

Escape report Captain John L Ryan (S/N: O-430620)

On March 6, 1943, Captain John L Ryan bailed out over the Brest peninsula and with the help of the underground was picked up by airplane in a field outside Paris and flew back to the UK.

"We left Thurleigh at 0945 hrs on 6 March 1943 to bomb LORIENT. The flak was intense as we approached the target at 2300 feet. One burst knocked out our No 3 engine and cut out my engine controls. I could not feather the No 3 prop and the engine set up a terrific vibration. We had been hit just before unloading our bombs on the target.

We made a left turn off the target and flew about 30 miles out to sea in formation. The No 3 engine vibrated about 6 inches, shook off the cowling and then the prop flew off. It hit the side of the fuselage, knocking out the windshield. The Co-pilot's face was badly cut. We started dropping behind. Capt Draper, leading the lower element, slid up under me and passed me. I realized it was impossible to get back to England. The engines were running wide open. We could not keep up and were doing 2100 RPM's and about 41 inches. My gas was insufficient to get back at that power setting. We made a right turn out of formation and headed in for the Quimper peninsula. The plane started to let down immediately. Our speed picked up and I lowered the wheels to allow us down. After giving the warning signal I told the crew not to jump until we had crossed the coast and to wait until I told

them.

We crossed the coast at 4000 ft over Guilvinec.

I waited until we were at least two miles inland before giving the order to abandon ship. Before the order we were attacked twice by F.Ws. One was from the rear which I did not see and the other came in at 11.00 O'Clock. The second one was shot down by Sgt Blakemore, top turret gunner. The fighter went into the sea. The French saw this and told me about it.

We started baling out at 3500 feet while travelling at 220mph. The top turret gunner went out first and I was out last. I put the ship on the automatic pilot and it held fairly steady. Before jumping I went into the nose which was empty, back past the cockpit where I twisted the knob on the automatic pilot to down position. The air speed had risen to 240 mph. I found no one in the radio compartment and could see that the main entrance was off. I went back to the bomb bay and jumped. Before leaving the cockpit I had destroyed the I.F.F. and I believe the bomb sight was thrown in the ocean. My jump was at 1430 hrs.

When the chute opened, my left arm got tangled in the main straps and was jerked up my back over my head. Because of the low altitude jump I was down quickly. I landed on my shoulder and passed out (1). The landing was made in a pasture about 10 feet from a road and a mile from St Jean Trolimon. There were

about 40 Frenchmen surrounding me when I regained consciousness. A woman helped me out of my chute. I asked about the Germans and was told they were in the town. Immediately I was shown the best direction in which to run. The French buried my chute.

I was in a small valley and started running west. When I came to a stream, I walked in the water for an hour before resting. I took a Benzedrine tablet and filled my water bottle and continued to walk until 1750 hrs. For a hiding place, I found some brush in the corner of a field and covered myself with it. I remained hidden here until 2100 hrs. After eating some of the chocolate and malted milk tablets and drinking most of my water, I walked for about 300 yards to a farm and asked for food. I approached a man and a boy in a barn and told them who I was. They gave me milk, bread and butter and told me the Germans had captured seven of my crew and that one was dead (2). I did not ask for help here because it seemed to near to the area of search. With the aid of my compass, I walked S.W. until 2430 hrs but when this brought me in sight of the Ocean, I changed my direction to North. Finally I found a haystack. My arm was hurting too badly to climb up on it so I slept at the bottom. When I woke up, I felt feverish.

At 0700 hrs I went across the road to a farmhouse. There was a Frenchman and 13 year old boy in the house. After talking to

them, they gave me coffee, bread and soup. They also gave me cake and bread to take away. After sitting by their fire for an hour, I started walking north keeping close to hedgerows. At 1200 hrs, having found a field of heavy brush, I made a bed and lay in the sun to get warm. I ate more bread and chocolate before falling asleep. About 1300 hrs a Frenchman awakened me. I was still wearing my uniform (pinks, leather flying jacket). He asked me about myself and when I said "An American parachutist", he was very friendly. He took his knife and cut off my insignia.

Then he told me to stay where I was, hidden, until he went after food. In an hour he was back again with a friend and some food (wine, a bowl of stew, 5 raw eggs and bread and butter). They stayed with me for about 30 minutes but before leaving said that they would come back for me that evening and hide me in their stable. They were back again at 2100 hrs. We went to their stable and they said they thought they might find help for me. At 0030hrs, they awakened me to say that friends were with them.

The friends were two men who brought civilian clothes and wooden shoes. I gave my passport pictures to one of the men who was trying to getting an identity card for me. After they left I slept until 0530 hrs when the farmer came in and told me to hide in the field that day. At 2100 hrs, the friend who was trying to get the identity card returned. He was discouraged because his effort had failed. My photos were given back to me and after we had

eaten I was told that since suspicion had been aroused it would be best for me to go further for help.

At 2400 hrs I started walking NE. I walked until 1200hrs before stopping for a long rest. My water bottle had been lost in some of the thorny underbrush. While I was sitting in the corner of a field smoking, two Frenchmen brought their cows into the field and upon seeing me ran away. I was walking off hurriedly when two women came after me bringing a man with them. They asked for my identity and then took me into their house for food. All of the neighbors came in to see me. The doctor who was called could not come because he had no gas. I stayed all that afternoon and slept in the stable that night.

One friend who came said he thought he knew someone who could help me. At 1300 hrs, a farm hand walked with me to a wood about 3 miles away where we met the friend. He took me another 2 miles deep in the forest where I waited while he went off to talk to the supposed helper. In a half-hour the both joined me and after talking for a few minutes, the rest of the journey was arranged for me.

The man who was the second friend that came to see me in woods had been representative of IBM in Paris. He spoke good English. He returned with two young men (Noel Arhan and Emile who was son of the mayor (at Plomeur)). We talked. The two young men said that Arhan would come for me that night in a car at

9.00 pm. Ahran came in a car and we went to Loctudy. At Loctudy, we stayed in a hotel owned by Ahran's mother. I met Blakemore in hotel. Stayed there from Wednesday to 23rd (two weeks). During this time, a doctor from Pont L'abbé came to see me 3 times but could do little. Arranged to have us sent to Pont Aveu. When the chief Mr Alexandre Thieubaud returned, he sent car to Loctudy and brought us to Pont Aveu where we stayed at home of Mme Clémence Barbarin. We stayed until April 5 when I left with chief for a farmhouse at 4 miles from Pont Aveu. Went there to leave for Paris. On Tuesday 6th, we left farm house at 6.00 pm. I walked 2 miles over fields to main road where car was waiting. We drove to Rosporden where we took train for Paris. Seats already arranged and bought in 1st class in same sleeper.

At Nantes, we were held for 2 hours by an alert. We arrived in Paris at 9.00hrs on Wednesday at station Montparnasse. We went across street in café for coffee. Then the chief took me to the house of Mme Montel. Stayed till 3.00 pm when a young lady took me to the apartment of Mme Jacqueline Richet. She works for the Red Cross, in charge of civilian P/W in Germany. Next day, Thursday another agent came to see me and we went for a walk. He speaks English and showed me buildings of interest. During this time, I was dressed with civilian clothes. I stayed there for one week and then we left by train from Saint-Lazare station (hot spot). No check of papers. We got off the train at Pont de l'Arche

and then took train to Lyons-la-forêt. From there, we went on bicycle to Fleury la Forêt. The next night we went 10 miles east to a field and we took off to UK at 1.00pm"

(1) It was discovered upon his return that Captain Ryan's arm had been broken near the shoulder

(2) 1st Lieutenant [Gerald L. Simmons](#) was shot dead by a German sergeant while trying to escape