

He was Admiral Sir - Cowan who had taken part in the battle of Jutland in the first war. I mentioned this to a local ex-naval Middi who also fought at Jutland and he said 'Oh that was Titch Cowan' Yes, he was a very short chap.

While I think of it, he used to come and sit with our little group of South Africans and was most interesting to talk to. One day he said "Oh, 24th September, yes, Forty years ago I was fighting on the Nile". He eventually became ill and the Italinas, fearing that he would die on their hands, had him repatriated to England accompanied by another officer as his A.D.C., and a batman. Later, after the war I was talking to one of our officers who had been transferred to the Commandos and dropped in Yugoslavia and he told me that a funny old man with another officer had been dropped, also in Yugoslavia. This was our old friend Admiral Cowan again. Of this I also read later when his death was announced in an English paper. He was a real tough campaigner.

During our walks Nightingale, whose feet were very tender used to collect a few suitable stones which he put into his boots overnight to stretch them as these army boots were rough on his feet.

He was one of four who had planned to escape by digging a hole through one of the outside walls, using some of the tools which were being forged in the boiler room by the Brigadiers. Well, he and his pals managed to get out of the camp and made off into the country but unfortunately the drilling of the hole had made so much noise that an alarm was raised. There was a terrible flap and all the Italian guards turned out. In the distance we could hear their Alsations giving tongue so we knew that they would not be free for very long and in this we were right. While this flap was going on we, of course trying to see what was going on, leaned out of the windows and the Italians assembled below got pannicky and fired a few shots into our room putting out one of the lights.

After a while we were all assembled downstairs in the large dining room while our rooms were thoroughly searched. After a couple of hours we were dismissed. Nightingale from my room was of course not with us and de Beer, and I had hardly undressed when we were called to the Commandants office where he said through his interpreter "The Brigadier has complained that shots were fired into your room". "Quite right" I said "but fortunately on account of your bad marksmen no one was hit." This remark he apparently did not like. "The reason shots were fired was because you threw stones at the men". This of course had not been done, so we denied it. "Well" said the Commandant "we have proof" "What proof?" He then produced a number of stones which he had found in Nightingales locker which he said proved that we had the stones. What had happened as I told him, "The stones were not stones but acorns dropping off the Oak Trees" This was the real cause. However we could not convince him and we were given two weeks in the 'Cooler' as the cell was known. This was not anything to look forward to as we had no one to talk to and no reading matter. The only redeeming factor was that our chaps in the cook house saw that we were well fed. We, however, only did one week as the Senior British Officer lodged a complaint and in an interview, this anti-facist Italian agreed that we might be right, and I think he himself knew that no stones had been thrown. Nightingale and the other two chaps we did not see again so did not get their story.

One very well known person in our camp was Colonel Desmond Young, author of the history on Rommel. He was able to read the Italian and German papers and try and make up a good story on the progress of the war in a talk each morning. We of course knew that the enemy news was not reliable. It was not until we got to a P.O.W. camp in Germany that we had a secret wireless. Of that later.