

Continuation and Results

5.1. Across the border: Belgian escape lines

Once Allied airmen had crossed the Dutch border into Belgium, they generally still had far to go before reaching their airbases. The next leg of their journey to freedom would usually take from several weeks to months. Traveling through Belgium and France, airmen almost always had to face crossing the inhospitable Pyrenees mountains, usually with the help of local *passeurs* who were familiar with the area. In several cases, removal of airmen directly from the French coast had been possible because, until the autumn of 1942, some French territory had still not been occupied by the Germans. In this free region of France, the reins of the Vichy government were in the hands of Marshal Pétain, an elderly commander who kept his nose turned toward the scent of German power. However, during the first two and one-half years after France's capitulation, Vichy-France had remained somewhat autonomous, thus allowing 'pilot helpers' some room to operate. However, as a result of this situation, France had gained an extra border called the 'demarcation line' which divided occupied from unoccupied territory. Anyone traveling through the southeastern part of France had to pass this border. However, by traveling via Bordeaux and Bayonne to Biarritz, the demarcation line could be avoided, although this required that one spend somewhat more time in occupied territory. On 11 November 1942, Hitler's troops took further control, occupying the remainder of France.

Diverting to Switzerland provided little advantage to those military men hoping to continue waging war against the Germans because the country was surrounded by nations hostile to the Allies. Officially, military personnel belonging to a nation waging war against the Germans were forbidden to depart once in Switzerland because the Swiss government was attempting to remain neutral throughout World War II. Estimations suggest that no more than twenty to twenty-five Allied airmen had been able to reach this mountain haven from The Netherlands¹.

Other refugees traveled from France over the Pyrenees to the Iberian peninsula. The passage through this mountainous region appeared truly to resemble a long and drawn out battle for anyone attempting it. For hours and sometimes even for days without rest the travelers were forced to scale the snowy mountainous slopes and follow narrow paths, with the risk of getting lost without the help of a trained guide. In addition, there was always the constant danger of being seen by German (*Feldgendarmes*), French (*Gendarmerie*) and Spanish (*Guardia Civil*) gendarmes patrolling the mountains. In contrast to many bitterly disappointed refugees who, after finally completing a grueling journey into Spain, were forced to remain months in Camp 'Miranda de

Ebro', Allied military personnel were usually allowed to go directly to England after crossing the Pyrenees. The Allies had drawn up an agreement with the Spanish government permitting them quickly to liberate Allied personnel via Gibraltar.

Allied crewmen who had crossed the Dutch-Belgian border found themselves once again being helped by individuals affiliated with escape lines in Belgium and France. In general, for two reasons, these escape lines had been established much earlier than those in The Netherlands. First, during World War I, the Belgians had already gained experience with escape lines. During the 1920s and 1930s stories about several famous organizers of escape lines, such as Edith Cavell who had been executed, were strongly romanticized, thus arousing people with incredible inspiration from what they had read². In addition, other individuals who had set up 'pilot' escape lines as early as World War I had tactical experience in planning organized escapes³. Second, in both Belgium and France, after the capitulation in May and June 1940, a number of British soldiers had been stranded on the mainland and needed immediate help while attempting to stay out of German hands. One should note that in both Belgium and France, where many 'pilot-help' lines were run by Belgians, underground activity was focused along several major escape routes, in strong contrast with The Netherlands where escape lines could be characterized as a hodge-podge of small criss-crossing routes. In the following overview of French and Belgian escape routes, a number of small escape lines through which relatively few people passed will not be discussed. Escape lines such as 'Luc-Marc', 'Zéro' and 'Benoît' were primarily used to send messages and gathered intelligence to London from occupied territory. After February 1944, the Zéro Line had been actively involved in transporting Allied crewmen from The Netherlands to Lieges or Brussels.⁴ Airmen were passed on to these groups from, e.g., Henri Beckers who was a *passeur* within the Vrij Group and from Sas van Gent. In addition, some groups such as the 'Nanson' and 'Sabot' Groups were generally specialized in moving Belgians and therefore are not relevant for the history of 'pilot help' in The Netherlands⁵. In France, there had been several cases of crewmen being picked up by airplane; only a few of the fliers who had been assisted in The Netherlands had been able to make use of such a possibility.

5.1.1. *Luc-Marc Line*

The Dutch Smeets/Renkin Group from Eijdsden had links with the Belgian group called 'Luc' that had been established in September 1940 by G. Leclercq (civil servant in the Belgian Ministry of Justice), by A. Cauvin (lawyer and film maker) and by Henri Bernard (professional military officer). The group had been named after Leclercq's son who was killed in May 1940. This group was concerned with espionage, sabotage and assisting various categories of *Engelandvaarders*. Sometime during 1941, the Luc Group was able to link up with an escape line running via Limoux in unoccupied France to Spain. At the end of 1941, the three organizers were forced to flee south when Belgium became too hot under their feet. P. Depreter assumed responsibility for the group until he was detained by the Germans in October 1942. His successor curtailed the group's activities to gathering intelligence.

5.1.2. *Comet Line*

A large number of airmen aided in The Netherlands found themselves moving along the Belgian Comet Line which was the most famous of all escape lines in Western Europe during World War II.⁶ This line had been established in the summer of 1942 thanks to the efforts of the 25-year-old Belgian nurse Andrée ('Dédée') De Jongh and her father Frédéric ('Monsieur Moreau', 'De Ridder', 'Paul', 'Kiki') who was a school principal in Schaerbeek. Dédée De Jongh was aware that, after the rapid occupation of Western Europe by German forces following May/June 1940, a

number of British soldiers had been forced underground in Belgium to avoid capture by German authorities, thus becoming POWs. She and her father were in agreement that this situation, which not only brought danger but also created problems for feeding and clothing the airmen, was not sustainable. An escape route had to be created. Dédée asked Arnold Deppé, a Belgian radio operator who knew southern France well, to scout around for a suitable route up to the Spanish border. After finding a number of primary transit addresses, he set up an escape line extending from Dédée's house in Brussels through Paris, Bordeaux, Dax, and St. Jean-de-Luz on to San Sebastian located on the Spanish side of the Pyrenees mountain range. In June 1941, Dédée and Deppé set out along this route with eleven Belgians in tow. On their second trip, while they were moving eight Belgians and one Scotsman to the south, Deppé was arrested together with six Belgians in the group during a general control of passengers at the train station in Lille. Dédée continued on alone, taking the Scotsman and two remaining Belgians to the British consulate in Bilbao. At first the consulate reacted with caution, dumbfounded that a 25-year-old nurse could bring such a perilous journey to completion.

On 17 October 1941, Dédée once again appeared at the consulate, this time with two Scottish military men. From that moment on, the British authorities supplied Dédée with funds to cover the costs of train tickets and payment for the *passeurs* who accompanied Allied military men through the Pyrenees. However, the British stipulated that, in the future, Dédée should only move airmen to Spain. Her contact would be Michael J. Creswell (code name 'Monday') who was employed by MI9 and stationed at the British Embassy in Madrid. He was responsible for transporting crewmen who successfully reached the embassy onward to England via Gibraltar. The line was named 'Postman' after the code name that Dédée had given herself. Later this escape line would be renamed the 'Comet' Line because of the speed at which people were transported.

At the end of 1941, Dédée was forced to flee Belgium, seeking safety for herself. Responsibility for leading the Comet Line was given to the 36-year-old Jean ('Nemo', 'Kas') Baron Greindl. He divided Belgium into various districts each having a regional urban center such as Gent, Namur, Lieges and Hasselt where airmen from the surrounding areas could be brought together for further transportation. Dédée remained in France where she continued her work on the escape line.

One important helper in the Comet Line had been Micheline ('Michou') Dumon who, together with her sister Andrée ('Nadine'), was quite actively involved. In southern France, a Belgian woman named Elvire ('Tante Go') De Greef who was a pre-war friend of Deppé played a major role in the group. Because her husband was a translator for the German *Kommandantur* in Anglet near Bayonne, he was able to get his hands on various types of German identity papers, passes and rubber stamps.

In 1943, the Germans dealt a heavy blow to the Comet Line after it had been infiltrated. On 15 January 1943, Dédée was detained by the German authorities at the Spanish border while accompanying three airmen. It was her nineteenth trip across the Pyrenees! Thereafter, more than 100 people were arrested, including 'Nemo' Baron Greindl. Jean-François ('Franco') Nothomb then assumed leadership of the Comet Line.

By a cruel twist of fate, Baron Greindl was killed on 7 September 1943 when the Allies bombed the barracks at Etterbeek where he was incarcerated.⁷ In June 1943, Dédée's father Frédéric was arrested after being fingered by the Belgian traitor Jacques ('Jean Masson', 'Pierre Boulain') Desoubrie from Tourcoing in northern France. Thereafter, responsibility for the Comet Line was divided over three sections. Yvon Michiels, Jacques Le Grelle and Nothomb each became responsible for one section, i.e., Belgium, northern France and southern France, respectively. In

January 1944, there was a new wave of arrests among the Comet Line helpers, and Nothomb and Le Grelle were detained. Once again the traitor 'Jean Masson' Desoubrie was guilty.

In spite of various major set-backs, the Comet Line remained functional until the Allies had liberated the entire region in which it had been operational. In total, the lives of 776 people had been saved via this escape line; of this number, 288 were Allied airmen who had actually been helped to cross the Pyrenees.⁸ Approximately 2,000 people in Belgium, France and Spain had been involved with the Comet Line.⁹ Almost all of these people were young Belgians; the Comet Line included very few helpers over the age of 30 years and – even in France – it was almost entirely run by Belgians. More than 800 participants had been arrested for their underground activities and, of these individuals, more than 150 did not live to see the end of the war.¹⁰ Among the Comet Line helpers, twenty-three people including Frédéric De Jongh were executed by firing squad and 133 died in concentration camps.¹¹ Dédée survived Ravensbrück, a concentration camp for women.

Mathilde A.E. Verspyck, born in 1908 in Semarang, Indonesia, had also been involved with Comet Line activities in Brussels. She had already been arrested in November 1941 but was released less than one year later. Fearlessly she resumed her underground activities but on 15 November 1943 once again found herself in the St. Gilles prison in Brussels. She was released again for the second time but on 12 April 1944 was imprisoned for the third time. Via the prison in Scheveningen and thereafter the prison camp in Vught, she was sent to the women's concentration camp at Ravensbrück where she died on 11 February 1945. Her father, who had also been taken prisoner, survived the war.

An important link in the Comet Line for Dutch 'pilot helpers' was Anne Brusselmans who resided in Brussels.¹² Soon after Western Europe had fallen into German hands, both she and her husband, parents of two young children, had been quickly recruited by their minister Vicar Schyns who was involved in helping British soldiers stranded in Belgium. As her mother was British, Anne had perfect command of the English language. After some time had passed, Vicar Schyns again approached the Brusselmans. This time he was accompanied by Major Gierse who asked if they would be willing to open their home to Allied airmen shot down over The Netherlands or Belgium. Anne felt at home with the Dutch because she had lived in The Hague as a young child. In 1943, she came into contact with Ernest Van Moorleghem whose activities have already been discussed in Section 3.7. Furthermore, she made contact with the Dutch-Paris Line through Benno Nijkerk and Hans Wisbrun who worked in Brussels. Through her home passed fliers who were sent down the line from Meppel, Hoogeveen, Twente, Utrecht and regions of Den Bosch and Dutch Limburg. Anne Brusselmans helped tens of Allied crewmen reach the south. In addition, during the last weeks of occupation before Belgium was liberated, Anne had hidden a large number of fliers while waiting for the Allied front to arrive.¹³

5.1.3. Eva Line

The Eva Line, which had been named after the English abbreviation for 'evasion', came into being after July 1943.¹⁴ An important link in its chain was around Lanaken where airmen were transferred from the Eva to the Comet Line. For example, Ernest Van Moorleghem who was a member of this group maintained contact with the Smit-Van der Heijden Group. Van Moorleghem was detained on 15 November 1943 and a little over one year later, at the age of 29 years, he was executed by firing squad in Benk near Bayreuth. After Van Moorleghem's arrest, Gaston Matthys became responsible for keeping contact between the Comet and Eva Lines. Several months later, however, it was decided that crewmen would no longer be sent along the Comet Line but rather be handed over to the so-called KLM Line. This decision proved to be fatal as the KLM Line was merely a

ploy organized by the *V-Mann* René van Muylem. Of the eighty-six airmen who had been brought into contact with the Eva Line, thirty-seven had rapidly fallen into German hands.

5.2. Dutch escape lines on foreign soil

5.2.1. *Dutch-Paris Line*

The Dutch-Paris Line had been run by Johan Hendrik ('Jean') Weidner born in 1912.¹⁵ His father was a preacher for the Church of the Seventh Day Adventist, first in The Netherlands, then in Switzerland and France. While in France, Jean's father taught the classic languages at the Seventh Day Adventist seminary in Collonges located just south of Geneva. After the French had been defeated in June 1940, Jean Weidner who was then himself working in a Seventh Day Adventist office in Paris fled towards the south. When it became apparent that it would be impossible for him to leave the country, he decided to stay and set up a textile shop in Lyon. Soon thereafter, with the support of the Frenchman named Maurice Jacquet who was the local consul for The Netherlands in Vichy-France, Jean began helping imprisoned Dutch refugees, especially Jews.

During the summer of 1942, the De Jong-Koster family approached Weidner, requesting that he take them secretly across the French-Swiss border. As already described in Section 3.7, with the help of the Marechaussee in Hilvarenbeek the family could escape to Brussels, thus making a contact which would be of great importance to the *passeurs* in Hilvarenbeek. Weidner accompanied the Jewish couple to the border region with which he had been familiar since his youth. He thought that he knew each mountain path like the back of his hand although he had not returned to this region in 10 years and discovered that the surroundings had changed tremendously. Thus the trio lost their way, roaming the area for ten hours. They had been totally unprepared for such a severe journey, moving along in the dark along terrifying steep mountain cliffs. Finally the group managed to cross the border successfully but they were almost shoeless and their hands were badly damaged. Only the conviction that giving up would have such serious consequences had kept their courage alive to continue on their way bravely.

In spite of the difficulties experienced on this journey, Jean Weidner decided to help other Jews cross the French-Swiss border. In order to do this, he had established a subsidiary of his textile shop in Annecy located near Collonges which he knew so well. After Nico Gazan and his wife had safely reached Switzerland with Weidner's help, they informed W.A. Visser 't Hoofd, a Dutchman who was Secretary General for the World Council of Churches in Geneva about his activities. As a result, Visser 't Hoofd invited Weidner to come to Switzerland illegally to confer with him and J.B.B. Bosch van Rosenthal who was the Dutch envoy in Bern. Both men pledged to finance Weidner so that he could continue helping refugees.

The Dutchman named Benjamin Maurits ('Benno') Nijkerk was partner in a Amsterdam wholesale house in metals with a subsidiary in Brussels. During the summer of 1940, he together with several other Dutchmen living in Belgium began helping Dutch and Belgian Jews escape to France. As the persecution of Jews escalated, also in Vichy-France, Nijkerk began asking himself if he should not attempt to move Jews further to either Switzerland or Spain. Thus in the autumn of 1942, soon after Weidner had made contact with Visser 't Hoofd and Bosch in Switzerland, 'Benno' Nijkerk sought out Weidner, requesting that he also explore the possibilities for creating an escape line into Spain. At the end of 1942, Weidner traveled to Toulouse where he met the French doctor named Gabriël Nahas whom he found willing to organize a route through the Pyrenees. In January 1944, the first three Allied airmen traveled this route.¹⁶ Thus escape lines running from Brussels both to Spain and to Switzerland resulted from the contact made between Nijkerk and Weidner

in the autumn of 1942. This line was further extended northward to The Netherlands thanks to David ('Vermaas') Verloop who had studied law. Verloop had been one of the students from Utrecht who had taken part in the '*Kindercomité*' (Children's Committee). This group had rescued Jewish children who had been gathered together in the Jewish Theater in Amsterdam by hiding them in foster families. Together with Frits Iordens and Anne Maclaine Pont who was an art history student in Utrecht, Verloop had been slowly drawn into helping airmen.¹⁷

In June 1943, when Verloop went to Brussels to study economy, he came into contact with Nijkerk and other members of the Dutch-Paris Line. He became an important link in Brussels where he supplied airmen, Jews and other *Engelandvaarders* with forged identity papers that were in part falsified by members of the student resistance in Utrecht. Two other members of student underground movements working as *passeur* at the Dutch-Belgian border were the medical students named Piet ('Frits') Henry from Utrecht and Willy ('Emile') Hijmans¹⁸ from Leiden. This escape line from The Netherlands to Brussels went through Roosendaal where the *passeur* and his group would board the steam tram traveling to the border. Before the final stop where people were always strictly checked, the *passeur* and his party would disembark, making a wide girth around Putten before dispersing to cross the border separately. Once safely in Belgium, the band of men would re-group, traveling first by tram to Antwerp and then by train to Brussels. There the *passeur* would hand his group of refugees over to Verloop.

Weidner's organization thus began calling themselves Dutch-Paris, although not all of its members knew the line by this name. Some people in The Netherlands who were familiar with Weidner's organization spoke of the 'Preacher's Line' to differentiate it from the 'General's Line' and the 'Swiss Road B' which led to Major General A.G. van Tricht who was the Dutch Military Attaché in Bern.

Hans ('Felix') Wisbrun, owner of a textile shop in The Hague, traveled with his refugees by night train to Paris. Herman Laatsman who was in charge of Weidner's organization in Paris had been associated with the Dutch consulate in Paris in the 1930s.

Using other *passeurs*, the journey to freedom continued on to Toulouse where the leadership on the line was in the hands of Salomon ('Moen') Chait, a wood trader from Rotterdam and son of a rabbi. Chait together with Weidner and Jacques Rens were the trio leading the organization. Antoon Aarts, a civil servant at the Dutch Consulate, also fulfilled an important role. He was supported by the abbot Johannes Bernardus aan de Stegge who in the 1930s had been the spiritual caregiver for Dutch and Belgian immigrants in the archdiocese Toulouse.¹⁹ Maurice Jacquet was responsible for Lyon.

The Dutch-Paris Line had ca. 300 members. Although the Dutch-Paris route mainly crossed through Belgian and French territory, many of Weidner's helpers were Dutch nationals such as David Verloop, Paul van Cleeff, Herman Laatsman, Jacques Rens, Salomon Chait, Maurice Lejeune, Paul Veerman, Madelon Verstijnen, Guillemette Claudine Daendels and Abbot Aan de Stegge. It is noteworthy that various members of the Dutch-Paris Line were Jewish such as Chait, Nijkerk, Rens and Veerman.

One of the couriers on the Dutch-Paris Line was Suzy Kraay who had fled to Paris from The Netherlands in October 1942. In the summer of 1943, when French ground also became too hot under her feet, Kraay attempted reaching England via the Pyrenees. She was captured, nevertheless, and imprisoned in Gurs. However, after several months, Weidner's organization was able to free her; she thereafter continued working for Weidner and his associates. At the beginning of February

1944, Kraay was again arrested, this time in Paris. Unfortunately when detained she was carrying a book containing the names of members of the Dutch-Paris Line. After first standing her ground during the harsh treatment that she received from her interrogators, she finally broke down, giving the addresses and hideouts of many of Weidner's associates. Shortly thereafter she was sent to the concentration camp for women at Ravensbrück.

As a result of Suzy Kraay's arrest and interrogation, 150 of the 300 members of Weidner's group were arrested; more than forty of these people under arrest later died in concentration camps. Among them were Laatsman, Verloop, Iordens, and Weidner's sister Gabrielle who from the very beginning had been supportive of her brother's underground activities from the sidelines. After his arrest, David Verloop threw himself to his death from the gallery of the Brussels prison 'St. Gillis' so that others could place the blame of 'guilt' upon his shoulders during their interrogation, thus saving their own necks. Iordens was arrested while passing through Hasselt in the company of several airmen. When attempting to flee, he ran into a dead-end street where he was cornered and shot to death. Thus, at the beginning of March 1944, the lives of two young students from Utrecht ended. After Laatsman's arrest, his position within the line was assumed by J.C.J. Baron Brantsen who during the mobilization in 1939-1940 and in May 1940 had maintained contact with the French authorities from his home in Paris on behalf of the Dutch Secret Service GS III.

Weidner temporarily went into exile in neutral Switzerland which, in spite of loud diplomatic protest from the German authorities, did not extradite him. Shortly thereafter, in April 1944, he was asked by the Dutch government to expedite from occupied territory the 'ex-filtration' of G.J. van Heuven Goedhart, publisher of the underground newspaper *Het Parool*. At the same time, it became necessary that Weidner himself travel to London, via the Pyrenees, to meet with the Dutch government-in-exile. Van Heuven Goedhart completed his escape successfully and later became Minister of Justice for the Dutch government-in-exile in London. However, on 20 May, Weidner, Rens, Veerman, and Gabriël Nahas who was responsible for organizing the *passeurs* in the Pyrenees were arrested in Toulouse. Nahas managed to escape directly upon arrest and Veerman quickly followed suit. Later Weidner and Rens escaped with the help of a prison guard. Upon escape, the men sought shelter at the house of Abbot Aan de Stegge. There they encountered Bob van der Stok, Wim ('Rudy') Schreinemachers who worked for the *BI* and Father Bleys who were also in hiding while making plans to flee to Switzerland.²⁰ On 2 June 1944, Weidner and Rens managed to reach Geneva but there was little reason to rejoice when more arrests followed. Veerman was arrested in Belgium and transported to a concentration camp in Germany. Although he managed to escape, he was again arrested just short of the Swiss border. 'Benno' Nijkerk and others were arrested in Paris. Brantsen was arrested on 10 July 1944 and transported on 21 August from Compiègne to Buchenwald in the last group of prisoners to be deported before the liberation of France; it was there that he died on 9 December 1944. In spite of two waves of arrests within the organization, the Dutch-Paris Line continued functioning until France had been liberated. Among the many individuals who did not return home after Germany's capitulation were Weidner's sister Gabrielle who died in Frankfurt-an-der-Oder shortly after the camp had been liberated, and 'Benno' Nijkerk who had been associated with the Dutch-Paris Line from its conception.

In total, the Dutch-Paris Line had provided the means for escape for ca. 1,000 people, among whom were 112 airmen.²¹ Among these numbers were various individuals important to the resistance movement as well as Dutch agents such as P. Dourlein and B. Ubbink who had been arrested as a result of the *Englandspiel* but had escaped from prison in Haaren. After being helped across the Dutch-Belgian border by the Marechaussee Huub Meeuwisse and David Jonkers who belonged to the Smit-Van der Heijden group, they had reached Switzerland and then England

thanks to the Dutch-Paris Line. Upon reaching England, they were able to warn the authorities that tens of Dutch agents had already fallen into German hands because of the '*Spiel*'.

5.2.2. *The Leiden connection*

Karst Smit, who had barely escaped arrest in November 1943 after the Germans had gotten wind of his *passeur* activities in Baarle-Nassau, went into hiding under the protection of the sexton of the *Nieuwe Zuiderkerk*, a Dutch Calvinist church in The Hague. In December 1943 while in hiding he came into contact with several members of the student underground movement in Leiden,²² such as Johanna Elisabeth ('Liesbeth') Boon, Pieter Wibbens and Jan Nauta.

Els Boon was the daughter of G.A. Boon, a liberal member of Parliament (second chamber) who had campaigned strongly against national socialism even before the German invasion of The Netherlands. Thus, in May 1940, Boon fled to England with his wife and son Dick but by chance his daughter Els had not been able to accompany them. As a result, Els Boon remained in The Netherlands, becoming involved with several students in Leiden who were also active in underground movements outside the country. Boon regularly traveled to Brussels, transporting documents as well as people. At the border she was helped by members of the Marechaussee and thus was introduced to Karst Smit. In addition to the border crossing at Baarle-Nassau, these students from Leiden also used the crossings at Goirle and Zundert.

In Brussels, Els Boon passed her responsibilities as courier over to Piet Henry, Victor Johannes Maria Swane or Abraham ('Jan Boets') Baron van Boetzelaer. Swane, a former law student from Leiden, mainly operated from his base in Paris.

By the time Els Boon had contacted Smit, the student resistance group in Leiden had already received a request from the Dutch government-in-exile in London. They were asked to establish an escape route through which they could funnel Dutchmen who in time would be deployed to maintain military authority within the areas of The Netherlands that had been liberated. On behalf of the student group, 'Liesbeth' Boon asked Karst Smit if he would be willing to participate in setting up such a route. Four people would each be responsible for one leg of the route. Boon herself would try to establish the line running from The Netherlands to Brussels, Pieter Wibbens would create the section from Brussels to Paris, Frans Willem Baron Van Hugenhout tot den Berenclauw would regulate the route from Paris to Bordeaux and finally Karst Smit would organize the last part of the line running from Bordeaux to Hendaye in the Pyrenees mountains.

By the autumn of 1943, Vic Swane had already made contact with Christiaan ('Chris') Lindemans in Paris.²³ Lindemans had been nicknamed 'King Kong' after the gigantic gorilla in the Hollywood movie because his stature was quite imposing and, due to a partial paralysis, his gait swaying. Although he was originally from Rotterdam, he spent most of his time during the war in France where in 1940 he had found work and met his wife Gilou Letuppe with whom he would later have two children. It was his wife who got him involved with French escape lines. In the summer of 1942, Chris Lindemans had been in touch with his brother Henk in Rotterdam who was working in the underground movement. As a result of this close contact, people could be moved from The Netherlands into France using the addresses which were familiar to Chris. At the end of 1943, 'King Kong' Lindemans had helped, for example, Kas de Graaf and J.J. Celosse who had been stranded in Paris while escaping to travel further south. Lindemans who had gained much experience with the French escape routes feared not even the devil himself and thus Swane decided to collaborate with him.

At the end of 1943, Lindemans and Swane made contact with Weidner who, striving to maintain high moral standards within his group, refused to have any dealings with Lindemans who was known as being 'trigger happy' and a womanizer.²⁴ However, Weidner did offer some money to the two men as support for their work. Swane, a former student from Leiden, also brought Lindemans into contact with a group of his fellow students still living in The Netherlands where he became known as 'Chris Brand'. It was agreed upon that Lindemans would coach Karst Smit to familiarize him with the trajectory from Bordeaux to Hendaye.

From mid-January 1944, Lindemans and Karst Smit kept constant company and Smit found Lindemans to be rather pleasant – indeed a woman chaser but entertaining enough. During the period in which Smit and Lindemans kept company, however, the giant of a man was deeply depressed about the arrest of his younger brother Henk who was facing the death penalty. During that time, Chris Lindemans gave the impression of verging on a breakdown and fellow resistance workers wanted him to take some time off to rest and regain his strength in a camp maintained by the Belgian resistance group called 'Secret Army' in the Ardennes. Lindemans wanted nothing to do with this plan and felt as if he were being put out of circulation. Thus Karst was asked to keep a constant eye on 'King Kong' so that he could not make any grave errors which might compromise either himself or other members of the resistance group.

On 10 March, Karst Smit and Van Hugenpoth set off with the man from Rotterdam, traveling by train from Brussels to Paris, to begin working on the plans given them by the resistance, i.e., establishment of a new 'pilot' escape line. Upon arrival in Paris, the men went to a small hotel called Hotel Montholon in Rue Montholon where Lindemans hoped to find his wife Gilou who had planned on arriving earlier that morning. Lindemans noticed, however, that the curtains were being used as a signal that something was not in order at the hotel. There had been a raid that night in which various Dutchmen, including Gilou and Vic Swane, had been arrested.

According to Karst Smit, upon hearing this bad news Lindemans paled and began trembling as a reed in the wind. It has generally been assumed that, on 4 March in Brussels, Lindemans had offered his services to the German *Abwehr* as a trade-off to save his brother's life. Smit, however, was convinced that this was not the case; he had been with Lindemans day and night during that period and certainly would have known if 'King Kong' had been in contact with the Germans. Considering Lindemans' reaction upon hearing news of the arrests in Paris, Smit was convinced that the detentions which were blamed on Lindemans' treason could not have been caused by him.

The three men discussed their options. Lindemans and Van Hugenpoth suggested that Karst Smit should return to Brussels in order to warn other members of their group. However, Smit felt that Lindemans was more experienced and should be the person to return to Belgium. Thus it was decided. From Karst Smit's perspective, Lindemans later used this opportunity to approach the Germans – not only to barter for the life of his brother Henk but also for the life of his recently arrested wife.

On the evening of 17 March, Lindemans returned to Paris and went looking for Smit and Van Hugenpoth in a boarding house for artists on the Avenue des Ternes 38 where they had found rooms. It was agreed that they would set off for Bordeaux the next day. The following morning, someone rapped on Smit's door in the same manner that Lindemans was accustomed to doing. This time, however, it was not the jovial man from Rotterdam who stood waiting but rather the German *SD* that stormed through the doorway.

Smit and Van Hugenpoth who had been taken completely by surprise were moved to *SD* headquarters on the Rue des Saussaies. Because Smit pretended that he could not speak German, a man from the Rhine area in Germany who understood some Dutch took over the interrogation. At one point, another *SD* interrogator entered the room, asking "Ist er der Mörder van Kopp?" (Is he Kopp's murderer?) Later Smit learned that 'Kopp' had been the so-called Canadian who had attempted to infiltrate the 'pilot' escape line operating in Hilvarenbeek. The Germans had indeed been well informed. Karst Smit survived several German concentration camps, Vic Swane died of pneumonia in 1944 while in a German prison, and Van Hugenpoth died on 21 November 1944 in a German concentration camp near Württemberg. Lindemans left a trail of treason behind him among the 'pilot helpers' in Brussels and Paris; it has been estimated that 250 people fell victim to his treason. After Smit and Van Hugenpoth had been arrested, Lindemans had continued his treachery for more than six months until – after the liberation of Antwerp – the Allied authorities who were using his services discovered the double role that Lindemans had been playing. He was arrested.²⁵

5.3. Escape lines and MI9 operations

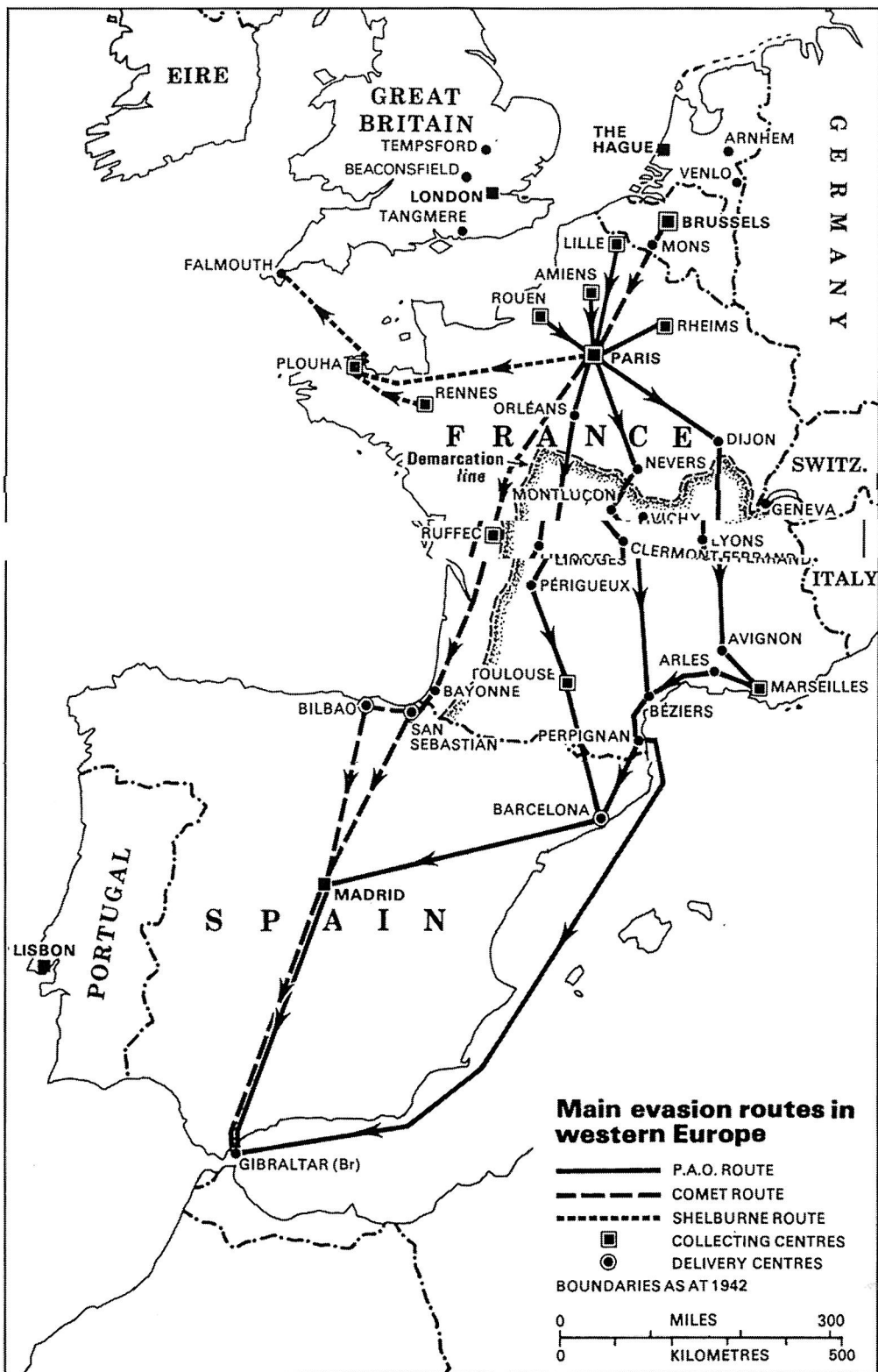
5.3.1. *Pat O'Leary Line*

The Pat O'Leary Line (Map 2) was the first escape line to be established.²⁶ Involved from the beginning was Donald ('Sunday') Darling who manned the advanced post of the MI9 offices on the Iberian peninsula and who, after the capitulation of France, operated under the front of Vice-Consul in Lisbon, seeking contact with the resistance in France.²⁷ It had been two Scotsmen who had organized the escape line within France. Donald Caskie was a cleric in the Church of Scotland who opened his arms to many a refugee coming to his church for seamen in Marseilles. Ian Garrow was a captain in the Seaforth Highlanders, part of the 51st (Highland) Division, and one of the hundreds of British military men who had successfully avoided falling into German hands after the British defeat at Dunkirk. Early in 1941, Garrow set up an escape line to Gibraltar via Lyon, Marseilles, Perpignan and Spain through which marooned British soldiers left to wander around France could escape.

In the autumn of 1941 Garrow came into contact with Albert-Marie Guérisse, a Belgian army doctor from Spa, who had escaped to England after the German success in Western Europe in 1940. He had become an agent of the SOE and was responsible for acts of sabotage in France, working from a British ship. While in the act of committing sabotage in Marseilles, Guérisse had been arrested but managed to escape from the German prison with the help of Garrow. Thereafter London had given Garrow permission to use Guérisse, who used the alias 'Pat O'Leary', for his escape line. In October 1941, Garrow was arrested by the Germans. By that time, however, 250 people, including a number of airmen, had managed to flee using his escape route. The Scotsman himself was later able to escape, fleeing southward.

After Garrow's arrest, Guérisse continued his work, extending the network further northwards to Brussels. He was also able to create two new branches of the Pat O'Leary Line from Paris: Nevers-Clermond-Ferrand-Perpignan and Limoges-Toulouse. In addition, thanks to 'Pat O'Leary', 235 airmen were transported by boat from the beaches of Marseilles and Perpignan to Gibraltar.

On 2 March 1943, Guérisse fell into Germans hands after his escape line had been infiltrated. He survived the dreaded concentration camps at Mauthausen, Natzweiler and Dachau. After his arrest,



Map 2. Pat O'Leary, Comet and Shelburne Lines [with permission from the publisher: from M.R.D. Foot, J.M. Langley, *MI9, The British Secret Service that Fostered Escape and Evasion 1939-1945 and its American Counterpart*, The Bodley Head, London, p. 74].

responsibility for the escape line was assumed by Françoise Dissart, an elderly French woman who had already passed her sixtieth birthday.

In total, ca. 500 Allied airmen returned safely to England thanks to individuals working on the Pat O'Leary Line.²⁸ Among ca. 250 people who had been associated with the Pat O'Leary Line, approximately fifty did not survive the war.²⁹

5.3.2. Burgundy Line

The Burgundy Line was named after Georges Broussine, a Jewish Frenchman whose MI9 code name was 'Burgundy'. 'Burgundy' himself had escaped via the Pat O'Leary Line to Spain. Thereafter, in the spring of 1943, he returned to France as secret agent and established a new line running to Andorra. His associates soon gained a reputation within MI9 for their daring behavior. For example, in Paris they filmed Allied airmen while they mingled with German soldiers. For some time, airmen moving southward on the Comet Line continued the last leg of their journey on the Burgundy Line. In 1943, 150 Allied airmen traveling along this escape route reached Spain.³⁰

5.3.3. Shelburne Line

The Shelburne Line was set up at the end of 1943 but lasted only briefly.³¹ It ran from Paris and Rennes to Plouha in Bretagne. Between January and August 1944, Allied airmen were picked up from the 'Bonaparte' beach and transported by British torpedo boats to England. At the head of this escape line was the French-speaking Canadian Lucien Dumais who had been arrested in 1942 after a raid on Dieppe had failed. He had escaped imprisonment by jumping from the train which was transporting him to a German prison camp. In October 1943, Dumais was flown together with his radio operator, the Canadian Raymond Labrosse, by a Lysander to French territory near Compiègne. Via the Shelburne Line with its ca. 200 associates, 128 Allied crewmen were able to reach safety.

5.3.4. Mary Lindell or Marie-Claire Line

Mary Lindell, Countess of Milleville, was British by birth. During World War I she had worked as a nurse with the French Red Cross.³² After marrying the French Count of Milleville, she had continued living in Paris since 1919. Soon after British troops had been forced to retreat from Western Europe in 1940, she quickly began helping marooned British soldiers. Thanks to her arrogant air – or as the British historian M.R.D. Foot has stated her "air of command that sits naturally on upper-class Englishwomen"³³ – she was frequently able to call the bluff of both German and French authorities. However, in 1941 she was arrested for helping British officers. Thanks to intelligent defense tactics, she was 'only' sentenced to a nine-month term of imprisonment. In November 1941 she was released from prison. The Countess then traveled to London where she arrived in July 1942 and made contact with Langley. She was the first person to be trained by MI9 on how to organize escape lines, although she was of the opinion that, in this regard, they had nothing new to teach her. In the autumn of 1942, she was flown by Lysander to France where, from her base in Ruffec 80 kilometers south of Poitiers, she began creating the Marie-Claire Line. Although shortly after her arrival in France she had been injured in a serious automobile accident, she had still been able to set up an escape line in northern France running via Paris and Ruffec to the Pyrenees. In November 1943, she moved her headquarters to Pau where she was soon arrested.

When the Countess attempted to jump from the train that was transporting her from Biarritz to Paris, she was shot through the back of her head. After surviving surgery in the *Luftwaffe* hospital in Tours, she was kept in solitary confinement for eight months in Dijon before being transported to the concentration camp in Ravensbrück for women. Only a limited number of Allied airmen had escaped to freedom via this route.

After the arrest of 'Marie Claire', 'Marie Odile' the Countess Pauline van St. Venant assumed responsibility for the escape route. Under her 'care' seventy-one Allied airmen were able to escape occupied territory. In the spring of 1944, 'Marie Odile' was arrested and did not survive imprisonment.

5.3.5. Operation Marathon

'Operation Marathon' was a plan conceived by MI9 – to be carried out during the Allied invasion of Western Europe and the months thereafter – to locate stranded Allied airmen who were fleeing from the Germans in France, Belgium and The Netherlands and to re-group them behind enemy lines, especially in North France and the Belgian Ardennes.³⁴ The Belgian named Jean ('John Rutland', 'Jean Thomas' and 'Kazan') de Blommaert de Soye who previously had escaped to England via the Comet Line was made responsible for running the operation within French territory. In the forest of Fréteval near Chateaudun he set up two camps, one British and one American, each with sixty-nine Allied crewmen. Another 100 crewmen had been hidden in two camps near Beauvais and Chantilly. In Belgium the same operation was being carried out by the MI9 agent named Albert ('Daniel Mouton') Ancia and the Belgian resistance fighter named Gaston Matthys. Towards the south in the provinces Luxembourg and Namur six more camps were established to contain ca. 100 Allied crewmen. In spite of the large concentration of people and the ongoing danger of discovery, 'Operation Marathon' was a success. Only one person involved lost his life and four people were taken prisoner.

5.4. The results

5.4.1. Structure of Dutch help for airmen

In general, 'pilot' escape lines in The Netherlands were minor in extent. They lacked the massive structured character of those escape lines in Belgium and France. In his dissertation on the resistance in Limburg, Cammaert concluded that up until 1943 in the province Limburg the 'pilot-help' organizations were 'fragile' and held together like 'loose grains of sand'.³⁵ If this description was indeed valid for Limburg where the strongest concentration of 'pilot-help' lines could be found, how precarious must the situation have been elsewhere in The Netherlands? It was not until 1943 that smaller organizations, namely in Limburg and Noord-Brabant, were either absorbed into or affiliated with the larger *LO* organization, although generally without losing their independence locally.

On the one hand, the decentralized character of the 'pilot-help' organizations, from the standpoint of security, had its advantages. Arrests resulted in less devastation for the continuing transport of crewmen than was the case in Belgium and France. There escape routes regularly became seriously overloaded when, due to informants, Germans were able to strike heavy blows to existing routes, sometimes arresting more than 100 individuals. On the other hand, one disadvantage of the methods used in The Netherlands was that helpers often had to improvise, fumbling in the dark, and intuit who would be suitable as a contact for crewmen. This naturally posed a greater danger

for the group's security. In addition, supportive facilities such as donations of civilian clothing or false identification papers were less streamlined.

Just as in the case of other forms of resistance,³⁶ 'pilot help' in The Netherlands began relatively late in the war, in comparison with the situation in Belgium where an extensive network of escape routes had been established as early as 1941. The majority of 'pilot-help' activities was concentrated in 1943 and the first half of 1944. After the Allied invasion of Normandy, most airmen remained at the addresses where they were then in hiding. Only the 'airbornes', after 'Operation Market Garden' at Arnhem had failed, posed a large-scale exception in this regard.

In addition, Allied attempts to extend existing escape routes from the south further northward into The Netherlands were rather scarce. One handicap for 'pilot helpers' had been their limited radio contact with England so that the identity and trustworthiness of an airman could not be verified rapidly. Moreover, helpers rarely received information from England about the impending arrival of crewmen. For example, although the André Group was in contact with London and could verify the identity of the crewmen whom they were transporting, they were never informed by London that few of these airmen had ever reached England. Almost without exception, these airmen – more than 100 in total – had fallen into German hands once within Belgian territory.

5.4.2. *Estimated success*

How many airmen actually returned to their airbases? How many individuals had been helped within The Netherlands and how many actually crossed the border? According to Airey Neave who worked for MI9, between the summers of 1940 and June 1944, a total of 3,000 Allied airmen successfully escaped Western Europe (Belgium, Denmark, France, Luxembourg, Norway and The Netherlands).³⁷ In his standard work on the history of The Netherlands during World War II, Lou de Jong has quoted this number of 3,000 and had estimated that between 1,500 and 2,000 airmen came from The Netherlands.³⁸ However, this estimate is much too high, and De Jong does not state how he reached this calculation. His estimate is higher than the 1,500 mentioned in *Het Grote Gebod*, the memorial annals of the LO-LKP,³⁹ which itself has quoted a figure that is not conservative. In the overview *Onderdrukking en Verzet* the author and 'pilot-helper' Hermance van den Wall Bake has also warned against the high estimates in circulation – for example, in 1946 the mouthpiece of the *Gemeenschap van Oud-Illegale Werkers Nederland* [Association of Former Resistance Workers in The Netherlands] stated that 10,000 airmen had been helped⁴⁰ – and suggested that the number of crewmen assisted in escaping The Netherlands 'almost certainly' did not exceed 1,000. In this same book, Weidner who was the leader of the Dutch-Paris Line stated that 'several hundred' Allied airmen had reached Spain from The Netherlands.⁴¹ In 1946, MI9 intelligence officers, who were carrying out their own extensive investigation of 'pilot helpers' with an eye to awarding individuals with medals of distinction, came to the conclusion that ca. 600 airmen had crossed the Dutch border into Belgium.⁴² A similar number was reached by W.J.M. Willemsen who has spent years doing historical investigation on the topic of 'pilot help' and who has built up an extensive database regarding individual cases. Based on numerous sources, Willemsen maintains that 600 to 625 crewmen had been assisted.⁴³ He has divided this number (see Table 2) over the three most southern provinces as follows: for Limburg ca. 330, for Noord-Brabant ca. 240, and for Zeeland ca. 30 individuals. Taking into account the soundness and reliability of the resources used for his calculation, and the research done on this question to date, Willemsen's estimates must be regarded as being the most reliable.⁴⁴

Table 2 Border crossings for the three most southern provinces: Limburg, Noord-Brabant, and Zeeland

Southern border Limburg-Belgium (Slenaken-Noorbeek)	10
Eijsden (Smeets/Erkens)	10
Maastricht (e.g., Eijsden, Geulle, etc.)	180
Roosteren	15
Neeritter	25
Stramproy	80
Budel	35
Borkel-Schaft, Achelse Kluis, Bergeyck	20
Reusel	10*
Hilvarenbeek, Baarle-Nassau, Goirle, Chaam	120
Alphen	5*
Zundert	25
Nispen	10*
Putte	5*
Zeeland	25
Individual	
In 1941	10
In 1942	10
In 1943-1945	30
Total	625

*Approximations.

How many Allied crewmen who actually crossed the Dutch-Belgian border reached their airbases? Willemsen has calculated that from Limburg between ca. 125 and 150 airmen returned safely to their airbases. That is to say, somewhat less than 50% of the crewmen given assistance in Limburg completed their journey to freedom successfully.⁴⁵ It is improbable that this factor would be more positive for airmen crossing the border from Noord-Brabant or Zeeland. Taking into account the fact that in Belgium there had been serious problems with infiltration within escape lines running through Noord-Brabant, one might easily assume that the percentage of successful escapes would be even lower in this case. Other authors speak, however, of a 50-50 chance for Allied airmen leaving The Netherlands to reach their airbases.⁴⁶

5.4.3. *Infiltration*

Why did only a mere 50% of the airmen leaving The Netherlands reach their destination? The extent of infiltration in 'pilot' escape lines in France, but especially in Belgium, was enormous. A small number of individuals, such as Prosper ('Captain Jackson') de Zitter, René van Muylem, Roger le Neuve, Harold Cole and the previously mentioned Jacques Desoubrie, continued to reek havoc over an extended period of time. De Zitter who had been born in 1893 in Passendale and his mistress Florentine Giralt ran boarding houses in Antwerp and Brussels where they took fliers under their wings and hid them.⁴⁷ In reality, De Zitter worked for the *Abwehr*. By setting up a number of fake escape routes, he had been able to entrap ca. 500 Allied airmen, including a large number from The Netherlands.⁴⁸ In 1943, with the help of traitorous Belgian and Dutch agents, the *Abwehrstelle IIIF* had also established a fake escape line in Antwerp, enticingly named the 'KLM' Line. Its most important agent was René ('Maerlant', 'Van der Meerschaut', 'Donald',

'Robert') van Muylem. He had been assisted by two Dutch women named Pauline Vlaming and Maria ('Anna', 'Pam') Verhulst-Oomes. After Van Muylem had been arrested in Paris in May 1945, he confessed that, together with his Dutch associates, he had entrapped 157 airmen, among whom were more than 100 airmen from the André Group.⁴⁹ In France, Roger ('Roger le Légionnaire') Le Neuve started working for the Germans after being arrested as member of the resistance in December 1941. In particular, early in 1943, he successfully caused great damage to 'pilot helpers', e.g., bringing about the arrest of Albert Guérisse who was leader of the Pat O'Leary Line as well as several other high-ranking individuals in the organization.⁵⁰ Harold Cole who in the spring of 1940 had deserted ranks from the British expeditionary force in Northern France was another prominent traitor. After German occupation, he first took part in the resistance movement. Like Le Neuve, after his arrest in December 1941, he had turned traitor and began working for the enemy. Because of his treachery, a large number of airmen and more than 150 'pilot helpers' could be arrested.⁵¹

5.4.4. Arrests

Once in Paris, few airmen could ignore the enticements which the city had to offer. While it had been difficult to calm feelings of emptiness among the crewmen in The Netherlands, it was even more difficult to keep the airmen indoors for long periods of time in frivolous Paris. Many of them fell victim while looking for entertainment when the women whom they met handed them over to the Germans.⁵²

The following story is especially sad when one remembers what efforts had been made and dangers risked by 'pilot helpers'. The American Lieutenant Dorgan who had been helped in The Netherlands finally reached Switzerland. He was allowed to move about rather freely because the regulations for internment of Allied servicemen were mild in neutral Switzerland. He and his fellow soldiers were a jolly lot, partying almost every night.

"One night, mid-July 1944 at about 23:00 hours, Lieutenant Dorgan was ordered by American MPs to return to Glion from Montreux. Because he had been drinking and had a date planned, he refused. The MPs detained him and locked him up in a civilian prison in Montreux, ordering the guard to release Dorgan at 08:00 hours the next morning. The following morning, he was found dead in his cell. It was concluded that he had fallen asleep while smoking, thus setting alight his bed, blankets, and clothing and that he had died of suffocation. According to an MP officer, Dorgan had requested a cigarette and match to light it." ⁵³

If one assumes that ca. 600 airmen crossed the Dutch-Belgian border and that each man supposedly had a 50-50 chance of reaching his airbase, then as few as 300 airmen from The Netherlands should have completed their journey to freedom successfully during the war.⁵⁴ Apart from that, a large number of crewmen did not return to England before D-Day, thus celebrating liberation either in Belgium or France.

As well as the 600 airmen who successfully crossed the border, Willemsen has made a global estimate that in The Netherlands ca. 200 Allied crewmen had been arrested in spite of the assistance that they had been given. Furthermore, ca. 400 airmen remained in hiding up until The Netherlands was liberated. Finally, according to Willemsen, another 300 to 350 'airbornes' had been helped to reach liberated territory after 'Operation Market Garden'.⁵⁵ Thus, in total, ca. 1,600 airmen had been assisted within occupied The Netherlands.⁵⁶

5.4.5. *Military versus morale output*

In his dissertation regarding Limburg, Cammaert has stated that the “yield which resulted from help given was somewhat disappointing”.⁵⁷ However, what was the military output gained from airmen who returned to their airbases? To date, exaggerated ideas on this subject can still be found in the literature. Often the theory has been expounded that ‘pilot help’ was so important because airmen were greatly needed for the Allied war machine and that much time and money had been invested in their training.⁵⁸ Calculations have even been made showing that 800 fighter planes could have been re-manned using all of the Allied crewmen who had returned to England after being shot down between 1940 and 1945 over territory occupied by the Third Reich.⁵⁹ However, in reality, most Allied crewmen who returned to their airbases in England were not deployed for flights over Europe.⁶⁰ By the time that airmen finally returned to England, they had long been replaced in their units by other personnel. Seldom were they stationed in other units because, should they again be shot down and captured, they would present a safety risk to those individuals who had helped them escape the first time. Once an airmen had returned to his airbase, he was strictly forbidden to speak about any of his experiences within occupied territory.⁶¹ Unfortunately, crewmen did not always comply. For example, MI9 has documented a case in which an airman who had escaped occupied France in 1941 gave his resistance addresses to a fellow airman. When the flier later crashed over occupied territory, the Germans, finding all the addresses on his dead body, were able to hunt down and shoot many members of these families.⁶² Illustrative for such a breach of security protocol was a story circulating in Dutch government circles at the beginning of 1944 that was told by the temporary head of the Cabinet at the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs in London. Jonkheer M.W. van Weede described how he and his wife had been visited by a B-17 bombardier who told him:

“It is strictly against our instructions to mention anything to anybody about any European country where we might have been and so I cannot tell you that I have been in Holland. ...”

According to Van Weede, the American

“... could not resist, in spite of instructions, to make this statement because those individuals who had helped him escape had requested, as the only form of compensation for their assistance, that he inform the Dutch Government in London about the excellence of the organizations which had been set up to help airmen who had crashed over occupied territory to escape to freedom.”⁶³

Most American airmen who returned to England were sent directly back to the United States. Both returning British and American airmen, however, were sometimes used as flight instructors by their own countries. British crewmen were also employed as ground personnel, in the Coastal Command, or as instructors in courses on how to escape occupied territory.

Thus the effect that an Allied crewman had upon returning to his airbase was more a boost to morale than military in nature.⁶⁴ Fellow airmen could see for themselves that, should they also find themselves in such a predicament, there were people – stepping stones to freedom – in occupied territory who would be willing to risk their own lives in order to help Allied airmen escape to freedom.

5.4.6. Dutch sentiment

Especially after 1980 questions were more frequently being asked about the moral aspect of the extensive Allied bombing raids on German cities such as Hamburg and Dresden.⁶⁵ One might thus question whether 'pilot helpers', in fact, were not guilty of participating in such an horrific war machine. Anyone posing this question and assuming that 'pilot helpers' should have come to such a conclusion should realize that these people – not islands unto themselves – were immersed daily in the mentality of their fellow countrymen who were also living under German occupation. With regard to the bombing of Germany, the Dutch had few scruples.⁶⁶

"... We did not commiserate with the Germans who saw their factories, installations and homes reduced to scrap after bombardment. We could not do that. The Germans had taught us not to think in nuances. Only black or white remained. Was not the overly powerful *Luftwaffe* destruction of Rotterdam, London and Belgrade much more ruthless? And now it was tit for tat. Good – they had asked for it. *That* was our point of view."⁶⁷

Friesians were singing the ditty:

"In the pale, pale moonlight
they bombed Berlin at night,
filling the Dutch with much delight"⁶⁸

Even when the Dutch themselves fell victim to Allied bombardments, the Allies were rarely reproached. Approximately 10,000 Dutch citizens died as a result of bombardments in their own country. In addition, ca. 13,000 Dutch died during bombardments in Germany where more than 2% of the Dutch sent to Germany as labor workers in the *Arbeitseinsatz* program were killed. In comparison, these 23,000 individuals represent about eight times the number of Dutch victims of execution and summary justice and equal about as many people who died during the Dutch 'hongerwinter' (winter of hunger).⁶⁹

The following are a few examples of the great distress caused by the Allies.⁷⁰ The Dutch harbor city of Rotterdam that had already been heavily bombed by the Germans on 14 May 1940 was bombarded no less than 125 times by Allied forces during the five-year period of German occupation. During these many Allied raids, approximately the same number of people, i.e., ca. 900, were killed as during the German bombardment on 14 May.⁷¹ For example, on 31 March 1943, an American 'precision' bombing raid on the Wilton-Fijenoord wharf in Schiedam killed ca. 350 people, left another 400 victims seriously wounded and made more than 20,000 people homeless. On 10 October 1943, American airplanes dropped their bombs on the Dutch town of Enschede, assuming that they were attacking a German town. They killed 150 people. On 6 and 7 October 1944, Allied bombardments in Hengelo killed more than 100 Dutch civilians.⁷² Early in March 1945, during Allied bombardments on the Bezuidenhout in The Hague, more than 500 civilians were killed.

The Germans had hoped to stir up anti-Allied sentiments using such unfortunate Allied bombardments as propaganda, thus cynically creating the slogan "It's your friends that you can reply upon."⁷³ After the Americans had wrongly bombed the Dutch city of Nijmegen on 22 February 1944, when almost 500 civilians were killed, an extensive documentary about the damage and horror of the bombings was shown in the movie-news. When Van Lokhorst, who was the mayor of Nijmegen as well as a member of the *NSB*, spoke to 1,600 next of kin he suggested that they should at least 'now be healed' of their Allied sympathies. On the whole, however, the Dutch

public refused to be influenced by this type of propaganda and remained quite tolerant of faulty Allied bombardments and miscalculations.⁷⁴

After the German authorities had launched a propaganda-based action against “English fliers who knew no compassion”, an anonymous poet replied with a biting poem about German airmen which when freely translated reads:

...
filled with compassion overflowing,
to Rotterdam they brought a visit.

Dropping in with their loads of bombs,
feeling tender and impassioned,
those fliers who said to know mercy
came destroying our Rotterdam!

“ ...
die hebben vol van mededogen
'n bezoek aan Rotterdam gebracht.

Zij lieten daar hun bommen vallen,
door liefd' en tederheid beziel'd ...
De vliegers die genade kennen,
die hebben Rotterdam vernield!”⁷⁵

For months the poem was copied repeatedly as it was passed from hand to hand. When in Den Helder, a city that had had to survive tens of Allied bombing raids, the first print-run of the underground newspaper *Vrij Nederland* was sold in 1941, all proceeds were donated to buy a wreath for the grave of a British airman.⁷⁶

Only after the Bezuidenhout in The Hague had been bombed could one speak of a generally angry sentiment regarding the consequences for the citizenry.⁷⁷ As horrible as the effects of such miscalculations had been, the populace remained convinced that they would have been spared such hardships had German troops never set foot on Dutch soil in the first place.⁷⁸ Only a few people spoke out sadly and with anger about the distress caused by Allied airplanes, such as an inhabitant of Middelburg who lost members of his family during a miscalculated bombing raid in June 1943. Years after the war had ended he said:

“A few days after the bombing huge formations of American bombers again flew overhead. When I saw the planes high in the air, I stood praying. Not that they would pass over without bombing, no, I prayed that *all of them would crash burning into the river Schelde!!!* That was horrible, really horrible, and I deeply regretted it later. Those airmen in the bombers certainly must have tried to hit the airfield, but then again ...”⁷⁹

Various ‘pilot helpers’ also fell victim to the Allied air offense. In February 1945, a bomb fell through the roof of the house belonging to the family Ottens in Amersfoort. Since 1943 they had hidden more than forty airmen and even named their fifth child ‘Harold Henry’ after two American airmen who had taken shelter with them shortly before their baby was born.⁸⁰ In September 1944, the farm belonging to Miel and Anna Heikants, who had helped Miet Cornelissen-Verhoeven take a number of airmen across the border, was totally destroyed during a bombardment. In the same month, during a bombing raid on the grounds of the Marechaussee barracks in Breskens, Cornelis Francke who had helped various Allied airmen was hit and later died of his wounds.

5.4.7. ‘Pilot help’ versus the resistance movement

In closing, one may question the usefulness of ‘pilot help’ in relation to other forms of resistance during German occupation. On the one hand, because the German authorities had considered ‘pilot help’ to be one of the most direct forms of aiding and abetting the enemy, punishment had been severe. On the other hand, the people receiving help – the Allied airmen – had nothing more

to fear after capture and arrest than being transported to a POW camp, as unpleasant as that might be. During the German occupation, the relevance of 'pilot help' compared to other forms of resistance was questioned by individuals involved in resistance movements. At the end of November 1943, for example, the Council for Resistance had instructed its people to stop their involvement in the transportation of airmen. "Too many victims and damage to other forms of resistance in recent times" was the only brief explanation given.⁸¹ Even within the *LO* resistance organization questions were raised as to 'pilot-help' efficacy, as read in this group's *Het Grote Gebod* [Book of Remembrance]:

"Level-headed minds in the underground movement weighed ... the importance of 'pilot help' against its dangers. Death by firing squad relentlessly resulted for this form of 'aiding the enemy'. Helping Dutch civilians, even Jews, hide was not punished as harshly by the Germans. When hiding Jews one was at least saving them from certain death while airmen, should they fall into German hands, would only be made prisoners of war."⁸²

According to *Der Kinderen*: "Without doubt hundreds of men and women who worked on 'pilot-help' lines were often more motivated by their own desire to help their fellow Allies than by any rational motivation related to Allied warfare. It is difficult to answer the question whether the great endeavors made and the cost of numerous lives lost by escape lines were worth the effort."⁸³ In total, it has been estimated that 150 to 175 Dutch 'pilot helpers' lost their lives as a result of their resistance work.⁸⁴ This estimation shows that, for each two Allied airmen who returned to their airbases, one Dutch 'pilot helper' paid the price with his/her life. There were, however, more Allied airmen and 'airbornes' who were kept out of German hands.

The most humane answer to the question regarding the 'yield' of 'pilot help' was found by this author (BGJdeG) in the book *De Zwarte Herfst* [Black Autumn] written by C.A. Dekkers and L.P.J. Vroemen about the attack on Arnhem and its aftermath. In this book, one can find a photograph taken at the marriage of Lieutenant-Colonel David Dobie and his bride. The happy bridegroom in uniform and his future wife are shown walking under a 'lane of honor' formed by the military men from the First Para-Battalion for which Dobie was commander. On their sleeves can be seen the Pegasus emblem. The photograph had been taken in December 1944, a few weeks after 'Operation Pegasus I' had been successfully completed thanks to Dobie as well as to resistance workers in the Veluwe. The photograph is symbolic for the result of 'pilot-help' work.

When Allied airmen requested assistance or when it was known that fliers had crashed nearby, 'pilot helpers' were there with open arms. At that moment, they did not pause to question the usefulness of their activities. When they saw a fellow human being caught in a dangerous predicament and in need of help, they conquered their own fears about the risks that they would be taking and lent a helping hand. Their efforts were directed towards helping an individual reach freedom, where there was no fear but rather room for personal happiness. During the war, 'pilot helpers' generally remained unaware of an airman's fate once they had lost sight of each other. However, after the war had ended, airmen often renewed contact with those individuals who had struggled to keep them safe. Numerous have been the encounters, both between individuals and groups of individuals traveling back and forth to visit, thus demonstrating a lively interest in each other's well-being. After the war, many 'pilot helpers' showed a keen interest in the personal lives of former airmen from Great Britain, the United States, Canada, Australia, etc., because they understood all too well that they had played an important role at a crucial moment in these young lives. This personal interest will survive until the grave brings rest to the bearer. Their examples of humanity crossing the barriers of fear, nationality and language, however, will remain alive in our history.