THE SHORT WAR OF DON RICE

It is the 24th of February, 1944. The 357th Fighter Group has been operational for 14 days. It has flown six missions, three of them French coastal sweeps and three to German targets. The latter three brought contact with enemy fighters and resulted in the Group's first victories, eleven of them. Six pilots were already gone -- Giltner, Hubbard, Ross, Lichter, Boyle and Carroll. Two of them were dead, the others would return in 15 months or so.

The target on the 24th was Gotha, a short mission - only 4 hours. Two 190's, a 109, a 110 and a rocket carrying JU 88 were shot down and two pilots, Chuck McKee and Don Rice who did not return. At the end of the day, 362nd pilot Kenneth Hagan reported, "My wingman, Lt. Don Rice and I were flying together near Coblenz at an altitude of 24,000 feet, to the left rear and above a box of B-24's. Suddenly Lt. Rice called me and said that there were two bogies under us at one o'clock at about 10,000 feet. I made a turn to the left so that I could come down on them from the sun, Don remained during the turn. Immediately after the turn, I called Rice and told him that I couldn't see the bogies anymore, that I was low on oxygen and that we better head home. I heard him say excitedly "they are 190's". I called him again and asked "are you with me Don"? There was only a garbled reply. Hagan did not see or hear Rice again, so tagged onto a couple of P-51's and came home.

15 months later, Don Rice carried on the story in his encounter report in which he claimed the destruction of an FW 190. "I started down in a split-ess and Hagan turned as though he were following me from the right. Getting close to the enemy plane, I noticed it had a yellow nose. In my dive, I had developed too much speed and although I retarded the throttle, I overshot him, but managed to get under him and when about 100 feet away, I opened fire with a 5 to 10 degree deflection. I observed strikes on his right wing root and all over the cockpit. I must have killed or wounded the pilot for the 190 suddenly nosed down and went straight into the ground. The pilot had not bailed out. Climbing back upstairs, I called Lt. Hagan but just then I was shot down from behind by another 190. I was able to bail out but broke my leg in trying to extricate myself from a tree in which I had landed. The Germans found me and I have been a POW until recently".

The aerial battles that swirled above them were of great interest to a generation of German boys, just as they had been to a similar group across the English Channel during the days of the Battle of Britain. Many of the youngsters on both sides were lucky enough to be just young enough to avoid getting caught up in a savage war as participants.

Erich Pfarr was one of those on the ground that day and he remembers. He said it was his last year in school being born in 1929. It was a sunny cold day, cloudless sky with 8 to 12 inches of snow. They had expected an air raid which came about 11:30 but the alarm came too late because the bombers were already above them on their way home. There was an intense fight above them and then everything happened fast. Parachutes flew above them in a westerly direction. Suddenly there were increasingly louder motor noises, a big bang, a smoke plume and one pilot in a para-

chute. It was the crash of a U.S. Jaeger (fighter) north of Unterbreizbach. The pilot landed near the Ulster Bridge, badly injured. A four motor bomber flew lower in a line from the south toward the Ulsterberg, and crashed in the woods.

Almost 50 years later, another German, Heinz Jirousek who had been about 4 years old in 1944, now an avid researcher of the vicious battles, located the wreckage of Rice's P-51. He also managed to track down Erich Pfarr (quoted above) and other witnesses and to identify the German pilots involved. The following was sent to both Don Rice and Merle Olmsted which is included here courtesy of Mr. Jirousek. "What a day today", Peter Gottbehut recalls, "the whole morning bomber streams going eastward". Now at 1340 hours, they come back just over our little village of Rott. Everybody was standing outside counting the little shining points with contrails. One hundred, two hundred and more. A big deep roar was in the air, you could feel it in your stomach. Suddenly from the east just over the top of a hill, a four engine bomber showed up, very low and aflame. Everybody was running for cover, like chickens hunted by a hawk. The bomber, a B-17 crashed just behind the houses in a small strip of woods with a huge explosion. We took a deep breath and came back on our feet again but a new noise made us freeze. A fighter plane with great engine noise came out of the sky. It crashed only a few miles from us in a hillside. A parachute was seen floating down. Everybody started to run to the scene of the crash.

As Rice indicated in his own narrative, he broke his leg getting out of the tree. He was then carried from the woods to the road by workers from an iron mine where he was picked up by a German farmer named Seul and taken to his farm. That same evening, a car from Neuwied took him to the Garrison Hospital in that town.

The German pilot who shot Rice down was Oberleutnant (1st Lt.) Waldi Radener, the commander of the 7th Staffel of JG 26. By the end of the war, he had 36 victories of which 17 were four engine bombers. After the war, he joined the new German Air Force, only to be the first air victim of the new Luftwaffe. He was killed in a crash on 8 Jan. 1957.

Heinz Jirousek has concluded that the FW 190 shot down by Rice was flown by Unteroffizier (NCO) Gerhard Loschinski, also of JG 26. who was killed. At the time he had flown 10 missions and had one victory to his credit.

Don Rice's missing Aircrew Report contains translations of several German documents including the following:

"The American Air Corps member Lt. Don Rice, reported by letter of 24 Feb. 1944, has escaped through the barred window of an especially fit (?) room for the purpose on March 24, 1944 at about 3 o'clock. Endeavors to recapture the prisoner have been started already by the local commander at Neuwied". Rice was indeed soon recaptured and spent the rest of the war at Stalag Luft I, at Barth in Northern Germany. Heinz Jirousek has invited Rice to visit him in Germany and plans have been made to do so early in 1994. On the 24th of February, Don plans to be standing on the spot on which he landed 50 years ago to the day, after his SHORT WAR.

by Merle Olmsted

SHORT WAR FOLLOW-UP

Don Rice did go to Germany the last two weeks of February and the first two weeks of March, 1994. Don met Mr. Heinz Jerousek and two of his friends who are also very interested in tracing various airplane crashes during WW II. Mr. Jerousek arranged to have Don picked up at his hotel in Frankfurt and driven to his home. From his home, he took Don to another friends home who had a large collection of souvenirs from various crashes. This friend had a 20 MM Cannon from a German plane, a 50 Ca. Machine gun from an American plane, plus several propeller blades of all kinds. It was like a small museum. After having lunch at this friends house, they all (5) drove to the vicinity of the crash site of Don's P-51. When they got there, they met 4 local citizens who had heard about Don's coming and they joined the others for the walk through the woods to the crash site itself. Don had several pictures taken. One of the locals said that he remembers seeing and hearing Don's plane before it crashed but he did not see Don's parachute.

Every German at the scene was extremely friendly and made Don feel more like a long lost buddy rather than a former enemy. One of the locals produced small bottles of "snaps" and they toasted to friendship, no more wars etc. They all agreed that America saved Germany and were very grateful for our help.

Heinz Jerousek gave Don the name of the German who shot him down. His name was Oberleutnant Woldermar Radener. He was killed in a T-6 during a training flight Jan. 8, 1957. He was the first casualty in the post war Luftwaffe. He had 37 victories to his credit.

The name of the pilot Don shot down during this same encounter was Unteroffizer Gerhard Loschinski who had 10 missions and 1 victory. His plane dove straight into the ground and his remains were dug up just 5 years ago and interred in a military cemetery. He had been buried for 45 years before he was dug up.

Heinz told Don that he had recovered and identified a pilot of a P-47 shortly before Don's arrival. He turned the remains over to the U.S. Armed Forces. The pilot had been carried as MIA all of these past years. Heinz gave Don a great memento of Don's airplane consisting of the tip of the horizontal stabilizer along with a Mfg. plate from the oil filter plus one of the actual 50 cal. bullets he had recovered from the crash site.



Don's German friends

Left to right, 4th
Heinz Jerousek

Right to left, 3rd
A man enjoying himself.

362nd



As a POW at Stalag Luft I prison camp



Don is standing in the whole that was created when his aircraft buried itself into the ground.

Pieces of aluminum metal are still at the site from 362nd. Pilot Don Rice's aircraft.

REUNION PX

VIDEO TAPES:

"357th Fighter Aces Reunite at EAA Oshkosh". Host David Hartman with our aces Yeager, Anderson, Carson, Peterson and Hayes. You can't go wrong with such a fine tape for $10.00 which is a 100% donation to our Treasury. We have 28 tapes left which we would like to close out.

We expect Tom Beemer (362nd pilot) to be making his video tape "Mustang Magic" available.

Pete Laboranti will have the 357th Fighter Group Lapel Pins on sale.

Bud Anderson will make the white 357th F.G. caps available at $7.00 each.

The PX will be set up in the Hospitality Room as you register.

The Valley of the Shadow

by Howard E. Moebius

Part 3 of 3

By evening a wagon was loaded to the limit. In the morning, a horse was hitched in place and two cows and one heifer were tied to the rear of the wagon. Everybody had put on extra clothing. I had found a set of "clumpers" (wooden shoes) and I thought that by wearing them I would really look Dutch. What I didn't know was that if they didn't fit perfectly, they would hurt tender feet and cause blisters.

After a light breakfast, the entire entourage of eight adults, ten children and one American pilot departed from the house at eight o'clock. We left the town of Angeren and headed east on a very huge dike along the Rhine river.

The clumpers kept my feet warm and dry and I was able to keep up with the slow moving wagon. We walked several miles on the dike until we came to a ferry that was to take us across the Rhine River. It consisted of a platform over eight barges lashed side-to-side behind eight more barges also lashed side-to-side. There were four outboard motors fastened to the rear that would slowly push the whole contraption along a guide cable that stretched across the river. After the wagon was pulled onto the center of the ferry, we all walked on as did about twenty German soldiers. They did not talk to any of us and after the ferry docked we pulled up on another dike on the other side and started our trek to the north.

We covered about twelve miles the first day and, in late afternoon, we stopped at the farmhouse of a friend of the Kok's. The two farmers butchered the heifer and we enjoyed a roast beef dinner that evening.

That night I became ill, very ill. I had dysentery and all the discomfiture that went with it. The impetigo was spreading, and the wooden shoes had worn a large blister on my left foot. They had also caused a good deal of swelling across the insteps of both of my feet. All that plus weakness from the loss of weight made me feel quite miserable. The fresh killed beef went straight through me and handling that in a crowd was not easy. That morning I made gestures to Mrs. Kok that I was very sick and she motioned for me to climb on the wagon and ride with her father and her mother. The rest all walked as we again headed north.

We crossed a very large bridge early in the morning that I noted had guard houses at both ends. However, they did not bother to query us as to where we were going. One time, we passed a group of soldiers that I estimated to be at least four hundred. They were sitting on the side of a hill, singing songs. They seemed to be singing to us as we passed directly in front of them. They sang very well and very loud. Perhaps many of them were just as homesick as I was. Of course, they had no idea who was in their audience.

I had a constant fear that we would be stopped and each one questioned by one of the numerous German officers or soldiers we passed along the way. Although there were nineteen individuals in the group, I couldn't get it out of my mind that it had to be obvious that I was different from the rest -- that I was not Dutch.

That afternoon we were going through the small town of Hummelo and a miracle happened. On the corner of one of the streets, *I spied John Emmerzaal*, the young boy who had helped Gijs take me to his farm the first evening. The others also recognized him and we stopped. I slid down off the wagon and managed to get to him first. I quickly told him how sick I was and that I had to see a doctor immediately or give myself up to the Germans in order to get medical attention. He said he would help me and that I should wait with the Kok's until he contacted me.

What a remarkable coincidence! At just the right moment, he was there were I could see him -- that he had gone to the same town that I was passing through. Somebody had made it happen -- just that way and I knew who it was.

John told Mrs. Kok where to park the wagon and that he would be back after a short time. After a while he came out of the house we were parked in front of and motioned for me to follow him back into the house. We went into a sitting room and he then told me that he would take me to a doctor. Then he went out and told Mrs. Kok that I would be leaving them and perhaps they would want to say goodbye. He did not tell them who I was.

First Mrs. Kok came in. I hugged her and gave her a kiss on her cheek. I could see that her eyes were starting to fill with tears and one rolled down her cheek. After she left, her mother came in. Before we left the house in Angeren I had given her a small wrapped and sealed package to keep for me. She had put it in a small bag that she hung under her dress. Now she took out the bag and returned the small package. I also gave her a kiss on the cheek and then she left. The rest did not come in.

I pulled the curtain back slightly and watched as they moved on. When John returned, I opened the package and gave my flight watch to him. He told me that we would now go to the doctor's office -- to a man, he was sure, would be able to help me.

We walked about a block and a half up the same street and entered his office. There were two men in the room, one older and one about my age. After the older one had gone out of the room, the younger man said to me in perfect English "I am Dr. Ewout Van Der Weg. May I see your identification papers, please?" I handed them to him and after a brief look he said "Please come over here under the light so I can examine you".

He looked at all of my infected areas and then went out of the room for a few minutes. When he returned he was carrying one bottle of medicine and a jar. He handed them both to me and said."This is for your health".

Then he picked up my identification envelope and handed that to me saying "This is for you life".

Then he said "I would like you to stay with me and my wife. We have no children. You will be safe there and we will be able to nurse you back to health. We will leave in a few minutes. I have two bicycles. It is not far. Perhaps you should say goodbye to John now. You will not be seeing him again."

Then he removed his white jacket as I said goodbye and thanked John for all he had done. After John left, we went out the back door and got on the two bicycles that were standing there. I followed him. He did not go fast since he knew how weak I was. We finally were at the outskirts of town and heading up a gravel road towards a large building that looked like a castle. We went to the back of the building and put the bikes in a shed and after the doctor had padlocked the shed we entered the building through the back door. A long hall led to a stairway that took us up to the second floor. We walked down another hall and stopped in front of the first door.

The Doctor knocked. I heard a voice inside and then the Doctor said very clearly "It is me" and then I could hear the latch being turned. The door opened. A woman stood in the doorway. She was about five feet three inches tall. She had blondish hair and intense blue eyes.

The Doctor said "Howard, this is my wife, Miep".

She looked at me and back to him. She said something in Dutch and then looked back at me, smiled and said "Please to come in".

I entered the room in which I was to stay for the next three months. I never left it except to go to the bathroom and one time to help Wout cut wood in the shed. The room had several easy chairs, a small dining table with four chairs, a small wood stove, a long bookcase the full length of one wall and a cot pushed under one of the front windows. Two lamps were turned on as it now was dusk outside and Miep had drawn the blackout shutters. There was fire in the stove.

Miep was an incessant chatterbox. She was so full of life and emotion -- a complete contrast to her husband. He was always very calm. Nothing seemed to ever bother him. He truly was a remarkable man -- about six feet tall, slender, deep blue eyes, short wavy sand colored hair and unusually small hands.

The Valley of the Shadow

He was very considerate of his wife. He loved her very much and constantly gave into her every wish. She was three months pregnant with their first child. They were both my age, twenty seven. He could speak seven languages. He spoke German so fluently that often the German to whom he might be talking would think he was one of them.

Miep's English was amusing. Most times it came out backwards and she talked so fast that I had difficulty understanding her at first. She too was a graduate Doctor but had given up her practice.

About six o'clock Miep went out of the room and returned shortly with several bowls and a small platter of meat. She had already set the table and we sat down to a very delicious dinner.

Earlier, Wout had given me some medicine to start curing the dysentery and had smeared a black paste that looked like grease over areas affected by the impetigo. After dinner, he showed me the toilet off of the landing that was half way up the stairs we had climbed earlier.

The house was owned by Mrs. Markvoort and was called 'The Villa Johanna". She and her late husband had run the very large farm and had raised their family in the Villa. She now lived alone and her son ran the farm. She had rented the small section that we were in to the doctor and his wife. Mrs. Markvoort did most of the cooking and supplied the fruits and vegetables. The Doctor on his rounds to the farmers quite often was paid with meat, poultry or sausage which was then turned over to Mrs. Markvoort to prepare. This combination of supply afforded us far better meals than most of the rest of the Dutch people. In urban areas, the Dutch were already starving since nothing was moving to the markets.

Every morning of my entire stay, Miep served me breakfast in bed. It unusually consisted of small openfaced sandwiches of apple or jelly or leftover meat. I would always have coffee and for the first week, I had eggs and rice. I later learned form Wout that the rice had been saved for the baby, but they thought I needed it more if I was to get well. Until the dysentery left, all fruits had to be peeled and the milk I drank was first boiled.

The first Saturday I was there, Miep handed me clean underwear, a shirt, pants and socks and took me down the hallway outside our room to the bathroom. She had already filled the huge iron tub with steaming hot water. She left me there and I immediately removed all of my clothes. I had not had my underwear off of my body since I had put it on back in England. I slowly climbed into the tub and sank down in the water until it came just below my chin. I was in heaven. I felt like I was being born again. I had to keep my infected right hand and wrist out of the water and also the large infected area on my face. I wanted desperately to dunk my head under the water. However, I did manage to wash my greasy, filthy hair without getting my face wet and when I climbed out of the tub I felt like a new man.

After putting on the wonderful, clean clothing, I returned to the room and Miep gave me a safety razor. I went into their bedroom and hacked off my beard and combed my hair. The mirror now revealed that I was no longer "the old man"

As our trust of each other strengthened, Miep told me that Wout was the head of the local underground and later I met several of the agents who operated under his direction. However when certain agents would visit, I would be asked to remain quietly in the bedroom until they had left. Wout had learned not to trust everybody, even some of those who professed their loyalty to his group. In that way, he could control who did and who did not know that I was staying in his house. If too many people knew, idle talk or a slip on the tongue to the wrong person could be fatal to all of us.

Some of the agents were only known or talked about by some identifying mark such as "the man with the golden tooth" or "the big one". This was done so that agent's real name would not be known and therefore he would not be able to be located by the wrong people.

One of those agents, Joseph, I saw fairly often since he visited Wout frequently. *He was the most remarkable man I have ever met.* Every time he came, he brought me tobacco or cigarettes. He was twenty one years old, about six feet four inches tall and had black wavy hair. He was built like an ox. He was ideally suited for the job he had with the underground. He was their exterminator. When a traitor was discovered, he automatically had the assignment to kill that person as soon as possible.

He admired me very much since I was a pilot, something that he always wanted to be. While he was in the Dutch Merchant Marine, two ships he had sailed on had each been torpedoed and now he had the job of killing those that would betray their fellow countrymen just to gain comfort with the enemy.. He was an important member and yet he felt left out. He wanted people to know what he was doing to help the effort of the underground, but instead, he had to keep a low profile and avoid associating with the others in his group. His usefulness depended on his remaining unknown so his presence would not cause alarm when he was about to carry out an assignment.

One evening, he came in with Wout and sat down in a chair and started to talk to me while Wout took off his coat and opened his satchel.

Wout then called over to him in Dutch, "Well, let me see it".Joseph then removed his coat and rolled up the sleeve of his shirt. He had been shot by a German and the bullet passed clean through the fleshy part of his left arm just above the elbow. The German had shouted for him to stop but Joseph at that time could not afford to be interrogated so he ran and the German shot. Joseph managed to escape and hid outside the Villa until Wout came home.

Wout cleaned the wound and then put a bandage on both sides of Joseph's arm. He then rolled down his sleeve, put on his coat and left.

I had been there about a month when the Germans moved a regiment through that area and billeted some of them in the Villa. They stayed on the first floor over night. Only one officer came up the stairs and knocked on the door. After Wout opened it, he took about two steps in and looked around. He said nothing and seemed to be satisfied. He said "Dankaschoen" and returned to the first floor.

Later that evening, Mrs. Markvoort came up and told Wout that one of the soldiers were starting to build a fire on the living room floor. He rushed out and was able to find into a mounted German officer. The officer rode to the Villa and thrashed the soldier with his riding crop right in front of Mrs. Markvoort as if to convince her that the German's really didn't want to antagonize the Dutch people.

Wout also told me that one day a German soldier stopped him and tried to take his bicycle away. A German officer happened to pass at the same time and when Wout told the officer what was going on and that he was a Doctor and very much needed his bicycle, the officer also thrashed the soldier with his riding crop for "being so stupid" as Wout overheard.

In the second week in December, we had a visit from two American pilots who had come down in a B 26 from the Ninth Airforce. The plane had been hit and the crew was instructed to bail out. The pilot and the co-pilot decide to ride the plane down and landed it dead-stick in a farmers field. They were being sheltered in a small barge on a canal about ten kilometers east of us. They stayed over night and we had a great time telling each other our experiences. We knew we would meet again since we were told that the underground would move us out together when the right time came.

They came back for a two day stay over Christmas. We all received packages of Turkish cigarettes and special candy. Mrs. Markvoort made a special dinner and we all got a little bombed on Dutch gin.

Occasionally, I would hear of groups of the underground who were discovered by the Gestapo and most times they were executed. One time three agents came in a box containing six boxes of ammunition and eight new pistols. Wout examined them and then they were taken to be hidden in the chicken coop behind the Villa.

They were to be used when the Allies tried to take that area. They would have some means of resistance against any last minute atrocities by the retreating Germans.

One time for about a week, I drew maps of the fortifications in the Hummelo area. There were several anti-aircraft guns, V-1 launching sites and two supply depots.

About every other night , we would hear the sputter of the V-1's going quite low over the house headed for Antwerp. The Germans had fled from Antwerp failing demolishing the docks and unloading facilities that were now being used by the Allies. The exploding buzz bombs were not accurate enough to do much precise damage, but they were occasionally hitting their targets.

The older man I had seen in Wout's office was Doctor Westerbeek, his associate. He had read a considerable amount of books in English and he made his entire collection available to me. Wout brought me a steady supply and it helped fill my time. At night, we listened to the BBC and quite often Wout challenged me to a game of chess. As I recall, I never beat him in a single game. He always won.

In the first week of February, I was told that plans had been made for me and the two other pilots to try to reach the Allies. On the night before I was to move out, the other two spent the night with us in preparation of our leaving the following evening. At dusk we assembled behind the Villa Johanna. We all had bicycles and two Dutch young men as well as Joseph joined us. He was given a 7mm Erfert pistol and was to lead. I rode in the rear and also carried an Erfert. The two pilots and I had maps showing German V-1 launching sites sewn into our coats. It started to drizzle as the seven of us rode single file towards the south.

We moved down the same roads that I had come north on when retreating with the Koks. This drizzle kept the German soldiers indoors and off the streets and roads, so we were able to move without drawing attention. Finally, we came to the huge bridge that I remembered crossing with the Kok's when we moved North. We all stopped and Joseph warned us that there was a guard house at each end of the bridge. If we were stopped, he would shoot the guard since we would all be shot if they discovered our identity and the pistols and maps. We were to move as fast as possible over the remainder of the bridge. We then proceeded up toward the first guard house. The rain fell more heavily. It seemed like forever to get there. Finally there it was. We all pedaled slowly and quietly past it. We then proceeded up over the bridge and passed the second guard house at the foot of the bridge.*Nobody came out! — we were in the clear!*

We stopped about 9:00 PM in a small village and entered a house right on the main street. We were led to a large room that could comfortably hold us all. They gave us a cold meal and a drink of Dutch gin. Soon someone started to sing and others joined in. The idea was to make enough noise so it would appear that we were celebrating. This was to throw off any observer as to just why we were there. There was a young girl about twenty three years of age in the group. Later, I found out that she had been the one that had arranged our escape. She at one point asked for part of my identification papers so that it might be used if somebody else came through that way. We were left to our singing and about 11:30 PM we all fell asleep.We were awakened at 3:30 AM, mounted our bicycles and were on our way. Our next stop was at a stone factory on the Rhine River.

The factory manager led us to the power house where he pulled a concrete slab off of an underground crib. We all went down a ladder into the dark dungeon and the cover was slid back over the top. There were three others already in the crib, were three Belgian young men who had deserted from a German labor camp. At dawn, we could see light filtering down through five holes in the crib top.

It was enough so that we could barely make each other out. Dim as it was, it helped rid me of the creepy feeling I had during those earlier dark hours of being swallowed up in a dark, dank cave.

At about noon, the manager brought us another meal of bread and cold pork. Just after sundown, the lid was slid way back and we were told to climb out. We followed the factory manager up to his house and sat down to an absolutely unbelievable delicious dinner - beef roast, mashed potatoes, two vegetables, desert and coffee. It well made up for all the wait in the tomb.

At 11:30 PM we left the cheery warmth of the manager's house and were led to the bank of the Rhine River. There in front of us in the water with its bow pulled up on the bank was a large steel boat. I was instructed to sit in the rear and steer with a large oar fitted in to an oarlock mounted on the stern that acted as a tiller. Joseph would sit up front and row and the seven others would lie in the bottom of the boat between us.

We all moved to our assigned positions and the manager cast us off into the stream of the Rhine River. We were to cross the river and hug the left bank so that we would be sure to go down the Wahl River and not the continuation of the Rhine.

Our point of embarkation was just above the place were the Rhine River split into the Wahl and the Rhine. The southern branch, the Wahl, would carry us to freedom in the city of Nijmegen. The northern branch, which was a continuation of the Rhine, would carry us to Arnhem ("The Bridge Too Far") which was still held by the Germans. We had to be sure to cross far enough to avoid being carried down the Rhine.

But, there was a problem. — farther up the Rhine, the Germans had blown up several dams to flood the areas there and deter the advance of the Allies. This excess water had advanced to the section of the river that we were in so that we could not find the river bank on the far side. We were being carried over farmer's fields, parts of roads and sometimes the actual river bottom. The current was strong and all we could do was to keep the boat headed down stream and hope for the best.

Two things were in our favor — one, the moon was not shining and two, the Allies started a major offensive that night to push further into Germany. We would not easily be detected. We drifted with the current for several hours and then in the distance we could see a battery of lights directed over the surface of the water. We were shielded from those lights and would have to go around a sharp bend to the left before we would drift into them. We were not sure whether we should go out into the lights, wave our shirts and hope somebody would come out and get us or whether we should pull up on shore and wait until morning to determine just where we were. At that point, we were not sure that we had actually gone down the Wahl. If we had continued down the Rhine then we would still be in German held territory. so we decided to go to shore and wait.

We had been told that if we were able to get near Nijmegen, we should proceed with great caution since there was a good chance that the banks of the river would be mined. When the boat drove up on shore, those in front started to get out of the boat. Joseph grabbed the first one and held him back. By this time, I had moved to the front of the boat and Joseph took out his wallet and gave it to me. He told us to remain were we were until he came back, He then proceeded to move up a path that led to an abandoned stone factory and as he went, he frequently stomped the ground where he thought we would have to walk. He was willing to sacrifice himself to save us. Even now, I get a catch in my throat every time I recall his act of bravery.

When we were all up in the stone factory, we could make out the super-structure of a very large bridge in the distance. Was it the bridge in Arnhem or the bridge in Nijmegen? We had a strong feeling that we had missed the Wahl and had gone down the Rhine — into German held territory. We were greatly dismayed. There was no turning back. We would have to wait until dawn to find out.

As it got lighter, we could see vehicles through the light fog in the distance moving across a dike but we could not identify them or the uniforms of the drivers. Finally, right within one hundred yards of us we saw a motorcycle go by and then stop not far away. We went down to investigate and upon examining the motorcycle we saw that it was made in London, England. We yelled to the rider who was returning and one of the Dutch boys asked him in Dutch as to where we were. *and he answered in English*! We were in Nijmegen which was now held by the Canadians.

We were taken to a field artillery battery not six hundred yards from the stone factory. Canadian Intelligence Officers were called in to give us a preliminary interrogation to prove we were actually American pilots and to question us as to how we were able to get that close to the bridge and the artillery battery. Joseph , the other Dutch boys and the three Belgians were taken to another camp and we did not see them again.

We turned over the maps and related to the interrogating officer our intentions to go out into the lights the previous night. He told us that those lights were shining across the water so that the 20mm and 40mm guns that were mounted on the shore could shoot anything that appeared in the water.

When the Germans retreated over the Wahl, they failed to destroy the bridge in Nijmegen. A heroic Dutchman raced out onto the bridge as the Germans departed and pulled all the fuses to the dynamite charges that had been set up to blow the bridge apart. Since then, the Germans had been sending mines attached to logs and frogmen down the river to still try to destroy the bridge. We were told that if we had gone into the lights, we would have been shot to bits because they felt that the Germans would try anything to accomplish their mission.

We were issued complete Canadian uniforms including toilet articles and then moved into a large hospital where there seemed to be no other patients. As I mentioned, the night we went down the Rhine, there was very heavy shelling by artillery as the Canadians started a push into Germany just East of Nijmegen. When we awoke in the morning, the ward was filled — mostly with Canadians soldiers who had had one or both of their feet blown off by shoe mines. There were also three or four German soldiers with them as well as an English bomber crew that had bailed out in that area.

We were treated very well by the Canadians and two days after our arrival we were driven to Brussels where we stayed for three days. From there, we were flown to Paris for interrogation and a seven day visit. Then I was flown to London. Here I was interrogated by a young West Point Lieutenant who upon seeing me in a Canadian uniform remarked, Thank God you're not another one of those damn flyboys". I said, "Sorry Lieutenant, but I am an American P-51 Pilot' He stood up, pushed his chair back and slowly crawled under his desk. He then said, "Tell me when I can come out". It really was quite funny. He made out an envelope addressed to me in Milwaukee. He said that he had to keep the documents to file with his report but that they would then be forwarded to me. At that point I doubted that I would ever see them again.

While in England, I decided to go to a well known Emblem Shop in an attempt to get an English "Catapillar Insignia" for my uniform. This is an award given by the British to any of their soldiers who have "walked out of enemy territory". While in this shop, I recognized a pilot from my brother Ken's Bomb Group and asked him to tell Ken that I was OK and back safe in London.

Later, I learned that he went back to camp, went to a movie and saw Ken there. After he gave Ken the news, my brother yelled and hollered so much that they turn all the lights on and stopped to movie until everything calmed down.

From London, I went back to Wing Headquarters and lived like a king. I flew the General's brand new P51-D to visit Ken and my own airbase. Occasionally, I was asked to fly the piggy-back P-51 (two seater) to take various officers to different Wing bases. I also was scheduled to visit several airbases and relate what had happened to me in an attempt to aid other pilots should they be shot down.

The Valley of the Shadow

Remembering just how much what Chuck Yeager told me had actually saved my life, I was more than willing to relate to others my experience.

Towards the end of March, I received orders to be returned to the States. We crossed on the Mauritania out of Glasgow and landed in Nova Scotia. Shortly thereafter, I was given a thirty day leave and returned to Milwaukee.

After my leave, I was assigned to an Air Corps Pilots Pool in Selma, Alabama. Here is where I was finally instructed on how to bail out of an airplane and how to pull my chute open — just a little too late. I knew more than the instructor — I had had actual experience.

From here, I was assigned to Instrument Training School in Bryant, Texas. This was just what I needed. We learned how to fly instruments through thick cloud cover which is something I had done on almost every mission over in England. But, it passed the time.

After V-J day, I went to the Commandant's office at the Bryan Air Station and asked to be discharged. Upon looking up my record, the Major in charge said "No go, You signed up for 'the war plus six months' unless, of course, you are an Escapee or an Evadee".

At the time, I was standing at attention in front of his desk. He was irritated that I would ask knowing how I had signed up in the first place. He immediately changed his attitude when I told him I was an Evadee! He suddenly became very understanding, ask me to sit down while he prepared the orders for my release from the Army. So, within two weeks I was a civilian but still in the reserve. When I arrived home, there was the envelope containing my "Deaf and Dumb" identification papers which I now cherish very much.

I flew AT-6's out of O'Hare field in 1946, but gave it up when I discovered that flying once a month was not enough to keep up my proficiency. I have never flown since and I don't miss it.

I have visited my friends in Holland many times and will continue to do so in the years to come. Most have passed away but Miep is still alive and well and we enjoy each other's company just as we did during the War.

In 1985, a Rose Nursery was being constructed in the exact location where my P-51 went into the ground after I had bailed out. During several of my visits to Angeren, I had stood over that exact spot and had taken pictures of it. I received a phone call from Gijs who had come over to Idaho after the war. He told me that he had heard about the excavation that was necessary in order to erect the nursery and that they had recovered parts from my airplane. However, he stated that they would not let anybody have the parts. The Dutch Army was called in to retrieve the plane and the unexploded ammunition.

I pondered on what to do and came upon the idea of writing a letter to the Queen of The Netherlands. I called the Milwaukee Library and was given the address, title and the proper protocol in addressing the Queen. I wrote thanking her for the bravery of her people in risking their lives to save me and told her of my being desirous of obtaining parts from my plane.

Several weeks later, Gijs called me again. His first words were, "Howard, did you write the Queen?"

I said, "Yes. why do you ask?"

He said, "because they are shipping you several parts.The Queen sent one of her Aides, a Major, to the excavation and he ordered the parts to be packed and shipped by air directly to you".

I now have a twisted propeller blade, the propeller hub, two cylinders, a brake pedal, a motor valve and other miscellaneous pieces.

When I last visited Angeren, we stopped to see the Rose Nursery and on the front of the building was large painting of a P-51 with the 357th Fighter Group cowling insignia of red and yellow checkers. The name of the nursery? what else but.....***The Mustang!!***