

## Good Times During Bad Times

Being the flight engineer and tail gunner on a B-26 bomber during WWII was a stressful job. In the periods allotted between missions for aircraft maintenance and repair we were left to our own devices. I have a number of pleasant memories of such periods



We were stationed at an airbase about seventy five miles north of Paris near the small town of Roye. On a number of occasions I walked to the railroad station in Roye to board a train to Paris. American soldiers were allowed free rides on the trains and also the Metro subway in Paris.

I would occasionally board the Metro, get off at a random stop, and explore the surrounding neighborhood. Walking down the Champs-Elysees, the equivalent to Times Square in New York, was a thrill. I visited other major tourist attractions such as the Louvre Museum and the Eiffel Tower.

Those were pleasant experiences because I didn't have to rush to do all them in a short time period.

I well remember one night after one of these trips that it was so dark when I got off the train that I couldn't find my way back to the air base. Black-outs were in force, and the only thing I could see was a narrow sliver of light from a farm house window. I walked up and timidly knocked on the door. When a man answered, I asked, in my very best French, "Où est la base?". After much pointing and hand waving, he got me headed in the right direction.

On another occasion I had heard that a friend from basic training was stationed at Amiens about fifteen miles north of Roye. I had borrowed a bicycle to pedal up and try to locate him. On looking back this was an ill advised venture from the beginning. After about ten miles I had a flat tire and aborted the mission.

As I was pushing the bike back toward home, a French man, who was also walking, caught up with me. We didn't communicate well verbally but with the few words we mutually understood plus a lot of gesturing we got along OK. He was highly animated in describing to me some of their experiences with the Germans both by bombing and later during occupation.

After a half mile or so he turned off into a driveway and beckoned for me to follow him. He became my friend for life when he repaired the puncture and pumped up the flat tire!

Those were some of the good times.