Behind Enemy Lines: WWII Escape and Evasion Reports

On September 6, 1943, 22-year-old Oscar Klass Hamblin (T/SGT.) and crew were flying over northern France when they were raked by fire from a German Fw 190, necessitating an evacuation from their plane.


According to Hamblin’s report, “I made a free fall for about 10000 feet and then opened my
chute. I saw three lakes with woods and a field nearby. I tried to drift to the field, but a south wind blew me to the middle of the lake and I went 10 to 12 feet under water. When I began swimming, I became entangled in the shrouds of my chute. Just when I had released myself from the chute, a Frenchman and woman came out in a boat, helped me into it, and pulled the chute in after me. When we reached the shore, they hid my chute, and flying boots under the boat. They took me to their house, there they dressed my wounds, fed me, and gave me some civilian clothes."

On September 3, 1943, 25-year-old Sebron Andrew McQueen, Jr. (2nd Lt) and crew were flying east of Paris when their aircraft was attacked, and the pilot gave the order to evacuate.

McQueen, Sebron Andrew Jr. (2 L.t) Escape and Evasion Reports, 1942 - 1945. National Archives Identifier 5554889.

McQueen details what happened next in his report:

"I landed in an oat field and wrapped my flying equipment in the chute before covering it with oats. About twenty Frenchmen were watching me quietly, waiting to see what I would do... I could tell they weren't sure of me so I concentrated on a boy who knew a few words of English. Finally when I showed him my dog tags he motioned me to follow him... My friend and I were joined by two Frenchmen who ran with us about two miles. We stopped near a house and while I waited in some bushes the Frenchmen were gone into the house for
several minutes before calling me. Inside the house I was treated politely, fed and questioned in great detail. Then I was told by an English-speaking man to go back in the bushes and stay until dark.”

On September 6, 1943, 23-year old Allan Johnston (2nd Lt.) and crew were flying over France when their aircraft received heavy damage from a fighter attack.

According to Johnston’s report: "The order to bale [sic] out was given by the pilot and acknowledged by all crew members. Because the bombardier's arm was injured, I helped him with his chute and watched him leave. Then I crawled forward and set fire to the maps. The pilot and co-pilot were still in their seats. I saw the radio operator go out through the bomb-bay before I jumped at 7500 feet, from the nose.

I think the best way to leave the nose is on the knees, tumbling head-first. Before I fell I unhooked my chute from the chest hooks and hugged it to my chest so that before pulling the rip-cord I could hold the chute over my head and not risk face injury when the straps went up. Leaving the aircraft I seemed to fall first at terrific speed and then more slowly… Touching the ground I hit the release on my chute and it fell away with the silk draped over the limbs of a tree. My flying pants fell off and I remember grabbing them in my hands before running.... I ran in the opposite direction from the soldiers I could still see in the field, I heard..."
the sound of motorcycles. I had a glimpse through an opening in the trees of three chutes coming down in the fields. I stuck to the ridge for several minutes, running hard, before crawling into some blackberry bushes.”

Citizen Archivist Transcription Mission

Hamblin, McQueen, and Johnston’s reports, along with nearly 3,000 others, are part of a series containing information on escape and evasion activities and training of U.S. soldiers serving in the European theater during World War II, and are available to view and download in the National Archives Catalog. You can help make these records more searchable in our Catalog! Escape and Evasion Reports are the focus of a new transcription mission for our citizen archivists.

Within these records, you will find dramatic and gripping first hand accounts of survival from U.S. soldiers in Europe during World War II. (Including the Escape and Evasion case file for Flight Officer Charles (Chuck) Yeager.) The records typically include questionnaires about the use of escape and evasion (E&E) training and equipment; a listing of crew members; dates; locations, as well as a typed or handwritten narrative documenting the escape and evasion experience of the escapee or evader. These reports were maintained by the Administration Branch of the Escape and Evasion Section of the Office of the Assistant Chief of Staff (G-2) of the European Theater of Operations, U.S. Army, of the War Department.

We hope you will explore these records and help transcribe them to make them more searchable and discoverable. Transcribing these records will bring history to life and ensure the stories of the soldiers will not be forgotten.

Get started transcribing!

New to the Citizen Archivist program? Learn how to register and get started.

Memorial Day

Memorial Day, initially referred to as Decoration Day, began as a way to honor those who died in the Civil War and has become a day to honor all American veterans who gave their lives in sacrifice to our nation. Learn more about its history on our website and in the Pieces of History blog. This Memorial Day, we remember and honor those who have died in service to the United States during peace and war.
Initial Burial Plats for World War I Soldiers, National Archives Identifier 12007376. This series consists of blueprint and plane table survey maps and field maps detailing the location of American soldier battlefield grave sites during World War I. Soldiers are identified by name, serial number and unit, if known.


Start your research on History Hub

Have a question? Find your answer on History Hub!

For those looking to conduct research or learn more about Military History and Military Records, we encourage you to browse recent posts and questions on History Hub, including the Military Records Community and subspaces.
History Hub is our support community for researchers, genealogists, history enthusiasts, and citizen archivists. Ask questions, share information, work together, and find help based on experience and interests. Researchers can ask—or answer—questions on History Hub, or search to see if a question has been asked before.

Citizen Archivists, there's a group just for you! You can share tips and strategies, find new challenges, and get support for your work. Get started with our poll: What kinds of records do you like to transcribe?

COVID-19 Update

The National Archives is committed to the health and safety of our visitors and staff. We are closely monitoring the situation regarding COVID-19, and we are working with public health officials and our counterpart agencies to monitor and respond to the evolving conditions and following CDC guidelines.

For more information, visit https://www.archives.gov/coronavirus

Questions or comments? Email us at catalog@nara.gov.