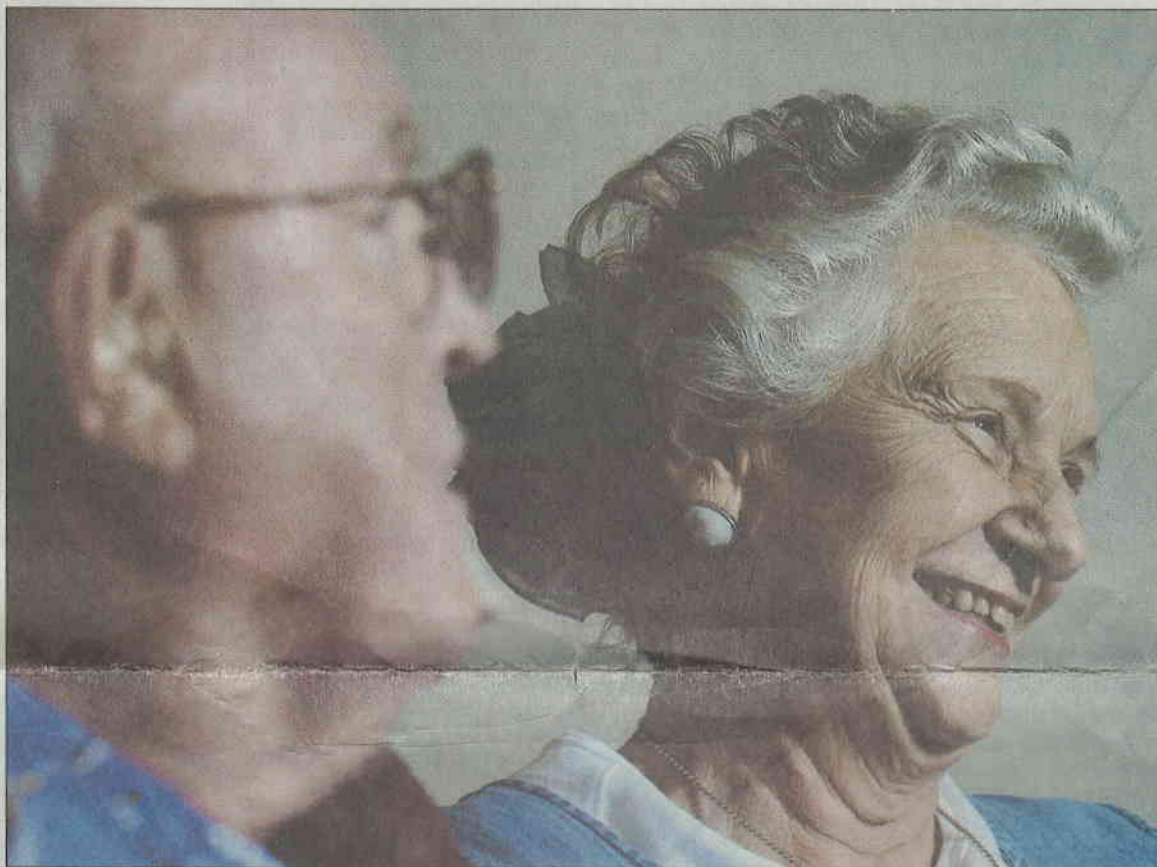


# FRIENDS & ALLIES

Allied airmen shot down over western Europe in World War II, and the people on the ground who helped them, gather in New Orleans to give thanks and swap war stories.



STAFF PHOTO BY TED JACKSON; AP FILE PHOTO (ABOVE)

Richard Smith, left, was shot down over enemy territory during World War II and was helped to safety by people like Yvonne Daley-Brusselmans, right. They are among the 165 people who are in New Orleans this weekend for a reunion.

By Lynne Jensen  
Staff writer

Their lives were brought together by improbable accidents of war: Allied airmen who parachuted out of burning planes over western Europe and the French and Belgian families who defied the Nazi occupation and risked execution to give the men shelter.

Almost as improbable as those wartime encounters, airmen and rescuers alike found themselves reunited in the past few days in a downtown New Orleans hotel, swapping stories.



Yvonne Brusselmans, shown with her mother, Anne, helped harbor Allied airmen who found themselves behind enemy lines during World War II. One of Anne Brusselmans' duties was to interrogate soldiers and sniff out spies.

Richard Smith, an 84-year-old veteran from Battle Lake, Minn., was piloting a B-17 bomber about 50 miles north of Paris when the aircraft was shot down on Dec. 30, 1943, and he and his crew of nine bailed out.

After parachuting to the ground, "I was able to get up and run," Smith said, regaling a handful of the 165 gathered for the reunion of a group called the U.S. Air Forces Escape and Evasion Society.

The first person he encountered, Smith said, was "an old Frenchman with two oxen and

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# Children discover wartime secret

**ALLIES**, from B-1

a plow. He pointed one way and said 'comrade' and he pointed the other way and said 'Allemands' (Germans). Well I didn't know the meaning of 'Allemands,' but I could understand 'comrade.'

Smith ran in the direction the farmer indicated and fetched up in a forest about a half-mile away. There he hid, waiting for dark. In due course, "Three young Frenchmen came up, and each had a handgun and sack of clothes. And I became a civilian right there."

Smith slipped on the clothing and was moved several times into small safe houses, staying until people living around the houses "got curious," Smith said.

## Path to freedom

After two weeks on the run, Smith arrived in Paris, where he was taken in by French citizens and "a dear little old English lady who didn't get out of Paris in time."

"She gave us some tea," he said. "Then she made a phone call and said, 'Go out the door, turn right, go down to the Arc de Triumph and you'll see a man with newspaper in his side pocket, and so you will follow him, you on one side of the street and him on the other.'"

The man with the newspaper led Smith to the doorway of a safe haven where Smith and a fellow American airman hid for two weeks.

"Then one morning, the best-looking young French girl you ever saw in your life came into my bedroom and shook me and said, 'You're leaving today.'"

Smith was put on a train and told to follow "a young lady walking down the middle aisle of the train with a leather trench coat on and knee-high rubber boots," he said. When he rose from his seat to follow her, to

"After nightfall, 25 of us met in a house in this little town," Smith said. "We were given instructions to walk single-file with one hand on one another's shoulders so that we would not get separated. We marched through barnyards and pig sties to lose the scent of any dogs that were patrolling."

At midnight, the group came to a "pretty good-sized cliff" then entered a cave where they saw a blinking blue light. Soon, rowboats, one packed with clothes and medicine, came into the cave and the Americans were taken to a waiting Royal Navy gunboat and on to Portsmouth, England.

## Close encounter

Perhaps the most vivid detail of Smith's whole ordeal was captured in a split-second vignette about the very outset of his adventure:

"I'm going down, and I go through this cloud," Smith said, recalling his descent by parachute. "I pull the ripcord and I'm hanging there at about 4,000 feet and I hear this (enemy) airplane coming, and this guy tips up on the wing and I thought, 'You dirty bugger, you're not going to shoot me hanging from this parachute are you?' And he comes pretty close and I could see his face and with his left hand he waved and I thought, 'Well, what the hell, if you're not mad I'm not mad,' so I waved back."

Laughter filled the room at the Park Plaza Hotel, where the AFEES group is meeting through Sunday morning.

Among them is Yvonne Daley-Brusselmans, a 73-year-old Belgian native who, as a young girl, was part of a family that risked death to shelter and assist Allied servicemen.

"I'm a proud American now," said Daley-Brusselmans, who became a U.S. citizen in 2001 and lives in Dunedin, Fla.

She was 12 when the minister of her family's church in Brussels knocked on their door.

"My mother spoke very good English, and he needed someone to translate some of the British pamphlets that were dropped," Daley-Brusselmans said.

Anne Brusselmans agreed to translate and to shelter a British airman. By the end of the war, her family had sheltered 32 airmen and her mother is cred-

mans and her younger brother, Jacques, who spoke French, were told that the strange-sounding young men staying at their house were Flemish cousins.

Then came the day when, rushing into the basement to take shelter during an air raid, she found a box containing "all of the false papers and pictures of these airmen," she said. "This is a secret. You keep quiet," her mother warned.

One of Anne Brusselmans' duties was to interrogate the airmen, her daughter said. "It was easy to recognize a genuine airman from a mole by getting the crew to corroborate" information, Daley-Brusselmans said.

Daley-Brusselmans recalled the day Germans barged into her family home while a French army soldier was hiding in her brother's bedroom.

"It took me 30 years to get over this German in full uniform with a gun in my face waking me up," she said. Her mother scared off the Germans by telling them her son had typhoid fever, Daley-Brusselmans said.

The first thing the Germans would do when they came into your home was to feel the radio, Daley-Brusselmans said. "If it was warm, they knew you were listening to the BBC," she said. "If you had warning they were coming you would turn it to a German station immediately."

Daley-Brusselmans said her father, Julien, "played a very important role because he kept the facade." He kept his job as a clerk with the gas company in Brussels and he spent his holidays, his vacation, by biking 100 miles to a farm and working for food to feed the airmen, she said.

Daley-Brusselmans has written a book about her family's war experiences called "Belgium Rendez-Vous 127" (127 was her address).

Before her death, Anne Brusselmans appeared on TV shows such as "This Is Your Life" and "To Tell the Truth" and was reunited with many of the Allied airmen she had helped.

Credit should be given to the underground helpers and to the many people "who came from all over the Allied world to give us freedom," Daley-Brusselmans said. "We'd be speaking German

is now able, without a consultant, to find and deal with motorists who ignore scheduled Traffic Court appearances.

Traffic Court Deputy Clerk Judith Ward Dugar, who has been nominated by the judges to succeed longtime Clerk of Court Chris Comarda when he retires next month, said work is under way to try to head off another pileup of open traffic cases.

Speeding up the court process may be one way, she and Ivon said.

"What we're looking at now is shortening the length of time between the arraignment date and a delinquent date," Dugar said.

Motorists now are given a ticket that lists a date by which they must either go in and plead innocent to get a trial date set, or plead guilty and pay their fines. The appearance dates are randomly set by computer, Ivon said. "It could be three weeks, it could be six weeks" from the day the ticket was issued.

Motorists who fail to appear by or before the date on their tickets receive letters telling them their cases are delinquent and a \$100 late fee has been added to the fines they face. That letter, and a second if the first one draws no response, serve notice that the drivers can expect to have the state suspend their driver's licenses if they don't take action.

Dugar and Ivon said there might be fewer no-shows in Traffic Court if drivers could get their cases heard more quickly.

One approach, Dugar said, might involve giving motorists who contest their tickets a notice to appear for trial in the following two weeks and sending out a letter threatening a contempt of court charge two weeks later if they don't show

## Rape suspect surrenders

From staff reports

A 13-year-old boy accused of raping an 8-year-old boy Wednesday turned himself in to police Friday, the New Orleans Police Department said.

Robert Laird, 13, of New Orleans, surrendered, accompanied by his mother, said Sgt. Paul Accardo, department



## ALLIES, from B-1

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Smith was put on a train and told to follow "a young lady walking down the middle aisle of the train with a leather trench coat on and knee-high rubber boots," he said. When he rose from his seat to follow her, to his surprise, so did six strangers. She took the seven men to her mother's house on the Atlantic coast, where the soldiers piled into one bedroom. Two days later they got word that the British were coming.

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Anne Brusselmans agreed to translate and to shelter a British airman. By the end of the war, her family had sheltered 32 airmen and her mother is credited with helping more than 130 Allied servicemen in various ways, her daughter said.

### Secret uncovered

For a while, Daley-Brussel-

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Lynne Jensen can be reached at ljensen@timespicayune.com or (504) 826-3310.

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An arrest warrant for aggravated rape had been obtained by Child Abuse Detective Antoniu Charles.