

A Tribute to My Helpers

Helping the Allied airmen was a high-risk contribution to the resistance effort, and many fine people of Europe paid with their lives when they were caught. Some were promptly executed, while others were tried beforehand. Many died in concentration camps or survived the camps to die soon thereafter as a result of their mistreatment. It is well known that the Germans applied their own severe rules in the concentration camps while generally following the rules of the Geneva Conference in their handling of the Prisoners of War. The difference takes nothing away from the hardships suffered by the thousands of Allied airmen who became POW's. But it does account for the difference in the survival rates.

I know more than 60 people helped me in one way or another while I was evading. This was an unusually large number of helpers due to the great distance I traveled behind the enemy lines and the fact that we were almost captured in Paris.

As is the case with most other evaders, I have never been able to identify accurately or locate some of my helpers. Odds are that some of those who remain unknown did not survive. There were those I know did not survive, and some survivors died after the war without my having much information about them.

The ways in which people helped, took risks, and expanded effort varied greatly among helpers. Some provided food, other information, clothes, money for train tickets, a hiding spot, housing, or a finger pointed in the right direction. Some children and adults helped by keeping their mouths shut about our presence. Then there are those who were our personal guides. They often helped in all ways others helped us and in addition risked being seen with us in public.

Every single bit of help I received was important to me then and now. It was the combination of all the pieces that made it possible for me to survive and evade. In recognition of all my helpers, and as a tribute to those who helped downed Allied airmen all over Europe, it has been a pleasure for me to be able to research and write this book. It has been stimulating for me to include comments about and some of my helpers, their experiences and their achievements. While it would require a thick book to do some of these individuals justice, I hope the vignettes included in this book have helped you, the reader, better understand the people who risked their lives to resist German occupation and aid the Allies. Most of my helpers resisted the Germans by helping people like myself in a humanitarian way. They kept trying to make something good for mankind come out of the war.

The amount of information available to me about each of these individuals varies greatly. Therefore, the amount I have written also varies, but individually and collectively these are true heroes and heroines to many people and especially to me. The honors given and the stories written about them will never tell it all, but history is made and recorded through the lives of those who live it. Living with these people through life-threatening experiences and being able to join some of them in sharing the joys of freedom has given me a broader understanding of how freedom evolves and the price often paid for it.

Freedom, like other things of great value, takes on the greatest meaning to those who experience losing it. You understand the meaning of freedom if you have walked beside those willing to risk everything, including life itself, to regain it. My successful walk to freedom remains a tribute to those who walked beside me and made it possible. We did it together!