



# The night Hemingway dropped in

John (“Jack”) Hemingway, like his father, is remembered as a gung-ho character and bigger than life. He was Ernest’s eldest child and though born in Canada he spent his early years in France, often in the company of his famous father’s friends: Pablo Picasso, F. Scott Fitzgerald, and Gertrude Stein.

After his parents divorced, he stayed with his mother in Paris until he was 11 where he attended the Ecole Alsacienne.

Jack, also like his father, seems to have been an embellisher of his adventures and didn’t necessarily let the facts get in the way of a good yarn. Needless to say, the written accounts of his adventures contain more than a few inconsistencies – which your reporter has done his best to reconcile!

What is beyond dispute is that the younger Hemingway parachuted in, one clear moonless night in mid-August 1944, and landed near Le Bousquet. His team’s principal mission was to look for an invasion route, and secondly, to assist the local Maquis.

In December 1941 Jack was 18 and living with his mother in America when the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbour. His initial impulse was to immediately join the marines – after all his father had volunteered as an ambulance driver on the Italian front lines in WWI at the same age – but his parents managed to persuade him that there was plenty of time left in the war, and that he should complete his college education and then enlist as an officer.

He continued his studies (French military) for only a year however, before dropping out and signing up. In February 1943 he became a second lieutenant in the military police and in early 1944 his platoon arrived in Algeria.

There he was invited (family connections) to a dinner party where, amongst the other guests, was Winston Churchill's son Randolph. Randolph entranced Jack with tales of his work with British special operations that included roaming the deserts of North Africa and parachuting into occupied Yugoslavia. Jack was smitten and determined to seek a similar role within the American armed forces.

On how he achieved this there is some doubt, some say through family connections.

“Jack decided life in an intelligence unit that operated behind enemy lines was for him. His father began to pull whatever strings he could find and his eldest son was soon assigned to the unit.”

Jack though preferred the version where “he stumbled upon it by following his nose”. In this telling he visited another camp because it had a French chef and, accordingly, better food. There he jokingly asked what he had to do to get into the unit and was told that if he could speak French, and was willing to accept hazardous assignments, all he had to do was volunteer!

By whatever route he got there, Jack was now in the 2677th OSS Regiment, the home of the American Special Services.

Jack's induction was to include parachute training, but this didn't happen. His version was that he concluded “why risk an injury in training?”, though by another account they simply ran out of time when an urgent replacement was required. So he became part of the American Jim Russell's team, along with two French radio operators, Julien and Henri (no family names it seems).

But Jack also had his own plans. Doing his best to maintain the mythology of the Hemingways, he also intended to do a bit of fishing while he was at it. Accordingly it is claimed

“he jumped into France with a fly-fishing rod in his right hand, along with gold Louis d’or coins sewn into his clothing, a compass and map case filled with trout flies, and an impressive assortment of weapons—a pistol, knife, and Thompson submachine gun.”

And

“when the British officer in charge of the jump told Jack that the fly rod would not be permitted, Jack winked and whispered that the rod was a radio antenna disguised as a fishing pole. The officer returned the wink and the ‘antenna rod’ accompanied Jack on the jump.”

The group were flown in a B-17 bomber and jumped into the darkness through an open hole in the floor. Floating toward the ground, Jack says he had never felt “a greater sense of jubilation”. The experience was so exhilarating he claims he shouted “God damn”, earning an instant reprimand from Jim Russell, the group’s leader.

They landed either on Les Piochs above Dio, or on the valley floor outside Caunas – records are contradictory – and either safely in one piece, or with injuries and broken radios, once again according to which version of the history you prefer. Either way it is agreed that Jack and his team were picked up by René Ribot, the manager of Café du Nord (then called Grand Café du Bousquet-d'Orb).

They were taken to Gours – or Ladournié – once again accounts differ, but both locations are in the Nize valley above Lunas, are very close to each other, are suitable isolated, and are known as hideouts of the Maquis, so we will accept either in this history.

In one telling of the jump

“both Frenchmen, were seriously hurt and knocked out of the action immediately, for the duration of the war. Jack was banged

up a bit but was happy to see that his fly rod had made it unscathed.”

However, the following photo, annotated by Jack as being of “our OSS team at Le Bousquet” says he’s in the centre, a downed US flier is seated to his left, Jim Russell to his right, and two French “Joes” behind them – both of whom it is noted look remarkably uninjured. (Unfortunately, photographic evidence of the survival of the oft mentioned fishing rod is not provided.)



What happened next is also unclear. With the loss of the radios their primary task of scouting, and reporting on possible invasion routes, was no longer possible. Their sole remaining mission was to assist local resistance fighters. Either:

- the two Americans were taken the next day by René Ribot to Clapiers (north of Montpellier) to join the Maquis there, or alternatively
- Jack spent some time in the Le Bousquet area fighting with the Maquis and fishing the local rivers in his spare time (“rich with

aquatic life and healthy, well-fed trout”) – whilst nonchalantly evading German patrols as he did so.

In all likelihood he was only in our valley for less than 24 hours, and his fishing exploits were a compilation of events (real or imagined) that occurred over the next two months.

In any event there is no record in Jack having participated in the attack by 20 local Maquis – 9 of whom were killed – on a German convey at Le Bousquet on 17 August.



*Memorial to 9 local men killed 17 August 1944. On D35 south of Le Bouquet d'Orb.*

The broad chronology of the remaining 9 months of his war is as follows (his bravado, and the writer's sarcasm included):

- End of August or first days of September

“Hemingway and Russell were probably the first uniformed Allied soldiers to enter the small city of Montpellier from the southwest after the Germans had left. On the morning in late August when tanks from the French II Corps rolled in, its soldiers standing in the turrets and waving to the crowds as if they had gotten there first, Hemingway and Russell were sitting in a café on the town square, nursing hangovers and watching the spectacle.”  
(Officially Montpellier was liberated 2 September)

- Early September

The pair had reported to the Strategic Services Section of the Seventh Army in the area and they became part of a larger cohort responsible for a variety of ad hoc OSS missions.

As the Germans continued their retreat to the Northeast, Jack and his compatriots followed.

- 28 October 1944

Near Hérival (100km SW of Strasbourg) Jack stumbles upon a German patrol.

- “Three rounds to his right arm and shoulder brought him down before he could bring his submachine gun to bear.”
- “Refused to allow the German doctors to amputate his wounded arm”.
- He was sent to a camp for officers near Hammelburg in the heart of western Germany.

- 27 March 1945

A 300-man task force of tanks and infantry from the 4th Armored Division—punched through German lines and travelled across some 40 miles of enemy territory to reach the POW camp.

“Jack and his fellow prisoners now had three choices: stay put and wait for liberation, hitch a ride with the task force, or strike out on their own for U.S. lines. Like Frederic Henry in *A Farewell to Arms*, the young Hemingway and another officer opted for the last.”

Or alternatively

The rescuers anticipated only 300 soldiers were being held in these camps — instead, the number averaged close to 3,000. Hemingway hitched a ride on one of these tanks [but] was knocked off.

Instead of staying with his rescuers, Hemingway decided to leave the tanks and travel on foot with another soldier.

"The next morning all 57 armoured vehicles of the American tank division were surprised and destroyed by six German Tiger tanks."

Hemingway evaded German patrols for two days, surviving off raw rabbit and the gardens of abandoned homes before being arrested by . . . a patrol of nervous German teenagers.

For the next ten days he and other prisoners were arduously death marched to a POW camp in Bavaria.

After a P-51 Mustang mistakenly strafed their position, they were forced to spell "US POW" on the ground.

During this march, Jack successfully employed a hand fishing technique that he had learned from a man in Le Bousquet.

"He was able to use patience and stealth to snag a 7-inch trout, which he cooked up to help offset his hunger."

(Clearly Hemingway was a quick learner, given he was likely only in Le Bousquet for 24 hours!)

- 29 April 1945

Liberated, his once fit and healthy 210 pound body was reduced to a gaunt 140 pounds.

"After checking in with the OSS, and then cleaning up, he was taken to the officer's mess hall for a decent meal. There, seated at one of the nearby tables, looking as glamorous as ever, was Papa's friend, Marlene Dietrich". (Of course. She would be, wouldn't she?)

From Regensburg, Jack was flown to Paris just in time to celebrate with the VE Day mobs that filled the Champs Elysees on May 8th, 1945. A fitting culmination for a soldier. (Being a Hemingway I'm sure, had nothing to do with the invite.)

Jack earned both the American Bronze Star and the French Croix de Guerre for his exploits.

He spent his last years as an ardent conservationist and died in 2000 aged 77.

An exemplary life for his time – that if you disregard his daughters' allegations of sexual abuse (see the mini history on this site, Margaux était là).



<http://www.amisdelunas.fr/histoire-contemporaine/faits-divers/hemingway-lunas.htm><https://www.historynet.com/jack-hemingways-war/>

<https://coffeordie.com/jack-hemingway/>

<http://www.thehemingwayproject.com/2018/08/17/luck-pluck-and-serendipity-bumbys-wartime-experience-with-hadley-audio/>

<https://stevenewmanwriter.medium.com/ernest-hemingways-son-jack-285b3e3d69bb>

To learn more about the local Maquis base at Ladournié see [Eugène BARASCUT \( 1888 – 1965\)](#)