

Patrol Chase

By Arthur Taylor

The robin landed on a tree branch, frantically flapping its wings for a moment, then propelled itself forward, aided by a brief gust of wind. It coolly moved its wings in an upwards motion, allowing itself to drop gently. The impact of the bird's mass on the tree branch released a torrent of raindrops from the rain hours ago, cascading upon the sleeping boy underneath.

Daniel Frazier had broad shoulders, black skin, scattered facial hair, and the beginnings of a moustache with short black hair. The tall lad grunted, then casually opened his eyes. It was 1940 and the fall of France had begun, although he did not know it yet.

He beamed at the sight of the chirping robin, then shakily stood up, moaning. Frazier hefted his backpack and fitted his soaked old green helmet on, an army surplus helmet his father had given to him, and taught him to use. Frazier leisurely skipped toward his rusty green bicycle, jumping up then throwing himself into a forced sitting position on the bicycle. He bent forward, tensing his shoulder muscles and looking onto the rock-strewn trail, his streamlined helmet taking the brunt of the faint wind as Frazier began moving his legs in a circular motion to pedal.

After a few turbulent metres, Frazier detected loud noises popping in his ears. Panicked, Frazier began breathing heavily, momentarily turning his attention away from the trail. As a result, he didn't notice the considerably large rock directly to the north of his bicycle's front wheel. In fact, Frazier was now so frightened that his face turned pale, a deathly white. His eyes moved quickly, searching every single visible area for possible danger. His vision was now blurred, of his own accord. Frazier's sense of hearing and smell doubled, his heartbeat and breathing tripled. The amygdala in his brain took over, pointing out many false evidences of fear, making him lose control of his muscles.

Frazier was closing in on the rock, 100 metres away. Ninety; eighty; seventy; sixty; his hand grip on his bicycle loosened. Fifty metres away; forty-five metres; forty; over the next ten metres, Frazier's grip loosened so quickly that his steady hand on the bicycle bars slackened, then slipped off the hand bars altogether. The front wheel went out of control, twisting and turning, and generally behaving like a rodeo bull. At first, this made it faster, the bike swinging a now sick Frazier into the twenty metres to the rock position. But the bike then hit a small rock at the worst angle possible. The rowdy bike reacted by sending itself into a sickening air barrel roll, Frazier clinging on for dear life with it.

Miraculously, Frazier avoided being shattered into pieces when the bicycle once again landed. He had noticed the rock a second too late and the bike hit it full force, sending Frazier flying into the nearby patch of dirt. Frazier's unbuckled helmet spiraled into the side wild bush. He himself closed his eyes and rolled about two metres on his worn out black kneepads. He cautiously looked up. Taking a few seconds to gather his wits, he made hastily to retrieve his helmet. Then he heard the popping noise narrowly whizzing past his ear. Gunfire! he thought, instinctively dropping to the ground.

He was only a French boy of twelve years, so he also naively yelled "Sauve qui peut!" as he dropped down, despite no apparent friends there, and giving away his exact position to his frustrated foes.

As Frazier wondered why he had gotten into such a terrible position, General von Rundstedt's patrols mistook him for a stranded French soldier. The smug Germans turned ever so slowly. As the French boy's young ears caught the sound of muffled feet, his spirits plummeted and he stopped breathing.

The German patrol stopped a moment to reload and cock their rifles frighteningly quick. Frazier winced very slightly, but could now see the imposing backs of the broad-shouldered Germans. However, the boy felt his adrenaline production quadruple as the German leader held up his right hand to stop the patrol. He then shouted in German, and pointed exactly in Frazier's direction!

Frazier scrambled to the big rock for cover, kicking his bike into the bush. He could make out the German leader's facial features. Yes, a fair-skinned, long moustache, brown hair cut short, brown eyes, short little man. He (the German) swung his arm in a pendulum motion, and the six other men readied their rifles. Frazier shifted his glance toward the nearby bush. It was possible. The leader said what seemed to be the final word of command, and they released a torrent of shots. Two grazed Frazier's cheek, one took off a small tuft of hair, and the rock exploded into smithereens.

When the patrol started reloading, Frazier sprang into action, legs pumping, as he picked up his bike and threw the helmet over his head, speeding out of there as fast as he could. As a boy, he had no idea of German efficiency, and, with the next round, they knocked off his helmet which fortunately protected his back from the next shot as it fell to the ground. He took in mumbled German curses with satisfaction as he doubled his speed and his breathing. His nerves were finally beginning to calm down when he observed a rumbling noise behind him. He turned with horror to see a Panzer tank closing up the gap with tremendous speed.

Frazier tried to push his paralyzed legs a little further, but he was frozen with fear. His mouth was dry, but then his prefrontal cortex began hardening, his resolve disappearing. The Germans could not be so stupid as to let off a badly needed tank for a single Frenchman, Frazier thought. Of course, that boyish carelessness once again returned, and he resumed the carefree

mind of a French boy. He carefully pedaled agonizingly slowly for five metres, whistling all the way. The Panzer was twenty-five metres away and closing fast. Frazier made a sharp turn to the left, but let his hands off the grips. The rusty old bike flipped into the side bushes and other vegetation in the dense forest, catapulting Frazier into a birch tree branch.

He opened one eye, then the other. His arms started slipping from the wet branch, and he fell with a startling cry, passing out after hitting his head on the hard tree trunk. Now, Frazier's thinking was not entirely idiotic—the Germans had spotted a large French battalion and were trying to get Frazier to show them the location. As the German search party unloaded from the Panzer, the sound of a body being dragged along the vegetation was muffled.

About an hour later, the Germans kept up their not so fruitless search, for they had found a bike, a strip of clothing torn on a low branch, and tracks of a body being dragged (flattened leaves) leading to wheel tracks. Meanwhile, Frazier was mistakenly taken for a German victim, buried in dozens of French bodies in a black wagon, in addition to the heavy, raided supply bags the Frenchmen were carrying. He was now with the much looked for French battalion, the Germans hot on their heels.

One must imagine how frightened the young boy was when he awoke to darkness. He thought this was death, and nearly fainted before seeing a narrow crack of light. Frazier pushed himself up and tumbled out of the wagon, accidentally picking up a dead Frenchman's loaded pistol as well. Unfortunately, he landed on a tree stump with such impact that it drove the breath from his chest.

He could see the French settling in trenches. The Germans were the same seven who had originally chased him, along with thirteen other soldiers. Frazier was then grabbed and pulled

into the trench, where nineteen Frenchman had the odds against them. "Idiot," he was berated by the lead French soldier, having his pistol then shoved into his face. "Sauve qui peut!" yelled the lead French Captain, plunging back into the trench. The Germans quickly disposed of five French Privates with their hand grenades. Frazier saw them die with a defiant cry of "Francais!" and five shots. The boy was amazed at their bravery, yet terrified of his German tormentors.

An expert German shot fractured the Sergeant next to Frazier, jarring Frazier's skull. The Sergeant gripped his hand before shooting the same German who shot him, passing his rifle onto Frazier and promptly dying with a loud thump.

The ten remaining Privates reloaded, cocked, and shot at the same time, killing the five Germans injured by the former five Privates, and injuring five more with a huge splatter of blood. The Captain stumbled upon the scarlet red blood of the dead Privates, slipped, and then took a shot to the upper right arm. The Captain desperately twisted his body to the right, narrowly avoiding a bullet meant for his chest. Frazier fumbled with his pistol, and gripped it with both hands. An accidental stray shot drove hard into the Sergeant killer's right shoulder, forcing him to drop his rifle, go on his back and slip into the trench feet first. The stocky, well-built, brown-eyed, blonde-haired, tall young man quickly came face to face with the light brown skinned, long brown mustache, bald head, short Captain. The Captain drove a bayonet into the German's stomach with a look of fury, his arms shaking. The German looked down, and his eyes rolled back as he crumpled like a sack of dirt. The Captain looked at his bloody hands, quickly fired two hand grenades that killed the five other injured Germans, then collapsed under extreme stress and horror. The three remaining Sergeants salvaged three hand grenades from the dead German, which promptly exploded and killed two Sergeants and three Privates, injuring the last Sergeant. In a rage of anger and fury, the remaining Sergeant picked up a heavy machine gun

with his right hand, throwing it on top of the trench, and quickly dispatched and killed six Germans in quick succession, before being downed by a shot to the left calf. Frazier was shot in the right leg, but skillfully killed a German with his rifle, gritting his teeth and wincing in pain. A Private was killed by a head shot with blood streaming out, another Private killing a German. Only the German leader was left of the German search party. The French Captain stood up, clutching his right arm, and fired a shot clean through the German search party's leader's head with his right hand.

The skirmish was over, but Frazier sensed motion in the above branches. He could make out the faint shape of a robin fluttering about in trees, towards the sun. It soon became a dark silhouette amid the sounds of grenades and guns. He walked toward the trees, trying in vain to get closer to the robin. The Captain noticed him and shouted for him to come back, limping after him, but he was too injured. Frazier noticed an activated grenade a few inches away from him, from the dead German leader's pack. It started whirring furiously, while Frazier smiled as the robin came closer. He stretched out his hands—he knew he was going to die. The grenade exploded. Frazier had wanted to die quickly. Hours later, the French Captain saw blood dripping through the branches of a tree, and a deceased robin under it.