not appear suspicious. Our troubles were just starting. Soon after picking this chap up we had a puncture. We had been told to stick in the lorry whatever happened, so when none of us made a move to help change the wheel the Fascist was very disgusted, especially as he had to give a hand. Conforte was of course, keeping an eye

on the proceedings. He kept up a running conversation, and offered a lot of useful advice but no manual help. Fortunately the soldier only wanted a lift to the next town, but we were thankful when he dropped off. However there was more trouble ahead. We had barely gone another ten miles when we had another puncture, and as there were no more spares we were sunk. Luckily the lorry stopped within a quarter of a mile of a garage so the only thing to do was to sit in the lorry until both tubes had been mended. It was now getting on for five p.m. and Conforte was particularly anxious to make Genoa before curfew. Apparently a message had come in saying that there was a possibility of a M.T.B. coming in that night with Major Croft on board. Two agents were to be landed if the wind and sea were favourable. It was therefore a golden opportunity to fill the boat up for the return trip. But time dragged on; there was no sign of the job being finished quickly, so Conforte hired a taxi to take the three officers in alone. We did not like this idea of being separated from the men, who would hang on and be brought in to Genoa by Emmanuele and his cousin, but as Conforte emphasised, it was most desirable for us to contact Major Croft and put him in the picture before he left. On the other hand if we all hung on until the lorry was ready to move on, we might be compelled to break the journey somewhere on account of the curfew, and so miss the opportunity of contacting him. If we drove fast we could just about make Chiavari and catch the only train from there to Genoa. We missed the train by a few minutes, in spite of cornering on three wheels, and having got us there the driver said that he had not enough petrol to take us on to Genoa. That meant stopping the night at Chiavari, if we could get in a hotel. Then came the amusing incident of the day; a bit of a safety valve too, for all our pent up excitement. The driver could not start the car as the battery was quite flat, so we pushed it away from the main entrance of the station into a quiet square. After tinkering about with the engine the driver threw up his hands in disgust. Not to be outdone though, he went over to a gharry driver, who produced a rope and coupled us up to its rear axle. He must have done this job before

the road and stumbled on a car park, guarded by a French sentry. I went up to him and in my best school-boy French told him I was an English Officer, and asked him to take me to one of his officers. I don't know what he thought he had seen when we came on the scene, probably a pair of scarecrows. I was bedraggled in plain clothes – all wet, and wearing a ski-ing cap; Conforte was much better turned out – he was in one piece, but we both had three days growth on our chins, and were covered in dry salt water spray. He took us to a French officer, and I asked him to take us to the nearest Allied Headquarters. He replied there were some Americans in Calvi, and this was just the news I was hoping for, so I asked him to give us a guide and lead us to them. A guide was produced who took us down the main street into a restaurant. I shall never forget the inside of that restaurant; it was full of American Air Force pilots having their breakfast. I took a good look at them to make quite sure that I was not imagining things, and then I went over to a Lieutenant and told him who I was, and how many there were of us. Fortunately I had two letters from my wife in my wallet, which had my rank and name with the prison camp address, i.e. Camp 29. Directly he saw them he was convinced, and told all the fellows who we were, and where we had come from.

I told him one or two of the party were a little tuckered out, as we had been sixty hours on the trip, and we were all a bit wet. Our hosts were the American Air Force stationed at Calvi in February 1944. They took charge of us from the start and a finer bunch of fellows I've yet to meet. My Lieutenant phoned up his Commanding Officer who came down right away, bringing their Padre with an ambulance, and a three-tonner with a doctor showed up soon after. Whilst the ambulance was coming we had our first American breakfast – flap-jacks, pineapple jam, and sausages, with lashings of coffee. Was it good? It was so good that we had several helpings. Many of the officers came over and congratulated us, and gave us cigarettes. We then went back to the beach with the padre who gasped when he saw the size of the boat.

Our party in the meantime had not waited and had wan-

dered along inshore, until they struck the main road, so we just missed them, but someone had guided them to the restaurant. The bombardier soon revived with some hot food inside him. He was also helped by the fact that, he was now back with his own people. They fed us again, and then took all the men and Italians off to their Infirmary to bed down and have a good sleep whilst the officers slept in their Mess. We were all so excited that the doctor gave us a sedative. One thing that worried us a bit was that our feet were partially frostbitten; frost bite makes ones feet ache and tingle when you are warm, but we did not let this worry us unduly.

While we slept they rang up Major Croft, O.C. British Commandoes at Bonifacio, and told him the news. When we woke up, the American Quartermaster came along and measured us up for clothes and boots. We were completely rigged out; there was nothing they could not do for us. I was given a pair of flying boots and wore them all the way home, and what I looked like when I got out at Euston, rigged out like an enlisted American airman, but wearing my British rank on my greatcoat, I cannot think. No red cap challenged me, and I must say I didn't care a hoot.

Everybody rapidly recovered and we were really none the worse for the crossing. We asked the A.A.F. at Calvi to guard the boat, the engine was valuable, in spite of the fact that it never went. Furthermore, the boat was now Mario's property, and we had promised him it would be looked after. We stayed with the Americans for thirty-six hours, and then they motored us up to Bonifacio, which was the Headquarters of the British Commandos. We said goodbye to our American friends with regret; they were a jolly fine crowd. Quite rightly they thought we were mad when they saw the size of the boat, especially when they realised that fifteen had crossed over in it. As we left they said "Well, I guess you guys deserve a break now".

We were most anxious to let our relations know, and also our Italian friends, that we had reached Corsica. In the first case it was easy as a telegram had been sent off to the War Office who would notify our next of kin, but we wanted to let Baccium and all the Cellas at Farfanosa know that we had

reached Corsica, and this is how we did it. After the United Nations news broadcast by the B.B.C., Radio Londra followed, which gave the identical news in Italian. Immediately after the news the announcer called out "Attentione," and then proceeded to read out several messages, all numbered. Invariably they were short messages, and conveyed absolutely nothing to the enemy or the ordinary listener. They were in fact a code, an agreed message in answer to some information required. I had listened to them many a time in Baccium's house, so I prepared one for broadcasting if we ever reached Corsica.

It happened like this. One day Angelina was in a nearby village buying tooth-paste for us. The shopkeeper said, "What do you want three tubes of tooth-paste for? You have no teeth." Angelina replied, "They are for my ass." I told him therefore my code message would be "Dentefriscio per assino. Salute tutti." A rough translation of that is, "Toothpaste for the ass. Goodbye all." I asked Major Croft if he could get that transmitted by the B.B.C., and three days after our arrival at Bonifacio I went up to his wireless room. Along came the news, and then the messages. After the twelfth message the announcer said, "Messaggio numero 13, Dentefriscio per assino. Salute tutti." I was delighted to hear it. I knew that Baccium, his brother and sister were listening in. That message brought them the satisfaction of knowing that all their efforts in helping us to escape had been crowned with success. The news would soon get round to those who should know, such as the Padre, and the Sub-Inspector of Police. The same message would also be heard by the relatives of the partisans, who of course, wanted to know if their menfolk had made the crossing safely. I brought all the partisans up the next evening. Messages were invariably repeated twice so they heard the messages with their own ears, and they were very delighted and relieved. "Bene Colonello, Bene," they said fervently.

Bonifacio is the second largest town in Corsica and when we arrived there it was looking rather knocked about. I understand that much of the damage was due to Allied bombing, though that would not have happened if the partisans had displayed an agreed signal that the Axis troops had left. We were

allotted a flat and waited nearly a week for air transport to take us to Naples. Whilst there, the Senior Naval Officer and R.A.F. Commander visited us, and very kindly brought some whisky and beer. It was very much appreciated, in fact we were rather made a fuss of at Bonifacio, and were very well looked after. Some of us took the opportunity to have a look at the town. It was typically French, but all the shops appeared to have been skinned of most of their goods by the Axis troops when they left. There were quite a number of American troops there, with a large proportion of coloured men, mainly transport drivers.

While in Bonifacio I made my introduction to the American equivalent of a N.A.A.F.I. Although rather off the beaten track it was quite well stocked, and I managed to get some underclothes to set me up. When they heard that I was an escapee there was nothing they couldn't do for me, because I had to explain who I was before I could be served. British personnel are not permitted to buy from these shops, but in our case an exception was made.

This American equivalent of a N.A.A.F.I. made my mouth water. Every conceivable article was on the shelves, and here again we were given the run of the place.

Altogether by the time we left Corsica we were well set up thanks to the kindness of the Americans and our own folk. Whilst waiting for a plane I took the opportunity to have myself medically examined. A jeep ran me to an American Base Hospital a few kilometres outside the town. A most attractive large villa perched half way up a hill had been taken over by our Allies. It lay in a little sheltered valley of its own, and commanded a wonderful view of the surrounding country and the sea. I was ushered in, and a most attractive nurse took my particulars. I think she wondered who on earth I was, as I was partly dressed as a G.I. but wore an American Officer's fore and aft cap. In due course I was introduced to the Senior American Doctor, who had studied at Guy's Hospital, and in Germany, besides qualifying in America. Having explained who I was, and why I had come, he soon ran the stethoscope over me, and took my blood pressure. It did not take him

EPILOGUE

Since writing this story I have been in communication with the partisans i.e. The Padre, Don Luca Cella and the grand old man, Baccium. All the Cellas are well. The Padre is an embittered man I regret to say. The Fascists suspected that he had helped prisoners of war, and they burnt his house to the ground in retaliation. He, his sister and small child just escaped in what they stood up in, and hid in the mountains and were on the run for several months until the arrival of the Allies. Although the Padre rendered less service to us than Baccium he was rewarded to a greater degree than Baccium, and presented with the illuminated address of thanks of the Commander in Chief. Why this happened I cannot say. I certainly never wrote him up, and I can only conclude that he sold himself very high. At all events it was not enough for him. Very irrationally he considered that the Allies should recompense him for the loss of his house and effects, and I regret to say that he now has not a good word to say for the Allies. He considers that the smallness of the award is an insult. Not so the Cellas. They heard the message over the wireless which gave them the clue that we had reached Corsica safely. Angelino promptly got blind drunk as he promised he would, and they all were wondrously pleased and relieved. The Cellas always thought that Mr. X would double-cross us and that we should never be allowed to escape from Genoa.

Baccium, after much delay, was rewarded, and I made it my business to press for repayment from this end. He was publicly thanked for what he had done for us and given the Commander in Chief's illuminated address of thanks and a sum of money too. He wrote to me and said that he was very satisfied. Unfortunately the value of the lira is rapidly dropping and although the money payment judged by pre-war standards was generous, today I fear it will just about buy a suit for Baccium.

When times are better and restrictions and export quotas are relaxed, and I am permitted to travel abroad, I shall visit the Cellas and bring them some clothes and boots.

Of the remainder I have only had news of Emmanuele. He was shot doing some job for the Allies or for himself. His family wrote to me, but could give no details. They did say that they were in no financial difficulties and for that I am glad.

Once I have contacted Baccium I most probably will trace what happened to the remainder. Mr. X for all I know may now be an M.P. or its equivalent. I somehow think he is not living in obscurity unless he too has been bumped off. He was an ambitious man and had lived in more enlightened countries than his own.

Baccium's last letter to me stated that times were hard and commodities were expensive to buy. Life was never easy in that unhappy land for the country folk, but I am more than thankful to know that when the end came and the Allies took over, the Cellas had not been molested by the Fascists, nor had they been the victims of any reprisals.

K.F.M.