



# **The Freedom Line: The Brave Men and Women Who Rescued Allied Airmen from the Nazis During World War II**

*Peter Eisner*

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The romance of Casablanca ... the gripping narrative of Eye of the Needle ... both come together in this enthralling true story of World War II resistance fighters and the airmen they saved.

As war raged against Hitler's Germany, an increasing number of Allied fliers were shot down on missions against Nazi targets in occupied Europe. Many fliers parachuted safely behind enemy lines only to find themselves stranded and hunted down by the Gestapo.

*The Freedom Line* traces the thrilling and true story of Robert Grimes, a twenty-year-old American B-17 pilot whose plane was shot down over Belgium on October 20, 1943. Wounded, disoriented and scared, he was rescued by operatives of the Comet Line, a group of tenacious young women and men from Belgium, France and Spain who joined forces to recover Allied aircrews and take them to safety. Brought back to health with their help, Grimes was pursued by bloodhounds, the Luftwaffe security police and the Gestapo. And on Christmas Eve 1943, he and a group of fellow Americans faced unexpected danger and tragedy on the border between France and Spain.

The road to safety was a treacherous journey by train, by bicycle and on foot that stretched hundreds of miles across occupied France to the Pyrenees Mountains at the Spanish border. Armed with guile and spirit, the selfless civilian fighters of the Comet Line had risked their lives to create this underground railroad, and by this time in the war, they had saved hundreds of Americans, British, Australians and other Allied airmen.

Led by an elegant young Belgian woman, Dédée de Jongh, the group included Jean-François Nothomb, an army veteran who became the group's leader after Dédée was captured; Micheline Dumont, code-named Lily, who wore bobby sox to appear as a teenage girl; and Florentino, the tough Basque guide who, when necessary, carried exhausted refugees on his back over the mountains to save them from the Nazis. All the while, the Gestapo and Luftwaffe police were on their trail. If caught, the airmen faced imprisonment, but their helpers would be tortured and killed.

Based on interviews with the survivors and in-depth archival research, *The Freedom Line* is the story of a group of friends who chose to act on their own out of a deep respect for liberty and human dignity. Theirs was a courage that presumed to take on a fearfully powerful foe with few defenses.

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