

Escape Over The Pyrenees

from Catherine Ramognino
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ESCAPE & EVASION REPORT OF GILBERT RAMOGNINO, FRENCH RESISTANCE FIGHTER AND ESCAPE HELPER

This report is written in Gilbert Ramognino's own words in somewhat broken English and punctuation.

PARIS March the 22nd 1946

From Lieutenant RAMOGNINO Gilbert
2e Commando Parachutistes de France

To:
Ministere de la Guerre
Services du Colonel de BOISSOUDY
231 Boulevard Saint Germain, PARIS
and
Escape and Evasion Service
Hotel Majestic
19 Avenue Kleber, PARIS

Sirs,

The 20th of December 1943, after having been working for my underground "reseau" (network) for three years, the Gestapo being a bit too much on my trail, I decided to join the French Free Forces. I was sent to TOULOUSE, to the local underground forces, represented by "CHARLIE" and police Inspector KELLER, who asked me to wait a few weeks in the town before crossing the Pyrenees – time necessary to group a few allied airmen they intended to try to send to Spain. This request was made because of my knowledge of the English language, as none of the airmen could speak any French.

The 20th of January 1944, I was ordered to get a ticket for a station at ST LAURENT de l'EST (LAURENT DE NESTE), a small village after the more important station of MONTREJAULT (MONTREJEAU). I was instructed that 6 allied airmen would be introduced to me at the TOULOUSE station itself.

In the waiting hall of the station of TOULOUSE on the 20th of January 1944 at about 14h00, my friends showed me 4 groups of 2 chaps whom I had to convoy. I found out afterwards that 2 of them were Dutch civilians, who could speak fluent English and very little French.

We all went separately on the platform, but learned that our train was 3 hours late. During those 3 hours I had to navigate from one group to another to explain the delay, and interfere when the very talkative French people of the Toulouse region wanted to start a conversation with members of the group, which would have been rather awkward and dangerous. Useless to say that those 3 hours seemed rather long to all of us, as the German and French Gestapo, and Gendarmes were rather numerous on the platform. It was the time of forced labor for French youngsters, and our allied friends were rather athletic looking and had mostly weird attire given to them by French peasants where the airmen had fallen.

The train came at last, and then another problem started because it was impossible to put my 8 chaps in the same compartment where 3 French people were already there. I told my friends of escape to pretend to sleep to avoid any questioning. Anyway, at the third stop I could manage to have them all in the same compartment after the 3 Frenchmen got off. Now we only had to rely on our luck to not be inspected by the German police. We decided in case it should occur, if there were only 2 of them, to get rid of them. But everything went smoothly. No Jerries came.

At St. Laurent de l'Est there was no station control, but the car that was supposed to be waiting for us, to take us to the foot of the mountains, was absent. I decided it was impossible to wait in the station (which was very modest in importance) with a group of men like us which would surely have attracted attention. I took the men to a nearby field and asked them to wait and to lie down in the snow, as we had the bad luck to have a brilliant moonlit night. During the next 2 hours, I went to and fro, from the field to the station until at last the car came.

The story is nearly ended. We started to walk with our guide for 3 days and nights, and after a rather very hard journey, very often in 2 feet of snow, going up to nearly 6,000 feet, we touched Spain at a village called OST or BOSOST.

From there we were duly accompanied by “carabineros” and taken to Viella, Lerida.

I parted from my friends in Lerida, the American airmen being called by their consul in Madrid, and I was myself (having been declared being British to the Spanish police) called to Barcelona by Mr. WINKFIELD, of the British Consul, who gave me a British Passport for Madrid and Gibraltar – from there I was flown to Algiers, where I enlisted in the French paratroops.

I had the joy to travel from Madrid to Gibraltar in the same train as my American comrades, and from there I lost sight of them.

Names of the American Airmen:

Lieutenant (Reuben H.) ECKART (Eckhardt)

Sergeant (Russell) JEVONS

Snd Lieutenant Glen Mc Cabe, Route Mt Pleasant, IOWA

Sergeant Arthur K. ENDERS Box 362, Globe, Arizona

Sergeant Joseph (BALEAH) – Left to the care of a French the second day of the Journey in the mountains (he was exhausted). Mc Cabe later told me in Gibraltar that he had reached Spain safely in another convoy.

Name of the British airman: BRIGHT, Tom (Thomas) Flight Sergeant 105
Varley Road, West Ham, London E.

Names of the Dutch Civilians: (Rene de Vries, and Kornelis Ydoma or Jdoma)

I must mention that Glen Mc Cabe and Enders were my closest friends during the trip. I was known only to them by the name of GILBERT.

Signed,
Gilbert Ramognino