

On November 13, 1943 our misfortune happened over North west HOLLAND as we were returning to our home base in England, after bombing Bremen. The bomber crashed in the Black Waters River at ZWARTSLUIS. By parachute I came down in a cow pasture along the same river, on the opposite bank at GENEMUIDEN, near the barge crossing.

I approached and tried to get help from a middle aged man who was walking along the road leaving the river barge crossing, going toward ZWARTSLUIS.

I attempted to bargain with him for his top coat to cover up my flying uniform. He wanted to help me, but he feared being caught by the enemy patrols. He offered me some very good advice. He informed me of the exact location of the enemy patrols outpost, which was only about one mile away. I returned to the pasture, hid myself the best I could, and began to survey my possibilities to evade the enemy.

A short time later I saw 5 enemy patrols armed with rifles, speeding on bicycles on the road near the pasture, heading toward the crashed bomber at ZWARTSLUIS. A short time later another group of 3 enemy patrols passed by on bicycles, also carrying rifles.

After the patrols passed by, I was visited by a group of people (about 35) from GENEMUIDEN. They crossed the river on the barge nearby. Curiosity, no doubt was their reason for coming to me. Much to my surprise, one of the group ROELOF HEIJS came to me with a good purpose--- to help me. As he approached me he gave me a big HUG and embraced me as a friend. ROELOF spoke English very good. As we began our conversations I looked up toward the road and I saw another enemy patrol of 5 speeding by on bicycles, again heading toward ZWARTSLUIS.

Both ROELOF and I agreed that the patrols surely did see us, there in the pasture. But they all continued on their way to the crashed bomber. Upon my request, ROELOF asked and begged everyone to go back home across the river. Roelof was the last one to leave me. Before he departed he did promise me he would try to seek help for me from his friends in GENEMUIDEN.

ROELOF HEIJS was a young journalist who was in hiding from the Germans, at the home of Mr. and Mrs. JAN MOL in GENEMUIDEN. ROELOF, making contact with me, made conditions very dangerous for he and the MOL family. After ROELOF returned to the MOL home arrangements were being made to help me evade the enemy.

Later that afternoon ROELOF returned across the river to check on my safety, and to inform me of their plans to smuggle me from the pasture. From Mrs. MOL ROELOF brought me some dark bread, a bottle of hot milk and some smoking tobacco, a top coat to cover up my flying uniform and a hat. (Baret style)

In GENEMUIDEN Mrs. MOL had a friend BERTUS BERMAN, a good automobile mechanic and the owner of his own shop. BERTUS was trusted by the local German patrols. To survive in his business BERTUS was forced to do mechanical repair jobs for the Germans when they requested his service. He also was permitted to use his private car. BERTUS was the perfect contact to help smuggle me from the pasture field and through all the road blocks already set up to block my escape.

After the night darkness arrived, BERTUS and ROELOF drove by car from GENEMUIDEN and picked me up from my hideout in the pasture. Our journey to a chosen farm house some miles away, made us travel through several enemy roadblocks. I wore the top coat to cover up my uniform. We had no problems passing through the first and the third roadblock. But we were stopped and delayed at the second roadblock. BERTUS was cited for a head light violation on his car. For me, who sat in the rear seat in the car, the patrols simply ignored me. ROELOF and BERTUS got out of the car to talk with the patrols. They kept the patrol's interest on the car, head light violation.

Later that night we arrived at our destination---the farm house of Mr. and Mrs. H. LUBBERS in DEDEMSVAART. Upon our arrival we were informed that the enemy patrols were making a search of their farm. The enemy outpost was located next door to the LUBBERS farm.

1 It was unsafe for us to hide out at the LUBBERS house that night. The LUBBERS did not want to refuse to help. Mr. LUBBERS parked his cattle trailer next door to the enemy out-post. ROELOF and I used the cattle trailer as our hide-out for the night, the next day and the next night. (Sunday) Our only
5 protection from the cold nights was the loose hay and straw that lay on the trailer floor.

Earley on Monday morning (Nov. 15) while the enemy patrols next door were still asleep, Mr. LUBBERS escorted ROELOF and I from the cattle trailer to his home. We were given a good hot breakfast and directions to the local train station near-by.

As ROELOF and I walked from the farm to the train station the darkness of the early morning was still with us. While waiting for the train to arrive, daylight cast upon us. Nearly all the passengers awaiting the train arrival were young school children. I was still wearing my flying uniform, covered only by a top coat and wearing the baret cap. I know several of the school children on the train did see a part of my uniform. Luckily, for ROELOF and I no enemy patrols along the route traveled, attempted to inspect the passengers aboard the train. I believe the patrols assumed all passengers were school children, enroute to school. Our next destination was a hide-out ROELOF had in COEVORDE--with a middle aged woman. (name unknown to me)

At this home in COEVORDE I met FRITZ VAN FAASSEN, FRITZ was a young school teacher, from SLAGHAREN who was a rental resident at this home. Through FRITZ, I gained contact and escape help from his father (and family.) who had connections with underground helpers. Late in the afternoon on Nov. 16 FRITZ
25 and I arrived, on bicycles, at his father's home in SLAGHAREN. (HENRY VAN FAASSEN) From the VAN FAASSEN home, through FRITZ and his father HENRY, my escape plans, connections and all preparations were made. They provided me with a civilian suit of clothing to replace my military flying clothing. I was given a false Dutch identity, and a false Dutch passport. I was the first of 13
30 X missing airmen to pass through the VAN FAASSEN home.

To overcome the language barrier, all of my escape traveling was done as a fake deaf and dumb. (a mute) My mute identity was used through all my travels through HOLLAND until I reached BRUSSELS in BELGIUM. During my stay at the VAN FAASSEN home was a young Dutch Jewish Ex-soldier in hiding. His name was
35 BOB. Bob and I spent our days in their home. At night we slept in a nearby school. HENRY VAN FAASSEN was the school principal.

On Nov. 28 I left SLAGHAREN and arrived at a new hide-out in HOGAVEEN. In command here was a minister, assisted by two young men. It was here that I believe I entered into the main stream of the Dutch underground movement.
40 The minister put me through a thorough and strong interrogation before I was accepted. Here also I met RAF missing flier, GEORGE WATTS. George and I traveled together, with success, the entire journey to Spain.

On Nov. 30 WATTS and I left HOGAVEEN and arrived at SPRANG-CAPELLA. My hide-out was the home of Mr. and Mrs. LEO KEUYSTEN. WATTS, hide-out was with Mrs. KEUYSTEN, s parents, who lived nearby.
45 *(at Best by train)*

On Dec. 2 WATTS and I left SPRANG-CAPELLA and arrived at NYNSEL. Our hide-out was the farm home of Mr. and Mrs. WILLIAM HABRAKEN. Also in hiding at the farm were three young Dutch men. One of the three was GIRARD WASSENBERG. In command of this farm hide-out was PAUL REYBROEK. PAUL VAN DEN BROEK was
50 also a helper.

On Dec. 17 WATTS and I left NYNSEL, by *bicycle* train, and arrived at the OTTEN home in ERP. HARRY OTTEN, GIRARD OTTEN, ANTONETTE OTTEN, and THEA OTTEN all lived together in their large family home. The OTTEN family was a very active, and a very important connection in the Dutch underground in central HOLLAND.
55 During our short stay at the OTTEN home, a Frenchman who escaped from a concentration camp, joined up with us.

On Dec. 19 WATTS and I and the Frenchman departed, on bicycles, from ERP enroute to HELDEN, escorted by the OTTEN'S. We had a 5 hour hide-out at the home of a brother and sister contact in HELDEN, awaiting for our next escort to arrive. From HELDEN, WATTS and I traveled together with a guide. The Frenchman traveled the same route alone. From HELDEN we were heading towards ROERMOND. Between HELDEN and ROERMOND we made two more contacts, in two separate small towns, hiding out for one night in each town. (names unknown)

On Dec. 21 WATTS and I arrived in ROERMOND by train, with a guide. We were separated and sent to two different hide-outs and contacts. My contact was the home of Mr. and Mrs. H. BREMMERS and 3 children. JUN BREMMERS, ELIZABETH BREMMERS, and WILLY BERGHS.

Four doors from the BREMMER'S home lived the VERBRUGGEN family. FRANCIS, TIMA, and GIRARD, their children were active underground workers. Both families worked together in the underground. I lived my daytime hours at the BREMMERS home. At night I would go to the VERBRUGGEN home to sleep. Today, and since the end of WW2 TIMA VERBRUGGEN and JUN BREMMERS are husband and wife.

On Jan. 18, 1944 WATTS and I departed ROERMOND by train, and arrived at MAAS-TRICHT, escorted by FRANCIS VERBRUGGEN. Our new contact and guide was JACQUES VRIJ. VRIJ escorted us to the home of a Mrs. MOONEN. Her husband was a prisoner somewhere in a concentration camp. Here is where I met her 8 year old niece, BETSY MOONEN. Later that same day, we were escorted, protected by the dark of night, to the home of BETSY MOONEN'S father. Mr. MOONEN operated a butcher--delicatessen shop in MAAS-TRICHT. The shop was on the first floor. His living quarters were located on the second floor, above his shop. For safety reasons, because he did underground work, is why BETSY lived with her aunt, elsewhere.

Early in the night of Jan. 20 P. SOUREN arrived at Mr. MOONEN'S residence. Mr. SOUREN was our guide who smuggled WATTS and I through the Holland--Belgium boarder. We spent the night at a vacant home of a former underground worker in Belgium, just over the boarder, and near the Albert Canal. Next day, Jan. 21 we arrived in BRUSSELS by train. We met our first contact in the basement of the Antwerp Hotel. Later on the same day we were escorted to another location where we met our second contact. We spent the night at this location. The next day we had another contact and a new hideout.

On Jan. 23, 1944 WATTS and I were escorted to the hideout and, I believe, was a headquarters of the BELGIAN "COMETE" underground. Later that same day, 2 American missing airmen and a British RAF airman, named PHILLIP, arrived at this COMETE headquarters. To my surprise, the Americans were my Buddies, from our crashed bomber. They were VICTOR FERRARI, the navigator and OMAR EDWARD ROBERTS, the bombardier.

The Comete gave we five airmen new identities. We all were labeled as FLEMISH. I was labeled a Flemish pharmacist assistant, working for the German "cause" in TOULOUSE, FRANCE. My travel papers showed that I was home on a short holiday vacation. In Holland our travel plans were quite restricted. We were not able to travel late during the night hours, because of the war-time curfew, 10 PM to 4 AM. But our travel through Belgium and France was possible, both by day and by night. The COMETE had access to the official bonded Gestapo paper on which legal travel orders could be made. This gave us the proper authority to travel all night, despite the curfew hours. We were some of the first escaping airmen to use these special travel orders.

At midnight, the same day, Jan. 23 we five (Flemish) left Brussels by train enroute to PARIS. Some hours later during the night the train stopped at the boarder crossing of Belgium into France. We all left the train and entered the train station in order to go through the custom's search before entering into France. As a normal traveler, we all carried a small brief case. When we opened our brief cases for the customs inspection, I was shocked to see that each brief case contained one piece of a women's under-clothing, plus a few pieces of clothing for a man.

One of the customs inspecting agents was a COMETE worker. The pieces of women's under-clothing in each brief case was his "clue" to our false identity. Under the watchful eyes of the many enemy patrols and Gestapo agents on guard through-out the train station, our boarder crossing into France was a big success.

By train we arrived in PARIS early in the afternoon on Jan. 24.

Our contact a Hotel in PARIS, the Hotel PARI was not available. Our guide was able to relocate us at another hide-out in a Villa somewhere out of the city limits of Paris. We spent about 2 days at the Villa, owned by an elderly woman, her daughter and son in law. We returned by train to a new hide-out in Paris on Jan. 26.

The new location in Paris was a small vacant room in the basement of a school. In command was a high ranking member of the COMETE underground---MADAME DE GREEF known as "TANTE GO" and her teenage daughter JANINE and VERNON DE GREEF. We called this hide-out "The Dungeon". This room contained no home furniture or any conveniences. Several blankets were spread out to give us a little protection from the cement floor. We ate our meals, sitting on the floor,. Our sleeping was also done on the cement floor. For entertainment, we played card games, and told jokes and stories of our past civilian experiences.

The Dungeon was much more than a temporary hide-out for we five airmen who escaped from Holland. It soon became the main Comete center for other rescued missing allied airmen. Day after day more rescued airmen through-out central and northern France were escorted to this location. By Feb. 3 there were 18 airmen gathered here.

On Feb. 4 seventeen (17) airmen from this group departed from Paris, by train on an overnight journey to TOULOUSE. My Navigator VICTOR FERRARI remained in PARIS.

He needed medical attention to cure a severe infection. Our guide on the train enroute to TOULOUSE, I believe, was the young girl JANINE DE GREEF. My identity during this travel to Toulouse, was a pharmacist assistant.

Later that night, somewhere in south-central France our train came to a sudden stop. The RAF Airforce was on a bombing mission in that area. The train was delayed for about 30 minutes. Many hours later, in the early morning hours, we all arrived safely in Toulouse.

At the Toulouse train station JANINE was greeted by two COMETE mountain guides, JEAN GREINDL and (FRANCO) JEAN FRANCOIS NOTHOMB. With GREINDL and FRANCO were two Belgians, who like we airmen were escaping over the Pyrenees mountains into SPAIN.

It is my belief that the two Belgians were former Comete underground workers fleeing into Spain for safety reasons. They were not missing airmen.

The road and trails our guides traveled over the Pyrenees mountains were about 10 miles from Toulouse. From the Toulouse train station our guides engaged two (2) taxis to transport us to the mountain roads. All total, all 21 men were squeezed into only two taxis, but did arrived safely at a small village at the foot-hills of the Pyrenees. Unknown to all of us, and by some unknown way, the German mountain patrols in this area were informed of our plans to cross over the mountains enroute to Spain.

As we began our march up and over the mountains, heavy snow began to fall. The trip over the first mountain range required about 20 hours, or more. In the valley between the first and second mountain ranges, on FEB. 6, at a deserted farm house, we unexpectedly walked into an enemy ambush. In the enemy out-post, there were six (6) German mountain troopers armed with rifles, on skis, and 2 Karine dogs. Many rifle shots were fired at us, and within a striking range. Twelve (12) airmen, including my bombardier ROBERTS were captured and taken as prisoners of war.

Watts and I and three (3) other Americans were the only airmen that escaped. The two (2) Belgians and our guide GREINDL also escaped. FRANCO, the other guide was captured, but only for a short time. By some good luck he later managed to escape from the German patrols, that captured him. He rejoined with us the following day in a village in southern France. The village could be -BEZIENS-.

GREINDL and FRANCO were removed from their mountain guide duties. Franco's identity was now known by the German patrols.

On Feb. 8 Watts and I and the other 3 American airmen departed by train for a new hide-out high upon a mountain range near the village of ST. LAWRENCE. We lived in small cave styled huts that the village sheppards used as their living quarters during the summer season, while watching over their sheep and cattle. These caves are vacant during the cold winter season.

During the days and weeks later, other airmen joined with us. Sometime during the last week of February my navigator -FERRARI- and I were re-united once again. He arrived with other airmen from Paris.

(5)

By the middle of March, the Comete underground had a collection of 37 airmen, hiding out in the mountains in this area.

On March 16 three new Comete mountain guides arrived at our mountain hide-out. They were escorted to our hide-out location by an American, his duties -unknown- to me, but I am sure he was not a missing airman. I recall first seeing him on Feb. 5 the same day we began our first journey over the Pyrenees. The three guides were armed with a sub-machine gun. All 37 airmen were collected together into one group. We began our long march over the snow covered mountains enroute to the Spanish frontier. The route selected by our guides, took us over the high elevations of the Pyrenees. It was a 2½ days and nights march, non-stop.

On March 19 about the hour of 1 A.M. we arrived at the Spanish frontier. The frontier was the snow covered mountain top, with no fence or other marking. Our guides, for safety reasons would not enter into Spain with us. Instructions and directions were given to we airmen after we entered into Spain. About 8 A.M. on March 19 we entered at BOSOST, a small village at the base of the Pyrenees in Spain.

In BOSOST we surrendered to the local police authorities, for safety reasons. By phone, from a small grocery store, contact was established with the American, British and Canadian Embassies in MADRID. Because of the avalanches on the Spanish slopes of the Pyrenees, many roads were blocked by very deep snow, and our American military attache was unable to come to our rescue in BOSOST. Our safety was assured.

On March 20 we Americans were taken by bus down the mountains enroute to VIELLA. For some unknown reason we were not permitted to ride inside the bus, even though we purchased passenger tickets. We were forced to ride on the top of the bus, despite the many empty seats available inside the bus. With much luck on our side we did arrive, later that day, in VIELLA at the base of the mountains. In VIELLA we were greeted by a Spanish employee from the American Embassy. (Mr. Garcia) With Garcia were two Spanish military personel, armed with rifles, as our escorte.

On March 22 we were bused to the village of SORÉ.

On March 23 we were bused to LERIDA, where we finally came in personal contact with our American Military Attache. In LERIDA some of our American airmen were rudely mistreated, and jailed, by the local police, and others.

On May 3 we departed from LERIDA, by bus and arrived at a small hotel in ALHAMA DE ARAGON.

On May 7 we departed from ALHAMA DE ARAGON by Embassy automobiles and arrived at the American Embassy in MADRID. Later that same day we departed Madrid, by train, escorted by the American Military Attache, and arrived in GIBRALTER the next morning May 8.

In Gibraltar we were issued military clothing. On the early evening of May 10 we boarded an American model C-47 cargo plane, piloted by two British Intelligence personel. After an all night flight over the Atlantic, along the western coast of Europe, we arrived safely at BRISTOL, ENGLAND airport very early on the morning of May 11, 1944. End of a 6 month journey for FREEDOM.

Nick Mandell

Pittsburg

Pennsylvania