

BEHIND THE LINES

My Experience with the French Resistance
During World War II

By Jack W. Stead

Summer 1990

Introduction

I write this, not as a tribute to any personal courage or glory, but at the insistence of my family, who for many years have urged me to set this down before it is lost either by a loss of memory or my demise.

Before I begin, I wish you to understand that for many years it was not possible to relate these events, due to orders from the U.S. Army that nothing be revealed until officially released. This was done to protect those brave people who aided us in that hour of greatest need. Had they been discovered, they would have forfeited their lives. The Germans would have seen to that.

This is the story of Jack W. Stead, Army serial #365 545 38, stationed with the 8th Air Force, 447th Bomb Group, 709th Squadron at Rattlesden, England.

When I was first assigned to the Air Corps, I had no intention of ever climbing into any kind of aircraft. It was not because I had any preconceived notion on the subject, but rather that I was very busy learning how to become a soldier. While in basic training in Clearwater, Florida, I made friends with a fellow and decided to apply to the same school as he so we could remain together through training. The school was Armament where we would learn to care for the guns used on the planes as well as all types of bombs.

The one thing the Army does not do is that which you think it will do. My friend shipped out ahead of me, and there I was, committed and left behind. In about two weeks I received orders to proceed to Buckley Field near Denver, Colorado. While attending the school there, I saw a notice on the bulletin board asking for volunteers for flying crewmembers. The idea sounded great to me so I signed up, was tested, passed the requirements and was slated for air training after finishing the armament school.

Gunnery school followed and then I was assigned to a crew for further training in a B-17 heavy bomber. There were 10 men on the plane and I was assigned to a waist gun position, meaning I operated from the middle of the plane, firing out a side window. We completed our training in the States, were formed into a squadron, and a group, and sent off to England to do our part in the conflict to rid the world of Hitler and Tojo. I did not have a worry in the world, after all I was young and nothing could happen to me. I merely wanted to get the mess over with and get back to my wife and daughter.

When we arrived in England, we set up our base and flew our first mission on Christmas Eve of 1943. As was the custom, we were given an experienced pilot and navigator for the first two missions, which meant that our co-pilot and navigator were two missions short and we wanted to finish together. At that time when a crew finished 25 missions, they were allowed to go back to the States together. We never realized that our chances of finishing were slim and almost none. Our two men volunteered for two missions to make up their shortage but, as luck would have it, they were both lost on the second volunteer flight. Now we were in a position where if we were to fly together, they would assign two men to us, otherwise we

ourselves would be used as replacements and would fly with crews we did not know or train with. This is the status that I operated under, sometimes flying with my own crew, other times being used as a substitute crew member to fill out another crew that was having a problem with manpower or sometimes I flew with a new replacement crew. Under this formula I finished 12 missions, almost half way through, maybe the Good Lord was with me after all.

We had been flying long and dangerous missions for many weeks and our losses were heavy. We were going deep into Germany, even to Berlin, to give Hitler some of his own medicine. He always claimed that his capital would never be a target but we proved him wrong on this statement. These deep raids were hard on the equipment as well as the men. We were at the very limit of our range for fuel and we lost a lot of planes due to a shortage of fuel. Many were forced to ditch (this means to land in the water) by going into the Channel between England and France. Many planes were lost but a lot of crew survived and was picked up by Air, Sea Rescue who patrolled the area whenever the planes were out on missions. Our first few missions were flown without any air support from our own fighter planes because we had nothing that could do the job. Our first support came when they had some P-38 fighters fly with us but their range was very short so the Germans just waited until they left us, and then had their field day. Between the flak and the fighters, we were under constant attack. Soon we had fighter support from P-51's and P-47's that were the latest in United States attack planes. They had extra fuel tanks carried on the wing tips that could be jettisoned if they came under attack. These planes made the missions much more endurable because we had sane help against the enemy fighters. There was nothing we could do about the flak from the ground except try and fly in an area that was more lightly defended. The target areas were fiercely defended and we had to fly through them and drop our bombs.

On April 27, 1944, our group was scheduled for a short mission over France to attack some installations the Germans were building to be used for launching a new type of weapon that was to be used against the English. At the time we did not know just what it was or how it functioned, but it later proved to be what is now referred to as Buzz Bombs. These were actually a bomb with wings attached and a crude type jet engine to drive it. Now, this mission was only to last about four hours, so I would be home at the base for lunch with another mission to my credit and a little closer to that magic number 25 we were all hoping to reach before our luck ran out.

When we reported for briefing prior to the flight, I was advised that I would be flying with another crew and in the bombardier position because it was a new replacement crew and these two positions would be filled by experienced men, the same as our crew had been handled. The reason I was assigned to the bombardier position was due to the fact that I had been trained in the bombs, fuses, bomb racks, shackles as well as the intervolumeter (the unit that controlled the sequence of the bomb release) so the armament-trained personnel was used to compensate for the heavy loss of trained bombardiers, who were officers. These men had heavy losses because we were experiencing concentrated frontal attacks from the German planes as well as a lot of flak damage to the nose of the plane. We also had breakage of the Plexiglas in the nose due to the falling shell casings from the machine guns in the formation. Many of the guns ejected the spent casings out of the plane. The Plexiglas was extremely cold and brittle and the impact of the casings caused it to shatter, resulting in shards of fractured material engulfing the two men in the front section. The bombardier got it full in the face while the navigator had a better chance of receiving the blast on his side or back where he had some protection.

This would be my first time to fly in combat in this position so I looked forward to the flight because it was to be, as they would say, a “milk run.” After all we were just going across the channel to France near a town called Rouen. We would get real eggs for breakfast and just keep my lunch hot because I will be back in about four hours from takeoff and the rest of the day will be mine and I will use it to catch up on sane sleep.

When I got to the plane and met the crew I was to fly with, I found out that this was to be their first mission so they were nervous about the whole affair. I have since found out that the man I was to be with in the nose was 2nd Lt. Oscar Iezman; he was the bombardier for the crew and would fly the navigator position that day. He asked me just what I usually did regarding the flak suit and the parachute. I told him that I wore both just prior to reaching the coastline of France because I felt that if they were needed there would not be much time to put them on in an emergency. He decided to take my advice and do the same. It turned out that we were both from Detroit.

Soon our turn came to take off so we assumed our positions and away we went, up through the overcast and formed up into our squadron and then into the group. As soon as we were over the Channel, I went to the bomb

bay and set the fuses on the bombs as instructed in briefing, came back to the nose and test fired the chin turret guns to be certain they were in working order. I then put on the flak suit, the chest chute and tied my G.I.-issued shoelaces together and set them aside. We made the coast of France and proceeded to the target area. The lead plane opened his bomb bay doors so our pilot did likewise. I set up the intervolumeter unit to salvo (drop all at the same time) the bombs and I waited for the lead ship to drop so I could jettison our load. It was at this time that we came under the most intense flak attack I had ever seen. I had been in others but this was the most accurate. They had our altitude and speed right on the nose. I moved forward to try and gain some protection from the chin turret and, in doing so, I pulled my head set loose but I did not know it. Just as I got into position and made certain I could reach the toggle switch to release the bombs, I felt someone pulling on my leg. It was the lieutenant and he was pointing to his head set. I looked down and saw I was disconnected so I plugged in to hear the pilot saying, "Bail Out, Bail Out," over and over again. I motioned the lieutenant to get ready to leave, secured my shoes to my harness, released my flak suit as well as the lieutenant's and we started to leave the plane through the front escape hatch. We never made it as the engineer came down, followed by the co-pilot, and the pilot followed him. The plane was now filling up with smoke so I assumed we had been hit in an oil line instead of a gas line. Frankly, if it had been a gas line we more than likely would have gone up like a Roman candle. I glanced at the instruments and saw we were at 18,500 ft. and going down at a steep angle. We now worked our way to the hatch and as soon as the lieutenant was out, I followed. We were too high to open the chute immediately and we also were going too fast, so I decided to free fall with the idea of opening the chute at about 10,000-ft. I think I fell much farther than that and would estimate I opened about 8,000 ft. I had a good free fall and the chute opened while I was upside down, which meant it opened between my legs and I took the force on my shoulders instead of my crotch.

I now had time to look around so I tried to spot our plane. It was below and off to the left, smoke pouring from it and in a steep dive. At about this time it exploded with a tremendous roar and it must have blown the bombs from the racks because I noticed subsequent explosions on the ground. I turned my attention to what was happening below and noticed a lot of activity but at that height it was hard to make out just what was going on or who was involved. It was so quiet and peaceful and there was no sensation of falling whatsoever. This tranquillity did not last for long because I

became aware of the fact I was being shot at with some degree of accuracy. I could hear the bullets whistle by and they had my name on them. To combat this, I decided to swing the chute and present a difficult target for the Germans. This proved not to be the best thing to do as I swung too far and slipped the chute, causing it to lose air and start to collapse. I dropped like a rock for about 50-ft. but luckily it filled again. I continued to swing but not so wildly. They continued to shoot but my luck held and I reached the ground in one piece.

I landed in an orchard with my chute draped over one of the trees. I hit so hard, I was shaking like a leaf and had a hard time getting my hands around the chute to pull it from the tree. I knew it would be like a beacon for the Germans and I wanted to try and escape. Because I could not get my hands to work properly, I wrapped the shroud lines around my arm and ran with it, pulling the chute from the tree. Now that I had it, and I might add, yards and yards of it, what was I going to do to conceal it? I looked around and, near a small cliff type rise in the ground, I spotted a good size pile of tree pruning. So I bundled up the parachute the best I could and ran the 50 feet or so to the pile. I dropped to the ground and worked my way into the middle of this pile, dragging the chute along. The material was white and I felt it could be easily seen through the branches of the pile I was in, so I gathered it together and laid on it, thus covering most of it with my outfit which was a dark green color. I was wearing a new type of heated suit and the outer pants and jacket covered my uniform; this must have blended in well because the Germans did appear twice that day at the top of the hill, looking for me, but they never did spot me through the branches although I could see them perfectly. The odd thing was that although the Germans did not know where I was, the local French people surely did. I had been hiding for maybe three hours when a man came walking by, paused by the pile, stooped down, looked me in the eye and said, "reste la," which means "stay there" in French. Now, we had been shot down about 10 a.m. so I knew I had a long day ahead and that I must stay right where I was if I hoped to succeed in getting away from the area without getting caught. I really had no firm plan. I would just have to play it by ear.

The day was indeed long and I was frightened and hungry and wanted to be just about anywhere but there. Nothing further happened the rest of the day except trucks kept going up and down the road near me all day, and I assumed the soldiers were very upset about not being able to locate a man they absolutely knew had landed in the immediate area. They must have

concentrated their search in another direction or in barns and buildings in the area and probably gave the local French people a bad time. The next time I saw anyone, it was dark. A man came to my hiding place and told me not to come out and follow him, which I did, and we proceeded to his farm house, which was not far away, so I thought I must have been in his orchard. We never discussed this so I never really knew for certain, besides I was having some difficulty with the language even though I had studied French for two years in college. The man took me inside the house, gave me something to eat and offered some clothing. I asked him what would happen if the Germans caught me and I was out of uniform. He replied by running his index finger across his throat in that all-nation, time-honored gesture indicating curtains for me. At this point, I thought it best for me to go it alone and see what would happen. I felt that the best thing would be to get out of the immediate area as quickly as possible and just play it by ear. I declined his offer of clothes and struck out on my own. There I was, walking in the dark, in a strange land, no certain safe haven, and not really sure of just what to do. I kept walking, going through several villages and keeping out of sight because I knew there was a curfew and how could I explain what I was doing or where I was going, let alone the fact that the minute I opened my mouth it would all be over.

I walked until almost dawn and by then I was so tired I could not go any farther, so I started to look for somewhere to hide and, if possible, get some sleep. I spotted a small house with an attached stable that seemed deserted so I made my way to it and found I was in luck. I found the door open, the house deserted and not a stick of furniture anywhere, let alone a bed. I went into the stable, scraped together some straw on the floor and made myself as comfortable as possible. I was so exhausted I fell asleep at once and slept right through the early morning until I felt someone shaking my shoulder. I woke up and there stood a young man with a pitchfork who wanted to know what I was doing there. I never have been able to figure out just what made him go into the barn or what he might have been looking for in the barn. I did not answer his question, but instead asked him for something to eat. He also did not reply to this, but just turned and left. I watched him from the stable window as he went up a slight incline to the neighboring field and started to break up cow pads with the pitchfork. Every now and then he would stop, look at the house, and then go on with his work. I felt he was trying to figure out just who I might be and what he should do about it. After about one half hour of this, I began to feel I had better get out of there because it did not appear as though he would be any

help either with food or any contact that might help with an escape. The next time he turned his attention to the job at hand, I dove out the window and ran into the cover of the nearest trees. I then proceeded to walk through the fields but parallel to the road so I might have some idea of the direction in which I was going. Finally, it occurred to me that I could not stay in the fields as the fences made it obvious I was where I should not be, and I did not want any trouble with the farmers, so I cut over to the road and walked the shoulder, trying to be one of the natives. I did not see one soul since the man that morning until suddenly I heard trucks coming, so I slid into the ditch aside the road, put my back to the road and waited. The trucks were loaded with German soldiers but they paid no attention to me. My green outfit must have paid off again. I started to leave the ditch when I saw a man coming out of a farm just down the road a bit, so I slid back down, turned my back again and waited. But this time I heard someone lay a bike down and slide down beside me. It was a man and I assumed it to be the man from the farm. He said nothing but reached into my jacket and pulled out my dog tags (army identification tags), and asked if I had fallen from the sky from a plane. I answered that I had, figuring at this point I was in the soup and had nothing to lose. He got up, motioned for me to do likewise and we proceeded back down the road to the farm where he put me into the barn, telling me to stay there until he returned. Without further talk, he turned and went out the door. Should I stay? Should I run? What should I do now? Could I trust him? Had he gone for the Germans? Oh God, what to do! So, as any good sensible soldier, I did nothing. I stayed there and a good thing I did, because this man, whom I later knew as Jean, was my contact with the French underground. He gave me food, clothing, and helped me dispose of my green flying suit as well as my uniform. At this point I had decided that if I were to effect an escape, I was going to have to take scan chances. So, we burned all my clothes, buried the ashes and the wires from the heated suit, and struck out for Paris.

Jean brought along two knapsacks; he carried one and I the other. I never thought to question him about the contents of the sacks. I just took one and carried it, as I was instructed. We walked about a mile, finally arriving at the rail station. It was small with no waiting room so we wandered around outside for what seemed like hours. We could hear a train coming and Jean thought it was ours and prepared to get aboard, having already purchased our tickets. I had no idea where he was taking me and was not about to muddy the waters by asking. Suffice to say I was relieved just to be with someone I could trust. The war did not allow for the best of train schedules so we were

not surprised to see that the arriving train was not ours, but was a heavily loaded freight train with German soldiers all over it as well as special flat cars carrying anti-aircraft guns shielded with sand bags. Thank God the soldiers did not get off the train and stayed at their posts while the train took on water. Jean and I tried to look commonplace and not too interested in all this, just hoping the train would move on down the tracks and that ours would come along so we could be on our way. This proved to be wishful thinking because due to bombing raids on railheads as well as strafing by fighters, the train had been delayed and was hopelessly off schedule. In all, we waited about four hours for our train, and when it did get there it was loaded to the hilt with people, all seats filled and all aisles filled. It was a case of squeeze in and stand with your back against the wall for support because it was going to be a long trip. Jean talked to me as well as to other people nearby, but I did not reply although I was surprised at just how much I understood. He got hungry, opened his knapsack, and extracted two eggs, giving one to me. I thought, how nice, hardboiled eggs, certainly better than nothing. Jean motioned for me to watch closely, took out his pocketknife, knocked a hole in the end of the egg and sucked on the shell. Oh, my gawd, raw eggs. I had never eaten one, never intended to eat one and now here I was hungry as the devil and knew I had to eat the thing. Because I was so hungry, I could have eaten the thing shell and all. I poked out the end, as Jean had and, with great difficulty, got the darn thing down and to my surprise it stayed down. We followed this with a little cheese and bread, making for a sufficient meal in a pinch. Everyone on the train was having a good time and soon Jean started them singing and they sang and passed the wine around. Aside from two stops due to rail damage, we made the trip without incident and finally arrived at our destination, which turned out to be Paris. But it was late --- and there was a curfew. What happens now?

We got off the train, walked a short distance, and Jean motioned to a blond woman in her forties standing with a bicycle. We approached her and the two embraced briefly. Jean introduced me to the girl, quickly explaining who I was and how he got me. He put the knapsacks into the basket on her bike and we started off, she pushing the bike as we strolled along. It was dark, about 10 p.m., and we were in violation of the curfew. We had gone several blocks when we ran into two gendarmes and, of course, they stopped us. I was walking several paces behind Jean and the woman, so I stopped when they did, thinking I might be able to run if trouble developed. The police asked for their identity cards and they produced them, so I reached into my pocket as though I had one, too. They checked the cards and handed

them back then looked at me. At this point the woman said, "He's all right. He's with us." The policemen looked at me causally, handed them their cards back and gestured for us to continue. I may have looked casual, but I was wet clean down to my belt buckle with nervous sweat. After walking for another 10 minutes, we came to a school on a short dead-end street and turned up the street, entering the building. I was now, as I later discovered, at my hiding place and with another branch of the French underground. The woman's husband was there waiting for Jean and he took the knapsacks, opened them, and I could see they held butter. I not only was evading capture; I was engaged in smuggling items that were rationed and illegal to have. Why didn't the gendarmes check those packages? They must have known they contained contraband and chose to look the other way. I could not believe my luck was holding out as well as it was. I now learned that the woman's name was Paulette, the man's name was Marcel, that their last name was Guyon, and that Marcel was a gendarme and they had a small son about 5 years old. I have often suspected that the police who stopped us might have known Paulette and that she was a policeman's wife. It would explain many things, but I never found out if such were the case.

Now I was in Paris, in contact with the underground and arrangements were to be made to get me out. How, when, where, still remained to be seen. The next day a man showed up, asked for one of my dog tags, questioned me about where and when I had been shot down, and left. I asked Paulette what it was all about and she said they must be certain I was indeed an American airman because the Germans were clever and there was much at stake for many people. I asked her what would happen if the information came back negative? She said that then I would have to be eliminated and that I would be watched closely until approval came from England. All I could think of was, "Please God, don't let them foul up this time."

The next day the man was back with the approval and said he would begin to make arrangements for my transportation to get me back to England. Things were still going my way. I could scarcely believe it. I spent the next several days with Paulette and their son, whom they called Te-Te, which I assumed to be a nickname, but not leaving the quarters the school provided them. Food was scarce and rationed very little meat and this only on occasion. This was supplemented with some pasta and not a whole lot of that either. Tobacco was also in short supply and provided only once a month, two small bags, one rough cut, the other stringy and good for rolling cigarettes. We all smoked and they shared everything with me. My job was

to run the rolling machine and transfer all the material into cigarettes. We mixed the two types of tobacco together, they instructed me in the operation of the machine and I set to work. I was told that when I finished smoking a cigarette, I was to strip the paper and return the tobacco remaining to a jar that was used for this purpose. We then would re-roll this tobacco into another batch and proceed with the same system. Let me tell you, the last cigarettes we rolled could send you to the moon, they were that strong.

One day Marcel came home with a rabbit and Paulette was ecstatic to have this added food for the larder. She tied its feet together, hung it from the kitchen cabinet door and proceeded to skin it. She then cleaned it and cut it up, and cooked it for dinner. The three of us sat down and, with great pride, Paulette put the head on my plate. I took one look at the thing and immediately declined where upon a big argument broke out as to just whom was going to get this thing. I mean they were not fighting to not eat it. They were fighting to get it. Paulette won, took possession and proceeded to eat the eyes first, then the brain, followed by finishing off the little meat there was on it. The other two looked on in envy, but not me; I was well rid of the problem. However, I did thank them for their consideration as best I could in my poor French. The following week Marcel decided that he and his son and I would go into the near countryside. We walked so it could not have been too far and also we could see the Eiffel Tower from the hill we were standing on. We turned over rocks and found quite a few snails. I could not imagine what anyone would do with a snail but I joined in the hunt and before long we had enough to satisfy Marcel. When we got back home, the snails were turned over to Paulette and she proceeded to extract them from their shell with a hatpin. Then she washed the shells, pulled the pad from the snail body, and re-inserted the body into the shell, adding some butter, parsley and salt. She then placed them on a metal tray, open side up, and baked them in the oven. I had never seen anything quite like this and sat there spellbound. These were incorporated into the dinner that night, served hot. I tried one but then left the remaining ones for my hosts. They loved them, even little Te-Te.

One night we had a visit from a member of our resistance cell and he was quite upset. The Germans had penetrated our unit by surrounding a whole block and questioning everyone. It seems that in this sweep, they picked up an airman who was hiding with another family. They tortured one of the French underground people and although he died, he talked first. Each cell had only one person who knew another person from another cell. Each

cell had some special work to do. Ours was the printing of identity cards to aid people who were without them. This could be Jews, escaped prisoners, evades like myself, or Frenchmen who needed to change their identity because of trouble with the Germans. Every day for the next week we watched to be sure that we were not going to be taken by the Gestapo. An escape route was planned by going out an upper window, across the rooftops and down to street level and to another house. We practiced until we knew it by heart. They hated to lose the school because the shop for teaching trades provided them with the equipment they needed for printing as well as the lathes for making the fake seals to validate the identity cards. It was at this time that they decided to outfit me with a set of papers. I carried six photographs of myself in the escape kit and used one, full face, for my papers. I would be known as Jean Pierre Martin. I would be a lathe operator, and my health card would show I was ill and unable to do hard labor. In the meantime, Marcel would have to locate another cell because we were completely cut off from our former organization. They did not know what to do with me or what to do with our cell. At this point I wondered if I was ever going to get out of France and back to my unit in England. Marcel decided he must take a chance and try and feel out a contact. Dangerous work this was to be, but he would do it. He was a man of great courage.

One night at dinner, Marcel and Paulette got into a lengthy discussion, which turned out to be about me. They got to thinking it must be about time for me to need a woman and told me they would look into the matter. I told them not to concern themselves with the problem and that they had enough to think about with everything else. But, being true Frenchman and Frenchwoman, they went to work and found a solution. A few days later, Marcel told me to be prepared to leave with him in the morning. The next morning I was ready as instructed and wondered if I was to be moved to safer quarters due to our problem. We walked about a mile to an apartment house and several flights up. He knocked on the door, it opened and there stood a rather stout woman, no--a very stout woman. Marcel introduced me, pushed me in, saying he would return for me that evening after work. The woman said her name was Louise, her husband had been taken to Germany for forced labor and she was ready to provide for my needs. Now picture this situation. I am 22 years old, weigh a massive 130 lbs. and Louise was about 40 years old and went about 230 lbs. As if I'm not in enough trouble already! She chased me from one room to the other in her desire to be accommodating until, out of breath, she finally gasped--"Well, what do you want to do?" and in my best French I proudly stated, "faire le café." This

really fractured her and she and I both laughed as she set about actually making coffee. Louise was a great gal and to the extent of our ability to converse we spent the day listening to each other's story. I often wonder if her husband lived to cane back to her. I also often wished I had asked her how big a guy he was.

Marcel returned that afternoon about 4 p.m. after work and, believe me, Louise had a tale to tell him. He just looked at me like I was crazy and that night at dinner he told Paulette and she was dismayed. Both looked at me and I shrugged my shoulders and said "ma femme," or in English, "my wife." Neither one of them understood this so they just shrugged their shoulders and let it go.

On another occasion, Marcel decided I had been inside too long and needed a little outing, so off we went. He seemed relaxed, but I was really nervous. We went to a small bar to have a drink and Marcel ordered for both of us so that I would not be giving myself away the minute I opened my mouth. We stood at the small bar with the drinks and watched the natives. No one spoke to Marcel so I gathered that he was not a regular customer. Everything was going fine until a German soldier came in and stood right next to me, ordered a drink in beautiful French, then turned to me and asked for a light for his cigarette. He had a big smile on his face and waited for me to give him a light. Now, I had a lighter with me, it was my own and very British and he would have seen instantly that it was different from any he would be used to seeing. I smiled back at him, said nothing, looked at Marcel as though I was going to die. Marcel had a grin a mile wide, leaned past me and lit his cigarette. The soldier thanked him, gave me another big grin and lost himself in his own thoughts and drink. We finished our drink and left as though nothing was wrong. I was wringing wet with sweat and had a genuine case of the shakes. Marcel turned to me after we were outside and said, "le Bosch est stupide" (the Germans are stupid) but at the moment I was not sure just who was the most stupid. I needed to be anywhere but there. Marcel was so pleased with himself that we next went to a restaurant where we met a group of his friends and he had a great time telling them about our adventure. Everyone had a great laugh and insisted on buying us a cognac to celebrate the occasion. I took mine, sipped it, and my hair stood up, it was so strong. I noticed the women were dipping a sugar cube into theirs and sucking the cognac from that, so I tried it and it worked fine although I took a little kidding from the men.

Marcel came home one night and he was excited. He had made contact with another unit and the odd thing about it was the contact was through his immediate superior. Both were involved in the underground and neither one was aware of it until Marcel's probing made him suspect that he needed help. He later told Marcel he was very nervous in replying because he did not want to expose himself and his contacts to any danger.

Our cell was again operational and they needed our ability to provide identity cards. Again my luck was with me because we could now make arrangements to get me out of Paris and into southern France so I could try and make it over the Pyrenees mountains and into Spain. They told us this was the route used most of the time. The necessary contacts were made and all we had to do was wait for a group to be formed. When the time came we would be notified. The unit in charge of moving us from one place to another had to find what they referred to as a conveyor or person that could convey us from one point to another. This was risky work, because they had to be with the people being transported but could not be caught with them if something went wrong. There was nothing to do now but wait, and hope, and pray-

About 10 days passed with no word on the progress being made. Then we received word that I would be leaving the next morning and to be prepared to follow instructions to the letter. That night the Guyon family and I made our goodbyes. I thanked them for all they had done for me, to which they responded that it was nothing. Imagine that, they risked their lives, shared their meager food supply, and searched out help when their cell was isolated, and regarded it as nothing. I asked if there was anything they wanted from me and Paulette said she would like to have a ring I had that was a Cameo that had been in my family for about 80 years or so. I immediately gave it to her and was pleased to do so. We all hugged, kissed and Paulette cried a little. She then gave me two small religious mementos to take with me as a remembrance and wished me Godspeed and to please write after the war. Now, I could not carry their address with me for fear of being captured and the Germans finding it on me, so I left mine with them so they could hide it until after the war. They could write me and I could reply.

The next morning Marcel and I left early and walked for about three miles in town to a church. We entered and found a man standing and about 13 people sitting in the pews. Marcel spoke to the man, came back to me and said in French "I leave you now, have a good journey," gave me a handclasp

and departed. I sat with the others and the man began to speak to us in French first then in English. He explained the procedure to be used for the journey south. We were to travel in pairs from the church, always keeping the pair ahead of us in sight but we were not to stay too close as to make it noticeable we were together. We, above all, must never appear as a group. The "conveyors" were to be a young man and a young woman traveling as man and wife. They would arrive shortly, be introduced so we might recognize them, and then we would be on our way. They did arrive and then left the church together. We waited several minutes and then the first pair of us left, repeating this procedure until all were gone. Each pair keeping the pair ahead in view and the first pair following the guides. We had been given train tickets prior to leaving and were instructed to surrender them only to the conductor on the train. We proceeded a short distance to the station and the train being there we, proceeded to board. To say it was crowded would be the understatement of the year. It was jammed to the gills, as they say, with absolutely no place to sit and hardly a place to stand. Now, I had been paired with a young American flier about 19 years old that had been seriously injured when he was shot down. His one arm was almost useless and he did not understand a word of French. We found a place to stand in the corridor not far from the bathroom and stood quietly, casting an occasional glance down the line to keep the pair ahead of us in view. If they moved, then we must do likewise. The train was so jammed that people were even in the bathroom, one sitting and two standing with the door open. We were all mixed together, men and women, not many talking, just keeping to our own thoughts. I could not talk to my partner, whose name I neglected to mention was John Katsaros, because if we spoke we would give ourselves away, and who could be trusted?

Our group consisted of men from 19 to 75 years of age, so we looked rather commonplace and this could only help. I later learned that half were Jewish and the rest of us were officers and enlisted men and French, English, American and, I believe, a Canadian. We had a real mixture.

The train finally started and we were on our way, packed like sardines lacking only the oil. After about two hours, a man cane struggling down the aisle, squeezing by person after person. Believe me, there was a lot of complaining but he just said he had to get to the rest room. He finally got there and found three people in it, and he had a fit. He carried on so much that the three in there decided they had to come out so he might get in. Now, let m tell you, there was hardly room for one extra person in the aisle let

alone four. One was behind the door, so the two had to come out so he could close the door, get around it and out of the room. They shuffled about and the desperate man finally got in and had his day. You will not believe this, but that guy, and only that guy, came back three times on that first leg of the journey to use the room. Finally on his last trip, someone spoke up asking what his problem was and another voice from somewhere said in a loud voice that he must have taken a suppository. As grim as things were, believe me, this brought down the house. The corridor was not disturbed again. It was a long ride until we reached a few stations that relieved the crowding, because more got off than got on. John and I were by now standing near a compartment and at a stop a seat became available. We only had to watch for the two ahead of us when the train stopped so I sat down and figured I could relieve John shortly. Soon a woman got up and left (it turned out she was going to the rest room), so John came into the compartment and sat down, happy to have a seat. Lo and behold, she reappeared and marched up to John and said, in French, "Sir, you have taken my place." He gave her a big grin and sat there. I knew the woman was not going to give up so easily and John had no idea what she wanted, so I got up and gave her my seat and that made her happy. So we proceeded south on the train, not certain just what to expect, or just exactly where we were going. We knew we had to cross the mountains but we had no idea how far south we could ride or even just how we would get into Spain. The people helping us escape could not risk the entire operation by some of us getting caught and being forced to reveal how the operation was run. We were all aware how the Nazis could obtain any information they desired. It was simply a matter of would you die before you talked, and they were experts at their job.

The route we were taking seemed to be in good repair, indicating that the Allies were not concentrating on this rail system, because we did not stop once for repairs to the rails. We made quite good time and now that we could sit down, the journey was endurable. The only thing was, we had nothing to eat and we had left very early that morning. But, all in all, an empty stomach is worth freedom anytime. Very late that day, we went through a town called Montauban. It was a good-sized town and, after a short stop, we continued on south for about another 35 miles to Toulouse. This was a much larger town and proved to be the end of the journey. The two people ahead of us got off the train and John and I followed. We were inside a huge station with about four tracks across for servicing various routes to and from the area. As we had been instructed, we stayed together in twos but this time we could see our conveyers. We all stood near the shops

and along the wall of the station, keeping our eyes on the man and woman. They had taken up a position adjacent to the nearest tracks, upended their suitcases and sat on them. We had been advised, in our briefing, that someone would walk up to them, engage them in conversation and that they then would give us the all clear signal and then they would simply leave the station while we waited for the next act. We stood and they sat for hour after hour, but nothing happened. We, John and I, felt in our bones that we were in deep trouble. This feeling got worse when the man and woman got up and simply left with no signal to us. There were German soldiers all over the place, some on leave, I presume, as well as Gestapo men because they were everywhere all the time and watched everything. Again, we could not talk because of the fear of being overheard, so we communicated by eye contact and head nods. We moved inside a small coffee shop for a while to change our positions so as not to be quite so obvious. We could not stay there for long because no one could contact us under those circumstances, so we moved back into the station proper. John was great; even though he was hurting, he never let on anything was wrong through the whole trip. Mind you, both of us were scared to death by the uncertainty of the situation.

The two of us stood there, watching and waiting, and finally a man came by, looked me right in the eye, and said in English, "Follow the man with the pipe." He said this quickly and moved on. John and I looked at one another with a question in our eyes. Was this a contact that could be trusted? Was this the Gestapo trying us on for size? Should we move out or stay put? Now, none of the other people had made a move nor had anyone contacted them, and we could not figure out why we had been spoken to but were ignored. All of us around the station were keeping an eye on the others. We had to, we were all in this together, and what happened to one happened to all. We decided that moving and following the strange order the man had given us was much too risky so we waited some more. After about one half hour, the same man came by and again looked me in the eye and said the same thing but this time he was mad as hell and said it through clenched teeth as well as slightly louder. I looked at John, shrugged my shoulders and nodded my head in the direction of the exit tunnel. We had to do something, so let's go for broke. But believe me, I was scared to death.

We strolled toward the tunnel trying to be nonchalant so as not to attract attention. A glance over my shoulder told me that the others were now moving also. Was I condemning all of us to capture once we left the station? As we arrived at the tunnel, there stood a man of average height,

smoking the largest pipe I have ever seen. He was leaning against the wall with a casual air, but as we approached, he turned and walked ahead of us, through the tunnel and outside. We followed for about two blocks when he then stopped and allowed us to catch up to him. We stood there and he finally said, in English, "Are you people the shipment from Paris?" We told him that we were and asked him what about the other people with us. He said that they were being taken by twos by other men, and would be safe and that we would be together tomorrow if all went well. We asked why we had been left there so long, and he said that his people knew a shipment was coming through that week but the men who handled that had been captured the week before and were either dead or in prison. He said that they had been going to the station every day to meet the train from Paris but had no way to tell who was who or what was what. Today, he said, they had gone again and without much luck. They had seen the couple sitting at the tracks but it meant nothing to them so they were about to give up when one of their men indicated he wanted a meeting. They left the station and had a conference. The man said he had spotted a young man with American army shoes that had been dyed black and he felt it worth the risk to try and make contact. In fact, he was so sure he was right, he insisted they try. They were my shoes that I had bailed out with and had been wearing right along. We airmen had been advised in lectures regarding escape and evasion that shoes were the hardest item to get in Europe and that it would be wise to take ours with us and do as I had done. So, a pair of shoes, it turns out, moved us to the next part of our escape.

The man with the pipe took us to his house, (I never knew nor asked his name) fed us, let us clean up and stay the night. He told us we would be leaving the next afternoon if things could be arranged. They were working on rebuilding the local organization to replace the operation lost the capture of the other men. It was not so simple because they had to arrange connections all the way back to Paris and be sure those connections were safe. It felt good to have a decent meal under our belts as well as a place to sleep after the long train ride and the episode at the station. By checking a map now, I can see we had traveled some 350 miles, as the crow flies, and by land more than that. I can see now why we had left so early in the morning. Chances are the train we took might only go once a day or, because of the war, perhaps once a week. The impression that remains with me to this day about this house we were taken to is that it was a multiple dwelling with, I think, four floors. The building was very old looking, from the outside, but when we entered the apartment itself, it was very modern

and furnished well. There was no woman to be seen, the man did everything for us and did it as though he knew what he was doing. I often wondered if he was alone because he was single, or if he had sent his wife away because of the nature of his business. John and I were so exhausted and so hungry that the many things I think about now never occurred to either of us. We seemed to live from minute-to-minute and at the hands of other people. The best way to describe the feeling is to say it was all like a dream or nightmare. We bathed and shaved and fell into bed to sleep, the sleep of the dead. I thought I would never be that tired ever again, anytime in my life. Little did I know!

The next day we woke up very late, having been allowed to get all the rest we seemed to require. The man fixed us breakfast, even though it was afternoon, and when we had finished, he announced he was going out and see just what plans had been made. He told us they had a man to guide us over the Pyrenees Mountains into Spain and that everything had to be coordinated. We were left alone for several hours as he went about his business. Our only fear was that someone might come to the door looking for him because we surely did not know what to do. Not answer the door was what we probably decided but, at this point, I can't recall. He returned and advised us that everything was in order and we were to leave right away. He had train tickets, which he gave us, and then led us back to the station to join the others. Our instructions now were to pay no attention to our former companions, but just ride the train to the end of the line and get off. We were to be met there by someone and told what to do. Off we went, onto the train, found a seat and waited. Soon the train started to move, and once we were under way the conductor came through and collected the tickets. We either looked like natives or he just did not care, but either way we attracted no attention and went on our way. There were not many people on this train and we were not sure if this was the best condition. Either way it made no difference because there was nothing we could do about it. We were not going as fast as the other train, and stopped at every little burg along the way. It was obvious this was a local line servicing all the little places in the south. Eventually we reached the end of the line and got off, standing alongside the train by the tracks. The station was not much to speak of and we could see no life. A few people got off with us but they went their way without a backward glance. Here we were again, not knowing what to expect, when along came a man walking quickly to the bunch of us. He never stopped but motioned us all to follow and went by taking the lead. He walked toward the front of the train and from there he branched off into the

countryside. It was slightly hilly but not too bad so we had no trouble keeping up. After about 20 minutes he stopped in a small clearing in the woods and had us gather around. He then told us we made it unscathed so far and also undetected by the Germans. We were, he said, to remain there until someone came for us. Under no circumstances were we to move or to do anything that might bring attention to ourselves such as lighting a fire or making any loud noise. He could not say exactly when our help would arrive, only repeating we must stay there. The man we had stayed with had given John and me some sandwiches so at least we had something to eat. Our fellow travelers also had been provided with something, not much, but something. Don't forget food was short for the people and anything they gave was less for themselves. So, not knowing how long we were to wait, we settled down on the grass in small knots of people, those knowing one another together, the rest of us in random fashion. I am certain we all felt our savior would be along before nightfall and we would start the next phase of the escape. The sun went down, dusk came, the moon came out, and night was upon us in full force. I tried to sleep on the ground, but the dampness permeated my clothes and I was most uncomfortable, as were all the others. There was much whispering, such as, "Is he coming? Did he get caught? Have we been set up? Should we strike out on our own? We had only questions, no answers. This, I think, was the longest night of my entire life. By morning I was so cold I thought I was going to freeze to death. It was June and we were in the foothills of the mountains. I remember standing at the top of a small rise waiting for the sun to come up. A young Frenchman was standing alongside me also waiting for the warmth of the sun. He spoke very good English and told me he was in the underground and had made this trip before. He claimed he had information he wanted to get to England so the trip was necessary. I was famished and so was he. He asked if I had any food and I said that what little I had had gone last night. He opened a knapsack and extracted a can of concentrated Pet Milk, poked a couple of holes in the end, tilted his head back, and poured some into his mouth. He offered me a swig and I gratefully accepted, getting it the same as he had. I had never tasted this canned milk before, but I can tell you, it was so high in sugar content, it was like a shot in the arm. I thanked him, returned the can, and he stowed it back in his pack carefully so it would not spill. We both soaked up the warmth of the sun as it got higher and eventually warmed up and dried off. I had no idea what the others did to keep going. All I knew was at last daylight had come and now our man would be there any minute to care for us. Life was looking good again

Time, as such, is relative, as I am sure we all know. Sometimes a minute can seem like an hour, another time the same minute goes so quickly that it seems never to have existed at all. Even days can follow this pattern of fast or slow flow. We all know the old saying, "the watched pot never boils," and it is so true to those involved in the time span in question. All we had to do was have patience and our troubles would be resolved in short order. Spirits were up, life was good, and the next part of the adventure would certainly be less complicated than what had gone on before. The day wore on slowly and the sun got higher until we were at noon. Still no one approached us in our spot in the woods. We were not that far from the little town, so why didn't someone come for us? Oh, well, maybe another hour and we would be on our way because we certainly couldn't just sit here all day and risk getting caught. Someone said that perhaps the Germans had also broken the contact we were waiting for and we would be here forever. We discussed this possibility, agreeing that there might have been a problem, and that if someone did not show up by nightfall, we would strike out on our own, using our escape maps and head for the Spanish border. Having arrived at this decision, we all tried to settle down and make the best of the situation. The afternoon dragged along, each minute like an hour, each hour like a lifetime. Mix this with a dose of scared, and you know how we felt. Hungry? Oh yes, but there wasn't anything to eat so we just endured, but not like heroes. No sir, we complained to whomever would listen. It sure didn't do any good, but we felt better just getting it off our chests. Had we known that it would be three more days before we had anything to eat, I am sure we would have given up on the spot. Finally, everyone got tired of complaining so we just sat and passed the time. We could not speak with the Jewish people very well, so they kept to themselves, talking among themselves. We did find out, through the French fellow, that the old man with this group was 75 years old, and we assumed that the underground was charging them all a lot of money to get them out. Right here, before I forget, I want to mention that this old man made the entire trip under his own power and I never once heard him complain. What happened to them all once we got to Spain, I have no idea, but I hope they lived to tell of their ordeal.

This is how the afternoon passed, just waiting, until at last the run started to go down. We were quickly reaching our hour of decision as to whether to wait some more or proceed on our own. All through the day, as odd as it might seem, we had been quite quiet, always speaking softly so as not to attract any attention should someone pass near. At last we heard some footsteps on the trail leading to our lair and our pulses quickened as we

watched to see whom it might be. It was our man; finally he had arrived. He explained to the French fellow that he never had any intention of coming to us in daylight and that we should have been told. Who cares, he's here; we are going at long last. Did he have any food for us? Someone asked. He merely said that he did not, even though he had a knapsack on his back. He carried his own food and we must shift for ourselves, as he did not have enough for everyone. I have since thought that this man must have been a Basque because he obviously was a mountain man and knew his way around the Pyrenees Mountains. He wasted no time, getting us all on our feet and under way. By now it was quite dark and the guide led us down to the valley and along a road that led deeper into the mountains. We were told to form a single line, keep the person ahead in sight, and above all, not to talk. The guide set a rather fast pace and it quickly became obvious that the civilians could not keep up the pace as they were carrying suitcases. The guide stopped and instructed us younger people to carry the luggage. We did this and started off again. Although we were younger, it was not an easy task to carry this stuff. So, when we came to a small bridge some time later, we all threw their things in the river. I have always wondered what was in those suitcases. Money? Jewels, or just clothes? Later on when they found out what we had done, they could have killed us, they were so mad. But as it turned out, we would have lost them anyway, or at least had to abandon them because of events that followed.

We were really making good time down the valley and things seemed to at their best, until all at once a huge search light came on down the road and a car started up, pulling out of a side road onto our road, and headed toward us. There was a short road to our right leading to the foot of a hill. It was about one quarter mile long, dead ending at the hill, with a field on both sides of the road. The guide ran back down the line of people, headed up this short road and ducked into the tall growth and threw himself on the ground. Needless to say, we all did likewise, lying as still as dead men. The car turned up this road and stopped almost opposite us. They never left the car, just sat there with the motor running for maybe three or four minutes. Finally, they backed down the road, never having flashed a light into the fields, and went back to where they had started. We hid there for about five more minutes to be sure everything was safe, then followed the guide as he abandoned the road and the valley and started to climb the hill at the road's end. It was tough work because the hill was about a 45 degree incline and grassy so the shoes slipped as we worked our way up. We would climb a little and rest a little. After a few hours of this, we were all so exhausted that

every time we rested we would fall asleep for a few minutes. We would be so hot from the work of climbing, but after a few minutes of sleep we would wake up shivering from the damp and cold. It was miserable. Our easy journey through the valleys was all over. From now on, it would be climb up and slide down, and climb up again. We were among the trees, so that helped some as it gave us something to grab on to if one was in our path. We asked the Frenchman why the people in the car didn't come into the field after us. He said the guide told him he was surprised also but felt that they way have been afraid that the people in the field were the French underground and heavily armed and were afraid they might get hurt. Little did they know how close they were to collecting a group of unarmed, frightened people.

We continued in this fashion all through the night. Poor John Katsaros, my partner from Paris, was having a terrible time trying to climb with only one arm. The other, as I said before, was badly shot up and of no use to him. I broke a branch from a small tree and used this to help pull him up. Of course, the only time we had to do this was when it was very steep. He never complained but I knew it was very painful for him to twist and turn in attempting to climb the hills. As daylight approached, the guide located a barn and we spent the day there sleeping in the straw. At nightfall he roused us and we went at the mountain again. Everyone was so hungry but there was no food. We were able to get water from the many streams we crossed, but after taking a drink and climbing a while one got thirsty quickly and we had no way to carry water with us. How do you keep going like this? I don't know, but go we did. If it was tough on us, imagine the older people, imagine the old man, how did he do it? I don't know, but by God he did. The will to live is powerful. As I look back on this, I am amazed at the lack of conversation that went on during this trip. It must have been because it took all our strength just to keep going. But I'll tell you one thing, our guide never once faltered and walked as easily at the end of the day as he did in the morning. We later felt that he must have made this trip many times and that as a matter of fact, he probably was a smuggler in peacetime and had made his living carrying contraband over the borders. This was conjecture but quite believable and it at least seemed like a good guess.

I could belabor the journey, but suffice it to say it took four days and four nights to get over into Spain. One day was quite like the proceeding, a lot of hard climbing by day and luckily sleeping in barns at night. It might help to mention here that although there were barns to be found, there were

no farmhouses. It seems that the natives, in the summer, take their live stock up into the mountains for grazing but do not stay there with them all the time. The barns are not large and are used to store hay, straw, feed and other incidentals they do not want left out in the weather. So there was no one to bother us and, moreover, it was early in the season so nothing had been brought up as yet. Our next worry would be when we approached the border where we might be seen by German guards with dogs because they were on continual patrol looking for anything amiss.

The third day out we had a catastrophe in that when we got up in the morning in the barn we had slept in, we thought we had roused everyone from the straw before we set out on that day's climb. Around noon, as we rested, we discovered we had left one of our men behind. There was nothing we could do for him at this point, only agreeing that in the future to make a good head count before leaving for the day. We could only hope the poor fellow could find his own way into Spain. Rested, we continued climbing and that day we climbed above the tree line as well as the usual mountain streams we used for drinking. By the end of the day we were all parched with thirst. We continued up until finally the guide called us together and pointed out some huge rock piles banded together with chicken wire. When you stood by one and looked off into the distance, you could just make out another one. These were the markers for the boundary between France and Spain. He indicated that we must be very careful of planes flying the border as well as soldiers patrolling on foot. The planes, if they spotted us, could notify the soldiers by radio of our position. He also indicated that they would come into Spain after us if we were seen. He waved us to go on and turned and walked away from us and down the mountain to our right. He obviously was finished with his job and now we were on our own. It was late enough in the season, so there was no snow for us to deal with, but there was a large depression in the ground maybe 50 feet around, and it was full of water. We made a beeline for this and dropped to the ground and drank the stuff. We didn't even stop to think whether it might be poisoned or at the very least, dirty. I guess it was good water because no one got sick. We gathered ourselves together and proceeded to climb past rock markers so as to be in Spain as quickly as possible. We continued up for several hours, made the top and proceeded down into Spain. We had it. We kept walking down the steep hills but couldn't see any sign of life. We walked until it started to get dark and, as luck was with us, we found another barn, the first we had seen that day. We spent the night as we had in the others. When morning came,

we would have to devise a plan of action because we were now without a guide.

The barn provided the shelter we needed from the chill and the dew of mountain. Sleep was no problem because we were worn out from the day's activities. When you think about it, it is odd that being in the situation were in, one might wonder how anyone could sleep. There is no doubt we all frightened, unsure of what was going to happen next, yet our body's need for rest apparently superseded our mind's need to worry. The night passed without event, so everyone got a good night's rest. We did discuss the man we had lost, wondering where he might be, and if he might up with us. Our hearts and minds were with him and we all wished him I, myself, thanked God that it wasn't me who was wandering out there lost and alone. Frankly, I had enough problems as it was. I sure need another batch of them to carry.

Now it was daylight and decisions had to be made. We had no set leader to make decisions, so it became a general discussion meeting and those of us that could communicate did so. There were not a whole lot of options for us to consider but we knew we must press on until we found some help in Spain. Here we were in another country and we had entered it illegally by crossing the border where there were no border guards. It was a moot because we doubted the guards would have admitted us if we did confront them. It became obvious there was only one real course of action to take, and this was to strike out in small groups, going down the mountain and let nature take its course. So off we went, sliding and when it was possible, the grade was very steep, until we came to a road. No sooner had we reached the road than the local police were upon us. There were no pleasant greetings or smiles, just some orders we could not understand. The language was not to be understood, but the gestures were not in doubt. They all had pistols at their waists and I am sure if we had given them any trouble, they would have used them. They kept us there as other policemen rounded up the others as they appeared at the side of the road at various points. We were all more or less in the same area so they had us all in short order. No one tried to escape, rather we happy to be found because we felt that now the authorities had us and proper steps would be taken to get us on our way to England.

WRONG! They marched us all to a good sized barn along the side of the road, lined us up and one by one had us turn out our pockets, taking everything we had of value. As each one was relieved of their valuables they

were ordered into the barn. They took all watches, wallets, maps, coins and rings, if a person had one. Soon everyone was inside, the doors closed, secured, and a guard posted outside. There we were safely, we hoped, in the hands of our saviors. Why they took everything we could not understand, but after a little discussion we decided the police were going keep this stuff for themselves. Why not? There was nothing we could do way or the other. Again, it would have to be a wait-and-see game.

I think we must have been in the barn for some two or three hours just sitting on the floor, letting our minds process the possibilities of the next chapter in the unfolding drama. Suddenly the door was flung open; an officer strode in, followed by two policemen. One man had a small table and a chair, the other a box. The table was positioned in the light of the door, the box was placed on the table, and the officer sat down. The policeman looked a little unhappy; the officer looked mad. He spoke some English, telling us to come up one at a time and reclaim our property. He did not apologize, but sat by the box as each person found his stuff. Now, although I have not mentioned it, we were all starving to death, and by the time everyone's goods were reclaimed, it was noon or a little after. Remember now, it had been four days and four nights since we had eaten. We had been expending energy like a ditch digger, and had about reached the end of our rope. How the old man suffered all this and kept going, I'll never know.

Once everything had been returned, the officer motioned for all of us to follow him. We went out the door, across the road, up a flight of steps and into a hotel-like building. A long room was already set up with a table and the number of settings to accommodate all of us. We had been expected! Quickly sitting down, we waited for some food. Before eating, they came, poured some clear liquid into a glass for each of us, and then filled the glass with water. The liquid turned cloudy and it tasted like licorice. We drank it but it really knocked us for a loop. We were in no shape for drinking. Finally we got some food, just what I can not recall, and when we finished we were shown to some rooms with nice clean bedclothes. That ended that day for the whole group. A real bed, clean sheets, a full stomach and, at least it seemed nothing more to worry about. We were on our way home.

The next morning we were able to clean up and it felt good to be washed even though there was nothing we could do about our clothes. They were dirty and had to stay that way. We were not about to ask for a washing machine or give anyone any trouble. We were fed and then taken down the

road a mile or two. It seemed to me that we walked because I don't recall riding in or on any type of conveyance.

I recently checked with my companion, John Katsaros, and he recalled that the town they took us to was Les. We had been apprehended down the road from this town, held in that immediate area, and transferred to Les. When we arrived there we were given a room in an inn and there were two of us to each room. We were then called together and a man who spoke English advised us that we were free to move about the small town during the day. We were not to leave the town proper, and were to be in the inn at nightfall. At this point, an officer who was with us, requested permission to try and contact the American Embassy in Barcelona. The man was not very friendly, but he also was not cruel. He gave his permission, told us how we could contact him if we needed him, and left the inn. The officer set about trying to contact the Embassy and after some little while he succeeded in getting through. The Embassy told him they could not help us from Barcelona because the area was too mountainous and the way the mountains were situated it would take days for them to get to us. They told him that the main Embassy was in Madrid and that they would contact them for us and arrange to try and get us out of there. Now all we could do is wait. We all walked the town to take in the sights, such as they were. It consisted of one main road with most of the buildings along this on both sides of the road. I recall a bridge built of stone over a rather small run of water. We sat on the bridge and soaked up the sun, enjoying the first real relaxation for many a day. We returned to the inn for lunch and dinner and as I recall, the food was not too bad. But then, four days and four nights without food can make anything seem good. We had learned not to be too fussy. We never could figure who was paying for our keep. It is true that in our case perhaps the Spanish government had been assured by the United States that it would pay for our keep, but what about the civilians who were with us? We had no money to speak of and I am fairly certain the others also were in the same position.

That night we went to bed early because we were still exhausted as well as the fact that there was nothing to do to amuse ourselves. The next morning we awoke, John and I, in the same bed. I took one look at him and had a fit. He was a mass of red welts all over. I thought he had caught something so I told him about his condition. He just looked at me and said I didn't look any better than he did. It turned out that the place was alive with bed bugs, so from then on we slept with the lights on. The second or third

day we heard some shouting outside and we rushed out to find some of our people walking with the man we had left behind in the barn. Believe me, he was a mess. The poor fellow was tired beyond belief and looked like the devil. Unshaven, gaunt, wild-eyed and also very mad, he was a sight to behold. We really thought we would never see him again. He felt we had abandoned him and indeed he was right. We did not follow proper procedure prior to leaving the barn that morning, but then consider that we had never been through anything like this before and we had never been briefed on how to handle the situation. We admitted we were wrong and that it was not intentional and he could see for himself the concern we had for his well being so when he calmed down he forgave us and said he now understood. I sometimes think he kept going because all he wanted to do was get to all of us and perhaps kill us. The amazing thing about his arrival was the fact that being alone and not knowing the area, he merely proceeded straight ahead uphill and down, trying to maintain a straight line to the south. Our guide knew the best way and I am sure saved us a lot of hard climbing. Our journey was not that easy, but we were appalled at what our comrade must have gone through. Another odd thing is that he would arrive so close to our final destination. It makes you think that perhaps someone was watching over him, at least I like to think that this was the case.

A few days later, we were all called together and informed that arrangements had been made for us to be transported to another place and that we should be ready to move out the next morning early. We had nothing to pack so we could leave on a moment's notice. We had been able to bathe but we had not been able to wash any clothing, including our underwear, so we were all a little ripe.

The next morning, after breakfast, we were told to go to the road and wait. We did. After a short time, a truck came along with a load of logs. They were piled high and tied down with ropes to keep them in place. This was our ride out of there. Not first class, but better than walking, so we climbed aboard and off we went. We had two more to our group at this point, a young couple, but who they were or why they came out with us I never knew. Because they were Spanish, we were not able to talk to them. The ride was not the most pleasant trip I have ever taken, but in that rugged terrain it sure beat walking.

We rode most of the day, passing men at work in the fields, and sighting quite a few wrecked vehicles, tanks and trucks, just abandoned in

the ravines. These were left from the Spanish civil war, left to rot and rust as a monument to man's inability to get along, even with his own people. The truck was old, very slow, and the road was quite steep both up and down. The day was most pleasant and not too hot, even though we were right out in the sun. We proceeded in this fashion until late in the afternoon finally, arriving at a place with a wall around it. Some people came out, ordered us down and into the walled area. We sat on the ground or walked around to stretch our legs, waiting for the next episode to unfold. Each time things seemed certain, we were faced with a new situation and our nerves would begin to get raw again.

It wasn't long until a man appeared and ushered one of our people into the building. In about five minutes our man reappeared and another person was taken inside. We all crowded around the first man, asking what was going on in there? He said he had been questioned as to his identity and why he was in Spain. He said he explained that he was an American airman and was escaping the Germans and wanted to rejoin his unit in England. This presented no problem, he said, until they had him turn out his pockets and discovered his French identity book. This, of course, had his picture but another name, place of birth, and occupation. They did not seem happy with this but kept the book and told him to go back into the yard. His advice to us was, to get rid of the books, and fast. We all, that is the military people, got our books out and heaved them over the wall. I really hated to do this because it would have been a beautiful souvenir to keep for remembrance. Soon enough, my turn came, and I was taken before a man at a table in the house. He spoke very good English, questioning me as the first man had said as to why I was in the country in an illegal fashion. I also explained why I was there and having nothing in my pockets to contradict my story, I was quickly returned to the yard.

When everyone had been interrogated, the military personnel were directed to the gate and we left the walled area to find a bus waiting, along with a small dark-haired man who proved to be a Spanish fellow who worked for the American Council in Madrid. Our other companions were left behind to their fate and even today, I often wonder what happened to them. It would be painful even for a moment to consider the possibility that they were turned back and into the hands of the Germans. We were well aware that Spain had leaned toward Germany all through the war because of the aid Franco had received from Hitler during Spain's civil war.

The bus started up and off we went, in style this time. We were taken a short distance to a town by the name of Lerida. The bus went to the center of town, stopping in front of a large store of many floors. It was, in fact, a department store. Our man from the embassy told us we were to get new clothes and, because it was so late in the day, all the clerks were gone but the store was being held open for us. Unbelievable! We all went in the store and up to the men's department. We were instructed to pick out a suit, new shoes, two pairs of socks, two sets of underwear, two shirts, and one tie. A man in the store listed our selections and we were ushered back to the bus for another short ride.

We were taken to a spa-type resort that had hot-springs baths with high sulfur and the odor to go along with it. We were given nice clean, albeit small, rooms and the view of the surrounding area was beautiful. We could come and go as we pleased, but again had to be in at dark and stay within the confines of the spa. How we forget the small pleasures of life. What a treat to take a bath and get into fresh clothes. My shoes, which were G. I. issue but dyed black, were held on by a series of small pieces of shoelace. The only laces we could get to replace the brown laces were made of rayon. Now, rayon, when wet, gets weak and breaks so I wound up with small pieces to hold the shoes on. You think this was a problem? John Katsaros was walking in shoes a couple of sizes too small for him. He had big feet and the people who helped him did the best they could. Imagine walking for weeks in shoes a couple of sizes too small. At last he had a pair that fit. I must tell you here that at no time all through the trip, from Paris to the spa, did John ever complain that his feet were killing him. I guess the poor guy was so shot up he hurt worse elsewhere. The food was good and there was plenty of it; the only problem was, they used oil for all their cooking. Have you ever seen fried eggs, beautiful to look at; sliding around on the serving platter in a sea of oil? We tried to get them to cook the eggs and other stuff with butter but they acted as though they couldn't understand what we wanted. I'll tell you this, between the oil and the beautiful big red ripe cherries and other fruit we could get, we were in a bad way. Our systems could not handle all this and we more than paid the price.

Things were starting to move fast now because we were not at the spa very long, perhaps a week, when we were put on another bus and taken to a town called Zaragoza, loaded on a train and off we went to Madrid. Upon our arrival, we were taken directly to the American embassy and, one at a time, again questioned. This time our people wanted to hear about any

information we might have regarding troop movements, German emplacements, tank deployment and other related information. When this was finished, we were told that we would be moved right along, the next day, to the British in Gibraltar. Consequently, we never were able to see anything of the city of Madrid.

The next morning we were again put on a train which proceeded to Granada and on to La Linea de la Concepcion, or as it is generally called, La Linea. This little town is right near the entrance to the Gibraltar fortifications held by the British, even to this day. We actually walked from the town to the gates of Gibraltar and were passed through with no delay. This indicated to us that we were expected. At last we were safe and again among our own people

The records I have obtained from the government show that we arrived at Gibraltar on the 13th of June. I thought we might have a chance to see scan of this famous Rock, the monkeys, the gun emplacements and whatever else might be of interest, but that was not to be the case. We were ushered into a room and told to get out of the civilian clothes we were wearing. We were to turn in the clothes we had received at Lerida in the store and we were issued G. I. underwear, shoes, socks, pants, a shirt and a fatigue jacket. We were allowed to spend the rest of the day as we pleased as long as we did not venture into any areas marked "OFF LIMITS."

As I wandered about looking at the rocks and the sea, I came across a sailor carrying a brown paper bag full of watches. He said that he had come from Africa where he had been able to get these watches for a song and did I want to buy one? Now, I had given my watch to the French people who helped me so I was in need of one. I asked him the price and he said \$12.00. I looked at the watches and did not recognize the name and thinking he was a fast dealer, I decided not to buy. The name on the watches was OMEGA. I later learned this is one of the finest watches made. Such is life.

It was getting dark so I returned to the area we had been assigned to only to learn that we were to fly out the next day, if the weather permitted. We had dinner in the mess hall and went to bed. The next night was bright and clear, real flying weather, so we were driven to the airfield, put on a plane and told we were bound for England. The flight was uneventful and we landed at Bristol where we were put on a bus, under guard, and taken to

London. We were installed in a large manor house that was used by the American Military Intelligence Service.

We were held here and interrogated in detail. They wanted to get as much information as they could from what we could remember and also our individual stories of escape or evasion for their future use. We were not to be allowed to leave the building until someone who actually knew us and could identify us arrived. For me this was a two-day wait and, fortunately for me, our tail gunner on our crew was still at the base. The rest of my crew had been shot down while I was in France, trying to get back. The man's name was Chuck Pryne, and was I glad to see him. He vouched for me and signed some papers to indicate he was telling the truth. We were allowed to leave the building for an afternoon of relaxation and we did just that. As a matter of fact, we hit several bars and got stiff as a billy goat. Chuck went back to the Group the next day, and I was sent to Eighth Air Corps headquarters to get my records. Then I went to my Group to have the records brought up to date and to be paid. My instructions were to return to London and prepare to try and find a seat on a plane home.

When I had everything taken care of at the Group, which, by the way, was located by the town of Rattlesden, I caught a train to return to London so I could begin to try and find space on a plane headed back to the States. The train arrived in London late and I took a cab back to the house we had been detained in upon our arrival from Spain. I rang the bell, and it was answered by an enlisted man. He informed me that I could no longer stay there because I had been cleared for transport home. He suggested I go to a Red Cross shelter. I walked the few blocks to the shelter, requested a bed, but was informed they were filled and that I should try the annex. This was another building a few blocks away, so I was able to walk there also. Upon arriving, I was again told there was no room at the inn. What to do? The man at the desk suggested I go to the underground (subway) and spend the night there where it would be safe from the Buzz Bombs, then return in the morning and use their facilities to clean up.

I did just that, spending the night with the civilians on the tile floor of the underground with the children crying all night and the trains caning through until about midnight. We had a terrible attack of Buzz Bombs all through the night. We could hear the close ones as they exploded even though we were way down in the ground. It is odd, now that I think of it, but I did get some sleep on that hard surface, in spite of all the inconvenience.

The next morning everyone gathered up their things and left to go about that day's work. I went back to the Red Cross annex to clean up only to find that it had been hit during that night's attack, leaving nothing standing and all the men inside killed. Not one survivor remained. I must tell you, this really shook me up. I had not only escaped with my life from the plane when it went down, but now a second miracle had occurred. I went to the regular Red Cross building to use their facilities and then proceeded to the place I had been told to report to each day and was told that there was no room for me on any plane that day.

As near as I can recall, I was about four days trying to catch a ride home. One day, when I inquired about my chances, I was told that there was room for me on a flight out the next day. They gave me the necessary papers and also the train tickets to Scotland. The train departed each evening from London and made the return trip the next morning from Scotland. This was one of the longest days of my life and I thought evening would never come. At last evening came, and I boarded the train for the near end of my saga. With any luck, I would be home within 24 hours.

We made the trip through the night and I dozed, off and on. Although I was tired, I was also very excited. I was to see my wife and daughter in not too many hours. Upon arriving in Scotland, I went to the appointed place to report in and get my assignment for the flight home. I knew that it was always a possibility that some higher qualified person might bump me from the flight. After all, there was a war on and some things took precedent over others. As it happened, there was no problem at all. I was to leave within the hour, and we did. I really did not rest easy until we were off the ground and on our way.

I had been shot down April 27, 1944, and arrived in Spain June 6, England June 30, and back home early in July. How could so much happen in so short a time?

And so now you know the story.