emember: Do Nothing. Say Nothing. Write Nothing Which Could Betray Our Friends."

This notice, posted for aircrew during World War II, reminded them of a reassuring secret: If they were shot down over France, Resistance networks were ready and eager to hide them from the Germans.

There was good reason to be optimistic. The Resistance enabled more than 3,000 Allied airmen to disguise their identities and walk out of German-occupied Western Europe. Airmen shot down in France and Belgium had especially good chances of making it out.

Future American ace and test pilot legend Charles E. "Chuck" Yeager was shot down by Focke-Wulf 190s on a mission over France on March 5, 1944.

"Before I had gone 200 feet, half a dozen Frenchmen ran up to me," Yeager later reported. They brought him a change of clothes and hid him in a barn. Under the care of the Resistance, Yeager was transported to southern France, hiked into Spain on March 28, reached the British fortress at Gibraltar on May 15, and was in England by May 21, 1944.

Yeager's speedy trip was made possible by years of effort to build networks for moving airmen from the moment they landed in their parachutes to the moment they reached friendly or neutral territory.

The evading airman's journey always began with immediate concealment. Then they sheltered with families, often in several locations. Next they traveled in cars and trucks, bicycled, and even rode

A B-24 crash-lands near Eindhoven, Holland. Resistance networks in Nazi-occupied countries helped downed Allied airmen traverse hundreds of miles to safety. American airmen shot down over Europe had a sophisticated web of supporters for attempts to avoid the Nazis and reach freedom.

Escaping
the Continent



trains through Paris right under the eyes of German soldiers. Sometimes they moved alone, but just as often the Resistance linked them into small groups at major assembly points such as Liège, Belgium.

BAIL OUT

For evaders the saga usually began with a struggle, often onboard a burning B-24 or B-17. Typically it was a German fighter that shot down the bomber over France or Belgium.

Through 1943, many of the bombers fell victim to the German tactic of nose-on attacks, introduced by Oberleutnant (1st Lt.) Egon Mayer. Skilled German fighter pilots used the tactic to break up formation accuracy during a bomb run. Frontal attacks at this time were "the chief defensive problem of the Eighth Air Force," found World War II historians Wesley F. Craven and James L. Cate.

Then-TSgt. Chester B. Hincewicz was a top-turret gunner in a B-24 shot down after bombing Germany on April 12, 1944. He remembered hanging over an open bomb bay, holding a fire extinguisher on the blue flames moving from the engine toward the wing of his B-24.

This attack left the "No. 3 engine out, aileron control shot away, [and] fire in [the] bomb bay and on [the] command deck," according to the B-24's pilot, 1st Lt. Joseph Pavelka.

Next came the parachute descent. Evading capture sometimes depended on landing near cover. Airmen who could manage it waited to pull the ripcord because having no open parachute canopy made them less visible targets for German forces. On this B-24, four of the crew fell into German hands and became POWs. The others evaded capture.

Sometimes pilots stayed with the airplane to crash-land it after the crew bailed out. Capt. Kee H. Harrison's B-17 of the 94th Bomb Group lost two engines to fighter attack near Le Bourget airfield outside Paris on July 14, 1943. A 20 mm shell explosion set the cockpit on fire. With a full bomb load, the aircraft was hopelessly dropping behind the formation.

A local Michigan newspaper announces SSgt. Harry Eastman to be missing in action in Europe, but by then the French Resistance had saved him from being captured.

Four crew members bailed out, leaving six on board for the crash landing. Harrison told the crew to scatter, pushed the destruction buttons in the cockpit, and ran to the nearby woods. "During the five hours I lay hidden in the [woods], I could hear the Germans searching," he later recalled in his escape and evasion report.

Those who evaded capture often found quick help from the Resistance movements.

French peasants spotted Harrison and soon a young boy approached him, offering food and clothing. The boy led Harrison home only to find German troops surrounding the house. The boy guided him to another house four miles away, where the pilot hid for six days.

A crew member from another airplane in the Le Bourget raid, a B-17 nicknamed *Good Time Cholly II*, also found sanctuary in the woods. SSgt. Harry L. Eastman, age 34, was the left waist gunner on the bomber. Focke-Wulfs and Me 109s in lines of six abreast came in "right after" Spitfire escorts turned back, recalled Eastman.

He parachuted into a wheat field. Then he saw a man on a bicycle wave him toward the woods. Four Frenchmen were waiting for him there, but Eastman gestured that his back was injured and he could go no farther.

A Frenchman moved him from the ditch where he had hidden under a thorn hedge into a nearby wood. Other Resistance members brought SSgt. Richard S. Davitt, the top turret gunner, to join him. Five days later, they drove the two airmen to a safe house.

Statistically, these airmen were now missing in action, and their families back home received telegrams giving that status.

WELL-PREPARED

The US Army Air Forces equipped aviators with special supplies and equipment in case they crash-landed or had to bail out. All this was the work of the Military Intelligence Service-X or MIS-X.

Silk maps were standard issue. Aviators also typically flew with a money purse. Red purses contained maps of France, Holland, Belgium, Germany, Spain, and Portugal. Tucked inside were 2,000 French francs, worth about \$50—a significant amount at a time when average monthly rent was \$40. Records indicate a total of 103,126 red money purses were distributed to US airmen through June of 1945. Yellow

money purses combined French francs with Belgian francs and Dutch guilders.

How was the money spent? Pavelka told debriefers he spent his mix of francs and guilders for "black market tobacco and train and bus fare" before leaving the surplus "as a gift for [the] family who helped us last."

Each aircrew member carried an aid box. These contained a chocolate or peanut bar, milk in a tube. Benzedrine tablets to counter fatigue, halazone tablets to purify water, matches, adhesive tape, chewing gum, a water bottle, compass, and Horlicks tablets, a malted wheat candy thought to stave off hunger. Some of the American evaders wrvly observed that the chewing gum was best for taking away the taste of the Horlicks.

Benzedrine was popular. "Very necessary," reported Capt. Douglas K. Hoverkamp of Staten Island, N.Y. "Used to keep awake and keep

walking for three days while on way to Switzerland." Despite this, it was all too easy for aviator and supplies to become separated. Harrison lost his money purse and supply box on Day One of his evasion. Others lost them during the bail out. Hincewicz threw

OCCUPIED FRANCE

WILLIAM

WILL

USAF images

Clockwise from top: A map shows the three major lines of escape through Western Europe. The Comet Line alone moved some 800 people to safety. A placard warns of the consequences facing helpers who were betrayed. Albert-Marie Edmond Guérisse, aka "Patrick O'Leary," organized the Pat Line. Betrayed in 1943, he endured Gestapo torture and a concentration camp without revealing his comrades. He survived the war.

his money purse down on the floor of the burning B-24 in a fit of anger when he realized they couldn't control the spreading fire enough to make it back to England.

Passport photographs were perhaps the most valuable item carried. Typically, each aviator had three or four small head shots to be used for creating new identity papers. Hoverkamp was unlucky: he had four photographs, but they were cut to the wrong size and worthless. For the most part, the photographs were the crucial link enabling Resistance members to create new identity cards and work permits so that the airmen could move through occupied territory.

Uniforms conferred some protection if caught. Masquerading as civilians put airmen at special risk. "By donning civilian clothing," stated Air Force historians, airmen lost their

Geneva Convention rights and ran the risk of "being shot as spies if captured."

ROUTES HOME

The men, women, and children who made contact with the downed fliers were highly networked and organized. A special arm of British Intelligence, designated MI9, started work in late 1939 with the sole mission of feeding information to Resistance networks in occupied Europe. Returning downed airmen—and the intelligence they sometimes brought—was one of the main jobs of the Resistance movements.

Transporting the airmen out of occupied Europe involved hundreds of miles of travel. Three main routes, or lines, shepherded the airmen out.

The Comet Line started in Brussels and moved airmen through Paris and into Spain where they exited through Gibraltar or Portugal. The name was a translation of the French phrase "Le Réseau Comète," or Comet Network. The route was the brainchild of a 24-year-old Belgian woman named Andrée E. A. de Jongh. Her line moved some 800 people, many of them airmen of several nationalities, to safety.



USAF photo

Above: A poster reminds aircrews to bring their escape and evasion kits with them on missions and what might happen to them if they didn't. Right: With this fake passport supplied by the Resistance, US airman TSgt. Chester Hincewicz became a Polish journalist.

The Pat Line was known for the code name of its organizer. He was a Belgian cavalry doctor named Albert-Marie Edmond Guérisse, alias Patrick Albert O'Leary. Guérisse was evacuated at Dunkirk then returned to special operations work as a British naval officer. He took over the Marseille route after its originator Ian Garrow was caught by the Gestapo. The Pat Line's "great strength came from the fact that the people who formed its guiding core all knew, liked, and trusted each other. They understood each other quickly, without long explanations; they were all well aware of the risks they ran, individually and in common," wrote the authors of MI9: The British Secret Service That Fostered Escape and Evasion. "Pat" himself fell into German hands, too, but survived imprisonment at the Dachau concentration camp.

The Shelburne Line was an MI9 venture especially active in early 1944. In addition, numerous small lines and one-time operations also shepherded the airmen. Yeager came home via the Françoise Line, named for Marie-Louise "Françoise"

Dissard of Toulouse, who ran the line from March 1943 until the liberation of France. Several times, small cutters sailed from the coast of France to return handfuls of airmen to England.

For many, the goal was Spain. The Comet Line favored an arduous western Pyrénées route, and for the evaders making their way home this way, success was a major victory. They climbed peaks to 15,000 feet on a journey that lasted about a week. "The weather changes as if someone has hit a fast-forward button," reported a BBC correspondent who hiked the path in 2011 with a commemorative group. "We experienced dank drizzle, boiling heat, freezing mists, snow underfoot, and then more heat in quick succession."

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Image courtesy of the Dillsburg Banner

on Aug. 28, 1943. His route, named the Bourgogne Line, moved across the central Pyrénées. Harrison made it to Gibraltar on Sept. 13 and was back in the UK by Sept. 16, 1943. Eastman also escaped via the Bourgogne Line.

Not all downed airmen made a quick return to Britain. TSgt. Dale G. Hulsey, a radio operator-gunner, spent 319 days with a band of partisans in German-occupied Yugoslavia after being shot down during the famous B-24 raid on Ploesti, Romania, on Aug. 1, 1943. Hulsey's B-24, nicknamed *The Witch*, was part of the 98th Bomb Group, based in Benghazi, Libya.

He wasn't alone. The raids on Ploesti in 1943 through 1944 saw hundreds of airmen bail out or crash-land in the Serbian provinces of Yugoslavia. By the summer of 1944, partisan leader Draza Mihailovich and his Chetnik army had collected hundreds of airmen. The US Office of Strategic Services—predecessor to the CIA—eventually arranged a mass airlift, with C-47s flying into rough-hewn airstrips. A total of 512 aviators were rescued by the time Operation Halyard ceased in December 1944.

Some exited Nazi territory by crossing into Switzerland. Hoverkamp landed in a pine tree in Belgium and walked along a deserted cart trail. Then, across the field, he saw someone run and sit down under a tree. It was TSgt. Orvin V. Taylor, the radio operator from his crew. Soon the two aviators met an old man who hid them in a corn crib. Later he gave them civilian clothes, a blanket, and dinner in a house before moving the pair to a lean-to in the woods.

They then received assistance from Belgium's "White Brigade," another Resistance group. Hoverkamp and Taylor spent seven days there, wet with snow

> on the ground. Then their benefactors moved them to a farmhouse where they found 1st Lt. Frank Paisano, the bombardier from his crew, and other airmen from the 379th Bomb Group. Four of them were next hidden under a bridge, then jumped onto a railroad baggage car where another White Brigade Resistance man guided them on. The train took them to Liège, where Hoverkamp estimated there were no less than 30 Americans.

> For Hoverkamp the moment of crisis came as he boarded a bus to head

east. The "Germans asked for my [identity] card and luggage. I had no luggage, [the German] spoke very bad French and had to have a woman interpret, so the guide told [the German] I only spoke Flemish," he said in his MIS-X report. Another woman on the bus "started an argument, which completely distracted" the German and got Hoverkamp off the hook.

By then, it was snowing hard, but guides pointed out the mountain route to Switzerland. However, the trail ended and, uncertain of the next step, a disagreement flared. Two other evaders "thought they knew better and left us," Hoverkamp stated in his escape and evasion report. Hoverkamp and his crew mate broke into a garage to rest. By now Hoverkamp had just two Benzedrine tablets left. He split

them in half and saw that each man had some before they set off at 2 a.m. Hours later they approached an illuminated farmhouse that turned out to be the Swiss frontier post. "We were given food and [a] lot [of] chocolate," recalled Hoverkamp.

ON THE MOVE

The bomber offensive intensified in 1944 as the planned date for the invasion of Normandy approached.

That's when Hincewicz bailed out over occupied Europe. "I kept my walking shoes, my GI shoes, tied to my parachute harness," he told a Pennsylvania newspaper, the *Dillsburg Banner*, in a 2009

interview. Unsure whether he was still over Germany, Hincewicz did not open the parachute until he was in cloud cover and near the ground. He was in Belgium. He landed near two women drawing water at a well. "One of them pulled up a bucket of water from the well and started washing the blood off me," he said. The women gave him old clothes and gestured for him to move away. Hincewicz found a wayside chapel overgrown with weeds and hid there. Hours later he heard noises. A teenager and three or four other children on bicycles had come to fetch him—bringing a spare bicycle.

Far worse was the situation of 1st Lt. Henry C. Woodrum, who bailed out over Paris on May 28, 1944.

Woodrum was flying his 35th mission as pilot of a B-26 Marauder. His mission was part of the last crucial step before D-Day: destroying Seine River bridges to prevent the Germans from easily reinforcing the Normandy beachhead areas. Confident of their precision bombing, the USAAF held off on these last attacks for the days leading up to the invasion in order to deprive the Germans of time to rebuild. However, executing the attacks demanded low-level bomb runs for the accuracy required to drop the bridges. Woodrum's B-26 was hit by anti-aircraft fire.

Woodrum parachuted onto the roof of a house in Paris. German soldiers began a door-to-door search for him, but he posed as a house painter and eluded them. Fortunately, he was then sheltered by the Resistance. Woodrum avoided capture until the Allies liberated Paris on Aug. 25, 1944.

Meanwhile, conditions for the evaders changed as Resistance members anticipated the June 6, 1944, invasion. Hincewicz became Pawel Hinewie,



Mademoiselle Sainson, a Resistance helper, took two Americans for a walk. When they ran into Italian soldiers, she asked them to pose for pictures with the group. They did, assuming the

Americans were French.

traveling Polish journalist, according to his forged passport. German troops were suddenly on high alert. Hincewicz had been with one Belgian family for several weeks. Then he was moved every few days by the Resistance. One of the last stops was a stately manor house where the Resistance was hiding other downed airmen. Hincewicz bunked in the stables with three young enlisted men.

"One morning I was awakened by noise—a lot of shouting. I glanced out the door and there was a German military unit that was in the process of routing out the Americans. The three kids looked at me and I told them to follow. Those kids stayed with me and then the shooting started."

The Germans were part of a retreating unit. Hincewicz and the three men managed to escape and rejoin the underground Resistance. Hincewicz finally made his way to British lines and then onward to American lines. Soon he was in newly liberated Paris.

DEBRIEFS

Returning aviators were debriefed by an attaché who met them. Evaders often brought back firsthand sightings of Germans, their vehicles, and installations.

In Britain, returning aircrew were under orders to report to locations such as the US Special Reception Center, then at 63 Brook Street in downtown London. They filled out lengthy forms describing how they used their aid boxes, reports on enemy

forces, assistance from Resistance and so on. Evaders could share no details, even with other flying units.

"Information about your escape or your evasion from capture would be useful to the enemy and a danger to your friends. It is therefore secret," said the standard form they signed during the war. Today, thousands of the declassified reports remain on file with the National Archives in Washington, D.C.

Aviators also commented on how well their escape and evasion lectures both Stateside and in theater had prepared them. Harrison reported there was no point in hiding in fields during the daytime, because the Germans used slow-flying airplanes to search for

downed aviators. "Do not hide in woods at night because Germans use dogs," Harrison also said.

Protecting the Resistance networks was paramount. Intense secrecy was necessary to preserve the escape routes enabled by thousands of French, Belgian, Dutch, Spanish, Greek, and other men and women who guided the airmen through Nazi-occupied Europe.

Even so, those civilians were often caught. Comet Line organizer de Jongh was arrested in January 1943 and sent to Ravensbrück concentration camp. She was liberated in April 1945. According to Britain's *Independent* newpaper, "Of the Comet Line helpers who fell into German hands, 23 were executed, while another 133 died in concentration camps or as a result of their incarceration."

Yet their success was impressive. More than 3,000 US and UK airmen were returned from occupied Europe alone. Although aircrew that had been helped by the Resistance were usually taken off flying status—if they were shot down again and captured, the Germans could exploit their knowledge of the escape network—some, like Yeager, went on to fight again.

Hincewicz rejoined the Air Force in 1948, serving on B-29s and then in intelligence until retiring in 1970. Decades later, he summed up the experience in a letter to Richard Hansen, a gunner on the same B-24.

"The next six months were stressful, but I learned a lot, which helped me in my personal and professional life," Hincewicz wrote. "I still owe a lot to the people in the underground, which I was never able to repay."

Rebecca Grant is president of IRIS Independent Research. Her most recent article for Air Force Magazine was "The Reagan Buildup" in the September issue.