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WERE THEY PREPARED? ESCAPE AND
EVASION IN WESTERN EUROPE,
1942 - 1944

MAJOR LAURA C. COUNTS 86-0605

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REPORT NUMBER 86-0605

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EUROPE, 1942 - 1944

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Submitted to the faculty in partial fulfillment of
requirements for graduation.

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→ This paper provides a review of the training and environment for American escape and evasion activity in Western Europe during World War II, with special focus on the period from 1942 to 1944. The study first examines the environment (physical, political, cultural) in which evasion activity took place. It then details the escape/evasion training and equipment provided to US aircrews to prepare them for successful escape and evasion. The author concludes that the training, which lacked comprehensiveness and standardization, was deficient by today's standards. However, it was the first such training ever developed on the subject and, given the circumstances surrounding its development and administration, it was remarkably successful in accomplishing its objectives.				
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PREFACE

In the summer of 1942, the first units of the United States Army Air Forces arrived in England to take up their position in the Allied air counteroffensive against Nazi Germany. Comprised largely of green crew members with no prior combat experience, these units would soon begin to bear their share of the casualties also. The lists of the missing grew rapidly longer. Soon, many were confirmed as dead or as prisoners of war. But by October 42, others began to reappear in England -- successful players in an elaborate game of cat and mouse known as "evasion."

How did they succeed in such a difficult enterprise? What did their government do to prepare them for the grueling hardships they would endure? Was it enough, and what did we learn from our mistakes? This paper attempts to answer those questions, first by examining the factors that helped and hindered evasion activities in Western Europe between 1942 and 1944, and then by detailing and evaluating the escape and evasion training which was common to both the British and American air forces during that period.

The author gratefully acknowledges the help of a number of former evaders and prisoners of war of the Stalag Luft III Association and the Escape and Evasion Society, whose memories and comments both validate and supplement existing archival material on the subject. Special thanks go to Colonel D. Gaston Alford, USAF, Retired, and Colonel Stratton M. Appleman, USAF, Retired, for their encouragement and special efforts in providing vital background information on the operation of escape lines in Holland, Belgium, and France.

It should also be noted that the archives available at the Simpson Historical Research Center of the Air University Library, Maxwell AFB, Alabama, provide a rich source of material on the subject of escape and evasion by both American and British forces throughout the European Theater. These files were enormously helpful, and provided the foundation for the evaluation and analysis of this early version of escape and evasion training.

What follows is a review of a politico-military situation as it existed in one theater (Western Europe) over forty years ago. While many of the circumstances which existed there were unique to that place and time, some of the most important elements of success in an attempted evasion still exist today. It is the author's hope that lessons of that war will not be lost on future generations of American airmen.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Major Laura C. Counts grew up as part of an Air Force family in California and Virginia. She entered the Air Force in 1972, and received her commission from the Officer Training School in January 1973. Upon commissioning, she was assigned as a personnel officer to the 907th Radar Squadron, Bucks Harbor AFS, ME. Base level personnel assignments to the 437th Air Base Group, Charleston AFB, SC, and the 60th Air Base Group, Travis AFB, CA followed between 1974 and 1979. She then served at the Air Force Manpower and Personnel Center, Randolph AFB, TX. In 1983, she was reassigned as an Air Force ROTC instructor at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and from there she was sent to the Air Command and Staff College as a student in the Class of 1986. Major Counts earned a Bachelor of Arts degree (with distinction) in anthropology from the University of Arizona in 1971. In 1976, she was awarded a Master of Arts degree in management by Central Michigan University. She has attended Squadron Officers School in residence, and has completed the Air Command and Staff College correspondence course.

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REPORT NUMBER 86-0605

AUTHOR(S) MAJOR LAURA C. COUNTS, USAF

TITLE WERE THEY PREPARED? ESCAPE AND EVASION IN WESTERN EUROPE, 1942 - 1944

I. Purpose: To analyze the adequacy and validity of the escape and evasion (E&E) training provided to American airmen who flew combat missions in the Western European Theater during World War II.

II. Problem: American servicemen who found themselves stranded in Western Europe in World War II faced a number of unique challenges to any attempt to return to their own forces. Cultural and linguistic differences, geographic barriers, political and military dangers all conspired to make such return extremely difficult. World War II was the first major conflict in which the United States military made an organized effort to train servicemen to face and overcome these challenges. How effective was this training and did we learn anything from our mistakes?

III. Data: During World War II, American airmen were thoroughly indoctrinated in the notion that, if shot down over enemy territory, it was their duty to escape/evade captivity by any reasonable means available. Those who did find themselves evading in Western Europe faced considerable obstacles. Cultural and linguistic differences made it difficult, and often impossible, to pass as a national of an occupied country. The neutral countries of Sweden, Switzerland, and Spain could be entered only by crossing the formidable natural obstacles of sea

CONTINUED

or mountains. Occupied territories were in the grip of the Nazi military and political machine. Transportation routes were patrolled, and travellers were carefully checked for proper identification. Betrayal by collaborators was a constant threat. In their favor, evaders enjoyed the widespread support of the common people of occupied countries. Organized help from resistance movements, as well as the casual assistance of sympathetic bystanders, was often available to the determined evader. Prisoners of war (PWs) contemplating escape enjoyed the organized support of a formal PW chain of command within their prison compounds. Finally, most American servicemen in the European Theater benefitted from the escape/evasion equipment and training provided by the British and American authorities. The equipment consisted of small kits of money, food, drugs, maps, and other paraphernalia. The training usually consisted of two or three briefings by successful evaders detailing their experiences and giving commonsense advice on what to do and how to behave. No survival training, as we know it today, was provided.

IV. Conclusions: Evaluation of escape and evasion training was based on a sampling of 200 of the 2000-plus World War II E&E debriefing summaries from the European Theater on file in the Simpson Historical Research Center at the Air University Library. Contemporary narratives and letters from surviving escapers/evaders served to validate conclusions drawn from review of the summaries. Based on this review, the author concluded the training lacked both standardization and comprehensiveness. It omitted a number of key concerns such as basic survival and language skills, and was often anecdotal rather than practical in nature. Nonetheless, the training that was provided benefitted its recipients, who remembered the key points when it mattered most. While lacking by today's standards, this training was developed without an historical basis and helped create the first benchmark for formal E&E training in the US armed forces. Thus, despite its deficiencies, it served the valuable purpose of validating the effectiveness of institutionalized attention to the problems of survival behind enemy lines.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

On 4 February 1944, Lieutenant Colonel David Gaston Alford, USAAF, Operations Officer of the 91st Bomb Group, was Wing Lead on a mission to bomb rail yards at Frankfurt, Germany. Following a successful bomb run, the group turned back to England, but Alford's plane, a specially equipped Pathfinder, was by now a victim of flak and fighters. With radar and navigation gear out of commission, a fire in the nose and a fire in the right wing "about the size of a Number 2 washtub. . . it was quite evident we needed to bail out, so I ordered the crew to bail out, which they did, not knowing where we were, but figuring we were still over Germany" (20:--).

Shot down, a fugitive without food, equipment, or adequate clothes, Col. Alford knew no language other than his own. He wasn't even sure what country he was in. But he successfully evaded capture by the Germans for seven long months until his final hiding place was at last overrun by Allied forces in September 1944 (20:--). The British War Office, which kept careful count of those Allied servicemen who successfully escaped or evaded enemy detention, calculated that by 30 June 1945, 3415 Americans had made it back to England from Western Europe and another 227 had reached safety in Switzerland. By the same date, 3631 British servicemen had successfully returned home from the same theater, and 4916 had reached safe haven in Switzerland (4: App 1).

These men, and their other Allied counterparts were carrying on a military tradition as old as warfare itself -- a tradition which holds captivity is shameful and to be avoided at all costs (4:6). However, the cost in reduced combat capability resulting from the loss of literally thousands of fighting men, combined with the economic cost of training technically competent replacements for an increasingly technical war, made national and military pride of secondary importance when considering doctrine and policy on escape and evasion.

By 1940, the British were putting a new twist on the traditional view that a captured soldier should attempt to escape. This new view was later embraced by the United States also. The idea was a simple one: those caught behind enemy lines, whether detained or free, were obliged to go on fighting as long as they could. Escape and evasion activity constituted a new "front" in the heart of the Axis that diverted important military resources away from the battle lines. Furthermore,

every returned soldier, sailor, and airman was a valuable, trained asset salvaged to the good of the war effort (4:13-15).

The original tradition was explicitly supported in the Geneva Convention on the Treatment of Prisoners of War (PWs), which recognized the prisoners "right" to escape. The new view, rapidly translated into doctrine that was drummed into every soldier's, sailor's, and airman's head, held that escape and evasion activity was not merely desirable, but obligatory. While evading, the Allied fighting man was to consider a resistance unit that sheltered him as his temporary chain of command. While in captivity, the PW was assigned a place in a traditional, structured military unit, which provided the discipline and direction necessary for survival and resistance.

The situation these men faced in Europe in the early 1940's is a far cry indeed from the contemporary scene. American doctrine on escape and evasion, as stated in the Code of Conduct, has continued to evolve as a result of our experiences in Korea and Southeast Asia. Still, as a matter of policy, the United States and her NATO allies take the view that another major war in Europe is a real possibility. If that happens, there will likely be Americans fighting to stay free and alive behind enemy lines in Europe, and the lessons we learned in the 40's will once again have some very practical uses, especially for training and indoctrination.

This paper is an examination of some of the key factors which helped or hindered evasion in Western Europe, with special attention to the adequacy of US aircrew training. First, it examines the geopolitical setting in which evasions in Western Europe occurred, followed by a more detailed look at the constraints on successful evasion and the resources available to aid it. These include geographic, cultural, military, and political factors that tended to be disadvantages or advantages. Finally, this paper examines the critical issue of aircrew preparedness by detailing the training provided to aircrews on escape and evasion, and evaluating its adequacy.

The author was greatly helped by the voluminous files of escape and evasion debriefing summaries compiled by Military Intelligence (PW&X) prior to October 1944, which are on file in the Simpson Historical Research Center of the Air University Library, Maxwell Air Force Base, Alabama. Over 2000 of these reports are available, and most contain completed questionnaires addressing the adequacy of equipment and training for evasion. This data provides much of the foundation for the conclusions discussed in Chapter 6.

For the purposes of this paper, Western Europe is defined as Germany, Scandinavia, the Low Countries, France, Switzerland, and

Spain. The primary focus is on France, Belgium, and the Netherlands, in which countries the majority of successful evasion activity occurred. Escape activities, per se, are not addressed. Instead, successful escape is treated as the first essential step in a post-capture evasion.

Since the early 50's, the Air Force has become increasingly concerned with the challenges and dangers of evasion in territory that is hostile not only politically and militarily, but culturally also. Our experiences in Korea and Southeast Asia have focused our attentions on the problems of survival in an environment that offers little hope of human assistance. However, this author believes that we also need to address the positive factors which may aid successful evasion in areas that are culturally and racially similar to our own so that our servicemen are prepared to take advantage of those positive elements when they do exist.

This paper, which examines lessons learned about escape and evasion in Europe over forty years ago, is an attempt to focus on those positive factors existing then and now in the NATO theater, and highlight the ways in which we both succeeded and failed in taking advantage of them. Modern NATO military doctrine postulates a war in Europe in the future. If we can learn from the past, perhaps we will be a little better prepared not to repeat its mistakes.

CHAPTER 2

THE SETTING

By the summer of 1942, American bomber groups had begun settling into small, hurriedly-built airfields all over England. The men who flew those planes had a basic knowledge of the situation in Continental Europe, but the knowledge often seemed unreal to them. Colonel Alford, who flew missions from England for 18 months before being shot down explains:

We were aware of German occupation of Europe and the boundaries thereof on the Western front. We were also aware of Vichy France, and the location of neutral but friendly countries like Switzerland, Spain, and Sweden. However, we didn't think much about OUR being shot down. We knew we'd lose planes on most missions, but it would never be ME. . . (20:--).

By the end of the war, thousands had indeed been shot down and were left on their own to face the challenge of survival in hostile territory. In the summer of 1942, that hostile territory included virtually all of Western Europe, with the exception of four countries (Switzerland, Spain, Portugal, and Sweden) which had preserved a precarious neutrality. Austria had been annexed by Germany in the Anschluss of February 1938, and though many Austrians opposed the union with Germany, it was under total Nazi control by the outbreak of the war (1:240). Likewise, Italy, long in the grip of Hitler's closest ally, Benito Mussolini, offered little haven for fugitive Americans (4:153-164). The south of France, nominally free and neutral under the Vichy government of Petain, was in fact a puppet regime of Hitler's Germany. This fact was recognized openly in November 1942, when the German army occupied Vichy France outright (7:viii-xi).

Escaping airmen faced difficulties even in the neutral countries. Under the provisions of the Geneva Convention on the Treatment of Prisoners of War, escaped PWs who made it to neutral territory were entitled to repatriation. However, those who successfully evaded capture and crossed a neutral border in the course of their evasion were to be interned in that country for the duration of the war (14:--; 15:--). In Switzerland, even those who managed to convince the authorities they were bona fide escapees had to find a surreptitious way out through occupied territory. Neither Germans nor Italians would permit repatriation through either homelands or occupied countries (7:17-38).

Aside from avoiding capture by occupation forces or local police, evaders faced the challenge of coping with European geography and culture. It is difficult to know which presented the most difficulties.

Most of Western Europe has a temperate climate, with average winter temperatures above freezing and even distribution of precipitation (1:207). Still, winter evasions posed special problems for airmen whose clothes were never designed for cold weather survival. Col. Alford, who had unfortunately fallen into a pile of cow manure, was forced to abandon his heavy leather flying suit. He recalls,

It left me with only winter GI shirt, trousers, GI shoes, and a light leather A2 flying jacket. In February in Holland in that kind of clothes, they're just not enough. One would freeze to death before too long, and I found this out in the next three or four hours. . . There was ice on the canals in the area, and it looked like it would start snowing almost any moment (20:--).

The natural barriers of sea and mountains also separated evaders from safety in neutral countries or England. The Alps of the central region and the Pyrenees of the Franco-Spanish border were formidable obstacles to successful evasion. The Baltic Sea, patrolled by the German navy, made escape into (or out of) Sweden exceedingly difficult, and the English Channel seemed an unmanageable gulf to those trapped in France and the Low Countries.

Western Europe is also a region of ethnic and linguistic diversity. Demographers estimate that in the 1930's over 2 million ethnic Germans lived within France's borders. Another quarter-million lived in Luxembourg, and significant German minorities existed in Italy, Belgium, Denmark, and the Netherlands (1:232). The border disputes that were common to Europe throughout the interwar period were usually marked by the conflicting loyalties of these and other groups separated from the legal territory of their mother culture (1:210). For the evader, this factor added to the uncertainty he already felt over the sympathies of potential helpers. Colonel Alford remembers:

I waded a canal, which was about knee-deep, and I approached the two men. One of these looked at me very suspiciously when I told him I was an American pilot that needed some help, and I think the only thing he understood was "American." The other man was. . . a very large man, and he was told by his friend to watch me. [They] had been working with pitchforks in the sugar beets here, and the man. . . picked up a pitchfork

and pointed it at me. At this time I was sitting on a big pile of sugar beets. I really didn't know what to expect. . . so I reached around behind me and got a large sugar beet in my hand and held it, waiting to see what would happen (20:--).

Other cultural factors also complicated the life of the evader. Fourteen major language groupings exist in Western Europe, and numerous local dialects challenge the skills of even dedicated linguists (6:59). While many American servicemen had a passing acquaintance with German or French, few were up to getting along in Dutch, Danish, Flemish, or Walloon. Religious divisions also played a part in the cultural and political identities of many Europeans. Northwestern Europe is predominantly Protestant, but possesses large Roman Catholic minorities. Southern Europe is predominantly Roman Catholic. Then, as now, religious minorities in any area frequently constituted political minorities as well whose sympathies were not always in keeping with the local majority (6:61).

With all the difficulties, evaders in Western Europe also enjoyed advantages that could be turned to good account. Nationalism is a strongly-rooted, profound phenomenon throughout Europe, and nationalist sentiment rebelled at German occupation (6:65). While Germany and Italy enjoyed considerable political unity at this time which made evasion in those countries almost impossible (7:--), underground political opposition was the norm in most occupied areas. Popular opposition to German rule was such that even those who were not actively involved in resistance movements could often be counted upon to help a fugitive Allied serviceman (14:--).

I found a barn that had been abandoned. . . but at least it was dry on the inside, so I went in and tried to get a little bit of sleep. In an hour or so, a lady came down. She had seen me, but didn't know who I was. . . The people were very cautious, but still desirous to help anybody who really needed help. I think she took one look at me and decided I needed some kind of help, particularly after she looked at my shoes. . . The lady brought me a little bread, and maybe some sandwiches. A little something to eat--not much. Obviously, she didn't have much to give (20:--).

A well-developed infrastructure provided opportunities for movement through occupied territories. The major population concentrations found in northern France, Belgium, the Netherlands, northern Italy, and northwestern Germany were associated with the industrial heartland of Europe (1:209). These areas possessed extensive rail, road, and communications networks (1:213) which facilitated evasion for many. The numerous navigable rivers,

inland canal systems, and waterways presented additional avenues for clandestine travel (1:207).

Evaders also had the support of British and American units set up specifically to help them. The British were first, in December 1939, to establish their escape and evasion unit, which was designated MI9. It was founded by a career army officer, then-Major Norman Crockatt (4:25-26). The United States Army followed suit in 1942, establishing the American unit under the auspices of Military Intelligence, and designating it MIS-X. MIS-X was headed by Lt. Col. W. Stull Holt, a professional historian (4:45-46). The British and American units were closely integrated, and shared office space, information, equipment, and training lecturers (7:viii). After the war, Crockatt defined the purpose of their efforts:

To facilitate escapes of. . . prisoners of war, thereby getting back service personnel and containing additional enemy manpower on guard duties.

To facilitate the return to the United Kingdom of those who succeeded in evading capture in enemy occupied territory.

To collect and distribute information.

To assist in the denial of information to the enemy.

To maintain morale of. . . prisoners of war in enemy prison camps (4:26).

At the time, Crockatt was writing specifically about MI9's mission, but the words can be applied equally to MIS-X, which was also tasked by General Spaatz to act as liaison with MI9 to acquire British escape kits, maps, and other aids and distribute them to US aircrews. Spaatz also directed Holt to cooperate with the British to train operational aircrews in escape and evasion methods (4:46). This training, undertaken by a sub-unit of MIS-X designated PW&X, is examined in Chapters 5 and 6.

It was MI9, starting in 1940, that worked to promote and protect various underground escape lines in Europe. Holt, having the sense not to fool with a good thing, largely continued to depend on the British for assistance and support in this area, and did not attempt to establish independent lines in Europe (7:50). Still, in addition to spontaneous help from anti-German nationalists, evading Americans had a reasonable expectation of organized assistance to hide them, feed them, and ultimately return them to England. Escape lines are discussed in Chapter 4.

This, then, was the setting that confronted an American flyer downed in Nazi Europe. He faced an uncertain climate for which he was likely not properly clothed. He confronted enormous natural barriers of sea and mountains between himself and freedom. He depended on unknown people for food, shelter, and care -- people who might be collaborators and would turn him over to the Germans. If he was lucky enough to find help from genuine resisters, the road home was still risky, over rails and roads controlled by hostile forces, through frigid mountain passes. He faced many daily risks of discovery and capture, and had to be canny in taking advantage of the rare opportunities that came his way. We will now turn to a more detailed examination of the obstacles the evader faced as he carried out "every soldier's duty to escape and evade" (14:--).

CHAPTER 3

OBSTACLES

By July of 1941, Western Europe was firmly in the grip of the German war machine. The Allied forces had been pushed into the sea at Dunkirk. Denmark, Holland, Belgium, and most of France were occupied outright. The division of France into occupied and free (Vichy) zones left southern France nominally free (9:738-741). However, the political and military blackmail exerted by Hitler on Petain's government effectively turned Vichy into a German satellite (9:813-817). Switzerland, Sweden, Spain, and Portugal also maintained their official neutrality, though these countries became battlegrounds for underground wars of espionage between the Allies and their Axis adversaries (9:785-89; 696-97; 648-49).

The geographic barriers of mountains and oceans between occupied Europe and free territory were formidable, and effectively turned the Continent into a relatively secure prison from which escape, if not impossible, was at least very difficult. Servicemen attempting to move to the outer fringes of that prison and cross those barriers faced significant obstacles before they even reached ocean or mountain range. Problems confronted evaders from the first moment and never ceased. They ranged from the language barrier to the need for food, clothes, papers, and shelter to the dangers of German counterintelligence efforts directed at identifying and shutting down escape lines. This chapter will examine these difficulties in some detail.

Those who attempted evasion in Europe had varied experiences, good and bad, that often prompted unique viewpoints on special problems. However, there are some areas of almost universal agreement among European evaders. One of these was the absolute necessity for help.

The regions of France and the Low Countries, where most successful European evasions occurred, are also the principal industrial and population centers of Europe. There is virtually no "wilderness" as Americans know it in which a man can lose himself and live off the land (1:209). Everywhere—even in farming districts—the chances of being spotted were virtually 100%. Colonel Alford remembers a case in point. He and a companion were attempting to move through rural Belgium, keeping off the road, in the woods, and out of sight. As a country-bred farmboy and amateur hunter, he thought he was pretty good at it until a Belgian farmer finally came out to the woods and collected them.

When I asked him how he knew where we were, he said, "We've been keeping an eye on you for the last two or three days." And they had. They had picked us up as rather suspicious characters, walking near the road, and of course wondered who we were. They'd passed word from farm to farm on down the road as we went along. So they'd kept an eye on us off and on for these few days, not knowing whether we were people who needed help, or whether we were Germans in disguise (20:--).

Since discovery was inevitable, problems with language quickly became critical. The Germans and their collaborators within occupied territories were on the lookout for evaders, and inability to communicate in the language of the land was an instant giveaway.

Colonel Stratton M. Appleman (USAF, Ret.), was a young lieutenant with the 437th Troop Carrier Group when he became an evader in France in June 1944. Arrested at a railroad station for lack of proper identification papers, Appleman and a companion were taken to military headquarters.

A civilian interpreter tried to interrogate us, first in French, then Spanish, Flemish, and other European dialects. Finally, I had to announce in the only language I know, "I am an officer of the American Air Force, and I demand to be treated as a prisoner of war."

His string having run out at that point, his only alternative was to be shot as a spy (21:--). Lieutenant Colonel George C. Padgett (USAF, Ret.), then a bombardier from the 379th Bomb Group, was also captured at a train station during a routine check by the police. "My inability to speak the language immediately identified me as being American or English" (28:--).

Other evaders also remember the difficulties of the language barrier, and the dangers it presented. Colonel Padgett recalls, "I referred to a phrase in [a French language pamphlet], 'Baisez-moi, mademoiselle' [sic], only to find that the exact translation was something more than I had in mind" (28:--). Colonel Alford's experience on a streetcar in Amsterdam went beyond mere embarrassment, however:

The streetcar being very crowded, many people were standing, and I accidentally stepped on a lady's toe. Out of instinct, I turned around and said, "Sorry." She let me have a long piece of her mind in no uncertain terms, at which the people laughed and stared. This didn't bother me, but I thought maybe after I had said,

"Sorry," that I had identified myself as an American (20:--).

Clothing presented almost as serious a problem as the language barrier. The difficulty was twofold. First, it was essential to be rid of the easily-identifiable uniform. Secondly, it was important to be clothed sufficiently to withstand the European winter. Robert Doolan, a navigator with the 92d Bomb Group, was lucky enough to find a civilian contact. "Our contact gave us civilian clothing. I had new English boots, so I had to give them up for crude, worn shoes. By September, [my] outer clothing was insufficient" (23:--). Similar stories are told by virtually all evaders who found help from the resistance (21:--; 22:--; 24:--; 26:--; 28:--; 29:--; 30:--). Alford was a bit more fortunate.

The gamekeeper dyed my GI shoes from brown to black, and stole a hat--a real nice derby hat--out of a barber shop someplace for me. They got me a stiff-collared shirt, and some trousers, and a nice overcoat, and a nice-looking tie. Dressed me up like a businessman of some prestige, money, and influence (20:--).

These were traveling clothes, and whether the evader was disguised as a person of importance or a peasant, traveling imposed another important requirement: identity papers. Mobility in Europe was severely restricted by the German system of passport control, which existed at every border and railroad station, as well as all major highway junctions and many minor ones. Fixed control points were augmented by random identity checks in public places and at unannounced roadblocks (4:10-11). The difficulties imposed by such tight control made adequate identity papers essential.

Colonel Appleman's experience is illustrative of the dangers of traveling without them:

We proceeded toward the station, and were stopped [by two German soldiers]. "Papier identifacate [sic]," the Wehrmacht soldiers demanded. Following instructions from the night before, I responded, "A` la maison," and turned as if I was going home to get them. I was ordered to halt, and both my companion and I were ordered to sit on the ground. We remained there for about two hours until what was apparently a shift change. . . . When the relief guards arrived, we were taken with our captors to a military headquarters (21:--).

Even with good papers, however, the evader could not expect to live long "on the road" without being discovered. Shelter

from hunger, the elements, and the Germans was critical to the success of an evasion. Long-term shelter was normally only available from organized resistance groups, had to be accepted unquestioningly, and varied considerably in quality. Robert Doolan's experience was typical. "We slept in houses, barns, haystacks, forests. I stayed in a home the first night, then on a farm. When Germans were in the area, I slept in a haystack. I moved on to a bakery in Roermont, and a house in Utrecht" (23:--).

Fred Wald, a B-24 gunner, stayed in a farmhouse and was "confined to one attic room and only allowed to exercise briefly in the nighttime hours" (29:--). Colonel Alford's experiences were similarly varied. Over a seven-month period he lived in a gamekeeper's forest cabin, houses and apartments in various cities, farmhouses, tents, and even caves (20:--). Without exception, these and other evaders received their shelter, food, and care only on the sufferance of the local resistance. When their support wavered, it quickly became dangerous to linger.

Alford remembers a disagreement with a resistance leader this way, "Now this man told me that he was just like a Chicago gangster, and he pulled a pistol out of his pocket and pointed it at me, and told me if I did anything to cause his--any of his people--to be caught by the Germans, then he would shoot me" (20:--). Colonel Alford was lucky. He wasn't shot. More importantly, he didn't fall victim to the most serious internal danger of shelter with the resistance: betrayal.

German counterintelligence was active throughout the war in its efforts to shut down resistance-run escape lines. Infiltration was a serious problem to the underground, as was the danger of betrayal, for money or politics, by collaborators. Airey Neave, an MI9 operative active in the establishment and support of escape lines, describes these problems in detail in his book The Escape Room (7:--). This paper will not examine those difficulties further except to discuss their effect on the evaders the escape lines were trying to support.

The danger of betrayal placed enormous pressure on the underground to keep evaders moving. For one thing, it was often difficult to keep their presence a secret. Colonel Appleman explains:

During three weeks in Rosay, we met dozens of the local vintners, political figures, and at least two people who identified themselves as members of the underground. A man from a nearby village identified himself as the Chef de Resistance in the area. [He returned later] and explained that it was urgent that we move the following day. The family with whom we

were living were in danger, he said, because the village mayor, who overimbibed of the local wine and champagne, had bragged throughout the Marne Valley that his village was hiding two Americans. He had brought many people from nearby villages to see us (21:--).

Infiltration and betrayal was often the result of such slack security. Major Robert L. Frakes (USAF, Ret.), then a pilot with the 20th Fighter Group, believes he was captured as the result of betrayal by "a Dutchman, supposedly a pilot escaping to fly with the Dutch Air Force in England. I am sure now he was a German plant" (24:--). Lieutenant Colonel James D. Hastin (USAF, Ret.), recalls his own experience:

Some people said we were going to be flown out. There was a lot of confusion about where the plane was going to pick us up. We should have smelled a rat because we were riding in a car. Finally, they said we were going into Paris. . . While there, a man who spoke excellent English came to have us fill out a Red Cross form. On the form were a lot of trivial questions like, "Are you married?" "What's your mother-in-law's name?" Interspersed amongst those was, "What type of aircraft do you fly?" "What group are you assigned to?" "What mission were you shot down on?" "What was your target?" It was the standard Red Cross form the Germans used (25:--).

Colonel Hastin and his companions were soon guests at the Fresnes Prison.

The problems of security in the underground nets created another exquisite dilemma for evaders. They couldn't evade for long without the help of the underground, but they could not be told where to find the underground for fear of security leaks. The reason for this caution in passing out names, locations, and directions was the extreme penalties exacted from helpers by the German occupiers. Helpers, and sometimes their families also, were treated very severely if discovered aiding the Allied cause in any fashion (4:299).

Colonel Hastin recalls his second day in the Fresnes Prison: "The next day, they took us down and interrogated us more. They locked me in a cubicle about three foot square with a Frenchman who had given some money for de Gaulle. He had been pretty badly beaten" (25:--). Major Frakes, captured with a resistance unit, spent several months in a prison in Brussels where "execution occurred daily. I was in solitary confinement the whole time with a big 'E' for 'espion' on my door. I was scheduled for the shooting squad" (24:--). While these men were able to eventually establish their status as PWs and save their lives, their

helpers, if identified, were probably not so lucky. For instance, Colonel Alford's first contact in the Dutch escape line that sheltered him in eastern Holland was shot by the Germans two or three weeks before the Canadians liberated the area. His widow has confirmed the reason for his execution was his involvement with the resistance (20:--).

As a result of the extreme danger to their lives, helpers were shielded from identification as far as possible by MI9 and MIS-X. Evaders who made it back to England were carefully debriefed and warned never to reveal the names or addresses of those who had aided them. Failure to follow this precaution could compromise the security of the line and lead to the death of the resistance workers involved (4:50-86). Intelligence debriefing summaries on returning evaders were filled with a wealth of detail about the particular experiences of the individual involved. However, even these classified, limited-circulation documents (since declassified) stopped short of identifying names or locations of resistance units or individual helpers. The standard phrase used, when the evader reached the point in his story where he was taken in tow by the underground, was, "I met a friend, and from there my journey was arranged" (16:--).

In summary, evaders were absolutely in need of extensive help in making good their escape from Fortress Europe to the green shores of England. They needed food, clothes, papers, shelter, and transportation. These things were only available from dedicated and fearless people who were willing to risk their lives for the freedom of these servicemen. The dangers the helpers ran were significant, and their need for some measure of safety from discovery made it much harder for their "customers" to find them when they were needed. Still, they were there, and the help they were able to provide was the mainstay of the escape and evasion program administered by MI9 and MIS-X.

MI9, MIS-X, and the many participants in the resistance movements of occupied Europe were the source of considerable support for escape and evasion efforts throughout the war. In the next chapter, we will examine in more detail the nature of the supporting resources available to escapers and evaders and which gave them a chance to succeed in overcoming the obstacles discussed here.

CHAPTER 4

RESOURCES

An Allied evader in Western Europe during World War II faced an environment that was both hostile and volatile. He had need of food, clothes, papers, shelter, and transportation, none of which were readily available for the taking. He also faced the certainty of discovery, and the uncertainty of the sympathies of those who would discover him. In short, to survive, he needed help. We have already examined the considerable obstacles he faced in his attempts to remain undetected by the Germans.

This chapter is an examination of the sources of aid an evader could reasonably expect to find. In general, these sources fall into three broad categories: equipment, people, and attitudes. Equipment primarily refers to the so-called "escape aids" developed by the British, issued to all Allied aircrews operating out of England, and sometimes even smuggled into prisoner of war camps. Inside prisoner of war camps, tightly-run escape organizations provided assistance to the would-be escaper. Outside the camps, the people who were a source of aid were usually members of underground escape networks. Those helpers who were not actively involved in the resistance usually had ties to it through relatives or friends. Finally, attitudes held by evaders and Germans alike, and based on knowledge or belief, often had a profound effect on the potential for successful escape and evasion. Let us now turn to a discussion of the equipment provided to aircrews to assist them in escape and evasion.

Anticipating that a general war in Europe would find large numbers of English soldiers either evading or attempting to escape from German prisons on the Continent, MI9 began as early as 1939 to plan for and develop suitable escape and evasion gear with which to equip British forces (5:1-14). Clayton Hutton, the man hired by MI9 to accomplish the task of developing escape aids, eventually came up with a compact kit in a disposable container which could be carried in a large pocket. The kit, generally called an aids box, contained a small amount of chocolate and hard candy, powdered milk, benzedrine tablets, halazone (for water purification), matches, compasses, and small silk maps of key continental areas. Water bottles (which leaked), miniature hacksaws, fishing hooks, adhesive tape, and other oddments were also tried in the kits at one time or another (16:App D).

As the Battle of Britain heated up, the aids boxes were routinely issued to British aircrews, and with the arrival of the

first American bomber units in 1942, American flyers also received them as part of their regular flying gear (4:37).

Hutton also designed other special escape aids, some of which were smuggled into prisoner of war camps through the mail. These included a variety of miniature compasses concealed in pencil ends, collar studs, uniform buttons, and even in safety razors. His special "escape boots", which could be stripped down by use of a concealed knife to resemble civilian shoes, enjoyed considerable popularity until aircrews discovered they were too poorly insulated to be comfortable in unheated airplanes flying at high altitude (5:15-175). At one point, MI9 was sending blankets, invisibly stamped with overcoat patterns, to PWs in Germany. The ink only became visible after washing (4:34-36).

By 1942, returning evaders had begun to provide the feedback necessary to expand and improve on the existing escape and evasion equipment. As part of their routine intelligence debriefing, returnees were asked to rate the helpfulness of the individual items in the aids box. They were also asked to identify special problems they encountered that might be remedied by additional equipment (16:App D). In general, the aids boxes were rated as very useful in those cases where the airman had kept possession of them. The leaky water bottle referenced above was frequently a source of complaint, and was eventually removed from the box.

However, returning evaders identified two problems that were capable of a more positive solution. First, even the most willing helpers could not be expected to support evaders in hiding totally out of their own pockets. Food, clothes, false papers, and train tickets all cost money. Secondly, the language barrier, discussed in the previous chapter, tended to create serious problems when potential helpers needed to be convinced the evader was not a German agent (16: App D).

In response to the first problem, all Allied crews were issued money purses containing a variety of European currencies, mostly French francs, with some Belgian and Dutch money included as well (4:37). This was not a complete fix. The lack of Spanish money was a continuing sore point with successful evaders who made it out through Spain. The Spanish, not suffering the discomfort of German occupation, were motivated by money, not politics, to assist Allied servicemen. Similarly, those who were shot down over Belgium or Holland had no use for French currency, but were issued little or no money good in the countries where they found themselves. Still, the money purses were of great service to almost all airmen who had the need and opportunity to use them. Few returned without having spent most, if not all, of the money provided (16:App D).

Attempts to cross the language barrier were persistent, but also ran into difficulties. Beginning in 1943, PW&X began issuing language cards to aircrews. These cards contained commonly used words and phrases in English and a principal European language (French, Dutch, German, etc.), and were intended to help the evader make initial contact with potential helpers (4:203). This item was somewhat less successful than the money purse. Returnees frequently complained that they ended up in Holland with a French language card, or in France with a Danish card (16:App D). Once again, this was a problem that was never completely solved.

However, even the most perfectly-equipped evader still needed assistance to make good his escape from the Continent to England. This help normally came from one of two sources, either the prisoner escape organizations run from inside PW camps or the underground evasion nets which operated in occupied Europe.

The prisoner escape organizations have been carefully documented in a number of memoirs, including Airey Neave's They Have Their Exits (a description of Colditz and his escape from that fortress prison)(8:--), Escape from Germany, by Aidan Crawley (3:--), and The Great Escape by Paul Brickhill (2:--). For our purposes, a simplified description will do. Prisoner of war camps were run on a strict military seniority basis, officers, NCOs, and other ranks generally being housed in separate compounds. The Senior Allied Officer had command authority over everyone, regardless of nationality (14:--).

Within the military hierarchy established at a PW camp, one officer was designated as the Escape Officer (or "X"), and was charged with running the escape organization. This Escape Committee had subcommittees under its control which were responsible for manufacturing escape equipment such as maps, keys, passports and papers, suits, and overcoats (14:--).

Parallel to the Escape Committee, and working closely with it, was the Intelligence Committee which was responsible for the interrogation of new arrivals and for the receipt and dispatch of coded messages (14:--). Approximately six per cent of British and American aircrews were trained in special code procedures, and as these men became a proportionate share of the prisoner population, they became the focal point for communication between camps and Allied Headquarters on a variety of intelligence and policy functions (4:101-102; App 2).

The Senior Allied Officer, on the advice of the Escape Officer and the Intelligence Officer, decided who would be allowed to escape. Once permission was granted (and it often wasn't for reasons of safety or security), the Escape Committee was responsible for working out the details of how and when the

attempt should be made, and providing all necessary support to effect the escape (14:--).

Once a prisoner had succeeded in escaping from his camp, the problem of shelter and support on the outside became paramount. Most Allied PWs in Europe were held in camps deep within Germany itself. In this arena, underground assistance was almost nonexistent. Germany enjoyed a largely homogeneous, politically unified population that, by 1943, was also beginning to suffer the effects of Allied bombing raids. So incensed was Hitler over these assaults on the Fatherland that, at his insistence, civilians were encouraged to lynch Allied airmen shot down over German soil, and quite a few met this fate (9:954).

For those evading within Germany, the best bet was to make for the border as rapidly as possible in the hopes of finding help within occupied territory. Escapers were generally advised to make their way west into Holland or Belgium, and then to France. As late as 1944, aircrews were advised that a route from northern Germany into Denmark across the Kiel Canal was open, but that the Baltic ports were generally no longer very useful. Switzerland could be reached by swimming the Rhine, but border crossing, particularly at the well-guarded Schaffhausen Salient, was extremely difficult, with police arresting all strangers on sight. To the south, Austria provided some opportunities for friendly assistance, and partisans operating in Yugoslavia and northern Italy often could be counted on to give aid (10:--). In general, aircrews were advised that easterly escapes through the Balkans or into Russia were extremely dangerous due to the uncertainty of their reception by native populations (4:226).

By far the best opportunity for successful evasion was to be found to the west in Belgium, Holland, and France. The populations of these countries were strongly pro-British and pro-American. They were willing to help evaders despite the danger of fatal German reprisals, and they supported the operation of escape nets throughout the war (4:299). These nets were very fluid, and were the target of an intensive German counter-intelligence effort. They were all penetrated at one time or another, and many helpers were arrested and executed. Amazingly, however, they were almost always reconstituted and continued their work, using ever-changing routes, safe-houses, and contacts (7:61-171;239-254).

The best known escape nets operated in France and Belgium. They included the O'Leary Line, based in Marseille, which arranged escapes by sea as well as overland through Spain (7:61-104). When this line was penetrated and broken up, its place was taken by others, such as the Burgundy Line in north and northwest France (4:209) and the Shelburne Line in Brittany (7:239-254). The Comet Line operated successfully in Belgium and

France (7:125-190). Additionally, the Dutch underground operated successful nets (19:--), as did the Danish until the Baltic ports were effectively closed in 1944 (4:198; 10:--).

Some of these lines attempted to use sea routes to evacuate escapers. However, by late 1943, this practice became increasingly risky, and the nets tended to converge in the major population centers of Amsterdam, Brussels, and Paris, with onward travel usually arranged by rail to some point near the Spanish border. From there, paid guides led the evaders on foot over the Pyrenees and to the relative safety of neutral Spain (4:200-209; 7:239-254).

Despite the constant threat of German infiltration into the escape networks, they continued to survive because of the compartmentalization built into their organization. For instance, the American Military Attache in London in 1944, summed up his estimation of the Dutch underground by noting compartmentalization was essential:

The Dutch, while extremely willing to cooperate in aiding Allied airmen to escape, are loath to allow its information gathering underground to engage in these activities, as any added activity increases their risk in geometrical proportion. It is a principle, for security reasons, that an underground group organized for one purpose should not have contact with groups organized for other purposes (19:--).

As a result of this care, the security problems mentioned in the previous chapter could often be overcome, and the long-term security of the line guaranteed. Colonel Alford describes his experience with the compartmentalization of the underground:

The way the underground was set up at that point, person A knew person B, and person B knew person C, but person A and person C did not know each other. If one got captured, they could only go to two people. . . and there the chain was broken. There was a man connected with the underground. . . who lived near the railroad station, and he had two British flyers living in his house waiting to move on. The railroad station was bombed one day, and in the bombing this man's house was destroyed, and the two British flyers were killed. Upon investigation, the Germans found these two flyers, and immediately realized the man who owned the house was part of the underground, and then they took him

prisoner. This broke the chain by which I was to start south to Spain (20:--).

In this case, the broken chain caused delays in movement through the net, but the compartmentalization built into the system also saved other helpers and evaders from discovery. As a result, the underground nets were able to continue operations in some fashion right up to the close of the war.

Having examined the equipment and organized assistance available to the would-be evader, we now turn to an examination of some attitudes, expressed in policy and behavior, that affected the will and ability of Allied servicemen to escape from Germany and occupied Europe.

The Geneva Convention recognized the traditional right of the prisoner of war to attempt to escape. In general, the Germans recognized this right, and treated western prisoners of war accordingly. This distinction is important to make, because the Russians, whose government was not a signatory to the convention, were treated with utmost brutality when in German captivity. Russian prisoners of war were forced to labor in munitions and other war industries, and were made the subjects of deliberate extermination campaigns. They were not accorded any oversight by or assistance from the Red Cross, nor were they recognized as bona fide prisoners of war by the German government (9:940;946-47;951-54).

In contrast, other Allied prisoners of war fared reasonably well. They were housed in adequate, if primitive, camp facilities, received mail and Red Cross packages, and were visited by Red Cross officials on a recurring basis (9:954-56). Furthermore, the Germans recognized the well-established international standard which held that "an escaper is not necessarily treated as an enemy agent even if he is caught wearing civilian clothes. Heretofore, the Germans have treated both [escapers and evaders] as entitled to try to escape" (15:--). Prisoners found in possession of aids boxes and other escape gear were not penalized, the gear merely being confiscated if found (4:14).

This attitude, carried out as a matter of policy by the Wehrmacht and the Luftwaffe, took a great deal of the risk out of escape activity within the PW camps and evasion activity without. When combined with the Allied standing order that it was every soldier's duty to try to escape, such activity increased rapidly as prisoner populations swelled. In fact, confidence was so high, escapers sometimes returned voluntarily to bring intelligence back to the Escape Committee (10:--).

However, the Allied High Command was forced to reconsider and alter its policy on escape activity when it became apparent the Germans were altering their response to this increasingly bothersome problem. In April of 1944, 50 Allied officers were executed by the Gestapo after a mass breakout from Stalag III in Sagan, Germany. This was the aftermath of the famed Great Escape, in which 79 prisoners attempted to escape (4:4; 29:--). At about the same time, two Americans evading in France were caught and shot by the Gestapo (15:--). A message from an unidentified PW camp (passed out by coded mail) discussed "the Commandant's recent orders restricting camp conditions. A camp officer stated Hitler has just issued orders that all escapes must stop due to the large number in Germany" (15:--).

As a result of the increasing danger associated with escapes (with the apparent likelihood of being shot if recaptured), the Senior American Officers (SAOs) in several PW camps asked for clarification of the escape doctrine (18:--). By January 1945, the British and Americans had agreed that safety of the prisoners was paramount, and escape was no longer considered a "duty" (4:294). Shortly after, British prisoners were forbidden to escape. American prisoners were advised that escape was not forbidden, but senior officers should use the utmost discretion in authorizing it (18:--). In fact, escape activity virtually ceased from this point.

Colonel Appleman remembers being ordered not to escape. However, he was tempted beyond his powers to resist by the slack security on a forced march to a new PW camp, and he tried anyway. He was caught, and returned to the line of march. His reception was a bit chilly:

It was well after dusk when I reached the column and it was the following day before I found my original position where my acquaintances were. Instead of being greeted as a hero though, I was chided. In fact, the SAO reminded me that he had relied on my infantry training as a glider pilot to help lead my fellow Air Force officers. He charged that I had deserted my command. During the balance of my PW days, I was content to wait (21:--).

However, those who were still evaders at large had a continuing interest in remaining free and returning to their own forces. For them, German policy on escape and evasion made little difference. They were going to continue to do everything they could to get home. They faced enormous difficulties in achieving that goal, but were the recipients of considerable support by resistance workers throughout Western Europe. Beyond

that, the lucky ones had a small reserve of evasion equipment and whatever knowledge they had managed to store away from the escape and evasion training they had received prior to being shot down.

Having examined the surrounding factors, both positive and negative, which affected the success of evasion activity, we will now turn to a discussion of that critical training, and attempt to determine its value in helping airmen deal successfully with the challenges of evasion in occupied Europe.

CHAPTER 5

TRAINING

The unlucky American airman who arrived as an uninvited and unwilling guest on European soil was immediately faced with major problems and possessed meager resources to solve them. Initially, all he had was his aids box (unless he had lost it -- an unfortunately common occurrence) and whatever knowledge he had gleaned from the escape and evasion training he had received at home base. Until and unless he found help, these two things were literally all he had. The previous chapter described his first resource, the aids box, in some detail. This chapter will examine the second resource, knowledge. We will first discuss the policy guiding the training, then examine in more detail its content and how it was taught.

First, it is fair to say that an underlying philosophy guided the development of escape and evasion training. This philosophy, expressed in public policy, was simply that "a fighting man remains a fighting man, whether in enemy hands or not, and his duty to continue fighting overrides everything else" (4:15). All American personnel were briefed that, if captured, they were to consider themselves as combatants posted to a new unit, the military chain of command prevailed, and military law still applied. Those who evaded and found their way into an escape line were similarly subject to its authority, and must obey its orders as they would a superior officer's (4:49). Training, then, was designed to emphasize the need to think of evasion and escape as a military duty, as well as the technical knowledge which permitted it to be carried out.

The training was initially developed by the British through MI9. Their method was a simple one. They started by identifying and debriefing successful escapers and evaders, compiling their stories, and then using them as lecturers to tell other aircrews about their experiences (4:53-55). PW&X, with its parent organization, MIS-X, shared offices and information with MI9 and adopted the British approach. Together, they developed a smooth system for getting practical feedback into the training plans.

First, all returnees were routed through MI9/PW&X on their return to England. After their identities were verified by their units, the men were carefully debriefed on their escape and/or evasion experiences (7:39-48). Their stories were then typed into formal reports, and distributed through intelligence channels to a restricted list of recipients (16:--). (MI9 and PW&X, for instance, shared reports.) Those returnees who appeared especially articulate and had good stories to tell were assigned to visit RAF and American airfields throughout Great

Britain to "spread the word." American returnees, who were barred from further combat in the European theater, were often sent back to the United States to perform a similar service there (4:53-55). Escape and evasion training, therefore, consisted primarily of lectures by experienced personnel whose stock in trade was the "war story."

The lectures followed a structured format designed to hit the high points of escape and evasion tactics, illustrated, of course, by the first-hand experiences of the lecturer. In one standard lecture script which survives, the outline starts by emphasizing that "every soldier knows it is his duty to escape and bring back information" (14:--). The script goes on to discuss evasion tactics, how to find help, escape tactics, the PW escape organization, escape routes, and what to do in a neutral country (14:--). This script is not much different from others that survive in the archives (12:--; 13:--; 15:--), and is consistent with the training references contained in the escape and evasion reports mentioned above (16:--).

To begin with, discussion of evasion tactics usually took the form of common-sense advice: get away from the airplane as quickly as possible, discard firearms, travel at night when in uniform, keep dogtags, and maintain a positive attitude. Other advice sounds a bit harder for the unprepared to follow: "look like a civilian" (14:--). Advice on train travel was common (i.e., use slow trains to avoid the ID checks common on expresses, buy only small fare tickets that don't require special coupons), as was the admonition to learn a few words of French and German (14:--; 10:--).

Crews were also told to learn as much as they could about land and celestial navigation (14:--). This turned out to be good advice for Colonel Alford, whose aids kit, with its valuable compass and maps, had been abandoned with his manure-covered flight suit.

It was almost dark when I headed west. Due to the exact location of this area, it was necessary for me to walk due west to avoid the German border [to the north and south.] I used my very limited celestial navigation training in order to go west, keeping the north star on my right shoulder and the moon on my left shoulder. As it turned out, when I finally stopped two nights and two days later, I found out I had actually walked almost due west (20:--).

At this point, E&E lectures quickly moved on to discuss the fine points of finding the help that was so essential for survival. In occupied countries, airmen were advised to avoid cities, if possible, and approach farmers. The approach, they

were told, should be made to people who were alone, preferably older men. They were advised to avoid talking in or near groups of people, where the conversation could be overheard (11:--; 14:--). If evading in Germany, Austria, or the French Rhineland (which had a very large ethnic German population), airmen were told to be especially cautious in approaching anyone at all, but that Catholic priests were sometimes helpful in these regions. Another potential source of help within Germany was the large community of conscripted foreign workers whose sympathies were largely pro-Allied (11:--).

Colonel Appleman remembers his attempts to follow all this good advice:

[We] ran like hell for the trees about a quarter of a mile away. It was a small grove good only for concealment during the day. We could travel at night, we concluded, and work our way toward Switzerland. . . Just as we had decided we would have to ask for help, an opportunity appeared. Frightened at first by the sound of something approaching, we hid in some dense brush. The sounds, it soon became apparent, were made by a small herd of milk cows being driven by a middle aged man. Taking care not to startle him, I first stood in the open until he could see me. When it became obvious that he had seen me, I held out both arms and walked toward him repeating, "I am an American. Do you speak English?" The man's response was obviously friendly. . . He would return with help, including clothing, he offered. Remembering a point from the E&E briefing, we moved several yards away from where the man had left us and watched it carefully from concealment. In a short time, the man did return with a companion, clothing, and refreshments (21:--).

Once having made contact with an escape net, the lectures advised airmen to remain security-conscious at all times. They were not to ask questions, or talk of other helpers they had met along the way. If they came in contact with other evaders being sheltered in the net, they were not to insist on all being taken out together. Such arrangements were entirely up to the resistance, and evaders should follow orders and be prepared for long delays (14:--). If they noted anything of military importance during their evasion, they should try to remember what they saw, but should never write anything down (13:--). This last precaution was designed to protect the escape net from compromise in case the evader was captured, as well as to protect the airman from a possible charge of espionage (4:12).

By the summer of 1944, when it was apparent that the Germans were inclined to indulge in fatal reprisals against evading

Allied servicemen, training instructions were changed to advise airmen to keep "their arms, equipment, and uniforms unless compelled to throw these away as the only means of avoiding capture" (15:--). So concerned were MI9 and MIS-X over this issue that they considered forbidding the wear of civilian clothes altogether (15:--).

Those who were captured were told to attempt escape as soon as possible. The earliest moments of captivity offered the best chances of success, and once a prisoner had been transported to Germany, the increased vigilance of the guards and hostility of the population made escape extremely difficult. Prisoners of war were usually transported to camps inside Germany by train, and crews were advised to look for chances to jump off the train: use lavatories to hide in while waiting for a suitable opportunity; fake lameness to fool guards into relaxing their vigilance; wait for the train to slow down for left-hand curves, and jump off to the right to reduce the risk of being fired upon (14:--).

One successful escaper followed this advice, and it worked:

We had been locked in compartments, in groups of eight, as the train traveled East. . . By morning, the six guards were exhausted. They unlocked our compartments and allowed us to use the latrine at will. . . First, I attempted to leave through the latrine window. It was not designed to open, and breaking it seemed out of the question. I then moved to the platform at the front of the car and idly tugged at the latch on the exit door. To my surprise, it was unlocked and the guard who was supposed to be there was chatting 15 or 20 feet away in the corridor. [I made a plan for escape and another pilot asked to go along.] The minutes seemed like hours as we waited for the right combination of circumstances for our jump off the train. . . [Finally] it was the perfect time. The train had not yet regained its speed [after passing through a village], we were rounding a curve which placed our side of the car on the outside, and we were going under an underpass. Jumping just as we had cleared the underpass, I was confident that I wasn't seen from the rear of the train, and was just as certain that the curved track prevented anyone in front of us from seeing our exit (21:--).

Not all, of course, would be lucky enough to escape at this point. So, the training lectures went on to describe life in the prisoner of war camps. The PW chain of command and the escape organization discussed in the previous chapter were described in some detail. Again, security was a key concern and the training

emphasized the need to limit information-sharing. Crews were reminded to tell the Germans only their name, rank, and serial number, and were warned against talking about mission-oriented information even among themselves (14:--). Special cautions were included about German eavesdropping techniques, and the use of ferrets and microphones inside the camps (4:144).

As previously mentioned, escapes were to be planned, coordinated, and approved only by the Escape Committee, and crews were warned against allowing "prison fever" to goad them into making unsupported and unauthorized attempts that might cost them their lives (14:--).

The training lectures then turned to a discussion of the most common escape routes into neutral territory. These routes, described in the previous chapter, changed somewhat over time. For instance, by early 1944, security at the Baltic ports made seaborne escape to Sweden almost impossible. Similarly, the most common border crossings into Switzerland had become increasingly difficult to negotiate. The routes west and south into Spain remained open the longest, and those escaping from Germany were advised to try to enter the Spain-bound escape nets in Holland or Belgium (14:--).

Finally, the training concluded with a discussion on what to do upon arrival in a neutral country. The Geneva Conventions provided for escaped prisoners of war to be repatriated to their country of origin. However, those who evaded and passed into neutral territory without ever being captured were not entitled to repatriation. They were to be interned in the neutral country until hostilities ceased. As a result, all airmen were advised to claim to be escaped PWs, even if they were not. They were told to contact the nearest British or American consulate, and make their presence known, and to cooperate with local authorities in every other way (14:--).

This, then, was the sum total of the escape and evasion training given to most American aircrews. There was no survival training comparable to what the Air Force provides today. The occasional veteran might recall some practical exercises in which he was trucked out into the English countryside and told to find his way home, but this was clearly the exception rather than the rule. For the vast majority, the only training they received in this important subject was a lecture or two such as the one described here. The question that we must now answer is, was it good enough? Let us now turn to a qualitative evaluation of World War II escape and evasion training for an answer to that question.

CHAPTER 6

EVALUATION AND CONCLUSIONS

Between November 1942 and October 1944, approximately 2400 American servicemen had returned from behind enemy lines in the European Theater (17:--). PW&X debriefed these men exhaustively, and summaries of the debriefings were published and distributed within American and British intelligence channels (16:--). By October 1944, however, the volume of returning soldiers and airmen was so great that PW&X, at the direction of Holt, ceased transcribing and distributing the summaries (17:--). By that time, however, over 2000 detailed summaries had been compiled, and an attachment (Appendix D) to each one contained the returnee's evaluation of the escape aids and training he had received prior to his evasion.

This chapter provides an evaluation of the quality of that escape and evasion training. In reaching her conclusions, the author relied heavily on the critiques provided in the Appendix D attachments, which were the remarks of those who were ultimately successful in their escape/evasion attempts. The author has also relied on the contemporary testimony of a number of ex-prisoners of war. These men, whose attempts at escape/evasion were not fully successful, have provided their opinions of the training they received, as they remember it. Though over forty years have passed since the end of the war in Europe, it is worth noting that their memories in this respect are consistent with the remarks made by successful evaders immediately after their return to England, and documented in the Appendix D attachments.

The author's evaluations and conclusions are based on a sampling of the 2000-plus E&E Intelligence Summaries and their related Appendix D attachments. The summaries were indexed chronologically by month of return. In order to provide for a representative sampling, the author reviewed the first ten summaries for each month beginning in November 1942 and ending in June 1944. This selection method, while arbitrary, provided for the review of 200 summaries with no preselection based on name, unit, country of evasion, or any other factor. The author did no sampling beyond the June 1944 reports because after this date they became increasingly brief and Appendix D was often omitted. As previously mentioned, the summaries were discontinued altogether in October 1944.

Appendix D to the E&E intelligence summary was a standardized survey answering five major questions: 1) Was the evader equipped with an aids box, money purse, or other escape gear? 2) Were these items useful? 3) How much E&E training had the evader received prior to being shot down? 4) Was the

training helpful? 5) What improvements would the evader make to equipment and training?

This chapter will summarize the overall response to each of these questions in turn. Questions 1 and 2 will be dealt with only briefly since they were previously discussed in Chapter 4. Questions 3, 4, and 5 will be reviewed more thoroughly. Finally, the author will summarize by providing an overall evaluation of the E&E program as it was operated in Western Europe during World War II.

The first two questions, then, deal with the equipment provided to each airman to help him in case he should be shot down and have to evade in Germany or an occupied country. To review, the equipment included an aids box containing small amounts of food and drugs, as well as silk maps and miniature compasses for navigation. This box was small enough to fit into a outside pocket in the flight suit. Additionally, airmen were issued money purses with a variety of European currencies. By early 1944, they were also issued language cards, and most were encouraged to carry ID-sized photos (taken in civilian clothes, of course) to aid in the manufacture of false papers should they be required. Some specialty items, such as hunting knives and the special escape boots described in Chapter 4 were also occasionally issued, but were not common items among aircrews (16:--).

By and large, the aids boxes and money purses were rated as very useful. Some items in the kits (such as adhesive tape and fishing hooks) were occasionally criticized as useless or flawed (such as the leaky water bottle), but the consensus on the aids boxes and purses was very positive. However, two problems were repeatedly noted, though the author found little evidence they were ever satisfactorily solved. For instance, though the kits and purses were rated as very useful by those who had them, fully a third of the summaries reviewed revealed that the kits had either not been issued at all, or were lost.

Failure of units to issue the equipment was fairly frequent in the early months of American involvement in the European war, but was rarely reported after early 1943. Loss of the kits was a much more serious problem. Returnees generally reported they had attempted to secure the aids box in an unzipped outside pocket in their flight suit or by tying it to their parachute harness. The kits were often lost from the open pocket while the airman was parachuting from his crippled airplane. Others, who landed safely with their gear intact, often lost it or left it behind in their rush to get away from the place where they landed.

The second frequently-mentioned problem was that of shoes. Airmen were advised during training that evasions were more

likely to be successful if they were able to pass as civilians. Flying boots were not very useful for this purpose, and many crewmen attempted to prepare themselves by taking along a pair of GI shoes. The problem of securing the shoes so they were available if needed was a tricky one, and many reported they had left the shoes aboard the airplane when it was abandoned. Others, who tied the shoes to their parachute harness, had better success, but there was apparently no training or policy on this minor difficulty, and its resolution was left to the common sense of the individual.

When asked what improvements they would make to the gear, returnees suggested a variety of items be included or eliminated from the kits and purses. These suggestions had little consistency except for three requests: to eliminate the leaky water bottle (this was finally done near the end of the war), to include Spanish currency in the money purse (this was never done), and to include language pamphlets in French or other major European languages (as noted previously, this was accomplished by early 1944).

Overall, the escape kits and money purses appear to have served their purpose. A minority, perhaps one in ten, rated the gear as useless, and a number of evaders were denied the use of the equipment because of chance or their own carelessness. However, those who kept them overwhelmingly approved of the gear. Even those who made suggestions for changes rated the kits and purses as extremely useful.

We turn now to the third and fourth questions addressed by the Appendix D surveys. That is, how much E&E training did the evaders receive, and how useful was it. The answers to these questions are much less clear-cut than the evaluation of the equipment discussed above.

The Appendix D questionnaires reveal that a high proportion (up to 70%) of American crewmen never received any E&E training prior to their arrival in England. When they did arrive in England, their training consisted almost solely of a briefing (or perhaps two) similar to the one described in Chapter 5. A number of veterans remember their training this way:

All aircrews were briefed by the Royal Air Force people who had been shot down and escaped back to England. I think we had two or three of these briefings. They told us generally where to go, and where not to go if shot down. For the most part, we were told to go to farmhouses and to avoid cities until we could contact the underground. . . We had no escape and evasion training, per se. The information given us by the RAF people was of tremendous help, but we could have used

more specifics. . . [Before going to England] we had received briefings on how to survive on the icecap in Greenland in case we went that way. In other words, we received no training whatsoever prior to our going to England (20:--).

[Flight training] had been intense, and not much was said (probably with good reason) about the combat mortality rate. As a matter of interest, we were told while training in the US that enemy anti-aircraft fire was not accurate when flying over 20,000 feet. Those observations were not passed to the Germans. . . Evasion or escape discussions were, as far as I can remember, not a part of individual briefings. In England, we. . . received some general briefings, but no one was particularly knowledgeable about evasion/escape. Being shot down was not a particularly palatable subject. . . Discussions were minimal. One fact I had gleaned somewhere along the line that was most helpful was to make the attempt promptly. Once in organized captivity, escape is most difficult (28:--).

[The E&E training we received was] almost nonexistent, perhaps a total of two hours of lecture, or twice as much as the information I received on the use of the parachute (27:--).

These comments, made by veterans over forty years after the fact, are remarkably consistent with the evaluations contained in the Appendix D surveys. Comments like, "Very useful. We could have used much more" (16:--), were common.

The frequency of training varied considerably, with about 60% reporting they had received one or two briefings in England, 20% reporting they had received several briefings, and about 10% claiming they had never been briefed at all. (The remainder failed to answer the questions.) The percentage of crewmen reporting they had been briefed rose steadily as the war went on, and by early 1944, virtually all said they had heard at least one of the E&E lectures (16:--).

Associated training in parachute procedures and survival was a hit or miss proposition (mostly miss). None of the sampled reports mentioned any sort of survival training. Parachute training was another matter:

I walked out of the quartermaster's at Kimbolton with my new parachute harness which fit me loosely around the legs. That suited me, but fortunately one of the ground crew veterans told me that there would be no future generations of Padgetts if I jumped with that

harness. He had it fitted, which may have saved me from a painful injury later. We did not receive any parachute training because training jumps using our 26 foot chest packs would have hampered our war effort. Landing had the same impact as jumping from a two-story building, or so I have been told (27:--).

Qualitatively, most crewmen reported the training they did receive was either "helpful" or "very helpful." A few (about 10%) rated the training between "not helpful" and "useless." However, in general, the briefings were well-received. The debriefing summaries indicate that the information given out in the training was remembered and used. Comments like, "I remembered from the briefing to approach a farmhouse for help" (26:Showalter-Jan 43), and "I knew from the briefing to claim to be an escaped PW when I got to Spain" (26:Mays-Jan 43), were common. Evaders usually remembered essential advice (hide your parachute, approach lone farmers for help, don't ask questions or mention other helpers, be patient), and mentioned it gratefully in their reports to PW&X.

The primary criticism voiced then and now was that the training didn't go far enough to teach practical survival skills. While the content of the briefings was fairly consistent over time, they were administered haphazardly, with little apparent attention to regularity or comprehensive coverage of the crewforce.

Finally, the fifth category of questions, soliciting suggestions for improvements in equipment and training, often resulted in specific suggestions for altering the contents of the aids box or the money purse, but rarely contained concrete suggestions for improving E&E training. As noted above, ideas for improved aids boxes had few common threads among the 2000-plus returnees, though many had individual suggestions on specific items to add or delete. The only one that was mentioned fairly consistently (as an item to get rid of) was the water bottle. Suggestions for improving the training, when they were made, were almost always expressed as a desire for more of it with more practical details on how to get along.

Looking at all these questions now, with the perspective bestowed by forty years of history, one is led to the conclusion that the training and equipment provided to American servicemen during World War II to prepare them to escape and evade in Europe were flawed, but nonetheless helped accomplish at least three of the stated objectives of MI9 and MIS-X:

To facilitate escapes of . . . prisoners of war, thereby getting back service personnel and containing additional enemy manpower on guard duties.

To facilitate the return to the United Kingdom of those who succeeded in evading capture in enemy occupied territory.

To maintain morale of. . . prisoners of war in enemy prison camps (4:26).

In evaluating the overall effectiveness of the World War II escape and evasion training program, it is important to remember that the efforts of MIS-X and MI9 constituted the very first organized attempt to prepare soldiers to deal with that challenge. Repatriated escapers and evaders had been mined as a source of intelligence in past wars, but there had never before been a coordinated plan for training the ordinary soldier, officer or enlisted, in escape, evasion, or intelligence gathering. Nor did the high-level support for such training exist (4:21).

As a result, MI9 and MIS-X were starting from scratch to build a training program, with no "lessons learned" from the past to draw on. The escape/evasion gear they created was born of common sense and ingenuity. Additions and improvements were a matter of trial and error until their system for getting feedback (the Appendix D questionnaires) started providing them an experience base to draw on (5:--). Despite all the problems, the aids box can be rated a success, even by today's more sophisticated standards. One veteran evader says, "I still have the map and box of tablets, etc. in my car for emergencies" (30:--). This was quality equipment that still inspires confidence in some.

The training, perhaps deserves more qualified approval. The glaring deficiencies in survival (or even parachute) training have been noted earlier. In this respect, the critique that "Boy Scout training was more valuable" (23:--), just about sums it up. However, as far as they went, the briefings, given by experienced escapers and evaders, made a lasting impression on their listeners. The testimony of the many who returned before the war's end, as well as of those who were liberated from PW camps, supports the view that these sessions were both effective and credible. The men who heard those briefings remembered what they had to say about the essentials. The most successful among them followed the advice they had been given. Since no objective measure of effectiveness is available, the testimony of the survivors has convinced this author that these briefings accomplished the purpose of instilling a degree of mental preparedness in the men they were directed toward.

In summary, we can ask two final questions. Were American airmen prepared to escape and evade in war-torn Europe in World War II? Could they have been better prepared? The answer to the

first question is a qualified "yes." For the first time ever, the Army made a coordinated attempt to train and equip soldiers for the possibility that they might be caught behind enemy lines. In this regard, clearly some training is better than no training at all. Given the fact that the training program had to be developed from scratch, with no prior experience to guide the way, it was remarkably successful in teaching aircrews what they most needed to know to survive in a wartime European environment.

The testimony of survivors overwhelmingly identifies the presence of active and helpful escape lines as the key factor in successful evasion. In the Asia/Pacific Theater, this factor was not in play, and fewer than 10% of all successful escapers/evaders were counted from that area (4:App 1). In Europe, where escape lines were common, not only in the western region, but throughout the Mediterranean and Balkan areas as well, escape and evasion was a very real possibility for any Allied serviceman who found himself behind enemy lines. To the degree that the E&E training developed by MI9 and PW&X prepared those servicemen to take effective advantage of the presence of a healthy resistance movement, it was most effective.

In other respects, the training appears inadequate by today's standards. So, the answer to the second question ("Could the training have been better?") is, "Yes, perhaps." The training might have been better if it had included practice in basic skills like camping, foraging, and land/celestial navigation. These "Boy Scout" skills were not taught in flight training (28:--), and the testimony of many survivors indicates they wish it had been. Some basic language training might have paid off, also, in improved mobility for some evaders. However, there is no data available to show that men possessing only rudimentary language skills fared any better than their more ignorant counterparts at that time and in that theater.

Whether the logistical and training resources to teach such things as basic survival were available at a time when top priority went to teaching war-making skills is a topic for another research paper. However, it seems clear that support for the E&E training effort did not extend much beyond the program worked out in London. Events of the '50s and '60s were to make survival and resistance skills an important part of the aircrew training program. However, in the early '40s, the idea of any training at all on escape and evasion was revolutionary.

Under the circumstances, it seems clear that the E&E training and equipment provided to American aircrews in the European Theater in World War II got the job done. It might have been done better or more thoroughly, but given the lack of prior experience in the subject, the British and American authorities did a remarkable job of preparing American servicemen to survive

and return. In the process, they also laid the foundations for our present-day survival training, and that is an accomplishment no one could reasonably sneer at.

CHAPTER 7

SUMMARY

This paper has provided a review of the training and environment for American evasion activity in Western Europe during World War II, with special focus on the period from 1942 to 1944. When the first United States Army Air Force units arrived in England in the summer of 1942, the perils they faced were not limited to the air over Europe. Inevitably, many American flyers were to unwillingly join their Allied colleagues in the war on the ground.

Thoroughly indoctrinated in their duty to evade or escape capture by all means available, these men faced great difficulties in successfully returning to their own forces. Geographic, cultural, and linguistic barriers all created significant obstacles to easy movement within continental Europe, as well as between the Continent and the British Isles. In addition, the lack of food, shelter, and warm, concealing clothes created an almost total dependency on the local populations of occupied territories for shelter and sustenance. Finally, the grip of the German war machine often made that help, when offered, insecure and unreliable.

To help them in their struggles with these formidable problems, American airmen did possess a few resources. First, they could usually count on the healthy and active resistance movements of the occupied territories for help in their evasion. Though finding these courageous people was a matter of luck (which failed often enough), it is still fair to say that their help in sheltering, feeding, and transporting evaders was vital to success of evasion activities throughout the war.

Second, they were equipped with a small amount of high quality evasion equipment which included maps, compasses, money, and small amounts of drugs and food. This equipment, developed and produced by the British, proved to be most helpful to the majority of those who needed it.

Finally, most received at least some form of standardized training on escape and evasion which focused on what to expect and how to cope. This training usually consisted of lectures, delivered by successful, experienced evaders. It included much common sense advice on what to do (e.g., get away from the aircraft wreckage immediately, approach lone farmers for help, keep your dogtags) and how to behave (e.g., follow the orders of the underground helpers, don't ask questions, don't talk about other helpers). Unfortunately, the training usually stopped at

that point, and neither survival nor basic language training were provided at all.

However, a review of the training itself indicates that while it had significant deficiencies in scope and standardization, it nevertheless instilled a valuable mental preparedness for the rigors of an evasion. It proved itself in the grateful testimonials of those men who were unfortunate enough to have to put it to use and established an initial benchmark for the development of modern survival, evasion, resistance, and escape (SERE) training. As a result, the World War II E&E training program, with all its deficiencies, deserves recognition as a small, but important, advance in the preparation of soldiers for war and all its uncertainties.

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