

SAVIGNY

WAR MEMOIRS

1940-1945



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REMEMBER, MY SONS

W A R M E M O I R S

by
Marc L. Savigny

With my thanks to Millie who was an inspiration to put down
my recollections
of this short but most vivid and thrilling part of my life.

Knowledge can be shared. Experience cannot !
No man is free who is not master of himself.
Epictetus (1st century A.D.)

I disapprove of what you say, but I will defend to the death your right to say it.
Voltaire

I have sworn upon the altar of God eternal hostility against every form of tyranny over the mind of man.
Thomas Jefferson

Is life so dear or peace so sweet as to be purchased at the price of chains and slavery? Forbid it, almighty God! I know not what course others may take, but, as for me, give me liberty or give me death.
Patrick Henry

Those who deny freedom to others deserve it not for themselves, and, under a just God, cannot long retain it.
Abraham Lincoln

God of our fathers, known of old, Lord of our far-flung battle-line, beneath whose awful hand we hold dominion over palm and pine - Lord God of hosts, be with us yet, lest we forget - lest we forget!
Rudyard Kipling

Freedom from fear and injustice and oppression will be ours only in the measure that men who value such freedom are ready to sustain its possession, to defend it against every thrust from within or without.
Dwight D. Eisenhower

The right to personal freedom comes second in importance to the duty of maintaining the race.
Adolf Hitler

June 14, 1940

"Les Boches sont là! ... "The Germans are here! I was just returning my three speed bicycle into our garage when I heard that resounding proclamation from Michel, also sixteen, while running towards his home.

How many people did hear that shoot throughout history? "The Huns are coming!" when Rome was about to be sacked. "The Red Coats are coming", and, of course, you have seen the movie "The Russians are coming!"

This time, the Germans were there! ... "Paris ist gefallen". Paris has fallen. We had heard the cannons during the night and I remember hoping that it was a thunderstorm in the distance. No such luck. Michel, out of breath, pointed towards the Seine river.

"They are on the quay, in armed cars..."

Curiosity had the better of me, and, surmounting my fear, I jumped back on my bike before mother would know of my rash move. After all, if the Germans were coming to us, why rush to them, unless you had a weapon to welcome them with! But, let's face it, I had never seen a German soldier in the flesh, only on Pathé movie news, and it was time for me to face the famous monster, the fierce conqueror who could decimate with his look alone!

By some fact of magic, my bike had slowed to a crawl when reaching the last corner before the quay and the thumping in my chest was perhaps not so much due to my exertion as much as to my sudden realization that I did not have a clue of what I would do if and when I faced the enemy!

Ah! But they did not know what they were up against, those ferries! A six foot, lanky youth, with ribs sticking out like a washboard, a nose that could split the bullets in half, and a determination passed on from Joan of Arc, no less! How could a vulgar brute, in a sweat-reeking Prussian uniform, spotted with the caked blood of my protectors, even the stare of contempt that

would haughtily signify to this decadent Hun that his end is near?!...

Nothing to the right, and nothing ... Oh! Oh! ... There, in that strange looking car, three of them, facing away from me. Bang! Bang! Bang! ... Hum! Nothing happened! They continue their chatting. The nerve! Not a weapon in sight. Let's give them a taste of the famous Gallic contempt and inspect the four wheel armored scout engine as if it were on display at the Sport d'Hiver Salon and ignore the occupants as if they were mere attendants!...

Yes, but wait a minute. Let's keep a casual but firm grip on the handlebar, just in case my hunger for breakfast was surpassing my curiosity. Fair enough. Well, there it was, my first Volkswagen, covered with brown dust, muddy tires. By God, it looked as if it could fly by itself! What wouldn't I give to be seated in it for a spin! With a friend, of course, who would definitely bring me back to the same spot.

Who could trust those guys...

enough childish desire. Let's take a look inside... spades attached against the body, chains (!), two gasoline caps (ferry cans?!...), in the open glove compartment a sowing necessaire! Wouah! They really came prepared! But wait a minute, what did the driver just bring out from that case behind him, a bottle of ... what! I can't believe my eyes! A bottle of Dom Perignon! I take a quick look at the case and surely enough it spells out its origin and I can now see the straw wrapped bottles that are still left.

The gall, the unmitigated gall of these animals!... My incisive nose took its azimuth towards those pagan conquerors and I finally faced three youthful figures, with wheat blond hair, en brosse, blue eyes, hardly a trace of beard, open collar showing a hairless throat, calmly tasting the nectar of the gods! ... too busy even to return my stare.

I noticed, at last, the machine guns casually resting on their laps while they were enjoying their liquid breakfast. I know now that they were Schmeisers, the best machine guns available

anywhere then, which I selected to carry four years later, when we decided to return their invitation to their home land, because they were superb machines. On the inside of the two front doors were attached grenades with their handles in a ready position

All this anomalous calm could be turned, in a bat of an eye, into murderous efficiency. A cold shiver passed down my back. Then I noticed that the one on the back seat was intently consulting a map. By golly, it was none other than a Michelin map! This was the ultimate compliment to the man who produced the best maps of Europe and was now glorified by these young lions who saw no purpose on improving on the best. By the same token, the German High Command also admitted later on that they simply had studied and followed General de Gaulle's book on tank warfare, and succeeded, practically completely, in demonstrating that, with the proper equipment, they could achieve fast and deep penetration, which they labelled "Blitzkrieg", a word that came to terrify all Europe in a very short span of time.

I casually inched my way towards that map, which, surely, was now marked with all the secrets of battlefare and divine inspiration, and, perhaps, reveal to this newly made super spy their schedule and intentions...

Turning toward me, with a look that reminded me of my Spanish teacher during the last test, superman said in a soft voice "nach Paris" while pointing in the right direction, straight ahead.

Hah! They were lost! Thought I! What a sublime contemplation! He was asking me! ... Fifteen, love!

As if driven by an automatic impulse my free arm pointed north, in the opposite direction they had arrived. My first act of rebellion and sabotage. How brave! How naive! How innocently hopeless! He just stared at me, with inquisitive, limpid blue eyes, the beginning of a smile on his lips, questioning already if this was the kind of collaboration they had to expect from now on. Fifteen - all.

The little sucking noise emitted by my stomach brought me back to reality and it was time to let the conquerors go on their journey and to go home where my bread "baguette" and café-au-lait were undoubtedly waiting for me.

So this was it! My vivid imagination, nurtured by years of listening to my grandmother's stories of her sighting her first cavalry lancer, double helmeted uhlan, who spread the terror in the Low Countries and France, who made history by his atrocities and left an indelible trace of horror for generations to come; of my grandfather's descriptions of infantry buried alive by enormous shells pouring down continuously, and of his having been gassed and unable to, breathe normally ever again!

None of the above had prepared me for the modern reality of meeting a youth who had been trained by an upcoming madman in a country that had dreamed, for generations, of making France part of its own backyard.

Let's face it, I was just a babe in the woods and I, suddenly, abruptly, was admitted in the shocking reality of the 20th century and was taking an early peek at the forces of Armageddon. It was time to prepare myself to do something about it and upon this resolve I headed for my Spartan breakfast.

"Tu es fou!" You are mad! If your father were here, he would have given you a good lesson! ... It had to come. My nose still in my coffee, I was not about to challenge the words of sanity proffered to me.

Yes, father would have given me one of his famous, long, silent, Spanish Inquisition looks which would have done far more than several lashes. Fortunately, my father was not around. But then, what tormented remorse to realize that we had not heard from him for days, whereas he dutifully called every night from his regimental outpost, in Douai, up north, near the Belgian frontier. In fact, at this moment my father was retreating, at the head of his regiment, towards Dunkirk, some one hundred miles north, which was known, by then, to be the last port of evacuation, the only way to escape the trap they were in.

He was then forty years old. In 1917 he had volunteered at the tender age of seventeen, lying about his age, and, after a few months of training, was sent to Verdun, a name that was going to live with dread in the imagination of many generations. Encircled for months, bombarded mercilessly day and night,

suffering from attrition of troops, with no more food to eat, and none getting through, they learned to survive by eating rats, cats and dogs, anything that moved on four legs, after all the horses had gone! Petain had said "They shall not pass!"... and finally Verdun saw the only case of mutiny in the French Army of World War I, suppressed by brutal decimation in front of the firing squad. Do you remember the movie that was made with Kirk Douglas as the captain carrying orders received from the commanding officer, Adolph Menjou? The same Petain who, forty years later, would shake hands with the enemy and order the French Forces to lay down their arms and co-operate with the occupying forces!

This feeble leftover of great French glory was telling France to accept the surrender to Germany and, in the same proclamation, was condemning to death any person joining the Allied Forces that were continuing the fight for freedom. Yes, my friend, it was no little solace for me to know, later on, that should I be caught at any time by my former countrymen, I would be executed as a traitor to my country! Amen! See if I care! Catch me first! Petain finished his days in prison, not shot because of his age, but banished and relegated to the annals of disgrace and dishonor.

Coming back to Dad, he was recalled in 1939, in his artillery regiment, although his hearing was fifty percent impaired since the First World War. He attributed his recall to the well-known apathy and unawareness of the French command, backed up by politicians who were more interested in grandiose gestures than in effective evaluations and positive planning.

After all, during World War I, they conscripted from 16 to 60, and Germany would, eventually, towards the end, take them from 14 to 80, so where was the beef, even if you could not hear, I suppose you could always aim or point a bayonette! And for the little the French people knew of the German army, it probably would be another war of trenches, starting with the Maginot line and all the way north to the sea, where, undoubtedly, anybody could stand on watch. Didn't it start that way, after all? It certainly did and it was called the "drole de guerre" (the strange war) because so little was happening.

And then - wham! The onslaught took place on May 20th, 1940, when an avalanche of irresistible new German tanks spearheaded through the Dutch and Belgian lines, sweeping through the Allied Forces in complete disarray and headed straight west, South of Douai, directly for the Channel, to close the pocket from Amiens to Dunkirk, in the hope of capturing the whole British Army on the retreat. Within these gigantic pincers were caught the remnant of the Dutch and Belgian forces that had not already surrendered, French forces moving straight North, and a whole British Army hoping that Dunkirk would not fall before they arrived.

On the morning of that day, my father realized that most of the officers in charge were either at home on leave or had mysteriously disappeared, leaving troops (artillery) completely unaware and disorganized. After hastily taking formation and abandoning all the materiel they concluded that the only way out was north, to Dunkirk, about 100 miles away, and on foot, that is to say about three days away.

So! under the hot sun of May, they walked north, with a few rifles and some provisions that each had to carry individually, hoping for the best. My father told me three years later, "Remember, my son, that we only survived thanks to the English tommies who had received strict orders to dig in and stay, no matter what!"

How reminiscent of Victor Hugo's poem where the sergeant has been ordered to make a stand in the cemetery and replied, "What a good place to die!" Food was handed out from these spaced Alamos by men who, gallantly, remarked that, "they would not be needed for long, you might as well share it! ..." Their crosses are still there, Along the roads where they fell, attesting to a resolution that would be proclaimed, to the rest of the world, by a man of destiny, that "we shall never surrender!"

After three days of march, they finally reached the port which would soon become as famous as Khartoum - Dunkirk. 'What a sight! Smoke and fires everywhere. Thousands of men wearing all kinds of uniforms, walking like turtles to the sea, en masse, haggard, exhausted, hungry, and so, so tired, but with just enough energy left to attempt the last escape, God willing!

Long lines had formed by the jetties that were still standing, and along the beach, waiting for any boat that might come along and carry them either to the large transports awaiting in the distance, or, perhaps, all the way to England, under the protection of a few remaining war vessels.

To this mise-en-scene, imagine dozens of Stukas, the well known diving monoplane, targeting on men and boats as in a circus gallery, with their shrieking sirens adding a supernatural effect to the already frightening machines of terror and death.

A whole section of Zouaves (Algerian recruits), no longer able to control themselves, simply ran amok.

My father, among others, had waded up to his neck, in the hope of avoiding the strafing, but he remembered his doctor telling him that, since both of his eardrums were pierced since the last war, the contact with water might make him go mad! Surely, not a satisfactory alternative, therefore he eventually came back on dry land, taking a place somewhere in the dunes, hoping for the clemency of destiny. Within seconds he was fast asleep, oblivious to the rest of the world.

When he woke up, some twelve hours later, a great calm reigned over the whole area, the sun was already high up, the boats had vanished and all along the beach white flags were attached here and there to rifles, wooden sticks, canes, and among the sleeping men German soldiers were casually walking, collecting rifles, pistols, sabers, anything that could be used as a weapon. It was all over! They were prisoners!

Before going any further I would like to clear up a point regarding the British Navy having, eventually, given orders not to accept any soldier on board who could not produce a British pay book.

This was a fact which was necessitated by their discovery that, among Foreign troops and particularly Belgian soldiers, there were a few German soldiers who had hastily dressed in an Allied uniform, found their way on board transport vessels and had managed to place incendiary pens in various locations, thus successfully sending whole transports to the bottom.

It took some time to figure out, but once they knew what they were up against there was no choice but to take drastic action, with the hope that very few German soldiers could pass for an Allied soldier.

The bitterness carried back home by French troops and the knowledge of this preventive action helped immeasurably the German forces to exploit the imagination of the French people against "Perfidious Albion", as did, later on, the shelling and sinking of French war vessels anchored at Mers-el-Kebir who preferred to obey Admiral Darlan in refusing to join the small contingent of French Navy already active in the British Isles. I remember a beautifully drawn poster with a French vessel sinking in the distance and a "matelot" drowning with a French flag in his arms, again with the wording of "Perfidious Albion". I often wondered if this poster actually stopped a certain number of good men from joining the only allied forces now defending their cause. It became a good excuse for "in the doubt, abstain!"

Back to Dunkirk where my father and thousands of others were simply herded in columns of four abreast and marched towards Germany. Then commenced what came to be known as the death march! Walking for days through Belgium, without any food or water, helping each other whenever they could. When you could no longer help your friend you just had to let him go down and, within a few minutes, a German cyclist would ride back to give him the "coup de grace" and roll him in the bank. You knew what was coming to you if you could not make it and they walked like automatons, not knowing how long the left foot would follow the right foot! How many times that sculpture has been reproduced on the entablatures of Greek architecture where you see the fallen soldier ready to be finished off by the conqueror. Antiquity revisited? You better believe it and no one left with the strength to even suggest the Geneva Convention!

Along the roads of Belgium he remembered seeing a few women throwing some bread into the column and creating an immediate commotion among the men who, literally, threw themselves on these morsels, looking like maddened rugby players.

Against all odds, three quarters made it to a central railroad junction and were boarded into horse cars made to contain eight quadrupeds and now contained some eighty standing men (no place to sit), who were made to sleep leaning against their neighbors, with no opening to the outside except in one corner where all the feces came to be thrown out! Remember, my son!

...

Twice a day, along the way, the trains would slow down, doors would slide open and the men were made to jump to the ground and relieve themselves at best, while armed guards observed this unforgettable vision. Many had to be helped back, unable, physically, to make this little climb.

Finally they arrived in Austria, where they were encamped in Stalags and Oflags, respectively, for soldiers and officers, and, slowly, resumed a semblance of living in barracks, surrounded by fences, barbed wires and observatory towers, not to mention a supply of ferocious dogs held on a short leash. Two million men in all ... leaving France at the mercy of Nazi Germany.

Meanwhile, back at the farm, as they say...

We had heard that the King of Belgium had capitulated on May 28th, my sixteenth birthday, and then, on June 18th, General de Gaulle's appeal from London... "We have lost a battle, we have not lost the war..." Little did I know that the "18th of June" would become the name of my promotion, three years later in England!

Paris was declared an open city to protect its noble heritage. Mother first decided that, without news from Dad, who might be dead for all we knew, we would place two mattresses on top of the car and head for the southwest and, hopefully, away from the furiosa Germanisa. Then, on second thought, she decided that we would probably be safer at home than on the roads with thousands of other refugees, driving cars, motorbikes, bicycles, carts, baby carriages, you name it.

What a meritorious brain wave! and I was egging her to change her mind, short on strategy and long on legs! We heard soon enough the general panic created by retreating troops, mingling with frightened evacuees, running short on food and fuel, being continuously strafed by the Luftwaffe, under the best weather conditions possible.

Days and weeks passed without any news of my father, and my mother, after crying irrepressibly from morning to night, suddenly adopted a stoic attitude, ready to face the inevitable bad news that seemed to be the only alternative to this deafening silence. She also tried twice to open the gas full blast and do away with our miserable existence. Fortunately, each time I woke up in time and made her promise not to try again. She looked at me like a wax figure, lifeless, not caring if the last breath of life were to be taken away from her. But no matter what, I felt that I had a duty to carry on, to preserve the faith, defend whatever was left of my family and, as soon as feasible, to join the forces gathering in free territories, preferably, if possible, in England, with our immediate and fraternal allies.

One late July morning I spotted the mailwoman at the gate of our villa, holding a white paper and trying to attract someone's

attention from the villa. When I moved the curtain she immediately smiled and waved the paper while ringing the bell for good measure. That was it! He had made it! Mother rushed past me like a first class roadrunner and grabbed the paper in hands shaking with haste and apprehension. "*Kriegsgefangener Alfred Savigny, Oflag XVII A, Elderbach, Osterreich*".

He was alive! But not well. Indeed, not well. This turned out to be his third letter, the first two having been censured because of their content and description of the death march and treatment in this Austrian resort! Of the original 252 pounds that he had left with, he was now down to 162 pounds, was wearing a long beard and the purulence would constantly run out of his ears for lack of proper treatment. Having to report more often than not to the medical section he eventually was offered a function which, in time, enabled him to stamp the papers of many seriously ill prisoners with the magical word "Repatriation", thus saving many from further agony and/or degrading death. The time came in early 1942 when his comrades also felt that he should go home and he was on his way to old barracks, now occupied by German troops, in a town called Rennes in the middle of Brittany, three hours away from home!

Having been advised of his move, mother decided that -we should go and visit him, and, uninvited, unannounced, we showed up one late morning to be told that no visits were allowed under any conditions! They were in for a surprise for, instead of moving, my mother, with both her hands on her umbrella handle, planted in the ground like the sword of Damocles, informed our gaoler (jailer?) in complete dismay, that she would not move until her husband is allowed to see her! There! Spreading his arms as if ready to take flight, he turned around in despair and, undoubtedly, reported to his superiors for, a few minutes later, we saw a blond officer, hatless, collar unbuttoned, marching towards us behind no less than three German shepherds pulling as hard as they could, as if their one meal of the day had presented itself. A clicking of heels followed by a curt, short bow and we heard him say "Madame, your husband is a prisoner of war and no visits are permitted! Please go home!" "Monsieur", said mother, having no idea that

the epaulettes indicated a Major, "I came here to see my husband and will not move until I have done so!" He smiled, tugged on the leashes and said to the dogs "Come!", making as quiet an exit as he had appeared.

Another fifteen minutes elapsed. My mother stoic and unmovable. Me, restless and wondering if we would have to sleep on that bench if they lock us in for the night! Before we realized it, some sorry figure of a man, half bent, with a thick graying beard, eyes of a tired spaniel, was standing motionless in front of us, with the beginning of a timid smile at the corner of the mouth.

"Oh! my God!" said mother finally recognizing my father. I thought she had gone bonkers! That wreck could not possibly be what was left of father! My mother was already in his arms, in a hysterical deluge of tears! "Well, son, aren't you going to say hello?" My paralysis suddenly ended and I threw myself under his protective arm.

Our reaction was purely emotional and it took us a -while, on the train back, to realize that this beautiful human being had been broken, stripped of all humanity. In the meantime, having given out enough tears to drown an alligator, we heard in a few minutes what martyrdom he had gone through and what miracle had kept him alive. Realizing that our interview might be called short any second, he gave us the important news that, with some luck, he would be freed, on parole, in a few months, maybe weeks, because the facilities were inadequate for the Germans to adequately guard them, and, furthermore, they could not be bothered to worry about these miserable wretches' health or well being.

Two months later he was back home, now down to 152 pounds, clean shaven and ready to resume a normal life, God willing. He carried with him instructions to report weekly to the Paris Kommandantur, at the Place de l'Opera, and had been warned that his wife's and son's welfare were dependent on his attitude and co-operation. An attempt to leave town without written permission would be treated with the utmost severity and possible return to a camp in Germany! "A bon entendeur, salut!"

(A person warned equals two).

Which did not stop yours truly to inform his family that, now that Dad was back home, it was my turn and duty to go and fight for my country. "Sit down, son" said Dad, in a very calm voice. "Look at me! Look at what is left of your father! Hopefully I can still make a living after the war is over. But if something happens to me you are the only male left in the family. Think of your mother. You are only seventeen after all. Where would you go, how would you reach the allies?" "Well, Dad, I know what you are saying, but I am not going to listen to the BBC news until the end of the war! They need men and they have to be trained. That takes time. By then I will be ready and can be sent into action. I would like to be a fighter pilot. If they will give me a chance ... I thought of going through Spain and find a boat to England, somehow! ..."

I could see in his eyes that he was thinking, pondering the alternatives. "I tell you what, son. Give me a few months to put some meat back on my bones and then we will all go. We cannot stay behind once you have left. They would send me back to hell, in a hard working camp this time, never to come back. I'll let you know when I can make it".

So be it. An important decision had been taken. I could not help hoping that the war would surely wait a few months for this hero to take his place among the tanks. Useless to say that, although I was then studying for my baccalauréat, my concentration was somewhat lacking and I counted the days.

In the meantime, I was glued to the BBC for the news. Leningrad! Tripoli! Bir-Hakeim! Names of glory, cemented for ever in the annals of the fight for freedom. Then the pace of war accelerated itself and Dad decided that October would be a good time to depart for the unoccupied southern part of France. Arrangements were made, at considerable expense, to cross the demarcation line one dark night and we were on our way to Marseilles, awaiting for a visa to reach North Africa by boat. Soon we ran out of money and, not being able to borrow anywhere without leaving our name on a contract that could be traced by the Germans who, by then, must have known that a

former prisoner of war and his family had disappeared from their home, we had no recourse but line up for food at the "popular soup" that was dispensed to indigents and quietly pray for a visa to be granted soon.

Then came the big news! The Allies had landed in North Africa! My jubilation was extreme but one look at my father told me that I was missing something. Fists on his lips, he was silent for a moment and then said "The French fleet is at Toulon. They will make a beeline for it in the fear that it might join the allies. They will be here to-morrow. We've got to move fast!"

Sure enough. Overnight the Panzers were on their way through unoccupied territory and Germany occupied the whole of France from the Italian border to the Spanish border, closing that last gate to freedom. We were trapped! So I thought. My father then decided that we must attempt to go to Spain before the German forces had had time to establish themselves in strength on the Pyrenean border. He sold his gold pocket watch for a song and he and I were on our way to Livourne¹, on the eastern seaboard of the Pyrenean mountains, in a locality well known for its desert wine, a few miles from the Spanish frontier, where we lodged in a local hotel a few days before Christmas.

We had a few days to reconnoiter our surroundings, especially checking when the frontier guards would be changed. Then, on Christmas Eve my father said "Let's go! They will all celebrate and there never will be a better time..." At one A.M., after leaving the rooms' rent on the tables, we quietly left, father and I carrying a briefcase crammed with a few shirts, underwear, an extra pair of shoes, and headed towards the mountain trails.

We reached the top, some 5,000 feet later, at four A.M., and ho! behold! we saw the first lights of civilization in the distance. Turning around, France was all dark under strict curfew. Au revoir, la belle France!

We celebrated the event by drinking the most limpid, clean and cold water from a little brook that tasted better than champagne

¹ The town of Livourne being in Italy, the real destination was most probably Rivesaltes

at that moment. Then, after a well deserved rest, we resumed our walk, leisurely, and at dawn we found a little cave to rest for an hour.

Later on, in Madrid, I met a young Belgian woman who attempted to cross the same mountain with her fiancé, a Belgian soldier on the run, and they had gotten lost, turning around in the snow for hours, until, finally, her fiancé, with frozen feet, then hands, had to be dragged until her forces gave up. During a night of blizzard and high winds, with no protection but the hugging of their own bodies, he died of exposure and she buried him in the snow in the morning. How relative is your pain, my friend, when you hear of others' torments?

We continued our descent after eating some bread mother had the presence to place in the briefcase and were looking forward to our newly found freedom, in a free country.

How erroneous we were! In fact, we were to find out later on that the large cities were saturated with German officers, in full uniform, well aware that they were in a territory whose government was repaying a large debt going back to the civil war. I remember reading a magazine, in Madrid, backed up with German money that complained that 40,000 foreigners had been allowed to transit through Spain, whereas there were only 20,000 Spanish volunteers in the "Division Azul" that was fighting, alongside the German troops, against Russia.

During that same time several compatriots of mine and I, made it a point to have tea, almost every day, at 4 P.M., at the Palace Hotel, in Madrid, simply because, every day, two tables away, six representatives of Das Reich were having their drinks, dressed to kill: brown shirt, black swastika on white background printed on a blond red brassard, shoulder belt joining a cross belt, beige riding gants, smartly ensconced into the most shining pair of black boots you ever saw! Believe me, they looked impressive with their shining skulls, monocles and expansive cigars. Completely frozen and ignoring those childish French boys who were intentionally speaking a rather tentative English, just to annoy them. I would not have been surprised if they spoke better English than any of us! And what a sorry sight we were! Our hair barely growing from the last prison cut, clothes

that tramps might hesitate wearing, prototypes for the 'three stooges'!

Around 9 A.M. we had been walking on a road heading towards Figueras when, from around the corner, we found ourselves face to face with five carabineros (Spanish police) with Cheshire cat smiles that clearly indicated that they had just caught more fish! Nevertheless it was almost a relief to look at these macho hombres wearing black laquered tricorn hats framing semi-friendly grins, lackadaisical figures interrupted in their boredom, nonchalantly carrying a rifle each as an instrument of their unequivocal authority.

The one with a stripe on his epaulette authoritatively said "Frances?"...we inquisitively looked at each other in the "what is he saying" attitude. This time he relaxed his stiff poise and articulated "Francais! si?" in a decisively affirmative way. My father immediately answered, in French, "we are Canadiens on our way to the embassy in Madrid"... A sad smile, of the déjà vu kind, came on the lies of the dejected officer who ejaculated "Papeles par favor" (papers, please). Again my father replied that, since we had to cross German liner we had to discard our papers and had none to offer.

Having done his duty with these unrelenting French intruders, he slowly and carefully told us to go on the same road and in about five miles, to stop at a white house by the road and wait for them.

We resumed our walk during which I first noticed that mother had considerably reduced her pace and was evidently in some pain which she refused to acknowledge and prodded us to go on. We walked and walked and walked until we reached the town of Figueras without finding the announced white house by the road. Actually we had seen such a house at the end of a long, tree lined allee, some three hundred feet from the road, whereas we thought we were looking for a house by the road.

Arriving in Figueras we were immediately accosted by two carabineros who took us to the local police station for further orders. By the way, carabineros always walked in pairs because it was unsafe for them to walk alone. A sure sign that all was not well in the kingdom of Spain!

We were made to sit for four hours on a bench, without any food or water, and by mid afternoon my mother was decidedly not well at all. She was lying on the bench in a fetal position, terribly pale and answering our questions with feeble moans.

Abruptly the door opened on our fiercely looking morning carabiñero who proceeded, at the top of his voice, to tell us that we had tried to escape from him by not stopping at the white house and that we would be taken back, immediately, to the French frontier!

Imagine the scene: a frustrated policeman, brow-beating three frightened pigeons, scared out of their wits to be handed over to the german frontier police, with dire consequences, for sure!

It was then that my father, throwing all precautions to the wind, took a step forward and looking the officer straight in the eyes said "All right! We are French! But you are talking about sending back a man who has been in two world wars, prisoner in the last one for two years, with a woman who is now without any further strength and obviously ill, and a youngster who has no intention of being sent to a Pétain or German working camp!"... all this in Spanish mind you.

The officer's face took a knowledgeable smile and commented "You speak very good Spanish, Señor! My congratulations! It is indeed enlightening that our good neighbours know so much about our culture..." His eyes drifted to my mother who was making a desperate effort to sit up "...and because the lady is not well ... I will forge the incident! She must see the prison doctor immediately. Good luck, Señor!" He saluted, turned around and disappeared out of our life, which, for one moment had been in his hands.

Then commenced our prison experience ... I say, old chap! Have you ever been in prison in your life? Prison, you say! By Jove, what kind of a chap do you think I am! ...Well I have, you know ... interesting subject of conversation after the war, don't you think?

We were taken to the "Prison de partido de Figueras", the local political prison where I came to meet some forty Spaniards of all classes of life, who had been in prison there since the end of the

civil war, were officially pardoned once a year during some religions holiday, but, in fact, were never released.

As far as the government was concerned they were dangerous "republicans", meaning, actually, communists, and they were not about to be let free to rejoin their clandestine cell and plot some more. Among them several occupied a condemned cell where, alone, they waited for the firing squad in complete fatality.

The prison consisted of about fifty cells in a U shape, with a central courtyard, each cell about 6 feet by 9 feet, a steel door on the court side with a square foot trap door in the center, a john in one corner, with no seat cover, or toilet seat for that matter, and an opening, two by three, on the outside wall, streaked by two vertical bars, about ten feet from the ground.

On the first day we abruptly realized that my mother would be separated from us and taken to the women's side of the prison. A quick embrace, a few words of comfort for one another, and hope for the best. "Take care, God bless!" Father and I were then taken to our cell which was already occupied by two nondescript youths who looked as forlorn as the prisoner of Monte Cristo's novel. One had a bandage around his head and was completely motionless. The other, head completely shaved, slowly turned to look at us and I had the feeling that he was looking somewhere one thousand miles away.

Then I realized that both were wearing a dark bluish uniform I had never seen before, with wings on the breast. There, sitting on the floor, were our two first British airmen of the war! My father immediately went to them and we introduced ourselves at best we could, my English being then more than rusty. We found out that they were both twenty-one (and I thought they were younger than I!), and had already had more than their share of their short war. Both were fighter pilots shot down over France by more experienced 'kampfpilot'. One plane caught fire and when opening the canopy the pilot was engulfed in flames, blinded while trying to free himself and jump, parachuted while experiencing an excruciating pain on a burnt face, not knowing what he would hit, where he would land, at the mercy of destiny.

Fortunately his companion had jumped first and spotted his descent, eventually rescuing him from his total incapacity.

They managed to reach a farm house a few miles away, in spite of despatched infantry escorted by trained dogs, and, very luckily, reached a farmer who had more feeling for his country and its fighting allies, than for his own safety. After hiding in his cellar for twelve long days, in practically complete darkness, the patrols had given them up and they were canalized by the underground from one hiding place to another, walking by night, hiding during the day, sharing the little food there was around, and, finally, were helped across the Pyrenees, hopefully on their way home. In a matter of days the British consul came to meet them and they were promptly released in the Consul's custody, to be repatriated via Gibraltar.

On the second day, father and I were moved to our final cell which we were to share with eight others. Ten persons in a room six by nine! Ten sardines in a liddy-biddy can ... Being over six feet by then, I could not stretch my legs completely across and disturbed four persons when I turned over. I was not very popular. When lying down my cheek would be hard pressed against the leather of my valise under my head, my shoulder would fall asleep against the hard cement floor and I simply had to move for Heaven's sake! The one blanket you owned was your most cherished possession against the evening cold, fully dressed as we were, day and night. Having nothing else to do during the days we took long siestas to pass the time and were often awake at night, listening, hour after hour, to the guards on the parapets, who were loudly counting the hours: "La una", "Las dos" ...

But let me tell you about the food at this Hilton palace. At one P.M., every day, the steel opening of our door would open and you would line up with your wood bowl, narrow enough to get through, and you would pray for a piece of meat or half a potato, both if you were extra lucky, swimming in that waterish concoction called meal. With it you got a roll about the size of your fist, hard as a nail, which you immediately dumped into your hot soup to soften it up, and the whole thing was gone before you had time to say "waiter, this is not what I ordered!"

You had just eaten your breakfast, lunch and dinner, all wrapped up in one! Yes sir, anytime you want the address of this lose weight venture, I've got it for you. I had weighed 150 lbs when I left and was already down to 140 lbs. At my age the lack of food made me look like the son of Gandhi. When my turn came to wash the cement floor of the cell with one old rag and a bucket of water with a drop of soap in it, my right shoulder would dislocate. I got in the habit of slowly twisting it around and putting it back by myself. Happy days are here again! ... Yes, you are right! I was not training for the Olympics, so what's the difference! Well, you try it, buddy, and you will know the difference!

After this gourmet meal we were allowed in the outside courtyard for two hours every afternoon and were left to ourselves to decide if we wished to avail ourselves of the two open air showers, with soap that did not lather, in a frigid January temperature. One look from my father and there was no point asking which one of us two was invited to sample first the precious amenities! First you undressed while in line, then placed your vestments in a neat pile on the ground, then grimaced your way under this freezing water, jumping up and down to keep the circulation going. You dried yourself with a provided towel, two by two, stiff as a board, that must have been cut out from bedsheets (bedsheets for whom you ask? The guards maybe) and you dressed in ten seconds flat. Then, all dressed and no place to go, the only practical solution from turning into an ice cube was to run around the court-yard and, hopefully, regain some warmth. Yes sir, that is the way I invented jogging! Didn't I tell you before? Must have skipped my mind I guess. The first day I tried the soup and spat everything into the john, in disgust! My dad remarked that when I get hungry I would eat it, like everybody else. "Someday, son, remind me to tell you what we ate in German prison camps! ... You just have to survive!" So I survived and ate my portion, like a good little boy should, to please Papa. But by God, was I starved! I don't know what they put into that food but I did have to spend a good time on the john and my companions did not refrain from telling me what they felt of my disgusting

behaviour. But they had all gone through it, what the heck! "*A la guerre, comme à la guerre*". All the cells were jammed with Belgians, Dutch, French, mostly former soldiers who did not wish to end either in a prison camp as hostage or work on the Atlantic western wall that was being erected against a possible allied invasion.

These same cells were once reserved for political prisoners, a mixture of republicans and communists, who had been living here since 1939, waiting for either freedom or trial or death. Several executions by firing squad took place during our stay. For them it was all part of the game they had played and lost. The survivors were removed because of our arrivals to a large hall where they all camped on wooden bunks and shared a communal life instead of their former solitude.

After a month of such living, if you will pardon the expression, my father managed to convince the prison director, with the help of our jailer, that his seventeen year old son knew enough Spanish to work in the library, sorting books and keeping track of them for the Spanish inmates. So, for the rest of my stay I worked from 10 A.M. till 4 P.M. in that function and really got a chance to improve my knowledge of that superb language.

At about that time, the British Consul's representative made his monthly appearance to meet and interview the newly arrived persons claiming to be either Canadian or English. Of course, when actual members of the British forces were reported to the Consulate to have arrived, they were immediately visited and arrangements for their freedom were promptly made. As far as all the others were concerned, it was simply a matter falling under the agreement made by Washington with Franco, allotting Spain with a certain quantity of wheat per person who had been allowed to transit through Spain to various other destinations like Portugal, Morocco, America if you could secure necessary papers. Yes, just like in the movie "Casablanca" with Bogie, Ingrid Bergman and Claude Rains. Fortunately for us, Spain needed food badly and Germany could not afford to share any with her Iberian ally. The walls of Barcelona and Madrid spoke for the people's hunger. "*Menos Franco, mas pan blanco!*" Less Franco, more white bread. Of course the Germans were furious

of this profitable exchange and I remember reading a Spanish magazine, backed up by German money, complaining that there were only 20 000 Spanish volunteers in the "Division Azul" presently fighting on the Russian front with their German comrades in arms, whereas it was well known that more than forty thousand persons had already been allowed to transit through Spain. Goebbels was obviously displeased to see these migrators escape the trap that Spain would have been if the Spaniards had been more grateful than hungry. Tough luck, little rat!

We provided the British Consul with the answers to all their questions and were told that once they have been checked out for their veracity we would then be accepted by the British Consulate as persons under the protection of the British Crown and receive a few pesetas a week to buy some food from the commissary. As a matter of fact, things got a lot faster when my father advised the Consul that it was my wish to join the fighting forces in England. He returned two weeks later to inform us that everything was in order and allocated us twenty pesetas per person per week, enough to buy a can of sardines or a bag of large dried flat figs, to supplement our culinary experience. Also that I would hear from them soon...

During all that time, we managed to see my mother in the yard by raising each other in turn on one's shoulders to peek through the open window overlooking the yard. She would signal us of her presence by reflecting the sun's rays, when any, into our cell, with a small mirror she had been allowed to keep. "How are you?" "I manage! How is Marc?" "Here he is. Chin up. God bless." Then I would go up on his shoulders, look down some eighty feet across, at that figure at the foot of the exterior wall, waving at me, biting her upper lip.

I must not forget to tell you about mass on Sunday mornings. At ten we were all gathered, one cell at a time, in the center hall and stood there with all the Spanish prisoners while the Catholic service was conducted. This gave us an opportunity to look them over and, in turn, for them to look at all those foreigners who had dislodged them from their cells. This included those who were condemned to death and we could see in their looks the

recognition that we were the ones who would continue on to freedom while they were doomed, with no court of appeal. At the end of the service we were ordered to raise our right arm in a rigid fashion, in other words, to give the fascist salute, whether we liked it or not, while the prison band played the national anthem which began as follows: "Por Dios, la Patria, el Rey" (for God, Country and the King) to which we altered the second sentence to be "Estamos en la celda ... " (we are in jail ...).

I learned how to smoke right there. Having nothing to do all day long, you learned how to roll your cigarette with one hand, close the ends with a twist over the rough Spanish brew, and try to light it.

I say try, because, due to the lack of air in the cell, you had to hold your match very close to the cigarette and quickly inhale, otherwise the match would extinguish itself. The tobacco was so coarse that it broke through the thin paper and fell on your clothes, burning holes all over.

Once a week we were directed to the barbershop and relieved of all our hairs, and I mean all our hairs! The simple reason was that the vermin was crawling all over and with the lack of sanitation there was no way we could control it. At night we could see the lice go up the walls, take a direct position over our bodies and wait for the dark to dive on their destinations. And no flytox or raid or anything to stop them. Our bodies were a mess and yet the winter was so cold that you hesitated between two dilemmas. To live with these invaders or attempt, in twenty degree temperature, to get rid of them. But then you quickly realized that even if you decided to wash with freezing waters, others did not and you inherited their pests.

I also recall that, when you are slowly starving in a cell with a dozen other persons inhaling your oxygen, it took very little to start a fight. Feelings were on edge and you took remarks as provocations, with heated discussions ending short of fist fights. By the same token, we related any and all jokes we had once learned to kill time and it was often evident that we could not

control our laughter at stories that normally would have passed for banal. I suppose that the rarefied atmosphere was responsible for these strange reactions that we could hardly control.

Finally came the day when we were, the three of us, called to appear in front of the jail's director and informed that we were to take a train to Barcelona where arrangements had been made for rooms at a hotel! Wouah! Freedom was smiling at us after three months of internment at the local Hilton!

My feet were worrying me - they had suffered from frostbite in the winter of 1940 and were itching me like crazy because of the cold. My father was then prisoner of war in Austria and the government of Vichy had issued food coupons valid only for prisoners of war. City hall would supply these coupons monthly and it was up to you to go and find the food, wherever it was available. Our local grocery did receive some such food, twice a week, like preserved ham, so I would wake up at five A.M., twice a week, walk in complete darkness to the grocery store and line up with housewives and elderly people who were there for the same purpose, find food for their husbands or their sons. At seven A.M. my mother would come to relieve me and I would go home for my breakfast, ready for me. My mother figured out that, if I was not in the first twenty persons on line, by the time your turn arrived to be served most of the sought-for food was gone and there were only cooky packages left, hardly worth while using your precious coupons on.

This way we managed, most of the time, to send two packages, one of ham, another of sardines and biscuits, and so on, which had to be taken to the Post Office for special expedition. The winter of 1940 was particularly hard and I suffered badly from frostbite and had to take warm foot bath with salt as a remedy. We purchased a pair of Dutch wooden shoes, filled them with straw, put on two pairs of socks and I went back on line. Ironically enough my father told us later on that upon receipt of the packages, the German soldiers supervising the openings of said goodies, would distribute the content like one for you, and one for me, and so on. Les vaches! ... Don't go away! ... This is the end of the worse and the beginning of a new beginning...

After traipsing from Barcelona to Madrid (visiting the Prado almost made it worth while - almost!) I was advised that I could join the armed forces in England and did not waste any time telling my family that all is well that ends well and was on my way to Gibraltar, by train, with some other hundred or more French men and boys who had spent time in other prisons or camps, like Miranda de Ebro, to mention one, where a few of my best friends went through their own ordeals.

My parents, before I retire them from my epistle until the Liberation, eventually found their way to Casablanca where they rested their weary bones in peace and appreciation of a well deserved wait for better days to come and return to the land of our ancestors.

It was then spring of 1943.

I left Gibraltar in a large convoy, with destination Greenock, Scotland. On May 28th, in the middle of the Atlantic ocean, I celebrated my 19th birthday, with the thought that, with the grace of God, I would enter manhood with a dedication to justice and liberty.

Our convoy was escorted by the aircraft carrier Ark Royal and battle cruiser King George V, and, on our flanks, four transport ships filled with 4,000 German prisoners taken in Libya, were our hostages for a safe crossing. A message, in clear, to the Admiralty had forewarned that, at the sight of the first torpedo they would sink all four vessels! The convoy did not even bother to zig-zag but went straight home. If you can call Greenock home! What an ugly port! But who cared. This was England. Sorry! Scotland.

We then took a train to London and were lodged in a former old people's home. We were then advised that those among us who had had sufficient schooling would be urged to join an Officer's Cadet Training Unit (O.C.T.U.) which would produce trained officers in one year's time through a crash program that would not allow any time for furlough.

I had, actually, in mind to join the air force and become a fighter pilot, but we were told that we would be sent for six months

training in Scotland, then six months in Canada, return for x more months of final training, if the war was not over by then. In other words we were discouraged from doing so.

Our military instruction, therefore, commenced at the "Ecole Militaire des Cadets de la France Libre", located in Ribbesford Castle, near Bewdley, along the Severn River, in the county of Worcestershire. A British captain had donated his home for the duration of the war and our quonset huts were positioned at the entrance of the property. Four rooms per quonset, two persons per room with one wood stove. The training staff was all British, while the officers were mostly from the Military School of Saint-Cyr, the French West Point. Our training went on, day after day, seven days a week. We had to absorb in one year what was normally learned in several years. We would, for instance be woken up at 1 A.M. for a 2 hour march, with full pack and rifle, and had to be back in class at 8 A.M. until noon, followed by field exercises till 6 P.M., and so on. Well, never mind! That was a lot better than the freezing courtyard in Figueras, not so long ago. We were now learning to give the "Shleus" (a derogatory name for the Germans, emanating from the name given to an African tribe) the change for their money. All while playing fair play, like decent human beings that we were, children of an old and precious civilization.

During a mortar demonstration, one of us, 20 years of age, placed the shell upside down, killing himself outright. His father came from London with his 17 year old son and told our Commandant, in the best of tradition, that his second son would take the place of his dead son. The spirit of 1914 was not dead, after all. There were people ready to make the supreme sacrifice so that other generations would survive, and, hopefully, remember.

Some English families formed an Association of the Friends of the Free French Forces and I soon received an open invitation to visit a home in Kidderminster (a few miles away) and share family life for an evening. We were all struck with the same memory that as soon as we had entered a home the hostess would offer us to take a bath. Our immediate thought was to reassure our hosts that we had taken a shower prior to our visit

and not to worry, but we realized that this institution was so cherished by the Britishers that they felt compelled to offer it to those who, while in training, had little opportunity to find such luxury. A very kind gesture, indeed, although we felt rather queasy about accepting this indulgence.

After a year of intense training we were promoted to Aspirant and six months later to Lieutenant. General de Larminat came to entice us to join the Forces of the Interior (FFI), which most of us did. Then commenced for us a very different kind of training, adapted to modern warfare and what we were to expect from this new type of enemy, beautifully trained, fierce and merciless, an elite ready to torture, rob each and everyone of us of our dignities, vilify our existence for their selfish ends, ready to kill without batting an eyelid, sometimes just for the fun of it, since they had come to believe that they were the invincible conquerors who could impose their laws on the conquered lands. Most of the atrocities we heard of and visualized later on were unknown to us at that time and it was difficult for our superiors to impart a desire to respond in appropriate fashion. What I mean is not to go to a hunt, with all the fanfares and panache of the past, but to study the fox, learn the lessons of life and death and, finally, outfox him with all the might that justice and freedom meant to the rest of the frightened world. This monster had to be crushed and annihilated for generations to come, to allow the stench to evaporate first, then, slowly, help them rebuild and regain the dignities of a once great people.

Our first destination turned out to be a lovely spot in Scotland's west coast, which could only be reached first by train, then lorry and finally by ferry. The Major in charge was the movie actor who, in the movie *Pygmalion*, played the suitor and in the first scene came out of the theater looking for a taxi for his escort and her mother. His right hand was covered with a glove, having been damaged by an explosion. As a matter of fact, Wendy Hiller, young and alluring, came to visit him during our stay. We had not seen a woman for months and to us she looked like the Queen of Sheba!

We trained here, in plain winter, in underwater demolition (wall to wall goose pimples!), silent killing (with the side of the hand

and the commando knife), silent pistol shooting and the use of the Spanish 9 millimeter pistol because it was the only one using 9 mm ammunition, and, we were told by the instructor, if we run out of bullets, go and get them from the Germans who just happen to use 9 mm as a standard size. Thanks a bunch, kiddo!

Our next destination was Manchester Ringway airport where we trained for a few days on how to swing from a tope, turn sideways, feet together and hit the dirt. That's it, we were now paratroopers and the next move, we had been told, was the balloon jump. But then we were told that time was running short (short of what we wondered) and that we would go directly to the planes! Aie! So we walked like molasses towards the plane... after you, no! after you ... well, somehow I managed to board first and consequently found myself to be the first to jump. Imagine a hole six feet or so in diameter in the center of the plane (Halifax) from which you would line up, seated on the floor, from the forward and backward sides. The first ones of each side would sit with their dangling feet over the hole, waiting for the order. The dispatcher would be standing on the side watching the lights on the panel. When the green light would go on, the dispatcher would shout "Action station" and the first two would be ready. When the red light would go on he would shout "Go, number one. Go, number two". Then would come three and four, and so on. The faster we could exit, the less chances there would be of our landing far apart from one another and the sooner the pilot could resume speed and reduce being a sitting duck for anti-aircraft or a fighter plane. So we had contests of which team would come out fastest. Our team devised a crazy system by which we would lie down, face forward, in a fan formation, our hands holding the edge of the jumping hole, four persons facing forward who would be numbered 1, 3, 5 and 7, and four persons facing backward, numbered 2, 4, 6 and 8. At the go command number one would propulse himself, head first in a dive downward, followed by number 2, then 3, etc. This position eliminated our having to slide sideways on our behind towards the exit hole and saved as much as 15 to 20 seconds. There was one drawback thought! One of us pushed himself down so hard that he hit the opposite side of the exit hole and

broke his nose, which he only realized once on the ground when someone pointed out to him that his nose was full of coagulated blood! We had no pain in reverting back to the old system. I remember telling myself that on the next jump I must remember to count how many seconds it would take to reach the ground. Somehow, the moment I jumped my concentration was such that I could never remember to count. We jumped in practice at 700 feet, but in action we actually jumped at 500 feet and I would say that it took about one minute and a half to reach the ground. It certainly was very fast but we carried a rucksack on our back with our clothes and ammunition (rifle and pistol) and a sailor's bag from our knees to our toes, weighing about 50 pounds of plastic explosive, which did help to precipitate our chute. As soon as we jumped we would release the straps holding that bag from our legs and let it hang about thirty feet at the end of a rope attached to our belt, which somewhat reduced our coming down too fast and would hit the ground before we did.

Well anyway, going back to my first jump, it just so happened that I was first to jump. I was sitting on the edge, looking down at the countryside going by and I drew the attention of my number two companion, facing me and also ready to jump, that the cows down below looked like toys! Big mistake! My buddy looked down, then quickly up, his face ashen, his eyes closed and his hands riveted to the plane. I knew that I had goofed but not how much. When the dispatcher shouted "Go, number one" I straightened up, face high, pushed myself away into the gaping hole and down I went, feeling a sudden rush of cool wind catching my whole body and in the span of two seconds my static line would snap the strings of my parachute and the canopy would open up, hopefully, otherwise you could always type a complaint in triplicate! Very funny, I know. I got hold of my forward parachute lines which could be manipulated to come down faster, more vertically (to avoid a Forest in the immediate distance for instance), or to go further away (here again to avoid an obstacle right under), and manoeuvred at will, while admiring the countryside. Upon landing I moved my body sideways, raising my knees slightly and keeping my feet together, so as to hit the ground slightly sideways so as to roll

and minimize the body impact and any possible breakage. Once down, you promptly moved to the side of the parachute in order to let the wind flatter it down and not drag you away if a strong ground wind prevailed, and start rolling the chute into a package to be carried back, whereas, in action, it would have to be buried quickly.

I noticed that the number two man had not jumped right away and when I reached the meeting point I promptly found out why. My number two man had simply frozen when I pointed out the cow down below and nothing could entice him to jump! He had to be dragged back in and number three jumped instead. The dispatcher came to see me and casually asked how I felt.

"Great", said I. "Couldn't be better. Loved it all" ... "Well then", said he "you could do us all a favor". "And what is that", said I, with a faint suspicion as to his motives. "Well, from now on you will jump last and in case of someone freezing at the edge you will have to push him down so that the others can keep on moving". I remember staring at him, not sure if I should laugh or just run away. Finally I realized the position this poor man was in and that he had a job to do, like all of us. So I enquired how I could possibly push someone whose hands are riveted to the plane. "Simple, my friend. you grab the sides of the plane with your free hands and kick him out without any further to do. You will be doing him and all of us a great favor". So be it. From then on I jumped last and had to kick several close friends with the hope that they would not gang up on me on the ground. They didn't and we remained friends.

A little incident will always remain in my memory for as long as I live. Manchester Ringway had a large hangar, away from the landing strip, where my friend Pierre and I drifted to, attracted by the blaring music coming through the large open windows.

We quickly realized that, inside, a dozen or so English girls, between 20 and 30, wearing blue overalls, were folding parachutes on long, Harrow tables, with such speed and dexterity that we stood there, transfixed for a moment and then started to make our presence known by making appreciative comments. One girl quickly turned around, stared at us for a few seconds to attract our attention and pointed to a large sign

hanging twenty feet up, reading, in large capital letters, "THE GIRL YOU ARE ABOUT TO DISTURB MAY BE FOLDING YOUR PARACHUTE!"... That did it all right. We calmly retreated. I had just learned the meaning of 'discretion is the better part of valor!' Oh well! ...

Soon we lorrried again to another location in the South, a beautiful estate where classes were conducted, sort of a review of everything we had learned in commando-parachute training, organization and combat in the underground, fast basic training of new recruits, utilization of grenades and mines in slow down and booby trap operations, guerrilla warfare with fast moving units equipped with a couple of machine guns, one light mortar and the conviction that you were not going to buy it this time!... Let's face it, we had really been trained as an elite force that knew how to operate individually or collectively at maximum speed. We learned how to operate a locomotive, a jeep, a truck (sorry! lorry!), a motorcycle, anything that moved on wheels and how to sabotage same. We could parachute, infiltrate, remove sentries silently, place pinioned mortars on trees to bombard a gasoline storage unit isolated by barbed wire, manipulate plastic explosive and detonators on railway tracks, bridge abutments, telephone poles, radio towers, you name it. Some years later I would smile when viewing Sean Connery as agent 007.

One of the basic things we quickly learned to do was to react with maximum speed (that is why I very much enjoyed playing squash racquet after the war). A sergeant demonstrated that if you jumped up and down while raising your arms overhead and spreading your legs laterally, back and forth, at maximum acceleration, you would only last 15 seconds. So what, you say. This was a lesson that, when required to exercise the maximum exertion, you had up to and no more than 15 seconds to accomplish it. For instance, you had managed to crawl to thirty feet of the pillbox (I heard you say "not me!" and I don't blame you). And now there is only wide open space to reach the 6 x 18 inch slit where one sentry is peeking from, perhaps sneering because he has seen the grass blade that you moved too quickly. You now collected your breathing, grabbed a grenade in each hand, removed the safety clips, slowly brought up one knee

under you and sprung to your target, slamming yourself against the cement pillbox, and one or two grenades are dispatched in a lateral movement that does not allow for the slightest mistake. Lights, cameras, action! 15 seconds. One grenade bounced back against the machine gun in the center? Sorry old chap, say hello to St. Pierre for me.

There you are. We had been trained like German shepherds, except that our brain was adapted to a multiple variation of actions, like a computer offering possibilities and results on the screen of your eyes. It took me years and years to mentally debrief myself and perhaps succeeded by 80%. Beware! Dangerous dog. Pet at your own risk ... If you ever see me looking over my shoulder, it is not because the shrimp boots are coming, as Red Skelton would say, but simply because I am covering my flanks. Weird? Pure instinct, my friend. Saved my life a couple of times on Locust Lane the way the young people drive these days.

We were also transported in groups some 60 to 80 miles away in a completely closed lorry and let out in an unknown area, given two days to find our way back to camp without being caught by the alerted home guard. A compass and a couple of azimuths to find your way and off you went, two men at a time. During one of these exercises we encountered our first V1. A missile shaped like a plane with wings jutting straight out and the ronron noise of a machine that you knew was not built to go far. Arriving at destination the motor would suddenly stop, followed by an eerie silence lasting some thirty seconds and "baroum", the sound of an enormous explosion that would destroy everything in a 100 foot perimeter.

Once, in a London tobacco shop, Pierre and I were buying a pack of Pall-Mall, when one of these V1 came overhead. Pierre handed the man a one pound note, saying "Sorry, I don't have ... (at that very moment the V1's noise stopped abruptly, Pierre and the man looked at each other in a pregnant poise, the explosion hit a quarter of a mile away) ...change". It was now getting to be routine. In a way it was like playing Russian roulette just for visiting London. One particular night during exercise it was just pouring cats and dogs and we were not looking forward to

sleeping in the wet woods and we jokingly decided to find lodging in town - which was strictly forbidden during exercises and subject to serious reprimand. On the edge of town we spotted a lovely villa with a typical flower garden, well attended, and decided to give it a try. The door opened and we faced a middle aged woman who categorically affirmed that they had no room for rent! Well, that was that, except that, right behind her, came a dignified, white haired gentleman in his mid-sixties, wearing a comfortable dark green velvet house robe down to his fur lined green slippers, who spoke softly, his eyes smiling, swiftly taking note of our parachute wings, Free French emblems and our very wet jumping boots. "Are you gentlemen looking for a bed for the night?" "Well, yes sir, but we did not mean to disturb you..." "Mary! Please show these good men to the guest room. It is late and I have an early meeting to attend. See you both at 0600 for breakfast. Good Night!" We quietly followed the maid with the start of suspicion that things had gone a little too well. And what about the 0600 business! Was our good host a former navy man? Well, who cared, the beds were softer than the clouds, the shower was simply divine and the clean towels were sheer luxury. We could look forward to six hours of bliss in the arms of Morpheus. What more could we wish? Blessed are the innocents! A gentle knock at the door awoke us at 5:30 A.M. and half an hour later we were directed to the dining room, looking forward to a nice cup of coffee, a piece of toast or two, and, with luck, some jams. Sitting directly across from the entrance door we suddenly spotted our host, quietly stirring his cup, harboring a timid smile and,... and,... and, ... wearing the uniform of a vice admiral of the British Navy! Holy Moses! WE were cooked for sure... "Good morning, gentlemen! I trust you had a comfortable night! Do sit down and join me in an invigorating breakfast before we all go and resume our individual duties!" ... Our throats completely dry and our minds getting ready for the firing squad, we set down as if the slightest pressure would bloom up the mine under our seat! "Help yourselves. There is more coming... I shan't ask you where you are stationed because I know better, but I hope that after the war is over you will come and visit us again. Our

countries must keep the bond of friendship that has been formed by civilized men. Good bye and good luck." We had a hard time refraining ourselves from clicking our heels to attention but his firm handshake returned us promptly to the marvelous civility of a most generous and courageous race.

On my twentieth birthday, in late May, we were in class, rehashing and reviewing again and again when a British officer interrupted our bored lecturer and called "Pierre Lefranc! Albert Blin! Marc Savigny! Please follow me." We looked at each other with that apprehension you get in your stomach when you are told to report immediately to the Principal of your school! What had we done now! We had done so many pranks lately that we wondered which one we were called for. Not to worry. We would play it cool. Arriving at the Commanding Officer's office we were promptly congratulated for being the first three men of our school to report for action. Yippee! Do you remember that feeling when you were told that you had passed your final exams? That was it! We would finally see action and account for all our learning. The game of life or death was up. Nero, salute those who are going to die ... Oh, come now. Things were not so dramatic! But what about that little pinch in the hollow of the stomach! ...

The following morning we were on our way to London and were taken to one of these townhouse blocks which housed an enormous variety of equipment and clothing from all provenance. For instance, since we were to be sent to the maquis, we were offered a civilian suit of our choice, made in France, a tie made in Brussels, a pair of shoes made in Lyon, etc., which we might need to use during our coming adventure. Of course, we were reminded that, as soldiers, should we be captured wearing civilian clothes we would be treated as spies ... Charming alternative, indeed. Well, we never wore these clothes and ended by giving them away.

But there was more unnerving news to come while we waited for our assignment. A British major made a point to let us know that underground information indicated that the Germans had penetrated the Dutch, Belgian and French maquis and that they probably knew our communication codes, knew who we were

and what was expected of us. Egads! Consequently, we were advised, since the enemy had a very good notion of our background and were, in fact the elite of the small, but determined, French army, dedicated to the extermination of the S.A., S.S. or anything they had trained to win their war of conquest, we should not expect any quarters! They would probably torture us and had ways of extracting information and then dispose of us. "For these reasons..." I interrupted by saying "Surely they could use us in Tahiti!"... and with a regretful smile on his face the officer continued "For these reasons, you will each be given a cyanide tablet which can terminate you in the matter of three seconds, and I, frankly, recommend you to use it if caught!" Mea Culpa! We all carried the tablet in the inside left pocket of our jacket and I, for one, forgot all about it until I was demobilized and had my uniform taken to the cleaners. Hopefully it was not found by a curious person who thought he had discovered a sweet.

Have you noticed that things were starting to take a turn for the worse? Well, hold on. There was more to come before we left that tight little island for la Belle France. One afternoon, while waiting at Headquarters, we overheard a conversation between two British officers who were speaking in an excellent French. Apparently one of the two had been parachuted about a week ago in the underground and was to rendez-vous in a farm with the local maquis. There wasn't a sign of life around that he could detect from his hidden position, so he decided to enter the storage house which was an extension of the main building. He entered and let his eyes adjust to the darkness, noticing a stench and lots of flies buzzing around. Then he saw the reason. Six men were hanging from their feet from meat hooks. I will skip the description of what had been done to these poor men. They were unrecognizable. But, obviously, they had not talked, otherwise the British contact would have been trapped. Instead he used his own portable radio to request immediate pick up and was "collected" promptly. We looked at each other as if saying "Is this trip necessary?" Madre de Dios! What kind of an enemy are we going to face? And we were next in line.

The three of us started to surmise what was in store for us if the ferries knew our respective code names. My code name was ASTRAGAL and right after the landing the BBC announced that "Astragal will arrive tonight" and a similar message for my two companions.

A few days before we had finally been given our mission. Destination: parachuted near the town of Le Blanc, south of the Loire river, to join a very strong communist maquis. Objective: organization of the maquis, instruction and preparation for guerrilla warfare against local enemy troops and delay at all costs the German columns that were coming to the rescue of those fighting in Normandy and particularly to form a buffer to protect the right flank of the American army that was desperately trying to break through in a southern push that would turn eastward north of the Loire. What we eventually had to fight against were two very strong divisions, one from the Toulouse area and the other from the south east, which turned out to be a tank division that obliterated everything in its way. Nevertheless, the maquis managed to mine the roads, blow up bridges, sabotage rails, ambush forward units and ladders, all in all so that these divisions arrived ten days later than should have normally taken them without any resistance. You can imagine what ten days meant to our invasion forces which were trying to maintain a front while more units and materiel were pouring in from LST's. As a comparison, it took about ten days for a whole tank division on the Russian front to reach Normandy because most of the way was in friendly territory.

Our little trio had been warned to stay close to camp and, surely enough, one afternoon which we were spending looking at the torrential rains which had been falling for days, we were advised to be ready to leave at 4 A.M. the following morning and to go to bed early. We had heard that a few days before and looking at the weather we had little confidence that this order would be followed through. But, lo and behold, the next morning the rain had stopped and only heavy, dark grey clouds were hanging very low. The real question was "Is it clear over France or are we going to be asked to jump with poor visibility?" We ate our breakfast, half heartedly, more interested in going back to bed

than boarding a plane, but the word came that it was "Go!" and we made ready. Half an hour later our jeep arrived at the airport which had tremendous activities in all directions and there was now little doubt that we were really leaving our adopted land for our own. Once in the plane, we were made to wait for three more hours, which did not add to peace of mind. There was plenty of traffic going on, in spite of the poor visibility and many delays. Eventually we crawled to a departure ramp and were next to go. Our Halifax took off and within minutes we were behind the clouds, looking up towards a blue sky and down to white cotton balls. The three of us stared at each other, our thoughts blank with apprehension. Our fate was now in the hands of God. I closed my eyes and was promptly asleep for what seemed like hours. When I woke up Pierre looked at me and said "How could you possibly sleep at a time like this?! You did not even hear the anti-aircraft explosions that shook the plane!"

Our dispatcher motioned us to move close to the jumping hole and we admired a lovely countryside passing under us, pleasant, colorful, inviting and frightfully close. We were at 500 feet off the ground, which means that we would hit the ground in about 2 minutes flat at great speed. Suddenly the green light went on and our dispatcher shouted "Action station". I positioned myself for number one, Pierre number two and Albert number three.

Half a minute passed which felt like an eternity and then the red light went on. "Go number one,... two, ... three". We were all three dangling in mid air, controlling our descending lines and taking a quick look around. The smoke markers were there on the field, showing us where we were supposed to land and two black cars under the shadows of a tree near by. Men were running towards us as we were approaching the ground and then we made individual contacts with the ground, rolled on our side, got up and started running sideways to flatten the parachute that had hit the ground in front of us. Then started a series of shake hands with the maquis men who were there to welcome us but also were immediately told to run to the waiting cars because they had had advice from town that German patrol cars had been dispatched in our direction. The "fun" had started. Arriving at

the cars we met the head of the maquis who carried a rifle and a revolver in his belt and signaled us to sit in the cars promptly. He drove the car Pierre and I were in and in one minute flat we knew we had a madman at the wheel or a former racer of Le Mans. His foot was clamped down on the accelerator, racing at 60 around sharp bends, we were holding on to everything we could. Was it better to die in a car accident or fighting the Germans who were supposedly after us? The churning car wheels were creating a curtain of dust behind us and I felt sorry for the other driver following us with Albert inside. After what seemed like an eternity we made camp and met the other maquisards in charge who promptly offered us a drink. I saw them pour what looked like water from a bottle without label, we clinked our glasses, "Vive la France!" and down the hatch. Well, my friends, I made the mistake to take a big swallow of what turned out to be home made alcohol extracted from potato peels and I coughed myself to death and was crying my eyes out ... among the considerable laughter of our newly met companions. The tough warrior from England was choking on a drink! What a miserable beginning! Taking advantage of the situation, Gerard, the maquis head told us in ferocious tones that he was not about to take orders from London or from us as to what he had been doing for the last several years. We had been warned that one of the reasons for our being sent to this maquis was that it was known to be strongly communist, well organized, and to watch for possible political take over of the area after the war was over. We, therefore, told him that essentially our mission was to give the maquis all our military expertise by training personnel in the handling of all weaponry that was coming by air from England, form guerrilla warfare units and take them into action, attack and delay any enemy convoy trying to join the battle north of the Loire, and, after the enemy was forced out of the region, see that the maquis éléments would then join the French army that was fighting with the allies to push the enemy out of France and into its own land. "They will fight when I tell them to fight and they won't join any other unit without my saying so!" well, there you are. We had been warned that it would be all uphill. The obvious implication is that he wanted to

make sure his men would remain behind, while the others were fighting on, to help him realize his political aims in that region. We would have to bide our time and take action when it was due.

In the meantime we spent our days training units and waiting for information as to the disposition of enemy forces. Soon enough we were advised of various convoys transiting from west to east and we placed various units in ambush locations that could hit with the maximum impact and give us fast withdrawal accesses.

One day we were advised that a convoy of sixteen trucks was heading our way, with machine gun equipped jeep in front and back. We did manage to eliminate the jeeps and captured eight of the drivers, the others having promptly abandoned their trucks and escaped in the countryside. I was particularly looking forward to finding badly needed ammunition and you can imagine first my amazement then my despair when I was advised that practically all the trucks contained nothing but ... dozens and dozens of cases of liquors! Would you believe! Armagnac, Cognac, Calvados, a wide variety of brandies and champagne! Well, I practically did not see my men for two days and those who attended training had a big smile on their face and birds singing in their ears.

On another occasion we were advised that a long, powerful column was on its way towards us, coming from the Atlantic coast. I arranged to have all my one hundred and twenty men available for that ambush and we had to wait until about ten thirty in the evening for the so-called column to arrive in front of our positions. I had at my disposal two machine guns, three mortars, one bazooka and a few mines which were already in place. The rest were riflemen. Our position was spread on about six hundred feet of road, behind an escarpment. I let the front part of the column go by and when we heard the noise of the boots on the asphalt we just let them have it. The engagement lasted for about half an hour, during which they suddenly started to hit us back with ack-ack guns on flat platforms which they managed to bring in to give us a taste of their gun power. I had positioned myself at the bottom of the escarpment, level with the road and was able to see in profile what was going on

on that road and could see the ack-ack tracers going right over my head, with a continuous flock-flock-flock round which our men were not used to and created some apprehension. They really thought that the kitchen sink was coming their way. The next day we heard that that very column had surrendered, with its commanding officer at its head, to the next guerrilla group without any fight. What a feather to our cap if it had happened to us! Can't win them all I guess.

The training went on daily and the fact that we were able to see actual results from our various ambushes made it that much more easy to go from one case to another since we could review the mistakes made in the last attack and the positive results achieved. The majority of our trainees were good natured paysans in whose hands the six shilling sten-guns that had been dropped from England were like small toys. Most were wearing civilian clothes and a black beret on top of their rosy cheeks. Half of them had already served in the army and it was not infrequent that they reminded me that in the French army they were entitled to a liter of red wine per day and what was I going to do about it! Half of them again were members of the communist party and most of the others had voted before with the same political conviction. Every time we got into a political argument we were reminded that things would change after the war and that a lot of blood would flow in the post war revolution in which they would have a lot to do and say! Fortunately they did not mind admitting that our presence had given them a chance to fight as real soldiers who could inflict upon the enemy more than mere scratches and that they had effectively managed to slow down the enemy's divisions on their way to the Normandy front.

An interesting incident happened after we had successfully attacked a big column coming from the west Atlantic front. The morning after the attack we revisited the location and found along the road in the bushes about a hundred English pay books that had been deliberately thrown down and they all were in the names of Indians, from India, who had been made prisoners of war during the Libyan campaign and forced to join the German army or be put to death. This was their way of letting us know

that they were part of the column we had attacked and that they did not intend to fight back if they could help it. We radioed that information to London and although they asked us to repeat that information several times, they refrained from making any comment at all. When the allied breakthrough occurred, our presence was no longer required in the area and we radioed London for instructions. We were told to wait for a plane that would pick us up and return us to London for a few days' leave.

When the plane arrived two days later, our "host" had arranged for a big banquet in our and the pilots' honor, which lasted about three hours. The chief pilot kept saying "we've got to go bloody back home or they will bloody come and look for us!" but never made an effort to get up. Maybe it was the amount of wine they had ingurgitated. After too many speeches we finally made our Farewell and were on our way to the plane. The pilots were so happy with their lunch that they felt it was the least they could do to show the local people their gratitude and started a demonstration that nearly cost us our lives, if not our lunch.

They took off and then made a U turn, aiming straight at the church steeple of the town where the banquet had taken place, namely Le Blanc, and when arriving about 1000 feet from the steeple the pilots turned the wings in a completely vertical position and passed about twenty feet from the steeple, returned to horizontal position, turned around and repeated the acrobacy on the other side of the steeple! Believe me, we were hanging on to the walls and could only yell that they were crazy to take such chances, but our words were drowned by their own Texas style shouts. Then they waved their wings back and forth in sign of friendship and headed due north for Britain. But here again, each time they saw either a cow in the field or anything moving on the road they would take aim and come down several hundred feet until we would fly just over the object of their distraction to abruptly climb back to our normal altitude. How we managed to keep our Gargantuan lunch we will never know, but we were very happy to take leave of our pilot friends as soon as we landed.

We had hardly spent two days leave that we were advised to make ready for our next assignment on the Atlantic front where

a large unit of SS troops was holding the U-boat pocket of St. Nazaire. Not a bagatelle, surely, to confront the best of the German army. Actually, when I say best, I mean the toughest and die hard men who would give no quarters as we had repeatedly been warned. For that very reason we found out later on that they had allowed contingents of the regular Wehrmacht to go because they could not be trusted to fight to the end, whereas the SS would.

This time we, the three Mousquetaires, were landed near the front and after meeting the commanding officer of the region were taken by jeeps directly to the front where we took immediate command of local units and placed in the lines, replacing other units which deserved a rest.

Our orders were mainly to form a tight cordon that would keep these elite troops from attacking the American army from the back and although we and they effected a few sorties, there was no serious engagement, except for one night when the region experienced a substantial storm with high winds and heavy rains, the enemy decided to show us a few tricks and attack us, in the false security of our shelters, and it was a free for all for one hour that we will never forget. We managed to reorganize and repulse them, but not before they inflicted serious casualties in our ranks. Live and learn.

An amusing experience occurred one morning when I was woken up by machine gun fire at 4 A.M. Rushing from my underground shelter I found the man who had fired at "something that moved" but in the early dawn we could not see anything and after a half hour wait we cautiously proceeded forward as the daylight improved. One hundred feet further we discovered a huge boar which had been killed by one bullet! I ordered the animal brought back to our lines where the cook prepared for a feast. I telephoned the colonel in charge of the area and invited him to share our find the next day and he promised he would join us with his female secretary and his assistant, who happened to have come out from my military school, but a promotion earlier. I then instructed our cook to have the meat presented on a large platter and to carefully separate the boar's genitals which would be offered to the

Colonel's assistant. All went well during our lunch and I inquired from the Colonel as to how he had found the meat. "Excellent", said he and so did his secretary. Then we asked his assistant who was somewhat frowning and he said that he thought it was rather tough and would not care for a second helping. I felt compelled, then, to inform him that since he had chosen the boar's genitals he might wish now to try another piece which undoubtedly would be tender. His face became completely red and the secretary at his side almost fainted. Only the Colonel appreciated the joke, as well as my own staff, but I sometimes think I lost a friend that day. When this fighting interlude ended, we were dispatched to the First French Army which had now entered Germany along with the allied armies and found several of our promotion's friends already very actively involved in missions that would raise the hairs on your head. It was commonplace for us to be parachuted behind the German lines with about fifty pounds of plastic used to blow up railroad tracks, bridges, telephone poles, radio stations, gasoline depots, etc., anything that would disrupt the Germans' communications and would create havoc amongst their midst.

Obviously it wasn't just fun to be sent to a country where you could not speak or read the language, dressed in an allied uniform which would be spotted immediately, carry your mission(s) and come back, completely on your own, first through the German lines, secondly, and far more dangerously, through the Allied lines that shot at anything that moved and asked questions later. It often meant your having to live on carrots after your limited supply of food had exhausted itself, travel by night and hide by day if necessary until you had a chance to rejoin your lines.

I could easily narrate many cases that would give you goose pimples, but one case comes to mind which will suffice. The man in question was from our promotion and was born in Madagascar which he left by boat to join the Free French Forces in England, not a small feat in itself. As a native he had developed great running facility and was our football star during inter-allied games back at our military school and we all were in awe of his physical prowess.

He was ordered one day to be parachuted near Ulm, a large city, to destroy a railroad junction for which he was to carry one hundred pounds of plastic to do the job, double the normal amount. He was sent to a British airfield to be boarded on a Halifax with a British crew for a night jump. Arriving near the target the plane was caught by a dozen projectors, seven hundred feet in the air, but the pilot nevertheless gave the order to jump and our friend, unaware jumped to what should normally have been in death. As soon as his parachute opened he was caught by several projectors that followed his descent while the anti-aircraft were sending everything they had towards him and the sirens were chorusing the show. He described it later on as a living nightmare, with lights that were blinding him and could not figure out where he was going to land, if at all, with a hundred pounds of plastic on his legs. Crazy enough it was this extra weight that saved his life because he recalled coming down like a ton of bricks and being missed by the roaring explosions around him. He finally landed about three miles from his objective and realized that his life depended, now, on his ability to make himself scarce. Goodbye the objective, goodbye plastic and run, man, run for your life. He remembers getting his compass, his bearings, leaving the chute on the ground instead of burying it, the normal practice, and taking off at full speed. It took him two days of running to get through enemy lines and to find a French Company shooting at him like a Clay pigeon, in spite of his raised arms and his shouts of "camarade" which was the wrong word to use in this case because it was the only word that a defecting German soldier would use. After being roughed up he was finally brought to the commanding officer who ordered radio inquiry from his unit which immediately cleared him.

As you can guess, he reported the incident and the British pilot was immediately grounded and reduced in rank for serious misjudgement. He had panicked and wanted to get out of the area as soon as he could. Then the three of us were ordered to report to the headquarters of General de Lattre de Tassigny, the supreme commanding officer of the French armies, which were located in an enormous mansion on Lake Constance, near the

town of Constance. You can imagine what a change of pace it was for us and we did not quite know what we had done to deserve such an obvious break. We immediately met de Lattre who wanted us as liaison officers because there was a shortage of same. Which, we found out promptly, meant that we were to replace those fallen in action! Not quite the break we had expected. Oh well...

Being continuously exposed to de Lattre we found in him a very prestigious commander who wanted to carve himself a glorious name as well as give back to the French armies a sense of pride and achievement for doing more than their share of the battle. He succeeded in doing so but at the expense of terrible casualties and complete disregard of human life. More often than not his orders were to 'take that hill and don't come back'. Consequently he was adored by few and hated by many. Strangely enough he was also very vain. He was known among the war correspondents for issuing passes difficult to secure if you took the precaution to bring him a new photo of himself.

A few more months of fighting, deeper and deeper into Germany and, soon enough, our action came to an end and it was time to head back home. On April 20th, 1945, on a beautifully clear day, we were ready to leave our quarters when we heard someone crying next door and decided to investigate. Our blond tressed German maid was tearing her heart out while making the beds and big tears were coming clown her rosy cheeks. Surely something terribly serious had happened and we tried, with our very limited German, to find out why she was crying. "Well," she said, with a voice choked by tears, "today is Hitler's birthday... and it is always a beautiful day on his birthday ... and last year everything was so pretty... and now ... !" We had a hard time to control our laughter. Yes, dear fräulein, something serious had happened indeed. The forces of aggression had been repulsed to their own self-made abyss, swallowed by their own murderous greed and blasphemy, and it was time, again, to return to a world of decency and better humanity, for having suffered so much.

I had found, in a locked garage, a beautiful Hanomag car, with four exhaust cylinders on each side of the motor, shining

beautifully; there was a partition behind the driver's seat to which was attached, on the inside, a horizontal bar for the passenger to stand up in this convertible and hold on to the bar. It was very obvious that this car belonged to a big wig in the government and when we tried to find the owner there was a complete denial of having even seen this car. So, there I was, the proud owner of a famous car which I would return to France with in a few weeks. But! yes, alas, the word reached my local commanding officer who made no bones about his driving a jeep and that the Hanomag would definitely be more in accordance with his rank than mine. Goodbye Hanomag... So we came back to France in a jeep which had to be returned to a Paris depot!

For a few months we worked for the Ministry of Information and then were assigned, once again, to the D.G.E.R., an organization somewhat similar to the American C.I.A. which worked closely with General de Gaulle.

Then came time, in September, to be demobilized or enlist for Viet Nam. We volunteered for Nam and for weeks nothing happened, much to our surprise. After making strenuous inquiries we were advised that the word from "upstairs", meaning de Gaulle, no less, was that we were the elite of the French army and were needed, alive, after the war and that our request was denied. How about that! We subsequently learned that the majority of French troops in Nam were the Foreign Legion, formed by war veterans who did not hesitate to dispose of young officers when they felt that the wrong order had been given!

We then decided to apply for demobilization and here again our request was denied by the general in charge because we had been promoted through a military school and were to be considered as soldiers for life. We requested to see this general, who, we had found out, had recently put his uniform back on after doing nothing for the cause. Our visit was most unpleasant and we were told to accept orders, especially when they came directly from a general. Well, that was a little too much for us to swallow coming from him and I could not help replying that we had been fighting from England to Germany and would not be told by a mothball officer whom to take orders from... "Young

man," said the general, "you will be court martialed for this impertinent reply". It finally required to receive a word from "upstairs", again, to squash the matter in the bud. We were finally demobilized and found employment in civilian life. Pierre was offered to be the government representative in Madagascar, where he contracted malaria for his good efforts; Albert went back to his father's wool factorie !; I found employment in a tanker brokerage firm with London parenthood.

I was not to wear my uniform again with the exception of one time, in 1947, when several unions went on strike in France, and the rest of the unions, urged by the communist party, decided to join the strike, which meant that the whole country went on strike. There was no transportation of any kind working (either buses, or trains, domestic air or subways), all telephones were disrupted, all the post offices were closed, the frontiers' customs let anybody go through without checking. In a matter of hours the country went dead. At 8 P.M. that night the radio announced that the military was ordering all reserve officers from the Free French Forces to report immediately, in full battle dress, to the assigned destinations. I was told to report at 0400, yes, 4 A.M., to the department store of Rochechouart, in the center of Paris, to take over some two hundred soldiers who would arrive at that time. The department store had been begun just before the start of hostilities and four cement floors had been built to be left unfinished until the end of the war due to lack of funds. It had been occupied first by French troops, then German troops, American troops and now by French troops again. The troops arrived by military trucks and they had traveled during the night from 200 miles South. The reason was that the government did not trust troops from the Paris area, which were mostly communistic, and had to bring in troops from several hundred kilometers away in the hope that they could count on them in case of serious trouble. Around 6 A.M. I ordered them to make a big circle around me and started to tell them what had happened, that the unions were threatening to destroy the French economy by staging unauthorized strikes and were hoping to force the

French government out, which, then, meant to force de Gaulle to resign.

And as I was telling them that things might get out of hand and that there might even be some shooting in the streets, a voice from the crowd said, loud and clear, "You will be the first to go down!" I could feel the blood rushing to my neck and I turned in the direction of the voice while unbuttoning my pistol's holster, staring at a multitude of faces waiting for my reaction. "Would the perrot who spoke move forward!" This was said not as a request but as a demand. Nobody moved. "I see that we are dealing with a coward who hides behind others' back. He probably will also shoot you in the back, so watch him closely." The day passed without any orders and at the end of the day the men were returned home when the strikes were settled. I remember deciding there and then that I would not stay in a country that had allowed its citizenry to reach such a low level of loyalty that a fourth of the population had endorsed a politic emanating from a Foreign eastern country and that among those there were some willing to shoot their own in the back to create havoc and terror in the ranks.

Did I ever have any regrets? The best way for me to answer is to quote the famous writer Victor Hugo who said "I wish I were a foreigner so that I might adore France!" I have managed to visit my parents almost once a year and got renewed exposure to the bored nonchalance of customs officials, the tolerating smile of the French stewardesses (until they realized that you spoke fluent French, then they gave you a real smile), the apathetic bureaucracy that reigns over anything and everything you might try to venture into, the tendency to denigrate whatever and whoever is American, all these things have served to make me realize that I made the right move. If I wish to visit the lovely Dordogne or the chateaux country, well I just do so and I will enjoy myself, but I have always been happy to come back home. And home is here, in the Bronxville community where I live with my family.

Which reminds me of one last story. Several years ago while I was in Paris I had lunch with a friend who then dropped me at the Etoile so that I could walk to visit another friend living near

by. There are eight large avenues springing from that point and it was always a very dangerous thing to cross at the intersection because there always was a tremendous traffic and no traffic lights. This time I was filling my pipe and distractedly crossed between the parallel rails (called *clous*), undisturbed by any traffic. Having reached the center there was a sudden surge of traffic coming from my right and I found myself pinned right there and then, hoping for the best. I then realized that there now was a traffic light system in the very center of the avenue, standing about three feet from the ground. This was entirely new to me. And then I overheard a voice, coming from the sidewalk, saying, very slowly, loud and clear, "Monsieur l'étranger (the foreigner), in this country one must respect the red light!"

I looked up and saw a gendarme in blue uniform, with a beaming smile, surrounded by a sympathetic crowd which was chuckling at the idea that he had caught one in "flagrant deli", (in the act). How did he realize that he was dealing with a foreigner? Well, very simple, I was wearing a wool plaid jacket, grey flannel gloves, sunglasses on, and, to complete the picture, a camera hanging from my shoulder. But with the pipe I could have been a Britisher. I quickly managed to cross over and facing the gendarme I said, in French, after having removed my sunglasses and was staring him in the eyes, "Monsieur l'agent! De quel pays me croyait vous d'être?" (From what country do you think I am?). From the crowd came a voice saying, "Oh, oh! This one speaks good French!" The gendarme's face became pale, in spite of the 80 degree heatwave Paris was experiencing, and he stuttered back, "Well, you see, you were crossing..." "No, no, Monsieur l'agent! I am asking if you know from which country I come?" All the faces in the crowd had an air of expectancy and it was obvious they were going to wait for the finish. The gendarme removed his kepi, wiping the inside with his handkerchief, then wiping the inside of his shirt's collar, looking away as if the subject was closed and obviously wishing I would go on my way. Then I came out with the 'coup-de-grace' by saying, loud and clear, so that the audience would not miss a word, "You see, Monsieur l'agent, in the country I come from, which is across the ocean, we allow the "flics" (derogatory word

for policeman) to take off their ties when the weather is that hot! Have a good day." The undisguised laughter of the crowd made me feel that I had won a great victory. I walked away, refilling my pipe again, then turned around to see the gendarme, twenty feet away, looking at me. His immediate reaction was to salute but caught himself, in complete embarrassment and turned away, as if he had been caught with his finger in his nose. It was really a Keystone top situation and I have told that story a thousand times with great success.

In the next chapter I shall give you my candid impressions of a few persons, like de Gaulle, Petain, Giraud, Darlan.

The following are thoughts and comments on events and personalities.

What had happened to France's military power which for fourteen centuries had been second nature to France?

Principal artisans of the victory of 1918, we had led the others toward it. Perhaps the reason lies in the fact that forty four years had elapsed since the cruel defeat of 1870, and that France had had a chance to renew its blood, and, when facing a second German calamity, was capable of placing at the head of the nation men of great character and vision, capable of inspiring the firm desire of unity and recover her prestige. Women lifted their children, not just to see the parades of men leaving for the front, but to remind the "poilu" that he had children to fight for and protect from another invasion which, eventually, took two million lives.

When it happened for the third time, twenty one years later, in 1939, the call to arms was made mostly to men who had survived world war one, and seen a sequence of uninspiring governments, incapable of coming out from under their own morass and unable to prepare itself to adequately defend its territory from a rising power that was already devouring other feeble nations one after the other. This time the wives and mothers told their enlisted husbands and or sons that 1914-1918 had been enough, "let the others do it!" Men, already in awe of the menacing monster at the eastern frontiers, were encouraged to stay home and report sick, rather than report for duty. The

country was sick with individualism at its highest degree, predisposed to desertion and "I don't care-ism", as long as you "leave me alone and ask the next guy."

To take a deeper look at France's decline one has to go back to the beginning of the last century, quite recent in historical terms, when France was the most populous country in Europe, with about 18 million people, more than the entire population of Russia, and was the strongest and richest in the world, and her influence unequaled. By 1812 Napoleon had lost one million men, the flower of France. Disastrous causes combined to drive her from this dominant position and to start her down a slope where each generation saw her stumble lower. When the economic capacity of the great nations depended on coal and petroleum, France had virtually none. During the same period population doubled in England, tripled in Germany, quadrupled in Russia, decupled in America. France remained stationary. This physical decline went hand in hand with a moral depression that had followed Napoleon's disasters, inflicted by the might of Russia and her German satellites which had submerged the French beneath such waves of humiliation that henceforth they were to doubt themselves. The 1918 victory temporarily revived their faith but it cost so dear and bore fruits so bitter that such hopes died at once under the shock of 1940. After numerous regimes since 1789 and inextinguishable divisions, France was now about to unite behind the voice that called her children to arm and march to her liberation. It took a second world war cataclysm to revive the somnolent spirit of a great nation. In the meantime two million men were in captivity and mothers were clutching their young sons against their breasts in the hope that they could be convinced to stay out, no matter what. This was the mentality of a tired blood that desperately needed rejuvenation. In June 1940 France's sword was at its shortest. From the abyss of submission rose a fierce struggle for her liberation, a refusal to accept military defeat and the subjugation of the state, working towards a reversal that would bring our forces to take an important and brilliant share in the victory, in spite of two million combatants in enemies' hands and a "legal"

government that persisted in punishing those ready to continue the fight.

We could reform an army with men who were in Africa but the number of active military men and of reserves ready to serve as officers and specialists was very low. From France came 15,000 young men, from Corsica 13,000 soldiers, and 12,000 boys, like myself, who escaped from France through Spain, or who came from Africa, Madagascar and even from as far as Tahiti, and 6,000 women and girls, who entered the service. By the spring of 1944, all in all, we could put into the field a campaign army of 230,000 men, 150,000 sovereign forces, a fleet of 320,000 tons manned by 50,000 sailors, 1,200,000 tons of cargo vessels, an air force of 500 fighting planes manned by 30,000 men.

The maquis forces regenerated themselves in direct ratio of avoiding being forced to labor service which had already mobilized 500,000 young men, either on the Atlantic wall or in German factories.

A tally of our human losses since the beginning of the hostilities revealed more than 635,000 men had died as a result of enemy action and 585,000 had become invalids, a very high percentage in relation to the total population.

Pétain.

This Marechal of France had accepted the enslavement of France, practiced an official collaboration with the invader and ordered armed opposition to the French and Allied soldiers of the liberation, while not permitting his countrymen to fire on the Germans. By his order, announcements were placarded all over France advising that any person leaving France without prior approval would be automatically condemned to death. So this would have been our sort if we had been caught when we escaped into Spain. Imagine, being condemned to death for wanting to fight for your country, by the man who once was my father's commanding officer at Verdun, where he spent his twentieth birthday in 1917. Not even his last advice to the nation, at the time of the liberation, did he condemn the armistice or cry "Rise against the enemy!"

Giraud.

This great leader had not been able in 1940 to win success at the head of the French Seventh Army. After a remarkable escape from a French fortress, a chance was offered him to join the resistance and eventually play a major part in the re-entry of North Africa into the war, provided that he acted without equivocation in reference to Vichy. It was to be expected that in the battle of liberation he should assume command of the reunited French Army. But he did not even bother to express some tribute to the resistance people who for two years had sustained our flag before the enemy.

Giraud thought that the problem of national unity would be re-established by the very fact that it would be identified with the military hierarchy in which he would be in complete command. De Gaulle clearly saw in this oversimplified notion a source of national division and Foreign interventions which did result in the Allies being tempted to take every advantage of it. Since the majority of the French resistance would certainly not accept a central authority founded solely on the success of a career general, it is to be wondered why the Allies were trying to employ Giraud in the accomplishment of settling North Africa before proceeding to any further invasions. The simple fact was that Giraud was uniquely a military man and he was quite happy to be the Allies' man and acquiesce to whatever they wanted from him as long as he would be given complete command of the French armed forces, which, he believed, would give him complete power, military, as well as political. But the Allies soon realized that even Giraud could not quell French opposition to the landing in North Africa. Eisenhower came to an agreement with Admiral Darlan, who, on November 10, ordered the cesse fire. At this moment General Clark announced, in conquering tones, that "all civil and military authorities would be maintained in their present functions". This led to Darlan becoming High Commissioner for North Africa, Giraud being named commander-in-chief of the troops. On November 15 Darlan announced these measures and proclaimed that they had been taken "in the name of Marshal Petain!"

Ironically enough, Petain repudiated these measures, declaring that Darlan had betrayed his mission and reiterating his order to oppose the Anglo-American forces and to leave the way open to the Axis armies. Roosevelt himself gave orders to Clark to recognize the "High Commissioner", whereas, for two years, he had opposed General de Gaulle and entered upon negotiations that led to Darlan governing and commanding, provided that he gave satisfaction to his Anglo-American backers. What they all refused to realize is that, if de Gaulle were made to stand aside, the reactions of the people, condemning both the regime of defeat and that of collaboration, in the depths of their suffering, would be eventually to choose the Communist ideology.

After Darlan's assassination, it was again suggested that Giraud be given political preponderance and the military command. The National Committee prepared a document which, in reality, would keep France from having a government until the end of the war and enabling the authority of the commander-in-chief - that is, the pawn of the Allies - to be exercised without limits.

Another clear case of personal humiliation was delivered by Eisenhower, not as his own instigation, when the National Council was handed a request to have de Gaulle and Giraud attend a meeting with Eisenhower, relative to the command and the organization of the French armed forces. Or Gaulle announced, upon arrival, that he was there in his capacity as President of the French Government. Eisenhower then declared that he was preparing a very important operation soon to be launched against Italy and that, for security reasons, it was essential that the present organizations of the French command in North Africa undergo no change and that Giraud must remain in office with all his present powers and keep control of the disposition of troops, communications, ports and air fields, and be the only one to deal with Eisenhower on all military subjects in North Africa! Also that if these conditions were not fulfilled the Allies would not continue arm shipments to the French forces! To this official slap de Gaulle replied that Eisenhower was asking for a promise he would not give, for the organization of the French command was the province of the French Government, not theirs. He also reminded Eisenhower that

during the last war, France had played a role analogous to that which the United States was playing now in regard to furnishing arms to several Allies, including the United States which then fired only French cannons, drove only French trucks, flew only French planes, without France demanding of the United States that they appoint this or that leader or institute this or that political system. It is a matter of record that Eisenhower was silent, a clearly implied explanation that he was only a messenger. At that time Eisenhower was mostly a soldier. By nature and profession, action seemed natural, immediate and simple. Abruptly invested with an extraordinarily complex role, he had become commander-in-chief of a colossal coalition where national susceptibilities and ambitions erupted in the tried and tested system of the units under his orders.

Fortunately for the U.S. Dwight Eisenhower discovered in himself the necessary patience and prudence to deal with these problems, but also an attraction toward the wider horizons that history opened before his career.

It was little wonder, in view of the above, that this man, Charles de Gaulle, who had answered the call to honor, would be found by his Allies as rigid and solemn, arrogant and undiplomatic. Robert Murphy, himself, had reported to Washington after the North African landing that, in his estimation, there were only ten percent "Gaullists" around in Algiers. However, on July 14, Bastille Day, hearing de Gaulle's speech to the population of Algiers, apparently impressed, Murphy went over to the platform to pat' de Gaulle his compliments and remarked, "What an enormous crowd!". To which de Gaulle replied, "Those are the ten percent Gaullists that you reckoned on in Algiers!"

No longer able to rely on Giraud to counterpoise de Gaulle, the Allies made a quiet attempt to bring former French President Lebrun to a hiding place in Italy, then to North Africa and, through him, control the political destiny of France. Lebrun turned down the proposition. Shortly afterward Hitler got vent of the project, had Lebrun arrested by the Gestapo and transferred to Germany forced to remain there a year.

Another example of very poor handling of de Gaulle occurred a few days before the landing in Normandy when Churchill

suggested to de Gaulle that an arrangement be made "as to our co-operation in France", then have de Gaulle go to America to propose it to Roosevelt who might accept it! De Gaulle refused to submit his candidacy to Roosevelt for the authority in France because the French government already existed. Churchill and de Gaulle then went to see Eisenhower at his Headquarters and de Gaulle was presented with a typewritten document made ready eight days prior and already printed that was to be Eisenhower's proclamation to the peoples of Western Europe, particularly the French people, urging the latter to "carry out his orders", declaring that once France was liberated "the French themselves would choose their representatives and their government", thus completely ignoring the French authority which for years had aroused and directed the war effort of the people of France and had now placed under Eisenhower's command a great part of the French army. The ultimate slap had been delivered, never to be forgotten or forgiven by a man who had given himself to his country and was about to lead her to its destiny.

Charles de Gaulle.

I was first to meet him in Gibraltar, when we were waiting on a British vessel for transportation to England. Most of the Frenchmen who were present had come through one of several Spanish prison camps. He made a short speech, explaining that he was on his way from England to Algiers and affirm his authority over the North African territory and told us how much France depended on us for its ultimate victory and recovery.

I remember then that he was my size, six feet four inches, but that he had such a way of looking at you that you felt small compared to him, not realizing that his scrutiny of the individual in front of him was already due to his bad sight.

He was born in Lille, a few miles from Roubaix where I was born, and he became an officer of the military school of St. Cyr, where, already they were calling him the "great asparagus" for his lanky size. In the mid-thirties he wrote a short book on the revolutionary use of tanks in warfare and the Germans later admitted that they had learned a great deal about blitzkrieg from

it. His tank battalion was the only one that gave the Germans a few lessons before being forced to retreat on account of overwhelming superiority in number.

Having been called to join the French government, he desperately tried to have it removed to North Africa where the fight could continue.

Before leaving for England to see Churchill, he paid a visit to General Weygand, the French Commander-in-Chief, who was resigned to defeat and resolved upon an armistice. He went so far as saying that once they had crossed the Seine and the Marne rivers that this was the end. When de Gaulle asked about fighting from North Africa with the rest of the world, Weygand laughed, saying "Fighting from North Africa! But that is childish! As for the world, when I have been beaten here, England won't wait a week before negotiating with the Reich."

Nevertheless, de Gaulle tried, again and again, to convince the Premier, Paul Reynaud, to commit the government to continue the fighting in North Africa, but in vain, for the Premier continuously vacillated, pushed towards an armistice by Petain, Darlan and Weygand.

De Gaulle then went to England to see Churchill and convinced him to withdraw his consent, in principle, to France's asking Germany what would be the terms of an armistice and also to attempt forming an "Entente Cordiale" whereby England and France would fuse their administrations, pool their resources and losses, in short a complete linking of their respective destinies. But it was too late, Reynaud had already resigned, and President Lebrun had asked Marshal Petain to form a government. On June 17 de Gaulle flew back to London, determined to go on with the war, to save the nation and the state. He realized only too well that it would be the end of honor, unity, and independence if it were to be admitted that, in this world war, only France had capitulated and that she had let the matter rest there. It was essential to bring back into the war not merely some Frenchmen, but France.

Starting from scratch, he sent on June 18, 1940, his appeal to the French to join him in England. He was 49 years old. When I heard his message on the radio I had just turned 16. My father,

unknown to us, was on his way to Dunkirk. The Germans had entered Paris a few days before.

As long as the armistice was not in force de Gaulle tried to urge General Weygand to take the lead in keeping the French government to go on fighting. The reply was a dispatch passed on by the French Embassy in London ordering de Gaulle to surrender himself prisoner in a prison in Toulouse, first, for a month's prison, then, as ordered by Weygand, to be condemned to death!

At that time, the governments of the countries at war with the Axis did recall their representatives from France. But there remained in London a consul who was in communication with Metropolitan France, while the Canadian consul-general remained accredited to the Marshal and the Union of South Africa left its representative there. Soon an imposing diplomatic corps assembled at Vichy around the papal nuncio, the Soviet ambassador and then Admiral Leahy, the United States ambassador. None of this gave encouragement to those whose first impulse might have driven them towards the Cross of Lorraine. Thus, among the French as within the other nations, the immense convergence of fear, interest, and despair caused a universal surrender in regard to France. Since no one anywhere acted as if he still believed in France's independence, pride, and greatness, de Gaulle's mission seemed to him, all of a sudden, clear and terrible. In the worst moment of France's history it was for him to assume the burden of France. You can now easily understand why so many people associated him with the famous Joan of Arc who had taken no less a burden on her frail shoulders. At least she had the armies of the French defenders of cities against the British aggression, and many well-known knights who were willing to fight for the crown. De Gaulle had a mere handful of well-meaning men powerless to storm the machinery of the French hierarchy still in London. For, in fact, it turned out that there were some military elements in England, such as units of the Alpine Light Division, at least ten thousand sailors manning over one hundred thousand tons of shipping which had escaped from French ports and several thousand soldiers who had been wounded in Belgium and brought to

hospitals in England. But the French military missions had organized the command of all these elements in view of keeping them under the orders of Vichy and preparing their general repatriation. The British did little to help rally these troops under de Gaulle since from one day to the other they expected the German offensive and perhaps invasion and, furthermore, by professional decorum and habit, they respected the normal order of things, namely Vichy and its missions. For these reasons they committed, in my opinion, a great mistake by distributing a leaflet advising members of the French forces that they could choose between repatriation, joining General de Gaulle, or serving in His Majesty's forces. A great many of them, tired of fighting, with their families already under the occupation, decided to return home.

De Gaulle then visited encamped French troops and managed to rally units of the Foreign Legion and of the Light Mountain Division, in spite of the fact that, after he left, two British colonels, sent by the War Office, visited the camp and literally told the troops, "You are perfectly free to serve under General de Gaulle, but it is our duty to point out to you, speaking as man to man, that if you so decide you will be rebels against your own government ... !!

Nevertheless a slow but steady stream of volunteers arrived every day, either through Spain, or by ship and more troops and sailors joined de Gaulle from various parts of the world.

Then a lamentable event occurred to considerably slow the Stream. On July 3 the British Mediterranean fleet had attacked the French squadron at anchor at Mers-el-Kebir. At the same time de Gaulle was advised that the British had occupied by surprise the French warships which had taken refuge in British ports and had taken ashore and interned their officers and crews. On the 10th, British aircraft torpedoed the battleship Richelieu at anchor in Dakar roads. All of this was presented as a sort of naval victory which was more than unfortunate. Consequently, many military or civilian who were preparing to join turned on their heels then. Also the attitude adopted by the authorities in the French Empire changed for the most part from hesitation to

opposition, with grave consequences for the rallying of the African territories.

At the end of July the number of effectives was barely seven thousand. By then the British government, for practical reasons as well as for the rights and obligations of those sympathetic Fighting French, took the decision on June 28 to recognize de Gaulle publicly as "leader of the Free French."

In this capacity de Gaulle secured a guarantee that Great Britain would guarantee the re-establishment of the frontiers of Metropolitan France and of the French Empire and insisted that the expenses relating to the forces of Free France would be repaid one day (which was done before the end of the war), account being taken of what was furnished in return. Now the whole world knew that a new beginning of Franco-British solidarity had been made in spite of everything.

De Gaulle then concentrated his efforts towards the United States in spite of the events of Dakar and, later on, St. Pierre and Miquelon. But since the U.S.A. was asking for the right to use the airport at Pointe-Noire for her heavy bombers, there was a ground for mutual agreement although the Free French government was not yet recognized. This made it difficult for de Gaulle to have the allies agree to use the Free French forces in the active battlefields.

But then, in June 1941, Hitler invaded Russia and the situation changed completely. In four months the three German groups of armies - von Leeb, von Bock and von Runstedt - had penetrated to the heart of the Russian lands to be finally stopped round about Moscow by Zhukov. Leningrad had not fallen. Hitler had made the fatal mistake of not grouping all his mechanized forces solely in the direction of the Soviet capital.

Since de Gaulle had not succeeded at first to get the British to agree to use, in Libya, two light divisions formed in the Levant, he gave the order to transfer one of them to the Caucasus, pleasing the Russians to no end. The British quickly changed their minds and agreed to have all the French troops for the battle against Rommel. De Gaulle then sent to Russia the Normandie fighter group which did magnificent service and was the only western fighting force on the eastern front. Of course,

this is not counting the "Division Azul" sent by Franco to fight with the Germans against Russia. In December de Gaulle placed under the Allied Command the 1st and 2nd French Divisions, the first being assigned to Bir Hakeim, the second in reserve, plus a Company of parachutists. In all, 12,000 fighting men, or about a fifth of the total strength which the Allies were putting into action simultaneously. The Alsace fighter group and the Lorraine bomber group had been fighting in the skies of Cyrenaica since October. On May 27 Rommel took the offensive. Bir Hakeim was attacked first.

The drama was being enacted round about the polygon of sixteen square kilometers field held by General Koenig and his men. If those 5500 fighting men, who had come of their own free will from France, Africa, the Levant, and the Pacific, were to undergo a sad reverse, our cause would be indeed compromised. On the contrary if they achieved some striking feat of arms, then the future was ours.

On June 7 the investment of Bir Hakeim was complete. The 90th German Division and the Italian Trieste Division, supported by about twenty batteries and hundreds of tanks, were ready to start the assault. A spokesman for the enemy asked them to surrender, followed by another request, this time in writing from Rommel's own pen, "on pain of being annihilated like the British brigades at Got-el-Skarab". Two days later another officer asked them to lay down their arms and was answered by the French artillery.

Day after day the assaults came, under excessive heat, with the nights used to putting the positions in order again. "Hold out for six days longer", asked the Allied Command. Then for another 2 days. The reason was that the 8th Army had taken such blows that Rommel might take the opportunity of their disarray to rush on towards Egypt. But first he had to deal with the resistance at his rear and Bir-Hakeim had become his chief anxiety and main objective.

After fourteen days of fighting, the 1st Light Division managed to disengage itself with about 4 000 men, leaving 1,109 officers and men on the field. But they had inflicted three times the losses they had suffered.

The Berlin radio announced that all French prisoners would be executed since they do not belong to a regular army. An hour later de Gaulle announced on the BBC radio that if the German army were to dishonour itself to kill French soldiers he would find himself obliged to inflict the same fate to the German prisoners who had fallen in the hands of his troops. Berlin reacted immediately to announce that the French troops would be treated as soldiers...

Shortly afterwards Tobruk fell, surrendering 33 000 British soldiers. The road to Cairo was open, but Rommel had overstretched his line of communications as well as his supplies. He decided to suspend his advance. The Allied Command took position at El Alamein and would soon launch their counterattack that would eventually drive Rommel out of North Africa.

On November 7th, 1942 the Allies landed in North West Africa. Churchill informed de Gaulle that the British troops were serving in a purely accessory capacity and that all the responsibilities were in the hands of the United States, and that now the Americans were demanding that the Free French be left out. However, General Giraud had been taken onto a British submarine off the Cote d'Azur and brought to Gibraltar, to take command of the French troops in North Africa at the instigation of the Americans. In the meantime the French forces under the command of Vichy were putting up a vigorous resistance, especially at Casablanca.

De Gaulle expressed his astonishment to the British that the Americans were not also including the invasion of Tunisia where undoubtedly the Germans would rush to, but that, after all, he had not been consulted. On November 9 the Germans landed their paratroopers near El Alaouina, Tunisia, without firing a shot because Vichy had given instructions to permit them to land.

Fortunately General Juin convinced Admiral Darlan, who took orders from Vichy, to order a cease-fire with the Allies and to order the general in command of Tunisia to be in a position to open fire on the Germans. On the morning of November 11, hostilities between the French and the Allies ceased. It had cost

three thousand lives on each side and extensive losses of war vessels and planes. Who knows whether this unnecessary fighting might have been avoided if the American government had backed up de Gaulle right away. The irony of it all is that General Clark then sanctified Darlan's position and that the latter became High Commissioner for North Africa "in the name of Marshal Petain." What a way to fight a war! To add insult to injury, Petain condemned the ceasefire, declaring that Darlan had betrayed his mission and published a letter that Giraud had written him promising on his honor as a soldier never to do anything that would contradict Petain's or Laval's policies...

In the meantime the German forces overflowed the "free" zone and Vichy forbade any opposition to them. Only the fleet at Toulon was still free, but not for long. Unable to flee and unwilling to surrender they scuttled the fleet to the bottom.

De Gaulle then told the British Government that "if France one day discovers that because of the British and the Americans her liberation consists of Darlan, you can perhaps win the war from the military point of view but you will lose it morally, and ultimately there will be only one victor: Stalin."

Then de Gaulle was invited to go to Anfa, in Morocco, where Churchill and Roosevelt were to meet. He accepted the opportunity to meet the two world leaders.

At his first meeting with Churchill, the Prime Minister informed de Gaulle that he had come to an agreement with the President that Giraud and de Gaulle would be established as joint presidents of a governing committee and that Giraud would exercise supreme military command. De Gaulle replied that he did not dream that Churchill would take seriously this solution which might appear adequate at the level of an American sergeant. Furthermore that he did not recognize in any respect their authority to deal with questions of sovereignty within the French Empire. That evening de Gaulle met with Roosevelt who reiterated his decision as expressed by Churchill. De Gaulle replied that the national will had already made its choice and that the authority established in the Empire and ultimately in metropolitan France would be the one France chose for herself. However, a head on confrontation was carefully avoided.

Later on Robert Murphy told de Gaulle that the plans mentioned here above would be formulated. De Gaulle questioned the public reaction when it would be learned that no agreement had been reached at Anfa. Murphy replied that many would be relieved because in North Africa not ten percent were Gaullists! He also confirmed that Roosevelt and Churchill had signed an agreement with Giraud for certain deliveries of weapons and supplies to North Africa. Upon his return to London de Gaulle found that the press and radio in Washington and London were now resolutely behind Giraud and that de Gaulle was now a candidate for a dictatorship and that the French people could rely on Roosevelt and Churchill to prevent him from enslaving them...

Fortunately more and more men enlisted into the Free French Forces and the population of North Africa was decidedly making it more and more clear that they wanted de Gaulle as their leader and not Giraud who had written Petain that he was his man. Also French troops were engaged in the battle of Tunisia and in March the Eighth Army entered into line, which resulted in the surrender of General von Arnim, trapped in Cape Son, with 250,000 men. The French troops were acclaimed everywhere with shouts of "Vive de Gaulle!"

In April General Giraud wrote de Gaulle that he renounced preponderance. Then in May came the announcement from the National Council of the Resistance, in Paris, under the leadership of the famous Jean Moulin, that they were endorsing the immediate installation at Algiers of a provisional government under the presidency of General de Gaulle. De Gaulle made ready to leave London for Algiers.

On May 30, 1943, de Gaulle's plane landed near Algiers. Giraud and de Gaulle met and from that moment on, the duel was on. Giraud insisted on his complete authority, as backed up by Roosevelt, over the military without it being subordinated to the government to be formed. A committee of seven men, including Giraud and de Gaulle was formed and they announced the creation of the French Committee of National Liberation, with Giraud and de Gaulle as its presidents, to direct the French war effort, exercise French sovereignty, assume authority over the

territories and military forces. Giraud, facing the loss of his military authority, decided to resign. For all intent and purposes, de Gaulle was now completely in charge, but he kept Giraud as head of military forces in spite of his reluctance to accept any form of subordination whatever. However, in the ensuing months it was revealed that Giraud had acted purely on his own in matters dealing with the liberation of Corsica which resulted in the Communist party taking substantial advantage of the situation and attempting to take over local governments. This had to be dealt with promptly in the fear that a similar situation might take place in France at the time of liberation. Everyone in the Committee of Liberation realized then that Giraud simply had to go and he eventually signed a measure which left de Gaulle as sole president. Offered an appointment of inspector general and awarded the Medaille Militaire, Giraud preferred to retire, declined the post to which he was appointed and even refused the medal! "I want to be commander-in-chief or nothing", said he. I took time to relate all these events so that you might visualize the man, his nature, his inspirations, his achievements. Men like Churchill and Roosevelt had to overcome an astonishment that was, in fact, quite comprehensible: this chief of state without a constitution, without electors, without a capital, who spoke in the name of France; this officer wearing so few stars, condemned to death by the "legal" government, vilified by many prominent men, could not fail to amaze the conventional spirit of the British and American military men. From nothing but himself as a beginning, this man was now capable of putting in the field, by the end of 1943, some 380,000 soldiers, 50,000 sailors manning a fleet of 320,000 tons, an air force of 500 fighting planes manned by 30,000 men.

During the Italian campaign, in December 1943, the French Expeditionary Corps, composed of 120,000 men, one fourth of the total allied army, was engaged in Italy, under Alexander's command, and was assigned the mountainous region of the Abruzzi, with mission to drive a wedge into the enemy defenses north of the famous Monte Cassino. After months of battle to open the road to Rome, General Juin suggested a new strategy

which was adopted in May. His attack was made in force in the most difficult sector, by the highest peak, penetrating the enemy's three successive defense lines. Three weeks later the Allied forces were entering the Eternal City.

There is no need to go any further as to the French Army's contribution to the Allied forces in subsequent actions during the south of France landing, operation Overlord, the battle of France and the campaign in Germany. It is history. De Gaulle was to receive the full backing of the French people and play an historical part for the next twenty-five years or so in French and international politics. I think it worthy to relate what de Gaulle felt about Indochine and the American involvement. In May 1961 Kennedy was traveling Paris where he had several talks with de Gaulle on the Berlin issue, among others, and the situation in Southeast Asia. Kennedy said that it might be necessary for the West to get militarily involved to bring the Communists to some agreement in Laos and Vietnam. Instead of giving Kennedy his approval, de Gaulle lectured him as follows. "You will find that intervention in this area will be an endless entanglement. Once a nation has been aroused, no foreign power, however strong, can impose its will upon it. You will discover this for yourselves. For even if you find local leaders who in their own interests are prepared to obey you, the people will not agree to it, and indeed do not want it. The ideology which you invoke will make no difference. Indeed, in the eyes of the masses, it will become identified with your will to power. That is why the more you become involved out there against Communists, the more the Communists will appear as the champions of national independence, and the more support they will receive, if only from despair. We French have had experience of it. You Americans want to take our place. I predict that you will sink step by step into a bottomless military and political quagmire, however much you spend in men and money."

Obviously his feelings were not given much publicity on these shores because of the highly sensitive issue of what was to become a war that was not a declared war, of a final victory that

was not won, of thousands of men who need not have died, and of thousands more who, incapacitated, physically and/or mentally, were left to their own fate.

I would recommend your reading Don Cook's book, published in 1983, entitled "Charles de Gaulle a biography", and learn a few more facts which have come out with time. Such as the considerable restraint of movement that de Gaulle encountered from his host, namely Churchill, when he desired to visit Middle Eastern countries which the British were attempting to bring into their hemisphere of influence, away from the former French influence. And what would de Gaulle have said or done if he had known then that Roosevelt had implied to his direct entourage that he did not wish to recognize de Gaulle's government as the legal one because he had in mind to possibly offer their freedom to Dakar, Indochine, and other French territories, after the end of the hostilities! This might very well explain his backing up of Giraud, the man who was not interested in politics, but would do anything in his power for his supporters as long as they would let him command all the French forces without any supervision.

I am closing these memoirs with the liberation of France, when slowly, severely, unity was forged. Now the people and the leader, helping each other, were to begin the journey to salvation.

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From left to Right, Pierre LEFRANC et Marcel SAVIGNY
(1944-Ribbesford)