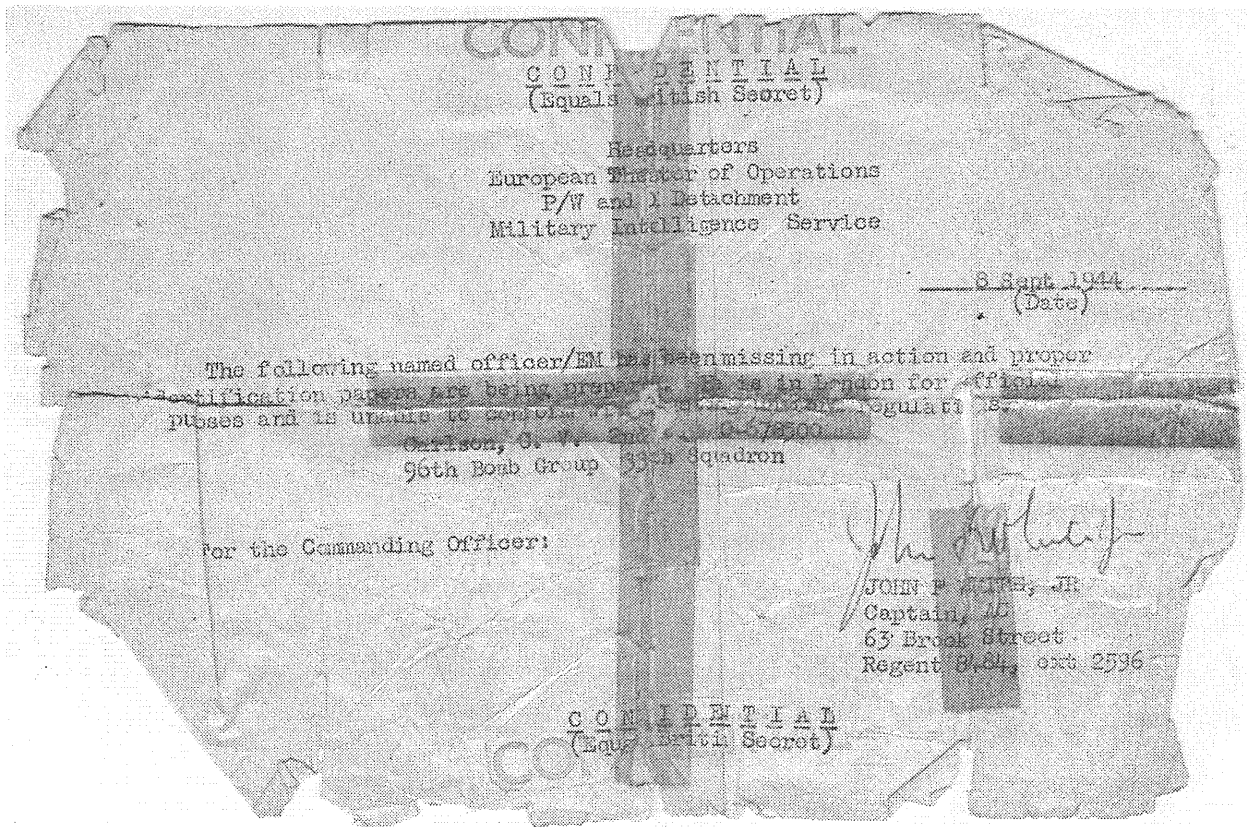


## Chapter 12 Going home

A Swedish newspaper carried the first story that a group of Allied airmen recovered near the border of France and Belgium included a Charles V. Carlson of Minnesota. His aunt was a subscriber and before the first telegram reached family she had passed on the good news that he apparently was coming home. The Swedes were quite interested in the war and had newspaper reporters in France combing for information — so much so that their stories routinely included the lists of those GIs and Allies who were to be repatriated. Thus Chuck's name made it into a Swedish paper that also published in Chicago.

"I suppose they printed any name that looked like it could be Scandinavian," Chuck said.

By Sept. 8, he was in London where he was interrogated again — whom did he meet, what did he see, where did he hide — before having to hurry up and wait in the Army way to collect his back pay and to receive a new uniform. With the Allies sensing victory, security remained tight and he carried papers with him explaining his situation.



The Military Intelligence Service issued Chuck this document Sept. 8, 1944. It read, "The following named officer/EM has been missing in action and proper identification papers are being prepared. He is in London for official purposes and is unable to conform with existing uniform regulations."

On Sept. 12 he was ordered back to the 96th, but he still had time to enjoy a few of the famed highlights of the British theater district. It was while calmly striding through free streets for the first time in months that he heard the cry "Charlot!" one last time. There stood the charming Monique, not in feminine garb but decked in military uniform. She took him to Belgian headquarters in London and together

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The program

that evening they saw the Sadler's Wells Opera perform "La Boheme" at the Princes Theater under producer Tyrone Guthrie. Unlike the cold January night in the French cafe, that evening could find true enjoyment in sipping any refreshments.

The awaited order to board an ocean transport came Sept. 17. Docking Oct. 4, he reported to the War Department for more official reports and debriefing. It was another three days before he arrived at Fort Snelling — just down the road from Wold-Chamberlain Field where it all began — and could greet his parents and Elizabeth. He proposed, and she recalled how upon arriving Chuck told her he wasn't going to let what had happened rule his life.

"I had my diamond in the fall. He asked me right the day he came home," Elizabeth said. They agreed to get married after Christmas, and she would leave nursing school.

Once engaged, Chuck went to Florida but soon returned when his mother died. He and Elizabeth were married Jan. 9, 1945, in Montevideo, Minn., in Elizabeth Roe's parents' home with family and a few friends beside them.

As the war in Europe ended that spring, the United States Armed Forces focused on Japan. At this point Chuck was confident he wouldn't see active duty again because he had enough service points. The cutoff point at that time was 80; Chuck had more than 90, receiving 20 combat points from his stay behind enemy lines. Each mission and month of duty carried points as well.

"I had enough points to be relatively safe," he called. "If it had gone on a month longer ..."

Thankfully, it did not.





Photo by Basil Shackleton, London

## Postscript

Chuck and Elizabeth have enjoyed attending the annual reunions of evadees and helpers organized by The Air Forces Escape & Evasion Society. Time spent talking with Bob Grimes, James McElroy and others was one impetus for this story. The 50th anniversary of the end of World War II was another.

After the war, Chuck decided to finish his degree and teach school, first going to Braham, Minn. He remained active in the Reserves and because he had encouraged young men to join the National Guard, he again volunteered when the Korean War broke out in 1950. He returned to the classroom, ending up in Morris, Minn., where he taught biology until retiring.

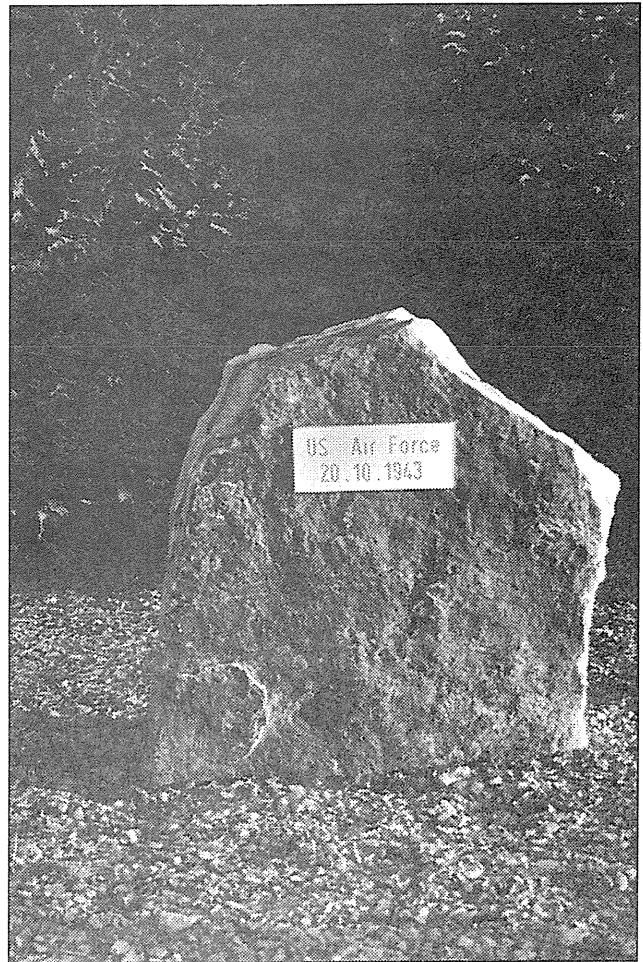
For many years he and his "helpers" corresponded. He sent photography supplies and magazines to the Hellers and tried to get medicine for the tubercular sister in border house. Unfortunately, drugs were scarce and nothing could save her. The Hellers visited in 1961, meeting Elizabeth at last and the Carlson children, Margaret "Margy," Elizabeth Ann and James.

The Carlsons were unable to attend the dedication in 1993 of a monument to the Shack Rabbit and her crew. But Chuck and Elizabeth's granddaughter Beth Fricke visited the daughter and grandchildren of Laure DuBoise and Firmin Vanderaspolden in 1995. That descendants on both sides still give thanks makes this story worth telling.



Ernst and Louise Heller came for a visit in 1961. They are pictured with Chuck and Elizabeth, and Elizabeth's parents, Lud and Alpha Roe (center), at the Roe's home in Montevideo, Minn.

The remaining members of Comet and the descendants of those active in the resistance erected a monument at the sight where the B-2 bomber went down Oct. 20, 1943. Many of the original crew members attended dedication ceremonies on the 50th anniversary of event.  
Photo courtesy of Elizabeth Fricke



Robert Grimes, Jim McElroy and Chuck Carlson have met several times at Air Force Escape and Evasion Society gatherings. They are pictured here in 1990 in Memphis, Tenn.

