

YOU CAN RETURN

Written by Andrew Anderson, 322nd Squadron

The flak bursts were heavy as the silvery B-17s of the 91st Heavy Bombardment Group approached Ludwigshaven on the Rhine River that bright morning in September of 1944.

It had been a hard fighting, action filled week. Two days before, on Sunday, the 91st had been one of eight Groups that flew a long, rough eight-hour mission to Kiel. Our number two engine was shot out by flak over the target. The lead ship aborted before the target run began, and the PFF (radar guided bombing equipment) had malfunctioned over the target, so we came back over the Kiel Isthmus blind and dropped our bombs by instinct. After we feathered the number two engine we couldn't keep up with the formation, so we dropped behind and sent our wing men on. P-51s escorted us most of the way home, bless them. If the P-51s hadn't been there the German fighters would have blown our long B-17 to bits. The bombing run just before we lost our engine had been a bastard. The Group had climbed to 27000 feet to bomb. B-17 controls are mushy at that height, and to add a problem, the bomb bay doors jammed. Engineer Malon got them cranked down by hand just before "bombs away," then he cranked them back up. He slipped and lost his flak helmet out of the open bomb bay doors, and cursed it out of sight as he laboriously cranked the heavy doors into the gleaming belly of the B-17. The cockpit heater worked off the number two engine. When number two was shot out, it got COLD in the cockpit. It was 20 degrees at 25000 feet. Long four hour flight home from Kiel. Feet damn near frozen by the time we let down over the English Channel. The ceiling over England was down to 3000 feet. We broke through just in time to see and join the landing pattern over the base. Landed OK. Got home before the high squadron, even on three engines. After de-briefing we ate enough at one meal to make up for the one we'd missed because of the late take-off (12:35 from a 9:15 squadron meeting and briefing).

The mission before that, # 12-B (13) had been through flak-gun loaded "Happy Valley" (Rhine), to hit an oil plant at Essen. Hammer flew low group lead. We flew lead of number four flight in the low group, 200 feet below and just to the right of Hammer. Up at 3:30 for 4:00 a.m. briefing. At plane stations at 5:40, engine start at 6:10, taxi at 6:20, and take-off at 6:40. Assembly at 14500 feet. Two B-17s from another group collided and went down in flaming pieces in front of us at 14000 feet just before assembly. We climbed all the way from the coast to the target to reach bombing altitude of 29000 feet, and lucky we did. The flak was hell all the way in. Did a lot of evasive action that saved us. Chaff helped, too. Flak thick enough to walk on 5,000 feet below us during bomb run. Tom flew the run. Use 2400 rpm and 46" of manifold pressure all the way. Red flame of flak bursts was right with us for the eighteen minutes of the bomb run. White flak was blooming above us. A burst under the wing of a B-17 above and ahead of us threw her into a beautiful slow roll. She recovered. It's a good thing the flak had blown the formation loose. Ships down and engines feathered all around, but only one small hit on us today. Flew M-Mike. Good plane, but she floats. Used short 350-degree runway to land. Nearly ran off. I took a piece of flak out of the cowling before we went in to debriefing.

Mission number twelve had been to Ostheim Airfield at Cologne. We'd flown # 3 on Hammer's low Group lead. He took us in the prop wash of the lead Group on the bomb run, and it broke our Group all up. Flak was heavy and accurate. The prop wash probably saved us. The two wing men of the wing leader lost and feathered engines two and four. Several men killed and wounded in 91st planes. We only had a few small holes. Lucky. Shockley saw bombs hit the airfield and string toward the hangers, our aiming point, but, in his words, he was "Too damn scared" to see more. Several groups hit by Jerry

fighters today, but we saw none. Flew "Choo Choo Lady." Seven hour mission, five on oxygen. Went in and out by way of Brussels. Saw a lot of flak Jerry put up for the Limeys. Dozens of Limeys around as we let down. Rough mission. Makes up for the milk run at Metz the day before. The day before Metz, German fighters got six of our high group going in to Leipzig. One got home. Really depleted the 324th squadron.

The morning of Tuesday, September 5, I woke up to the insistent voice of the "wake-up" sergeant. "Lieutenant, lieutenant, briefing at 4:30." It was dark except for the sergeant's flashlight. I looked at my watch. It was 3:30 a.m.

"I'm not up today, we're stood down."

"Yeah, I know, Lieutenant. That's changed. You've been tapped to ride with a new crew, today."

"What crew?"

"New guy named Kelley."

I groaned and rolled out of my bunk. The scrambled, powdered eggs and cold bacon in the mess hall conspired with the drizzly, chill English weather to instill what seemed to me to be a permanent chill into my California bred bones. Briefing began at 4:30 in the briefing hut. I met pilot Bob Kelley, navigator Alton Karoli, and bombardier George Lancaster at briefing. We were to bomb a truck assembly plant at Ludwigshaven on the Rhine River. Our load was 4500 pounds of incendiary bombs. I took notes on assembly altitudes and radio codes, stuffed an escape kit with maps, passport photos and French and German money in my coverall pocket, strapped on a .45 pistol, struggled into my sheepskin-lined flying suit and boots and climbed into the truck for the ride across the tarmac to our plane for the day, a well-worn B-17 with the name "My Baby" painted beneath the cockpit window. She was waiting patiently to begin her 58th mission over occupied Europe. For me this was mission # 15. It was Kelley's second mission, and the first for the rest of his crew.

By 5:00 we were at the ship. I met the engineer, who monitored the gauges, but whose principal duty in flight was to man the rotating, twin machine-gunned turret above and behind the cockpit. The belly turret gunner, the two waist gunners, and the tail gunner were already aboard. The remaining guns, the nose side guns and the nose gun, were operated by the navigator and the bombardier in their spare moments. Kelley and I pre-flighted the ship. He had had his first taste of combat two days before, riding as co-pilot on the mission to Kiel. Two German buzz-bombs putt-putted over while we were completing pre-flight inspection. They hit in an open pasture just past the base. Too close.

We started engines at 5:00 and sat in the take-off line. We were last plane off, today, Tail-End-Charlie, but as we reached the assembly area, at 8000 feet, we pulled into number two position on Tom Gordon (my own crew) in the fourth element. Some planes went out too far. Assembly was raised three angels (3000 ft.) to allow the wing formation to tighten up before we reached the continent with its umbrella of German fighter craft.

At 20000 feet the flak was heavy. The wing zigzagged across Europe with an occasional B-17 drifting out of formation as it was crippled by flak bursts. Two red-orange blossoms flowered in the Group ahead of us as flak bursts found their fuel tanks. German fighters nibbled at the edges of the Wing formation. We had flown beyond the fuel capacity of our P-51 fighter escorts.

With a thump, a piece of steel from a flak burst beside us chewed into our number three engine. It began jetting oil. We feathered (turned the stopped propeller edge on to the air to diminish the drag) number three. The number four propeller began to run away. We feathered number four and dropped

away from the formation as it turned into its bombing run. With two engines gone, we couldn't keep up with the group and had to get out of the path of planes and bombs now overflying us. The squadron leader, Captain Thompson, radioed "Good luck," and called for fighter support for us on the way home. The American fighters never found us, but almost immediately five or six ME 109 German fighters began making passes at us.

The top turret, ball turret, tail and side guns were all chattering. The ship shook as she was wracked by shells from the German fighters. More German fighters, Focke-Wolfs, joined in the hunt. Word came thru the intercom from the waist gunner, "Doyle's hit, Lieutenant." Then, a moment later, "He's dead." A burst from a fighter lanced into our left wing. Number two engine quit. Kelley and I looked at each other.

"Time to bail out," I said. "We'll be OK, Bob. I'll see you on the ground." He rang the bail out bell. I said over the intercom, "Let's go, guys; all out."

The engineer's voice came over the intercom, "What'll we do about Doyle?"

"Nothing we can do," I said. "Go."

In a moment that seemed an eternity, as the German fighters roared past us and their shells ripped through us, came, "All out back here, and I'm going"-----then silence.

Kelley and I reached behind our seats, pulled out our chest pack parachutes, snapped them on, and in what seemed one continuous motion, rolled out of the bottom hatch, which the engineer had thrown open and exited, and through which the bombardier and navigator had just preceded us.

I had never jumped from an airplane. The quiet was almost deafening. The roaring sound of the plane, with its racing engines, rivet bursting machine guns, acrid smell of cordite and blood, and atmosphere of imminent disaster, was instantly gone, and was replaced with a soft sigh of air as I floated downward. I remembered to count to ten, and the count seemed to stretch interminably as I drifted gently through the sky. Clouds covered the earth below, and stretched as far as I could see. With nothing with which to compare my height and speed of fall, it seemed as if I were gently, gently floating to earth.

I reached ten and pulled the rip-cord. The parachute snapped loose in front of my face and bloomed above me. An awful "whump" almost pulled me apart. I looked up at the white canopy above and watched a row of black holes stitch across it as a German Focke-Wolfe screamed by and made a slewing turn to try again. Just then the clouds engulfed me. Blessed clouds. I would never curse their damp chill again. The German fighter roared past, but he couldn't see me in the thick cloud, and he flew off.

I broke out of the clouds at about 2000 feet, with just time enough before I hit to see that I was coming down in the center of a tiny meadow surrounded by woods, with alternating green fields and woods all around. There were pops like firecrackers in the distance. More black holes blossomed in my parachute.

I hit the ground with my knees bent in a forward roll, and lay still with the half collapsed chute tugging gently at me. It was quiet. I stood up, collapsed the chute, unsnapped it from my chest, and looked around. Out of nowhere, it seemed, a woman came running to me. She stopped in front of me, looked at the collapsed parachute, grabbed it, stuffed it together, dragged it to the edge of the woods a few feet away, hid it under a bush, and came running back.

"Aleman?" she said. I looked at her blankly. She pointed at me. "Anglaise?" she said.

I shook my head, "No, American."

Her face lit up. "American" she said, then said, again, as if the sound were a good, fresh taste, "American." Her face bloomed with a smile, then the smile disappeared as she grabbed my arm, pulled, and said, urgently, "Aleman, Aleman."

I was a country boy, one year out of high school, trained only to fly. When she saw that "Aleman" was meaningless to me she pulled me again and made a motion that even I could see meant urgency. The Air Force had recently commissioned me a pilot, and officer, and a gentleman. I had my doubts about the latter two, but I did want to fly again, so I ran after her as she disappeared into the edge of the woods and began to run along the winding path along and up the hill. I heard the running feet of the German patrol as they entered the other end of the meadow. Jeanne and I ran quietly along the path up the wooded hillside for about half a mile. I was beginning to gasp, but she was still running lightly as a deer when she guided me off the path and up the hill into the thick brush. Five yards into the brush she stopped, kneeled, and pulled aside what seemed to be a part of the hill. It was a willow and leaf trapdoor, so cleverly made that not even a rabbit would have been able to discern the opening into the hillside. We climbed straight down a narrow shaft lined with logs into which were inserted iron rungs, as handholds. Jeanne pulled the trapdoor into place over our heads and waited quietly as the German patrol ran past. Only then did I notice the two men behind us, where the vertical shaft turned horizontal and became a small room in the hillside. The two men were Russian soldiers, Paul and Tim-o-fey, who had been captured at Stalingrad and brought far across Europe to Metz to work as slave labor, there. During a British night bombing, nearly a year before, they escaped from Metz, somehow found their way across country from Metz to Baslieuse, where we now were, and had been hidden by Jeanne, her husband Jacob, and a French farmer, Jean Ney, who constituted what there was of an underground (resistance) in the area. I learned their story later. They spoke no English and little French, and I spoke only English. Jeanne pointed to them and said, "Russky—Paul et Tim-o-fey." She pointed to me and said "American." Paul and Tim-o-fey hugged me, kissed me on the cheek, and heaped up straw to sit on the cold floor, where we began to try to communicate.

Jeanne listened to be sure the German patrol was out of sight and hearing, then she lifted the trapdoor and was gone swiftly and quickly as a woodland fawn to seek other survivors from our plane. During the day she and her husband, Jacob, brought in Anton Karoli, George Lancaster, and Bob Kelley. Bob's mother had met and married Bob's American soldier father in France after World War I, so Bob had been raised in a bilingual household in America, and spoke fluent French.

The four of us were all Jeanne and Jacob could find. Four others had been able to exit the plane, but they had been captured by the Germans and spent the rest of the war in a prison camp.

In the evening the French farmer, Jean Ney, brought us a chocolate cake. We didn't realize what a sacrifice this was. Almost all of the men from the village had been taken by the Germans to Germany, to be used as slave labor—the German armed forces had drained Germany of German working men.

The small passageway in the cave where the Russians, Paul and Tim-o-fey, and now we Americans lived, opened into a larger room. The cave had been dug during World War I and Frenchmen had hidden there from German conscription in 1916. The men from the village had hidden there again in 1939 when the Germans invaded, but over the years most of them had been captured and sent to Germany. Jean Ney was left to work his farm and produce food, and the Germans never caught Jacob. Now, in 1944, the Germans retreating from the fighting at the invasion front confiscated all of the food as they passed through. Where Jean found the material for the chocolate cake we could only guess.

The rushes on the floor were vermin infested. It was cold. Jacob brought us civilian clothes for later escape use. He brought what food he could find, usually raw potatoes. Once he brought his five-year-old son, and so impressed upon him the need for secrecy that the boy would not tell his sister in the morning where he had been the night before. Jacob brought us water, and dumped in raw beet sugar. They had no wine, and they could not conceive of drinking water alone. We crept into the village at night and shared some bread, mostly sawdust—the wood pieces were large enough to interfere with chewing. Paul and Tim-o-fey slipped out to ambush Germans, coming back grim, but satisfied. On one of our trips into town we lay beside a low hedge while a German patrol passed on the other side. We hid in the Rolland's root cellar, under a trapdoor under a rag carpet in the largest room of their tiny house when the Germans inspected.

After several days we decided the risks to our French friends were too great, and we were suffering seriously from lack of food. We decided to strike out across France on foot. The escape map in my leg pocket showed that we were about ten miles from the German border, near the cities of Metz and Nancy. Two smaller towns nearby were Longwy and Longyon. We lay awake for one last itching, scratching night, said "goodbye" to Paul and Tim-o-fey, and started for the village. Halfway there we were met with the news that "The Americans have come." Running to the village, we saw a beautiful sight—four Americans in a jeep, with rifles. With yells of joy we hugged the soldiers, then hugged our village friends, especially Jacob and Jeanne, and climbed in the jeep to go join the American forces which, we presumed, were just down the road.

The jeep took off like a scalded bronco, coming to a stop almost immediately in the next village, where the people, seeing the jeep and the American uniforms, lined the street holding out glasses and trays of calvados and liquors. The soldiers partook enthusiastically, we cautiously, and me, with my Mormon abstemious background, not at all, so that very shortly I was the only sober one in the jeep. I was the more sobered by the information from the four soldiers that they had no idea where the American forces were, that several days before they had tired of their weeks long assignment of unloading supplies at the invasion port at Cherbourg, had picked up their rifles, climbed in a jeep, and headed for where they thought the "front" was to do what they had come to Europe for, fight the Germans, before it was all over—with them still unloading ammunition at the beachhead. They had driven through the "front" and never seen it. They were looking for Germans to fight and found us.

Dusk was drawing on. The soldiers wandered away with the village girls. I shared some food with a village family, then crawled into a haymow for the night, wishing I were back with Paul and Tim-o-fey, who were sober, and knew where the Germans were.

In the morning we persuaded our soldier friends with the jeep that the better part of valor was to advance to the rear, locate some Allied help, then return to the fighting. They did drive us for another day toward where we presumed the "front" was, but they then repented of their retreat, said "goodbye" to us and roared back to find some action. We all knew we had been involved in a miracle, driving two days through country crawling with retreating German units without meeting any. We gave our soldier friends our names and unit number. We knew they would be court-martialed for desertion when they returned to their unit, and we wanted to do what we could for them, but we never heard from them. Most probably they encountered angry retreating German soldiers within minutes of leaving us, and were quickly killed.

We moved on as best we could, and eventually walked into and advanced American body collection station. There we climbed on a truck with a load of American bodies and rode west. We left the truck near Paris and walked into that Queen city. The Queen was jumping. The main German force had

pulled out, but the Allies had not entered in force, and the FFE (resistance fighters) were systematically eliminating the remaining Germans.

We found a room in a little hotel, paid for it with the "escape" money in our kits, and watched the action in Paris. Kelley's facility with French was invaluable. I sat with him in a street café one evening as he was pairing up the senior Allied officers (senior to me was major and up) who had found a way to Paris, with the welcoming Parisian mademoiselles. It was wonderful how much happiness a little translation could achieve. I still have that enormous key to room 604 of the Mondotel at 22 Ave. Opera, in lovely Paris.

That was more than forty years ago. When we returned to London and went through an intelligence "debriefing," I asked that our friends in Baslieuse, the Rollands and the Neys, be given some help and recognition. General Eisenhower sent them a letter of thanks. Some time later, when I inquired further, I was sent this report:

A-3 Confidential:

"Intelligence reports indicate that the Russians, Paul and Tim-o-fey, were exposed to the government by the collaborator, Father Paul. The Russians were transported to the Berlin sector and returned to the Russian army. Father Paul could not be located. The Rollands have been located and they will be aided if aid is necessary."

After the war I wrote to the Rollands. They were very poor. No further "aid" was ever given. Jean Ney owned a farm. Jacob Rolland scratched out a living as a road laborer. They raised a family. We sent packages.

After the mission to Ludwigshaven, when our plane disappeared with a swarm of German fighters attacking it, and we were not heard from, the War Department sent a "Missing in action—presumed dead" telegram to my parents. The telegram was delivered to my father. Man of magnificent faith. Later, when I said "Why didn't you show the telegram to Mother?" he said, "It was in God's hands, not mine." Mother later said she knew why the tears rolled down his cheeks when my phone call from England that I was "O.K."

When my parents retired from a lifetime of teaching, they traveled to Europe and visited the Rollands. Last fall my son, traveling in Europe for his computer manufacturing company, searched for and found the Rollands in their tiny house at the end of the house row in Baslieuse. When he came home he was thoughtful.

"Dad, none of the people they saved has ever been back to visit them. You're the one they'd really like to see."

My conscience lurched. I am the principal of a junior high school in Northridge, a suburb of Los Angeles. My wife has taught, occasionally, but she has spent most of her life as our homemaker. We have put three children through college, then through professional school. The last one, a nurse, graduated in January, studied for her California license, and went to work last month. There has been little time or money for travel.

"Perhaps in five years, when I retire, Kevin."

"Dad, it's been more than forty years. Jacob is seventy-six. Jeanne is in her sixties."

At Christmas Kevin handed me a small packet, but there was a twinkle in his eye.

"I'm sorry it's so small, Dad, but it's been a tough year."

I said, "It's the thought that's important, son."

I opened the package. Inside were two airline tickets to Luxembourg, the nearest airport to Baslieuse. It was the first time my family had seen me totally unable to speak. Kevin said, "If you'll go in April, I'll go with you."

We planned to go at school vacation time in April. I wrote the French Consul General in Los Angeles, Monsieur Jean-Claude Moreau, to ask help in creating an award ceremony for the two families who had risked so much for us. He wrote back with Gallic enthusiasm and warmth. He made arrangements, so that when we should reach Europe, in mid-April, we would contact the "director du Cabinet" in Meuthe et Moselle, the province which Nancy, Longwy, and the tiny village of Baslieuse.

I wrote the Rollands that we were coming. In early April Kevin, Virginia and I flew to the Europe I had last seen more than forty years before. We stopped to see the shimmering mass of bloom that is Keukenhof, the national tulip gardens of Holland, we glided on a steamer up the Rhine, through the watchful, medieval castled valley of the Ruhr above which I had flirted with death so many times, and drove from Luxembourg to Balieuse, which I had left so hastily, so many years before.

Baslieuse is so tiny that in spite of the fact that Kevin had been there a year before, we drove right through the village before we knew it was there. After a consultation with a passing driver, who spoke no English as we spoke no French, we drove back to the village center where a group of people were waiting outside a small building.

I climbed out of the car and straight in the arms of Jeanne. Her lovely elfin face had a few more lines than it had four decades before, and she had added a few more pounds, but it was the same merry smile and loving person who had shared with us the food her children needed, and who had held me down behind the bushes while the German patrol ran by, machine pistols at the ready, more than forty years before.

Jacob had not grayed a hair nor aged a line in all those years. I got the same kiss on both cheeks from the same rough, wise face that had grinned at me when he climbed through the trapdoor and brought in the other fliers so long ago.

The village mayor, Marcel Humbert, with his badge of office, a splendid red, white, and blue tricolor sash wrapped around his waist, ushered us into the city hall, where all of the inhabitants of the village were gathered. I spotted the farmer, Jean Ney, and his wife, and was able to give them a hug before the champagne glasses on the table were lifted and the speeches began. The senator from the province of Meuthe et Moselle, Hubert Martin, was an orator with a lion-like mane of snow-white hair, and a deep, reverberating voice. He orated. Antoine Porcu, the local deputy (congressman) spoke. M. Maigret, from l'office de' partmental des anciens combattants (the office of verterans' affairs) spoke. The local military commander and the local police commander spoke, the Abbe Djemange, the village priest, blessed us, and all of this was translated into my ear by an ex French Air Force pilot, Bernard Wesoloski, now the curator of a local museum, who had come by to see what all the excitement was about in Baslieuse. The interpreter promised by the "director du cabinet" never appeared, so Bernard, who spoke excellent English, became our interpreter for the day. He was kept busy as the speeches, toasts and awards rolled on. I had brought an illuminated scroll from the city of Los Angeles, signed by our mayor, Tom Bradley (an old friend), and an award scroll from our Los Angeles Board of Education, and some personal gifts for the Rollands and the Neys, but our friends, with the warmth and affection so characteristic of the French, overwhelmed us with gifts. The municipality presented us with a magnificent, renaissance style crafted plate, I was presented with two personal medals, Jean Ney had found our crashed aircraft, extracted a piece of metal from a cylinder wall, embedded it in a handsome

wooden plaque, and had carved the Cross of Lorraine on one side, the stars of the United States on the other, and a message of affectionate commemoration across the bottom:

Que ce fragment de bombardier dans lequel se trouvait Monsieur Anderson lorsqu'il fut atteint en Septembre, 1944, relie nos deux nations et nos deux peuples comme il relie sur cet icusson.

Les Etoiles des Etats Unis d'Amerique et notre croix du Lorraine

Que Dieu nous garde de la Guerre.

(May this fragment of a bomber, in which Mr. Anderson was when he was hit in September, 1944, tie together our two nations and our two peoples, as it ties, on this board, the stars of the USA, and the Cross of Lorraine. May God keep us from war.)

After the ceremonies the whole group trooped down the street to the village inn for lunch/dinner. It was a remarkable repast. Later, in trying to recall the meal, we could remember ten separate courses, with appropriate wines. There may have been more. We ate and talked away the afternoon, with Bernard doing a running, two-way interpretation. During the course of the meal, the deputy, Monsieur Porcu, moved around the room exchanging pleasantries with each person. A villager down the table leaned over to me, motioned to M. Porcu, and, with Bernard's help, said, "You have politicians in America, too?"

We had begun toasts, speeches, and awards at 11:30. We went in to lunch/dinner at 1:00. At 5:00, when we had finished eating and talking, we all set out to visit the cave where we had hidden. As we walked across the green fields and down the wooded paths where we had moved so stealthily years before, the memories flooded back. We stopped at the cave where we had lived. It was broken open, but still there. Then we moved on down the path to the meadow where Jeanne had met me and hidden my parachute. She told me, now, that she had gone back there after we left, salvaged the parachute, and used it to make underclothes for their children. That parachute had served me well, but it had been Bob Kelley's. When Bob and I had boarded the plane, through the front hatch and up into the cockpit, each of us had shoved the parachute chest pack we carried behind our seat. In the heat of battle, when it became apparent that our ship was about to blow up, each of us had reached across the aisle with one hand, (we couldn't take the other off the controls of the ship) had pulled out a parachute from behind the other's seat, and snapped it onto the chest rings of the parachute harness we wore. After rolling out of the hatch, Bob's parachute opened fine for me. Mine didn't open for him. The red ring pulled out in his hand. Nothing happened. He looked at the ring, then threw it away and tore at the canvas covering of the parachute with his fingers. He did the impossible. He tore through the heavy canvas with his fingers, grabbed the silk with his hands and pulled it out of the pack. It caught the air, the rest of the chute pulled out, and it opened.

The meadow was tinier than I had remembered. We stood in the middle of it where I had landed and I remembered Jeanne's "Aleman, Aleman?" and her tugging at me to run as the Germans rounded the edge of the meadow after us, and we disappeared up the hillside path on our way to the cave.

I remembered Bob's bloody fingers as Jacob brought him into the cave. We talked of what happened in the field, in the cave, and in the village. Then we walked back across the green fields to the village. As many villagers as possible crowded into the Rolland's tiny home. Jacob pulled aside the rag rug, opened the trapdoor, disappeared into the tiny root cellar that I remembered so well, and came up with a bottle of clear, homemade cherry liquor. One sip set off a fire in my throat and an explosion in my head. We moved to Jean Ney's home. More toasts. He slipped a bottle of homemade cherry liquor into my pocket. I brought it home with me. Liquid dynamite. The level has gone down an inch in a year.

At the lunch/dinner an old farmer said to me, through Bernard:

"We hoped to see you again. DeGaulle did not want us to be such good friends with Americans, but we know what you did for us. We would like always to be friends."

Dear brave, generous, kind, warm French friends. I look at the picture we took in the meadow of our son standing between the two Rolland sons. My son is there because the Rollands and the Neys risked their lives and their children's lives for us so many times. We love them. We returned.

- - - - -

THE ABOVE STORY IS THE PROPERTY OF THE AUTHOR AND MAY NOT BE REPRODUCED WITHOUT THE AUTHOR'S CONSENT

www.91stbombgroup.com