

## *Chapter 7*

### **Paris**

Like many Americans, I had always dreamed of seeing Paris. How I wished this could have been a sight-seeing tour instead of an escape route. But the many German guards and French gendarmes at the railroad station served as a reminder of our precarious situation. We were not comfortable in their presence, and I felt relieved as we left the station and entered the subway. I did not realize at the time how easily we could have been trapped and captured while at the subway. However, we were lucky, and the rapid travel of the Metro soon had us at our destination. We emerged to street level at a quiet and nearly deserted place in the city.

Later we learned how fortunate our timing had been. While we were making our successful arrival in Paris and taking a ride on the Metro, other things were just beginning to happen. Less than 30 minutes after we had left the subway station, a strict guard was placed on each station, and the people were all required to show their identity cards. That could have meant capture for us if we had arrived 30 or 45 minutes later.

After leaving the subway station, we walked a few blocks and entered a schoolyard. The schoolyard was fenced and there were teachers, classrooms and students, but other elements made this school different. In addition to the housing for the custodian of the school, his wife, and daughter, I also suspected that there was space or refuge available for those who needed it. In some ways this place resembled a boarding school with the custodian and his wife as guardians and a devoted priest as the overseer. School was not yet in session when we entered the main

building and were escorted down a hall that echoed every step we took. We went down a stairway to the basement and then further down into the furnace room which also contained an electric generator. As we approached what was to be our hiding place, we found ourselves weaving around massive pieces of equipment and entering an area that was seldom visited.

By this time, our original guide had vanished. The custodian had taken over, and close behind him was the priest. They seemed concerned about the number of us gathering there. We would bring the total to nine. In addition to the four of us who had just arrived and the four fliers who had arrived a few days earlier, there was also a Dutchman.

We had just reached the area where the other five were hidden when the custodian was notified that he had visitors. He and the priest would return to the entrance of the building, and we were to remain very quiet. In silence we waited for what seemed like an hour when in reality it was probably ten or fifteen minutes. A lump came into my throat as I heard footsteps in the hall above us, for it was the loud and sharp echo of military boots. The sound stopped at the steel door about ten stair steps above us, and there was an effort to open the door. But the door was locked, and on the hall side of it was a sign indicating that there was danger from high voltage on our side. The German and Vichy French police who had just tried the locked door had no idea how close they were to people they would have loved to find, or they would have demanded that the door be unlocked. The police walked away from the door as rapidly as they had approached it.

When they were gone, the British flier, who spoke French, told us about the conversation that had occurred in the hall above us and emphasized how close we were to being caught. In a few minutes, the custodian appeared and was very excited. The priest was with him and was trying

to quiet him down. By why shouldn't he be scared? A wall and a locked steel door were all that had stood between him and certain death a few minutes before. For us there was danger, but probably prison instead of death if we were found. After a brief moment, the British flier turned to us and said, "We are to be moved from here. There are some at work in making fake passports and false papers. They are not sure. It may be the work of a student, but until they know more, the police may be expected to return anytime for a closer search."

"Where are the police now?" we asked.

"They have left the building unhappy with their findings," he continued. "But they are certain to return. The priest is going to lead us to a place in his nearby church. It is a part which has been condemned and is not in use."

We quickly gathered up the items we had and followed the priest while the custodian remained behind to clear away any evidence that we had been in his building. We followed the priest who was tall, thin, and elderly. He was firm in his convictions that freedom and Christians must live. Walking quickly he led us out of a passageway, up through the school building, out a window, across a rooftop hidden from view, and into the old part of the church he had told us about. We climbed a spiral stairway which took us to the top floor of this building, four stories above the street. The priest then turned and quickly walked away, for he had work to do in offering guidance to the custodian and his family so that they would all be calm if and when the police returned. The police did return later in the day and searched the spot where we had been behind the steel door but found nothing. The earlier decision to move us had been a good one!

Our new hiding place was without heat – quite a contrast to the warm area we had just left. It consisted of two rooms with a toilet and wash basin in a small room between the two where we stayed. It was a cold February. However,

there was a warmth in our hearts and in the eyes of the priest when about 2:00 pm each day, he brought us some food prepared by the school custodian's wife and daughter in their living quarters at the school.

We kept warm by huddling together in groups of four or five with a straw tick on the floor under us and some blankets over us. We were concerned about the need for exercise because we knew that getting into Spain, our ultimate objective, would require a difficult walk and climb across the Pyrenees Mountains. Any exercise had to be done without making noise because there were nine of us where no one was supposed to be. We found that push-ups, leg stretches, sit-ups, and lying on our back doing the bicycle with our legs were a few things we could do quietly. The exercises were also helpful in keeping warm.

There was plenty of time for us to learn something about each other, and here is summary of what I learned: The Englishman, Flight Officer Smith, was a navigator on a British bomber and had been forced to parachute out at night. His civilian job was as a certified public accountant in Brazil working primarily with British firms. He spoke Spanish and French and was the only flier among us who spoke more languages than English. He had returned to England on his own because of the war and joined the British Air Force. One of the American fliers, Lieutenant Donald C. Schumann, was with Flight Officer Smith when the three of us met near Maastricht. He was the one who had been burned when he bailed out. The underground people had hidden him in a cave and nursed him back to traveling health.

The Dutchman spoke some French and had friends near Paris where he would go once in a while as we all waited for our chance to get to Spain. William Lock was the pilot of a B-17, and traveling with him was Charles Mullins, one of his waist gunners. Their plane was on fire when they bailed out over Holland. Before Charles got out, a wing

came off the plane, and it began rolling. He had crawled to the waist door and been thrown back by the force of the plane's roll when his parachute was accidentally opened and sucked out of the airplane, pulling him with it.

The other three men were from the same crew. They were William J. Koenig, the copilot; Kenneth D. Shaver, engineer; and John R. Buckner, a waist gunner. Their B-17 had crash-landed in Holland on 5 November 1943. They had been immediately captured by the Germans, and a few days later eight of them were being escorted by four German guards to Germany on a train. The guards did not speak English, so these men conceived the idea of trying to escape from the train while it was still in Holland. They had talked about it openly to each other. As they talked, they saw a number of the people on their car leave it and move into other cars. These were no doubt Dutch people who understood English and wanted to be in a safer place where they could not become witnesses. When all conditions including speed and location of the train had seemed right, the Americans jumped their guards and overpowered them. After disarming the guards and at least knocking them out, the American fliers jumped off the train. These three had succeeded in getting away with help from the Dutch resistance. Joke Folmer's father had hidden them in his house for several weeks until the Dutch had felt it was safe to risk moving them. Now they were as far as Paris with the rest of us.

After about two weeks in Paris we were all getting restless. The prolonged confinement was not only a cause of restlessness but an indication that something was wrong down the line toward Spain. If things had progressed as we had expected, we could have been in the Pyrenees by now. There was a feeling among us that the longer we stayed in one place with this many men, the greater the risk of being found.



Above: A picture from 1985 of the school (Ecole Normale) at 24, rue Lhomond in Paris, where Clayton David and the other Allied evaders were hidden in the basement of the building to the rear. The vehicle gate was closed and they entered through the pedestrian gate next to the building. The custodian, his wife and daughter lived in a first floor apartment where the curtains hang in the windows.