

From: Air Marshal Sir Basil E. Embry, K.B.E., C.B., D.S.O., D.F.C.,
A.F.C.

AIR MINISTRY,
AIRSTRAL HOUSE,
KINGSWAY, W.C.2.

9th October, 1946.

R.A.F. ESCAPING SOCIETY

Report on activities to 31st August, 1946.

Dear *Pittwood,*

In my letter sent to you earlier this year inviting you to become a member of the Escaping Society, I stated that it was hoped to publish a monthly bulletin of our activities. Unfortunately this has not proved possible, but I am taking this opportunity of giving you some idea of what has been going on since the beginning of the year.

I had hoped by now that it would have been possible to have included all evaders and escapers from every theatre of war, but to date we have only been able to deal with those who got away in Western Europe (France, Belgium and Holland). Expansion of membership has proved more difficult than was at first foreseen, due to certain administrative problems which it has not so far been possible to overcome, coupled with a continued shortage of staff. I do not anticipate, therefore, that it will be possible to widen the scope of membership for the time being. Nevertheless, within present limits, the result has been most gratifying and encouraging, and the analysis set out below shows the number of members and subscription totals received to date:-

550 Members in the U.K., and serving overseas, subscribing 3300. 12s. 8d.	
72 " " Canada	2129. 0s. 0d.
26 " " Australia	244. 19s. 10d.
13 " " New Zealand	219. 19s. 3d.
2 Donations from next-of-kin	210. 0s. 0d.
<u>663</u>	<u>Total 31,089. 12s. 2d.</u>

The objects of the Escaping Society were set out by our President in his introductory letter to you in November, 1945, but their development was not possible until the measure of your support could be assessed. This development was to be within the social aspect of the relations existing between helper and evader, because official recognition was being made through M.I.9.

I therefore decided that, as soon as practicable, the Escaping Society should make plans for effecting re-unions, both here and on the continent.

We were informed that the granting of donations to individual helpers, which it was intended should form part of our policy, was deterred by Exchange Control Regulations. It was therefore decided, after obtaining the necessary permission, that donations should be made, after investigation of "bona fides", to deserving charities. By so doing, it was felt that such action would, in effect, be an expression of the gratitude felt by escapers and evaders as a whole for all that had been done on their behalf.

By early summer the number of members who had joined warranted a start being made with our plans.

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A.12571.

From the beginning it was realized that, due to the quantity of correspondence received covering all manner of topics, considerable research would be necessary in order to answer the innumerable queries raised by members. It seemed to me, therefore, that special attention should be given to this work, and liaison with other official departments developed so that these many queries could be answered. Thus has developed what I call the "Information Bureau" side of the Escaping Society's activities.

Until the Escaping Society's future has been settled on a permanent basis, it will continue to enjoy the use of Air Ministry accommodation (with use of heat, light, telephone, and clerical facilities without charge) and a serving officer to act as Secretary. In the circumstances, however, it has not been considered desirable to proceed with certain matters, such as the striking of a badge, although it is realized that many members desire that one should be produced.

For the first few months responsibility for conducting the Escaping Society's affairs lay in the hands of the three Executive Officers appointed: myself Chairman, Air Commodore E.S. Burns (Director of Personal Services) Honorary Treasurer, and Flight Lieutenant E. Dale, Secretary. Our affairs developed to such an extent, however, that it became desirable to set up a small Committee. An election by ballot at a convened meeting was quite out of the question, for obvious reasons, and so I decided to send out a limited number of invitations to serve to members situated in or near London, who might be available. Four members were eventually chosen: Air Commodore Whitney Straight, C.B.E., M.C., D.F.C., ex-Flying Officer D.G. Southwell, and ex-Warrant Officer G. McGregor and P.W. Robertson. The full Committee held its first meeting in July, and it was decided to meet at least once a month.

From November, 1945, until May, 1946, a team of four W.A.A.F. clerks had been attached to the Awards Bureau in Paris, Brussels, and The Hague, in rotation, copying from their files the names of all helpers who had submitted claims for recognition. These names, together with those submitted by you on your pro-formae, have become the basis of a card index system for helpers which is being prepared at the present time. Many more helpers have registered with the Awards Bureau since May, and I hope that when staff is available, it will be possible for a further survey to be undertaken, and the additional names of helpers obtained to be added to our card index.

Official Recognition to helpers

From the correspondence received, it is apparent that many members do not quite understand this matter of official recognition, which has been made, and continues to be made, by H.M. Government. H.M. 9/19 is responsible for the co-ordination of this work. Thousands of people have rendered assistance to our Escapers and Evaders, and in every case which has come to light, official recognition has been given. Many names of helpers were available from the Interrogation Reports of Escapers and Evaders, but in some cases, names of helpers had been withheld for obvious reasons, and in others, Escapers and Evaders could not remember them. The Awards Bureau and Allied Screening Commissions of H.M. 9/19 therefore repeatedly publicised their work in the countries concerned by means of press and radio announcements, requesting all people with claims to forward them for investigation. These claims, together with the evidence already available from the Interrogation Reports, have enabled the investigators on the spot, who are drawn from the three Services and include a proportion of Escapers and Evaders, to assess the value of the help given and recommend appropriate recognition where deserved, which has ranged from high awards to Certificates of Thanks. Claims for monetary compensation have also been investigated and payments made where justified. The table below will, I hope, give you some idea of the scope of the recognition that has already been made in Europe. This covers almost every country formerly occupied by the Axis.

/STATISTICS

STATISTICS - REWARDS/AWARDS TO HELPERS

12 George Medals
3 O.B.E.'s
2 D.S.O.'s
17 O.B.E.'s
6 M.C.'s
2 M.M.'s
100 M.B.E.'s
45 B.E.M.'s
570 King's Medal for Courage
867 Commendations
68 King's Medal for Service
5 Mention-in-Despatches

In addition, many thousands of official Certificates of Thanks signed by Lord Tedder and Lord Alexander have been presented.

Up till 31st July, 1946, a total number of 112,570 cases of compensation have been settled in Europe, and large sums have been paid out. There were then approximately 20,000 cases outstanding, principally in Italy, where 18,000 cases have still to be settled.

Activities

The Escaping Society's aim to foster friendships and maintain good relations have fallen roughly into four categories:-

- (a) Re-unions and entertainment of helpers privately in U.K.
- (b) Visits of members to their helpers on the Continent.
- (c) Donations to charities.
- (d) General services.

(a) Many members have requested the Society's help in enabling arrangements to be completed for helpers to spend holidays in this country. The chief difficulty at the start was the inability of helpers to obtain visas for their visits. In February last a scheme was submitted by us to the Home Secretary and eventually approved. He agreed to authorise the issue of visas, provided the visits were sponsored by the Escaping Society, and an undertaking given in each case that whilst in this country the helper would be privately entertained.

Payment of helpers' travelling expenses from our funds was one of the principles originally laid down. Exchange Control Regulations prevented us obtaining the necessary foreign exchange for this purpose, but we were able to arrange for the purchase of tickets to cover sections of the journey which could be paid for in sterling.

Some members have particularly desired to pay all expenses incurred, and have not, therefore, taken advantage of this facility, but to date 20 individuals have visited this country, at a cost to the Escaping Society of £113. 7s. 7d. As Dominion members cannot participate in this form of re-union, it has been decided that the cost shall be borne entirely from the funds subscribed by members in the U.K.

(b) 47 members who were still serving or on release leave have been given facilities through the Service to visit their helpers on the continent. From the letters which members have sent to us on their return, the value of these re-unions cannot be over-emphasised in playing their part to foster friendships.

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(c) Donations have been made to two charities:-

- (i) "Colonie Seclaire de L'Oise" (35,000 fcs.) £79. 3s. 9d.

This is one of many similar Institutions operating in the various "Départements" in France. Holiday Camps are maintained by the sea, and weak and delicate French children are thereby enabled to enjoy holidays in suitable surroundings. The Secretary of this particular "Colonie", and many of his co-workers, were responsible for helping a number of aircrew to evade.

- (ii) "British Forces Tribute to French Families." £105. 0s. 0d.

This is an appeal which has been sponsored by Mrs. Little for funds to purchase a villa at Antibes, which it is proposed should be equipped as a Convalescent Home for children, especially those of French civilians who helped to shelter men and women of the British Services. It is an appeal which is very worthy of our support.

Financial Statement

The funds of the Escaping Society have deliberately been conserved, and only used for those purposes which would further the aims of the Society. A brief statement on income and expenditure is set out below:-

Income (from subscriptions and donations)	£1,089. 12s. 2d.
Expenditure (donations and helpers expenses)	307. 11s. 6d.
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Balance at Bank	£ 782. 0s. 8d.

Correspondence

The value of correspondence in maintaining good relations, cannot be over-emphasised. Most evaders are writing regularly to their helpers, but to those of you who may have lost touch or who may not, until recently, have been aware of your helpers identities and whereabouts, I would suggest you make every endeavour to re-establish contact. A letter to the local Mayor of any community which helped you does an immense amount of good.

Creation of sub-Branches

The desirability of de-centralising the present organisation to stimulate and maintain interest, by the creation of sub-branches in the U.K., on the Continent, and in the Dominions, has not been overlooked. Such a step would, however, require a larger organisation and resources than are at present available. I hope we will be able to go ahead with this proposal in due course as the idea is sound.

Yours Sincerely
B.S.S. Day

Chairman, R.A.F.E.S.