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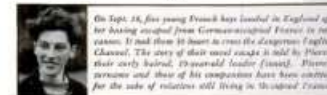
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LIFE'S REPORTS

WE ESCAPED FROM FRANCE BY CANOE

by PIERRE



On Sept. 18, five young French boys landed in England after having escaped from German-occupied France in two canoes. It took them 10 hours to cross the dangerous English Channel. The story of their novel escape is told by Pierre, their early friend, 19-year-old leader (far left). Pierre's parents and those of his companions have been confined for the sake of relatives still living in occupied France.

After the armistice, when General de Gaulle urged our people to fight on, we all had the same idea but we didn't quite see how we were going to get to England. Jean and I wondered if we could get across in our canoe. We expected our parents to make a fuss, but they thought the idea so crazy they didn't bother.

Last May our plans began to take shape. I took on the organization of the trip while Christian collected maps, charts, navigation instruments and data. Jean and I had one canoe. Reynolde got hold of another one for only 300 francs because it had a huge hole in it. As the Germans had instructions to be pleasant to the local people, Reynolde became friendly with a Nazi motorboat crew who gladly helped him repair the canoe. It took us six weeks to make the canoes seaworthy and then Reynolde and I tested them up and down the coast, while Guy and the others walked along the cliffs, timing us and making noisy jokes so that the Germans would get used to seeing us playing together. We guessed we could make the crossing in 15 hours.

The next thing was to collect food and water and wait for calm seas. We had 50 lb. of bread, 75 soldier's ration biscuits, stolen from the Nazi store, a homemade French flag, a service rifle and 40 rounds of ammunition "borrowed" from a surrendered arms dump in Nazi headquarters. The day we decided to leave we buried our stores in the sand near my canoe. That night at 9—an hour after curfew—we sneaked out of our bedroom windows. Each of us left the same message pinned to his pillow: "Cher Pierre—I have gone to join General de Gaulle."

All of us dropped suddenly flat behind some sand dunes where we heard sounds—the Nazi patrol of eight men. We had an hour before they would come tramping back. According to plan, we rolled the two canoes to the water's edge, quietly stowed everything away and pushed off from France. Reynolde was alone in his single-master. The rest of us were in my big Canadian canoe.

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Churchill headed them when they arrived in London. From left to right: Pierre, 19; Jean, 18; Reynolde, 17; Guy, 16; Christian, 17. Only lower part of Guy's face is visible.