



## **The Cost of Freedom: Down Behind the German Lines**

**By Homer "Bus" Badgett**

**Edited by Joseph Naumann**

## Editor's Note

I don't remember exactly when Uncle Bus died – it was at least four or five years after he wrote this little book. My wife, his niece, and I visited him and Aunt Ruth a year or two after he had sent me a copy of the book. Uncle Bus was born in Mount Vernon Illinois, served in the Army Air Corps in World War II, earned an engineering degree, worked for Douglas Aircraft in San Diego until he retired, and for several years after retirement, he taught science in a middle school in the San Diego area. After reading this book, I think one would agree that he was also an excellent writer.

I decided to edit the book which was originally written on an Apple II and printed on a 9-pin dot matrix black and white printer. Uncle Bus sent me a copy when I was teaching social studies at McCluer North High School in Florissant, Missouri. On the cover, he wrote this note:

*To: Joe and Mary Jane, with love.*

*Joe,*

*I hope you can find something here to help with your history classes.*

*Good luck,*

*Bus*

For several years, until I retired in 2000, I read parts of the book to my eleventh-grade World History students. On those days, one could hear a pin drop, they were so quiet. Now, as I teach geography at the University of Missouri St. Louis, I got to thinking that this could be a valuable piece of original source material for those interested in World War II, particularly from the point of view of an American airman who was down behind the German lines and dependant on the French Patriots to keep from being captured by the Germans. So I began the process of scanning the pages and correcting all the OCR errors in the hope of getting it published. I hope you are reading this because that will mean that I may have succeeded in sharing this wonderful document with many more social studies teachers and students of history.

Any photos not scanned from Uncle Bus' booklet, are USAF photos in the public domain, are other public domain photos, or are from the Wikipedia Commons under the terms of the GNU Free Documentation License. I also made and added the maps, and I added (Appendices I and II). Appendix I is a letter from Bus' French Mama to his mother in Mt. Vernon, Illinois. It was received shortly after Bus had been reunited with the American forces in England and had been reassigned. Appendix II contains some general information about the Aubers region in the Department Nord of France obtained from sources free of copyright restrictions. I've always had a special place in my heart for my wife's Uncle Bus, and reflecting on his many contributions to America (from Army Air Corps co-pilot to being a middle-school science teacher) and from pursuing this endeavor, that special place has only been enriched and deepened.

Joseph Naumann  
October, 2008

## FORWARD

I have written this true story as an historical record for my grandchildren, with hope that none of my family members will ever have to fight in another war.

Way back in 1933. When I was a sixth grader in elementary school, I remember reading in the school copy of *Current Events*, "The likelihood of Germany starting another war which could eventually involve the world." The Germans were going through a "peace time" mobilization of their country by training large numbers of glider pilots in the absence of engine driven aircraft, and troops carrying shovels, because rifles had not reached the mass production stage. By the end of the year, Hitler was made general chancellor. Germany withdrew from the United Nations, which removed a restriction against rearming. People became aware of Hitler's *Mein Kampf* and torchlight parades became popular. Concentration camps sprang up in many locations. It was obvious to everyone that they were preparing for a future war. Yet, most nations were playing the game of "isolationism" or "let things alone and hope for the best".

I kept asking myself: "how does this affect me?" I didn't want to become a soldier in 5 to 10 years and fight in a war with Germany. Just thinking about it made me a little sick to my stomach. As I grew older, I became like everyone else and ignored most of what was happening in Germany. Inwardly, I felt there wasn't anything I could do about it anyway. As the years went by, the free world stood by and watched the conditions inside Germany grow completely out of control. As a result, millions and millions of people were destined to lose their lives! Today, I ask myself: "why didn't the free nations "get tough" with Germany much earlier?"

We are not war mongers. We are freedom seekers. Without freedom, life would not be worth living. Peace is not possible without freedom and our freedom must be protected. Remember the words of Thomas Jefferson, when he said "I have sworn upon the altar of god eternal hostility against every form of tyranny over the mind of man".

Written by ..... homer "Bus" Badgett  
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## PROLOGUE

In my age group, just about every one remembers where they were when the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor, that Sunday morning of December 7, 1941. I had been home for the weekend and my Father was driving me back to Southern Illinois University (S.I.U) in Carbondale, Illinois. I was in my second year of pre-med. studies. The University was only about 60 miles from home. The car radio was on. A news commentator was telling us the Japanese had just bombed the U. S. Naval Base in Pearl Harbor, which meant we were at war with Japan.

I was 20 years old and knew I would soon become a member of the armed services. I also knew I had the option of joining up or waiting to be drafted. I wanted to fly airplanes and began to think about how to get into one of the military flight training programs.

By joining the Army Air Corps Active Reserve (July 22, 1942), I was able to get into a Civilian Pilot Training Program. Ground classes were taught by S.I.U (Southern Illinois University). While flying instructions were given at the Marion, Illinois Airport. After completing 30 hours of flight time in light aircraft, I earned my Single Engine Pilot's License. From here, I received my military orders sending me to Roswell, New Mexico for continued flight training to become a Military Glider Pilot (Sept. 13, 1942).

After I finished primary and basic glider training and earned my Staff Sergeant rating, a notice was posted that said more power pilots were needed. Interested glider pilots would be given a Cadet Entrance exam, and if they could pass the test, they would be placed in an accelerated night training program. It meant giving up my Staff Sergeant's rating and reverting back to Private: a Cadet's rank was the same as that of a Private, but I wanted to try for this anyway. I passed the tests and became an Aviation Cadet in Class 43K. I studied and worked day and night to graduate from the Santa Ana, California Cadet Pre-Flight School in three weeks. Some students had been in this school for more than a year and did not look fondly at my accomplishment. From Santa Ana, I went directly into Primary Flight School at the Claiborne Flight Academy in Wickenburg Arizona. I had gone through this same school when I completed my Primary Glider Training. At that time it was called the Clayborne Gliding Academy. Now, the name had been changed by substituting the word "Flight" for the word "Gliding."

All the gliders had been transferred to another base. Now, there were only aircraft with engines here. I had an excellent primary flight instructor named M. C. Watrud and learned more from him about flying than any other instructor. My Basic Flight Training was in Pecos, Texas, where I flew an aircraft called the "Vultee Basic Trainer;" a low-wing monoplane. It was commonly known as the "Vultee Vibrator." Finally, I graduated from the Advanced Flight Training School at Yuma, Arizona, after flying twin engine aircraft (UC-78's and AT-9's). Here, I earned my wings and graduated as 2nd Lt., Army Air Corps. Now, with my wings and my commission, I become a military pilot. I had accomplished what I basically set out to do, and it was a very good feeling. From here, I wanted to become a fighter pilot in a P-38 (Lightning) or P-51(Mustang). This did not happen!

From Yuma, I was sent to Muroc, California ("Muroc Army Air Base" - Now, its name is "Edwards Air Force Base"). At Muroc, I started flying as copilot on a four engine B-24

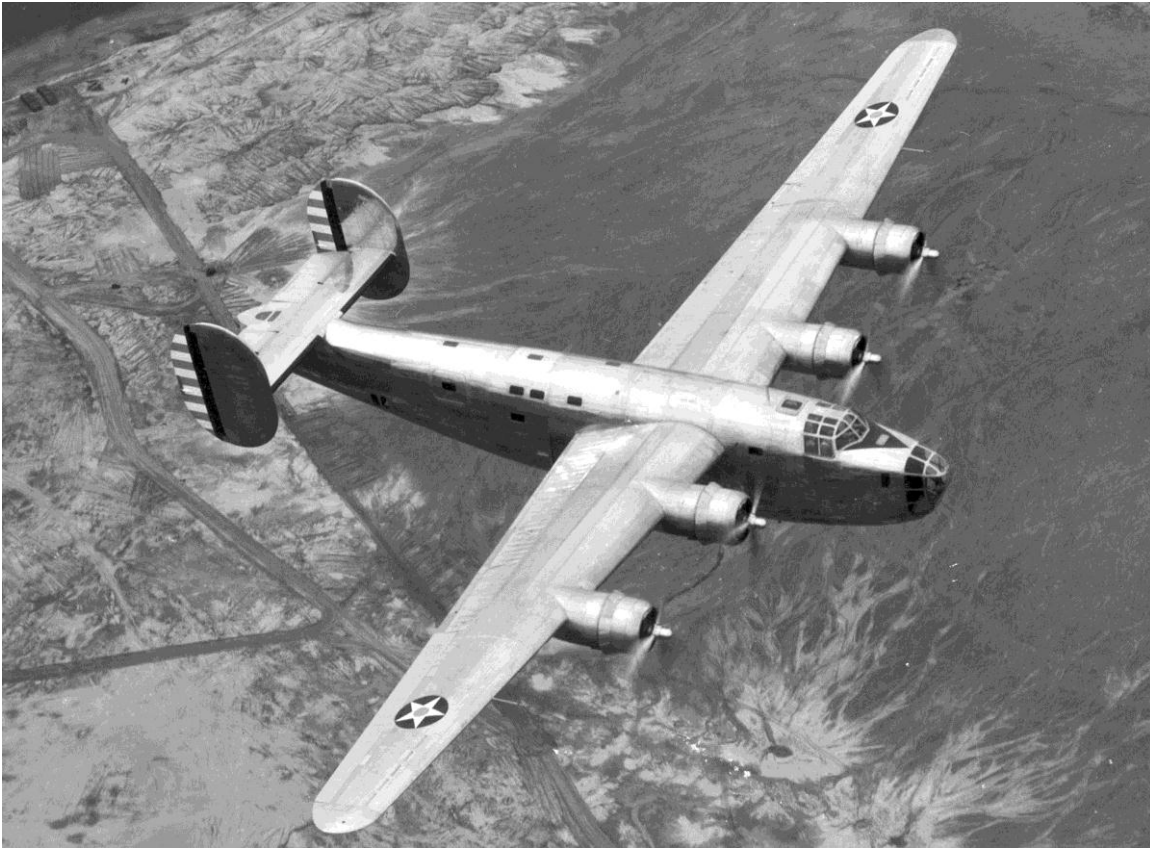
Liberator along with a newly formed crew of 10 airmen. At the end of the training period on B-24s, our crew became qualified for combat assignments.

I became a member of a B-24 Liberator crew made up of the following ten airmen. Together, we received our orders to go to Hamilton Field, California. At Hamilton Field, we were given a new B-24. Then, we were directed to fly the Liberator and crew to West Palm Beach, Florida, where we were to receive our next assignment in some war zone outside the United States. I kept a pretty good flight log book, so, I will start my story with a log of each night leading up to that fateful day of July 11, 1944.



**Figure 1** From left to right, **Back row:** 2nd Lt. Ralph E. Woodard - first pilot, 2nd Lt. Homer "Bus" Badgett - Co-Pilot, 2nd Lt. Andrew E. Felbinger - Navigator, 2nd Lt. Charles P. Crawford - Bombardier, S/Sgt. Donald Carter - Flight Engineer. **Front Row:** S/Sgt. John Y. Wargo – Gunner, S/Sgt. Thomas Cox – Gunner (Later became Flight Engineer), S/Sgt.

## **PART ONE: Information from Bus' pilot logbook, with additional comments**



**Figure 2 B-24 Liberator - USAF photo in public domain**

### **3/30/44**

We picked up a new B-24 "B" with only six hours of flight time and logged on it at Hamilton field (San Francisco). We flew the crew and supplies to the first stop, which was Sky Harbor Airfield at Phoenix, Arizona. The new B-24 performed beautifully. The time for this flight was 5 hr. and 25 min.

### **4/2/44**

We flew a new B-24 from Sky Harbor to Midland, Texas. Flight time: 4 hr. and 10min

### **4/2/44**

We flew a new B-24 from Midland, Texas to Macon, Georgia (Robin's Field). Our flight time: 7 hr. and 15 min.

### **4/3/44**

We flew a new B-24 from Macon, Georgia to West Palm Beach, Florida. Here, all crew members were given complete physicals and shots. After we checked into the barracks, someone slipped into the room, occupied by me and Ralph, and stole Ralph's electric

shaver. He was so mad, he ran out into the hall and shouted, -whoever stole my razor is a -fat head!" no one ever returned it. Flight time: 3 hr. and 25 min.

**4/8/44**

From Morrison field in West Palm Beach, Florida we flew to Waller field in Trinidad. We were issued sealed, secret orders, before the take-off.

We knew these orders would either send us to the Asian or to the European theater of operations. Inwardly, I felt that one's chances for survival in the Asian theater would be greater than in the European theater. We had a load of machetes, sleeping nets, and other jungle gear aboard the aircraft, just in case the orders should send us to Asia. Also aboard was a large shipment of K-rations. We could hardly wait to open the large official envelope. One hour out from the tip of Florida, we opened the secret orders.



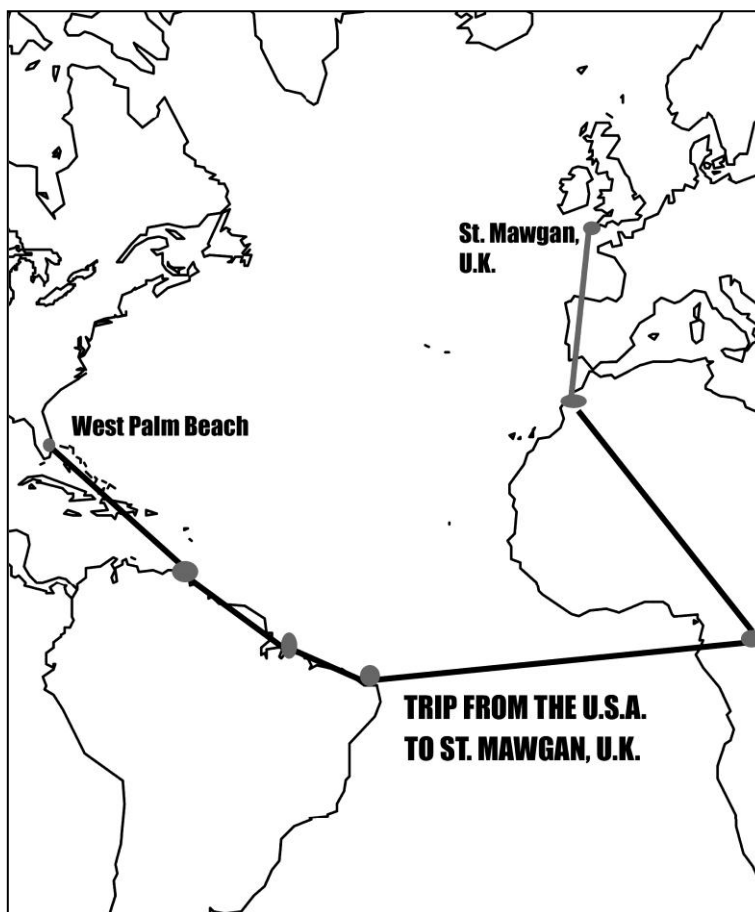
The secret orders directed us to fly the south Atlantic route to the European Theater of Operations (England). Our new mailing address in England would be APO 12945, c/o postmaster, New York, N. Y. flying time to Trinidad was: 11 hours. We landed at Waller field; an American base in Trinidad. We slept under mosquito nets. Each of us was given a small bottle of Atabrine tablets\_and told to take one each day. These tablets were supposed to suppress the symptoms of malaria fever. Taking them would not prevent getting malaria, but they were supposed to suppress the symptoms adequately to keep you feeling good enough to travel, should you be unfortunate enough to catch it.

**4/9/44**

From Trinidad, we continued to Belem, Brazil. We flew two hours on instruments, because of low visibility. We crossed the equator and again, we slept under mosquito nets. It was hot and humid. It seemed to rain every half hour. Meals were served as buffets. There were several types of bananas and tropical fruit provided. I liked the bananas and some of the little black ones were delicious. The total flying time was 2 hours.

#### **4/10/44**

We flew from Belem to Natal, Brazil. Natal is located on the east coast of Brazil. Along our flight path, cumulus clouds ranged as high as 17,000 feet. We flew at 4,000 feet and through some of the lower clouds. They didn't seem as turbulent as the ones in the United States. Below, the green forests were extensive and so thick. It appeared impossible for the sunlight could never shine through them. We flew across the mouth of the Amazon River.



I went down and buzzed some water buffalo. Ralph was against it, but I did it anyway and almost got into trouble. One of the other pilots did the same thing and picked up a hole in his wing. He swore it was a bird, but I was afraid it might turn out to be a chicken. It did turn out to be a bird, hurrah!! How lucky can you get? After landing at Natal and getting settled, I went out and bought a pair of Brazilian leather boots, which were very comfortable to fly in. Later, Felbinger bought a small monkey, which flew with us to England. The flying time was 7 hr. and 5 min.

#### **4/12/44**

We flew across the Atlantic Ocean, from Natal, Brazil (South America) to Dakar, Africa. During the first half of our flight there were many swelling cumulus clouds over the Atlantic Ocean. About midway across, we had to fly on instruments through an equatorial front. This was accompanied by high turbulence, rain, and pounding hail. We engaged the auto-pilot to help keep us flying straight and level through the worst of the turbulence. There were times when I thought the impact of the hail might shatter the windshield or the aircraft's cables might snap, as they jerked the controls back and forth and labored to keep up with the rapid commands of the auto-pilot. With the extreme turbulence, Felbinger's monkey became difficult to control. It urinated on Ralph's



shoulder and spit chewed up fruit on the aircraft's control cables. When Felbinger noticed his monkey was becoming a pest, he named it "Shit for brains".

As we approached the African coast line, visibility became limited because of Africa's blowing sand and dust hanging in the atmosphere. Felbinger's navigational calculations brought us in about 50 miles south of the Dakar landing strip. We tuned on our radio compass, and had no trouble homing in on the base. We landed on a steel mat runway laid out on the reddish sand. Dakar was a French colony. The native troops were Senegalese. A seven foot giant black soldier carrying a rifle with a long bayonet guarded our airplane, while we reported to Flight Operations. The guard was dressed in a colorful African military outfit, and wore a fez cap, he reminded me of a colorful genie who had just jumped out of his lamp. Our flying time was 11 hr. and 20 min.

#### **4/13/44**

From Dakar, Africa we flew to Marrakech, North Africa, in French Morocco. We flew across the western part of the vast Sahara desert, avoiding neutral "Spanish Sahara" along the coast, and on through a mountain pass in the Atlas Mountains. We landed at the American base in Marrakech. When we landed, I noticed several B-29 "Super Fortresses" lined up on the parking ramp. The total flying time was: 7 hr. and 30 min.

While talking to some of the B-29 crew members, they said they experienced many maintenance problems with them. Marrakech was very crowded and smelly. Natives were trying to sell us wallets, hammered silver gadgets, shoes, and curved knives. Most of the children were dirty and covered with various types of sores. It was a very depressing experience.

#### **4/17/44**

We flew in formation with several other B-24 Liberators from Marrakech, French Africa, to St. Mawgan. England. The flying time was 10 hours.

We were warned not to follow any false radio homing signals that Portugal frequently sent out, especially in bad weather. They did this to trap American B-24 bombers. With continuous cloud coverage below, a pilot might become confused and think Portugal was England. Since Portugal was supposed to be "neutral" in the war, it would intern the pilots and then sell their Liberators to the highest bidder (so the story went!). After landing at St. Mawgan, an Englishman from "animal control" came around to see if we were bringing any animals to England. He took our monkey! We had grown attached to the little animal, so it was a sad goodbye when the Englishman took away "Shit for Brains".

#### **4/17/44**

From St. Mawgan, England we flew to Valley Airport at Hollyhead in Wales, England. The weather was bad and we had to fly on instruments most of the time. Visibility at valley airport was less than one half mile, but we spotted the runway which was illuminated by red flares outlining the runway. Total flying time was 2 hr. and 30 min.

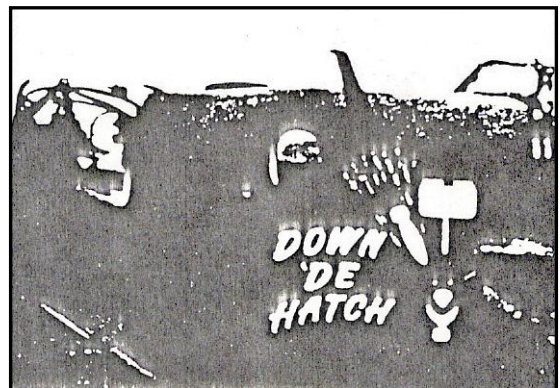


Figure 3 We paid \$40 to have "DOWN 'DE HATCH" painted on our B-24.

After landing and parking the aircraft, we were approached by a military artist, who offered to paint an icon on the side of our B-24, for a price. A nude female and a title, not to exceed "x" number of words, cost from 60 to 80 dollars. A non-female painting cost less. We all pooled \$40.00 and had "down de hatch" painted on the side of our aircraft, along with a painting of a falling bomb heading for a commode. We were very proud of our new insignia, thinking it gave the bomber a unique place in the war, with its own name. At that time we did not know we were going to have to give up our B-24, with its new painting, and fly some of the older aircraft in combat.

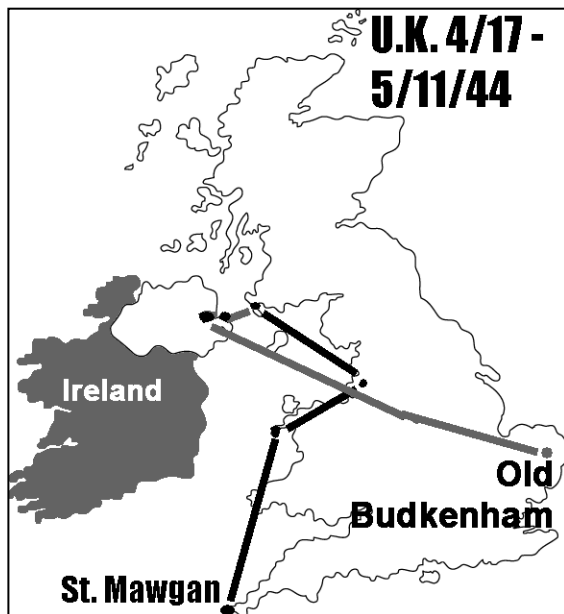
#### **4/18/44**

We flew from Hollyhead. To Worton Airport in Blackpool. England. Our flying time: 1 hr. and 20 min.

Blackpool was a vacation resort. It was a place for English people to go "on holiday." We went to the Blackpool Palladium where the English were having a dance. There was an orchestra. It seemed to me to be more like a symphonic orchestra than anything else. It was playing beautiful classical music and every one was dancing English fashion, with bowing, swirling, etc.). I asked a very attractive English girl in military uniform to dance. Much to my surprise, she accepted and proceeded to instruct me on how to dance the way the English were dancing. It was fun! When the dance was over, I thanked her, said goodbye. Then I returned to the air base at check-in time. We left "down de hatch" at Worton airport to be modified for combat. They were going to replace the quarter inch Plexiglas in the windshield with one-inch-thick, bullet proof glass, and add coffin shaped iron body shields behind the pilot's and co-pilot's seats, etc. We left our aircraft and we never saw "down de hatch" again.

Forty-four years later, I found that it had been sent to Shipdham. England and assigned to the 44th bomb group. It survived the war with 115 missions and got credit for downing 3 German fighter planes. It was one of the few B-24s that was flown back to the United States after the war.

We went by train to Stranraer, Scotland. Then, we boarded a ferry boat to Larne, Northern Ireland. Next, we boarded a truck that took us to Nutts Corner near Belfast, which was the home of the 2nd replacement and training squadron, 2nd CCRC GP., north Ireland (army air force station AAF 238, APO 639-Combat Training School). We were in school until 5/10/44. Here, we were taught how to best meet the challenges that would face us in combat. The first speaker got up and announced, "I want you to know, there will be no discharges here in the European theater of operations. If you listen carefully, we might even save your life, so you can complete your missions and return home." The comment about the discharge drew a few chuckles from the students. As the class continued, procedures were discussed for taking off B-24s with heavy bomb loads and grouping with other aircraft in formations at attack flight altitudes. We reviewed



emergency procedures on what to do if we should have to ditch, crash land, or parachute down in enemy territory. We were told that originally, pilots had to fly 25 missions before they could return to the United States. Now, however, General Doolittle had taken over command and added a requirement of 5 more missions per airman.

Later, after the allied invasion of France, five more missions were added, bringing the total to 35. We were also told we were lucky, because the average aircraft losses per mission had been 4%, but now they had dropped to 2%. We were introduced to the escape kit that each of us would check out and carry on each of our missions. It contained French, Belgian, Dutch, and German money: about \$50.00 per country, four silk waterproof road maps, of the countries we would be flying over, a razor for shaving, a morphine filled tube with needle to help suppress pain, a set of translation cards, with English sentences, translated into French, Flemish (Belgium), Dutch (Holland), and German languages. Examples of these sentences were: "will you help me?"; "I am looking for food;" "I want to contact the French underground;" "can you speak English?" etc. To take care of emergencies, the kit contained malted milk tablets for extra energy, and caffeine tablets for preventing sleep. All these things were packed in a plastic flat box that could be placed in one of the knee pockets of our flight suits.

We were told, if we had to bail out over Germany, to be careful about approaching farmers, who would, most probably, try to kill us with a pitch fork or whatever was handy, rather than turn us in to a German military unit. It seemed, our chances for survival in Germany would be best, if we just surrendered directly to German soldiers. They would probably try to protect us from the civilians. These instructions weren't meant to discourage our thoughts of escaping, if an opportunity were there. Trying to get out of Germany, however, would be extremely risky if we had to bail out over occupied France, Belgium, or Holland. It might be possible to evade capture; however, it would be up to each individual to decide whether or not, to get rid of his uniform. If he were captured while dressed in civilian clothes. The Germans could say he was a spy and end up shooting him. Most of the French people hated the Germans, and if they could, they would probably help a downed allied airman. Regardless of any other decisions we might make, we were urged to always keep our dog tags on under our clothing. Being able to show our dog tags after being captured could save our lives. Statistics showed that after parachuting. The chances of evading capture were much better if we avoided teaming up with another crew member. Hearing two people speaking English could easily attract the enemy and hiding one person was easier than hiding two.

If it became necessary to make an emergency landing inside a neutral country, such as Switzerland or Sweden, the procedure was to lower the landing gear. This would indicate the aircraft was crippled and searching for place to land. When observing an aircraft in trouble. A neutral country would usually send up two fighter planes to escort the aircraft to an airfield or landing strip. Once inside the neutral country, you should expect to lose your aircraft and be interned for the duration of the war.

We were informed. We could wear our pistols on combat missions. However, when making emergency parachute jumps with a pistol, it could easily slide out of its holster and cut one's face. The benefit of having a pistol was doubtful. Germans were less likely to shoot you if you didn't have one, and it probably wouldn't aid you in getting help from the resistance inside occupied countries. Carrying a pistol had to be an individual decision.

One day in school. Some one passed around photographs of some of the damaged aircraft and wounded airmen who had participated in the August 1, 1943 low level raid on the Ploesti oil fields in Rumania. The pictures were frightening! Could the air war be this terrible? I thought I was going to get sick to my stomach. Over half of the 179 liberators that were on this raid, were shot down or missing. These were just the pictures of the liberators and their crews that had returned from Ploesti. What about the ones that were not so lucky?

After finishing combat school, we were assigned as a replacement crew to the 453rd bombardment group. We were to replace a crew who didn't return from a mission.

#### **5/11/44**

Arrived at the 453rd bombardment group, in old Buckingham, and were assigned to squadron 735.

The daily routine for flying combat missions started with the orderly awakening you in early morning hours to do these things: (1) go to breakfast. (2) report to the briefing room at a scheduled time, to learn the details of the mission for the day and (3) fly a bomb loaded B-24 Liberator to a specified target and destroy it.

When walking to the mess hall, one of the officers had a large black crow for a pet. Each morning, the bird would walk along with us to breakfast. We were all very careful not to step on the bird, as it waddled along toward the mess hall. The cook always fed the bird, along with the rest of us.

Our briefing officer was Jimmy Stewart (previously a movie star). Everyone said he did not like to be asked about the movies. He was an officer who flew a Liberator, like the rest of us. Each morning, when we reported for briefing he always seemed to be on the telephone with intelligence, weather, or some other office that had an input for his morning briefing. You didn't have to look at him to know who he was, because it was easy to recognize that "one and only" voice of his. Everyone seemed to like him.



**Figure 4 Flight clothing and equipment, without a flack jacket and an iron helmet.**

In the briefing room, he would have a large wall mounted map with a red ribbon on it to mark our flight paths from England to the target and home again. The map would have red areas marked to show the probable position of German anti-aircraft guns, possible interception points, where we might encounter enemy fighters, etc. He would point out where the enemy moved flack barges up and down-the coast, etc. The weather officer would tell us what we could expect to encounter in the way of weather. An intelligence officer would show a picture of the target and describe it. Our flight altitude would be given, with the number and types of bombs we would be carrying, and the number of gallons of gas that were in the tanks. The location of the initial point (I.P.) would be marked on the

map. The I.P. was the point where we would all fly at a fixed altitude and straight and level to the target. This was the most dangerous part of the mission. An estimate was made of the amount of flack we could encounter over the target area and where we could expect to run into enemy fighter planes. The briefing always ended with the synchronizing of our military watches. This was called an official "time hack."

In dressing for the mission, we would first put on our heavy winter underwear, and then decide if we were going to wear a loose fitted blue flannel heated suit under the flight suit, or put on sheep skin pants and a sheep skin jacket over the flight suit. Finally, over the outside, we strapped on a flack jacket that could be easily released in an emergency, by pulling on an attached chord. The flack Jacket was made up of canvas and metal strips. It covered the front of the body and extended down between the legs. We nearly always wore heated gloves. Sheepskin boots were worn over our shoes. The temperature at altitude could vary from 30 to 50 degrees below zero. We were always breaking icicles off our oxygen masks. We wore a leather helmet with goggles in case the windshield got shot out. The oxygen mask snapped on the face of the helmet. We wrapped a throat strap microphone around the throat. Earphones were mounted inside the helmet. On top of the leather helmet, we wore an iron infantry helmet. Lastly, on the outside, we strapped on a Parachute. Also, an escape kit was secured in a pocket.

With all this gear, we would ride in a jeep to the hardstands where the liberators were parked. We were assigned two B-24s to fly in combat. Both of them had combat modifications such as the iron coffin enclosed seats, extra armor plate, etc. However, one of the aircraft had bullet proof glass installed and the other had the old thin quarter inch thick Plexiglas installed in the windshield. The two aircraft were in hardstands next to each other. The reason for having two aircraft assigned to us was to give maintenance crews enough time to patch up flack holes and combat damage in one while flying the other airplane. As soon as we got to the assigned B-24, it was my duty to go over the aircraft and give it a preliminary flight safety check. I would spin the waste gate supercharger turbines and inspect them for cracks, check the tires, inspect the mechanism that retracted the landing gear, make sure all holes were patched, check the fuel, bombs racks, etc.

As we waited for the time to taxi out for take-off, Ralph would have us grouped close to him on the flight deck. Then, he would take out his small bible, read a passage, and pray for our safety. He would ask god to protect us on the mission. Ralph was sincere in his beliefs and belonged to the church of the Nazarene. He was a wonderful person. I thought this was a nice thing for him to do. I felt much better as a result, and I think the crew members felt the same way.

Following the payer, we all went to our individual stations. Ralph and I got into our cockpit seats, which were set back into the coffin shaped iron shields. Then we plugged our earphones into the radio junction box, inserted the oxygen hose into the auto mix outlet, and plugged in any heated clothing we were wearing. There was a rubber relief tube equipped with a funnel for urinating. But it was useless at high altitudes because the urine would freeze and plug up the hose. We carried empty fuse cans to urinate in. These would quickly freeze and they could be stored behind our seats. We usually threw them into the German fields or the English Channel, when returning to England.

At the proper time, Ralph and I would start the engines and taxi away from the hardstand. We would join the long line of aircraft. Heading for the take off runway, an aircraft would

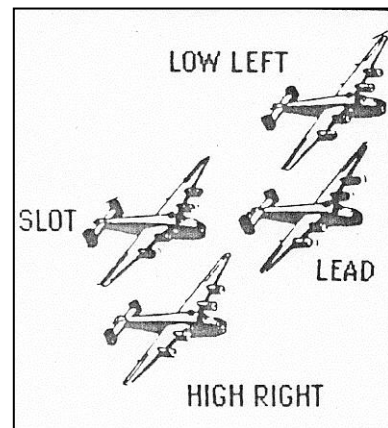
take-off as soon as the plane in front of us started moving, we would move up. At the end of the runway, we would run up and check the engines and turbo superchargers. Then we would wait for the next green take-off flare to be fired. As soon as the flare was fired, Ralph would advance all four throttles as I engaged the four waste-gate superchargers. I carefully monitored manifold pressure, the cylinder head temperature, rpm, and oil pressure. If all these indications remained normal, we continued to pick up speed for take-off. As soon as the wheels left the ground, I would hit the landing gear retraction lever. By reducing this drag, our airspeed would increase along with our rate of climb.

As we climbed higher and cut back a little on the power, to let the engines cool down, we looked up into the sky to find the proper combination of colored flares being shot from a pistol, out the waste window of our "Buncher aircraft" (the formation assembly aircraft). This is how we found our position in the right formation. There were hundreds of liberators from different bomb groups and squadrons flying around, Trying to assemble, and without the flares and Bunchers, it would be almost impossible to find the right place in formation. Each Buncher aircraft was painted with its own unique design of contrasting colors, lines, dots, squares, circles, etc. that was easily recognized. After completing our formation, the Bunchers went in and landed, while we climbed, with the other aircraft to combat altitude. Sometimes, Jimmy Stewart would be leading our 453rd bomb group formation to the target.



Ralph and I frequently traded responsibilities of taking-off and landing the aircraft.

Each element of a formation consisted of four aircraft. They were assembled together with a lead aircraft, a second aircraft flew on its high right and a third one flew in the low left position. The fourth aircraft flew in the "slot position," below and behind the lead plane (sometimes called the "Purple Heart corner"). Once the lead element was formed, another element of 4 planes would fly the high right position on the lead element and the third element would fly in the low left position, etc. On and on it went, until hundreds of aircraft were headed for the target. In a maximum effort, it was not uncommon for two thousand aircraft to be used in a bombing mission.



On combat missions, Ralph and I would alternately fly the aircraft 30 minutes each, which turned out to be a very good procedure for us.

Each morning, when taking-off with our bomb loads, an English farmer, standing in his field just past the end of the runway, would extend his right arm upward and give us a "v" for victory sign with his fingers. This always made me feel good, because it was an expression of appreciation by the English. I always looked forward to seeing the English farmer on take-off. I never failed to wave back with a "v" sign.

Maintenance of the liberators was excellent. Mechanics worked day and night to make sure everything on the aircraft was in working order. When we picked up holes on a mission, the

damaged aircraft went to maintenance for repair. While it was being repaired, we would fly the other 'plane assigned to us, the following day. In this way, an aircraft ready for us every day. I sure missed the bullet proof glass when flying the aircraft that didn't have it. This was just another thing to worry about. On the way across the English Channel, we test fired all of the .50 caliber machine guns aboard the liberator. Each aircraft was originally equipped with ten guns, but now we carried only eight. Two guns were eliminated when all the aircraft had their ball turrets removed. This was done, because the German fighters had stopped trying to attack our formations from underneath.

#### **5/16/44**

Link trainer instrument practice was conducted at Old Buckenham. This practice helped us to fly accurately and safely on instruments under conditions of zero visibility. Time: 55 minutes.

**Note:** many years later, after the war (1949-1950), I worked for the link trainer company ("Link Aviation Devices") in Binghamton, New York. I participated in designing the Navy SNJ flight simulator, using analog computers to solve the equation of flight for the SNJ aircraft. Anyone who could fly this advanced simulator could certainly fly the aircraft - a far advanced design when compared to the original link trainer in the above photo. Now, there are simulators to train pilots before production aircraft are off the assembly line. There are simulators for about every large aircraft flying, including space craft.



**Figure 5 The Link Trainer used for practicing instrument flying. USAF photo in the public domain.**

#### **5/17/44**

Formation practice flight: Old Buckenham, England (local) flight time: 1 hr. and 45 min.

#### **5/16/44**

We flew a high altitude assembly and formation flight from Old Buckenham, England. Our flight time: 4 hr. and 50 min.

#### **5/19/4**

Link trainer - instrument practice - Old Buckenham - Time: 1 hr. and 35 min.

#### **5/20/44**

Prepared for our first mission

Briefed and taxied out; however, the mission was postponed due to unacceptable overcast.

#### **5/21/44**

Prepared for our first mission again

Alerted but, later went on stand down because of weather.

#### **5/22/44**

**First combat mission:** 57-1, Flew to the "Rocket Coast of France." Loaded with eight 1,000 pound general purpose bombs, we flew at 21,000 feet to Sira Court Nobel no.7. I saw

a dozen bursts of flack several hundred feet in front of us. There were no enemy fighters. Our flying time was 5 hours.

This was our first mission. It was military policy to send new replacement crews on an easy mission the first time. This, our first mission, was supposed to be what was called a "milk run." A "milk run" was an easy target where it was not expected that any airplanes would be shot down. In this way, new crews could learn combat formation flying, use the correct procedures for bombing a real enemy target, and expect only a minimum amount of retaliation from the enemy. "Milk runs" built confidence. "Milk runs" didn't always turn out to be easy missions, however. Sometimes aircraft were shot down and airmen were killed on "milk runs." All of the aircraft returned safely. We were partially successful on this trip. Our bombs chipped off some pieces of the German "V-1" launch sight. They probably shook up the electronic launch equipment and operators inside.

The Germans sent "V-1" flying robot bombs over England. Their maximum range was about 150 miles. They were programmed and powered by ram-jet engines. The V-1 was a pilotless flying robot. They were approximately 25 feet long, with a wingspan of 16 feet. In England, it was said, you didn't have to worry if you heard them. It was only when the engine cut-off that the bombs glided downward to hit whatever target might be ahead. "V-1" weapons were certainly inaccurate, and a flop as a strategic weapon, but they did lots of damage to British property. They were almost incapable of hitting a specific target; however, they made large numbers of people nervous and also killed people. There were many casualties. Psychologically, the "V-1" was a successful German weapon. I was glad our first mission gave us a chance to destroy one of the "V-1" launching sites.

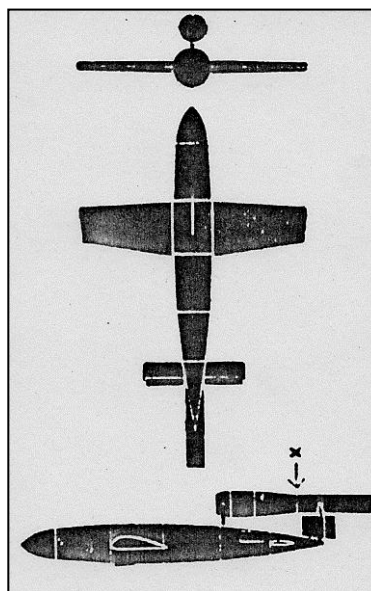


Figure 6 Different views of the German V-1 ram jet powered flying bomb.

After flying back to Old Buckenham, we experienced the routine of interrogation. The red cross provided coffee and doughnuts to all who wanted them. The flight surgeon gave each airman a paper cup with a couple of shots of whiskey or gin in the bottom. I found out early, this was exactly what I needed, because it would relax me enough to concentrate on what I had seen on the mission. I'm sure the interrogators got much more information in this way than they would have gotten otherwise. The next day the mission was described in a British newspaper under the heading, -Robot Coast hit again. The concrete walls surrounding the German "V-1" sites were several feet thick, providing much protection. Perhaps we should have carried larger bombs. Anyway, we tried to knock it out.

#### 5/23/44

**Second combat mission:** 58-2, Flew from Old Buckenham to Orleans, France at 20/000 feet, carrying twelve 500 pound general purpose bombs. We flew deep into occupied France and bombed the German installations at Creist Airport (approx. 110 miles south of Paris). We had to descend to 7,000 feet to drop the bombs because of low visibility. Flack was light to moderate but accurate at times. The German antiaircraft guns tracked us pretty accurately off our right wing, during a left turn away from the target. It turned out to be



another lucky day. Although, some of the B-24s in formation picked up holes, we didn't pick up any. Also, there were no enemy fighters pestering us. The flight time was 8 hours.

#### **5/24/44**

**Third mission:** 59-3, Flew from Old Buckenham. We flew at 20,000 feet to Paris, France. Bombing was accurate! We dropped twelve 500 pound G.P. bombs on two large German storehouses at Orly Airport, located in the southern vicinity of Paris. Both storehouses were destroyed. Flack was moderate and accurate. There were many Nazi anti-aircraft guns stationed in and around Paris. We picked up holes in leading edge of our left wing and in our no.3 engine cowling. The holes were small and very little damage was done. There were no fighters that day around Paris. The flying time was 6 hr. & 10 min.



**Figure 7** Flying in formation onward to the target! USAF photo in the public domain.

#### **5/25/44**

**Fourth mission:** 60-4, Loaded with ten 500 pound bombs, we flew from Old Buckenham to Troyes, France, where we bombed the marshalling yards. There was no flack over the target; however, we got moderate and accurate flack while returning to England. There were no hits on our aircraft. We were lucky again. The Flying time was 8 hours.

#### **5/26/44**

Prepared for fifth mission - alerted, but later we went to stand down.

#### **5/27/44**

**Fifth mission:** 61-5, Flew from Old Buckenham to Saarbrücken, Germany, with twelve 500 pound bombs. This was our first mission to a target inside Germany. We bombed the German marshalling yards and the target was accurately hit. The flack was thick and accurate, especially on the low wing formations. One plane was badly shot-up and another plane was shot down. Our B-24 was hit in four different places. On the way back, we tuned in the "Axis Sally" program on the radio (the German propaganda program). "Axis Sally" was saying "attention all American airmen: say goodbye to your families, because starting tomorrow we will be sending up German suicide squadrons, piloted by men who have already lost their own families and have nothing more to live for. They have volunteered to give their lives in a program to ram all American planes with their own aircraft." Then, the music, we most liked to hear, was played from records. Most of the things "Axis Sally" said were ludicrous. No one seemed to take anything she said seriously.

**5/29/44**

**Sixth mission:** 63-6, Loaded with ten 500 pound bombs and topped with 2,700 gallons of gas, we flew from Old Buckenham to Politz, Germany (Near Stettin, Germany). We bombed the synthetic fuel plant. Flack was intense and accurate from the I.P. to the target. We picked up 8 or 9 holes. Our formation was attacked by German fighters; FW-190s (Foke-Wulf) and ME-210s (Messerschmitt). I saw one B-24 shot down to our left. Part of its right wing was shot off. I saw some parachutes. Three other planes were also shot down over the target. We hit the target.

Because on the way back we could see the fire belching from the fuel plants with black smoke climbing up thousands of feet. We could still see the black smoke from the burning fuel, 60 miles away. While over the target, a piece of flack came through the right side of the cockpit, and cut through a large aircraft electrical cable under the instrument panel. I noticed my right knee was getting extremely cold. I looked at it; I felt the cold air coming in through a 3 inch diameter hole in the fuselage, about an inch above my right knee. I looked back at the instrument panel and noticed that all electrical indicators on engines 3 and 4 went to zero. The engines were performing ok, but the rpm had to be adjusted by sound only. The lead plane, flying off our right wing had no.1 and no. 2 engines smoking from flack hits. In spite of this, we maintained very tight formation so that none of the German fighters could dive through it. I prayed that the smoking engines would not explode and kill us all. They kept smoking, but never caught fire.

On the way back, we could see the southern tips of Norway and Denmark. Most of the return trip was over water, flying over the North Sea. When we returned to our base, a b-24 ahead of us had crash-landed and we had to fly to nearby Hethel until the runway at Old Buckenham was cleared.

**5/30/44**

**Seventh mission:** 64-7. We flew from Old Buckenham to Oldenburg, Germany...\_We carried ten 500 pound bombs and one 100 pound "marker" smoke bomb. The airport, barracks, etc. were bombed. We saw no enemy fighter planes, but flack was moderate. We were well escorted by our own fighter planes. On the way back, one aircraft was shot down, one had to ditch in the English Channel, and two damaged b-24s cracked up on the runway at old Buckenham, while trying to crash land. We were lucky this day, not to pick up any holes in our aircraft. Total flight time: 6 hr. & 50 min.

**5/31/44, 6/1/44, 6/2/44, and 6/3/44:**



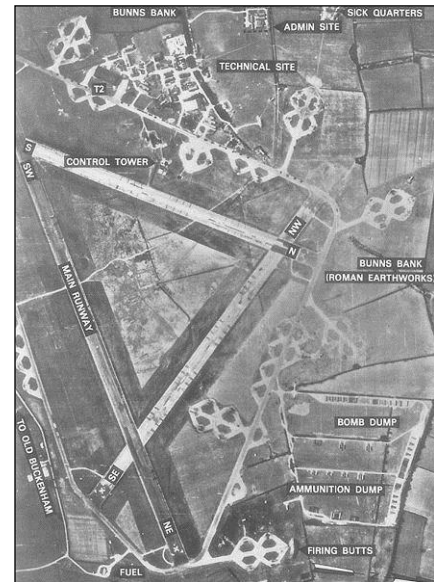
**Figure 8 B-24s bombing Politz, Germany.  
USAF photo in the public domain**

We prepared for mission number eight each day for four days. We were alerted, but went on standby, due to very bad weather. On two or three of these days, we were alerted in the morning and again in the afternoon. Day after day, we kept sweating them out!

**6/4/44**

**Eighth mission:** 66-6, In the afternoon, we flew, loaded with six 1,000 pound bombs, from Old Buckenham to Romorantin in southern France... The target was an airport which was heavily bombed and knocked out. Flack was moderate and accurate on the French coast. We were hit twice. Our navigator, Felbinger, was hit on his iron helmet by a piece of flack. Fortunately, he was not hurt. Weather set in with a ceiling under 1,000 feet, with almost zero visibility.

While flying back to England, I worked like hell to hold our low left position in formation with the lead plane. There were brief moments when I couldn't even see the lead plane. I tried to be super sensitive on the controls, to avoid any type of over correction which could cause a collision. This position was easier for me to fly, than Ralph, because the lead plane was on my right side. When Ralph talked to Felbinger, he seemed confused about our location. I guess he was shaken up a bit after being hit on his helmet. More and more clouds were forming and reducing visibility to almost zero. I told Ralph I was afraid we would become totally lost if I didn't hold our close low left position all the way back.



**Figure 9** Ariel view of Old Buckenham shortly after the war. Royal Ordnance Survey Photo - GNU Free Documentation License

It was dangerous to break away and fly back alone like most of the others had already done. There were so many aircraft flying around in the soup. We could have easily collided with one. On top of all this, we didn't know where we were. We flew so low crossing the English Channel and coast line, that I could feel the British guns tracking us. After landing, we were congratulated for being the only plane to hold its position in formation all the way back. I shrugged my shoulders to make it appear like just another routine. I certainly didn't want to advertise how nervous I was. To me, this had been a life or death situation, I knew I had to hold our position in order to get back. I couldn't help but wonder how many mid-air collisions occurred that afternoon. I followed the lead plane, and I didn't see the runway until our wheels were almost touching. I felt so keyed up, I could hardly settle down. My body continued to pump adrenalin, and I wanted my drink of liquor ASAP! After the whisky settled, I calmed down. We had just completed 8 of our required missions. We all felt like seasoned combat airmen. Total flight time: 7 hr. and 30 min.

**6/5/44**

Alerted for mission no.9, During the morning, bad weather continued to put us on stand down. Nothing happened. We just sat around sweating it out again, until we were dismissed about lunch time. We returned to our barracks. At 11:00 p.m. We were alerted again. We were told it was urgent and that we were to report to the briefing room within 15 minutes, after which, the doors would be locked and a roll call taken. There was tension building in

the air. Everyone sensed something very important was about to happen. Security was tightened, and telephone service from the base was shut down. At the night briefing, a telegram from General Doolittle was read. It said we were to participate in a history-making invasion. We were told about the allied invasion being planned for 6:30 a.m. the following morning. Our job was to take out the German gun emplacements along the Normandy beaches, just minutes before our troops were to go ashore. Our crew was to replace another crew that was still out on pass. Early in the morning, shortly after midnight, we were told we would not go on this mission after all, because the other crew came back and would take our place. We were dismissed again to return to the barracks.

We were alerted again about 1:00 a.m. This time we were to fly inland and take our bombs to St. Lo, France.

#### **6/6/44 (D-day)**

**Ninth combat mission:** 70-9, Loaded with twelve 500 pound bombs, we flew from Old Buckenham to St. Lo, France. On this day, we were all very proud to assist in the invasion of France. Our troops were already going ashore at Normandy.

We flew across the English Channel. It was cloudy, but we could see the channel through occasional breaks in the clouds. We flew over the tops of allied ships transporting troops, arms and supplies to the beaches of Normandy: they stretched in a continuous line from England to the Normandy beachhead. From the air, the ships appeared so close together, it looked like a person could walk from one ship to the next across the channel. This gave us a warm feeling inside because if we were forced to ditch for any reason, we could expect help immediately. The Normandy beach, where all the troops were storming ashore, was overcast.

Near St. Lo, the Germans were putting up a moderate amount of flack to the right of us. Fortunately, we didn't pick up any holes and there were no enemy fighters. We couldn't see the target at St. Lo because of an overcast sky. Because of this, we were ordered not to drop our bombs and return to base. We headed back to England with the bombs still aboard. At old Buckenham, we made a very smooth landing, with 6,000 pounds of bombs. The bombs were unloaded and returned to storage area. Other pilots were equally careful because there were no accidents. Flying time was 6 hr. and 50 min.

#### **6/7/44**

**Tenth mission:** 73-10, Argent an. France. We dropped twelve 500 pound bombs on roads and the communications center at argent an. The weather was bad with broken clouds over the target. There was no flack and no enemy fighters: however, flying was difficult in this bad weather. We flew low again across the English coast line to stay under the clouds. This time, we could see the English antiaircraft guns tracking us. Flying time was 6 hr. & 50 min.

#### **6/8/44**

**Eleventh mission:** 74-11, Our take-off ceiling and visibility were almost zero. Following take-off, we were immediately flying on instruments, until we broke out of the clouds at 26,000 feet. The aircraft's response to the controls was very sluggish at this altitude. I could feel the aircraft, with its heavy load, mashing through the rarefied air. It was difficult to maintain airspeed of 165 miles per hour. After breaking into the clear sky, we started generating vapor trails and dodging contrails from other aircraft. We took our position in formation and flew from old Buckenham to Fiers (Pont Aubault, France. At 15,000 feet, we

dropped 46 100 pound bombs on railways and roads. Targets were hit, as planned. Over the targets, there were no enemy fighters and no flack. On our return trip to England, the weather remained very bad. We flew mostly on instruments over England. Flight time: 6 hr. and 10 min.

#### **6/9/44 and 6/10/44**

Stand down - bad weather both days; No passes were issued. In spite of this, we welcomed the badly needed rest for these two days. At least, we didn't have to worry about being shot down for a couple of days. Being on alert 24 hours every day and sweating out missions became very trying on every one's nerves.

#### **6/11/44**

**Twelfth combat mission:** 77-12, Loaded with four 2,000 pound bombs, we flew to the ~ Port Boulet in France. These large bombs completely filled the four sections of the bomb-bay. Our target was a bridge over the Loire river. There was an undercast at 2,000 feet blocking the aerial view of the target. At first, "bourbon red leader" told us to prepare to descend below the cloud level to take out the bridge. There were a few groans from the pilots, sensing the danger of being blasted out of the sky by their own exploding bombs. Then a radio command was received, not to bomb the primary target because we could not safely go below 3,000 feet. We spent much time looking for a secondary target, before giving up. Soon we were ordered to fly back to England with our bombs. On the way back, we saw 6 allied battleships, firing inland at enemy shore batteries. This was a fantastic view of each ship firing in sequence, with apparently, no let-up. We didn't know how long this had been going on or how long it would continue. As we left the French coast line and headed back to England, allied ships and boats were still lined up, as before, from the Normandy coast of England. We landed at Old Buckenham with a load of 8,000 pounds of unused bombs. Luckily, we made a very smooth landing, again. The flight time was 7 hours.

#### **6/11/44**

##### **Practice flight (Old Buckenham-local)**

I was "dog tired" after the mission, and I knew the crew was exhausted. Never the less, we had to practice fly in the high right position of a formation. I could not wait to hit the sack for some badly needed rest. I was thankful Ralph seemed to still have some energy! Total flight time: 2 hr. & 5 min.

#### **6/12/44**

**Thirteenth mission:** 79-13, Loaded with twenty-four 250 pound bombs, we flew from Old Buckenham to Conches Airfield in France. The airport was actively used by the Germans. We Scattered our bombs right down the runway. There was moderate, but inaccurate, flack around the target area. German fighters were reported several times on the radio. We heard shouts that bandits were at five o'clock and at seven o'clock; however, I did not see the enemy fighters. We were closely supported by our own fighters. I guess they must have taken care of the enemy planes. During the day, there were six bridges hit, along with sixteen Nazi airfields. Total flight time: 6 hours.

#### **6/12/44**

We made a maintenance check flight in the local area (Old Buckenham). We flew locally to check out an A-5 automatic pilot. Flight time: 2 hr. & 20 min.

#### **6/13/44**

**Fourteenth mission:** 61-14. Loaded with ten 500 pound bombs, we flew low left position in formation from Old Buckenham to La Vicomte, France. We took-off with 2,700 gallons of gasoline and flew at 20,000 feet. Our target was a bridge. We hit it but did not wipe it out. There was no flack or enemy fighters around. Flight time: 6 hr. and 40 min.

**6/15/44**

**Fifteenth mission:** 64-15, Loaded with twelve 500 pound bombs, we flew at 20,000 feet from Old Buckenham to the Loire river (La Port Boulet) in France. Our target was another bridge over the Loire river. We hit it, rendering it totally unusable. The bombers following behind us probably finished it off easily. There were no enemy fighters and no flack over the target. Everywhere we looked, we saw American fighters and bombers going after targets in France. It appeared as if our missions were becoming easier for us, since the invasion. I wondered how long it would be, before we would resume our bombing of targets inside Germany. Our flying time: 6 hr. and 40 min.

For every 5 missions they completed, a crew was given a bottle of liquor. The first 2 bottles we earned were given to the enlisted men. We had just completed our 15th mission and were entitled to another bottle. The other officers agreed that this bottle would be mine. I chose a bottle of Jim Beam bourbon. Later, after we transferred to Hethel, I hid it in a drawer of a cabinet inside the barracks. It was still there when I flew the fatal 17th mission. I was hoping that we would eventually get a couple of days off to go into some nearby town, where I could supply the liquor for our first celebration.

**6/15/44**

Transferred from Old Buckenham, the 453rd bomb group went to Hethel in Norfolk, and the 389th bomb group. We were to fly pathfinder ("Mickey") missions over cloud formations. Our transfer orders were cut on June 12th, but we didn't move until after today's 15th mission. Here, a radar bombardier, Edgar Clde, and a radar navigator, Donald Donovan, were added to our crew.

**Note:** Our navigator asked Ralph if he would mind if we requested a transfer to the 389th bomb group. He apparently thought it would be an opportunity for him to advance in rank as lead navigator in the pathfinder group. Ralph asked for my feelings on the matter, because there would be times when we would take on a high ranking officer (depending on the target and the number of aircraft we would be leading) and I would be required to give up my position of co-pilot and ride along as "formation control officer". In other words, I would no longer be flying the aircraft on some of these missions. I told Ralph I would feel a little uneasy about not having direct control of the aircraft, however, I would go along with whatever the crew wanted to do. After all, my primary objective was to fly the required 35 missions and return to the United States. Apparently, the crew went along with it, because we were transferred to the new bomb group.



**Figure 11 Hethel air base shortly after the war. USAF photo in public domain.**

**6/18/44**

Practice "Mickey" flight using radar. We practiced cross-country flights from Hethel to make a practice bomb run over clouds using the A-1 autopilot and radar. Flight time: 3 hr. and 30 min.

**6/20/44**

Another "Mickey" practice mission in which we practiced another bomb run over cloud cover with radar (Hethel – local) Flight time: 3 hr and 25 min.

**6/21/44**

Aborted mission to Berlin

I volunteered to fly a mission as co-pilot with another crew, in order to gain credit for an extra mission. The orderly woke me at midnight to go to briefing. I had no idea my first volunteer flight would be the target most feared by all crews. Being awakened at midnight certainly aroused my suspicions. At the briefing we were told we were going to Berlin. There would be a total of 1,000 aircraft going to the target. My new crew and I were to replace another crew that had, somehow or other, gotten a 2-day pass and had not returned to base on time. All I could think about was how stupid I was to volunteer to get myself killed. We had to leave early to get to Berlin in a coordinated effort and the crew we were replacing had not returned. Loaded with fifty-two 100 pound incendiary fire bombs in our bomb bay, we joined our formation and headed out over the North Sea.

About 10 miles out, while flying high over a 3,000 ft. thick overcast, our navigator suffered an attack of appendicitis and started throwing-up in his oxygen mask. We reported it, and, much to our surprise, we were called back. Ordinarily, this would not have been an adequate excuse to abort a mission. We were told the crew we had replaced had returned to base and was flying up to take our place in formation. We were advised to return to base and to land carefully, since the fire bomb clusters on board were very sensitive. We made a very rough landing and bounced all over the runway. Nothing let go! How lucky can you get!

At the end of the runway, a military ambulance was waiting for us. Our navigator was taken directly to the base hospital. Then we taxied to the hardstand where the fire bombs were unloaded and returned to storage. I was so keyed-up, I went right to the commanding officer and had my name removed from the volunteer list. He said he didn't blame me. I was so glad I was still alive. I never volunteered for anything again! (even today, I am very cautious about volunteering for anything). I secretly thanked God for saving the navigator's life, as well as my own. Then I returned to the barracks. I was so glad to see my crew members; I hugged each of them and admitted what a foolish decision I had made. I also announced that I didn't intend to monkey around with my luck ever again! I drew much laughter from all of them. At the expected time, we went out to count the returning aircraft. While we watched, none returned. We all liked to believe that some of them had landed at other bases. I'm sure some of them returned, but we didn't see them. My nerves were temporarily in a severe state of shock. (Later, the newspaper report stated that 43 of the bombers that attacked targets in Berlin were missing that day). Flight time: 3 hr. and 30 min.

**6/23/44**

Third "Mickey" practice mission. Flight was local from Hethel - flight time: 3 hr. and 15 min

**6/24/44**

We made our first grid practice bombing flight. The flight was a local from one Hethel. Flight time: 3 hr. and. 40 min.

#### **6/26/44**

Radar check flight PFF B-24. Hethel local flight - Flight time: 1 hr. and. 55 min

#### **6/29/44**

Flight tested repaired PFF B-24. This plane had two new engines installed. Flight was local - Hethel total time: 3 hr. and 5 min.

#### **6/30/44**

Second grid practice bombing flight - Hethel-local flight - total time: 3 hr. and. 25 min.

#### **7/5/44**

This was our third grid practice bombing flight, a combat-type flight from Hethel to southwest England. Our code was: "bourbon red leader". We assumed a high-altitude formation. Our flying time: 5 hr. and. 25 min.

#### **7/6/44**

##### **Sixteenth combat mission: (Mickey) #16**

I flew as co-pilot. In the afternoon we flew from Hethel to Gien, France. As deputy leader to "big bear blue" leader, we were in formation in the no.2, high right position. Fighter coverage was excellent. We dropped two 2,000 pound bombs and two 100 pound smoke bombs on a bridge across the St. Lo River. We encountered German red marker flack bursts, and we ran into flack approximately 6 different times. The flack was meager to moderate, but mostly inaccurate. We saw no enemy fighters. None of our planes were hit. We landed at Hethel, England after dark. Our flying time: 5 hr. and 45 min.

## **PART TWO: The Last Mission**

#### **7/11/44**

##### **Seventeenth combat mission to Munich.**

The planning of a mission into enemy territory usually left me with a grinding sensation in the pit of my stomach. Regardless of how I felt, I always tried to be optimistic and instill confidence in others. I tried to create an image of being in control of the situation. I sincerely believed Ralph and I were the best working team in the 8th air force. I felt we could fly and control the B-24 better than anyone else and under any emergency condition.

This flight would be different. It would be our second pathfinder flight. This time, a major, a command pilot, would be sitting in my co-pilot's seat and I would be riding in the back of the aircraft as formation control officer (a sort of observer and trouble shooter for the formation).





On July 10th, I went to bed early to make sure to get plenty of rest before going on another mission. At 2 o'clock in the morning, the orderly turned on the lights and started waking us up. While squinting at the light and rubbing our eyes, we rolled out of bed, knowing a new mission was awaiting us. The first thing to do was to get dressed and see about getting a little breakfast. I was never hungry this early in the morning, but I knew I had to eat something to keep up my energy during the day.

The bombardier was the last one to get up and he trailed along behind us. We made our way out the door into the black, cold moist morning air, so common to England. Outside, everything was quiet, except for the sound of distant aircraft engines being run-up for their early morning checks. We walked for about 5 minutes, and spotted the officer's mess ahead. Inside the lights were shining out of the small windows. Occasionally, there was a flash of light as other officers entered the door for breakfast.

Soon, the officer's mess hall was full, and conversations were buzzing around us. During breakfast, we discussed the things we were going to do to prepare for this flight, still having no idea where we were going. One of the officers seated near us said, "they are loading the aircraft with twelve 1,000 pound bombs and 2,700 gallons of gasoline-. This triggered our thoughts: it was now certain this would be a long trip, probably deep into Germany. We finished our breakfast and proceeded down the dark wooded path to the flight line. This was where we would attend briefing. With only 2 minutes to spare, we entered the guarded briefing room. Inside, we took our seats about half way down toward the front. That seemed to be the best place for seeing and hearing everything.

I don't know where my thoughts had wandered off to when the colonel; the briefing officer, appeared before us. We were all anxious to see the wall map, which would show us where we were going. Everything grew quiet in anticipation. The colonel quickly pulled off the cover from the wall map and announced, "gentlemen, today, we are going to bomb the airfield and military barracks in Munich, Germany. There were a number of slight grunts from his audience. For a brief moment, I studied the map and followed the red lines, which zigzagged around German gun emplacements and marked our flight paths to and from the target.

The colonel continued by saying, "This will be the first day of a four-day maximum effort to get Munich out of the war. Americans will bomb during the daylight hours, and the Royal Air Force will bomb the targets each night. The bombing raids will involve approximately 2,000 American aircraft per day".

Thirty minutes later, the colonel turned the meeting over to the weather officer, who proceeded to describe the weather condition at every point along the flight path. He said, ".here is a solid cloud cover over the target and we will be using our radar equipped path finder aircraft to locate the targets for the aircraft we will be leading" each path finder would be leading a squadron of 36 aircraft. We were to lead a squadron from the 453 bomb group (the group with whom we flew our first 15 missions).

Next, the briefing was turned over to a major, who was the intelligence officer. We gritted our teeth, as he showed us where we could expect trouble. Finally, the briefing ended. He said we could expect to encounter enemy fighter planes near the target area. The next thing to do was check out the equipment we would need, such as parachutes, escape kits, oxygen masks, flack jackets, sheep lined clothes and boots, etc. I had made a check-off list listing all

of the things I would need for this mission. Using the list, I checked out and signed for all the equipment. I did not plan to take my .45 caliber pistol and left it in the barracks. It was time to look for transportation to the parking area. I went outside and found everything was still dark. A truck was waiting to take a load of airmen to their assigned airplanes. I crawled into the back of the waiting truck. My eyes had not adjusted to the absence of light, and I couldn't identify the other airmen inside. I heard my bombardier talking and found he was seated in the darkness, just across the truck bed from me. Two more guys climbed aboard the truck and we headed toward the parked aircraft. Both Pat and I were straining to see the numbers of the bombers parked in their hardstands. Finally, I noticed our numbers and shouted for the driver to stop. We both got out the rear of the truck and headed for airplane parked in its hardstand.

The guard was still standing by the B-24 but started to leave when he saw two officers arriving. The flight engineer was already looking over the aircraft. I hardly had time to set my equipment down, when two waist gunners and the radio man came bouncing out of another truck that had stopped, within a few minutes, the entire crew was present, including the major who was to be our command pilot. Ralph called us all together to say a prayer for us before take-off. It took about 10 minutes to check everything on the aircraft. We all got aboard. I went back and sat down beside one of the machine guns positioned at the left waist window. It seemed to have an adequate supply of loaded gun belts. I plugged in my headset into the interphone system just in time to hear Ralph call for individual station reports. Satisfied, all was okay, Ralph said, "Okay, let's start 'em up." Within moments, all four of the big engines were rumbling at idle speed.

Ralph released the brakes and we started rolling along the taxi lane toward the runway. Other aircraft started lining up behind us. When we almost reached the beginning of the runway, Ralph applied the brakes and we came to a stop. Each of the four engines was revved up to make sure we would have enough power for take-off. The brakes were released and we lined up for take-off. A few seconds passed and the control officer fired a green flare from his biscuit gun. It was approximately 6:00 a.m. This was our signal to go. Ralph poured on the power by pushing all four throttles to the fire wall. Slowly, we started to pick up speed. Faster and faster we went, until we saw the runway lights pass by beneath us. We were airborne and the landing gear was retracted. In the climb, Ralph retarded the throttles a bit to bring the cylinder head temperature down a little. We all looked around the sky to pick up the color coded flares that would identify our "Buncher" plane's position. We located the red-green flare combination and found our spot at 15,000 feet. We lined up behind our "Buncher" plane, while the other aircraft assembled around and behind us. While this was happening, we flew around in large circles to allow everyone to catch up with us and assemble in formation. With our formation established, we headed toward enemy territory, while climbing to our combat altitude of 23,000 feet. At 23,000 feet, we approached the enemy coastline. Our navigator warned the crew, that it was time for everyone to put on iron helmets. Frequently, the Germans would move their flack barges along the coast line to fire at allied planes. We crossed the Belgian coastline and headed inland. Luckily, there was no flack here today, so we continued on toward Germany.

We could see the target area from 30 miles away. About 2,000 German anti-aircraft guns were firing away at the bombers ahead of us. I saw a monstrous cloud of black puffs and flashes, as the shells exploded around the formations. The anti-aircraft shells were bursting far below and above our altitude and looked to me like a gigantic Christmas tree of flack. Far ahead, as the aircraft approached the flack zone, they looked smaller and smaller, until they

appeared to be tiny house flies, flying into a dark boiling cloud. Soon it would be our turn to enter the flack cloud. We started to throw out boxes of aluminum foil strips, called "chaff," These strips offset the German radar which was used to aim their anti-aircraft guns. The sky was full of it, looking like sparkling snow flakes descending to the earth. We reached our initial point and started our bomb run to the target. Flack was coming at us from all directions. We could see some aircraft breaking up and going down in other formations. The time from the initial point to the target seemed like "forever". Finally, we passed over the target and dropped our bombs. All the others in our formation dropped their bombs as soon as they saw ours go. I felt the surge upward as the aircraft released its load. Quickly we went into a diving turn to the left to clear the flack area. In the process, one of our fuel tanks picked up a hole from the flack. A large gray cloud of fuel started trailing behind our bomber. The flight engineer immediately started transferring gasoline from the punctured tank, into the good tanks. We saved as much as we could, but was that enough to get us back to England?

Ralph and the command pilot discussed the problem for awhile and it was decided we would leave our formation, call in P-38 fighter escorts, and take up a straight line compass heading for England. Fighter

coverage was needed, because, the German fighters were always looking for stray, crippled aircraft. They were an easy kill. A German fighter came up under our formation, but was immediately shot down by the gunner in the B-24 behind us (**Note:** Over 45 years later, at a 2nd air division convention in Las Vegas, I met and visited with the gunner from that plane). Our engine power settings were cut back for minimum fuel consumption, at the expense of slowly losing altitude. Guns and ammunition, the auxiliary power unit and anything not essential to getting back were thrown out of the aircraft to lighten the load. I watched one of the machine guns, with an ammunition belt spin round and round, appearing smaller and smaller, as it headed for the German fields below. No wonder the German farmers hated us. Detonators were set on all classified electronic equipment in the aircraft, so that the explosive charges stored within each "black



**Figure 12 Consolidated B-24 Liberators of the 389th Bomb Group on a mission over enemy-occupied territory. Public Domain Photo.**



**Figure 10 P-38 fighter. From Wikipedia Commons.**

box" would blow up upon impact. We recognized that if we could not make it, we would have to bail out, crash land, or ditch the B-24 in the English channel. We started preparations immediately, in case it became necessary to bail out, we all made sure our parachutes were securely fastened in place. Also, we made sure we had our escape kits secured in our pockets. We planned to make a free fall to the 2,000 feet cloud level, before opening our 'chutes. This was to minimize the opportunity for German soldiers to shoot at us on the way down. We were to avoid getting together, once we were on the ground.

The navigator gave us continuous readings of our changing ground positions. We were very relieved, when we made it out of Germany into occupied France. When the fuel-starved engines started cutting out at 14,000 feet, near Lille, France, Ralph used the interphone to give the command to "bail out!" About 30 seconds later Ralph asked the flight engineer how the bailing out process was going up front? He said he thought everyone had cleared out, up front. I looked up and saw Cox fly past the right waste window, upside down. Right behind him two more crew members went past, but I couldn't tell who they were. Then Ralph called me on the interphone and asked how things were going in the back and I responded, "we are working on it". One by one, we all jumped out of the aircraft and plunged downward into the unknown. When only Ralph was left, he placed the aircraft on auto-pilot and set the bomber in a steep glide toward the ground. Then, he bailed out.

Since we delayed the opening of our parachutes in free fall to the 2,000 feet level, the P-38 escort pilots failed to see any parachutes open. They didn't know what happened to us when they saw the B-24 crash and burn. Also, since we failed to return to England that day, we were all listed as "missing in action."

### **PART THREE: Parachuting Over German Occupied France**

I dove out of the camera hatch, head first as the loud rumble of the sputtering B-24 engines was replaced by the intense swishing of air rushing against my falling body I had on a British back-pack type parachute and I was rapidly falling with my back down, my head low and my legs dangling upward. I had never made a parachute jump before, so it was all new to me. During our cadet training, we never practiced bailing out of an aircraft. Some said, it had been a part of the training program at one time, but too many of the pilots were getting hurt. At any rate, we did receive instructions on how to jump off a tower attached to a rope. It was called a simulated parachute jump. It was nothing at all like this. I kept my right hand around the parachute strap and the ripcord at the same time to keep myself from opening the 'chute until I hit the 2,000 foot level.

I was spinning around and around as I fell downward. I experimented with my feet, and found, by turning them outward they would act as rudders and stop my spinning. After I stopped spinning, I could look down at the clouds below. Anti-aircraft shells were bursting somewhere, and it sounded like I was falling through the middle of a thunder storm. Suddenly I started thinking about all the things that had happened in my past life. I thought of my mother reading Uncle Wiggly stories to me, when I was a child. I quickly came back to reality as I lost control and found myself starting to spin again. This time it was easily corrected. All at once it seemed to me that steam from a boiling teakettle was blasting upward around me. Instantly, I knew it must be the cloud layer at the 2,000 foot level. I let go of the parachute strap and grabbed the handle on the rip cord. I pulled it out, but nothing happened. I was still falling rapidly. I pulled it again, only this time, I pulled the rip cord all the

way out and threw it away. This made me feel more certain that I had done the right thing. I certainly had, because just then I felt a strong jerk on my body and saw the beautiful white blossom of the opened parachute above my head.

I was swinging back and forth so abruptly, I began to feel a little motion-sickness. I looked at the ground and found I had less than a thousand feet left before hitting it. There were a couple of parachutes spread out on the ground not far away. I noticed a road with two people walking on it. They appeared to have rifles on their shoulders. Also, there were some telephone wires below and I was afraid I might drift into them. So, I tried to steer the parachute by pulling on a shroud line. I started to swing back and forth more violently. After a few seconds it stopped swinging, and I decided to leave the parachute alone. While looking down, I started thinking about evading capture. I reached down and unbuckled the parachute from my right leg. Just as I started to unbuckle the other leg for a quick get-away, I hit the ground. Luckily, it was plowed ground, because I buried my right knee about a foot into the loose soil.

### **THE WHEAT FIELD**

Our 24-foot Military emergency parachutes came down very fast. I hurt my right knee but ignored it. Thank God, none of my bones were broken! I was certain the two people I spotted from the air were German soldiers. Also, I knew it would take them several minutes to get to my position, even if they ran! Luckily, no one was around at this moment. I knew I had to move fast and get under cover. I gathered up my parachute in a wad, and rapidly scooped up loose soil. I threw it on top, to cover up the white color. About 30 feet in front of me was a fully grown wheat field. The wheat must have been up 3 or 4 feet in height. I jumped into it and started crawling as fast as I could, ignoring the pain in my knee. Also, I started zigzagging hoping to disappear in the wheat. After going to what I thought was the middle of the field, I stopped to get my breath and ripped the tiny hidden compass out of the lining of my flight clothes. Not knowing what else to do, I decided to crawl in the general direction of England. At this point, I realized anything I did was a gamble, and I had left a path of collapsing wheat anyone could follow.

I continued to crawl. Perhaps ten minutes had elapsed, and I found myself rapidly approaching another edge of the wheat field. I cautiously raised my head and peeped over the top of the wheat. I really thought I might get my head blown off; however, no one took a shot at me. I saw a dirt road running along the edge of the field, and across the road was a farmhouse set about two hundred yards from the other side of the road. Two French farmers in front of the house started waving at me. They saw me in the wheat. Cautiously, I waved back and sat down to wait. This was it! I had to take a chance, before the Germans caught up with me.

One of the Frenchmen carried a bundle of clothes under one arm, and the other had a hoe. They threw the bundle and the hoe into the wheat and in my direction. With no waste of time, they returned to the farmhouse. I crawled over, looked at the clothes and hoe and immediately took off my flight clothes and stripped to my underwear. I put on the French work pants, shirt, and jacket and placed the dark blue beret on my head. Then I took the hoe and dug a hole, where I buried my flight clothes, helmet and gloves. I took off my sheep lined boots, but there wasn't enough room left in the hole for them, so I threw one boot in one direction and the other in the opposite direction in the wheat field. I made sure I had my dog tags and my escape kit. The dog tags were still around my neck. I put the escape kit in

my pant's pocket. Quickly, I took the hoe, limped to the edge of the road, stood up, and began hoeing the edge of the wheat field. A young French boy bicycled past me and looked at me like I was crazy. (No real farmer hoes around the edges of a wheat field!)

Across the road, I noticed two men and a woman coming toward me from the farm house. They noticed I was limping, so the lady and one of the men grabbed me under the arms; and the three of us ran to the farmhouse. I ignored my knee and ran like hell with them. I did not see any other people anywhere around us.

### **THE BRAVE FRENCH PATRIOTS**

We went up the front steps, onto the wooden porch, and into the front room of the farmhouse. The door was quickly closed behind us. Straight ahead was another door to a back room. We entered this room and the door was closed. The room had two windows with worn curtains. The lady reached over and pulled down the blinds on both windows and the room got rather dark. They lit a couple of candles which provided enough light to see what was inside the room. There was a worn easy chair in one corner. They gestured for me to sit down in the chair and remain quiet. The man left the room for a moment and returned bringing back a small glass of warm red wine. He gave me the wine and left the room along with the lady, who I assumed was his wife. I listened carefully as I heard them go back outside the house. I could hear them walk across the wooden porch and down the steps. I sat there in the dim light sipping the wine. Everything was silent for awhile. I was still so nervous that I wondered if the wine might upset my stomach again.

About a half hour later there was noise outside. It sounded like several people were talking in French in a rather excited manner. Several people were walking heavily across the porch. I wondered if the Germans were outside asking questions. I froze, and remained very quiet. These loud, confusing conversations went on for 1 to 2 hours. Then, gradually, everything quieted down again. Finally the farm couple came back into the room with a bottle of red wine and filled my glass again. They brought in two extra glasses and poured themselves glasses of wine too. I calmed down a bit and realized it was time to try to communicate with them.

I had taken French in High School but didn't remember much of it. In spite of this, each time I tried to think of French word, it seemed to pop into my mind with little trouble. I opened my Escape Kit and took out a card that had English sentences with French, German, and Spanish translations. I pointed to the first sentence which said "Will you help me escape?" They pointed to the word "hide." Then the farmer pointed to himself and to his wife. He said the word "patriots." Next, I pointed to the sentence, "Will you help me get in touch with the French Underground?" They shook their heads "No" Again, the farmer pointed to himself and said the word "patriot."

By using the card, throwing in a few French words, and gesturing lots, I asked them if they knew anything about what happened to the rest of my crew. The answers were very confusing. I interpreted what they said was that the airplane landed in a field and burned. When the Germans got to it there was little left of it. I thought they were trying to tell me that the pilot had stayed with the aircraft and was killed in the crash (later, I found this to be untrue). Some men were picked up by patriots and helped, so they said. Others had been captured by the Germans (in time, I found out that five of my crew members had been

caught by the Germans, and one was killed coming down because of a collapsed parachute).

At this point the farmer left the room and went outside again. About 15 minutes later he returned pushing a bicycle. He also had a piece of my parachute strap. He showed it to me and said "souvenir". It seemed he had found my parachute. He probably dug up my flight clothes and disposed of them, too. I was relieved, to think he had been covering up my tracks. He asked if I could ride the bicycle. I got up and found that my leg was a little sore but certainly okay again. I got on the bicycle and peddled a couple of feet across the floor to show him I could ride okay. He said he and his wife would peddle with me to a new hiding place. He indicated his farmhouse was not a safe place for me, and that I must move to another location as soon as possible. His place was dangerous because the Germans would come looking for me near the site where I landed with my parachute. After a period of time, he motioned that it was time to go. We pushed our bicycles outside beside the wheat field. We lined them up along the dirt road I had crossed earlier, and in the direction we were to travel.

### **THE SECOND FARMHOUSE BESIDE THE GERMAN MILITARY BASE**

Together, we started to peddle the three bicycles down the road. There was no one in sight in any direction. The sky was overcast, and it had just begun to drizzle. The fine mist felt cool and relaxing on my face. Along the way, all I saw was an occasional farmer working in his field. No one else paid any attention to us. It seemed to me we had gone at least 10 kilometers, when just ahead I saw a German army base on the left side of the road. It was built on an elevated mound about 10 feet above the road. A heavy wire mesh fence, with rolls of barbed wire on top, surrounded the entire compound. There was a large Swastika flag flying above the courtyard. There were hundreds of German soldiers standing at attention while a band was playing some type of military music. It appeared as if the soldiers were standing retreat and it was about 5:00 P.M. We peddled along the road which ran beside the army base. All the German soldiers were standing at attention, and no one seemed to be paying the slightest attention to us. I knew instantly that, the French Patriots had planned to pass at exactly this time of day.

About half way along the side of the base, we made a right turn along a narrow dirt road that led to a farm house about five hundred yards to the right of the German base. We peddled directly to the farm house and stopped. There was no room between the edge of the house and the dirt road. A farmer opened the gate and we went into the yard in front of the house. The back of the house faced the army base. The house was now between us and the base, which made me feel a little more secure. We were greeted by two more farmers and a lady. They asked me to come in. I was escorted through the front door and then through another door into a small side room.

As soon as I entered, they indicated that I should remain very quiet. Then they left and closed the door. As I stood there alone, I looked around the room. The room measured about 6 by 8 feet. One of the 6 ft. walls was aligned with the back of the house and contained a window. The window faced the German military base. It had a curtain pulled back on each side tacked to the window casing. This left enough clear glass to see the military base and the dirt road going to it. Against the opposite wall was a cot and mattress. One could lie in bed and look out the window. The head of the bed rested against the wall

that was aligned with the outside dirt road (where we had stopped our bicycles and entered the gate). A flat dressing bureau was placed along this wall beside the head of the bed. The entrance door was in the wall opposite the dressing bureau.

Inside the small bedroom, everything was quiet except for some low conversations somewhere in the house beyond the closed door. I remained quiet. At about 7:00 P.M., one of the farmers brought me a plate with a thick slice of bread, a small cube of fat, some jelly, and a glass of red wine. I was not hungry because I had a nervous stomach, but I ate the food anyway. When they took my plate away, they brought me a cup of some kind of chicory coffee which I drank. That evening I went to bed on the cot. I could not sleep, so I decided to lay as quiet as possible and get some needed rest. A mouse kept running back and forth in the straw within the mattress, which didn't help. I just didn't think about it. The mouse finally settled down, and I must have dozed off as the early morning light started coming through the window, I woke up instantly when I heard some people singing a French song; The song was "Alouette".

### **THE GERMAN SEARCH PARTY**

While still lying on the cot, I saw a squad of four German soldiers, with lederhosen type summer uniforms and rifles on their shoulders marching along the dirt road, straight toward my window! A German Officer marched along beside them. They were all singing and marching to the cadence of their own music. I was sure the soldiers were looking through the window at me, as they got closer. I jumped out of bed, backed up against the wall between the cot and the end of the dressing bureau. I sucked in my stomach, and held my breath. I was hoping I couldn't be seen or heard when they actually reached the window. I was almost positive I had been seen. They must have watched me jump out of bed and back up against the wall beside the dressing bureau. Now, they were in the road, practically brushing against the outside of my bedroom wall. They could not have been more than a couple of feet away from the back of my head.

Listening carefully, I could tell they had stopped at the gate. I took only shallow breaths and listened carefully. They stopped singing when they reached the gate. I heard German words being spoken along with the French farmers answering their questions. The adrenalin was pouring into my system, causing my heart to beat heavily against my chest. I kept thinking they could surely hear my heart beating, and this was going to be the end for me! It will be the firing squad for me, and all these brave farmers will be shot right outside in their own yard. Outside, the conversations continued for a few moments. Then I heard the squeak of the gate being opened. I heard boots walking to the front porch. People were coming up the steps, crossing the porch, and then entering the house! They were coming toward my room. Now, they were just outside the closed door! My mind raced. All I could think of was that all of us were about to be shot. What kind of a story could I give the German soldiers to convince them I was not a spy? How could I protect the French farmers who had helped me? Then I thought, "Do I still have my dog tags?" I grabbed them just as the door flew open in front of me. I looked up into the faces of three familiar farmers, who had been taking care of me.

There were no Germans with them. Moments later, when I got myself under control, I took my translation card and asked what happened to the Germans? The farmers said that the Germans were from the army base, and they had stopped to ask if any of the farmers had seen an American parachutist during the morning hours. Of course, none of the farmers had



seen anyone fitting my description. One of them told the Germans, "If an American parachutist had been around this area, surely someone at the military base would have spotted him before now:" The Germans accepted the farmer's reply and had gone on down the road without singing or calling cadence. They went to search elsewhere. I had not heard them going away. I started to think about how I should conduct myself in front of a German firing squad, if it should happen. The farmers could see I was very nervous, so again they brought me a rather large glass of red wine. I drank it rapidly and began to calm down again. They seemed very pleased to have fooled the Germans. I thanked them over and over for saving my life. Of course, I knew they had just saved their own lives as well.

### **The Canadian Lady**

Two of the farmers remained in the room for awhile and started talking to me. One could speak a little English, but not much! I got out my translation card again and started trying to piece together some intelligent communications. Again, I asked these people if they were in the French Underground. They all said "no." They were only French Patriots co-operating with the family who picked me up initially. They said it was important that we all understand one another and that I would be at this hiding place for only a few days. They said there was a Canadian lady living close by who could speak perfect English, as well as French. Her husband had been arrested by the Germans for some reason, and sent to a labor camp in Germany. They said the Canadian lady would come to the house in three days to talk to me. This was good news. It would be great to converse with someone in the English language! Perhaps I could learn something about what happened to my crew. Until the Canadian lady arrived, I was told to remain quiet, and stay in the closed room.

The next day, the farm lady came in and released the ties on the white curtains so they would cover the entire window. I kept them closed, except when I peeped out to see what the Germans were doing on the elevated military base. During the next two days, all was quiet. I saw German aircraft taking off from a near-by airport. I couldn't see the air base, but the aircraft would fly low over the house after take-off. I could hear the Allied 'planes bombing in the distance, both day and night. At this time, I was unaware that the British Air Force had plans for a night mission to drop huge "Blockbuster Bombs" on the German Air Base, and in the process, they would destroy this house I was in. (This actually happened a few weeks later. I couldn't get any information on what happened to the French farmers who helped me).

Most of the German soldiers stayed pretty much inside their elevated base. These were undoubtedly the German occupation forces that went out on daily work assignments in this part of France. No more Germans came to the farm. Each morning a pan of water, a bar of soap, a wash cloth, and a towel were brought in. I used the razor from my escape kit for shaving. Each evening, one of the farmers would bring me a glass of wine to have with my bread, fat, and fried potatoes. In the mornings, they would bring me some German invented sawdust bread, jam, and hot chicory coffee. I was very grateful for the food. On the third day, after the German soldiers came to the house, I started to relax more and think about how I might get out of occupied France.

During early morning of the fourth day, there was a knock at my door. It was one of the farmers. He told me the Canadian lady had arrived and was ready to talk to me. I was very excited about this and hurried to get dressed. I went into the living room and saw an

attractive lady, perhaps about 40 years old. She got up, came over and greeted me with kisses on both cheeks. I took a chair facing her. She could indeed speak good English. I asked her if she had heard anything about the fate of my crew. Apparently she had not heard anything except that an American airplane had crashed and burned recently. She wanted to know where I was coming from when I parachuted from the aircraft. I told her I was returning from a bombing raid over Munich where the airplane had been hit by German anti-aircraft fire. She said that the Germans had been parachuting young men disguised as American crewmen to trap the French Patriots. In this way, many Patriots and Resistance people who thought they were helping the Allied Forces were arrested and executed.

She said "I have been studying you carefully, and now I know you are really a German". I told her I was not a German but rather a Yank Pilot in need of help. "Are you really an American?" she asked again? I answered "yeah." Then she asked me, "Why do you keep saying 'ya'?" I tried to explain that most all Americans say yeah for yes even though it probably did sound like a German "ya." I said "the word yeah is not the German word ya!"

"Well", she said, "Let us go into the kitchen and have some coffee." I sat down with her at the kitchen table. The farmers brought us some chicory coffee, bread and jam. I spread jam on a piece of bread. Then I took a sip of coffee and bit into the jam covered bread. "Now we know you are German," she said. I asked her "Why?". Her answer was, "All Americans dunk their bread in their coffee before eating it." I informed her that this was certainly not true. "Most Americans do not dunk their bread in their coffee!"

I was becoming irritated with all this crap. I said, "I am a Yank pilot and I would like to get in touch with someone from the French Underground." She said, "This is impossible!" and explained that neither she nor any of the farmers, who were helping me, knew anything about the French Underground. "If the Germans discover anyone who knows anything about the French resistance, he or she would be tortured to get more information. You must remember", she said, "the only reason we are helping you is because we don't like the Germans. We are Patriots doing what we think is best for our country." I sensed she was getting as irritated with me as I was with her. Finally she said, "Wait here" and left the room to talk to the French farmers.

After about 20 minutes, she returned. "All right", she said. "We have talked it over and believe you are an American pilot. You must remember that you have created a dangerous situation for these French people. They can't continue to hide you, for fear the Germans will find out. When are you going to leave? You can't stay here! If you are discovered, everyone will be shot, including you. You have no right to endanger the lives of these French farmers!" I thought this over carefully and realized what she said was true. I really felt bad about it and told her I would be gone by tomorrow night. She asked what I planned to do.

I told her I had observed German airplanes taking off some where to the left of the German Army Base. "My plan is to work my way to the airfield. As soon as I see a German pilot in the cockpit of a fighter aircraft, with the engine running, I will hop up on the wing, hit him on the head with a rock, pull him out and fly his airplane back to England. I will fly at low level and land it either in the English Channel or on the sandy beach of England. By flying low, I will avoid being hit by British anti-aircraft guns and attacks from British and American fighter planes. She said, "You are dreaming and probably have seen too many American movies. This crazy plan is impossible. In the first place, the perimeter of the airfield probably has an

electrically charged fence. This, and the guard dogs, would prevent you from even getting close to an airplane". As she talked, I realized my plan did sound like a ludicrous idea to her, and to try it would almost be sure suicide.

I said "OK, let's forget about this plan. I have a better one. "This is my alternate plan: I will work my way west, from here to Calais on the France coast, and swim across the English Channel to Dover. I'll look for a log or something to hold on to."She told me this was as ridiculous as my first plan, perhaps even worse! "The area of France you plan to cross is the most heavily fortified place on the face of the Earth. Most of the German army is concentrated there. It would be impossible for you to work your way through the entire German Army."

I realized this was very true, so I told her about my third plan. "I really think this plan will work if my luck holds up: I told her I would work my way south to the Pyrenees Mountains between the border of France and Spain. Spain was neutral in the war, so the worst thing that could happen to me would be that the Spanish people would intern me for the duration of the war. I had enough French money in my escape kit to hire a French or Spanish Guide to take me across the mountains.

Again, she said, "This is an impossible plan. Your own planes have shot up most all our moving trains and buses. All our bicycle tires are worn out. The Germans would notice how young you are and pick you up right away. It's too far to walk. If you were lucky enough to make it to the mountains, how can you be sure the guides will not take your money, and kill you?" I told her, "This is a chance I will have to take. I will walk at night and hide in places where I can sleep, during the days. I can get vegetables from the fields. This will be enough food to keep me going." I looked her in the eyes and continued, "I am willing to take these risks and I will do it." She seemed to be getting nervous. "Now listen," she said, "forget all this nonsense. I have a good plan for you."

### **THE CANADIAN'S PLAN**

"In about two days or three days, a French couple will arrive here early in the morning with a horse and wagon. The wagon will be loaded with hay. You go cautiously behind the wagon and crawl under the hay. They will leave with you hiding under the hay." I asked her where they would be taking me. She said, "They will take you to Lille, where there is an Insane Asylum! Inside, there is a British Pilot who sits out in the yard in a robe. He blends in with the patients there. He is patiently waiting for the Allied Forces to advance and liberate the Asylum. We can do the same for you. He's getting along fine." I told her I did not like the idea because the Germans were killing off sick people to preserve their so called "Super Race." I would be helpless there. She said it was the best plan the French could come up with, so you should be ready to go quickly when the wagon arrives. I told her to scrap the plan. I told her, "I will be gone by tomorrow evening, as planned, and do not send the wagon of hay". She left, appearing disgusted with me and my plans. Her lasts words were, "Wait for the farm wagon! Don't be foolish!"

For the rest of the day, I planned my escape from occupied France. I was going to head south to the Pyrenees Mountains which separated France from Spain. I did not eat my evening meal and stuffed the bread in my jacket pocket. I made sure my escape kit, with its maps, food tablets, caffeine, etc., was in my pocket. I placed my compass in another pocket. I studied my French map and plotted a course south toward the Pyrenees Mountains. That

night, every detail, and possible emergency were racing through my mind. I wish I hadn't left my pistol in England. Finally, I tried to relax enough to get some rest, because I would need all the energy I could get.

### **THE FRENCH FORCES OF THE INTERIOR (FFI)**

I got up the next morning, the sixth day in France, as soon as it was light outside and planned to store more food from the meals this day. About an hour later, there was a knock at my door. One of the farmers was there. He said, "You have friends here to see you." I became more suspicious, because I didn't understand what he meant by this statement. Had the Canadian lady lied about believing that I really was an American? Perhaps the French Patriots still thought I was German and had come here to kill me. On the other hand, it could be the early arrival of the people, with the wagon of hay, coming to take me to Lillie. I wondered what kinds of friends have come to see me. Cautiously, I approached the living room, wondering what I should do.

I saw three men I had not seen before talking with the farmers who had helped me. They were dressed in plain clothes. All three had pistols under their belts. One of them was cleaning a hand held machine gun. They all smiled at me as I backed up a little. The machine gun was placed on the table, and the Frenchman came over and kissed me on both cheeks. In fairly good English, he said, "We have your bombardier and we are going to take you to see him: I said, "How do you know it's my bombardier" Immediately he took a small picture from his pocket and showed it to me. This was a picture that had been taken back in the United States for use in making up false identification papers in foreign countries. Each individual had only one photo of this type. They were passport sized photos, taken and issued to each airman going into a combat theater. I did not realize the importance of them until this very moment. This "one and only" type picture could only have come from Pat Crawford, my bombardier. I still had my own similar picture tucked inside my escape kit. I became very excited about seeing and comparing notes with Pat.

I took my translation card from the escape kit and found out that these three men were French Resistance members of the FFI (the French Underground). From here on I knew I would get continued help, and my chances of evading capture had suddenly improved. How was this contact made with the French Underground? Was it through the French Patriots or the Canadian lady, or did the FFI find me after their contact with Pat? I asked questions about how this contact was made, but none of the visitors would answer these kinds of questions. I guessed it was the Canadian lady.

The Frenchman returned to the table, picked up his machine gun, folded back the stock, and placed the cleaned weapon in a white cloth sack of what looked like dirty clothes. Looking around, I saw another dirty clothes sack. It also had a machine gun in it. These machine guns were the British type with hinged shoulder supports that folded back to make the guns easier to conceal. Probably the British had dropped these guns by parachute for members of the French resistance. I reassembled my escape kit; made sure I still had my dog tags, and told the FFI visitors I was ready to go. Then I thanked and bid good bye to the Frenchmen at this farmhouse. I would never see them or their farm house again.

Outside were three bicycles. One was a tandem bike and the other two were singles. The two men with machine guns in white bags took the single bikes. The third man indicated that I should ride behind him, keep my head down, and act the part of a deaf and dumb person.

They cautioned me not to say anything under any conditions. They said we would all be watched by other members of the FFI, but I would only notice some of the farmers giving us safety or warning signs along the way. Again, they made it clear, "If we run into any problems with the Germans, keep your head down. If we have to do any shooting, get off the bicycle and run to the nearest field. Most likely, one of the farmers will help you." At their request I rubbed some loose soil all over my shoes to cover up the "Army look." I was still wearing my military G.I. shoes. The Frenchman in front of me, on our tandem bicycle, said we would be traveling about 20 kilometers.

### **THE TRIP TO THE THIRD FARMHOUSE**

The first Frenchman rode off on his single bike with his coat pulled over his pistol and with his white bag thrown back over his left shoulder. You could not see the outline of the machine gun inside because of the clothes were tucked in around it. Next, we took off on the tandem bike. The Frenchman guiding our bicycle concealed his pistol under his coat. Then the third Frenchman fell in behind us with his concealed pistol and a machine gun tucked in the white bag, over his shoulder. The four of us peddled on the dirt road and headed back toward the elevated German army base. This was the same dirt road I had first traveled on with the French Patriots. I didn't look up at the base and its German soldiers as we turned left and peddled on for about five or six kilometers.

Soon, we reached a crossroad and took it. It led to a paved road on which we cycled for a couple more kilometers. Frequently I would look up and see farmers giving us the "victory sign" with their fingers. Suddenly, about 500 yards ahead of us were two German guards with rifles on their shoulders, standing in the middle of an intersection. I kept my head down and tried to imagine I was deaf and dumb. We had kept our bicycles separated by approximately a hundred yards between them. The Germans stopped the first Frenchman on his bike. He got off his bike and began talking to them. After a few seconds, he got back on his bicycle and continued peddling past them. After going about 50 yards, he stopped, took his bag off his shoulder, and placed it on the road beside his bike. He was waiting to see if we were also going to get by the guards. We were rapidly approaching the German guards on our tandem bicycle.

The Frenchman in front of me started ringing a bicycle bell over and over. This bell was the kind I had seen on children's tricycles. The Germans looked at us, as if we were stupid, and started laughing at us. I thought we were going to run into them, but they stepped aside just as we peddled by. I didn't dare to look directly at their faces. I kept my head down as I had been instructed. I didn't dare look back to see if the third Frenchman on his bike got through. Later I saw he had gotten through and was still about a hundred yards behind us. We made another turn onto another dirt road. Ahead of us was a railroad crossing.

We stopped at a German controlled crossing barrier. A tiny guardhouse rested on top of a hill to our left. Someone in the guardhouse controlled the electric crossing barrier. The barrier did not come up. As we stopped, the first Frenchman was already half way up the hill going toward the guardhouse. I did not look up, but after a few minutes the cross bar was lifted. The Frenchman came down, remounted his bicycle, and we all continued on our way. After two or three more kilometers we appeared to be on the outskirts of the city of Lille.

### **DREAMS OF FREEDOM**

The buildings were large brick structures and closely spaced. We turned down an alley and stopped at the back of one of the buildings. There were stairs going downward to a basement door. We started down the stairs, pushing our bikes with us. We entered a large room, which looked much like an English Pub with benches all around the walls. Inside were about twenty people dressed as if they had just been to church or some formal function. Most of the people were middle aged. It was obvious they had gathered here to see me. The Frenchman who could speak some English introduced me as the American parachutist they had heard about. One by one they came, hugged me, kissed me on both cheeks, and wished me good luck. They brought out several bottles of wine and we all had wine with pieces of bread and talked. Some of them spoke good English.

Two or three of the people were crying. One lady, who was crying, said her two sons had just been killed by the Germans. Another said her husband had been shot two weeks ago. I realized these French people had suffered greatly because of the German occupation troops. Most of them were depressed and looking for encouragement of any kind! One man got up on a small table and drank a toast to me. He said "All of us are fed-up with the German occupation and are praying that the Allied forces will soon come and liberate us." I followed up and said, "You will not have to wait much longer because our invasion has been successful; Allied troops are making positive advances and are defeating the German forces in large numbers. The German Luftwaffe is no longer any worry to us. You will be liberated soon!" There was some low level applause and all wine glasses were filled again.

As I looked around, I could see the suffering in their eyes. I suddenly loved them for their courage. Inside, I felt deeply sorry for them, and I tried not to show the tears in my own eyes. All at once, I was amazed to realize I had completely forgotten about my own desperate situation. What really mattered was how I could help these French people. I hoped, with all my heart, that I had, some how or other, given these people a little more courage to deal with their own problems.

### **OUR BOMBARDIER, PAT CRAWFORD**

We remained with these people for perhaps an hour before one of the FFI Frenchmen announced that it was time for us to leave. We went around hugging the people while another of the Frenchmen went out to see if all was clear. When he returned, he indicated we should leave quickly. The French people closed the door and remained inside as we pushed our bicycles back up the stairs and peddled out of the alley the way we had come in. We turned off on a dirt road and peddled for the next hour. Then we went back into the country with its many farms. The last part of this trip went without any problems. We finally approached a farmhouse/barn/barnyard complex that was all enclosed with a 6 foot high brick wall. One of the Frenchmen took out a key and unlocked the gate to the barnyard, and we pushed our bicycles inside.

There was an old lady inside, probably in her 80s, who greeted us. One of the Frenchmen introduced me to her grandson, Francois, who was 15 years old. I was told, my bombardier (Pat Crawford) was here. Francois said Pat was asleep up in the hayloft and asked not to be disturbed. We went to the barn. I saw a ladder and moved it over so I could climb up to him. When I reached the loft, I saw Pat sleeping on some hay. As I approached him, he woke up and smiled at me. He was not expecting me because he thought I was dead. He thought I had been killed during my parachute jump. I told him what Francois had said about not being disturbed. He laughed and said, "Just another one of those problems with communications."

We both laughed. We were both very excited about getting together and talked steadily for the next hour. He told me everything he had heard about the crew and I told him everything I had heard. We concluded that there were too many conflicting stories for anything to make much sense. From what we heard, we were almost certain that one crew member had been killed when he parachuted. From the descriptions given us, We thought it might be our navigator, Andrew Felbinger.

### INFORMATION FROM PAT

Pat said the French helped him when he landed in his parachute, but not without a problem. He said Francois almost shot him, thinking he was a German. Finally, Pat convinced him he was an American airman, by picking up a stick and drawing sketches in the sandy soil, to help illustrate what he was trying to say with his excited words and gestures. Then, Francois had brought him to this farm. Pat said Francois was very active in the French Underground.

A few months ago, Francois had been involved in blowing up a German troop train and found himself too close to the explosion. He had suffered a deep cut in his left arm. The only thing that could be done at the time was to take him down in the basement of a house and sew up the arm with a large sewing needle and a string taken from a seed sack. The cut had gotten infected, but he finally recovered. I noticed this terrible scar on his arm when I first saw him. Pat said Francois lived with his grandmother who was in her upper 80's in age. With the help of some other hired farmers, the two of them kept the farm going. Francois' father had been killed by the Germans and his mother had died some time ago.

### THE BRITISH LANCASTER RESCUE ATTEMPT

Francois came to me and Pat after we were almost hoarse from talking. He said he had good news for us. The leaders of the French Underground had made radio contact with England. Plans were being made in England to send a British Lancaster aircraft to occupied France soon to pick us up and take us back to England. He said, "The Lancaster will land six



Figure 14 British Lancaster Bomber(photo from Wikipedia Commons)

days from now." We couldn't believe our good luck! I simply couldn't express how relieved I felt. Francois said there was a relatively flat grassy field not far away where the aircraft could land. He said, "Members of the French Resistance would line up on both sides of the field with flashlights and guide the aircraft in for a landing, late at night." He continued by saying the two of us could not stay together at his house because this could be dangerous. The plan was to take me somewhere else to hide, and allow Pat to continue to live with him. Francois went into the barn and came out pushing two bicycles. The Frenchmen who had brought me to see Pat had gone on their way. I never saw them again. Francois told me to

follow him. I said goodbye to Pat and reminded him we would soon be leaving France together on the Lancaster.

It was about an hour before sundown when I got on my bicycle and followed Francois out the barnyard gate. We peddled for about an hour on several dirt roads to a small village. We stopped along a sidewalk and started pushing our bikes. We passed several young German soldiers walking on the other side of the road and going in the opposite direction. They could easily see us, but they paid no attention. Were they on leave from their military bases? Suddenly Francois stopped at a small house with its front entrance practically on the sidewalk. As we stepped next to the door, it was opened from the inside. Just inside were a young man and his wife. They appeared very nervous and their faces were white with fear. Quickly we pushed our bicycles inside the door and closed it. The young man told me I would be staying at their house until the British were ready to fly me back to England. He said that when the Lancaster landed, it would land in a near-by grass field some time after midnight. The most important thing was to be ready and move quickly, because the Lancaster would land, turn around, and take off again.

We walked to a back bedroom where I was to remain in hiding. Francois pointed out the back window to the outside toilet. He said, "Each time you use it, go out this window and quietly lower yourself to the ground. Then crawl close to the house and next to the short section of fence so that no one can see you from the street, in front of the house. The fence was only four feet high. Return to your room the same way." I assured him I would, and that I would also be extremely careful. All the blood seemed to leave the faces of the young couple as they nervously listened to Francois. I don't think they wanted me around. Francois seemed pleased with my cooperative attitude and assured the young couple everything would work out fine, because I would only be with them for 6 days. Believe me; I didn't go to that toilet at any time during the daylight hours, except for one emergency. At night, I felt much safer crawling out my window and over to the toilet. My room didn't have anything in it except a wooden floor, one hard back chair, a small writing table in the corner of the room, and one small bed. The door, through which I entered the room, was always locked from the outside.

After Francois left, I didn't see much of the young couple. I knew they were living in fear of the Germans discovering me. I knew I had to be very cautious. Periodically, the young man, who didn't look any older than I did (I was 22 years old), would place a plate of food (bread and jam, usually) on my small table; then, he would leave, locking the door from the outside. Later, he would unlock the door and return to pick up the empty plate. He always looked scared and ill at ease, and I felt depressed for putting him under this terrible stress. He tried to smile from time to time. He had made some wine out of some berries, and it had not fully fermented, however, he would occasionally bring me a glass of it. The wine tasted like yeast and had pieces of red berries in the bottom of it, but it was a very friendly gesture on his part, and it did not make me sick. It was all he had, and he was sharing it with me.

Living so isolated in this room was very difficult for me. I almost felt I was some type of a prisoner. The walls were an uninteresting gray color. My only exit was the window. I knew there were plenty of Germans around, so I didn't sit next to the window. I sat there on the wooden chair and stared at the walls, day after day. There was no one to talk to. The room was bare. There were no magazines or anything else to look at. I began to feel, that if something didn't happen soon, I was going to go out of my mind. Living this way was terrible! Finally, I noticed I had a small piece of notebook paper in my pocket, so I sat down



at the little table, took a pencil out of my escape kit, and made myself a small calendar in French. I remembered the French words for the months of the year, from my high school French class.

I didn't tell the young man about the calendar, because it would have only worried him more. He was already afraid we were all going to be caught and shot. With the calendar, I began to count back to the day I parachuted. Then I marked the day the Lancaster was to arrive. This wasn't much on which to focus my attention, but at least it was something! I started to think about my past life to keep my mind busy. Would I ever see Francois again? Why doesn't he come and give me a progress report? My idle mind was tormenting me. Why doesn't something happen?

About three or four days went by, and I could hardly stand it any longer. Finally, on the fifth night, about midnight, Francois appeared and rapped on my window. I opened it, and he crawled in. I was very excited about this and asked if the Lancaster had arrived? He said, "The British Lancaster will not be landing, after all. The entire rescue plan has been scrapped. It has become too dangerous to attempt it. You and Pat will have to wait for the advancing Allied troops to rescue you. Until then, we will help you to continue to hide from the Germans". I became very depressed and wondered if I shouldn't go ahead with my own escape plans.

### **THE RETURN TO FRANCOIS' FARMHOUSE**

Francois asked me to return with him to his farmhouse, and he said we should leave "right now". He said Pat had been transferred from his farmhouse to another hiding place, and I would be staying with him for awhile. He took a key from his pocket, opened the door, and walked into the next room to tell the young French couple we were leaving. When he returned, we crawled out the rear window where two bicycles were resting against the house. Outside, it was very dark, and everything was now dark in the house. We peddled back to Francois' farmhouse while he used his flashlight to illuminate the dirt roads. We finally entered the gate to the barnyard again. We went inside the house and into Francois' bedroom. His grandmother had heard us and came into our room. Francois introduced me to her, which he had not done when I came to find Pat. She gave me a toothless smile. She seemed to be a very nice old lady, who understood that Francois took commands from the French Resistance. Also, she knew her grandson had to come and go frequently in the night.

After she returned to her room, I looked around the bedroom. It was an arsenal! There were several rifles under the mattress of the bed. There were large cabinets, against one wall, loaded with ammunition, six or seven machine guns, German hand grenades, and pistols. Sleeping beside Francois was very difficult, because of all the hard lumps in the mattress. I tried to relax and had hardly dozed off when Francois jumped out of bed, and said it was already 6:30 in the morning. Francois went to the barn, fed the horses, cows and cleaned the floors by shoveling the animal manure on top of a high pile of wastes in the middle of the small barnyard. I got a shovel and helped him. His aged grandmother couldn't help him, and his arm didn't look very good, because of inflammation. Soon I was doing everything he had been doing; I was rapidly becoming a French farmer.

The next day we were working together in the barnyard. I noticed Francois had a pistol in his pocket. A German soldier rode by the farm house on a motorcycle. Francois looked as if he

had been waiting for him. Quickly, he jumped on his bicycle and peddled across the field as fast as he could go, about 90 degrees to the direction the German motorcyclist was traveling. I went on working. Five minutes later I heard gunfire, not far away. Ten minutes later, Francois returned with a German Luger and a hand grenade. He went into his room, left the pistols and returned still holding the German hand grenade. He suddenly said, "Here, catch this! He tossed it to me. It was unarmed, but it scared me. He doubled over laughing. I told him I didn't like playing games like this! He realized I was irritated. I was so mad; I had to restrain myself from hitting him in the face.

### THE FOURTH FARMHOUSE

The next morning, there was a knock at the door. Grandmother answered it. About five minutes later she called Francois inside to talk to him. When he returned to the barnyard, he was very nervous. He said, "Two Germans came to the door to ask his grandmother if she had seen any cars or bicycles following a German motorcyclist yesterday. She said she did not even see a motorcyclist, and nearly always remained inside the house. Apparently the Germans accepted the old lady's answer and left to look elsewhere. Then, Francois came to me and said, "Things are getting too dangerous for you to stay here any longer. You will have to leave immediately." He got the two bicycles out of the barn and we left the barnyard and peddled down a back dirt road toward still another farm which I think must have been about five kilometers away.. At any rate, it didn't take long to get there. The two-storied farmhouse was made of brick and looked to be in good condition. The house was adjacent to the barn yard. A six foot brick wall ran from the house to the barn. There was an entrance gate built into the wall.

### MY NEW FRENCH MAMA AND PAPA AT THE FERME de PIETRE

The gate opened into the barnyard. The main highway was about a Quarter of a mile from the house with a dirt road going from the house to the highway. Francois opened the gate and we both entered the barnyard area. A farm couple (man and wife) came out of the kitchen which was next to the gate. Both of them hugged and kissed me. They told me I would stay with them as another son. They had two sons of their own, one of whom was my age and one about three years younger. The older one's name was Claude. The younger was Pierre. Papa. Mama. Claude and Pierre were members of the French Resistance. Also. Papa and Mama had two daughters. one who was about two years younger than I and her name was Georgette. The other, Marguerite, was about five years younger. Counting me, they now had three sons and two daughters.

I only addressed the parents as Mama and Papa. They told me they would give me a camouflaged name of Henri. I didn't tell them my real middle name was Henry. Papa asked me for my special photograph for use in making up false identification papers for me. I took it out of my escape kit and gave it to him. A few days later he gave me my French false identification card with the official Vichy Stamp impressed across the photograph and card. The card listed my new name; Henri Wlquart. I had the last name of my new family. It was a remarkable job of falsifying information. The card said I was deaf and dumb and



**Figure 15 This photo was removed from the false identification card. Note the official Vichy stamp in the upper left-hand corner.**

my occupation was a worker at a German airport (in occupied France).

I was given the upstairs room in the farmhouse with a window overlooking the dirt road coming from the highway. The dirt road was about a half mile long. Papa said I should be alert whenever I was in this room and always watch for any automobiles that might be coming toward the house. on this dirt road. Any incoming automobile would most certainly be a German car.

He took me out into the field and showed me a five foot hole that had been dug about a hundred yards behind the farmhouse. The position of the hole could not be seen from the dirt road because the house was in between. However, if a driver entered the gate. and parked in front of the kitchen door, the cover to the hole could be seen. There was a metal sheet covering over the top of the hole with trash and animal dung heaped on top of it. By pushing on the metal plate, the pile of trash could be moved just far enough for me to jump down into the hole. Papa said this was where I would hide if any Germans came to the house. He told me if I should see a car coming toward the house on the dirt road, I should call him, leave my room, run down the stairs to one of the two windows facing the field (and the hole), raise the window, jump out, and run for the hole before the driver of the car had a chance to enter the gate.. I practiced it once, and it seemed to work out okay.

Each day Mama would prepare the meals, and I would join the rest of the family in the kitchen. There wasn't much to eat, but we shared what we had. Three other people also stayed at the farmhouse. They were the grandmother, the mother of Mama; a Polish refugee lady, whose name was Josephine; and her five months old baby. Josephine's husband had been killed by the Germans. The grandmother was senile and continuously wanted to know who I was. Mama would just say I was "Belgic," but the grandmother kept saying, "He does not look Belgic, and he does not talk like someone from Belgium." Mama kept assuring her that I was Belgic and let it go at that.

Later, Mama told me that she and Papa had talked it over, and if she became too much of a risk, it might become necessary to do away with grandma, especially if the Germans closed in on the farm. The way things were going, there appeared to be little danger that grandma might tell the Germans anything. Collaborators were always a threat to our safety, especially if they should become suspicious.

Papa and Mama were very careful when the local Catholic priest came to the farm. They always warned me to hide if I saw him around the farm. They always warned me if they were expecting him. They said he was a collaborator and a very dangerous man. They were always afraid grandma would tell him I was in the house and expand on her theory that I was not Belgic. The Catholic Priest could easily get us all killed if we were not very careful. I saw him leaving once, but I made sure that he never saw me!

Whenever grandma came to the kitchen to eat with us, she would place her false teeth on the table and forget to put them in her mouth. This irritated Marguerite, her granddaughter. Marguerite threatened grandma several times, saying she would hide her teeth if she didn't stop laying them on the table. One day, when we were all around the kitchen table, Marguerite grabbed the teeth off the table and started snapping them. She looked at me and shouted, "Look out Henri! I'm going to bite you with grandma's teeth." Grandma was shocked! She stood up with her puckered mouth and shook her fist at Marguerite. Marguerite ran around the table to where I was seated and snapped them at me. I ducked

several times. By now, everyone was laughing except grandma. Then, Marguerite returned the teeth to the table at the spot where she had taken them. Grandma grabbed them quickly and jammed them into her mouth. The pucker disappeared and grandma smiled with relief. After that, grandma never failed to keep her teeth in her mouth when eating.

Josephine, the Polish refugee, was like a member of the family and naturally hated the Germans. In addition to taking care of her baby, she helped mama with housework, cooking, and cleaning. She helped with the farm work too. Like me, she was staying there, hoping she would be liberated along with the French people. She had no place to go. Papa and mama said we would remain with them until the Allies drove the Germans out and liberated the near village of Aubers.

### **THE PEEPER**

Claude, Pierre, and Francois were always busy going here and there on their bicycles doing their work for the French Resistance. Sometimes they would come home out of breath and paint their bicycles a different color.

Papa had an illegal radio hidden in a small room next to the kitchen. If it had been discovered by the Germans, they would shoot him for sure. Listening to the radio was risky. We listened to it every evening. Sometimes, Winston Churchill would deliver a speech in both French and English to help build up confidence in an ultimate Allied Victory. The news program on BBC (British Broadcasting Corporation) kept us up to date on where the Allied Forces were advancing and what was happening in the war. News coming from England boosted our morale. I remember one evening when the English gave us some news from the United States. The commentator said that John L. Lewis had just called for a strike of the coal workers. My first thought was, here I am trying to "save my neck," while this bastard is calling for a coal strike!

On another evening, we were all in our places around the radio, when I looked up and saw a face at the window. For some reason or other, some one had forgotten to pull the blind down all the way. I pointed and shouted to Papa! Papa grabbed his pistol off the table and ran for the kitchen door. Claude and Pierre were right behind him as they all ran out the door and across the barn yard. Papa came back winded after about five minutes. He had failed to catch the peeper and was very upset. He said we were all in danger, and that I would have to be hidden somewhere else, as soon as possible. The peeper could be a French collaborator or a German. We waited! After a half hour, Pierre and Claude returned smiling. They had caught the peeper and found out that he was the retarded son of the local French butcher. The son was just curious and didn't mean any harm. Evidently, Papa, Mama, Pierre, and Claude were all good friends of the butcher and were sure they could trust him.

### **ACTIVITIES AT THE FARM**

During week-days, we would work in the fields of wheat and sugar beets, tend the live stock, milk the cows, and churn the butter. Participating in these tasks really helped me to keep my mind busy and away from thinking about the risks we were taking.

On Sundays, the children would have their friends over, and they would play records in the living room and dance. One day mama came up and had me carefully peep over the railing

of the stairs, to see how much fun the young people were having. No one outside the family knew I was there, except the Captain of the Resistance, Louis Lesaffre and Francois.

At the farm, I talked to the Captain once, but only for less than five minutes. He appeared to be a very important person to Mama, Papa, Claude, and Pierre. He was their commander in the Resistance Movement. The Captain told me to cooperate with Mama and Papa and if they needed me to help in some way they would let me know. I assured him I would cooperate fully with them. He was a very proud man, and Papa said he was well respected, not only in the community, but by the French people who served under his command. The Captain would have been a prize catch by Nazi "butchers" like Klaus Barbi.

German Gestapo chief, Klaus Barbi, was also known as "the Butcher of Lyon." French Captain, Lesaffre was responsible for many lives in the Resistance of the North and bad news for the German Occupation Forces. He was a brave man. He told me he would continue to protect my safety as well as the safety of Mama and Papa.

Food was scarce. Papa raised pigs in a lighted room inside the barn. The pigs never saw daylight. The big sow got sick one day and Papa was unable to save her. She died bearing her young. Papa did not want to waste the meat, with all the hungry French people around. I went out to help him butcher her. He cut open the sow, and the meat was purple and rotten. The odor gagged both of us to the extent we could hardly work. I don't think I could have eaten the meat without getting sick. Finally, he gave up and asked me to help him dig a hole to bury her. This, I did with much relief. Papa was crushed to find out nothing was salvageable. The French people were badly in need of meat for their tables. Also Papa could trade meat for other necessities. It was a terrible loss!

Almost every day Allied aircraft would fly near or over the farmhouse. Most of them would be flying at high altitude. Almost every day, I could hear bombs being dropped by the Allied planes, and frequently, the concussion of the sound produced by the explosions would beat on my chest. One day it was raining, and there was a low overcast sky. We heard airplanes flying high over the farm. The overcast prevented us from seeing them. Papa seemed very nervous about this. I told him not to worry, because American pilots were not allowed to drop bombs in France without seeing and identifying the target. I remembered those times when Ralph and I had to fly loads of bombs back to England because we couldn't see the target in France. I had scarcely finished telling him this, when several bombs began to explode along the outside edge of Papa's sugar beet field. Papa yelled "Get down!" We both hit the ground. Papa made a joke out of it later, but it sure embarrassed me! I couldn't imagine what happened up there. Whatever it was, it sure scared the Hell out of us!

On another day I was out in the sugar beet field when part of a formation of American P-47 Thunderbolts flew over and came down to attack a German supply line of ammunition trucks on the road next to the field. In one pass the shells were coming in just to the side of me. Soil shot up into the air where the bullets were hitting. I waved at the American pilot as the fighter plane thundered over my head. I don't think he saw me.

Somehow, I felt better, having waved. If he had seen me, he would have thought I was just another French farmer. Another Thunderbolt dove down toward the convoy. There was a tremendous explosion as one of the German ammunition trucks blew up. It was like the forth of July! Ammunition was exploding all over, sending scattered smoke trails in all directions. Many of the German soldiers jumped off their trucks and started to run for cover in our field.

The American P-47s continued to strafe the convoy. At this point, I ran back to the barn and got under some loose hay for a while. Luckily, none of the Germans came over .as far as Papa's farmhouse.

From the radio broadcasts, we continued to follow the news of the advancing Allied troops. This was always inspirational to hear.

One Sunday morning, it was cloudy and the visibility was very low. There was a fine misty rain. I became very depressed about the war. I felt I had to get away from the farmhouse, if for no other reason, than to just to sit outside awhile and think. I wondered about several things. When the Germans were forced to retreat, would they leave any of us alive? Would they destroy everything for reprisal? Would there be a destructive battle between the Allies and the Germans here? The war seemed to be going on and on. When would it end? It was very doubtful that I would ever see my family and friends again? Finally, I told Mama I was going out to the barnyard for a little while, to a familiar place, beside the drainage ditch. I told her not to worry. If she needed to contact or warn me, she could easily find me there. I told her I just needed to get out of my room for awhile, to get some air. I felt secure enough, being surrounded with a foggy atmosphere and fine mist. This was one of those days where one might say "even the birds are walking."

I sat down on the edge of the drainage ditch and down into it a couple of feet so that I could not be readily seen by anyone. As I sat there wondering about the war, I began to believe I wasn't going to make it out of occupied France, and I knew I must finally decide how to conduct myself, if I really had to face a German firing squad. I had thought about this before, and I would try to look proud and irritate the riflemen in some way. But, what if they blindfolded me? My hands would probably be tied. If possible, I could smile and wink at them before they could fire their guns. I promised myself I would not panic under any condition. Suddenly, I began to think about my past life, and my heart became filled with love for all the people I had previously known. I thought it would be such a wonderful thing if I could just return home for an instant, and tell everyone I had ever known, simply that I love them. What a strange feeling, this was. My eyes filled with tears. I started to pray; I asked God to forgive me of my sins and to help me get through this terrible war. I wanted to survive and live a normal life, like everyone else at home. I wanted to live long enough to meet a girl and fall in love with her. I wanted to get married and have children and a family. I wanted to stay alive until I was at least 50 years old. I wanted to find out what it would be like to live a happy family life. At this moment, I had never felt so close to God. I asked Him to protect Papa and Mama and give my mother enough insight to know that I was really okay. I felt that God was with me and would continue to be with me forever, regardless of what happened here. I knew my prayers had been heard. My confidence suddenly jumped "sky high." I walked back to the farmhouse feeling wonderful! I've never forgotten this very special moment! I still think about it often.

### THE ARRIVAL OF A GERMAN STAFF CAR

One Sunday afternoon, I was sitting in my room and

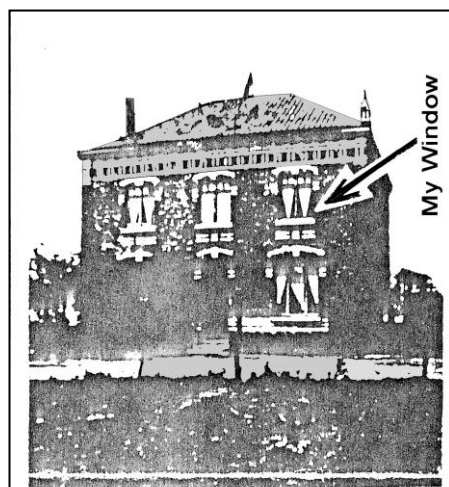


Figure 16 The Wicquart Farmhouse where I remained in hiding.

looking out the window. I saw an automobile coming across the dirt road toward the house. By the time I saw it, the car was halfway to the farmhouse. I ran to the door and brushed by Papa who had already seen the German car. Papa said, "Run quick Henri, the Germans are coming! Mama is raising the window for you!" I ran down the stairs two at a time, with Papa right behind me. Mama was shouting, "I can't get the window open! It is wet from the rain and will not open! Both papa and I got our hands under the window along with Mama and it opened. I simply dove through the opening and fell on my shoulder just outside the house.

There was a ditch and a barbed wire fence between me and the hole. I leaped over the ditch and caught my pants on the barbed wire. Jerking free, I ran as fast as I could, hoping the driver of the car would not see me running. I quickly pushed against the cover. The cover, with all the weight on top, made a terrible grinding noise as I pushed it back a little. The opening was just large enough for me to dive into the hole. I dropped to the floor through spider webs. Then, I got up and pushed against the handle on the under surface of the cover to close it. There was another metallic grinding noise.

The light turned to total darkness. There was no way of knowing whether or not they saw me. I held my breath as much as possible and took slow shallow breaths to avoid making any noises. In the meantime the German car entered the gate and stopped in front of the kitchen. Down in the hole, I said a silent prayer, asking God to help me through this crucial situation. All was quiet for a half hour. All at once, I heard boots approaching the hole. Again I held my breath. "Henri!" Papa was calling! "The Germans have gone. You are safe." In my mind, I quickly thanked God! Papa helped me pull back the metal cover. I crawled out of the hole, with his help, brushed off the spider webs, and together we forced the cover back over the hole.

When we returned to the kitchen. Mama seemed to be in a state of shock. Papa said the visitor was a Special Service Nazi Officer who said he held the title of Baron in one of the old royal families of Germany. He and his assistant were looking for food to feed the hungry German soldiers. Mama's face was white and she couldn't talk. The Germans asked what was wrong and she couldn't answer. Quickly, papa said she had been very sick and was lucky to even be out of bed. The Germans asked Papa if he had any pigs. He said he needed them for the German troops. Papa told them he did not have any. He hoped his pigs did not make any noise in their double roomed home. The Baron believed papa and did not bother to search the farm. He told Papa the war would not last much longer (there was no indication which side he thought would win) and invited Papa and Mama to visit him and his family in Germany after the war was over. When they left, Papa came out to get me. Mama still looked like she might faint.

As the Allied forces approached Aubers, the French people started to prepare for the forthcoming liberation. They were supercharged with emotions and thoughts of gaining back their freedom. In anticipation, Papa and Mama became happier by the day. Papa said the people were making French and Allied flags and banners to welcome their liberators. We could hear more and more gun fire to the south. From my window, I could see some of the German retreat. On September third, I reached my twenty-third birthday. On September 4th and 5th, the exodus continued. Young German teen-age boys were driving cattle and plow horses hitched to cannons. Tired, sluggish, troops marched along side large troop carriers with officers and their belongings. Long lines of troops, walked in broken formation, toward a large wooded area to the north of Aubers.

Papa called my attention to the German tanks and trucks, loaded with troops. They all seemed to be headed North. I didn't want to attract any attention, but Papa said "They are only interested in getting back to their homes in Germany" The sad part was, some of the revengeful German soldiers were shooting members of farm families and throwing hand grenades through farm house windows. On the evening of September 5th, there were many German reprisal killings around Aubers.

### **THE BRITISH LIBERATION OF AUBERS - SEPTEMBER 6, 1944**

On morning of September 6th, I awoke to hear church bells ringing. Papa came to me with tears in his eyes. He said it had finally happened. A large column of British tanks were approaching Aubers from the South. Aubers would be liberated within the day. Mama and Papa asked me to come with them to go see the British tanks and join in the celebration. He said my bombardier, Pat, would also meet us there. This was terrific news! We got on bicycles and peddled toward Aubers, it was only about three Kilometers away. When we arrived at the outskirts, hundreds of people lined the streets, shouting, hollering and waving Allied flags! The excitement was beyond belief! A large banner was stretched across the road which said "HONOR TO OUR LIBERATORS."

All the German soldiers seemed to be gone, having retreated to the North in the direction of Germany. "The British tanks will come along this road," Mama said. We stopped. Pat arrived to join me after about five minutes. Because we were about to be liberated with them, we were just as happy as the French people about the news. Mama and papa began telling everyone around us that Pat and I were the American parachutists that had been hidden in Aubers for a long time. She told them how we had changed into French clothing and how Mama and Papa had kept Henri, and how Francois had kept Pat hidden. This made us very nervous. We had heard that many of the German soldiers had changed into civilian clothes. Who could tell them from the rest of the people around us? I was afraid that Pat and I would be German targets before the day was over.

We saw a few ladies with their hair cut-off sitting on the steps of a building. Mama said "These women have been fraternizing with the German troops. The Resistance has punished them by cutting off their hair."

Amid the noisy wild celebration, we heard the rumble of powerful tank engines. A line of tanks was coming around a corner about a half mile away. They were coming directly toward us. There seemed to be no end to the column. There must have been at least 50 of them. Most of the tank commanders were sitting just on top of the lid to the entrance, waving at the screaming, crying and laughing crowds.

I waved at the commander on the lead tank, "I am a homesick Yank Pilot and I would like to go home. I shook my dog tags still around my neck. He shouted back to me, "Bloody! You are a Yank pilot! How long have you been waiting to get out?" I said "Two months" and "This is my bombardier," Pat waved. The tank stopped in front of us, All the rest of the tanks lined up behind and came to a halt.

People started running out to shake hands and kiss the tank crews. They crawled all over the tanks and gave the British soldiers flowers, bottles of wine, chocolate, handkerchiefs, etc. I shouted again to the tank commander, "Can you get us out of here?" He said "I'm afraid there's nothing we can do for you right now. If you can get back to our supply line



trucks in Lille, perhaps they can help you! They will be in Lille this evening, as soon as the troops can secure the place."

He asked if I would like some cigarettes. I didn't really care for them, but I remembered how hard it had been for the French to get cigarettes. So, I said yes. He threw out two or three packs of English cigarettes. Pat and I immediately opened them and handed cigarettes to the people around us. He asked, "Which way did the 'Jerries' go?" I told him the German troops all headed for the woods to the north, and the last ones left this morning. Immediately he climbed back into the tank, as did all the others. The hatches were then closed and latched. All of the tanks started their engines again. The French people crawled back off the tanks and the entire column headed north toward the woods. This was the last I saw of the English officer and his British tank column.

### THE CONTINUED CELEBRATION

Papa and Mama had told so many people about me and Pat, the shouting crowds started gathering around us. We were suddenly grabbed and hoisted up on the shoulders of several men. Off we went with hundreds of French people following us. Crying, shouting, and laughing came from everywhere! People were pointing at us and shouting "Americans!" People ran up to us and thrust souvenir handkerchiefs, chocolate, wine, and flowers into our arms, just as they had done with the British. We were being treated as heroes! The crowd stopped at the beautiful Catholic Church in Aubers (the church of the collaborating priest). The men set us down on the church steps. A group gathered with some old beat up musical instruments. They started to play the United States National Anthem. Tears came to my eyes as I stood Proudly and saluted Pat did the same. Next, the "Marseillaise," the French National Anthem, was played while we continued to salute. The martial music inspired me. Someone gave me an enormous bouquet of red roses which I placed on the tomb of the French unknown soldier located just inside the churchyard. Cheers went up everywhere. I wondered how soon the first German in civilian clothes would take a shot at me and Pat. The Catholic priest was nowhere in sight. The celebration continued as Pat and I were picked up again on their shoulders. We all returned to Mama and Papa.

It was still early afternoon but Mama and Papa said there would be a celebration in our honor before we left. We went to a very large room in a building with tables set with white table cloths, silver and beautiful cut glass goblets. Pat and I were given two seats at the head of the long series of tables. I can't begin to describe the beautiful food or where it was coming from. We started with a very large glass of red wine. It was a superior wine, probably saved many years for the liberation. We had meat dishes, deserts, fancy breads etc. What a celebration it was! Speeches were made and people would come and hug and kiss us repeatedly. It was late afternoon when Mama and Papa took me and Pat back to their farm. We could hardly wait to head for home. We wanted to get started to Lille as soon as possible.



Figure 17 Aubers, France - 1944.  
From left to right: Bus, Pierre,  
Claude, and Francois.

### ONWARD TO LILLE

Following the celebration on June 6th, Claude, Pierre, and Francois decided to escort us to Lille. It was difficult to say goodbye to Mama and Papa. I swore I would return after the War to see them, and I couldn't thank them enough for saving my life. Mama, Papa, and I cried as we hugged each other for the last time.

Francois carried a machine gun, and Claude and Pierre had pistols. Pat and I were not carrying any weapons. We got on our bicycles and started peddling for Lille. It seemed like hours passed before we got there.

On the outskirts there were many wounded soldiers and civilians lying out in a field. French red cross women in white dresses and hats displaying red cross insignias were taking care of them. The sun was just going down. Evidently there had been a significant afternoon battle in Lille between the English (supported by the FFI) and the German forces. The men were lying on blankets arranged in rows in the field, and it was difficult to tell what nationality they were. They were all suffering from battle wounds.

We asked two of the French nurses where the British supply trucks were. They directed us to an area just inside the city limits. We found the van belonging to a British commanding officer in charge of the supply lines. He was very courteous to us and realized why we were searching for help. There had been a radio contact between him and the tank column, because he said he was expecting us. He said he would not be able to help us because they were on the move, however, if we would come back the following morning he would get us in touch with a branch of Canadian Intelligence, and he thought they might be able to help us. So we decided to return to the farm for the night.

In order to get out of Lille, we had to go down a road guarded by a German sniper on top of one of the buildings. A Jeep with British soldiers went by in the dark and stopped ahead of us. I walked up and told them my story about trying to get back to Aubers. An officer said "Well, you'll need a gun" and gave me his pistol. He quickly grabbed it back and said he would need it more than I would. I didn't understand, except that he must have realized he shouldn't be giving away guns to strangers.

### **THE GERMAN SNIPER IN LILLE**

We didn't go far before being shot at. Bullets were ricocheting off the bricks in front of us. We all got down and Claude said, "Run quickly for the opening in front the large department store." We huddled in the darkness in the entrance archway. There were already several French people huddled there. Francois told us to get ready to run and push our bicycles down a nearby alley. He would cover us by firing at the sniper.

We prepared ourselves, as Francois stepped out into the street and opened fire over our heads with his machine gun. He startled spraying the top of the buildings above us. Pieces of bricks started to fall. Quickly we ran, one behind the other to the alley. Bullets hit the road around us. I looked around and perhaps ten to fifteen French people were running behind us. Francois kept firing in short bursts over our heads. When we reached the alley the shooting stopped, and Francois joined us. We all peddled back toward Aubers.

### **BACK TO THE FARM**

We reached Mama and Papa's farm late that night. Patrick went back with Francois to stay at his farmhouse. I greeted Mama and Papa again, and Claude explained what had happened. Then I went back upstairs to my room. I was uneasy upon returning because the collaborators and Germans undoubtedly knew who I was and where I was staying. I went up to my room again and went to bed. I couldn't even begin to sleep after all the day's excitement. I got up and sat in a chair looking out the window. I must have dozed off sitting in a chair because, about midnight, I heard some noise outside and jumped out of my chair.

I looked out the window and saw a car skidding side ways to a stop under my window. It almost hit the farm house. There were about six people in the car: two riding on top and one on the hood. I don't know how they kept from falling off. They all had rifles. It was obvious they had been drinking. I called for Papa just as he entered my room. He told me not to be afraid. He said these were men from the French Resistance. The Resistance had captured this German staff car and sent the Frenchmen over to check on my safety. Wow, was I relieved! For the rest of the night I remained awake but rested. Nothing more happened until morning. In the morning I went down stairs to the kitchen. Pat and Francois had already returned. We had bread, jam and coffee for breakfast. Claude, Pierre, Papa and Mama joined us.

### **BACK TO LILLE**

After we ate, we set out for Lille again. I said goodbye again to Mama and Papa. and somehow I knew this would be the last time I would see them for a long time. We were all very sad again. Mama cried, as I hugged her. After giving Papa a hug, Claude, Pierre, Francois, Pat, and I got our bicycles again and set out for Lille. We passed the Catholic Church, where there were twelve wooden coffins stacked upon one another in a group. These were the bodies of the French people the Germans killed the night before the Liberation of Aubers. They were beginning to smell, and I noticed streaks of lime on some of the boxes This indicated that someone had thrown lime on the bodies, after placing them in their coffins. How could the German soldiers be so cruel?

When we arrived back to the outskirts of Lille, the van with the officer was still there, but there were no sounds of guns being fired in or around the city. The Red Cross nurses were still hovering over the wounded. We talked to the British officer who immediately radioed the Canadian troops. We waited as we drank English hot tea together. A half hour passed before the Canadians arrived in their jeep.

There were two Canadian officers in the front. After friendly greetings, they said they were taking us to Paris. Pat and I got in the back They explained that they were going to escort a convoy of trucks loaded with German prisoners down to Paris, and that we would all drive behind the last truck, as rear guard. They said there was a detachment of American intelligence officers in Paris who would take care of us and get us on a flight back to England. Paris had just been liberated.

The Canadians said they had several hours of free time before the prisoner convoy was ready. They drove us to a French cafe, in Lille and ordered a round of cognac for us. We told our story and asked the Canadians if they would help us find out what happened to our navigator. "Sure," they responded.

We got into the Jeep again and drove back to where we thought most of us had landed in our parachutes. We stopped at a pub near by and asked the people inside if they had seen any American parachutists, about two months ago. The owner said there had been a whistle that day and those inside the pub thought it was a bomb. They all ducked under tables but nothing happened. They went outside and there was a Yank airman smashed on the road with his parachute out of its pack. The whistling had been produced by an unopened parachute. They picked up the parachutist and quickly buried him beside the road before the Germans could find him. Later they transferred his body to a cemetery in Lille.

The owner gave us directions to the cemetery. We drove there and found the grave keeper. He went to the maintenance building and got the dog tags of the buried man. The dog tags belonged to our navigator, Andrew Felblinger. Then we were guided to his grave. We wrote down the number of the grave for later reference.

After that, we drove back to see the second farm house where I had stayed for the first six days. The elevated German Army Base had been completely bombed out. There was nothing left but large bomb craters where the British had dropped their "block busters" one night. Also the farm house was no longer in existence. There as only a very large bomb crater where the farmhouse once stood. I hoped the farmers, some how or other, survived this total devastation.

Our spare time had run out and we had to return to Lille where the prisoner convoy was being assembled. After about a half hour, the convoy was ready to roll, and the truck loads of German prisoners headed south for Paris. There were, perhaps, 50 large trucks in the convoy. When the last truck took its position in line, we pulled in behind with the Jeep. One of the Canadians sat in the front seat with a machine gun, in case of an emergency, and the other one drove. While following along behind the last truck, the German prisoners were laughing, talking to each other and in very good spirits. Occasionally, they would wave back at us. The war was over for them. They had no intentions of giving anyone any more trouble. They were through fighting, and very happy they weren't captured by the Russians.

## ON TO PARIS

Hours later we arrived in Paris. There were half destroyed German trucks and tanks everywhere. We stopped at a large hotel near the Arch of Triumph where Hitler's troops had marched into Paris. The name of the hotel was the "Meurlice Hotel" We went into the lobby. There were American officers inside who greeted us. They wanted to hear our story and asked if we had any false identification cards. If so, they wanted them immediately. They said we could be sent to prison if we lied about not having them and failed to turn them in. I quickly pulled off my picture, with the official Vichy stamp, shoved it in my pocket and gave them the false identification card (I still have the picture). They told us we would stay with them for the night and, then, we would be flown back to England the next day. Before leaving, we would be issued American military clothes. Pat and I went up to our assigned room on the top floor. There was a German sniper on the roof, but he was being ignored for the time being. Pat and I pulled down the windows, locked them, and decided to sleep under the bed. We didn't sleep very well but we rested anyway. The next morning we discarded our French farm clothes and put on the military clothes which were much too big for us. My pant legs were very baggy and the pant legs were a foot too long, so I had to roll them up. My shirt sleeves extended over my hands and I had to roll them back. I felt like another Charlie Chaplin and wished I had been allowed to wear my French clothes back to England.

## OUR RETURN TO ENGLAND

On the morning of September 8th, we were driven to the airport and boarded an old American C -47. Within an hour we were back in England. The first thing I did in England was to locate a Western Union Office. I sent a telegram home to my mother saying I was alive and well in England. Then I returned to my military base in Hethel. There was no one there that I knew.

I went back to my old barracks. There were no clothes or anything inside the building. It was empty except for some trash. In one corner was a beat up cardboard box. Inside was a stale crushed chocolate cake with a card. It had been mailed to me from my mother. She hadn't given up hope and had sent it to me for my birthday, which had been September 3rd. The Army Air Corps had sent my mother a telegram saying I was missing in action. Then, they stuffed all my clothes and belongings into a barracks bag and sent them to her. I had left my .45 caliber pistol on my bed, and a bottle of bourbon in a drawer. Both were gone and it looked like everyone had assumed I was dead.

From Hethel, I was issued orders to report to the Red Cross in London and wait for additional orders to send me back to the United States. My combat duty in the European Theater of Operations was over, probably because of the risk to the French Patriots and the people in the French Resistance. If I should fly missions again, get shot down and captured, the Germans would probably torture me for information about who helped me evade capture. I stayed with the Red Cross for the better part of a month and was finally flown back to the United States in October, 1944. I kept thinking how wonderful it was that most of the French people had regained their freedom. I felt the war would be over soon and all the people of France would be free again.

I finally received my orders and was flown back to the United States in a C-54 with a group of evadees and a number of airmen who were suffering from combat fatigue. We left England and landed in Presque Isle Maine. In the United States, I was sent to a military rest camp for 10 days in Miami Beach, Florida. I was then reassigned to the Training Command. I was given a choice of flying as co-pilot on a B-29 Super Fortress in the Asian Theater of Operations or going into the Training Command. It didn't take me long to make a choice! I spent the next months flying gunnery students on "splash missions" from the Gunnery School in Apalachicola, Florida. Also I flew radar navigators on student flights out of Victorville, California. Later, at my request, I was transferred to the Air Transport Command and checked out as First Pilot in C-54 cargo aircraft. I was assigned to fly runs from New York to Paris via Bermuda and the Azores Islands. The Commanding Officer said "You have



**MISSING FLIER**

**LIEUT. BADGETT MISSING FROM RAID ON REICH**

Mt. Vernon B-24 Pilot Reported Lost Since July 11.

Mrs. Carrie L. Badgett, 1001 south 12th street, was notified by the War Department today that her son, 2nd Lieutenant Homer M. Badgett, 22, has been missing in action over Germany since July 11.

Lieut. Badgett was the pilot of a B-24 Liberator bomber. Overseas since March 30, he had been awarded the Air Medal and a citation for gallantry in action by General Doolittle.

A graduate from Mt. Vernon high school with the class of '39, he was attending Southern Illinois Normal University at Carbondale when he enlisted for training as a glider pilot.

He received civilian air training at Marion, Ill., and in the gliders at Wickenburg, Ariz. He transferred to flight training in March, 1943, and was commissioned as a second lieutenant in the Air Corps at Yuma, Ariz., last December.

Lieut. Badgett is a former Register-News carrier boy.

**LT. HOMER M. BADGETT,** 1001 S. 12th street, Mt. Vernon, was reported by the War Department today as missing in action since July 11.

Figure 18 An article that appeared in the Mt. Vernon Register News in Mt. Vernon, Illinois.

accumulated enough points to get out of the service, so you must sign up for three more years or return to civilian life". I thought it over and decided to get out of the service. After the war with Japan ended, I was separated at Scot Field, Illinois (October 21, 1945). Once again I was a civilian.

## EPILOGUE

I returned to Southern Illinois University and majored in physics. I became an Aerospace electronic design engineer and later a Program Manager. After 21 years in engineering, I returned to college and received my California Teaching Credentials. For 13 years, I taught Science In Junior High until I retired In 1986. During this time I earned a Master's Degree In Educational Administration. I now live in a senior retirement community in California.

Andrew Felbinger landed with a collapsed parachute and was instantly killed upon impact with the ground. The French people who found him, speculated that his parachute could have been collapsed by German ground fire. Later, his body was recovered from a cemetery in Lille and returned to his parents in the United States.

Carl Moss' parachute got caught in some telephone lines. before anyone appeared on the scene, a French farmer tried to help him, but had to quickly back-off, when A German truck drove up. Two German soldiers got out and pointed a pistol at him. He was captured and first taken to Lille, where he was locked up in the Citadel (The old Bastille). From there he was taken to a German prison camp (Stalag Luft, No.4, in Pomerano), where he spent the rest of the war. He was forced to march with other prisoners, 14 miles from the railroad station to the prison camp. The prisoners who were wounded and couldn't keep up were beaten, and attacked by German guard dogs. Carl survived the camp, however, he almost died from German harassment, exposure to the cold, and bad food. He had a great deal of trouble with his stomach. He could not digest the food the Germans fed the prisoners. The German guards would bayonet the prisoners by pushing the pointed tips of the blades an inch or so into the flesh (enough to guarantee an infection). Also they would release their dogs to bite them, en masse. The food was far too low in calories. Red Cross food parcels arrived sometimes, and these helped the prisoners survive. Temperatures dropped below zero degrees and the prisoners had to huddle together, at night, to keep from freezing. Sanitation was terrible, and there was always much sickness in the camp. God must have kept a watchful eye on Carl, for him to get through this barbaric treatment.

Ralph Woodard's parachute got caught in a tree. He was captured and spent the rest of the war in a German prison camp for officers. He was treated better than Carl, but he was also treated in an inhumane fashion.

Ron Smith landed in a small village. When he hit the ground, he broke his ankle. Fortunately, he was quickly offered help. He was taken to a French barn where he spent the first night in the loft. Someone brought in a French Doctor who treated his ankle. The next morning, he was taken



**Figure 19 Bus and Ruth show the Liberation Banner presented to them by the villagers of Aubers, France. It is now in the 2nd Air Division Memorial Library in Norwich England.**

to a lady's house in the city of Tourcoing, about 20 Kilometers northeast of Lille. The lady's name was Helene Himpe. Her husband was a German prisoner of war, and she lived in the house with her young daughter. Helene fitted Ron with French clothing, sheltered him in her home. There was a trap door in his bedroom floor with a hiding place underneath the floor. This was a good hiding place, if the Germans came searching for him. Once, they made an arrangement for him to get a haircut in a local French barbershop. The barber knew he was coming, however, when Ron entered the barbershop, there were three or four German soldiers waiting for cuts. He saw the Germans before entering the shop; however, he felt it was better to go in, rather than to arouse suspicion by backing away. The soldiers were no trouble, as they sat staring at the wall. Ron thought they smelled terrible and probably had not bathed for a long period of time. Finally the soldiers got their hair cuts and left. Ron said the barber was so nervous that he did a terrible job of cutting his hair afterwards. After the British and Canadian forces liberated his village, Ron was driven South to the American sector of Paris, where Pat and I saw him for the first time since we all bailed out. What a coincidence! After meeting and staying in the same Paris hotel (Meurice Hotel) for the night, the three of us were flown back to England together.

John Wargo and Ed Boice were captured and spent the remainder of the war in a German prison camp. They were finally rescued by advancing Allied Forces.

The French Underground helped Thomas Cox and Donald Carter to evade German capture. They are now deceased. Donald died Oct. 14, 1988. Thomas died July 1, 1989.

My wife and I visited mama and papa in Aubers, France several times after the war. On our first visit in October, 1963, there was a continuous round of parties from Saturday to Tuesday morning. After a banquet at the Ferme de Pietre, we were escorted into the large kitchen. On the wall hung the 24 feet long banner, spelling out "Honneur to our Liberators" which had hung over the town square when Aubers was liberated. It had been hand made from grain sacks and oil cloth letters, while the Germans still occupied France. The French saved it for the day of Liberation. Also on display were the flags of the Allied countries, England, France, Russia and the United States. We joined hands as they sang a Flemish song of the home. It was a stirring moment. Louis Lesafre, the leader of the resistance and his wife were present. The next day, before our departure, they presented us with the banner. We kept this treasured possession for many years. In 1987, we took the banner to Norwich,

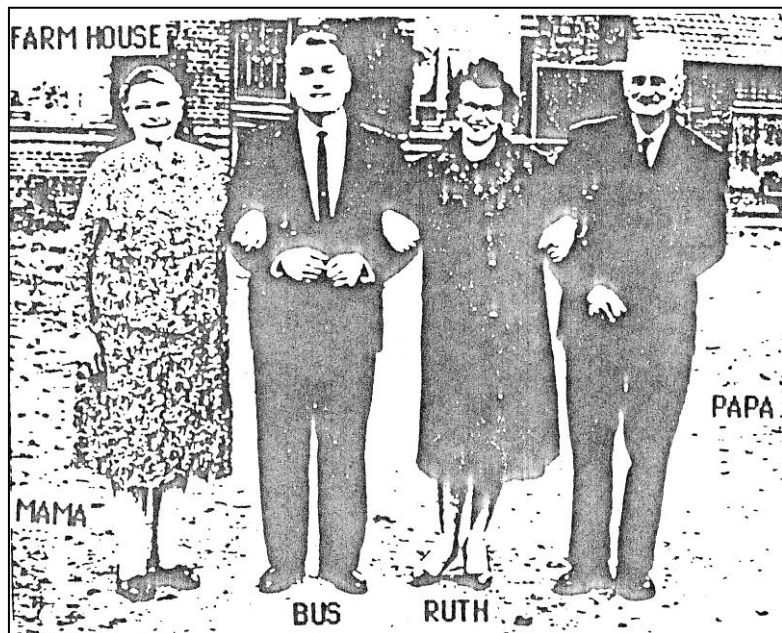


Figure 20 After the war, we returned to France to see Mama and Papa in 1963.

England, where it was placed in the 2nd Air Force Memorial Library.

We have kept in contact with my French family over the years. Our last visit to the farm was in 1976. Marguerite and her husband, Roland Descamps welcomed us there along with Mama, Papa and other family members.

Pierre, his wife Therese, and their daughter Emmanuelle visited us in Southern California in 1991. They met us again in 1993, in La Havre, France. They took us through the Normandy region and down to the D-Day landing beaches. The love for these French people will always be in my heart. I will never forget the great risks they took to save my life, when the Germans occupied France. The memories of mama and papa will be with me forever.

The article on the next page (translated from French to English) was published in the French newspaper, *Le Journal de Lille* in 1963. The news article states that I was co-pilot of the downed B-24. On the day of this flight, the command pilot occupied my seat and I was designated "Formation Control Officer." I have always wondered if things would have been different if I had been in my usual co-pilot position and in control of the aircraft – probably not.



LA VOIX DU NORD  
SAMEDI, 26 OCT., 1963  
(THE VOICE OF THE NORTH  
SATURDAY, 26 OCT., 1963)

## LE JOURNAL DE LILLE

Aubers (a small French village near Lille, France)

**When an American aviator sees again "his father and mother from France" after twenty years of separation.**

About twenty years ago on the 11th of July, 1944, an American liberator coming back from a mission over Munich was falling on the territory of Marcq-en-Baroeul, aux Rouges-Barres...

Out of thirteen men who made up the crew, one died. The other twelve were able to bailout - - five were made prisoners, and seven were able to escape from the enemy, thanks to the Resistance.

Thus began the adventure of lieutenant Homer H. Badgett of Illinois, co-pilot of the plane.

The members of the movement, "Voice of the North", who had taken him in, got in touch with a farmer, Georges Wiquart, who at the time was taking care of the farm of Peter Wiquart gladly accepted (him), and lieutenant Badgett became one of the sons of the family until 6 September 1944, the day of the liberation.

He kept writing back and forth to his father and mother of France. Better yet, from his pay-check as program manager in an electrical firm, he was saving the few thousands of Francs that he would need for a trip to Europe. During this time he and his wife would go to evening classes to learn French.

Just about eight days ago Lieutenant Henry Badgett and his wife, Ruth, left by air from San Diego, Calif. After a stopover in England, where the ancestors of Mrs. Badgett are from, they landed at the airport of Bourget.

In a rented car they drove immediately to the little house on the street of Bourg (Aubers), where Mr. and Mrs. Wicquart -Montreuil now live. It would be impossible to describe the depths of emotion felt by both parties at this reunion because of those few months during the occupation, when fear marked the existence of all of them.

After a night of rest, "Henri" (since that is what the host called him), received a visit from the children of Mr. and Mrs. Wicquart. Together they talked about the time when Henri helped the father and sons with the harvesting, also, about the time when papa was watching the planes (bombing Lille), while the London radio gave the latest news.

When they went to the farm of Pietre where Henri revisited, with pleasure, the room where he had lived and marked off the days. Many things had happened since those unforgettable weeks of the summer of 1944. Henri met the new families of the children of Mr. and Mrs. Wicquart. Henri himself showed pictures of his daughters, Sherry and Janet --- two beautiful little blondes of ten and six years of age.

The ones that he knew as teenagers have become fathers and mothers. But as far as Henri is concerned, Papa Wicquart hasn't changed. He is always, he said, "tres chic". As it is supposed to be, at the return of an adopted son, there were champagne toasts, and, at the demand of Mama Wicquart, a deep stirring Flemish song of the home was sung, to seal the profound friendship born during the dark days of the war.

Mama & papa died in Aubers in 1983. It was said that they were very much in love and that Papa died two months after Mama, with a broken heart. Claude, their son, died of cancer in 1975, and Francois died about 1978 of cancer.

Captain Louis Lesaffre died in 1978. He was a brave man and a hero of the French Resistance of the North. Here are some of the things he wrote to me in Dec. 1973 (at that time. he was 78 years old):

"After the Liberation of Aubers, I was appointed to bring to justice, those who rallied to President Petain's politics. I cannot put down on paper, all the sorrows I experienced during those days. The Mayor of Aubers was brought to trial. He was judged and removed from his office. The Village Priest was also brought to trial for preaching in church in favor of collaboration with the Nazis. He was finally acquitted on the basis of being a Priest."

Captain Lesaffre greatly admired Mama and Papa for hiding me from the Germans and saving my life. He was grateful to the American Government for sending Mama and Papa a certificate of honor, signed by President Eisenhower. Lesaffre said "America never forgets".

I can still see him standing proud, while raising his champagne glass and drinking a toast, "**I drink this toast to the happiness of being free!**"

I hope there will never be another war and that we can all live in peace, however, I know now that **freedom doesn't come free and there cannot be peace without freedom.** I am now 72 years old, have a wonderful wife; Ruth, and two beautiful daughters; Janet and Sharman. and two grandchildren, Ashley, 10 years old, and Justin, 7. I thank God for helping me, when I needed it the most. God will always be with me.

## Appendix I

While going through the papers and poetry of my wife's maternal grandmother (Bus' mother), I came across a letter written by Mama Wicquart to Bus' mother. It certainly attests to the close relationship that was formed in the two months when Uncle Bus was being kept safe behind the German lines in occupied France.

Aubers, Nov. 9, 1944

Dear Madam,

I have great pleasure in informing you that I sheltered (concealed) in my home for two months, that is to say, until the liberation of our country, your dear son, Homer Henry, who had parachuted from his plane.

He left us the 7<sup>th</sup> of Sept. to return to England and to resume his service again. Since that day we have had no news from him.

I hope it is not the same with you dear madam and that you know he is in good health. So I would be extremely grateful to you if you would give me an account of your latest news concerning him. Henri (such was the name he borrowed here) has promised us to send us news about himself, but I attribute his silence to the short time he has at his disposal.

I can assure you madam of the esteem we had for him, he was so kind. He spoke of you with so much affection therefore I tried to replace you a little with him.

For myself and my husband he was a fourth son and a brother to my children. Accordingly I hope and with sincerity that he may some day have the joy himself of telling you about his too short stay spent among us. I want you to know madam that his departure left a big vacancy here.

We hid him so carefully that that only increased our mutual friendship. He left but the memory of him is quite vivid with us. More than 20 pictures constantly recall him, as much, those taken here on the farm under all conditions as those taken on the occasion of a very fine celebration arranged in his honor the 5<sup>th</sup> day of Sept. the day of the liberation of our village of "Aubers" in the north section of France.

I hope dear madam to have the pleasure one day of sending to you these pictures in order that you may be able to realize the very beautiful celebration and the enthusiastic ovation of which your son was the hero.

Please excuse my vanity if I tell that I was very proud to pass along our streets with your dear son on my arm.

I hope that my letter will reach you and that it will please you to give us news of our dear "Henri." Please accept madam our very sincere greetings.

Madam Misquet Montevils

## Appendix II

### Department Nord

#### General Background

Aubers and Lille are located in the most populated department in France, Department Nord (North), which covers 2,303 square miles and has a population of 2,583,493 (2006 est.). In 2005, Lille had a population of 226,800, with 1,091,438 inhabitants in the Lille Métropole. The Commune of Aubers (a *commune* is the lowest level of administrative division in the French Republic) is located 15 kilometers west of Lille and is one of 652 communes in the department.

Once part of the Spanish Netherlands, this area was ceded to France in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Flemish, as well as French, is spoken in the department; however, the number of Flemish speakers has been steadily declining.



At the forefront of France's 19th century industrialization, the area suffered severely during World War I and now faces the economic, social and environmental problems associated with the decline of coal mining with its neighbors following the earlier decline of the Lille-Roubaix textile industry.

#### World War I Trench Warfare

The Second Battle of Artois, of which the British contribution was the **Battle of Aubers Ridge (May 9, 1915)**, was a battle on the Western Front of World War I, it was fought at the same time as the Second Battle of Ypres. Even though the French under General Philippe Pétain gained some initial victories, the battle ended in what was largely a stalemate. This was the final allied offensive of the spring of 1915, followed by a lull in the fighting until September 1915.