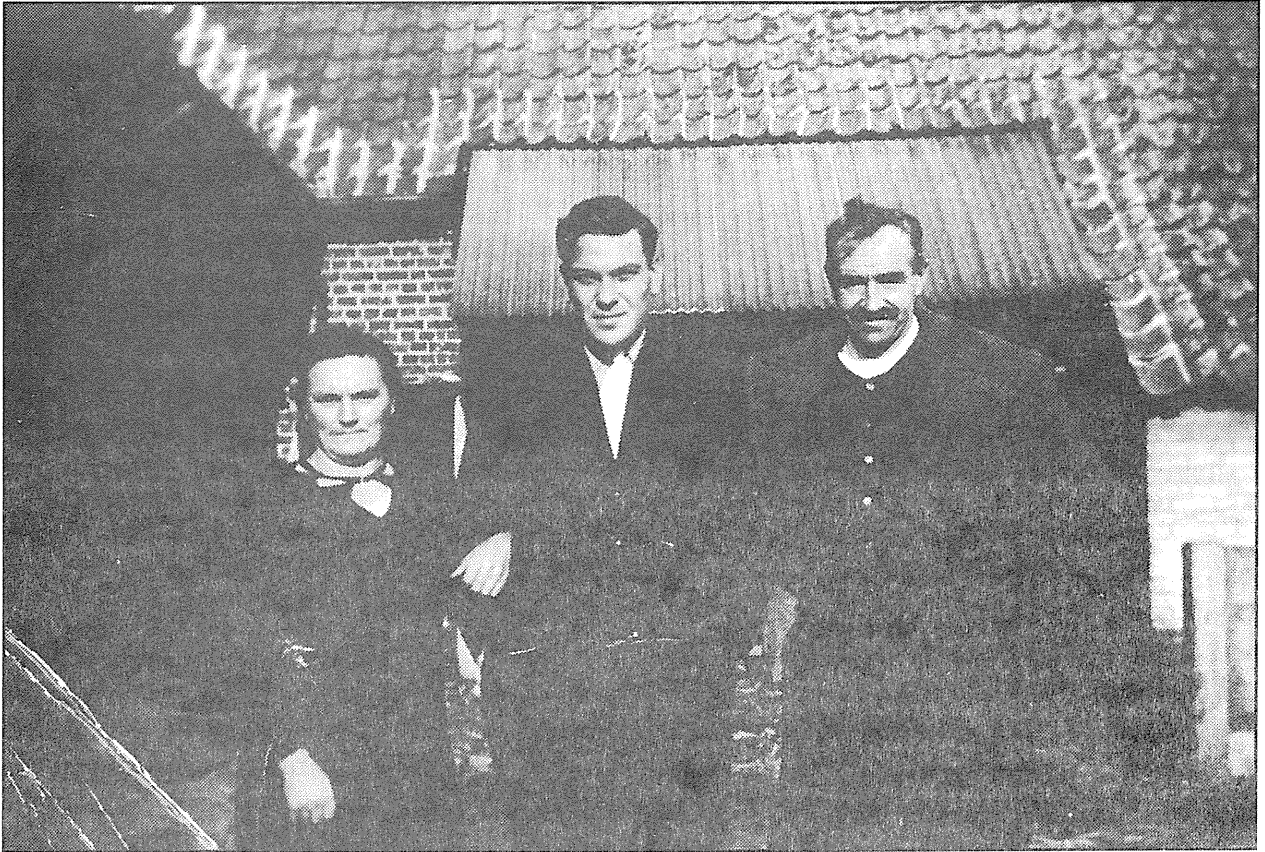
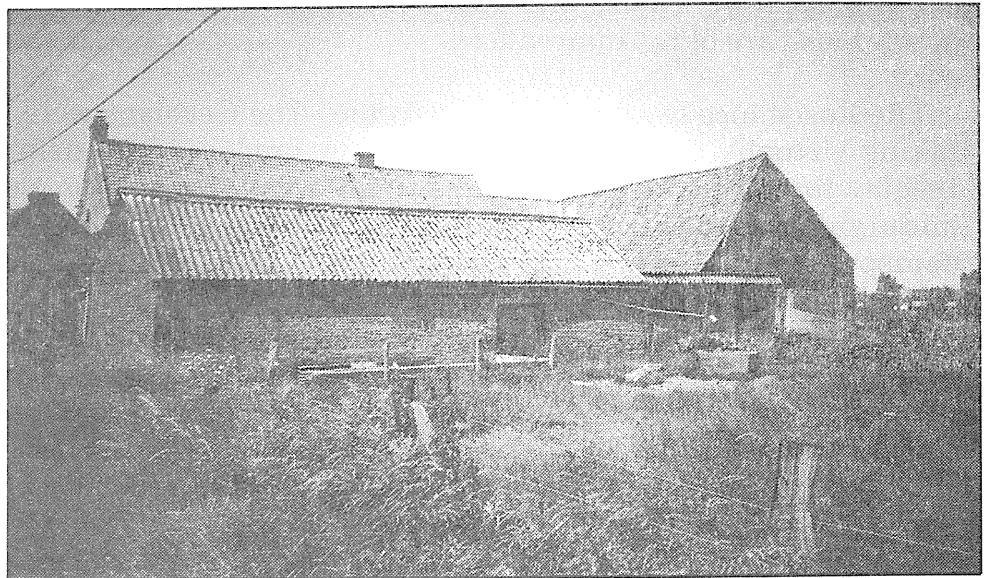


and clandestine newspapers came as well as urgent messages that my father would distribute. We listened to the English broadcasts: It was forbidden but important.



Laure DuBois, Chuck Carlson and Firmin Vanderaspolden pose in the courtyard of the Belgian couple's farm. She was quite nervous about being photographed with an airman for fear the picture would fall into the wrong hands, Chuck recalled. She sent him a copy after the war.



Only the cars of certain doctors were allowed on the road. One late fall day, Onesime Vandercoilden, who belonged to the Resistance's Group G and owned a garage

in Frasnes, borrowed the car of a Doctor Fievet. Denise recalled the excitement of hearing Onesime was bringing an American soldier:

He introduced us to a handsome, strapping man: Charles V. Carlson of Minnesota. My parents heard all about him," Denise recalled. The family knew he had been aboard the bomber that been shot down over the village of Grandglise.

The Vanderaspoldens' farm site was laid out something like a fort, Chuck said. There was a house on one side. Connected to it was an L-shaped barn with a machine shop that was attached to the other end, forming a courtyard in the center. Two large steel doors standing 10 to 15 feet high secured the entryway. The farm was an example of what the Resistance called a réseau. The word literally translates as nest.

Firmin was a sandy-haired, blue-eyed man with a distinctive farmer's walk. Laure was quite a bit shorter than her 6-foot husband. "The thing I remember the most was she was the best cook of the whole bunch," Chuck said. Her specialty was a finely chopped soup.

Chuck helped with many farm chores, but primarily cut sugar beets in spirals. The cows would chew and chew, unraveling the hard roots. There were no English books to read to help pass the time.

Denise wrote:

He helped with the farm work, cut beets for the animals, kept quiet and thanked my mother for the 'apple pies' — that is the apple pies that she baked for him. He never left the farm and nobody ever saw him except Joseph Van Zele, who spoke English with him, and Dr. Jean Noville, who took care of his injured foot.

The Resistance involved farm work, too. The Germans were hard on the farmers, taking virtually everything they raised or produced. To help get around that the Belgian farmers milked cows three times a day rather than twice. They saved the midnight milkings so the families had plenty of cream and butter. The Vanderaspoldens put any extra butter to work on wagon axles because grease wasn't available.

A few days at the farm stretched into weeks. Thanksgiving and Christmas passed into the 1944 New Year. After six weeks Chuck wondered if the leaders of the underground had forgotten him. What he couldn't know was that the Nazis had arrested the latest leader of Comet, and the Belgian Resistance was in turmoil.

In January of 1943, the Gestapo had arrested the founder of the Comet Line. A year later they were closing in on her successor. On Jan. 18, 1944, they arrested him while he was visiting an apartment headquarters in Paris. This did not deter the other members of the Resistance, however, and again they re-established their network.

The Comet Line began in 1941 with 25-year-old Andrée de Jongh, a Belgian

woman living with her parents in Brussels. At first unbeknownst to her family, Dedée helped Allied soldiers and airmen escape over the mountains into Spain. Eventually Frédéric de Jongh joined his daughter, and they worked directly with the British, including Airvey Neave who after the war chronicled some of their activities in his book, "The Escape Room." He was part of MI-9, the section of the British War Office responsible for creating escape routes in Europe.

As Neave explained it, Dedée's motives were uncomplicated. In the Allied airmen she saw the instruments of victory over the Nazis. Her story inspired many young adults and teens to carry on her work. The line was broken and mended many times before the war ended. ⁴

After Chuck left, the Vanderaspoldens hid a member of the Resistance from nearby Renaix, but they began to be scared. Only after the liberation in 1944 did Laure DuBois and her daughter learn their fears were justified and how close the Nazis had come to uncovering the local Resistance headquarters at the family farm.



Chuck is flanked by two Comet members whose identities were kept secret in the event that Chuck was captured en route to Spain. He received a copy of the picture 45 years after the war. The Allies were so concerned about the names of people who aided escapees and evaders, as well as the locations where they were held, that although there was a shortage of trained, experienced airmen, those who did successfully return to Spain and England were not allowed to fly combat missions over Europe for the remainder of the war. ⁵ *Odette Baton and Henri Cnudde.

Strangers would wander around the farm from time to time. One member of the Resistance in Ellezelles, Albert Rivier, who was hiding at Grand Mochaut and who walked through the quarry, told us that he had seen a man hiding

4. Airey Neave, The Escape Room, Doubleday & Co., Garden City, N.Y., 1970, p. 165

5. Horning, , p. xxv.

in a ditch near the house and he was watching us through binoculars. My parents become really careful," Denise said.

The blueprint of their house was later found at the German headquarters in Renaix.

The war cost her family dearly:

If Charles V. Carlson was saved, everything fell apart for my parents: my father lost his life during the fight in Wodecq at Christmas 1944, during the VonRundstedt offense. My mother received a package from Charles V. Carlson who was back in the United States. In it was chocolate, cigarettes, cookies, tea, all sorts of goodies that we no longer had. Sadly, my father was no longer there to hear about it.

Chapter 6

Beer and barking dogs

One noon shortly after Jan. 1, Jeanne Vandercoilden, Onesime's daughter, rode into the courtyard and, after a rapid conversation in French with her relatives, got back on her bicycle while the family got out a bicycle for Chuck. There was no time to prepare. He was told to follow his guide, who quickly pedaled out of the yard.

She stayed ahead of him all the way to the bicycle shop in Frasnés. Traversing many steep hills, Chuck recalled the relief of catching the down slopes as his bicycle would accelerate to about 40 miles per hour. But he barely had recovered from his injuries and with each climb up the next hill Jeanne pulled a little farther ahead.

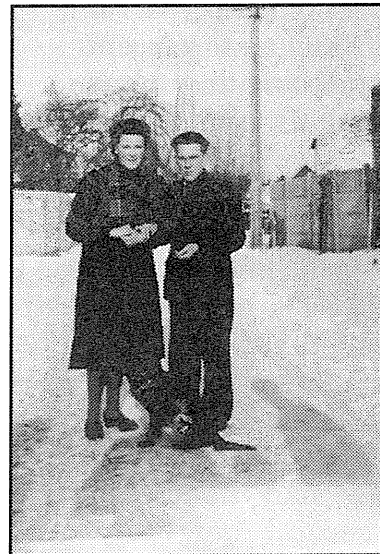
"It was rather exciting except that of course I hadn't had much exercise, but I managed to keep up for quite a while," Chuck said. Eventually Jeanne disappeared from sight. "All I could do was to keep pedaling. Finally I reached the top of the hill and there she was waiting for me. We rested for a few minutes and then we started off again."

It was 10 kilometers — a little more than six miles — from the farm to the edge of Frasnés. The two passed through some woods and a park, sticking to rough field paths in some areas before nearing the bicycle shop where Chuck had met the saboteurs. "We went through the town and at one point we passed four German soldiers who were looking in the shop windows. I thought, 'What will I do if I have a flat tire?' Once we were out in the country it went a little better."

Jeanne sent her regards in a note dated Feb. 2, 1946:

I think you don't forget your good friends and that you often think of them and of the good days passed by us. Unfortunately, this time was sorrowful for you. I often think to our promenade with bicycles from Ellezelles to Frasnés.

Once they reached the bicycle shop, Jeanne promptly left and the owner and his wife put Chuck up for the night. In the morning, a car arrived for Chuck. He was bound for Watriont eight kilometers away. One of the two men in the car was Albert "Bert" Saily, a Belgian youth who was active in the Resistance. He had visited Ellezelles several times each week during Chuck's stay at the farm. And while Chuck had had to discard all traces of his U.S. citizenship in the event he was discovered by the Germans, Saily elected to keep Chuck's dog tags. The youth wrote to Chuck after learning the airman he had helped had survived the war:



Jeanne is pictured with her boyfriend, Victorien,

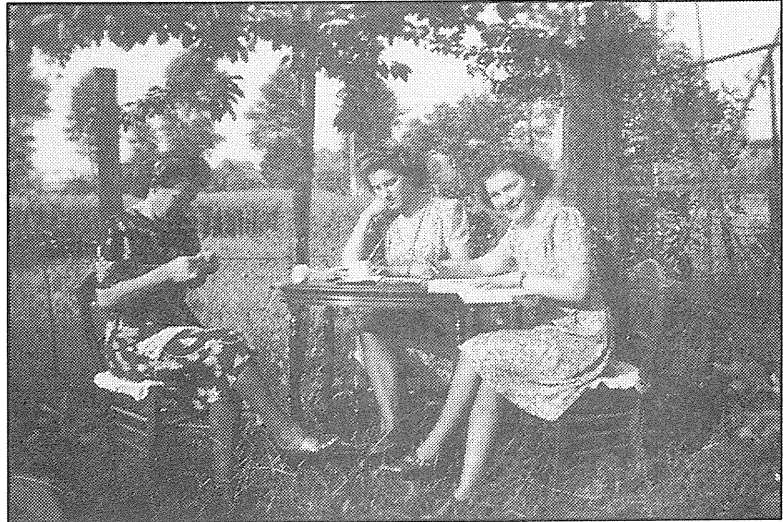
Do you remember the day you leave Ellezelles with a girl, Jeanne, on a bicycle? It was Sunday and you have slept in Frasnés. The Monday morning, we go, you, my friend Friever and myself, in the car to Wattripont. Then I remain till the end of the war without news.... So cheerio and my best wishes. I shall never forget the time we have spent together. A far, far away friend,

Bert

The car stopped at a small house that sat directly on the edge of the road. It was one step out of the car door and into the front door. Indoors Madame Delmeé and her daughter Yvonne welcomed Chuck warmly. The largest room in the small house included the kitchen and family room. In the rear of the kitchen was a store room with a small window that Chuck eyed as an escape route to the woods a short two blocks away. With no cover to the front, he knew it was his only hope.

By day, the Delmeé family and Chuck could see the Nazis in their motorcades and on their bicycles policing the streets. The officials often stopped in the vicinity. Chuck recalled how frightened he and the Delmeés became one afternoon. Several German soldiers in a car and on two motorcycles stopped half a block down the road and stared at the house. They stood there for what seemed to be forever before driving away. No one ever discovered why.

This home had a one major luxury for Chuck – access to English books. Mme. Delmeé's second daughter, Pauline, was rarely home but a friend of Pauline's



Mme. Delmeé relaxed with daughters Yvonne and Pauline at the lake in the idyllic days of 1938 before the war. The family hid Chuck Carlson in January 1944. Their success led them to shelter several other Allied airmen.



brought him two or three books each of the three weeks he was there. “That, of course, helped pass the time away,” Chuck recalled.

In the backyard stood a shed where the family kept gardening tools, vegetables and a mysterious bag the likes of which Chuck had never seen. It produced one his most pleasant memories in hiding — home-brewed beer.

The process began in a large wash boiler on the stove. It was Chuck’s job to fill it with several buckets of clear well water. This was heated to the boiling point. Mme. Delmeé then put the strong cotton bag filled with hops and other ingredients into the water to steep. This would take several hours.

“Now this had been used before and some new ingredients were added to the ones already in the bag,” Chuck said. “After the required cooking time was reached, the container was removed from the stove and set on the floor behind the stove to ferment.”

The bag went back into the shed to dry, and wash boiler was tended to for several days. When the beer reached the proper fermentation point, the family used a siphon and hose to fill dark bottles. Chuck capped them, and they were set aside to continue aging. With new stock in place, the brewmasters could relax and enjoy treat in a time when essentials were hard to put on the table. The finished product tasted fine, he recalled, and produced a frothy foam when poured out of the bottle.

The nights weren’t so easy. The Germans patrolled on bicycles in the dark. The whir of the tires alerted farm dogs, and when the patrols were a mile or so away from the Delmeé home Chuck could begin to monitor their progress as the barking seemed to grow louder, fiercer and closer. For years afterward any barking dog would bother him in the night.

The family hid not only an American, but munitions as well. Pauline Delmeé was a courier for the Resistance.

Yvonne shared her memories in a May 2, 1946, letter:

The house was getting quite an arsenal for, you see, we had the deposit of munitions necessary for the sector’s sabotage.

Oh yes only now we really understand how much we were audacious, but you see it was so so necessary Charles. Anyway we did it with confidence in the (word obscured) end of the terrible torment and we all thank God to have keep us safe.

Indeed – soon after we got the happy liberation.

The evening of Jan. 18, a car pulled up in front and a knock sounded at the door. Mme. Delmeé glanced at Chuck, who scrambled to the store room window preparing to escape. He heard two strangers’ voices, but the French was too rapid for him to grasp. Then Mme. Delmeé called for him. There in the living room stood an elderly man and a young woman with hair dyed a striking bluish purple – Monique. There was no time to get acquainted because once again the Resistance had decided to move Chuck with no notice. Grabbing his coat and hat, he quickly told the Delmeés goodbye and got into the car.

The man was Marcel Delbrayere, another doctor, and thus had a car. He gave Monique Jules and Chuck a ride to Renaix, a railroad town about four kilometers away. He let them out in the center of town and left without looking back. The streets were dark because of the wartime blackout, and the two stuck to the shadows cast by the buildings. As the two walked, she explained that she would take him as far as the Belgium-French border and instructed him how to act during the journey: He should follow at a distance and wait near the station while she purchased the tickets.

"We won't be together, but you do what I do," Monique said. "If we get on a railroad car, you sit over there and I'll sit way back here someplace."

The train to Tournai was scheduled to depart at 7:30 p.m., but was predictably late so they had time to sit in a cafe. They said nothing to each other as they drank their soft drinks – some type of artificial juice – but they started to draw people's attention so they quickly finished and left.

"I stood a ways away from the entrance to the cafe, leaning against the building. Some Belgian youngsters came by and said under their breath "sol bete, sol bete," which means dirty beast. Standing in my blue-black coat they must have thought I was Gestapo or something. They did this two or three times. As long as I didn't chase them they thought it was fun," Chuck said.

At 9 p.m., Monique signaled and he went back to the depot, although no one could tell them when the train would arrive. She stood at one end of the crowded room and Chuck stood in the center. What made it so difficult was all of the Belgians were so short. "I'm not very tall, but I was head and shoulders above everybody else," Chuck said.

After the two had been there an hour or so, all of a sudden there was a clump of marching feet. In came an officer and squad of German soldiers. "This is the end," Chuck thought. His Belgian identification card wasn't the best forgery.

Monique sidled over to the door and left. "I wanted to follow her in the worst way. That would be the worst thing I could do so I stayed there."

The officer and station master chatted for some time. Then the officer walked through the crowd, shouldered Chuck out of the way and took his troops onto the platform. They boarded a train heading in the opposite direction of Tournai.

The Tournai train finally arrived at 10 p.m. Monique returned and boarded. Contrary to orders, there was nothing she and Chuck could do except sit together because the car was empty. To avoid drawing attention to himself, Chuck propped his ticket into the band of his hat and feigned sleep. With little more than a glance, the conductor punched the ticket and stuffed it back into the hat. He was more interested in chatting with the vivacious Monique. From Chuck's point of view with his eyes closed and body frozen in one position, the conversation dragged on and on. More than 15 minutes later the conductor at last moved along.

The astounding Monique was just latest in the string of the young women who risked their lives to help Chuck and hundreds of other Allied airmen. Like Jeanne Vandercoilden and Pauline and Yvonne Delmeé, Monique apparently took to heart the lesson of Edith Cavell, a Belgian nurse of World War I who had helped British soldiers escape, in addition to her efforts to pass along military information. She was caught and shot in 1915 for hiding Allied soldiers in her Brussels clinic, but not

until after she made a public confession in which she declared her actions to be morally right.⁶

Her legend was of great significance in the Second World War especially to the Belgians and many young women risked their lives for her example. She was to be an inspiration for those heroes and heroines of the escape lines who felt the humanitarian importance of their work. Of them, it can surely be said, that mere patriotism was not enough.

The 22-kilometer train trip ended at 11:30 p.m. The next step was to avoid Tournai night patrols. Because a German soldier had been killed while standing in a doorway at a local beer parlor, a strict sunset curfew was in effect and any violators could be shot. Monique quietly led him to two bicycles that fellow members of the underground had hidden. They pedaled through quiet, black streets. Monitoring his progress by the looming Roman Catholic cathedral in the distance, Chuck watched the church seem to grow in size. It took forever to pass it and reach the countryside. The whirl of the wheels mingled with night sounds as they pedaled eight kilometers (or five miles) to Monique's mother's home at Rumes and could finally rest for the night. It had taken three months, but now only a three-kilometer walk separated Chuck from France.

6. Neave, p. 55

Chapter 7 Back home

It took several days for the Carlson family to hear that Chuck was missing in action. The Duren mission was on Oct. 20, and on Oct. 29 the announcement came by telegram. Axel and Hulda contacted Elizabeth. Thanksgiving passed, and then they learned a few sketchy details in a letter dated Nov. 29, 1943, from Col. John Cooley, air adjutant general in Washington, D.C. For security reasons, the Army Air Forces would not release the names of the other nine crew members nor specify the mission's location.

Further information has been received to the effect that Lieutenant Carlson was a crew member of a B-17 Flying Fortress which participated in a mission to Western Germany on October 20th. Details are lacking, the report stating his plane was found to be missing when the formation returned to its base, and that information as to the cause, the place and the hour of its loss, is unknown.

Because of all of the individual training and numerous substitutions to fill the frequent vacancies, the crew members' parents had no way of knowing that the original 10 men were back together. But the Picketts knew that Charles Carlson had flown with son Arthur across the Atlantic and wrote to Chuck's parents. Carlsons still had learned nothing about the mission. Like all, families with sons and husbands fighting the war, they had the right to place a blue star in their window. If the star was changed to gold, it signified the soldier had died.

At one point the Picketts heard from Harold Sheets, who managed to return to the Allies' front lines with the help of the underground. He told them Art had bailed out of the plane over what Sheets believed to be the French border. The Picketts eventually learned that their 23-year-old son was dead. His parachute apparently deployed too late or its lines tangled. He hit a residence, which later was named a Place de Pickett in his honor in Harchies, Belgium. He died within



Elizabeth Roe received an ambiguous telegram from Comet, the Belgian underground, that indicated Chuck was all right. She and the Carlsons heard nothing more for about nine months.

211 Main Avenue
Warren, Pennsylvania
27 December 1943

My dear Mr. Carlson;

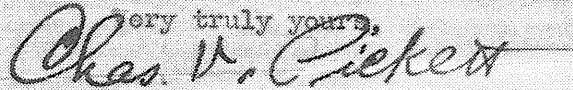
Second Lieutenant Charles V Carlson, 0678500, was a crew member of a flying Fortress, which flew to England about 1st September. My son, 2nd Lieutenant Arthur C Pickett was either Pilot or Co-Pilot of this Fortress.

My son was reported by the War Department "Missing in Action" on 20th October 1943.

I have no knowledge that anyone who flew the Atlantic with him about 1st September, was with my son on the Fortress on 20 October when he was reported "Missing in Action". A lot of changes could be made in crew members since that time.

Please write me what you hear from Second Lieutenant Charles V Carlson, 0678500. I do not wish to unnecessarily alarm you, and remember, no news is generally good news.

Very truly yours,



Charles V. Pickett
211 Main Avenue
Warren, Pennsylvania

minutes of head injuries. After the war ended, Madame Fraz Lefebvre sent the Picketts a poem describing their son's final minutes. She also sent a small box containing his belongings that included letters from home, his pilot's ring, a pen, some cords from his parachute and three locks of his hair.⁷

In the meantime Christmas 1943 came and went. Then in late January, the military wrote to the men's families. The letter from Col. T.A. Fitzpatrick to the Carlsons, dated Jan. 20, contained only a list of crew members and their next of kin:

I regret that, up to the present time, no additional report has been received regarding your son. Please be assured that we are exerting every effort to ascertain the whereabouts of our men who are missing and should further information concerning your son reach this headquarters, it will be communicated to you without delay.

Within a couple days of receiving this letter, the Carlsons heard from Ted Kellers' mother in Akron, Ohio. She asked if they had any news to share.

Mrs. Kellers had to wait until the end of the war to know that her son was alive. Kellers landed safely and, like Chuck, connected with the Belgian underground. He

7. Capt. Becky Colaw, "Ordinary American, Ultimate Sacrifice," *Airman*, October 1992, pg. 40-43.

Akron, Ohio
Jan. 24, 1944

Dear Mr. Carlson,

The war Dept. has supplied us with the names of the crew members on the bomber which was lost on Oct. 30th.

My son Tech. Sgt. T. R. Kellers was among them and we have received no further word since the telegram stating that he was missing. Have you received further news of your son? I would appreciate any news you have received that may help to relieve my anxiety.

Respectfully

Mrs. Eliz Kellers.

572 Patterson Ave

Akron, Ohio.

managed to visit Robert Grimes, who was in bed after his leg wound became infected. Kellers evaded the enemy until he reached the Pyrenees Mountains in southern France near the Spanish border. Germans shipped him to a prisoner of war camp in Poland. The Allies released him in the spring of 1945.

The Carlsons and Elizabeth Roe finally received their first inkling of good news in late February 1944. An obscure telegram from France reached Elizabeth. It read something like, "Charlot has a new job and enjoys it very much."

She said she knew then that Chuck was alive and, since Charlot is French for Charles, that he must be somewhere in France. She contacted his mother, who had no way of knowing that a similar telegram had been sent to her but it apparently never cleared the censors in Nazi-occupied France. Friends and family heard nothing more for nearly eight months.

Chapter 8

A man worth 1 million francs

With a kiss for the border officer, Monique successfully transferred Chuck into France the next morning. He was now in the hands of Sgt. Maurice Bricout, who ostensibly worked for the Germans checking people's travel papers, but actually served Comet. He always wore his uniform of the French artillery and often walked with his two dogs, Poopet and Coquette, by his side. One was a large Alsatian.

He put Chuck into two sisters' home which was located on the edge of the park district that served as a buffer between Belgium and France. Because the home had been a stronghold, the Germans had shelled it during the Nazi invasion. Three years later only one portion of the roof covered the upper floor, and it was to the far end where the attic was little more than broken rafters and scarce shingles that the sisters placed Chuck's bed.

"They didn't think the Germans would think about looking up there," Chuck said. "It was a nice place as long as it didn't rain."

One of the sisters was a courier for the underground. The other suffered from tuberculosis and was stuck at home. There were no antibiotics available for civilians at the time, and her condition gradually worsened as the war dragged on. Chuck tried to send penicillin after the liberation, but couldn't get it in time to save her.

It was during his three weeks there that a casually spoken command to the sisters' cat over breakfast nearly cost Chuck his life. Glancing down from a book, he saw the animal about to help itself to his oatmeal and milk. "Halt!" Chuck said. It was the wrong thing to say. Although halt is a perfectly fine English word, it smacked too much of German control for the sisters' peace of mind.

The Resistance had to contact England all over again to verify that Charles V. Carlson was who he said claimed to be. This took some time, but confirmation in the code something to the effect of "a beautiful rabbit in a big tree" came back and Chuck, the sisters and Bricout once again rested easily.

"Charlot," Bricout said. "If it had come back wrong, I sure would have hated to shoot you." And Bricout would have done it, too, Chuck said.*

Comet members knew too well the dangers of

* Charlot is pronounced SHAR-low.



Maurice Bricout is pictured with his son, René, and wife, Rachel, in 1946. Bricout ran Resistance operations in Bachy, France.