

WORLD WAR II
MEMOIRS
OF
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THE STORY OF ONE MAN'S EXPERIENCE AS
A MEMBER OF A CREW ASSIGNED
TO THE CARPETBAGGERS 801st/492nd
HEAVY BOMBARDMENT GROUP
U. S. ARMY, EIGHTH AIR FORCE.

the night of July 4, 1944. The mission was to be a drop zone near Gien, France, which is southeast of Orleans. It was a long flight for the amount of darkness available. In the summer July has short nights and England is north so the nights were even shorter than in our latitude.

We left our base at Harrington so we could cross the English Channel into France at dark and return to England before dawn. This made the mission relatively short, usually five or six hours. On this particular night as we crossed the channel shortly before midnight, our homing radar malfunctioned. It was not very important in terms of completing the mission but it was an omen of things to come.

We flew at about 5,000 feet which was standard. Very shortly after leaving the channel we encountered a German airplane. I believe it was an ME-110. Our inexperienced crew, instead of dropping closer to the ground, decided to climb to about 8,000 feet and enter a cloud bank and change course several times in order to lose the German plane. Little did we know that the German plane was equipped with radar. Immediately, as we flew out of the cloud bank, the German plane was upon us. The pilot only needed to fire one burst of his guns at us and our left wing was on fire. He was so close to our plane that I could hear his guns fire from my position in the top turret. This was incredible to me for as we crossed the channel we had been instructed to test our guns with a test fire. I could never hear Syra in the tail when he tested his guns. So in order to know when he had completed his test, he had to call us on the plane's inter-communication system. Yet this German plane was so close to our aircraft that I could hear his guns fire. Amazing!

Since our plane was on fire, we were forced to abandon ship. Six crew members left the airplane through the bomb bay which by now was on fire. As a result, my hair, eyebrows, and eyelashes were singed and I had a bad burn on my right leg. None of us had ever been trained to jump with a parachute. The single instruction we had received was to pull the ring on the chute when we were clear of the plane. I did not even know how to land. Even worse, the countryside was in complete darkness. So I did not even know how close to the ground I was until I could begin to see the tops of the trees. I knew then that I had to make a quick decision on how I was going to land. I was afraid of breaking my leg or injuring my ankle so at the last moment I pulled up my legs and landed on my rearend. Fortunately, I was in excellent physical condition. Except for being stiff for a couple of days, I was able to quickly get away from the area.

I later learned through the French underground while I was still in hiding in France, that when our B-24 crashed the tail gunner, Ellis Syra, was still in the tail of the plane. He had either been killed by the gun fire or the hydraulic system had been disabled in the attack and he had not been able to exit the turret. The co-pilot, Jim Lovelace, was killed when his parachute did not open correctly. It appeared to the underground that he had become entangled in it. This was very possible for the pilot and co-pilot both had back packs while the rest of the crew wore chest chutes. Lovelace had to pull his ring when he was falling away from the plane and not able to see it burning. Apparently, he opened his parachute when he was in the wrong position and it blossomed up around him.

The navigator, Gerald Mitchell, was taken prisoner and spent the rest of the war incarcerated in a German prisoner of war camp. In jumping, I became separated from the rest of the crew. The other four crew members somehow joined up together: Meade, Bonnin, Jones, and DuBois. They spent the rest of their time in France in a safe house in Paris.

The first thing that I did after landing was to hide my Mae West and my parachute. Both were stenciled with my army serial number. The discovery of these two articles by the Germans who were looking for all of us led to a radio message back to England notifying them that they had captured a T-Sgt. Frank E. Hines and had executed him as a spy. This action resulted in a telegram to my wife, Hila Maurer Hines, from the War Department which simply stated that I was missing in action. However, due to the nature of the missions I had been flying, they would provide no further information for security reasons.

After burying my Mae West and my parachute, I started walking generally in a southeast direction as our instructions had been to head for Spain. I was very fortunate that the weather was warm since it was summer in France. I had on suntan pants and a T-shirt under my fatigues (coveralls). I also had an extra pair of socks and my escape kit still in my pocket. Everything else had been lost in the fall.

I had only walked a couple of hours after the downing before it became dawn. At that time I went out into the middle of a wheat field and laid down for I knew that the Germans were looking for me. The wheat field had not been harvested yet for it was the beginning of July and it was not yet ripe. Shortly afternoon of that day I was awakened by a Frenchman and his two boys. He had a loaf of French bread filled with blood sausage accompanied by a bottle of wine. The wine was typically half water and half wine in order to conserve their wine supply. Now I had enough food and water for several days. I kept the bottle and placed the remainder

of the food on top of it while I slept. When I needed water, I would find a wagon track or a puddle and fill the bottle and then treat it with the chlorine tablets from the escape kit.

The second or third day I finally came to a forest. This forest had many roads running through it but there was never a simple crossroad in it. There were always six or eight roads converging at a central point. Right in the middle of this conjunction stood a concrete post with all the signs on it pointing to a specific location. This arrangement was really very dangerous in blacked out France for in the darkness it was not uncommon to run into this post and wreck your vehicle.

While I walked through this forest there was no traffic or people, so I usually stayed on the road. The undergrowth was so thick that I could step off about ten or fifteen feet and could be completely undetected. As I walked for several days I ate wild berries which were ripe at this time of the year. Probably in the last part of the second week I came to a clearing. In sight were two houses. At this time I decided that to reach Spain was impossible without help. So I had to decide which house I would approach for assistance.

I chose the house on my right and knocked on the door. Not speaking French, I had a piece of paper in my hand taken from my escape kit that said in several languages that I was a downed airman and I needed help. The person who answered the door took one look at me and dragged me inside the house. I was told that next door was a "Bosch" family who were pro-German. I often think about this decision as a "miracle of the Lord". Obviously this choice had protected me from prison. The first thing that happened now was that they fed me - a welcome event!

My French host contacted the local French underground and I was moved. This began a series of changes which now have become a blur but I eventually made a more permanent move. One morning I was awakened before dawn and told, "Come on." Outside in intense darkness was a big black car which operated on charcoal gas. The convertor was located on the running board. I had never seen anything like it before. When I got into the back of the car, I could see nothing but I did sense the presence of other people. Then a voice in English said, "Where did you get shot down?" I was home!

It turned out that there were two other people in the back seat with me. One was an Englishman and the other was an Australian. The Englishman was severely wounded, but he did speak fluent French. He soon left the group to make his way alone back to England. This left the Australian and me. His name was Frank also. We never knew the others last name for this was customary in case you were captured. In that event

you were not able to give any information to the enemy and endanger the others.

One place I stayed was with an elderly couple. They had no other family members that I saw. He took me rabbit hunting one time. We went to a rabbit burrow he knew. He had a large net very much like the ones fishermen use and I helped him to spread it out over several entrances to the rabbit burrow. He then produced a ferret. This was new to an Indiana farm boy. He started the ferret down one of the holes and stood near one of the other holes. In a moment a rabbit popped out of the hole into the net. The man had a club to kill the rabbit. Then in a moment the ferret came out. The farmer picked him up and put him back into his carrier. We retrieved the net and the dead rabbit and went home.

We eventually were placed in a large forest near Orleans with a group of British OSS agents who were dropped in to do sabotage and other kinds of harassment against the Germans in occupied France. The British camp was centrally located in among several French camps. When they brought me to this camp they immediately checked my identity in England by radio to determine whether I was a spy or not. When they discovered that I was truly a downed airman, I was placed in the radio shack to help that group.

At the time I was placed in the forest I still had nothing but my clothes, so my first priority was to get some way to sleep. The camp had plenty of food supplies but was short on bedding of any sort. I decided to go on a drop to rectify this. A drop was an experience! They picked an open field which was usually surrounded by trees and away from any habitation. Then the coordinates were given to England by radio and a plane was assigned to deliver the order to France. We had a Morse Code that would tell the incoming pilot whether it was safe or not for him to make his drop. It would have been very easy for the trees surrounding the drop site to have been filled with Germans equipped with small arms and one burst would have killed everyone in the area. A scary situation.

On this particular night a large Lancaster, a four-engined British plane, came over and dropped several items. I got myself a parachute and took it back to the camp with me. I spent several days driving stakes in the ground and using the shrouds from the chute to lace a net between the stakes above the ground. On top of this I placed approximately half of my parachute to use as a mattress and used the remainder as a cover.

The soldiers in this British camp went on several more drops but I never went again for I considered it so dangerous. Some of the other groups in the camp were going on sabotage missions.

Once we found a freight train on a siding that was unguarded. This made a much safer operation than the drops. In one of the camps there was an old 1936 five-ton Chevy truck with a stake body. About thirty or so of us piled on the truck and went to the train. Since the cars were locked, the French used a sledge hammer to open the doors. The lock and hasp were pounded off and the noise scared me to death. I thought it more sensible to quietly pick the locks. We unloaded what we could of the cars and returned to camp. Naturally, we did not know what was in the boxes we had stolen for it was totally dark. The next morning about dawn we discovered we had stolen 800 pounds of butter in wooden tubs. You can imagine what happened in a few days without refrigeration. The butter became rancid and the odor was terrible which made it necessary to bury this booty.

Another incident occurred with a train. The Colonel in charge of the British Forces in my camp was a former British Ambassador to Germany. He spoke fluent German. This particular night we got to a train on a siding which was guarded by German soldiers. So the Colonel drove up to the guards in his jeep. Remember it is totally dark and he said to the man in charge that one of the German soldiers had failed to salute him. He told the German to line up all the soldiers on the train for he was going to make an example of him.

While this inspection was going on the rest of the British group were on the back side of the train unloading what we could. This time it was cigarettes. This haul was welcome to most of the men but unfortunately these cigarettes did not taste at all like what we had been used to.

Normally on excursions such as this, plastic explosives were used. I knew little about plastics but was informed that an amount about the size of your fist would destroy most any building. This amount was also enough to destroy the railroad tracks which we concentrated on. On this particular trip we ran into a Frenchman riding a bicycle who was on his way to destroy a rail point. This is the part of the switch which is difficult to replace. He must have had at least 25 pounds of plastic. Everyone in our group wanted to know why he needed so much when a fistful would do the job? He said he wanted to make a "big bang". This incident typifies the French philosophy of the troops stationed in the forest.

At one time during the early days when I was with the British underground, they with the French figured out that I was part of the crew that was shot down over Etampes. They also knew that this plane finally crashed near Pithiviers. They decided I should visit the graves of Lovelace and Syra and also visit with the people who buried them. They also wanted me to see what was left of the airplane. So a group

from the British camp took me to the grave site at Pithiviers. The graves were located at the edge of a cemetery and were marked with a wooden cross with the dog tags hung upon them. This occasion is marked in my memory because after a meal and some wine everyone present was asked to sing a song. I could not do this for I can not carry a tune and was so embarrassed. No amount of coaxing could change my mind. Now as I reflect upon it, I would have tried. Age changes a lot of things.

The only medical experience I had during the entire time I spent in France occurred right after I joined the British in the forest. One day a French doctor appeared to treat anyone who needed attention. When it became my turn, I wanted him to look at the burn I had suffered on my right leg when I jumped from the burning plane. The doctor looked at the burn which had blistered and he got out a stainless steel pan. In it he put all the instruments he needed, poured alcohol over them and then ignited it. I thought what an unusual way of sterilizing an object. However, no other way existed to do the job. He kindly treated me without charge.

The British in the camp always had to have their tea each day about dusk. It was necessary to start several small fires to heat the water. The tea came in a tin can with milk and sugar already mixed in with it. This was my first encounter with instant tea. On this particular night in question a small German plane like a Piper Cub flew over the camp about tree top level. The very next day a troop of Germans came into the forest and mortared it with 88's and completely destroyed the camps.

Since I was in the radio shack group, I felt responsible to help save the radio equipment and get it to a safe place. In our camp each person had built up an escape kit and hung it on a belt - similar to a gun belt. These were then hung in the bushes along each side of the paths leading out of the camp. If an emergency occurred such as mortaring, they could run down the path and grab the kit as they ran by. The more level headed people in the camp had trouble keeping some of them to help load the radio equipment for removal.

After this incident, Frank, the Australian, and I decided to move into a small village in the area. It really was small with about one hundred people. The name of the village was Nancray-Sur-Rimarde, (Loiret). This is in the vicinity of Orleans. We stayed with an old lady, Madame Grivot, who was the tobacconist for the village. She was a widow of about sixty years of age. In the picture on the next page you can see her standing in the doorway of her shop. The hotel and restaurant are on the left side of the street as you look at the picture. In the background is a small public park.