

Not only did the 10 guys consider it theirs after breaking it in, but before flying from Maine to Newfoundland to Scotland they had hand-washed the plane to increase flight efficiency. The plane needed combat modifications; the 10 men left it behind and went by train to Watford, England. They attended some lectures, then briefly stopped at the B-17 personnel replacement depot in Bobington.

The final assignment was to the 339th which was one of four squadrons in the 96th Bombardment Group at Snetterton Heath. The others being 337th, 338th and the 413th. The airfield was located in East Anglia near Norwich in southeastern England. Shot-up aircraft greeted them. Robert Grimes recalled that each night the men noted the missing crews from the Group's hut and anxiety grew. Chuck said that the different crews were discouraged from mingling — it would be too bad for morale for the men to lose someone they knew well.

The Germans shot down 248 B-17s from the 96th Group during September and October of 1943. Most planes lasted five or six missions. Twenty-six of the crews lost in September were among the newest members. Of those 260 men, 130 became POWS, 105 were killed and 17 evaded capture after their planes were shot down. The fate of eight other regular crew members, plus five replacements, is unknown.

Grimes, Pickett, and company had their first bombing mission Oct. 2. They rose early to shower and to be ready for predawn takeoff. Hot water was in great demand because of the importance of a clean shave. As Grimes explains in his war account called "Evasion," the oxygen masks required a snug fit. The planes weren't pressurized, and a steady supply of oxygen was critical above 12,000 feet or people would pass out. Crew members continually checked on one another to ensure no one suffered from hypoxia.

Readying the plane took an hour. Chuck checked the bombs and his bombsight. Jim McElroy checked his maps and navigational equipment. The gunners — Sheets, Nawracaj, Janser and Metlen — loaded ammunition and prepared their gun positions. Pickett oversaw the gunners. McManus ensured the radio equipment worked and he set the proper frequency for the mission. Keller's job as engineer was to go over the entire plane with Grimes. Only when these two said so did the crew crank up the engines.

A green flare approved each plane's taxi; security necessitated no radio signal. The bombers took off in pairs in 30-second intervals, and by 0600 they were nearing the target, the seaport of Emden on the North Sea. The Germans had a series of lifts there similar to the United States' locks and dams. The system was the highest in Europe. Chuck doubts the mission was too successful. The skies clouded over, and the bombardiers were told to drop their bombs when the leader dropped his at 0615. One plane was lost. The Germans peppered Chuck's crew with a little flak but caused no serious damage. Upon returning to base, the men received "medicinal whiskey" as part of their debriefing. They had survived their first aerial combat mission.

Two days later the 96th Bomb Group hit Frankfurt at 0715. The target was the railroad marshaling yard that led to Saarbrücken. The Germans detected the bombers and, in an attempt to stop them, created a flak battery that was a 3,000-

square-foot space filled with anti-aircraft fire. The smoke of the bursting shells formed a black cloud, and once the formation started, a pilot could not turn back.

Snetterton to Frankfurt was about as far as a B-17 could fly a combat mission. The ground staff had to calculate carefully the proper weight ratio of gasoline and bombs; the planes could not have full loads of both. The men were highly upset because most of the time they barely had enough gas to get an empty plane home, Chuck remembered.

His crew nearly didn't get its bombs dropped and the plane emptied. Someone had used the relief tube in the bomb bay after the plane had reached its mission altitude. But there was a design problem, and at 56 degrees below zero the urine froze as soon as it hit the tube. No one realized it had overflowed onto the long jack screws that opened the bomb bay doors, freezing them shut.

Passing the I.P., the initial point of attack, Chuck flicked the door switch. The "open" light stayed off. He tried it again with the same result. He left the nose to see what was wrong. "I found Sgt. Keller was already looking for the problem," Chuck said.

Chuck held Keller by the legs so he could break the ice and crank the doors down by hand. Suspended over the open door and wearing no parachutes, the two could see Frankfurt 3 1/2 miles below. With the doors clear they signaled Grimes that they soon would salvo the bombs. The plane was falling behind the formation. Chuck spotted a bend in the Rhine River and manually calculated the time of release. With the load gone, the crew members flew home on their remaining fuel.

World War II, by the numbers

Estimated number of deaths, worldwide: 53,477,000. Number of Soviet deaths, military and civilian: 22,320,000. Number of U.S. military deaths: 292,131.

Jewish population, prior to the war, of Germany and the nations it conquered: 8,851,800. After the war: 2,917,900.

Peak strength of major combatants: Soviet Union, 12.5 million; United States, 12,364,000; Germany and Austria, 10 million; Japan, 6,095,000; France, 5 million; China, 5 million; United Kingdom, 4,683,000; Italy, 4.5 million.

Killed in action: 8.6 of every 1,000 American servicemen. Dead of other causes: 3 in 1,000. Nonmortal injuries: 17.7 in 1,000.

American forces that were draftees: 61.2 percent. Prospective soldiers rejected as physically or mentally unfit: 35.8 percent.

Average duration of service: 33 months. Number who worked in noncombat, rear-echelon jobs: 38.8 percent.

Average base pay, enlisted personnel: \$71.33 per month. Officers: \$203.50 per month.

Direct economic costs, worldwide: \$1.6 trillion. By nation: United States, \$288 billion; Germany, \$212.3 billion; Japan, \$41.3 billion.

Weaponry produced: aircraft, 443,031; guns (rifles to artillery), 49,319,462; ammunition (bullets to bombs), 82,352,314,472; ships (naval and merchant), 79 million tons; vehicles (jeeps to tanks), 5,157,458.

Prisoners of war, held by Allies: German, 630,000; Italian, 430,000; Japanese, 11,600. Held by Germans: French, 765,000; Italian, 550,000; British Commonwealth, 200,000; Yugoslav, 125,000; American, 90,000. Held by Japan: British Commonwealth, 108,000; Dutch, 22,000; American, 15,000.

Source: "World War II Almanac, 1931-1945," by Robert Goralski.

Chapter 3

The milk run

With two missions under his belt, Chuck returned from a mandatory stint at gunnery school along The Wash* in east England to find that the crew had flown additional bombing missions to Gdynia, Poland; and Bremen, Germany. The next mission was set for Sunday Oct. 17, immediately following "Black Week" when Allies lost so many B-17s that the brass reconsidered its bombing policy. This mission was to Duren, a Nazi center of communications and a site of steel mills. The Allies also hoped to find and destroy some specially modified Nazi planes.

The mass bombing was touted as a "milk run" where the loss of aircraft should be less than 5 percent. The 96th Bombardment Group's planes were to fly higher than ever, safe from anti-aircraft fire, drop their load and go home.

Stormy weather canceled the first three attempts. The bomber group took off before daylight Oct. 17, but at sunrise heavy clouds prevented members from seeing each other to fall into formation, and the run was scrubbed. Oct. 18 was a repeat, as deteriorating weather forced the group to land. The next day the bombers never left the ground because of low, heavy clouds.

The morning of Oct. 20, the crew under Lt. Robert Grimes learned they must fly another crew's plane. Damage in combat over Bremen had taken its toll and their B-17 needed repairs. That left them with Shack Rabbit III from the 413th Squadron.

"I do remember a feeling of relief when I saw that our replacement plane was a B-17F rather than a B-17G," Chuck said. "The G had a chin turret and needed a little training to operate. I did not have the training. I had just come back from gunnery school where we shot only the hand-aimed 50-calibers."

Loaded to capacity with general purpose bombs weighing 100 and 500 pounds, the plane took off at dawn. Chuck in his seat in the nose of the plane had a perfect view of what lay ahead. Just off the runway were the woods of East Anglia. That morning's takeoff was the lowest and the closest they'd come to the trees.

Lifting off one after another in 20- to 30-second intervals, the B-17s slowly circled and found their places. First, three planes joined to form an element. The element joined another element to make a squadron, and finally the many squadrons completed the formation. Here was the 96th Bomb Group.

Each B-17 had 10 or 11 50-caliber machine guns. This meant there were more than 200 guns to defend a 21-ship combat formation. The defensive firepower was supposed to shield the group of Flying Fortresses from German fighters, but the fighters were much more nimble aircraft, flew at greater speed and simply could

* Gunnery school was on "The Wash" along the eastern shore of England. (See map on page 11.) The soldiers shot at tow targets on the water and at targets mounted on a jeep that drove around a track.

One of the U.S. commanders there created a personal gold mine by charging junior officers \$10 and \$15 per week but denying them access to the officers club. Apparently many complained, including 2nd Lt. Charles V. Carlson. Eventually the commander was court-martialed and returned to the United States in disgrace.

outmaneuver the bombers. The fighters also carried 20-millimeter cannons, outclassing the U.S. guns.

Quickly climbing, the group headed out over the English Channel. The target height of 29,000 feet was the highest Chuck had flown. Their hope was to clear the weather front at 26,000 feet and make it more difficult for the German anti-aircraft gunners to sight them. The planes were nose up, and to Chuck they appeared to be clawing the sky to stay up so high. The B-17 hit 20,000 feet when Lt. Grimes reported over the intercom that the No. 4 engine was malfunctioning. Unable to correct the problem, he shut it down mid-morning over the French coast.

"Here is where the old 'milk run' gets us in trouble," Chuck recalled. In a quick discussion the crew decided to try to complete the mission by running three engines at full emergency power level.

But as the group continued to climb, Shack Rabbit couldn't keep up; the high altitude and increased power proved too much. As the bomber gradually dropped one slot after another in the formation, another plane moved up to take its place. Shack Rabbit finally fell to "Tail-end Charlie," the most vulnerable position in the formation. Then Pilot Grimes reported that another engine was malfunctioning. They must abort the mission and try to return to England on two engines.

As Shack Rabbit turned, the gunners reported that 12 to 15 German fighters were attacking from all angles through the clouds. There was a thump and the plane lifted and started to fall. Grimes called out that the controls were damaged. Unable to keep the plane steady, Grimes switched to automatic pilot.

"Bail out!"

Tail gunner George Janser never answered the call and apparently fell with the tail. One of the waist gunners reported that Janser appeared shot. Fred McManus, the radio operator, took a bullet to the head while trying to stave off incoming fighters with his machine gun. Grimes was shot in the thigh but managed to reach the hatch and jump later.²

From his vantage point, Chuck could see that the bomber was partially out of the clouds. He heard firing from the waist guns and the ball turret. The intercom went out, and Lt. Jim McElroy and Chuck glanced at each other, shed their oxygen masks and scrambled to get ready to jump.

Chuck found a "walk around" oxygen bottle and hose which he stuck into the knee pocket of his flying suit. As he bent down to pick up his parachute a bullet pierced the center of it. Luckily, the shock cords were not hit or the 'chute would have deployed right there. Looking up he saw McElroy wave as he slipped from the plane at 25,000 feet.³

Chuck picked up the 'chute, but had no intention of using it because the bullet would have punched a series of holes through the folded canopy. When Lt. Pickett

2. In the unpublished account "Evasion," Robert Z. Grimes explains events from his view in the cockpit. He knew before jumping that at least two crew members were dead. He passed out briefly after jumping because of a lack of oxygen, but awoke to find himself suspended from his parachute and concluded that he had pulled by reflex.

3. James McElroy details his story in "Lucky Jim," also an unpublished account. He walked alone through Belgian and France to return to the Allied forces. He received food and lodging from sympathetic farmers, villagers and church officials, but never connected with the underground.

came down from the flight deck, Chuck showed him the parachute and was told a spare was in the radio room. Pickett then slipped out the hatch.

"Then for some unknown reason I wanted to get back at the Germans so I went back to the bombardier's gun, and when I thought I saw a fighter go by in the clouds I let go a good long burst, hoping I could get a lucky hit. Then I turned and started to the radio room," Chuck recalled.

"To go through the bomb bay I would need my hands to hold on as I made my way across the central beam, so I hooked my damaged 'chute on my harness. When I got by the hatch the plane went out of control. The motions were so wild there was no way I could make it back to the radio room. I think I decided I had to leave. Using my hands and arms I managed to get halfway out of the hatch and the strong forces pulled me back into the plane." The plane was spinning flat like a plate on a juggler's stick.

When the pressure threw him back into the plane his head had come near the "G" box and he could hear something banging. It registered immediately that the detonators had broken loose.

The "G" box was the latest in technology. Two ground stations emitted radio signals which the box interpreted. With the help of a chart, the crew could determine their location. To prevent the device from falling into the hands of the Axis powers, the Allies rigged a self-destruct feature. Springs held two shotgun shells with primers in a tube. If the plane experienced a sudden change in speed, as would happen in a crash, the shells would ram up against a firing pin and blow up the set.

As the boxed rattled, Chuck could see the shadows of German fighter planes as they strafed the falling Shack Rabbit. A few bullets pierced the bomber's oxygen tanks, sending fresh oxygen into the nose compartment. Chuck said that's what kept him conscious, otherwise he wouldn't have survived.

"I figured that this was going to be the end," he said.

Then there was a sudden explosion. The G box ignited as the oxygen fed the detonation. The whole bottom of the plane was blown out and Chuck with it. Then it was quiet.

"I had no sensation of falling. I looked over my shoulder and I could see the plane. It seemed to be quite far away. The bottom of the nose had been blown off and the tail had been broken off at about the rear hatch. The tail was upright and was just gliding down. The main part of the plane was spinning around the wing axis. I looked for parachutes but there were none to be seen."

Chuck's face was burned, his eyebrows were gone and he felt as if he had a bad case of sunburn. His hands were singed and red.

He could see the countryside slowly getting bigger between his feet, but because the crews had been warned that German pilots might shoot a man held helpless in a parachute, he decided not to open the damaged chest-pack parachute's rip cord until he could tell the difference between trucks and cars on the road below. There was a large woods and beyond it a Nazi airfield. He worried about the German fighters in the air and about the troops on the ground, and he wondered if his parachute would open and hold. And then it was time to try.

"Remembering a Bible verse from confirmation class, 'Ask and it shall be given,' I asked, and pulled the rip cord."



Chuck Carlson landed in these woods, but never saw the gatehouses. The Nazis converted this estate at Beloeil, Belgium, into an airfield command center. Photo courtesy of Elizabeth Fricke.

The torque of the deploying 'chute whipped his heels back until they brushed his head. His flying boots went sailing, and so did his helmet.

At 195 pounds, Chuck was larger than the average Air Force man and a standard parachute didn't fit. His had been modified, but the risers, which are doubled-over strips that should give way when the parachute opens to help ease the jolt, mistakenly had been sewn with nylon instead of cotton thread. Chuck took all of the force on his back rather than on the leg straps. He felt as though his back had been broken. "I checked the 'chute and, how lucky I was, the bullet had put nine holes in the canopy and had severed two shroud lines. The 'chute was holding the air just fine," Chuck said.

As the ground appeared to come nearer, he realized he was dropping quickly. He was coming up to the woods and could see the outlines of several two-engine planes parked in such a way that the branches obscured them from up above. He tried to maneuver the 'chute to the far side by pulling on the remaining shroud lines. The attempt wasn't too successful, and he landed in the crown of a tree.

The parachute fouled over the top and it looked as though he would hang 30 feet above the ground until the Germans came. By now the pain in his back was intense.

"I began to check what things I had with me. No escape kit — it was in my A2 jacket in the airplane. No 45 automatic — it and the two extra clips I always car-

ried were gone," he said. The standard packet of two silk maps, two dime-sized compasses and the emergency candy were gone with the plane. "This is about the worst way you could come down in enemy territory. Now I had to get down as quickly as possible and put as much distance between me and this place as possible."

He tried to unbuckle the parachute harness' risers which extended up his chest and shoulders, but began to swing back and forth like a clock pendulum, banging his injured back against the tree trunk. He had no knife to cut the shroud lines to make a rope with which to climb down. There was a need for speed because he knew the Nazis had seen him come down and were only on the far side of the woods. He crawled up the shroud lines and let go, hoping his weight would drag the 'chute free. It moved a little so he tried a couple more times. Each time the 'chute moved slightly. Determining it could take awhile, he wasn't prepared when the next drop ripped the parachute free and sent him careening to the ground. He landed on his feet, his tail bone came down on his right heel and broke a bone in his foot.

The lesson in jumping that U.S. Army had never seen fit to give its Air Force bombardiers had come at the hands of the German Luftwaffe. Chuck's first drop in a parachute had ended, and it was time to flee.

Chapter 4

Mon dieu, Américain!

"Lying crumpled, bruised and winded on the ground, I began to remember in great detail the escape briefings. The most important item: put as much distance between you and your landing site as possible. If you could run one mile, the Germans would have to search an area with a radius of a mile," Chuck said. He stuffed the parachute and harness together and quickly buried them in a hole at the base of a large tree and his flight suit in a dip in the ground beneath decaying branches and leaves.

Limping, Chuck started across an open field away from the air base, but returned to the trees when he saw bicyclists. Servicemen had been warned to stay away from people with bicycles and automobiles because friends of the Germans would be more likely to have them. He watched the riders go and he struck out again.

He was a hundred yards out when he heard and then saw a plane that had just taken off from the airfield. As the pilot began a search pattern, Chuck dove into a drainage ditch.

"I squirmed down deeper in the water and mud and hoped that my khaki uniform would blend in with the dried grass and weeds. Twice the plane flew over the field and made some low altitude turns that would have done credit to a crop duster. There was no indication that he spotted me.

"When the plane flew away from me I raised my head and checked the plane. It had two engines and a double tail and there was a lot of glass in the nose. It was the plane that we were supposed to look for on our mission to Duren. It was an ME 210 which had been used solely as a bomber but was now being used to attack the Allied bomber formations. I was supposed to be looking for this plane but now it was looking for me."

As Chuck tried to catch his breath, he realized he was not only wet and cold, but he smelled. A farmer obviously had used natural fertilizer — recently and in some quantity — on the field. Chuck was lying in manure. He had to stay soaking in it until the plane moved off toward where the B-17 had crashed.

He ran back into the woods and dug up his electric flying suit. With it on and feeling warmer, he again left the woods but in a different direction. "Now was the time for a cigarette. Boy, how good that was going to taste," Chuck recalled. "I had the cigarette, but I could find no matches in the pockets of my khaki uniform. In my search I found 24 cents, a paper clip and my picture of Elizabeth."

He kept walking north on a path until he met a small, older man. Chuck figured the man wasn't so big that he couldn't confront him, so he offered him a cigarette. The man put it to his mouth. Chuck did the same and just stood there. In a minute the man realized the dilemma and produced some matches. The two then tried to talk.

Neither understood the other fully. The man used hand gestures to explain that the soldiers were looking for the crew members from the downed bomber. When the stranger gave Chuck the matches and put him in a clump of willow-like trees,

Chuck comprehended that the man planned to return from him after dark. Watching him go, a leery Chuck waited before moving 50 or 75 yards away to climb a tree from where he could watch in case this was a trick. It was about 2 p.m. and he had a long time to sit among the branches, listening to the search planes, smoking, thinking about home, worrying about capture and planning strategies. Twilight dragged.

The preflight lectures concentrated on evading capture rather than escaping once caught. It was usually necessary for a soldier to take cover until the search parties stopped. However, in some cases it might be better to make off across country as soon as possible.

If a man landed by parachute, he should cautiously approach a house or farm but not enter until the owner appeared to be alone and there were no Nazi troops in sight. Schoolteachers, doctors and priests would likely speak some English, and priests could be approached safely in the confessional.

The Germans had invaded Netherlands and Belgium in May of 1940. According to Airey Neavey, by the end of that year the British had found it impossible for an airman to reach neutral territory in Switzerland or Spain without help. Neave was one of the coordinators for Great Britain's Room 900 which was charged with assisting the undergrounds in recovering downed airmen and lost soldiers. He wrote in "The Escape Room" that the Gestapo had tightened its grip on occupied France, and the security forces of the Vichy government hampered soldiers' efforts. Most of British men who had been captured were transferred to Germany when the whole of France was occupied by Hitler in November 1942.

There was some heartening news for Chuck. It was 1943 and the airmen shot down in the big raids that were preceding June 1944's D-Day landing, had about an even chance of returning home – if they were not severely wounded.

Twilight dragged.

Late in the evening the man returned alone and Chuck went to meet him. "He looked at me and where I had been hiding and bobbing his head, he clapped me on the back to show he appreciated my wariness," Chuck recalled.

The man wore two pairs of pants and two coats. He took one set off so Chuck could cover his khaki uniform with dark European clothing. Then the two began to walk.

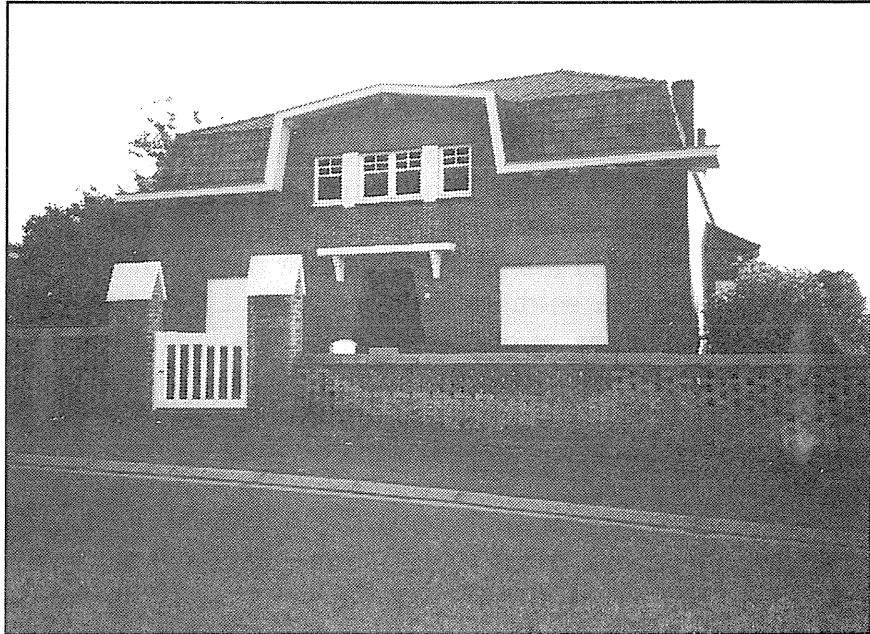
His foot hurt, but he could move. Fortunately, he hadn't lost his shoes when the flight boots went sailing. The stiff leather gave the broken bone some support. "You're so full of adrenaline that you manage to overcome the pain," he explained.

They walked in the dark about five kilometers until they crossed a bridge over a canal. They turned right to backtrack on the other side, but Chuck's guide stopped abruptly after a hundred yards in the deep shadows. He put his hand to his lips. A squad of German soldiers and an officer came marching. Their hobnail boots drummed a steady percussion, passed the concealed men, down the street and across the bridge. "Then my guide began to smile and he gleefully pounded me on the back. They were looking for me," Chuck said.

The twosome followed several paths, crisscrossing behind houses and through fields until they reached a large, vacant house. The man unlocked the back door and in the dark took Chuck upstairs to a back bedroom. The guide checked the

Chuck spent approximately four weeks, beginning Oct. 20, hidden in an upstairs bedroom of this summer home in Stambruges, Belgium. The caretaker, Henri Cnudde, was part of the Belgian underground. Chuck could not be reunited with his crew members and moved toward France and Spain because he needed time to recover from internal bleeding, a broken foot, injured back, as well as burns on his face and hands.

Photo courtesy of Elizabeth Fricke.



heavy drapes at the window and then lighted a candle. He left momentarily to get some blankets.

Chuck sank down on the bed to remove his shoes. The broken foot was black and blue well above the ankle. Between an enlarged foot and blistered hands, Chuck struggled with one shoe. "The helper came over and looked at what I was trying to do. He took out his pocket knife and cut the laces loose," Chuck recalled. "I also had some internal injuries because both my urine and stool were flecked with blood. That continued for several days."

The man disappeared for quite some time but returned with coffee and bread. "So I had my first supper in France and Belgium. It was not a gourmet meal," Chuck said with a laugh. The man also provided his first name: Henri.

Once each day Henri returned with food. It was up to Chuck to make it last for three meals. Although the other survivors of Chuck's crew were en route out of the country, he had to remain hidden until his burns healed. The red skin showed the clear outline of an American helmet around his face.

After a week, Henri decided that Chuck should have a hot meal and meet his family. "There was only one problem. I still could not put my weight on my foot. Henri solved this by carrying me, 185 pounds, across the street to his house. I met Henri's family, his wife and young son. What I remember about the dinner is that potatoes never tasted so good. After dinner and getting to know each other, Henri carried me back to my hiding place."

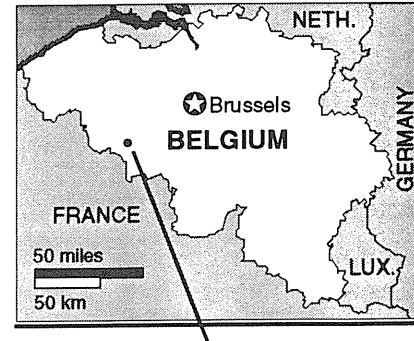
Chuck told the Cnudde family where to find his parachute. Material for clothing was in demand and the silk would make fine shirts

Through conversation he learned that his hiding place was a summer home for some Parisians; Henri Cnudde was the caretaker. The village was Strambruges, Belgium. Henri also relayed that Lt. Arthur Pickett and Sgts. George Carl Janser and Fred McManus were dead. Lt. Robert Grimes had been wounded. Sgts. Harold Sheets and Robert Metlen were together in a town some distance away. Henri

offered no news on James McElroy, Ted Kellers or Jerome Nawracaj. Because of Chuck's injuries, here was no talk of him joining Grimes, Sheets and Metlen.

Henri kept to himself at the time that Jerome Nawracaj was dead. The details aren't clear, but, after landing, Jerry somehow acquired a bicycle. On Oct. 21 he approached a woman to ask for directions. She alerted German soldiers. They ordered him to stop and when Nawracaj continued to ride away the soldiers shot him in the back.

On one of Chuck's last nights in Stambruge, Henri brought some absinthe, a potent liqueur, and offered him a drink. Not knowing what it was, Chuck had a couple of shots, which made him woozy. Cautioning Chuck not to forget to blow out the candle, Henri left. That night Chuck dreamed that the candle stood 7 feet tall. Over and over he tried to climb it to blow out the tell-tale flame, burning like a beacon to signal the Nazis that an American was there. He hasn't touched absinthe since.



Approximate location of the downed Shack Rabbit III.

Chapter 5

Ellezelles: Misplaced or forgotten

Henri Cnudde brought civilian clothing one late November morning and told Chuck to get ready. He could walk now, and Comet, the Belgian underground, needed to begin moving him surreptitiously through Belgian and into France. The two men waited until about noon when a 1936 Buick pulled up to the rear. Henri checked to ensure that the right party had arrived, and then Chuck stepped into the bright sunshine.

"Viet! Viet!" urged Henri and the two men who sat in the car.

Chuck quickly climbed into the backseat. It was full of knitted wristlets the local women had had to make for the German troops who were facing a second Russian winter on the Eastern Front. But as Chuck sat down, he felt something knobby, hard and uncomfortable. Looking beneath the wristbands he found a machine gun.

"If we get stopped by the Germans we'll use it," said the man in the front passenger seat.

The car had a charcoal burner mounted on the back. This generated the power that drove them 22 kilometers north by northwest from Stambruge to a bicycle shop in Frasnés. There were no customers in the shop, but the owner hustled the three men into the family quarters in the back. The two escorts held a hurried conversation with the owner and left. Soon Chuck and the owner's family had lunch.

"We carried on a conversation using hands and facial expressions. I think we understood each other quite well. I was not to stay there for they were a part of a group that was active in sabotage," Chuck recalled.

The 20-year-old son showed Chuck a string of bullet scars from his thigh to his shoulder. He had been riding a bicycle with other people trying to flee to France during the 1939-1940 Nazi invasion of Belgian. He became a casualty when the German planes strafed the roads. Now he and his friends were preparing for the Allies' invasion. The exercise in which he'd participated the previous week dealt

with destroying land communications. He and a partner had gone to the Province of Nord, where no travel was allowed. At night they partially sawed through the base of telephone poles, then disguised their work using sawdust and mud. After several nights' work, they sawed down the last pole. That falling pole pulled the others to the ground with it. Another method of stripping communication lines involved looping a rope tautly over the wires, tying it to a vehicle and driving away.

"He thought this was hilarious. But evidently it was good practice, because this is what they did at the time of the invasion," Chuck said. As a result, there were no civilian communications for the Germans to use to help track the Allies' progress

Chuck has forgotten the man's name – if he ever knew it – but the son of a bicycle shop owner in Frasnés, Belgium, was one of an estimated 12,000 people who took part in protecting the Allies' airmen and soldiers who were lost behind enemy lines during World War II. The 20-year-old helped to hide Chuck, as well as to destroy the Nazis' communication lines.



the next fall. "All the telephone lines were down. That was one reason the Allies did as well as they did," he said. The Germans had to rely on hand-held radios, while the Allies strung their own lines.

The young man took Chuck upstairs to try on six pairs of extra shoes, but none fit. When Chuck asked how he had come by so many leather shoes, the young man ran his finger across his throat.

The Germans apparently caught onto the family's activities. As the wife explained in her rusty English in a letter dated Sept. 14, 1946, and signed "Maman from Frasnes:"

We have learned the new of your return in your family with great pleasure! What a fortune, you are in good health!! We all are very well too. Papa has been arrested by the Germans but, fortunately liberated by the Allied troops advance the 3 September 1944. We received new from you by Min. Monique (of Rumes) but after that, nothing. We have feared bad news.

Happily, you are living. This is the chief point.

Will you remind (remember) Charles, when at home, in the evening we learned you your identify card! Wath (what) happiness for your mother when you come back and for your bride (you often speaked about her). We hope she is in excellent health.



To protect people in the Resistance, airmen typically weren't told people's names. Here are "Papa and Maman" from the Frasnes bicycle shop.

At sunset a man named Onesime Vandercoilden arrived for Chuck. Years later, Denise Vanderaspolden, who had been a young girl, recalled the circumstances of how her mother's cousin brought Chuck to the family farm near Ellezelles, which was 10 kilometers away:

Firmin Vanderaspolden and Laure DuBois, my parents, joined the Resistance in 1943. They lived at Arbre-Saint-Pierre, a rather isolated farm. The only other house opposite ours was inhabited by an elderly couple. The path leading to the house was not an important one. To the left of the farm buildings through a dirt quarry, then through the field you arrived at the hamlet of Camps et Haies. In front of the main gate a narrow path led the same way to the farm of Jean Risselin and the road to Semenil, that is in the direction of Frasnes.

Because of all those advantages, their house soon became a meeting point for the Resistance and its headquarters. It is also there that the mail, leaflets