

E&E 374 - Thomas F. Mezynski  
(See E&E 333 and 334)

SECRET - AMERICAN  
MOST SECRET - BRITISH

HEADQUARTERS  
EUROPEAN THEATER OF OPERATIONS  
P/W and X Detachment  
Military Intelligence Service

E & E REPORT NO. 374  
EVASION IN France

2-7-44  
(Date)

Thomas F MEZYNSKI, S/Sgt, 33267030  
(Name) (Rank) (ASN)

350th 100 Bomb  
(Squadron) (Group)

TARGET: Frankfurt

MIA: 4 October 1943  
Arrived in UK:  
2-6-44

MEMBERS OF CREW: (This information checked with PWIB)

		Official Disposition	Narrators Disposition
PILOT	<i>See 333 &amp; 334</i> Helstrom, Harold B. CAPT 0-72985Y	MIA	
CO-PILOT	Trent, Hubert E. F/O T-60807	MIA	
NAVIGATOR	<sup>curtice</sup> Guttice, Harold H. 1ST LT - 0-73127Y	P/W	
BOMBARDIER	Phillippe, Hilbert W. 1st LT - 0-729559	MIA	
RADIO OPERATOR	Giles, Robert C. T/SGT 16044018	<del>MIA</del> RTD - E4E #334	
TOP TURRET GUNNER	Shander, Joseph (NMI) S/SGT 13082478	MIA	RTD - E4E #373
BALL TURRET GUNNER	Haarup, Carroll F. T/SGT 37193193	MIA	RTD - E4E #339
WAIST GUNNER	Edwards, William D. S/SGT 19083107	? MIA	
WAIST GUNNER	Mezynski, Thomas F. S/SGT 33267030	Ret. Duty	narrator
TAIL GUNNER	Crippen, Charles, E. S/SGT 1902139A	MIA	

Were you wounded? *no*

*Q G*  
*same as*  
*333*  
*6334*

(1)

WITH heavy flak being poured up at us we made three runs on the target. Two fighters were seen and called out but they did *not* attack our element. As far as we know there ~~was~~ no damage to the aircraft when we left FRANKFURT to return to Base. ~~We were~~ <sup>back in</sup> ~~had gotten over~~ FRANCE when the Navigator said that we were off course to the extent that his maps did not cover the ~~area over~~ <sup>area</sup> ~~which we were flying.~~ Our fuel tanks were reading zero ~~and~~ <sup>so</sup> we had to let down. Other ships were leaving formation as we dropped ~~ix~~ through clouds to find that we were over water. There was land ~~is~~ ahead of us. The navigator asked for a QDM but every station tried was busy. The pilot said ~~then that~~ it didn't matter because ~~we~~ we were going to crashland. We ~~thought~~ we were coming down in England until tracers from machine gun fire were seen off the wing.

PREPARE TO  
CRASHLAND

SOUTH OF  
CAEN

After the crew had taken crashland <sup>positions</sup> in the radio room, the pilot made a beautiful belly landing. Previous to this all extra weight had been thrown out of the ship, but the secret equipment had not been destroyed. Within a few seconds Frenchmen appeared from all directions. The order was given immediately for all equipment to be destroyed. During the next fifteen minutes each man was busy with his own job. The Bombardier could speak some French and it was he who learned that we were a few kilometers south of CAEN. There were no Germans in the immediate vicinity but they would be there before long, the French said. When we offered our heavy flying equipment to the Frenchmen they wouldn't take it. The Bombardier opened several chutes and dropped them over the engine nacelles, but the plane would not catch fire. The French were motioning us all this time to leave quickly and <sup>let</sup> ~~leave~~ them to destroy the plane.

DRAW STRAW  
FOR TRAVELING  
COMPANIONS

The pilot told us to split up anyway we wanted. We got everything we needed out the plane, changed into GI and low cut shoes, drew straws to ~~xxx~~ decide ~~xxxxxxxxxxxx~~ with whom we would travel, then held a last minute conference to orient ourselves before choosing the best direction for travel. A young <sup>French</sup> boy had brought overall maps of France to the plane with him, and, after studying these, the navigator said ~~xxxxxxxx~~ that we should go southeast. The pilot and navigator walked south across the field and then changed their direction so that they were walking north. The copilot and bombardier followed a minute later in a general southeast direction. } Sgts Crippen, Shandor and Edwards were behind them, but at the other end of the field, when we started southeast with Sgt Mesinski. ~~The countryside~~ <sup>In the</sup> ~~was~~ wooded and hilly <sup>countryside</sup> ~~so that in~~ our small groups we quickly lost sight of each other.

LEAVE AIRCRAFT  
IN GROUPS OF TWOS  
AND THREES

We were dressed in light summer flying jackets, flying coveralls and green fatigues. For warmth we had kept on our blue heated suits beneath the coveralls.

In leaving the field we stopped to <sup>ask</sup> ~~xxxxxx~~ a Frenchman for civilian clothing. He hesitated and appeared to be thinking it over. We noticed that he glanced at his companions before he told us to get on our way. Had we not spoken to him in front of other Frenchmen it is possible that he would have helped us. The Frenchmen with him and all others in the field were still yelling at us to run.

? REUSED CLOTHING  
BECAUSE OF  
ASKING IN A  
CROWD

We crossed some fences and ran through several fields with the other three sergeants not yet out of sight. To give them a chance so that we would not all be clustered together, we crawled into some bushes and got out our maps. While discussing the situation the bombardier and copilot stumbled

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MEET CREW  
MEMBERS  
AGAIN

upon us. There was another hasty ~~giddy~~ farewell and goodluck spoken with them before they went on southeast. We stayed in the bushes a little longer making our plans. We decided to stay together as long as possible, walk southeast, and look for help along the way. If necessary we would <sup>walk</sup> to Spain because <sup>We had heard at Camp that</sup> it had been done. Leaving the bushes, we filled our ~~water~~bottles, checked our compasses and started walking.

The character of the countryside made it easy to ~~keep~~ under cover. For several hours we followed hedges, lines of trees and walked through dense undergrowth until arriving on the outskirts of a small village. Wanting food and clothes we decided to lie low in the vicinity of this village until we found someone to help us. We had found a small cart road leading into this quiet village and were watching it when a woman came out of the village walking toward a small isolated farmhouse. We went up to her and said that we were Americans. She was startled, but not frightened or unfriendly, and motioned us to follow her home, after she understood that we were hungry. She had civilian clothing for only one of us - Giles, because he was about the size of her <sup>young</sup> ~~small~~ son. After she had given us food we thanked her, offered her money which she wouldn't take, and left. She said there were no Germans in that immediate vicinity.

~~PLANE~~  
APPROXIMATELY  
GIVEN ~~HER~~  
FOOD!

From her house we went into the fields, ate the food she had given us, and walked along looking for a place to sleep. We found some stacks of fodder to make our ~~beds~~ beds in for the night. Giles had not put on his civilian clothes and ~~decided against it~~, because we felt that it made us look more conspicuous than we were in our flying coveralls. We discussed going on that night, but ~~xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx~~ decided against it because of darkness and the possibility of running into night patrols and curfew. During this night we heard the sound of exploding ~~ammunition~~ and decided that our plane had been set afire by the French.

THAN DAYTIME  
TRAVEL

REFUSED AID  
AT THREE  
HOUSES

We were up at daybreak, and for breakfast had some bread left over from the night before. During the morning we walked through the fields, avoiding farmers and keeping well within cover. We tried to have a line of trees or hedges on one side of all the time. At least one of us was never without a compass in his hand to prevent getting too far off course. There were few houses in this section and during the morning we approached several of them. Our luck had run out on us; we were met with suspicion and fear, <sup>each time,</sup> and after the third attempt, we did not to ask for any more help that day. Twice we gathered apples from orchards. There were very few people in the fields and we did not stumble upon anyone accidentally. Many times we changed our course to avoid a small village or a small group of houses. After thirteen hours of walking, during which time we may have covered about ~~ten~~ <sup>ten</sup> miles. At 1600 hours we ~~did~~ looked around for a place to sleep because we didn't want to be caught without ~~some kind of shelter~~ some kind of shelter after dark. In the dusk, as we were becoming resigned to sleeping in the open fields we came upon a small hut, far from any house, and made beds in it with hay which we gathered from a field. For the first time we opened our Aids Boxes and had malted milk tablets for suppers.

OPEN AID  
BOXES ON  
SECOND DAY

THIRD DAY

On this third day we started out at dawn and saw no one until 1030 hours. We went up to a lone farmer working in his front yard and told him that we were American airmen. He hesitated after we had asked for food but we hastened to reassure him that we had not been followed. He asked us in the house and introduced us to his wife who ~~made~~ gave us a bowl of hot soup. We got out our maps and tried to get some idea of how far we had travelled but the maps were not detailed enough for that. He pointed to about the same spot/<sup>as</sup> the Frenchmen at the plane <sup>HAD</sup> when we had asked/<sup>them</sup> where we were. Before leaving, our waterbottles were filled with cider, and we were given eggs to take with us. We offered money and the farmer tried to give us change, but we refused to take it.

BUY FOOD  
FROM FARMER

We decided we wouldn't go to anymore houses that day because we had enough food to keep us going until the next morning. While crossing a field we met

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BUILD FIRE  
TO ROAST  
POTATOES, EGGS  
AND TO DRY  
CLOTHES

two farmers. We let them pass, without speaking to them, though they stared at us and we were sure <sup>we</sup> were recognised. After they were out of sight we increased our pace and changed our direction for a ~~time~~ few hours. While crossing a potato field we ~~put~~ <sup>put</sup> a few ~~potatoes~~ in our pocket and later found a small clearing enclosed by a tall hedge in which we felt it safe to build a fire. The fire was built next to a fence so that we could dry our socks and shoes by hanging them on ~~the~~ wire. While the eggs and potatoes roasted we lay in the sun resting.

We walked all of this night on a cement road. For a time we were following a river and stopped long enough to fill our waterbottles. Soon after this we got into a large town. There seemed to be no one on the streets so we made no effort to stay in the outskirts. About halfway through the town we passed a house that was showing a light. We wanted a place to ~~stay~~ and we wanted a bed so we went to the door and knocked. A man answered our knock and invited us in. We explained that we were Americans in need of help. The Frenchman just stared at us and while we were motioning and talking he started crying. We got nervous ~~xxx~~ then and tried to ~~back~~ <sup>back</sup> out but he took us by the arm and led us into another room. He pulled us on across the room to look at a woman lying in a coffin. We stared for a few minutes and tried to mutter some apologies but at no time did the man ever speak to us. We got away from the man as quickly as we could, and just as quickly away from the town. Before 0300 hours we had met no one on the road ~~through~~ <sup>except</sup> once we crawled behind a culvert while two cyclists passed. Before daybreak we went off into a pasture and tried to get some sleep but the grass was wet and we were too miserable.

FOURTH  
DAY

After daylight we left the road and went back into the fields. During the morning we passed through the outskirts of a small village and attracted stares from a few women. Just after leaving the village we saw two women washing buckets in their yard. They jabbered to each other after we said we were Americans and one of them brought out some bread and pork. They had no clothing to give us, so we went on after thanking them and ~~trying~~ to pay for the food. In the afternoon



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The man took us into his home and seemed very anxious to help. We were nervous for only a few minutes because there were more people around than we had wanted to see just then, but the man's enthusiasm soon put us at ease.

Given Food  
AND Clothing

After we had been fed he led us to a grove of trees and indicated that we were to wait for ~~him~~ <sup>his</sup> return. ~~When he did~~ <sup>at the end of</sup> He brought <sup>at the end of</sup> clothing which we picked through until all of us had on something that fit fairly well. We insisted that he take a hundred francs for it though he kept refusing.

We had been discussing the possibilities of riding trains ever since being shot down but none of us could ~~remember~~ remember anything S-2 had said about it except that we might find it possible to ride freight trains. We didn't see how ~~to~~ we could do this because it meant going into a town and getting into a freight yards. We asked the Frenchman if we could do this and he explained that the railroads were guarded and particularly the freight yards. We got out our maps and with the Frenchman's help planned a train route that would take us south. We wanted to go to ALENCON, walk to CHARTRES, get another train at a small station near there to the Line of Demarcation and then walk across the the Line. The man agreed that this plan was all right but cautioned us about crossing the Line without papers. We tried to persuade our helper to come into the nearest village and buy tickets for us but he was afraid to do that. In the end he showed us which town to go to and explained that there were no Germans in this village.

PLAN TRAIN  
ROUTE WITH  
FRENCH HELP

We followed a path through the fields as the Frenchman had directed us, and when in sight of the village crawled into some bushes to make last-minute plans. Sgt Haarp <sup>went alone into the station to buy the tickets.</sup> ~~was to buy the tickets and he went off to the station alone.~~ He

BUY TRAIN  
TICKETS WITH  
HELP OF  
TICKET AGENTS

knew he would have to expose himself to the stationmaster and when he got to the window there was no one around but the ticket seller. <sup>He</sup> ~~The~~ Sgt produced his money and, by pointing on the maps, asked for three tickets to VERNAY. He asked the ticket seller if there were any Germans in VERNAY and was told no. The ticket <sup>agent</sup> ~~seller~~ filled out one family ticket for three and said that the next train left at 1205 hours. It was then around noon and we were advised to 'promenade' until

1400 hours. We waited in the bushes until train time and at 1355 hours went to the station. As we ~~walked~~<sup>went</sup> onto the platform a woman walked passed and handed us a package ~~box~~ of sandwiches, ~~to~~. Before other people arrived to ~~catch~~<sup>catch</sup> the train another man stopped in front of us and pointed first to his eye and then to his cap. We understood that we were to watch his cap and get off the train when he did. No words were spoken ~~to~~<sup>by</sup> either the woman or man. 54

FRENCH WOMAN  
FURNISHES  
FOOD FOR  
TRAIN RIDE

We boarded the train, ~~third~~<sup>third</sup>-class, behind the man with the cap. There were no seats in our compartment so we huddled together near the door. We were dirty and had not shaved for a week but it was too late to do anything about that. We had not realized how conspicuous we would be in standing together but there was no room in the compartment for us to separate without attracting more attention. The man we had followed on the train told the woman ~~was~~<sup>was</sup> sitting next to ~~us~~<sup>him</sup> who we were, and in a few minutes every Frenchman on the car was staring at us and whispering about us to his companion. The only person who did not seem to know was a German soldier at the other end of the car.

FEEL CONSPICUOUS  
ON TRAIN  
BECAUSE DIRTY  
AND UNSHAVEN

We were not spoken to <sup>however</sup> and when the train arrived in ARGENTAN, our supposed guide got off the train. So did all most everyone ~~else~~ on the train. Not knowing what to ~~do~~<sup>else</sup> do we just stood where we were, by the door. During the next two hours ~~of waiting~~<sup>of waiting</sup> a few people got on and off so that we were never completely alone. Once a German troop train pulled into the station on the track next to us and we and the Germans just stared at each other. Except for that incident no attention was paid us. At the end of two hours the train began to fill again and we started to VERNAY. <sup>para</sup> Soon after pulling out of ARGENTAN Sgt Haarup began to get sick. Several times he thought he was going to vomit and we couldn't find the lavatory. For fifteen minutes we watched him turn white and green. It was getting ~~so~~ too dark to read the names of stations and we didn't know how much further we had to ride to VERNAY so finally Sgt Haarup said he couldn't hold himself any longer and would have to get off at the next station. In the next few minutes we arrived at L'AIGLE and left the train.

FORCED TO LEAVE  
TRAIN BECAUSE  
OF HAARUP'S  
ILLNESS

We had to wait for the train to pull out before we could cross the tracks to get to the exit gate. We went out with the crowd; Sgt Haarup held out the one

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ticket and we ~~xxx~~ pushed through together. There was a German guard on the gate but he was not checking papers or paying any attention to the people going through the gate. He looked like an RTO sergeant to us. Walking through the station we found ourselves in the middle of town and waited some time <sup>here</sup> arguing about the best way to get quickly into the country. Finally we just walked until we struck a country road.

WALK INTO COUNTRY  
LOOKING FOR  
HELP

We tramped about five kilometers before seeing a house that was isolated enough to approach safely. A woman let us in after we ~~knocked~~ ~~and~~ ~~said~~ that we were Americans. She was not seared and seemed glad to give us some cider but she had no food. When we asked if we could sleep in a shed we had seen in the front yard she refused. We left her and slept in the shed anyway. We were not bothered <sup>during the night but</sup> made a point of leaving before daylight.

~~The~~ <sup>next</sup> day ~~the~~ (sixth) we walked into a small village and found the railway station in the center of the town. The stationmaster was friendly but told us that the railway line through this village had been abandoned. He gave us a map and marked a route <sup>with</sup> following gravel roads, to CHARTRES. He gave us some sandwiches before we left. During mid-afternoon we stopped at a poor-looking farmhouse and went up to the man working in the yard to ask for more food. He took us inside the house and this time it occurred to us to ask if we could ~~shave~~. He loaned us the equipment for our first shave and gave us warm water to bathe in. Sgt Haarup was too sick to eat and <sup>for this reason</sup> we hoped ~~that~~ <sup>our helper</sup> would let us sleep there ~~for~~

CHASED OUT  
OF SHED TO  
MAKE ROOM FOR  
COW

~~that reason~~ but he <sup>shook his head</sup> ~~said~~ when we asked. Just before dark we found a shed in the fields and had just crawled into it when a farmer came up to the shed with a cow. He was not particularly unfriendly but said that we would not stay there because that was where the cow had to sleep.

JOURNEY  
ARRANGED

We walked another two kilometers and reached a small village. Sgt Haarup was very ill by now and beginning to have chills. We decided to look for a ~~small~~ Catholic church and walked up one side of the street, then down the other side. On our return walk we saw a light shining in a window and knocked on the door. We were taken into this house and from there our journey was arranged. We ~~xx~~ learned later that had we gone to the house next door or to the church we would

John F. White, Jr. - *W.S. Holt*  
have run into pro-German sympathizers.

APPENDIX B:

- a. In the railway station at ARGENTAN evaders saw several ~~mobile~~ anti-aircraft guns on flat-cars. There were two men to each gun, one gun to each flat-car and the flat-cars were all on sidings.
- b. Fifteen cars of German troops, ~~officers and enlisted men~~ on a train ~~marked~~ LE MANS, stopped in the railway station at ARGENTAN on 7 October 1943. The troops carried rifles and full field-packs and were thought by evaders to be infantry troops.
- c. Two German police control officers on a train between VERNEUIL and PARIS wore a half-moon disc around their neck on a chain. They wore steel helmets, gray-green uniform, black leather boots and waist-type jackets with a large buckle. They carried pistols.
- d. A large brick building, about 200 yards south of the railroad tracks and station in ARGENTAN, had a heavy military guard *placed around it.* 7 October 1943.
- e. Ten miles north of VERNEUIL and one-half mile east of a main road there is a stationary battery of ten anti-aircraft guns. It was just being installed and also had a battery of searchlights. (hearsay) *mid-october*
- f. There were many German troops stationed in VERNEUIL. *(not heavy)*
- g. French source stated that there were forty divisions in FRANCE and the tank divisions were being moved toward the coast. The men were being quartered in small villages; 800 to a 1000 in each small town. Many troops were also being billeted in reconstructed barns. They were held in readiness for quick movement and none of them had been moved directly *to* onto the coast but were being held inland.
- h. German troops were being moved out of PARIS, according to a French source. This information was based on the fact that there were many ~~less~~ *fewer* troops in PARIS in November than in September.
- i. In November evaders were told that LE BOURGET had been bombed out of action and had been ~~in~~ inoperational for three or four months.
- j. The Renault factory is being rebuilt. The walls have been built up and in late November a new covering was being built but the inside is still a mass of wreckage. One electric power plant ~~is operating~~ in the factory area is operating. Observation - end of November.
- k. There was much activity around a large crowded German barracks located off the east end of bridge ~~de~~ Marie d'Issy between the Seine and Avenue de Verdun. Dec.
- l. At LE MANS on 23 December there were heavy German patrols guarding the railway station because of large troop movements travelling west that night.
- m. Evaders heard that there was a heavy chain across the river mouth at Douarnenez. Dec.
- n. Evaders heard that there was a searchlight battery and some light artillery positions on the sea point of Ile TRISTAN
- o. ~~These light artillery positions are used to prevent the~~ *prevent the*