

Chapter 15

Spain: Arrest and Internment

On the south side of the mountain where we were descending, the snow did not extend as far down as on the north side, where we had just come up. Water from the melting snow was trickling down the mountain, and we decided to follow it. We knew the trickling water would lead to a bigger stream and probably eventually to a road near the stream.

As we made our way down the mountain, we crossed the timberline and entered an area of trees and vegetation that helped to make our descent less obvious. Finally, light from the dawn replaced the moonlight. The dream of a new day in a new country became reality. From our briefings, we knew being in Spain could include some uncertainties and that though Spain was supposed to be a neutral country, our being there was risky; so we were mentally prepared for the situation.

As expected, the stream that had started out as a trickle from melting snow grew larger as we followed it down the mountain. Finally, we were low enough to see scattered houses, small farms, and country roads. At this point, we were not yet ready to become involved with the local residents, so we continued to follow the stream. It led us to a small village, where by now the people were up and the daily activities begun. The Spanish gendarmes were also up and active.

As we entered the outskirts of the village, two Spanish gendarmes were there to meet us. It was as if someone had spotted us earlier and alerted them to our coming. They were armed, and we knew immediately that our future was in their hands. They could not speak English any better

than we could speak Spanish, so conversation was very limited. We did establish our identities as Americans and gave them our names. While they did not put us behind bars and were courteous to us, it was evident they had no intention of letting us proceed on our own.

In our presence, they made at least one phone call, and even though we did not understand the conversation, we could tell that they were checking with someone else to determine what they should do with us. I believe we were in the little village of Ochagavia. These gendarmes would be the ones to move us to a larger place. We did not see any police cars, and naturally we wondered how and when we would be moved. We did not wait long for our answers.

Two gendarmes soon had us waiting with them for a bus. When it arrived, it was not the kind of bus we had been accustomed to in the United States but an all-purpose vehicle loaded with produce as well as people. The inside of the bus was full, so we were obliged to sit on top among the crates chickens, luggage, and other miscellaneous objects. While we held on to the railing around the top of the bus, the guards with their rifles did likewise. Together, we resembled a sheriff's posse riding shotgun with their prisoners in an old western movie. That was the way we traveled to another village where we got off, walked about one fourth of a mile, and waited in the shade of some tree for another bus.

On the next bus, we had seats inside, and the ride was more comfortable. We arrived in the city Pamplona after dark. There we were escorted to a hostel, where the manager met us and took us to the second floor to join other American and British fliers for dinner. Our first day in Spain had just passed from the first stage, arrest, to the second stage, interment for an undetermined period of time.

At Pamplona, Sgt. Shaver and I were separated. He was taken to a large house with fenced surroundings at the edge of town and confined there with other non-commissioned

officers. I remained with the other officers at the hostel in the middle of the city. We could go and come as we wished as long as we stayed inside the city limits. With adequate rooms and food, I began to have some sense of freedom. I enjoyed that feeling and the opportunity to be with others who had also been shot down and had escaped by various routes into Spain.

Early in the morning of my first day in Pamplona, the manager of the hostel contacted me by phone in our American embassy in Madrid. They wanted my name, rank, serial number, and the approximate time and place at which I had entered Spain. They also wanted information on other Americans who had entered me. This was referred to as “reporting in.” It was the beginning of a formal process that would lead eventually to my being returned to England. A few hours after my phone contact. I received a call from the embassy. They reported that I had checked out OK with intelligence and that my parents would be informed that I was being interned in a neutral country. That was good news for me, and I knew my parents would be elated to hear something positive about my situation. For more than three months the only word they had received was the message, “Missing in Action.”

After the embassy people had made my position clear, the conversation turned to S/Sgt. Kenneth D. Shaver. “How long did you know Sergeant Shaver before you entered Spain together? Where did you first meet him? Is there any question in your mind about his being an American?” After answering their questions and assuring them that he had to be an American, I asked, “What is the problem?” I was told he had been reported dead by the International Red Cross. I remembered then Ken’s story of how he had had his dog tags in his flight jacket around his neck while he was a prisoner of the Germans in Holland. When he and his fellow crew members had beaten up the guards and jumped off the train, he left his flight jacket behind. Apparently

those dog tags were used to identify him as killed in the escape, not just as missing. After all, it is a serious charge against a military guard when prisoners escape.

The American embassy sent a man from their organization at Madrid to talk with Ken. The man was familiar with Ken's home town in North Carolina and interrogated him thoroughly in trying to confirm his identity. As a result of that visit, the embassy was confident that he was S/Sgt. Kenneth D. Shaver, and they treated him accordingly. However, it was not until after he returned to England and was identified by the intelligence officer of his base that Ken's wife was notified that he was alive.

While we were in Pamplona, an incident occurred which justified the need for caution in identifying men as Allied airmen. In this case, a man in the non-com camp was clearly a loner. He professed to be a French-speaking Canadian who knew no English. The American and English evaders found cause to doubt his story and created a situation to test him. Once, while he was standing near the perimeter of the grounds, one of the men moved in close to him without being noticed. When the American shouted, "Achtung!" (attention in German) the Canadian imposter snapped to attention. Realizing his true nationality had been established, he confessed to being a German soldier who had deserted, and he asked to remain with the group. He reported that he had been with the German Army on the eastern front fighting the Russians. Casualties were high on both sides, but it seemed to him that the losses the Germans inflicted, including men and tanks, were returned twofold by the Russians the following day. The futility of the situation and fear for his own life had caused him to desert. He had secured civilian clothes and escaped into Spain.

I believe he was permitted to remain with the Allies as a Canadian, but he was kept under guard and later flown blindfolded to England. There, intelligence could have a

proper go at finding out as much as possible from him. His place as a prisoner of war in England would certainly be safer, and his life better than on the eastern front in Germany.

During my first few days in Pamplona I found out why we had not been moved on schedule from Paris. One of the Americans officers confided that the same organization that had helped Ken and me had got him through Paris just prior to our arrival at the school and church. He and others were safely escorted to Toulouse, France, and out into the mountains for their walk across into Spain. In spite of the checking which was done, a German had successfully infiltrated the group using American identification. By the time they reached the mountains, the infiltrator had learned all he could hope to about the organization, and so, as they rested one night, he slipped away and alerted German guards. They returned expecting to capture the entire group, and in the gun battle that followed many of the evaders and their helpers were killed, and some were taken prisoners. But my informant and one other man had been resting away from the group, and when the battle started, slipped away in the darkness and hid until it was all over and everyone had gone. Having been started in the right direction before the flight, the two succeeded in walking across the Pyrenees into Spain. Learning about that incident not only answered some questions for me, it made me more thankful than ever that we had gotten out of Paris and away from those who had helped us. At that point I could only hope the charges brought against Father Superior, the custodian, and the custodian's wife had not become more serious than the possession of black market food, which serious enough.

On my second day in Pamplona, I was interrogated by the Spanish military. They had a fort in Pamplona and trained soldiers there. The officer that attempted to interrogate me, however, was already a seasoned officer, a realist who knew his job and was courteous to me. The

process began with a questionnaire (in English) about my military organization, our equipment, where I was based, our target the day I was shot down, how we were shot down, and much more. I filled in my name, rank, and serial number as required and stopped.

When I refused to write in any other information, the Spanish officer tried to get me to answer the questions he put to me orally. He did speak English. He also tried a few tricky ways of getting information, but he was not abusive. The entire process continued for about an hour and a half. When it was clear I was going to tell him nothing but my name, rank, and serial number, he gave up in disgust and said, "Oh what the hell. It was all for the Germans anyway." I am sure he had been through this fruitless process other officers of the Allied Forces. He was also sufficiently informed about the war to know the Germans were losing at this point, especially in the air.

Although Spain took on the status of a neutral country, it was easy to understand their sympathy with Germany. The Civil War in Spain had provided a testing ground for German arms and equipment and at the same time helped provide Franco with the winning margin which did not go unobserved by the officials of Franco's regime. It was not surprising that some of the Allied fliers who had tried escaping through Spain earlier in the war were imprisoned in undesirable conditions. Some of them were even turned over to the Germans.

There are indications that Spain even went through a bidding game between Germany and the Allies to see who would pay more for Allied evaders behind held in Spain. In the latter part of the war the Allies offered petrol instead of money. That was an offer the Germans could not match, and was made at a time when the trend of the war favored the Allies as the eventual winners. Therefore, when I was in Spain, internment with a later release had become more routine – almost a sure thing. Time and the proper amount

of petrol transferred to Spain would send me and others on our way to England.

Our embassy had also established a procedure permitting us to acquire some necessary clothing at a store in Pamplona. In addition, we received a few dollars each week for spending money. We could also draw some money against our pay if we desired. As we felt more freedom and adjusted to the situation, we could begin to enjoy some aspects of our internment and it offered some interesting incidents. One such enjoyable experience was shopping for new clothes.

The suit I had been given in Amsterdam was better than the clothing most of the men had been given, but I had worn it constantly for three months while traveling some tough terrain and in all kinds of weather. My G.I. shoes had been nearly new when I started, but the rocks and snow on the mountains had played havoc with them. I also needed a change of underwear, some socks, a couple of shirts, and a haircut to avoid looking like a drifter.

It was time to do something about my appearance. Another officer, who had been to the designated clothing store earlier, agreed to accompany me. I would select my clothes and have the embassy settle the account. That seemed simple enough until we discussed how I would communicate my needs to the clerk. It was agreed that I must try to use the few words of Spanish I knew, and he would help me if he could. After considerable effort on my part which included a lot of pointing, the lady clerk chuckled and began conversing in English. She had been through this experience before and enjoyed my struggle. She was an American. Her father was in management at the Sir Francis Drake Hotel in San Francisco. She and her mother had been visiting in Spain when the Spanish Civil War broke out and they had been detained there. She met, fell in love with, and married the man who owned and

operated this store. They were delightful people and had several of us out to their place for dinner one day.

A store we visited on a more regular basis was the ice cream store. It was great to enjoy an ice cream cone and pastries after not having had them for many months. Getting an ice cream cone after siesta became a daily routine, and the young lady who waited on us seemed to look forward to our business. She tried hard to learn some English words, and we tried to learn Spanish. As it sometimes happens, she learned a few words of American slang that I fear may have had limited value to her.

Spanish soldiers would patronize the ice cream store once in a while, but the young lady was quick to point out how we were the more regular customers. The ice cream cones cost the equivalent of about five cents. That was almost identical to the amount the Spanish soldiers earned per day when they first entered service for training at the local fort. They were hesitant to blow a day's pay for an ice cream cone.

There had been a bullfight in Pamplona a few days before I arrived, and a number of the Allied fliers from the hostel had attended it. Their comments about the fight were interesting and varied, but I believe they found the running of the bulls to the arena the most unusual feature. At least that was the part of the event they talked about most. No bullfights occurred while I was there.

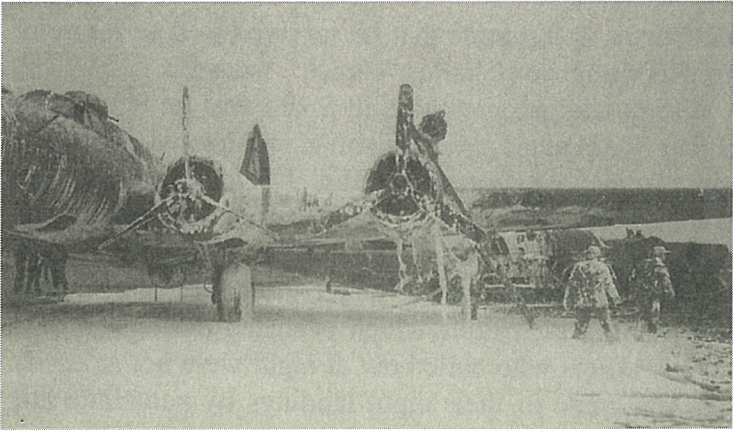
In Spain we would share a few of our past experiences when we felt certain our conversations would not be monitored. We learned about the variety of incidents that had brought us together in Spain. I met for example, a P-51 pilot who like so many fighter pilots had been escorting a formation of bombers when he was hit by German fighters. It was the first time he had bailed out in combat, but not his first time to hit the silk to save his life. He went down on the 5th of March in southern France and like the rest of us had escaped into Spain. Aviation, and particularly the

United States, is fortunate that he survived to do a lot more flying. His name was Charles “Chuck” Yeager.

A British navigator with us in Spain was an interesting chap. The RAF made their bombing missions at night and did not fly in formation as we did. I believe most of the American fliers preferred to be in formation during the daylight hours, while the British fliers usually expressed satisfaction at going it alone under the cover of darkness without the big air battles which occurred during the day. The British fliers who bailed out at night were not as easily visible, but some of their night landings by parachute left much to be desired.

It was in Pamplona, while talking to an officer who went down after I did, that I learned Lt. Jack Watson had returned our burning plane to a base on the coast of England and survived without a scratch. The odds against that happening were unbelievable. My immediate thoughts were then, as they have remained, “Thank God he made it!” No good can come from wondering if we might have gotten back had we stayed with the plane. There is no way to be sure, our best odds at the time favored the decision which was made.

After a couple of weeks in Pamplona, a group of us was moved to a large warm springs resort hotel at Alma de Aragon. We gave up some of the advantages of Pamplona for the pleasure of hot mineral baths and the exercise of rowing boats on a small lake. It was a smaller town than Pamplona with very narrow streets. There was a small theater in the village, and when they showed American films, the words were written in Spanish across the bottom of the screen.



Above: A picture from *The Stars and Stripes* in England when it announced the return of a burning plane.

If I had any illusions about Spanish señoritas being overly warm and sexy, some reality came to light at this location. The ladies who worked at this hotel were friendly and interested in exchanging comments about their culture and ours. Their dating offered quite a contrast to ours according to what we were told. When their young ladies went out on a date, mama went along until the time the couple publicly announced their engagement. While we were there, one of the young ladies working at the hotel became engaged to her boy friend after many months. One of the ladies with whom she had worked came in kidding her about matrimony. Naturally we were interested in how soon the wedding would take place. Our inquiry was a simple, “Pronto?” (soon).

Her reply was, “Mucho pronto!” (very soon).

Our next question was with regard to the number of days, “Cuantos dias?”

To that she answered, “No dias, dos-tres anos.” (two or three years).

Then we began to understand something about their thoughts on the length of a courtship and probably the

accumulation of a dowry. I found myself hoping that my stay in Spain would not last for as many months as a short courtship in Spain, and it didn't.

I had been there about a month, which was long enough to receive one letter from home, when I learned I would be on my way to England. Several of us were picked up in a couple of cars from the embassy in Madrid and driven to the embassy. It was an interesting trip, and we drove through the plans where much of the Civil War fighting had occurred, and where the damage from the fighting was clearly visible.

Our trip to Madrid took place on a Sunday, so there was limited activity at the embassy when we arrived late in the afternoon. We were exposed to some questions which I remember as being more of a curious than an interrogative nature. It was great to be back in American hands! However, this was not the place to celebrate or be too obvious in the eyes of the natives. That evening, we were escorted to the train and given good accommodations for an overnight ride that would get us to Gibraltar the following day.



These two pictures were taken in Spain. Those in the picture below are Charles B. Screws, James E. Williams, Dale W. Kinert, Harry C. Yarwood, Bernard W. Rawlings, William Guyn (Dutch), Roy W. Carpenter, Jr., Howard J. Mays, and Clayton David on right first row.

