

FFL-55933

MEMOIRS

1943-1946

A. Gérard

FFL-55933

MEMOIRS

1943, 1944, 1945, 1946
AFL-21119
A. Gérard

© 1998, Andrés Gérard Cortés
1998, Editorial Siglo XXXI, S. A. de C.V. Primera edicion: Octubre, 1998.
Fotografias de portada, contraportada y reproducciones fotogràficas de los interiores: Carlos Contreras de Oteyza
Cuidado de la edicion: Alfonso Serrano Maturino
Diseño de Portada e interiores: Octavio Funes Navarrete
Lt. Col. Claude J. Guinchard, USAF Ret. Edicion en Inglés
ISBN 970-92158-2-5
Este libro no puede ser fotocopiado, ni reproducido, total o parcialmente, incluidas las fotografias e ilustraciones, por ningun otro medio o método, sin la autorizacion por escrito del autor.
Impreso en México / Printed in Mexico
Version numérisée Par ASCFL 2017

In memory of my parents. In memory of my fallen comrades.

55933 was my army identification number in the Free French Forces (FFL) and is the title of these wartime memoirs which cover the years 1943, 1944, 1945 and 1946.
AFL-21119 is my identification in the association for those who were members of the Free French Forces.
ANDRES GÉRARD CORTÉS*
*In Mexico one's family name – Gérard in my case – is followed by one's mother's maiden naine – Cortés.

INDEX

Prologue 7
I.- The departure 11
II.- England 19
III. - France, mission in the Vosges area 37
IV – France – Germany, 2D.B 59
V. – Indochine 73
VI. – The Return Home 105
Abbreviations 114
Pictures 116
Bibliography 151

PROLOGUE

These are my soldier's memoirs of the time I spent in the Free French Forces during the Second World War. My family, of French origin, lived in Mexico, where my older brothers were born. My father, Don Hipolito Gérard Payan, who married Doria Magdalena Cortés y Sieyès, belonged to a French immigration movement to Mexico from France which took place last century. These immigrants came from a region in the French Alps now called Departement des Alpes de la Haute-Provence. They are referred to as Barcelonettes since most of them were from the town bearing that name.

I was born in Cannes during one of the overseas trips my parents made, but I grew up and completed my studies in Mexico. I went to the American School, then to the Colegio Franco Español and finally to the Escuela Bancaria y Comercial in Mexico City.
The French residents in Mexico participated actively in the First World War. There is a monument in the Panteon Francés de la Piedad, - a cemetery patronized by the French- where the many names of those who died in that conflict are engraved. The names of those who died in the Second World War are also engraved on that monument, but they are far fewer, the reason being that at the beginning of 1940, the contingent of French residents of military age in Mexico were recruited by the French consulats and sent for their military training to the French Island of La Martinique.

It is during this period that France's disastrous surrender occurred. The French governor of La Martinique did not recognize the de Gaulle government and sided with that of Vichy. As a result of that, when the armistice was signed by Marshall Petain, the contingent was ordered to return to Mexico. It was only following the American landings in North Africa and the recognition of General de Gaulle by the rest of the world's nations that La Martinique ended its association with the Vichy government. Consequently, the French residents in Mexico could be mobilized, anew by the representatives of the de Gaulle Government. However, when those members were sent to La Martinique, trained and sent overseas, the war was ending.

The French residents in Mexico who participated in the Second World War were all volunteers and joined the Free French Forces individually and of their own free will. They were obviously few in number. Evidently the number of Franco-
Mexican participants in the Second World War would have been far greater if conscription had been implemented during these years.

I. - THE DEPARTURE

We are at the beginning of 1943. Six months before, on the lst. of June 1942, Mexico had declared war on the Axis powers – Germany, Italy and Japan – after German submarines sank two Mexican

tankers: the Potrero del Llano and the Faja de Oro, without any warning or provocation, in May, 1942.
Mexico's Escuadron 201 of P47 Thunderbolt fighterbombers participated in the Pacific theater. Many other Mexican citizens enlisted in the US Armed Forces, and fought on all the 2nd. World War fronts.
Mexico was one of the first countries to recognize General de Gaulle – and to allow a representation of the Free French in Mexico City. I became eighteen on November 29th, 1942, and had already presented myself for the "Servicio Militar Nacional" in the "Class of '24" – the year of birth of those called to serve their country in 1942. Military service was compulsory for Mexican males upon reaching eighteen years of age.

My Mexican army identification card number was 508003, but I did not participate in the lottery drawing for active duty because, at the medical examination, the doctors found some sort of defect in the vision of my right eye and to my great dismay I was declared only partially fit.

There was then a great patriotic fervency and my anxiety to do something and participate in the Crusade Against Evil kept me awake at night. After thinking it over for a short time, I decided to go to the Free French Representation, where a French officer received me and where I signed a contract to serve with the Free French Forces for the duration of the hostilities plus three months. You will see that further events modified greatly the duration of my engagement.

When I told my parents of my decision, I saw my father cry for the first time in my lifetime, but neither he nor my mother objected to my resolution to serve in the Free French Forces.

The farewell took place in the Buenavista Railroad Terminal in Mexico City, where I boarded the train bound for New York City via Laredo and Saint Louis, Missouri, where I had to change trains.

Leave-taking is always sad, but the unknown nature of my destiny made me overcome my sentiments momentarily and I left my family behind. Nothing much happened during the passage to the US border, but after crossing it a WAAC (Women's Auxiliary Army Corps.) contingent boarded the train. I was the only male in the railroad car, surrounded by dozens of excited and playful girls. For a couple of days and nights we all had a very good time. I thought it was a good omen for my coming military life!

In New York I went to the offices of what was then called the Comité National Français with the papers the Free French representation had given me in Mexico City. Among the people in that office there was a very impressive person – Colonel Brunschwig – a disabled World War One veteran who, I was told, was the head of the Free French military mission in the United States.
I was told that they would send me as soon as possible on an eastbound convoy. In the meantime, I was lodged in a small hotel on Fifty-something street. New York seemed to be an extraordinary place: the war fever, the multitude of uniforms of all kinds everywhere, including those of French sailors with their typical cap with a red pompon from the crew of the French battleship Richelieu docked for repairs, and the numerous cocktails and parties that New York society offered to

members of the armed forces, all of them attended by beautiful hostesses, models and very nice high Society girls. I fell in love and had a brief affair with a Powers model that I met during one of those parties, but it only lasted for the very short duration of my stay in New York.
There was also a parallel French mission representing General Giraud in New York. General Giraud was recognized by President Roosevelt because Roosevelt did not sympathize very much with General de Gaulle. But a few months later, the Giraud mission ceased to exist when General de Gaulle was recognized by countries around the world as France's leader. At a cocktail party I met a young Frenchman more or less my age who was wearing an American uniform, but with a French 2nd Lieutenant insignia and a shoulder patch with FRANCE embroidered on it. He told me that he had enlisted with the Giraud mission, and that after a brief training course at Fort Benning he had been commissioned a 2nd Lieutenant and was going to be a liaison officer and interpreter with the US Army during the coming campaign in France.
I did not yield to the temptation of obtaining a relatively easy commission by becoming a liaison officer in Giraud's army and instead kept to my original idea of serving with the Free French Forces as a combatant.

All good things come to an end, and one day I was informed that my New York vacations were over. I was to board my transportation – a merchant ship – in New York Harbor that afternoon (I don't recall the name of the ship) and travel to England to join the Free French Army at last.

I boarded the ship (which was registered in Curaçao and flew a Dutch flag), and we departed later in the afternoon after the sun had begun to set.

The ship was crammed with supplies and weapons, including on deck several disassembled airplanes with their wings strapped along the length of their fuselages all wrapped up as Christmas presents. They occupied all the available space on deck. In addition to the cargo there were around twenty passengers, including a small group of American soldiers headed overseas to join their unit in England. During that first night, with a complete blackout that forbade even lighted cigarettes on deck, the ship headed for Halifax, where it joined a gigantic convoy. Next morning, as I stepped out on deck to take a look around I saw three or four lines of ships extending as far as the eye could see from port to starboard, and from bow to stern. Like faithful watchdogs, corvettes came and went continually, running across the convoy's lines from side to side between the ships, and then racing off to another part of the convoy farther ahead or behind to do the same. They blew their very distinctive horns constantly. The Atlantic crossing took more than three weeks because the convoy's speed was only as fast as the slowest ship. We sailed very close to the Arctic Circle (to keep as far as possible from the German submarines, I believe), and then due south through the Irish Sea to the port of Cardiff.

The passage was not at all monotonous. Every night, the depth charges launched by the corvettes and the German torpedoes hitting their targets sounded invariably, like giant hammers slamming against the hull of our ship, urging us all to pray. The blackness of the sea and sky was illuminated by fires blazing off the unfortunate ships that had been torpedoed. While talking with a crewmember I learned that my cabin was midway between the steam and the stern of the ship, right next to the engine room – directly above the preferred aiming spot for German torpedoes. He also commented that it was not worth the trouble of leaving my cabin and taking a blanket to sleep on an upper deck because even if I survived the impact of a torpedo, the seawater was so cold that I

would be dead in about fifteen minutes anyway. Years later I learned that during this period the German "Wolfpack" submarine offensive had been greatly stepped up and many ships sent to the bottom!

When we arrived in Cardiff I had to go through the British Intelligence interrogatory that was applied to all arrivals to make sure I was not a Nazi spy, or belonged to the Fifth Column. There was an institution called the Patriotic School, where new arrivals, except uniformed members of the Allied Forces, were interned. Although I arrived as a civilian, I didn't have to go to that school, because the authorities quickly realized that I was really an inoffensive volunteer who had come to enlist in the Free French Forces. It is when I was making this clear to the authorities that the air raid sirens began to wail – the first and more occasions between my interview and departure for the train station. I got to think that the Germans really didn't want me to join General de Gaulle's forces, first besetting me with their submarines during the Atlantic crossing and then with air attacks during my stay in Cardiff. However, they failed to scare the hell out off me and distract me from my goal!

I took the train to London, where I was accommodated in the Free French Reception Center – a large house in Kensington. I particularly remember my first night there (which was also interrupted frequently by air raid sirens and bombardments), when I decided to take a bath shortly alter settling into one of the dormitories. I noted in each of the bath-tubs a red line painted three inches from the bottom as a reminder not to waste water. Also to my great disappointment, when I returned to my bunk I discovered that in my absence some occupants of the center had revised my pockets and taken the two or three hundred dollars still remaining from what my father had given me before setting out for New York. The next day, in the FFF London offices in Carleton Gardens, I believe, the matriculation, medical examination, uniform, clothing and soldier pay book issue proceedings, etc, were initiated. My FF Army matriculation number was 55933. As it happened, the French military physicians turned out to be less demanding than their Mexican counterparts, and they accepted me without any reservations.

After these procedures, interviews and attendant bureaucracy in the recruitment center, they decided that I could become a candidate for the Ecole Militaire des Cadets de la France Combattante, the French Military Academy at Ribbesford Hall in the Midlands, on the River Severn. This was something of a coincidence, as the river flows into the sea at the port of Cardiff, where I had disembarked from the ship a few days earlier. 1 got my things together, took the train and got off at my railroad stop (although I can't remember if it was at Kidderminster or Bewdley, both of which are close to Ribbesford Hall) to begin the process which was to transform me from a young civilian into a combat unit officer.

II. ENGLAND

The Military College had two installations: the principal one at Ribbesford Hall, which consisted of a manor house that had been converted into dormitories, classrooms, infirmary, mess hall, kitchens, and offices.
Barracks consisted of Nissen huts in the ample grounds surrounding the manor. The barracks made of corrugated iron shaped in a half-pipe form housed dormitories and classrooms. There was also a shooting range and a parade ground for ceremonies among the tree lined alleys that criss-crossed the manor grounds.

Apart from the installations at Ribbesford Hall there was another in Bewdley next to the River Severn called Dog Lane, which served among other things, as a depot for rolling stock, trucks, etc. Dog Lane was an extension of the Military Academy installations which opened in June 1943 as, an input of new candidates -more than a hundred strong- had increased greatly in relation to the average of previous years. Many members of the group had escaped from France via Spain, after being interned in the sadly remembered concentration camp Miranda del Ebro. After months of confinement, they had finally obtained their freedom through the Canadian embassy. The embassy had passed them off as French-Canadians, else if they had been identified as Frenchmen, the Spaniards would have returned them to the Germans and they would have met certain death at their hands.

Both installations were guarded by the cadets in shifts. The teaching staff was composed of French Army officers and non-commissioned officers, with the exception of the physical education instructor — a British Army sergeant named Fox who was well liked by all. In the headquarters and kitchens there were soldiers and women from the auxiliary services - equivalent of the British WAAC's. Interestingly, among this staff there were two young ladies that had the very famous surname of Rothschild — Monique and Nicole — who drove the Peugeot pick up trucks that belonged to the headquarters. As a point of interest, these two trucks had arrived in England with the French Expeditionary Corps which had previously disembarked in Narvik, Norway, in a successful operation which was aborted owing to the lightning — like German advance in France — the frightening blitzkrieg. This corps, composed of the 13th DBLE of the French Foreign Legion and French Alpine troops, re-embarked at Narvik and was directed to England where, upon its return from Norway it formed the original nucleus of the FFF.

The training course designed to earn your aspirant stripes (acting second lieutenant) lasted two semesters. In the first semester the cadets commenced their preparation; in the second they became the E.A. (Eleves Aspirants). Owing to the influx of new cadets (already mentioned and the problem of limited space), the E.A. —Eleves Aspirants- in their second and final semester were installed in Dog Lane, along with a group of first semester cadets to which I belonged who had arrived late for their first semester of June — December in 1943 and had been sent there in the interim. The time lost owing to our late arrival was to be made up during the training course, which meant we had to work furiously in order to catch up.
A motorcycle platoon in which I was a participant was also formed at Dog Lane, under the command of a Corsican sergeant called Torelli, who had served in Indochine and was completely

insane. He made us ride over rough terrain on our BSAs at full speed, sometimes with another cadet as passenger.

The pace of instruction was demanding as the course only lasted one year and we had lost time to make up. If I passed the final exam I would receive my commission as an aspirant. Five promotions graduated from the Military Academy, and were baptized in the tradition of Saint Cyr Military Academy as: Liberation, Bir Hakeim, Fezzan Tunisie, Corse et Savoie, and 18 Juin. The reveille was in the early hours of the morning, prelude to a working day of theoretical instruction, practical instruction, shooting and combat on the school installations and in a field near the school, physical education, study and written work – a syllabus that contributed to our dropping into our bunks like stones at the end of the day. The food was abundant but very insipid. For example, the eggs were of the powdered variety mixed with water, resulting in something akin to scrambled eggs. The meat was generally canned Spam, the potatoes boiled (unrationed), bread (of course) in the French tradition and, for breakfast, café au lait with bread, butter and jam. Everything considered the food wasn't all that bad and nobody got sick.

In December of 1943 the E.A. Corse et Savoie class graduated, its members received their commissions and left the school to join their units. The cadets who had arrived late for the course were relocated in Ribbesford Hall and the Dog Lane section of the college was closed. In the college there were a few Renault light tanks – survivors of the Narvik, Norway campaign, a dozen British Bren carriers and an American light tank – all of which we had to take turns driving. During maneuvers you were sometimes foot soldiers, sometimes in the light tanks and at other times a motorcycle scout. Indeed, I obtained my licence to drive from cars, trucks and motorcycles to vehicles with tracks, such as tanks. The instructor we had – a Lieutenant Louis Pichon – was a very refined person. Many years after the war he commented to a friend in common of ours that he remembered me driving the light tanks as though they were my father's Cadillacs – an error in car brand names as my father was a Lincoln-Mercury distributor, and the cars I drove when he wasn't around were Lincolns! To get to the area where we carried out maneuvers we used Bedford trucks, which the students took turns at driving. The steering wheel was on the right, and as they didn't have a synchronized gearbox, you had to move the gear lever with your left hand while double-shuffling the clutch. If you missed the gear change the gearbox stayed in neutral, which meant that it was necessary to stop the truck completely in order to start the gear shifting again exposing oneself to the jeers and whistles of the other cadets, and to a reprimand from the supervising officer. After returning to the college grounds we invariably had to clean the vehicles and remove the pounds of mud which had accumulated in the tank tracks, wheels, chains and other parts. This was the downside for those whose turn it was to drive a vehicle and hadn't previously exhausted themselves on marches and other training exercices during maneuvers.

Among the cadets there were two brothers named Digo –Jean and Guy. On October 29th, 1943 in the field used for maneuvers near the school, a lamentable accident occurred during an exercice which involved shooting rifle grenades. A small mortar was coupled to the barrel of the British Lee Enfield rifle which we had been issued; after inserting the grenade in the small mortar, it was fired by means of a blank cartridge. When Jean Digo fired the charge the grenade exploded, killing him instantly and seriously wounding cadet Charles Hessenbruch, who formed the shooting team. Charles Hessenbruch suffered the amputation of both legs and his brief military career was thus terminated. As far as I know this was the only fatal accident having occurred during training. As a sad corollary to this tragedy Guy Digo, the other brother, finished the course satisfactorily and

received his aspirant stripes in December 1943, as a graduate of the Corse et Savoie promotion. He was killed in action on November 28th, 1944 in Alsace, during the campaign to liberate France. Jean died at twenty-one years of age and Guy at nineteen.

Sundays were for R&R unless it was your turn on guard duty. When off duty we all went to Bewdley or preferably to Kidderminster, where there was a restaurant which seemed marvelous to us. To eat from china plates laid on tablecloths was a total luxury. Obviously, to be able to leave the college on Sunday we had to get good grades and not have been on report. It was then necessary to pass the rigorous uniform inspection, with boots perfectly polished and the rest of the uniform likewise in perfect conditions of presentation. On some occasions and holidays the British nobility invited a privileged cadet to spend a weekend with them. I was once fortunate enough to be invited to stay at the Wellesley's (the Duke and Duchess of Wellington) mansion, and thus escaped from the tension and fatigue of the Military College for a brief time.

During Christmas and New Year's Eve in 1943 I had to mount guard duty at the Ribbesford Hall check-point with some other cadets, and could not participate in the festivities. It was in fact a very cold but clear and starry night on December 24th, and there was an alert for German agents who might possibly have been parachuting into the area.

From our guard post at the entrance to Ribbesford Hall near the river we could hear the laughter and singing of our comrades having a great time at the academy. This encounter with solitude filled me with nostalgie and my thoughts flew to my family, so far from me on the other side of the Atlantic.

On another occasion a detachment from our academy went to Windsor Castle to march in a parade in front of the Royal Family, presiding on a podium in the center of the large court-yard reserved for ceremonies. I can remember very clearly seeing Princess Elizabeth a few yards from the marching column. She was about fifteen years old and would be one day the Queen of England.
The final oral and written exams took place in the classrooms. The practical exams were held on the shooting range and in the field where we performed maneuvers. They were pretty difficult, but according to my grades I obtained the twentieth place out of the one hundred and twenty-four cadets of my promotion, although I appeared in twenty-fourth place in the final qualifications – probably owing to previous averages I had obtained earlier.

At the end of the course, a few days before graduation, we were visited by General Leclerc, commander of the Second French Armored Division, who had arrived from North Africa with his division and which was then stationed in Scotland. We were very impressed by his presence as he was an epic figure among the Free French Forces. Finally, on June 3rd, 1944 the traditional ceremony was held, our graduating class having been baptized "18 Juin". The English authorities who controlled the college thought ours was a jolly gond idea as it was the date when the Battle of Waterloo – an English victory over Napoleon - was remembered by the British. With great tact they were informed that the date chosen for naming the graduating class corresponded to General de Gaulle's call to the French to keep their weapons and to continue resisting! A call the general made on the BBC in London the 18th. of June 1940.

General Koenig, the hero of the Battle of Bir Hakeim, was present at the graduation ceremony. In accordance with French tradition the cadets who had received their aspirant stripes and commission were given the right to choose the unit they wished to serve in, depending on their ranking in the final exams. According to his grade, each cadet went to the stage and noted his selection, depending on the vacancies available in the different units.
The most sough after was the 2DB, but it only had twelve places available and obviously, owing to its fame, was the most solicited. The other combat units – the 1DFL, the Commandos and the SAS – were full and had no vacancies. Only two options remained: liaison missions, or parachute drops behind enemy lines, for purpose of training and leading the maquis (French Resistance). Although I didn't like the idea of parachute jumps much I took this option, because I thought that if I had come this far to fight for France's liberation the idea of working in liaison missions was out of the question.

The ceremony was followed by a dance at which all the girls from the neighboring villages and towns, including the famous land girls, were invited. This marked the end of my time at the Free French Military Academy. The next morning there was no reveille for the first time since our arrival, and we were lazing in our respective bunks. Suddenly I was awaken from a deep sleep with the question "Where is aspirant Gérard?," to which I replied that I was he. But what a surprise! It was my brother Enrique, who I hadn't seen for many years since he had gone to study in France. After many embraces he told me that he was incorporated in an anti-air-craft battery in the Second French Armored Division, which was camped in Hull, near the Scottish border, and that he had obtained permission to come and visit me. In spite of so much time having passed without news of each other we didn't have any idea of what to say and went to the nearest pub to celebrate our reunion. Our time together was brief, as Enrique had to return to his unit. The Military Academy closed its doors permanently on June 15th, 1944.

Before closing this chapter on my time in the Military Academy I would like to mention both my commanding officers and those cadets with whom I had closer contact or a more enduring friendship later.

Officers:
Major André Beaudoin, Academy Commander
Captains Louis de Cabrol, Assistant Academy Commander, and René de Lajudie, Chief Military Instructor.
Lieutenants Jacques Chambon, Jean Masson and Louis Pichon, who were at some time my platoon commanders and instructors, as well as Sergeant Fox, Physical Education Monitor.

Cadets:
Louis Georgelin and Francois Chapman, the latter from New York. He was killed in action during a mission which all three of us participated in with the maquis, in France.
Serge Arvengas, who enlisted while passing through Mexico. Charles Briault, alias Chonchon.
Guy Desrousseaux, with whom I still exchange letters. Michel Iriart, from Argentine, with whom I sang a few tangos in Spanish.
Pierre Lefranc, President of the Association of Ex – Cadets. Maurice Nidelet, whose wanderings and mine led us to cross paths in Indochine.
Claude Barrès, a singularly heroic figure killed in action at the head of his Company.
Jean Servière and Marcel Ruff, both of whom enlisted in Mexico.

André Casalis, author of the book "Cadets de la France Libre, l'Ecole Militaire", and Jean Pierre Nouveau, now passed away – my companion in the Groupement de Marche de la 2DB, in Indo-China.
And finally, a respectful salute to the memory of the 60 combatants who passed through the Military Academy and died for their country.

Note:
In total 211 cadets graduated and were commissioned as aspirants during the existence of the Military Academy in England.

The group of around 70 aspirants that had chosen to fight in the Resistance were under the authority of the BCRA (Bureau Central de Renseignement et Action – a Free French office which directed undercover operations in occupied France).

Our special training in British installations began immediately, so that we would be fully prepared for carrying out our mission to the best of our abilities.

We were sent to a place near the city of Inverness, Scotland in the north of Great Britain. There we began our commando and special services training under the command of British instructors.

All the tactics and tricks of guerilla combat were taught to us: how to use all kinds of firearms (which included shooting practice with silhouettes that appeared suddenly in the windows and doors of a movie set town), knowledge and use of German weapons, and how to use plastic explosives. We went on maneuvers both during the day and at night, where and when our instructors would sometimes dress as German soldiers and shoot at us with real bullets whenever we made a mistake. There were marches over rugged terrain for days and nights, crossings made in freezing rivers, with nothing to eat but what we could find, such as plants or animals. This was called "living off the land". The training was extremely hard physically, and prepared us for what was to come. We were even taught how to drive steam locomotives!

Finally came the training for parachute jumps, which took place near the city of Wilmslow and lasted for exactly eight days. On the first day we were taken to a plain to watch hundreds of paratroopers jump in what appeared to be waves to build up our confidence. We were told that many of the paratroopers in those waves were making their first jump, and that jumping was a piece of cake.

Once again came the physical training without let-up. There was an infernal machine that consisted of a platform of about thirty feet in height, which we had to jump from. Each jumper was placed in a parachute harness attached to a cable. The cable was rolled on a free wheeling spool with windmill blades at both ends. As the freewheel spool revolved faster during the drop from the platform to the ground, the resistance generated by the spinning windmill blades slowed the descent at the point of hitting the ground. This apparatus was truly horrendous. It served to help us get used

to the sensation produced by free falling, and also taught us the way we should land: "Feet and knees together."

On the third day we went to the airfield for the great moment of the first jump. Unlike the paratroopers, we didn't have to jump from the rear door of the plane, but rather through a round hole in its underbelly that was about three feet wide. This was owing to the fact that, in combat, we would be jumping from converted bombers, and not from troop transports. From the parachute there ran what was called a "static line", which was anchored to a fixed point inside the plane and helped the parachute open once you had jumped. The planes we were to jump from were old twin-engine Armstrong Whitworth Whitleys that smelled strongly of castor oil -Castrol.
The great moment arrived. They formed the first four of us around the hole in sitting position in the plane's underbelly,
turned on the lights and, at the command of the dispatcher: "Action station Number One. Go! Go! Go! Go!"; we began to disappear through the hole. With my heart in my throat I jumped and, once I was outside the plane the sensation of speed disappeared. I passed from the noise and smell of the motors to silence and beauty. The parachute opened while the plane moved farther away above and the beautiful green fields of England stretched out below my feet. It was truly an extraordinary spectacle. In a few moments the ground seemed to come rushing up to me faster than before, and I remembered what the instructors had told me: "Keep your feet and knees together and let yourself fall in the direction the parachute is taking." I pulled the cords in front and above me to adjust my descent and avoid landing on my back, and after a somersault as I had been taught, that was it.

As a reward for that first jump we were taken to a sports club where there was a beautiful swimming pool with a diving board. I was never a good diver, but I told myself "If you've just jumped from 900 feet above the ground, a five-meter dive into a pool is a cinch!". I climbed up, moved closer to the end of the diving board and ....aaahhh! What a coward! I turned around and climbed back down the stairs. I had overcome my fear of heights for duty, but not for pleasure.

Time passed and other parachute jumps followed. In one of them, it was once again my turn to, jump last. My companions had jumped moments before, but when I jumped nothing happened. I looked up and saw my parachute stretched out lengthways like a torch, but still not open. It so happened that we were never given a second parachute (which was strapped against your stomach) for emergencies. It occurred to me to kick with both legs in the same way that you kick when you want to untangle the ropes on a swing, and then – miracle of miracles! the parachute started to open and the cords separated one by one. By the time I hit the ground the parachute had opened. I was getting up and starting to haul in my parachute when I saw the British instructors running towards me to see if I was all right. I responded that I was – the fear hadn't taken hold of me yet. Shortly after, my companions, who in spite of having jumped before me had touched down after me, said they had seen me falling like a comet.

That night in the nearest pub, the lukewarm beer and a few whiskies with water managed to slow my pulse and return my heartbeat to normal.

There were further jumps – among others one made at night. This jump was very special because we did it with a sack tied to our feet. We would carry ammunition, explosives and provisions in the sack in combat. There was a cord some 10 yards long rolled around the sack, which we would

release once the parachute opened so that it would dangle below and alert us when we were about to land.

I finally earned my paratrooper's wings, which in those times you wore on your shirt sleeve near the cuff until you had made a jump into a combat zone. Once you had made the jump into combat you wore the insignia on your shoulder. I am not sure whether this custom still exists in the British Army today.

After earning our paratrooper's wings we were sent to another camp, this time in the South of England near the English Channel. We were sent there to learn how to disarm German mines and also to become familiarized with their antipersonnel devices. To make the training more realistic there were several graves right next to the minefield which we were to clear. According to the instructors these were the graves of the students who had made mistakes! Once we had finished our commando training, paratrooper course and other preparations, the English declared us fit. We were sent to London to await the night when we would be dropped in occupied France on a mission with the Resistance.

As it happens I felt rich at the time, as the few shillings and pence that they paid us each month as cadets, became the respectable sum of one pound sterling per day. I was assigned a magnificent suite in a very elegant hotel in Picadilly with my companions Louis Georgelin and François Chapman, where we were totally free except for the sole obligation of reporting daily to the Free French offices for word of when we were to be sent to France.
One morning we were told "It's today." Georgelin, Chapman and I presented ourselves with our few belongings, and were then ordered to board a small truck headed for the airport. I learned many years later that the airport was called Harrington. There we were equipped with parachutist's overalls for the jump. We were each given an American carabine with a folding butt, a pistol which, it so happens, was a Spanish Llama 9mm, that would permit us to use German ammunition; a watch which we were told was a gift from the Queen of England and all sort of military supplies and equipment. We were also given a cyanide capsule to commit suicide with if we were captured by the Germans or, even worse, by the "Miliciens"– the French scum in the service of the enemy invader.

The Eighth Air Force bomber group number 802/492 was stationed at the air base. It was composed of B24 bombers painted black and adapted precisely for transporting agents, military personnel and containers packed with arms, munitions and explosives into enemy occupied territory. This bomber group was named "The Carpetbaggers", and had an heroic and important participation in the aid given to the Resistance not only in France, but also in the Low Countries and in Norway. The group suffered numerous losses: of the crewmen who didn't die in action, some were taken prisoner by the Germans, while others managed to survive and escape hidden by the French Resistance. Some even stayed to fight side by side with members of the Resistance, with various groups of maquis until liberated by the advance of the allied Forces. Today there is an association called the "Carpetbaggers" which reunites both the crews and other members of the group and a few agents who survived that epopee. I am honored to have been invited to become a member of this association. Moments before takeoff they informed us that we were to be dropped in the Vosges, our mission being to train and lead the Resistance in combat. We were also told that the Allied offensive would probably reach where we were to be dropped in a few days. Unfortunately, as will be seen later, the Allied offensive was halted – owing, among other things, to a fuel shortage. In the

region where we were dropped the Germans took advantage of this situation and the rugged terrain and dug themselves in, which meant that it was one of the last to be liberated from the German occupation in February, 1945. Along with the three ex-cadet "aspirants" from the Military Academy there was a 2nd. lieutenant named Michel, who was to jump with us too...

III. FRANCE MISSION IN THE VOSGES

At nightfall on September 8th, 1944, we made an uneventful takeoff and headed south. It was a clear night with a full moon, and in spite of the blackout it was possible to see many lights in England. We traveled under a certain apprehension as it had been said that there wasn't much security in the Free French offices in London. Rumor had it that to find out where agents or military personnel were to be dropped in France, all you had to do was ask the porter at the Free French building. Unfortunately there were, in fact, many cases where agents and officers fell into German traps instead of friendly hands, and were generally executed after suffering horrible tortures.

Over the English Channel the panorama was beautiful. We could see the sea and the moon's silver reflections on it. It was like a dream. We returned to reality and realized that we were flying over France once we heard and saw the flashes of the explosions of some fire from German anti-aircraft batteries on the French Coast. They didn't hit us, thank God. The tension and our anguish increased proportionally as the moment to jump drew nearer. After a time, the dispatcher indicated that we were getting close. He took the cover off the hole in the plane's bowels that we would be jumping through, ensured that our static lines were properly secured and positioned us around the hole. The pilot throttled back the four motors and lowered the flaps. Moments later the small lights came on and the command to jump commenced: "Action station number one. Go! Go! Go! Go!" As usual, it was my turn to jump last once again! I passed by the dark, noisy fuselage to a clear and tranquil night, my parachute opened and I landed. Owing to my rapid landing, I calculate that when I jumped the plane must have been flying at an altitude of scarcely 300 feet. As it happens, I thought that I was going to land on some trees while I was descending, but that wasn't the case. The forest clearing over which we had jumped was carpeted by heather thickets that looked like trees from above in the moonlight. I let go of my harness immediately, turning the lock that brought all the parachute straps together and snapping it open with one good hit from a closed fist. I was able to distinguish a person approaching and, crouching where I was among the thickets, took out my pistol, cocked it and waited for him to arrive. I could see that it was a Frenchman who hadn't noticed me. He almost tripped over me and the barrel of my pistol. As I was sure that I hadn't fallen into a trap, I got up and followed him, talking to him as I hauled in my parachute. This maquis was the maquis de la "Piquante Pierre", near La Bresse. The code name of the operation was "Coupole". We arrived at a farm where my three companions from the jump were waiting for me with a group of clandestine Resistance members. I must express my admiration for the B24 crew that flew us over, for their extraordinary navigation skill, as we were dropped precisely on the landing zone, at night, and in the middle of the forest. It took me a while to realize that I was in France, in the Resistance, and that soon I would have to confront the enemy and the moment of truth. It was no longer about maneuvers or training, but rather the real thing, and things were serious.

The "Piquante Pierre" maquis was divided into several camps of approximately 100 men per camp, composed primarily of young men from neighboring towns such as La Bresse, Cornimont, Gerardmer, etc. who had joined the Resistance among other things to avoid being deported to Germany under an obligatory work program that had been imposed by the invader. There was also a camp called "Alsaciens" , which was composed of young men sent by the Germans to the Vosges to build fortifications, but who had managed to escape. The body of troops was formed by a few corporals and some sergeants who had managed to avoid being interned or had escaped from prisoner of war camps. I also had an Alsatian sergeant among my men, who had been incorporated

by force into the German Army, like many others Alsatians, and had deserted. The camps that formed the maquis had a perimeter of some 20 kilometers, and between each camp there was a gap of about one to two kilometers which was covered solely by observation posts and permanent patrols. The armements were also totally insufficient. The commander of the maquis was a lieutenant named Monnet, and the regional commander was a Mr. Lucien.

A "Jedburgh" mission composed of French and Allied officers had parachuted into the area under the code name of "Pavot". There was a radio operator who also formed part of this mission whose job it was to maintain contact with London. This "Jedburgh" mission was to coordinate the Resistance's efforts and request that combat officers be sent to prepare and train the Resistance fighters, as well as parachute drops of arms, munitions and explosives to supply the "Piquante Pierre" maquis with. Theoretically this mission was also in contact with the other maquis of the region and was informed of all their actions.

The men and young men of the "Piquante Pierre" maquis were divided into groups of 100 men, or "centaines". Georgelin, Chapman and I were each assigned a group which we were to transform from peaceful villagers into combatants in record time, instructing them in the most essentiel knowledge of weapons, shooting practice, combat school, guerrilla and petrol tactics. 2nd. Lieutenant Michel, who had jumped with us, was designated as Lieutenant Monnet's assistant.
I was assigned the La Bresse "centaine", and began instruction and training immediately. What they lacked in military training they more than compensated for with enthusiasm, love of their country and unquestionable courage. As it was the intention of the commanding officers to occupy and maintain the territory we dug individual foxholes and automatic weapons emplacements with a clear field of fire, as quickly as possible, in the places where we thought that the Germans might arrive. Almost every night for a week, more or less, the "Carpetbagger" bombers which had been converted into cargo planes visited us, dropping containers of arms, ammunitions and explosives while the good weather lasted. Little by little the groups started to take shape as combat units as they advanced in their instruction and training and the young men finally received both their own individual arms and the collective weapons. A dozen deserters from the German Army also joined us: they were Russians of Mongolian factions who had been captured and conscripted into the German Army. Their Regiment was stationed in Nancy. We didn't give them arms and used them only as stretcher bearers and in other non-combatant tasks. Apart from the young men's training and preparation routine we mounted a series of successful ambushes against German troops. We occupied the higher parts of the mountains and forests by day, and at night went down to the bottoms of the valleys, where the highways passed through. Only the German truck convoys and armored vehicles dared to travel during the day, because at night, protected by darkness, we had control.

Once, I had to head a patrol whose mission it was to capture a man who was collaborating with the Germans and lived in the center of La Bresse. La Bresse is a town at the bottom of one of the valleys that surrounded the maquis camps, and it was there that a detachment of numerous Germans was stationed. My patrol was composed of five or six members, and at nightfall we entered the town, playing cat and mouse with the Germans, who didn't detect us. We arrived at the house of this individual who offered no resistance, but once we had penetrated the house, a heavy German motorized contingent passed. Only a window and a curtain separated us from it. It seemed to me that the collaborator was going to do something to give us away. In a low steady voice, I told him that the first to die would be him, which apparently calmed him down. We returned more or less by

the same way that we came, bringing him with us. He behaved peacefully. Upon arriving at the camp we handed him over to our senior officers and I didn't hear any more of what happened to him.

We also carried out a sabotage operation on the railroad line from Strasbourg to Saint Die, where we blew up a munitions train inside a tunnel. Georgelin was in charge of this mission and it was there that we applied what the British had taught us about this type of operation to the letter. As I understand the train line remained useless for a long time.

Security among the maquis was nonexistent. In the town of La Bresse the young girls used the parachute fabric that their boyfriends had brought them at night, and made every possible kind of scarf with them and wore them openly. The Germans had us perfectly well located because, apart from the indiscretions of the Resistance members' relatives, a light German reconnaissance plane flew over us at least once a day, almost certainly noting our positions. Finally, because of the continuous harassment of German troops and installations carried out by the maquis, the German high command decided to exterminate the Resistance. They mounted a great operation and surrounded the maquis camps, taking advantage of the aerial reconnaissance that they had carried out in previous days. It is said that Himmler himself gave the order to finish us and take no prisoners. At 7:00 am on Saturday, September 16th the Germans made an unsuccessful attack on the Gerardmer camp. At 9:00 am they withdrew with two trucks full of their dead, according to witnesses. The maquis suffered ten killed and a couple of wounded. As the liaison between the camps was not very good I didn't find out about the encounter until eleven in the morning, some two hours after everything had ended. The following day they attacked another camp. Two Resistance fighters were killed, but I never heard how many casualties the Germans suffered on that occasion.
In my sector, which measured about a mile, my hundred men took their combat positions every morning in the foxholes at 4:30 am and stayed there until 8:00 am, when only the lookouts remained. At 7:00 am on Wednesday 20th, from the height of my command post, I began to see German trucks coming down the road at the foot of our position at the bottom of the valley, and many Germans disembarking from them. The force was made up of a battalion of the German Marine Infantry, which attacked our positions. The highway was some 600 meters from my sector and my automatic arms emplacements. Previously we had seen a Company of cyclists coming down the highway and form a cordon as they dismounted. For an instant, I thought that they were there simply to protect the convoy as it passed, but once I saw the trucks which had gone by full of soldiers returning empty, I prepared my men and had them occupy all the foxholes and emplacements and sent word to the camps' headquarters that several hundred Germans were in front of us and about to begin their assault. The Germans started to advance in a firing line towards my positions.
Among the arms dropped to us by parachute we had received a British weapon called a PIAT, which was ambivalent as it could be used as an anti-tank weapon - something similar to a bazooka – and also as a mortar. You placed a detonator on the head of the grenades it fired that made them explode on impact.

In order to detain the Germans' assault I set my PIATS in a battery and prepared the grenades for use as mortars, and we started to fire them at the German infantry as it advanced. But, horror of horrors! To my great disillusion, not one of thegrenades exploded and therefore had no defensive effect whatsoever. What probably happened is that the ground was very soft as it had rained a lot,

and the grenades simply buried themselves without the detonators igniting as a result. In contrast the Germans rained explosives down on us with their mortars. Thanks to the automatic arms emplacements and the individual foxholes we had dug, until that moment my "centaine" hadn't suffered any losses or had any men wounded. The first German line was already some 60 to 80 meters away, and they still hadn't detected my positions because they were perfectly buried and camouflaged, and I had told my men to hold their fire until I gave the order to fire. Almost all the Germans were totally in the open. On my command all my Bren guns from their emplacements and all my men from their individual foxholes opened fire. The result was terrible for the Germans who retreated in disorder, while leaving many casualties on the ground.
Once again they sent mortar fire raining down on us, but just as before not one of my men was killed or wounded. The Germans mounted fresh assaults, again and again without achieving their goal. It so happened that during one of these assaults, I was looking out from my command post, which was covered by a piece of khaki green parachute silk that served as protection from the rein. I heard a detonation, and a small hole appeared in the fabric above my head. Stupidly, I straightened up in the same place to try and see where they had fired at me from, and obviously heard another detonation. This time another small hole appeared in the fabric, but very close to my head at the base of my hairline. It was then that I remembered a little late that in these cases you shouldn't poke your head out twice in the same place. I belly-crawled a few yards, raised my head and managed to distinguish a person hidden behind a thicket some 50 to 60 meters away. He wasn't looking my way at that moment. I pointed my carbine at the thicket and squeezed off several shots. All I saw was a boot that moved in a half Circle, and then nothing more moved. In the maquis' other locations, Georgelin and Chapman were resisting the Germans' attack with a different measure of success, as the Germans had already achieved some penetration by taking advantage of the uneven terrain and the fog that was starting to form.

The fire was heavy and did not stop. I found out that Chapman had died while leading his "centaine" of men on my left flank. His name is engraved on the "Piquante Pierre" monument, along with the approximately 60 other Resistance fighters who gave their lives in these encounters, and of others who were captured and were shot without mercy by the Germans.
Although the Germans were unable to penetrate my position, I realized that they were advancing on my right flank because, as they moved up the valley, they burned the farms they were capturing. They also killed every living thing they encountered in their advance. At about two in the afternoon a fog started to form in the valleys and rise towards the crests of the mountains. Then suddenly, five women sent by the Germans appeared, with instructions to tell us that if we surrendered we would be treated as prisoners of war, but if we did not, they would burn the town of Planois, La Bresse and Gerbamont. These women returned of their own free will to inform the Germans of our refusal to surrender.
My positions were at the top of the crest which overlooked the La Bresse-Planois road. On the other side, behind in the distance about half a mile away in the open was the heavily wooded pine forest. I heard a vague report that all the camps had been attacked, but did not learn of the result. At about three in the afternoon it started to drizzle, and we began receiving fire from German weapons from behind our left and right flanks. Once again we received mortar fire, and at about 16:00 hours I received just in time lieutenant Monnet's order to retreat to the forest and avoid being surrounded with no means of escape. We abandoned our positions on the double and in an orderly manner, taking advantage of the fog which was increasing, crossed the clearing and penetrated the wood with all our weapons at the precise moment that the first Germans took over the crest and occupied our emplacements that we had just abandoned. We went inside the forest with a certain calmness because, in spite of the fire we received from the Germans once they occupied our positions on the crest of the hill, we knew from experience that they were unwilling to enter the forest, and that they

did not like combat at close quarters. Once we were installed in the forest the Germans halted their pursuit and instead contented themselves with burning all the farms they had not yet burned and killing any poor unfortunate fellow they found. One of the many poor unfortunates they found and killed was a boy of 13 or 14 years of age who was not a combatant. His sole participation had been to bring and take messages for me. Once inside the forest we headed for the higher ground where we spent the night. That night I found out that the "Pavot" mission had managed to escape in time, and that the other camps had been dispersed. It was estimated that the attack on the maquis had been carried out by at least three German battalions. A large part of the Resistance members took advantage of the darkness and dispersed. On Thursday 21st, in the morning, lieutenant Monnet sent me with a patrol to reconnoiter the terrain where the battle had taken place. It was there that I realized how many farms and farmhouses had been burned: more than 25. In the course of the patrol I also encountered 2nd Lieutenant Michel and Georgelin, both of whom had taken refuge in the woods with their men during the night. As a result of the patrol I also found out that the Germans had gone, and that they no longer controlled the outskirts of the forest. After reporting my findings to lieutenant Monnet, he decided that we would occupy the border of the forest, near the camps' old headquarters. In the afternoon the enemy attacked again and lieutenant Monnet decided that it was necessary to withdraw. For the second time in two days the remainder of the camps withdrew to higher ground in the forest. We received instructions to head for a place called "Haut-du-Tot". As it was no longer possible to transport the wounded, we left them with some peasants in a farm. We crossed the forests, passing by Rochesson and, after walking all night without incident, arrived at "Haut-du-Tot". Lieutenant Monnet, the "Pavot" mission and Mr. Lucien were waiting for us. In view of the situation they decided to disband the maquis, and that it was time to separate. Georgelin, Michel and I stayed together with a few members of the Resistance, and decided to try to cross the lines in search of the Americans. It meant to try to cross the Cleurie valley at night, but this happened to be absolutely impossible in view of the number of Germans we had in front of us occupying the valley. The following day, lieutenant Michel sent various patrols to attempt a crossing, but they were all fruitless, and the food situation was becoming desperate. I remember eating raw mushrooms which are called "Pambazos" in Mexico, and grow at the foot of pine trees. It was then that Michel ordered me to attempt to cross the lines, and we arranged to meet in the town of St. Amé in a few days, calculating that it would have been liberated by the Americans by then. I left with two volunteers who supposedly knew the region, but it wasn't long before they confessed that they didn't know the region and had volunteered to come with me because they thought it was the best way of saving their skins.
We moved down toward the valley in the afternoon, taking every type of precaution. We fell upon a German gun battery without having them see us. They were shelling the Americans, who were a mile or two away in the Moselotte valley. We hid in a barn on the edge of the forest and waited for nightfall. Through the cracks between the planks that formed the barns walls I could see the Germans coming and going in the valley, and at the same time noticed their trenches and automatic arms emplacements. With my compass I worked out a rhumb line that would avoid the German positions. We waited nightfall calmly and quietly, hidden in a haystack. I use the word calmly in a relative sense as, in spite of my tiredness, my nerves were stretched as tight as a drum owing to the possibility that a German patrol might find us in the haystack. In addition, the Americans were bombarding the area, and their shells were falling all around us.

Once night had fallen we left the barn and started to bellycrawl across the valley, following the rhumb line I had taken with my compass in the haystack. We skirted the German emplacements, even holding our breath as we did so, because they were in fact only a few yards away on both our right and left. We could hear them talking and singing, just as we could hear the metallic sounds of weapons and canteens – sounds which always accompany troops. We crossed the river totally immersed, with only our heads above the water. Thank God it wasn't deep, but the water was icy.

On the other side of the river we took the same precautions and belly crawled to the edge of the forest on the other side of the valley. We moved a few hundred yards into the forest and stopped to rest and avait for dawn.
At daybreak we could see that the forest was empty and headed westward with great caution to try to reach the American lines. On that Tuesday, September 26th at around midday we came across an abandoned American bivouac. There was equipment, weapons, ration boxes and also a body. The scene gave the impression that two patrols – one German and one American, had run into each other and, after exchanging fire, had withdrawn to their respective units. With the permission of the dead man my two "guides" and myself attacked the American rations, as we were truly dying of hunger. We continued to advance westward, taking every type of precaution to avoid falling into an ambush and, late afternoon, we saw the Moselotte valley in the distance, a little to the south of Eloyes. We could see in the valley American Army convoys motoring in both ways. While taking even more precautions because of the imminent contact with the Americans, we came upon an American advanced post. Thank God the sentry hadn't seen us. In fact, I was wearing German boots and a camouflaged rain coat - we could easily have been mistaken for Germans. 1 signaled to my guides to crouch and not move. I jumped to my feet with my arms above my head, shouting "Don't shoot! Don't shoot! I am an officer of the French Resistance." The sentry swung around and shakily pointed his Garand rifle at me. He was totally taken by surprise. I continued advancing towards him slowly, speaking nicely to him all the while, until he allowed me to enter his emplacement. He called his watch officer, and they were both soon convinced of who I was.

They belonged to the 36th American Infantry Division called "Texas-Oklahoma", and treated both myself and my two "guides" verty well. We were escorted to the 36th Division's headquarters and then passed on to the G2, where I was able to give them all the recent information I had obtained the day before concerning the German troop positions and artillery emplacements hidden in the forest. I explained that I had to go to St. Amè (I had learned that the town had been liberated three days previously), and that I needed to meet Michel and Georgelin on or before Saturday September 30. I sent off my two guides (who probably went to their homes) and never heard of them again.
On Thursday 28th, having found out that an American battalion was about to attack the Cleurie valley, I obtained permission to go along with one of the advance companies, in the hope of finding some of my comrades. However, the Americans were unable to advance more than half a mile owing to the strength of the enemy resistance. Artillery fire support was requested, and the first salvo fell short, right over our heads. It was there that my vocabulary in English increased, thanks to the highly colorful expressions that the Americans exclaimed at coming under fire from their own artillery!
On Friday I returned to St. Amè and waited until midday Saturday. Georgelin and Michel did not arrive, and I decided to get in touch with my commanding officers at the BCRA to inform them of what had happened to the "Piquante Pierre" maquis.
In the afternoon I returned to Eloyes, where the general headquarters of the 36th division was stationed, and got a ride to Lyon, from where the French authorities dispatched me to Paris. I arriver at the BCRA offices on October 4th to give my report.
According to two historical publications which were produced after the war: "3 années de Resistance dans la montagne vosgienne" written by "Lucien", and "La Bresse martyre"; it says that the Germans lost four hundred and fifty men in the combats which took place on September 20th ("La Bresse Martyre"); eighty Resistance fighters died during the battles, and one hundred prisoners and civilian hostages were shot by firing squad. The books also mention that the presence of the Resistance in the region obliged the Germans to maintain around ten thousand soldiers there during the last months of occupation ... No comments!

In the BCRA offices I was debriefed orally and asked for a written report which I handed in. I was then lodged at a small and horrible hotel, where I really suffered from the cold. Paris was gray and rainy. After finishing with the formalities of the report I was given a two or three weeks' furlough and some money from my back pay. I was told to present myself for new instructions once I returned. I knew that my sister Margarita, whose husband Jean Forcella, an artillery captain, had been taken prisoner by the Germans in June 1940, had taken refuge with her two small children Polo and Patrick in a farm called "Le Moulin Dumas". The property belonged to a very kind woman named Claire Dumas, and was situated near the town of Grignan, in the Rhône valley in the south of France. The town became famous because the Marchioness of Sevigné died there in the 17th century. The Marchioness' correspondence of more than thirty years with her daughter, the Countess of Grignan, is a picturesque epistolary literary work describing the provincial customs of the day.

France was still in the process of being liberated, and was confronted by truly chaotic railroad transportation problems, among others. I traveled on what was available – a train headed south and, after moving at a snail's pace, finally got off at Montelimar, some 25 kilometers from Grignan. Indeed, pursued by the First French Army, the Germans had blown up all the bridges in the Rhône River valley during their retreat. I began my walk toward Grignan in the total absence of anytruck or other vehicle with wheels. With the physical training I had received, I covered the 25 kilometers from Montelimar as though it was nothing and arrived at the "Moulin Dumas". I asked the woman who came out (who happened to be Claire) if Margarita my sister was there with her two children. She replied that they were and called out to them to come out. Margarita hugged me when she saw who I was, but at first she had in fact confused me with my brother Enrique, as she knew nothing of my services in the Free French Forces owing to the lack of communication between occupied France and the rest of the world. She was extremely surprised and happy to find out it was her brother André she was embracing. Our reunion was unforgettable. Polo, who I had held in my arms just before my family's return to Mexico, was now a ten year old girl, and I met her five year old little brother Patrick for the first time.

We didn't stop talking about the family and the many experiences we had both had and endured. Margarita told me of the suffering under German occupation, of the summary executions of innocent citizens in the main square of Grignan and God knows what other savagery . She also showed me where she had hidden some weapons inside the house, which we dug up. The risk they had run was tremendous. The Germans' searches had never uncovered the hiding place, but if they had been found the penalty would have been instant death for all the inhabitants of the "Moulin Dumas".

I presented myself at the Grignan police station, as it was an obligation for all military personnel on leave. They lent me a bicycle, which proved to be very useful to move around on.
The days spent in the Company of Margarita and her children were unforgettable, like a calm after a storm, but they passed too quickly. The day for good-byes, tears and separation arrived, with the hope that we would meet again. I dont remember what I did with the bicycle, but I returned to Montelimar, took the first train that came and eventually arrived in Paris. I presented myself at the BCRA headquarters once again to find out what the future held for me. It was there that a lieutenant or a captain, who was comfortably seated behind his desk and had probably sent many agents to their death, asked me if I would be prepared to carry out another mission which consisted of my parachuting at night into a prisoner of war camp in Germany. I told him that I was prepared to die for France, as I had already demonstrated, but that this mission was sheer stupidity as, firstly, I couldn't see what I would be able to do in the prisoner of war camp, and that there would surely

be terrible reprisals in response to the mission. I went on to say that secondly, once I was in the camp, the Germans would find me immediately for a number of reasons: my youth (19 years of age), my good physical condition and my lack of a shared background with the French prisoners - as my upbringing and education prior to the Ecole Militaire des Cadets had taken place entirely in Mexico. Even my vocabularywas certainly very different to theirs. I told him that I wanted to continue fighting the Germans, but that this time, preferably in a combat unit. As my brother Enrique was with the Second French Armored Division, I asked for and received authorization to travel to where it was located and join it.

I was given my mission orders and headed East, hitching rides on the trucks that formed the supply convoys which the Americans were directing toward the combat areas. It was truly an unending stream of vehicles - almost fender to fender – and very impressive.

On seeing these convoys, you realized the gigantic industrial might of the USA, and that it was being directed one hundred per cent towards the war effort.

IV. FRANCE GERMANY 2DB

I arrived at the 2DB's theater of operations and found my brother Enrique's battalion, the 22 FTA anti-air-craft artillery unit, which was mounted on GMC trucks. The encounter with Enrique took place near the Vosges, and was once again as emotional as the previous time at the Military Academy in England. He presented me to the unit Commander – an officer named Lancrenon (who, by the way, was killed later during the war in Indochina). The battalion was divided in batteries – the equivalent of companies in infantry terminology. In order to protect the batteries, each one had a group called "Groupe franc" - the equivalent to an infantry platoon -. The "Groupe franc" main mission was to protect the anti-aircraft cannons against enemy infiltration, as in many instances the batteries were to be found at the front line, exposed to enemy attacks. The Battalion commander placed me immediately in command of the group which corresponded to the third battery. Captain Malibas was the 3rd. battery commander. This "Groupe franc" was composer of volunteers who had joined the 2DB when the division passed through Paris, so most of them were Parisians.

Shortly after, on November 21st, under the command of General Leclerc, a brilliant maneuver executed by this division in the Col de Saverne area overcame the German resistance in the mountains, slightly north from where I had been dropped by parachute. The Col de Saverne was a pass in the mountains which opened the way to the plains of Alsace and made possible the liberation of Strasbourg in a lightning–like movement. The first 2DB tanks to enter Strasbourg found German military police still directing the traffic in the streets. The division almost reached the Kehl bridge, which crosses the Rhine there, but the German garrison recovered and, from the forts and blockhouses surrounding the bridge, halted the French advance for a time. Thus, the division was unable to free the bridge and enter Germany by surprise. Strasbourg's population went wild with happiness and, in spite of the German artillery fire from the opposite side of the Rhine and some airborne Messerschmidt strafing on houses and streets, tricolor flags appeared in all the windows and buildings. In spite of the danger, the population jammed the streets, ready to hug their liberators. This feat earned the 2DB an American decoration called "Presidential Unit Citation", and the right of all its members to wear the decoration. Farther south, the First French Army found itself detained by German resistance in the Vosges and near the Swiss border, causing it to be held back in its northward advance.

The 2DB began to advance southward in an attempt to join the First French Army and to cut off the German Army in the Vosges. Owing to the Germans' tenacious resistance, this operation was extremely difficult and bloody. Himmler himself had taken charge of the defense of the Black Forest and Alsace: to the contrary of what had been surmised, not only did the Germans fail to start their evacuation from Alsace, but availed themselves of a large quantity of reinforcements and equipment. Moreover, the onset of winter brought below zero temperatures, snowfalls and freezing rain that caused flooding and resulting obstructions. On various occasions I participated with my "Groupe franc" in actions which were carried out by a group formed by different units, infantry, tanks, etc., under one sole commander – generally a major or lieutenant-colonel. The group would have one or two tank platoons, an infantry Company, engineers, a medical unit, etc. and had a predetermined objective – for example, the capture of a small town, the taking of a hill crest, or capturing and holding a cross-roads.
Accompanying infantrymen of the Regiment de Marche du Chad, we huddled on the rear platform of the tanks, behind the turret, until the shooting started, and thus providing extra pairs of eyes to supplement the tanks' lack of visibility and protect them against enemy snipers hidden in foxholes,

armed with the dreaded Panzer Faust - the German equivalent of the bazooka. Once the battle began we fought as foot soldiers, accompanying the tanks. One night in December, in the middle of a snowstorm we suddenly received the order to change course. We turned around immediately and headed north at full speed. I have never in my life felt such cold as when I was traveling in my open jeep. It was when the Germans made their last desperate attempt to punch through the Allied lines, and they almost achieved it. History books refer to this episode as the Battle of the Bulge, in Bastognes; a German offensive begun on December 16, 1944, in the Ardennes. The Allied high command ordered all the available units that were in the general vicinity to head there as quickly as possible to reinforce the Allied defenses and stop what would become the last great German offensive in the western theater.

At the beginning of March 1945 the 2DB was sent on R & R to a place near Chateauroux so that its members would receive some well-deserved rest. The break also served as a chance to carry out maintenance and replace vehicles and armor. More troops were also incorporated into the 2DB as replacements of the casualties sustained in combat. During this period the 2DB sent some of its units to finish off a pocket of German resistance that was still active in the town of Royan on the Atlantic Coast which the French Forces of the Interior (FFI) had not managed to reduce. During these days of R&R I had a very enjoyable adventure with a young girl who had a small store in Chateauroux that sold umbrellas. The store was called "A mon joli parapluie", and its pretty owner helped me recover my good humor and calm. For the majority of the troops our time in Chateauroux was one of rest, and for the recent arrivals a time for training and preparation. I had a chance to see my brother Enrique again on various occasions. In Strasbourg he had "recovered" an abandoned Mercedes Benz. Feeling that we had nothing to do, we thought that we would make good use of the car and drive south to the family house in Cannes; without asking for the corresponding permission. We headed for Cannes, but after only a few miles the clutch began to slip. We decided that we would not be able to reach Cannes, and that it would be better to head back towards the 2DB camp. But oh, what a frightening surprise! Marching orders had just arrived, directing the 2DB on a forced movement to Germany to take part in the last of the combats. If it had not been for the slipping clutch, Enrique and I would not have returned on time and we would have been absent without leave (AWOL), which in wartime could have meant a lot of trouble for us, to put it mildly.

We penetrated Germany, pursued the German troops who surrendered to us quite more easily than the German forces did on the Russian front. They were reserved a nasty surprise when they realized that their captors were not Americans; although we had identical equipment, uniforms and vehicles as the Americans, we were in fact French.

We passed through Landsberg, a notorious place where Hitler wrote his book "Meir Kampf" while incarcerated, and also by the city of Kaufering, where Mr. Maurice Schumann, one of general de Gaulle's ministers, arrived at our camp and stayed overnight. As a keepsake from this event, I have the book called "Honneur et Patrie", containing the speeches Mr. Shumann made in London at the BBC, during the occupation of France, to uplift the morale of the French people, and autographed by him for me and mentioning our meeting in that place.

We later passed through a place where there was a Nazi concentration and extermination camp. Once the Nazis saw our column of vehicles arriving, these bastards locked all the poor souls in detention in the barracks and set fire to them.

It was extremely irritating to realize that the local civilian population claimed that they had known nothing of these atrocities, and actually wanted us to believe them.
We continued advancing in Germany towards the southeast, and could see that the magnificent freeways (autobahns) had been converted into Luftwaffe airstrips as we went. On one side of the freeway there were hundreds of Messerschmidt ME-262 twin jet aircraft parked wingtip to wingtip. They had not been fully employed owing to the lack of fuel and the Allied troops' lightning-like advance. If they had been employed on a massive scale, these twin-engine jets could have destroyed the Allies' much slower internal combustion, propeller-driven aircraft.

We arrived in Munich, and found the streets deserted. By chance I passed by a publishing house which published the "Volkischer Beobachter", the Nazi party's official newspaper. The edition for Sunday, April 29th, 1945 which the German public had not been able to read as it had never left the building, was still in the printing machines. I kept a copy as a souvenir of our advance across Bavaria.

The pursuit of the German troops continued . There was a kind of competition between the 2DB and the 101st American airborne division, called the "Screaming Eagles"; probably because its insignia was an eagle's head. The race was on to see who would arrive first at Berchtesgaden and at Hitler's famed Eagle's Nest. The 2DB's advance units arrived first at Hitler's Berchtesgaden refuge in the mountains on the Austrian border on May 4th, 1945 I believe, and in so doing beat the American paratroopers to it. Hitler was not there as he had committed suicide in his Berlin bunker shortly before.

There was sporadic resistance from some fanatic SS troops but we reached the Eagle's Nest located at the top of the mountain, from where there was a spectacular view of the surrounding valleys. It is said that it was there that Hitler used to experience his visions of grandeur.
From the cellars and tunnels under the housing complex of Berchtesgaden, we recovered hundreds of crates of French wine and all sorts of articles and merchandises that the Germans had stolen in France. I recovered an abandoned German four cylinder Ford sedan, and a Horch Auto Union 2 door convertible with a very long hood and a big engine with a lot of horsepower. Also, I still have a parchment that was given to Hitler by the city of Koblenz on March 20th, 1933. That parchment is a diploma that names him honorary citizen of that city.
It was decided that the Americans, would take over the occupation of this zone, and the 2DB was sent back to France. The war in Europe had ended.

On the way back to France, at a checkpoint, an American colonel started to dispute my rights over the Horsch convertible, threatening me with an accusation of pillaging. In order to avoid problems, I had no other alternative than to give him this beautiful automobile. Anyway, it would have been far too showy a car for a simple 2nd Lieutenant!
The euphoria had taken us over and the simple fact of having survived left us intoxicated. The ingestion of a few bottles here and there that we had recovered, also helped. All our vehicles, jeeps, half tracks, GMCs, etc. were stacked up high with recovered cases of French wine and our convoy took on an appearance of a Company of movers or gypsies. We returned to France and the 2DB settled in near Paris. On June 18th, 1945 there was a great parade in Paris in which, among other units, the 2DB took part and received the most applauses. Unfortunately I did not participate. On June 21 st, 1945 General Leclerc awarded me the "Croix de Guerre" with a bronze star (2DB General Order Number 88) for my participation in the Resistance and with the Groupe Franc of the

3rd Battery, 22nd FTA's. My brother Enrique and I got leave permits and this time we actually made it to Cannes, where we spent some unforgettable days. A curious detail of our time spent there was that there were a lot of Brazilian soldiers enjoying their R & R in Cannes. I did not know that Brazil had sent an expeditionary corps to Italy. This expeditionary force consisted of 25 000 men (two divisions) and took part in the bloody Italian campaign. Their air force flew 445 missions, 2 546 offensive sorties and, in 6 144 hours of flying time, dropped 10 010 metric tons of bombs on the enemy. I think very few people in the world know about Brazil's participation in the Second World War.

In Cannes we had an entertaining adventure when we rented a sailboat and went to the Islands of "Lerins", "Sainte Marguerite" and "Saint Honorat", some five or six miles from Cannes in the Mediterranean. On our way back something happened to the mast and the sail became loose. As a consequence, we arrived at the marina in Cannes some two or three hours later than the time we had agreed upon. The person who was in charge of the sailboats started to shout at us and, with all types of exaggeration, reproached us for our lateness in a particularly unpleasant manner until he wore out our patience. We stopped him dead when we told him that it was his fault that the boat was in such poor condition and that he had possibly committed a criminal act, by putting the lives of two officers from the glorious French Army at risk! People who were walking along the Croisette started to gather around us and obviously took our sicle. Full of remorse, the sailboat rentals man said nothing and, to avoid any further problems, did not even charge us for the rental of the boat.

The war had finished in Europe, but it still went on in the Far East, where the Americans in the Pacific, and the British in the Indian and Burmese theater continued fighting the Japanese, who put up a suicidal and fanatical resistance.

Elements of the 2DB were integrated to form the "Groupement de Marche de la 2DB", which was to be sent to fight the Japanese. The unit was to head for the British theater of operations in the Far East, which was under the command of Admiral Mountbatten. The headquarters of the Admiral Commander-in-Chief of the British Sector was on the Island of Ceylon, which is now known as Sri Lanka, and was based in Kandy, a place famous for its botanical gardens.

I was detached to this group; this time in the 4th Battalion of the "Régiment de Marche du Tchad" (IV R.M.T) and was assigned to its staff. The GM2DB Commander was lieutenant colonel Massu. The commander of the IV RMT was Major Dronne, who became famous as he was one of the first soldiers to enter Paris at the moment that it was being liberated from the Germans when he was captain of the 9th RMT Company in the 2DB. It is also worth noting that the liberation of Paris was achieved with the help of the FFI. Another interesting fact is that the members of this infantry company were almost all Spanish (ex – republicans), as was the commander of the 3rd battalion to which the 9th Company belonged, a man named Putz who died gloriously leading his men in Alsace during the French campaign.

We were concentrated in the port of Marseille prior to embarking on a ship bound for the Far East where we would unite with the British troops.

My sister Margarita and her two children had returned to their apartment in Marseille after her husband Jean Forcella was liberated from a German prisoner of war camp. He had spent nearly five years in captivity. It was, in fact, the Russian troops who had liberated him as they had arrived first at his "Oflag" (a prisoner of war camp for officers) . I spent some very good times with them each time I was able to escape from my Army duties.

The two atomic bombs fell one after the other on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and Japan surrendered. In light of that our orders were changed; they arrived informing us that we would be going to the Far East anyway, but instead of Burma we would be going to Indochina to receive the Japanese military's surrender and reestablish French sovereignty in that peninsula.

The majority of us thought that it was going to be like a vacation on a cruise ship followed by a picnic in Indochina, and that instead of having to wage war we would be touring around and taking photos. I had a Leica automatic camera which had belonged once to the German Air Force ("Luftwaffe Eigentum") that I had recovered from one of its abandoned depots. The camera was mounted on the wings of the Messerschmidt ME-109 and was activated by fixing the plane's machine guns or the cannon mounted in its nose, so that it would film the results of the shots. As it didn't have a viewfinder I pointed it using guesswork and its sides as a means of lining up the shot.

In Marseille we had a lot of problems with the mafias which controlled almost all the bars, the black market and the areas around the docks. Many soldiers were assaulted and beaten up by these rascals. As everything has its limit, after one particular incident in a bar, a group of soldiers returned to the place there with a jeep that had a .50 caliber machine gun mounted on it and let fly a few bursts at the establishment. Thank God there nobody was killed or wounded, but the bar was partially destroyed. The attacks against members of the GM 2DB stopped completely. I understand that no one was found guilty in the investigations which later took place, but it was recommended that we should not respond to these provocations in such a spectacular manner.

V. INDOCHINA

The flotilla which was to transport us to Indochina comprised, among other ships, the BEARN aircraftcarrier, the Suffren, the Gloire, the Ville de Strasbourg, the Pasteur and the Quercy. The Ville de Strasbourg, which I was to sail on, finally arrived at the dock and we began loading the jeeps, half-tracks, armored cars trucks etc. on board. The troops boarded last and we finally set sail for Indochina.
I had to share a cabin with a higher-ranking officer. Obviously the bed corresponded to him, and the sofa was mine.
We passed through the Messina Straits at night, and could see the spectacular fireworks display from the Stromboli volcano, which was not dormant. The journey continued across the Mediterranean, which was calm, and then on to Port Said, which is the entrance to the Suez Canal. The Ville de Strasbourg made a stopover there for three or four days to take on supplies, and we all obtained shore leave by turns meanwhile. The French colony there received and entertained us in a splendid manner. I met a beautiful girl there whose father was a pilot of the Suez Canal Company. It was love at first sight for both of us, and we agreed that if it was God's will that I would stay alive, then I would come for her upon my return to France. However, Man proposes and God disposes; after my odyssey in Indochina and return to Egypt I found out that she had not waited for me and had married

We began the sail through the Suez Canal and it was quite hot. The countryside divided by the canal was arid – pure sand and no vegetation on either side of the ship. A few yards from the ship, north and southbound, there were some sailboats carrying cargo on the canal. They were typical Egyptian Dows. On the banks, just a stone's throw from us, there were camel caravans carrying loads alongside the canal. We passed by Ismailia; a desert oasis, and then arrived at the Red Sea.
To keep the troops busy we did gymnastics, ran relay races and other activities on the deck every day. We also gave conferences on every type of topic, including history, geography etc. about the country we were travelling in. At the far south end of the Red Sea we anchored in front of Djibouti for a few hours and later headed for the Indian Ocean, where we sailed for several days uneventfully until we arrived in view of Ceylon and docked in the port of Colombo. We were there for two or three days during which I imagine the French authorities made contact with
Admiral Mountbatten, who was still commanding that theater of operations. Once again we set sail and later reached the Malaca Strait during the day, passing through it, very close to the coast. From the ship it was possible to see some beautiful residences which had not been destroyed by the Japanese. We arrived in Singapore, where we also anchored for a few hours, and then continued on a heading for Cap Saint Jacques, in the southern extreme of the Indochina peninsula and the Mekong Delta. Our destination was Saigon - the capital of Conchinchina and an important seaport, a few kilometers inland on the river, just like New Orleans. As the day broke, my curiosity led me to the deck to see how the ship made its way inland via the river. The countryside was beautiful, totally green and cultivated with bananes, palm trees and rice paddies. I was lost in thought when suddenly a metallic sound that was like stones hitting the side of the ship brought me back to reality, and then a little later another and another. It took me a while to realize that they weren't stones, but ballets fired from the riverbank. I couldn't believe it and thought that the shots had been fired by some lunatic, since the war had ended.

Those shots were like a premonitory warning that something was amiss and that the pleasure cruise was going to become something terrible very different from our rosy vision of it.

We arrived in Saigon, moored the ship and started to unload the equipment and disembark the troops in order to head for what was to be our camp in the Cho Lon area. The city was calm and the Japanese troops, still armed, ambled through the streets peacefully. In the city there was also a division of Ghurkas from the British Army that had arrived, just as we had, to receive the Japanese Army's surrender, disarm its troops and send them home. The Vietnamese population was living in peace – there was only a minority of Ho Chi Minh followers then.
Days before our arrival a massacre of European civilians by the feared Viet-Minh had occurred. The Japanese who controlled the region had not lifted a finger to stop it.
The first operations to liberate the towns and regions of My Tho, Tay Ninh and Go dau Ha from the terror of the Viet-Minh began. I participated in these operations, and it was there that we suffered our first losses.

Near where I was working on the staff of the IV RMT as an aide to Captain Grall, assistant Commander of the Battalion, near Go dau Ha, was the famous and feared Plaine des Joncs, a swampy place which was one of the Viet Minhs' refuges. It was there that I witnessed a bloody combat between the IV RMT and the Viet Minh as an observer since I had no men under my command. Some Indochinese sympathizers who supported us accompanied the French troops as soldiers during this encounter. When the encounter ended and the troops returned, I suffered a terrible shock when I saw that the localtroops were carrying the severed heads of their vanquished enemies, dangling from their hands by their hair. This barbarity was a reprisal against the Viet Minh who, as they had entered villages of the region, had wrought their vengeance upon those who did not cooperate with them, killing civilians right and left as they encountered them. In Go dau Ha, on the Mekong river, the bodies of vietnamese executed and horribly mutilated by the Viet Minh, floated down the river, and often with their genitals severed and held in place in their mouths, with a bamboo sliver through their cheeks.
I have other memories of my time in Go dau Ha and they are mixed with the smell of rancid coconut oil. Coconut oil was used for everything: for combing hair, for cooking and for lighting, being used in lamps with a wick. I do not know what those lamps produced more of: light, or smoke that stank of rancid coconut oil.

The first regiment of the colonial infantry 1RIC, arrived in Indochine. Its principal mission was to take and occupy territory and establish garrisons, although it also often participated in combats, while our mission was to push ahead and liberate the territories held by the Viet Minh.
I continued to be on the IV RMT staff and, on occasions, accompanied the groups on their combat and reconnaissance missions.

During an operation whose mission was to liberate the region called Terres rouges an area of large rubber plantations (hevea), a platoon of captain Djanbekoff's (an old Russian tsarist officer) 13th company, which was commanded by 2nd lieutenant Nidelet, was ambushed. During the shooting, a bullet entered the half-track through the slot in the armor across the windshield. Thanks to the fact that Nidelet was standing at that moment, the bullet wounded him in the thigh, instead of going through his head. It was in this manner that I inherited the platoon and left the IV RMT staff. The platoon comprised five half-tracks that carried 10 men, each commanded by a sergeant: one that was the command half-track, which I rode in, two that had a squad of riflemen each, one that carried a mortar and finally one with a 57 millimeter anti-tank cannon.

The order received were to pursue the Viet Minh and liberate the region. I do not know whether I misunderstood the orders to advance to a specific point as, the case is that my platoon, enfevered with its success, pushed on and advancing further than it should have. Major Dronne gave me a strong reprimand and even threatened to strip me of my 2nd Lieutenant ‘s stripes as he believed that my advance had jeopardized a large operation he was going to implement the following day.
However, it did not actually happen that way; instead of tipping off the enemy, we provoked a great panic in its midst, and it retreated in disorder. The objective of the following day’s operation was achieved by my platoon without any losses at all. In light of what occurred Dronne not only did not demote me, but instead congratulated me.

We arrived at a settlement where two or three beautiful mansions stood among the other buildings. They reminded me a little of the houses in Acapulco. They were totally abandoned, and we did not know what had happened to their occupants. They surely must have been planters and must have belonged to the directors of the plantations and their families.

When I asked some peasants, they told me that the owners had left, but that they were some Japanese on the other side of the highway in the ravine. I left my platoon in position around the houses and moved ahead with my half-track in the direction that the farmers had pointed out to me. In effect, a the bottom of a small valley there was a Japanese camp, housing an infantry company headed by a captain who happened to speak English. I felt a little uncomfortable, as we were only ten French soldiers standing before 100 armed Japanese.

The captain and I started to talk. I am not exactly sure of how I did it, but I Managed to convince him to join his contingent to mine and help comb the rubber plantation on the other side of the highway. With the Japanese captain leading 100 Japanese soldiers in a firing line, with 30 or so French soldiers mixed in, and a Frech 2nd lieutenant commanding the whole operation, we combed the plantation from one end to the other. We did not find a single Viet Minh, but I think this operation was truly unique in the annals of the Second World War.

On December 24th, 1945 we were closing in on the Moi région when we were ambushed once again. As a curions foot-note, owing to the intense heat, I had taken off my shirt and placed it over my duffel bag so that it would not become dirty on the floor of the half-track. The road was flanked on both sides by the heavy tropical jungle which in Indochina is very dense and interspersed with many tall trees. As we had practiced on many occasions, we carried out the maneuver for confronting ambushes automatically. To stay in the open, on the highway was a most perilous move; in order to take cover it was necessary to enter the jungle on both sides of the road; my sergeant with half the platoon on one side of the convoy, and I with the other half of the platoon on the other side of the road, both combing the jungle portions for a certain distance and routing the ambushers. These were very tense moments, as we had to fight hand to hand at close quarters. We were really scared, but the enemy was scared also and often after a few minutes couldn't stand the pressure and ran away terrified.

This ambush cost the enemy several casualties, but unfortunately one of my soldiers was killed, as he was about to get out of the half-track, possibly by a sniper hidden in the trees. When I got back into my half-track, my God! I saw that myshirt had three bullet holes. What had probably happened is that another sniper in the treetops had seen my shirt over the duffel bag in a corner of the half-track, thinking it was an officer crouched on the floor inside the vehicle and shot at it (as half-tracks

only have armor on the sides, and do not have a roof). As a keepsake of this adventure, one of my soldiers took a picture of me standing in front of my half-track, holding up my perforated shirt.

In the great Indochina jungle lived a people called "Moi", différent ethnically from the vietnamese and original inhabitants of the peninsula. Many years ego, the Chinese started southward and began infiltrating the Indochinese peninsula, seizing and occupying the low and arable lands. The Moi people were cornered in the jungle, and ever since have not sympathized with the descendents of this Chinese immigration, who, over the centuries, became Vietnamese . The Moi lived in small villages, and their houses were thatched huts built on stilts of approximately one and a half meters above the ground. On the ground below their huts they use to burn green branches so that the smoke would rise between the bamboo slats used as floorboards and keep the mosquitoes away, and also heat the hut during cold weather. The Moi were friendly and the only thing we had to watch out for was that the soldiers did not go near their women. It was one of the few places where we could sleep peacefully without a permanent guard, as the Moi themselves warned us of the close proximity of, or penetration by the Viet Minh forces at a given moment. When we patrolled the jungle it was impressive to hear the monkeys' cries from the trees, the screeches of the macaws and every other type of noise, including the growls of tigers.
Every time my platoon stopped and camped, latrines were dug according to regulations; they consisted of a hole in the ground with a pair of planks across the top of it so that you could squat over it. These holes were filled in with earth at the moment of abandoning the camp not only for ecological reasons, but also to leave as few traces of our presence there as possible. On one occasion when I made my way to a recently dug latrine and was about to do what my physiological needs demanded, I prepared to position myself on the planks when an enormous snake came out from the hole and almost bit me where I would prefer not say. I shot away from the hole like a rocket, and the fright made me forget what I had gone to the latrine for.

The half-tracks served primarily to transport us on the roads or tracks with a certain security owing to their armor plating, but invariably the patrols and combats were carried out on foot. We walked many kilometers in swamps, rice paddies and in the jungle, and many variably important skirmishes took place as a result of our encounters with the Viet Minh.

However, a common denominator in all these actions were the leeches which one way or another managed to penetrate to our skin and suck our blood until they were almost bursting. If they were simply pulled off, part of the worm remained inside the skin, and the wound it left always became infected. The only way to make them release the skin without leaving anything inside was to apply a lit cigarette to them.
In one operation in which the group remounted from the lowlands and rice paddies of Conchinchina, we passed through Ban Me Thuot and continuel towards Dalat, in the highlands; a favorite vacation spot of the Europeans owing to its temperate climate. We also passed through a place called the Three Frontiers (Conchinchina, Cambodia and Annam). We came up against resistance at various points, but always managed to rout our enemies without too many losses on our part. We also made a few prisoners each time.

From Dalat the column turned east towards the China Sea, with the port of Nha–Trang as our destination.

We had to use the highways as it was absolutely impossible for the vehicles to transit once they were off them. In one of our encounters with the enemy, my dear friend lieutenant Mengel, who commanded an armored car platoon was killed while returning to pick up one of his men who had been wounded and laid on the ground.

Our battle orders changed almost daily, and different units took turns leading the column. Obviously, those whose turn it was to lead the column came under fire first and were the first to confront the resistance offered by the enemy. On January 25th it was my platoon's turn to lead the procession. I had received our orders the night before where we were camping by the side of the highway. I do not know what happened that night, but my men and I overslept and very early the next morning it was the noise of the vehicles of the column already moving on the highway that woke us up.
Filled with panic, I awoke everyone with my shouting. We rapidly climbed aboard and started our vehicles, as they had already been filled with gas the night before, and we moved up onto the highway, overtaking one by one all the vehicles of the convoy, until we arrived at the head, just behind an armored car leading the convoy. My platoon was embarked on GMC trucks instead of our half-tracks, owing to a lack of caterpillar tracks for our half-tracks. I will explain the reason for this lack of spare parts, later.

So, having occupied at last our position in the column, little by little my nerves calmed. It would have been a serious neglect of duty if my platoon had not occupied its place in the convoy ... a certain court martial for its leader! We were moving at about ten or fifteen kilometers per hour when the armored car in front of us stopped and began firing its 37 millimeter cannon. We could also hear heavy fire coming principally from ahead, on the other side of a river. A small bridge over the river had been blown up and the Viet Minh were dug in on the other side. We automatically jumped down on both sides of the trucks. As on so many other occasions; my sergeant with part of the platoon, on the left of the convoy, and myself with two groups on the right. We entered in the under brush and advanced towards the river and the destroyed bridge that impeded our advance which was also where the shots were coming from.

With some men from the group I was commanding we moved to the river that was pretty shallow at the bottom of a small ravine. Once there, I saw that bursts of fire were coming from a machine gun directly in front of us, but thanks to the slope that led down to the river the bullets could not reach us and passed over our heads before burying themselves in the riverbank on the other side.

The enemy also realized this and started to throw grenades, which rolled down to us in an attempt to eliminate us, I quickly understood that if we stayed there they were going to kill all of us, and that if we tried to retreat by climbing up the other slope their fire would reach us, which left us with no other alternative than to take the blockhouse which was some ten meters in front of us by a direct assault. On my command the group got to its feet and we ran up the ten meters of slope that separated us from the Viet Minh positions. I remember seeing as in a dream, the flashes of the machine gun, contrasting with the blackness of the blockhouse's embrasure through which it was firing, just in front of me . We were already on top of the blockhouse, and miraculously my group was intact. To silence the occupants of the blockhouse we threw a couple of grenades through the

embrasure and at the rear entrante and everything went quiet. On both sides of this fortification there was a trench that ran in a zig-zag along the river bank and it extended for quite a stretch. I jumped down from the blockhouse to the bottom of the trench and moved ahead on what was the right hand side of the highway. In a corner, a few meters away I bumped into a Viet Minh who was carrying an automatic rifle. I fired at him at point blank range with my pistol at the same moment that he fired a burst at me with his automatic rifle. I felt something hit me hard in the face and I fell on top of him. I thought I was dead, but the simple fact of thinking demonstrated to me that I was alive. The Viet Minh had three bullets in the chest, while my face was bloodied because the burst of fire he had directed at me had just passed by a few millimeters from my face. The blow that I had felt in my face, was the result of the deflagration produced by an automatic weapon fired at point blank range. Soon, my people arrived and I found out that we had captured these fortifications, amazingly without a single loss; while in contrast the enemy had suffered several and the remaining survivors had fled and disappeared in the jungle.

The troops who were behind my platoon in the convoy, advanced and occupied the terrain that we had just captured , the engineers began repairing the bridge immediately and soon I found myself at the end of the column in one of the medical units' ambulances with a pair of really lovely nurses and a very friendly doctor. They smeared my face with iodine, removed the slivers of gunpowder from my eyelids and, best of all, gave me a full glass of cognac! For the action at the bridge I was awarded my second "Croix de Guerre"; this time with a palm, and a Citation of the Army. (Decision number 235 of 22 July, 1946, printed in the "Journal Officiel" of the 18th of August, 1946, page 1512G).

We finally arrived at the port of Nha-Trang, a very nice beach resort on the China Sea. It had wonderful beaches that once again reminded me of far-away Acapulco. We rested for various days, and I had a delicious affair with one of the girls that drove the ambulances. Those days passed by lightning-like and we set out for the return journey to Saigon - this time with fewer ambushes and without my having to participate in any of them.

After the operations we carried out in the southern half of Indochine we always returned to Saigon for R & R. The main street in Saigon was called Rue Catinat. There were many good French restaurants there, but for Chinese food it was necessary to go to Cholon, a Chinese neighborhood in Saigon where it was possible to enjoy real oriental feasts. The Peking duck, one of the most famous specialties, was served with a lacquered skin, and is a dish which is eaten with all kinds of sauces and vegetables. After many other dishes – all of them very tasty, at the end of the meal, they brought a delicious rice in a way which reminded me of Mexico, where also, at the end of the meal the beans called the rellenadores or "fillers" are served. If you were invited by a wealthy Chinese for lunch or dinner, they would also serve you rice at the end of the meal. Although the rice looked very appetizing, you were supposed to take only a very small helping of it. If the guest served himself and ate a large portion, this would be taken as an affront by the hosts as it suggested that either there was not enough food or it was not to the guest's liking.

The echoes we received from France via the press were not the sort to lift our spirits. We were treated as no better than mercenaries and assassins, obviously on instructions of the Communist Party.

We had some outbursts of mutiny among the soldiers, who did not understand why the press attacked them so ferociously considering that they were risking their lives daily. These outbreaks did not become serious, but there was a great feeling of resentment towards the homeland that sent its young men to die so far away, and not only failed to show them any gratitude, but condemned them instead.

The equipment of the Groupement de Marche de la 2DB, which had already been used in the campaign in France and Germany, was showing evident signs of wear and tear. The catterpillar tracks on the half-tracks and tanks primarily had become worn and broke suddenly, as did quite a few parts of the jeeps, trucks and armored cars. Not far from Indo China, in the Philippines, there were enormous depots of American equipment that had not been used as the Second World War had finished suddenly with the dropping of the two atomic bombs on Japan. There were acres and acres of tanks, half-tracks, jeeps, trucks and every type of American Army rolling stock standing in the open air and enormous inventories of spare parts, all of then which were absolutely not needed any longer by the American Army. A French mission went to Manila with the objective of buying equipment and spare parts to renew our existing stock and get our equipment into a gond working condition. The Americans refused to sell us even a single bolt, and all that equipment remained where it was, slowly rusting and deteriorating in the open air in the Philippines. As a consequence, while replacements arriving from France by sea averaged more than a month to arrive, the GM2DB's casualties increased greatly because GMC trucks without armor, were used for our operations, instead of the armored half tracks.

Apparently, the then deceased president Roosevelt's directives were still being carried out beyond their time. In October, 1944, the president had given a formal order to the American forces in China and the Pacifie, to withhold aid and supplies to the French Resistance groups in Indo China which were fighting the Japanese.

The American president's dislike for what he considered French colonialism in Indochina and for De Gaulle meant that the Americans did not lift a finger to help the Frenchmen, in spite of the fact that they were fighting a common enemy – Japan. This abandonment by the Americans caused the extermination of the French troops in Indochina. From 9 March, 1945, the Japanese carried out surprise attacks on the French garrisons and tore them into pièces. In the Ha Gian fort, the Japanese included women and children in the massacre; in the Brière de l'Isle fort the entire garrison was executed without mercy by machine gun as it sang the Marseillaise; in Lang-Son the French military commander, General Lemonnier and the local civilian governor were decapitated after their capture for refusing to ask the garrison to surrender. The garrison resisted to the last bullet, calling in vain for American air support in the form of a munitions and provisions parachute drop. Their last message was: "We still control three quarters of the citadel. No water. Request air support and supplies by parachute drop. Where are the Americans?" The entire garrison was massacred with excessive cruelty by the Japanese. There was only one survivor. This man had saved his life by remaining buried alive under the piles of bodies which had been thrown into a mass grave.
As time passed this situation changed. After the surrender of the Japanese the danger that they had represented no longer existed, but the shadow of Mao spread over the far east and Chiang Kai Chek was about to be expelled from continental China and take refuge in Taiwan.

America's attitude subsequently changed when General Eisenhower became president of the U.S.A., and new orders were issued that cancelled Roosevelt's original policy, but it seems that these changes were.... "Too little, too late".

When I learned of the Americans' absurd refusal to sell or supply us with materials and equipment, which in fact was surplus, I asserted (without being a prophet) to whomever would listen to me, that, eventually, in the not too distant future it would be American soldiers who were going to die in Indochina instead of the French soldiers who were currently dying there, as, sonner or later, the Americans would have to confront the advance of communism in the region. Unfortunately, Korea, and later Vietnam, are sad annals of American military history.

The Chinese who were still under Chiang Kai Chek's government, sent various divisions which had been perfectly equipped with arms, uniforms, helmets etc. by the Americans and invaded the Tonkin province, which is Indochina's northern frontier with China. The official motive for that occupation was that they were there to receive the Japanese surrender and to disarm the Japanese troops in the area. With the Japanese disarmed and sent home, the Chinese troops stayed on and showed no intention of returning to their country. Evidently their intention was to take control of that territory.

They were installed mainly in Hanoi, the capital of Tonkin, and also in Haiphong, which was its port and also the port for that province. As a result of talks between high ranking Chinese and French military authorities, the Chinese finally agreed that the French troops would relieve them and that the Chinese would return to China. At the end of February 1946 a great amphibious operation was prepared in Saigon, with many LST, landing barges and even an aircraft carrier – the Bearn – escorted by destroyers and corvettes.

With the Groupement de Marche 2DB aboard, the French armada set sail and headed north with the intention of disembarking in Haiphong, then onward by land to Hanoi and relieve the Chinese troops who, as it happened, were very reluctant to return home. We stopped briefly in Cam Ran Bay to regroup the ships and then left there and went on to the bay of Ah Long where the mouth of the Haiphong river flows into the sea. This bay is extraordinary and unique in the world, with its many, high, rocky Islands that stand up like towers of a cathedral and look as though they came out of a James Bond novel. The biggest ships remained in the bay, and the landing ship tanks, landing barges and corvettes steamed up the Haiphong River on the morning of March 6th, 1946 under the assumption that they were doing this with the consent of the Chinese.

With the flotilla already committed to its journey up the river, the Chinese opened fire with everything they had: artillery, mortars, machine guns, etc., without any previous warning and at point blank range.
The French command did not respond to this aggression, and the flotilla held its fire for about 20 minutes, but the order finally came to return fire, and at that moment the cannons of the corvettes and destroyers also responded at point blank range. The result was terrible. A salvo from what I believe was the Triomphant hit a junk filled with explosives, moored to a dock. The explosion was huge, and we saw bodies fly some 50 meters into the air.

The French suffered many losses among the dead and wounded. I was with lieutenants Michaut and Dufour, crouching behind a jeep which offered protection from the shooting. Michaut and Dufour each commanded a platoon of tanks. We were in front of the Haiphong cement factory when, among other spots, a cannon shell (almost certainly from an American 57 millimeter anti-tank gun manned by the Chinese) pierced the jeep through and through, penetrating first the left headlight and then exiting through the right rear wheel. When the shell detonated, it blew off one of lieutenant Dufour's legs, slightly wounded Michaut and severed my femoral artery. A nurse – Miss Colette Verge – grabbed me by the armpits and dragged me, under a hail of bullets towards the ship's infirmary. For having risked her own life to save mine, Colette received the "Croix de Guerre" with a citation given by General Valluy, Commander-in-chief of French troops in the Far East. General Valluy was the second Commander-in-chief of French Troops in the Far East. The first had been General Leclerc. The citation given by General Valluy read as follows: "*Having been incorporated into the Rochambeau Group in Saigon after serving in India with total dedication as a code clerk, on March 6th, on a landing ship tank which was under fire from the riverbank in front of Haiphong, she did not hesitate to rush to the aid of the gravely wounded lieutenant Gerard and transport him, under fire, to the first aid post, thus saving this officer's life. She did not cease to demon-strate exceptionnel bravery and presence of mind during operations in Conchinchina and Tonkin.*" To the best of my knowledge, this citation is a unique case as it mentions the name of the person who was saved. Normally, citations only mention the facts and circumstances considered heroic, without giving names other than that of the person deserving the citation.

We were about to enter the infirmary when an explosion and acrid cloud of smoke prevented us from entering. A salvo of Chinese shells had penetrated the ship's infirmary, killing the entire medical team of doctors and nurses and finishing off all the wounded who were inside.

I was carried through the LST's narrow passageways to the mess hall in front of the ship's superstructure. I remember being laid down on one of the benches, which was lined with green plastic. This remains ingrained on my memory because the red blood that was gushing from my wound started covering the bench and dripping onto the floor. I could also see my shoes. There was viscous, red blood oozing through holes out of both of them from my wounded feet. Owing to the lack of anesthesia, a lieutenant doctor gave me a sip of gin (for many years I could not stand the taste or smell of gin, nor the smell of almonds, which reminded me of the cyanide capsule I had been given during my mission in France), with a scalpel he cut open my groin, located and bound my femoral artery to stop the hemorrhage. This lieutenant doctor was killed the following day on the highway from Haiphong to Hanoi. When ready to disembark, I was lowered into a sort of lifeboat along with the other wounded and taken down the river to Ah Long Bay, where the Bearn was anchored. On this occasion this ship was transformed from an aircraft carrier into a hospital ship, owing to the unexpected high casualties suffered.
On board the Bearn, the entire lower deck below the flight deck, had been transformed into a large hospital, overfilled with stretchers and cots with wounded soldiers, and with doctors and nurses moving about.
I was placed in a corner surrounded by wounded who did not stop moaning and complaining in a low voice. In the stretcher immediately next to mine there was a poor soul who had taken cover from the shooting behind a barrel -unluckily filled with fuel- which, when perforated by an incendiary bullet, had produced a sudden incendiary flash that had burned his entire body terribly.

The cannon shot had wounded me at about 10 in the morning, but my evacuation to the Bearn had probably occurred at around two in the afternoon. The large number of unexpected wounded caused the naval surgeons to be overwhelmed. Hours passed and they still did not operate on me. My neighbor's complaints ceased; after the nurses covered his face with a sheet they took him away. As I was not aware of the type of wounds I had sustained, I thought I was wounded in the lower abdomen where most of the pain came from, and that if more than five or six hours went by, septicemia would set in, followed by death. When members of the medical team, a nurse or a doctor passed by, I begged them to operate me, but to no effect. My anguish increased until well after nightfall when I was finally taken to one of the surgery rooms, where I do not remember anything.

When I regained consciousness, I was once again in the hangar on the lower deck, and could feel the vibrations from the engines and the gentle rolling of the ship on the open sea.

The naval doctor who operated on me told me that I was very lucky to be alive, and that perhaps it was a sign of good luck that one of the pieces of shrapnel that he had removed from me was in the form of a horseshoe!

My memories of the journey to Saigon are confused, as I was unconscious for most of the time. What I do remember is that there was an extraordinary chaplain on board who had an artificiel leg as a reminder of the First World War. This blessed gentleman named Jean de Gueuser visited all the wounded continually, helping them to withstand their suffering. He offered to help me write a letter to my parents, which we both composed as I was unable to move any part of my body, and even less able to dictate coherently. He took charge of getting the letter done and sent off, and it finally arrived in Mexico. I was very grateful to him for his kindness.

My mother, donã Magdalena, to whom I was always very sentimentally attached, knew that something bad had happened to me even before the letter arrived. On the very same day that I was gravely wounded, she felt an intense pain that paralyzed her legs, and she knew that I, her son, had been wounded. Absolutely incredible!

Of our arrival at Saigon and my internment in the military hospital number 415 I have only confused recollections. I had to share a cubicle with another wounded officer due to a lack of space, probably caused by unexpected high casualties. He had the hospital bed and I had an adapted stretcher on the floor. My room mate and I became friends. He told me he had fought in the Resistance in France, and what had happened to him there was an extraordinary adventure. He had been captured by the Gestapo and sentenced to death along with various other members of the Resistance, all of whom had been grouped on a piece of level ground near a ravine and guarded by a German soldier armed with a sub-machine gun. They were taken, pair after pair at a small distance near a ditch and where they were shot by a team of German soldiers. Being Lucky enough to speak German, and after he saw that the German guard was wearing a Chain with a cross on it, he moved closer to him and said, "You are a Christian like me. What you are doing is a terrible crime. So, I am going to put my faith in God and run towards the ravine. If you believe in God you will shoot at me, but you will miss." No sonner said than done, he ran to the edge of the ravine and jumped. The German soldier fired his sub-machine gun and missed. Truly hair raising.

I felt a Little better, although I was still weak, immobile and with fevers that came and went. One day, my wound reopened when I exerted myself, and gushes of blood appeared once again. My room mate noticed what had happened and shouted for help. The doctors arrived running and managed to stop the hemorrhaging. The sensation produced by these hemorrhages is curious. The first thing to go is your vision, then your hearing, and then finally comes the darkness and the loss of conscience. When I came to, I was in my stretcher, covered in my half-coagulated blood. For several days they did not change my sheet, which became like a coffee-colored piece of cardboard under my body. During this time I was completely immobile, with the end of the stretcher where my feet were, raised.

One day the medics came running in answer to a call from my room mate, and took him away. He never came back. I heard later that he had died as a result of a wound similar to mine, but that it had become infected, and when they had tried to stitch it back together (according to what they explained to me), the wound disintegrated in their hands, leaving them unable to stop the hemorrhaging. After a time in this hospital I had the good luck (I never knew who had that good idea) to be moved to the GRALL hospital, which was Saigon's main hospital, with magnificent installations. Penicillin was a new and scarce medication at the time, and when obtained it was applied via intramuscular injections every three hours, day and night. Apart from my wounds I had contracted malaria and dengue, in spite of the Atebrina pills they gave us. I suffered bursts of fever which were provoked as much by my infected wounds as by the bouts of malaria.

One day I thought I really was delirious because I could hear the song 'Lili Marlene" being sung double-time in German. I had heard the song during my mission in the Résistance in France when, crouched in the bushes, groups of German soldiers had passed close by in step to the tune. In reality I was not in fact delirious – what had occurred is that the first battalions of the French Foreign Légion had arrived to Indochine, and they were constituted of almost 100% ex German soldiers. According to what I was told the German prisoners of war had been offered immédiate freedom under the condition that they enlist in the French Foreign Légion. What I had heard in effect was a group of German soldiers enlisted in the French Foreign Légion who were passing in the street below my window and singing in step the renowned "Lili Marlene."

That song was the German "Afrika Korp's" favorite and soon was also sung by the British of the 8th Army, who were opposing them.

During my stay in the GRALL hospital, I was visited by friends passing through Saigon, and two very friendly young ladies also took me under their wing. One was the daughter of the Army's quartermaster général in Saigon, and the other belonged to the very well-to-do Denis family. The Denis Frères establishment owned a maritime transportation line, various rubber plantations and I do not know what else. Thanks to them I received on many occasions some really delicious dishes and delicacies, which were a happy alternative to the hospital food. I also received a visit from Admiral D'Argenlieu,the French high commissioner in Indo China, or, in other words, the équivalent to the Governor Général. He made his visit mémorable because, apart from being very kind to me, he also gave me a bottle of champagne. Général Leclerc, also sent me a bottle of Veuve Clicquot.

Little by Little my différent wounds began to heal. I began to walk and feel better. I had also started to realize where I had been wounded. Fortunately a very patriotic French nurse showed me that the conséquences of my wounds were not irremediable. There was also a very kind and efficient Vietnamese nurse who told me without ceremony that her relatives were in the Viet Minh, and that she could guarantee my life there in the hospital, but that outside it was another matter.
I finally left the hospital and went to a military camp, where I awaited my order for repatriation to France. One afternoon, an acquaintance who was also billeted at the camp told me that a friend of his who owned the best French restaurant in the Rue Catinat had invited us to have tee with him during the sieste. He took me to his friend's house in a very pretty suburb with gardens filled with bougainvillea, flamboyants and every type of tropical flower. We entered his house and oh! What a surprise! We found him in the living room half-lying on a "tatame" (mat) next to his wife, who was a very young and attractive Vietnamese girl, another young girl friend of hers, and a Chinese man of a certain age. My friend and I set on the mat, next to the owner of the house. In the center of the "tatame" there was an Aladdin's lamp lit and some round boxes which were very similar to the ones I had known in my youth in Mexico that contained cajeta de Celaya – a dessert made of sweetened condensed goat's milk. In this case, however, the sweetened condensed goat's milk was opium, and the Chinese man introduced the end of some sticks that looked similar to chopsticks inside de box of "cajeta". He turned the sticks until a small ball had formel at the end and then put it to the flame of the Aladdin's lamp. When it started to sputter, he deposited the small ball in the bowl of a bamboo pipe, where the opium bail continuel to burn. This pipe was passed from mouth to mouth and, after each guest's turn the Chinese man took a puff. The opium in the pipe's bowl was smoked in one inhalation, drawing the smoke in until the ball disappeared. A curious detail is that it appeared to excite the women sexually, while it appeared to calm the men physically and only excite their imaginations. I was a little worried about this, as the drug was strictly prohibited.

We finally returned to the Street. I felt fine, but the contact with the fresh air at dusk made me dizzy (I had smoked three pipes, and the others many more). This dizziness was very similar to the sensation you experience after leaving a party when you have drunk a little too much and the fresh air makes you feel a little sea sick. We returned to the camp, and as we passed the sentry box where an old colonial trooper was onsentry duty, he told me after having saluted me, "We had a good time, didn't we lieutenant?" He must surely have detected some odor, but the situation did not develop any further and the colonial kept my secret. This was my first and only experience with drugs in all my life.

On June 18th, 1946 –the anniversary of General De Gaulle's call to the French people– I was informed that my plane would be leaving for Paris that night. As I was already packed I advised the medical service that I was going to go to the Saigon's Cercle Sportif club, as there was going to be a celebration of that anniversary there and to please pick me up there and take me to the airport. The party was very lively, the drinks generous and, in the middle of it all, the stretcher-bearers arrived. I sat on the stretcher carried by the stretcher-bearers and, with tears in my eyes and amid many bravos and salutes. I said good-bye to the party, I said good bye to my friends, and I said good bye to Indochina, a wonderful and fascinating country that I will never be able to forget.

As I left Indochina forever, my mind was filled with the memories of many friends and comrades, both alive and dead. Of the soldiers of my platoon, I remember in particular a sergeant by the name of Sergeant Blanco, an exiled Spanish Republican soldier in the French Army killed so far away from his home country. The passage of time has erased the names of many of my comrades but I still remember among fellow platoon commanders Lieutenant Florentin and Lieutenant Vilain, the latter who, after leaving the Army, pursued his religions vocation and became a priest. My captain, Captain Djanbekoff, commander of the 13th Company, an old czarist officer, Circassian by birth

and muslim by faith. According to him, his religion prohibited him from drinking wine, which is why he drank cognac with his meals. When he invited one of us, his officers, to his table, we returned to our respective units positively euphoric, as we were unaccustomed to drinking cognac in abundance, while this seemed to have no effect whatsoever on the captain. Of Lieutenant Michaut, my blond brother, I had the immense plasure of seeing him again years later when he arrived in Mexico as a colonel and Military Attaché at the French embassy. I would also like to mention Major Dronne, commander of my battalion, the IV RMT, and Lieutenant Colonel Jacques Massu, later colonel, the commander of the GM2DB. Lieutenant Colonel Jacques Massu sent me an extraordinary letter when I was in the hospital in Saigon. I have kept the letter and still read it to this day with great emotion.

VI. THE RETURN HOME

The ambulance took me from the Cercle Sportif club Saigon to the airport, where I boarded a military C3 (C47) like the ones used by paratroopers, with an aluminum bench running lengthways inside the fuselage on both aides.
The plane was carrying some bundles, five other wounded soldiers who were also returning home and an American colonel, in uniform which really seemed quite mysterious, I must say. We took off at dawn and flew uneventfully until we reached our first stopover in Rangoon, the capital of Burma, from where we were to continue in the afternoon to Calcutta. Owing to bad weather – we were in the middle of the monsoon season – we could not take off and we spent the night in Rangoon at a British military establishment.

The following morning we attempted to leave again, but also without success. Finally, on June 21 we took off, flew over the Gulf of Bengal and at last landed in Calcutta. The city of Calcutta made an impression on me – with so many people on its streets, its sacred river the Ganges, the funeral customs, the caste system, its untouchable sacred cows in the streets and its very particular exotic atmosphere.

On the morning of the 22nd we took off from Calcutta, this time headed for New Delhi, where we made a stopover to refuel and ate lunch. We left in the afternoon and arrived in Karachi that night.
During the long hours spent flying I had the opportunity to go over what had happened in my life during the last few months, and arrived at the conclusion that my wounds had saved my life. The law of probabilities is never wrong, and sonner or later I would have been killed. To be a platoon leader in Indo China was one of the deadliest occupations. Some time later I found out that more 2nd. lieutenants and lieutenants died in the expeditionary force in Indochine every year, than those who graduated from the Saint Cyr academy and from other officer schools.

Once in Karachi, on the way from the airport to the hotel where we were to spend the night, I witnessed a sight which was quite out of the ordinary. It was nighttime and I remember seeing long caravans of camels that had arrived from the northern régions, with all their camels lying down in the empty streets. It was truly an unusual spectacle to see so many camels ruminating and lying down one behind another, white their camel drivers were profoundly asleep on the sidewalks.

The following day we left early and we headed for the Island of Bahrein, in the Persian Gulf, where the plane was refueled and we had lunch. We left later and touched down in Baghdad, the city of "The Thousand and One Nights", but for the crew and passengers of the plane it was the fifth night of this voyage. We took off once again the following day and flew over Jérusalem and Bethlehem.

The pilot showed us the Olive Mount. We landed at midday in Cairo, then, after lunch we took off again and landed in Tobruk. Tobruk was the site of bloody battles between the British Eighth Army and Rommel's German and Italian forces, and which changed hands several times during the war. We arrived at a very nice military hotel and ... What a surprise! The waiters, valets and various employées were all Italian prisoners of war who gave the impression that they were as happy as could be owing to the good life they were having there. They were perfectly uniformed in white tunics and appeared to be much healthier than the allied soldiers they tended to.

Once again we left very early and, after making a stopover in Tunis, we arrived in Paris after nightfall on June 25th, 1946. In the airport there was an ambulance waiting for me, supposed to drive me to a military hospital but I convinced them with a bribe of chocolates bought during my stopover in Egypt to take me to my relatives, the Barrier family, at whose home I had left my few belongings and some keepsakes before going to Indochine. The following morning I presented myself at the military hospital and commenced the process of medical examinations which were to fix the percentage of invalidity they would grant me for my wounds and mutilations.

Those were terrible days. The French people did not care for military personnel and seemed to have soon forgotten about their recent liberation and that the expulsion of the Germans from the French territory, was owed to us, the soldiers. On the streets and in the metro they would accost and insult you to such a point that I preferred to travel around dressed as a civilian. The medical examinations and paperwork finally ended, and I was granted an invalidity of 30 per cent. At the same time I began my application for my return to Mexico, as stipulated in the contract that I had signed when I joined the Free French forces.

An ex-girlfriend of my brother Enrique lived in Paris and was, as it turned out, a lawyer, so I went to look for her. She had a sister – Nanette - who was a dress designer for a fashion house. They invited me to stay with them and this was obviously a great deal more fun than staying with my relatives, the Barrier family. This confession is not meant to diminish the merits that my relatives deserve for the generous help and friendly hospitality they gave me.

As I was going to have to avait for some time before getting a place on a transatlantic ship bound for America and had already received quite a few months of back pay from my time at hospital and in convalescence, I had enough money to have a holiday and leave Paris for a few days, I convinced Nanette to come with me and we went to my family's house in Cannes. My brother Enrique had already gone back to Mexico, and my sister Margarita had also returned with her husband and two children, so there was no longer anyone in Marseille.

The days we spent in Cannes were marvelous. We rented two bicycles to go to the beach or on picnics in the surrounding area every day. In the "boulangeries" we bought the French delightful baguettes, and in the market delicious peaches, tomatoes and fresh sardines and played at cooking. The days went by and the vacation ended. We took a train back, I went on to Paris and Nanette got off one station before Marseille to visit some relatives.

In Paris I received my transatlantic ticket and official documents, I took the special train for Le Havre and boarded a mixed cargo ship called the Oregon. The ship was full of passengers – the cabins were filled to bursting point and even the cargo holds had been converted into dormitories with three layers of superimposed bunks. My rank as an officer provided me with an individuel cabin.

As I was boarding the Oregon, a customs official asked me whether 1 was carrying the amount of francs permitted to carry at that time owing to some very severe currency controls. I told him that I was carrying more than the permitted amount as I had just received my back pay, but gave him my word of honor that I was going to spend all of it on bottles of wine and champagne during the voyage. The customs officer smiled and, perhaps because I was a decorated and convalescing soldier, told me that he was going to make an exception, and that he was taking me at my word of honor. He then wished me a happy journey.

The trip was enjoyable and fun. I gave the head waiter a tip so that he would seat attractive girls and pleasant young men at my table in the dining room, and that is the way it was. In relation to the customs official, I kept my promise and spent all the francs I had on drinks for my friends and myself.

In New York my brother Hipôlito was waiting for me, and I had a memorable reunion with him. When I was passing through customs, etc. with my French Army documents, it so happened that I had brought along with me my Llama 9 millimeter pistol, which I had been given when I was to parachute into France. My relatives the Barriers had kept it for me after the mission, as the regular army was going to give me a Colt 45, which was the regulation weapon. The American official told me that I could not introduce the pistol into the country, and that American soldiers were prohibited from bringing arms into the country as keepsakes. I told him that firstly, I was on an official mission, secondly that I was not going to stay in the United States, but in transit, and that thirdly, I was not an American soldier, and that French Army regulations did not prohibit me from carrying the weapon. After consulting with his superiors, going into and out of various offices and failing to find a solution in his regulations, he told me, "OK. Since I don't know what to do in this case, hide your pistol and go through discreetly." With that the problem was resolved.

Hipôlito and I took an American Airlines DC4 headed for Mexico in the morning and, after various stopovers, arrived in Mexico City at nightfall, where I fell into the arms of my parents, brothers and sisters and other relatives.

This is where the brief account of my time in the Free French forces and the French Army during 1943, 1944, 1945 and 1946 ends.

Shortly after arriving in Mexico I received news that the French government had made me a "Chevalier de la Légion d' Honneur", with an additional "Croix de Guerre" with a palm (Decree of September 27th, 1946 and published in the "Journal Officiel", of October 22, 1946, page 1557 G).

In 1970, by decree of March 31st, the président of the French Republic promoted me to "Officier de la Légion d'Honneur". My blond brother Colonel Michaut presented me with this decoration on June 18th, 1970, the thirtieth anniversary of Général de Gaulle's call to the French people. I am sure that colonel Michaut had a great deal to do with this promotion.
Lastly, on the fortieth anniversary of the libération of the Commune of La Bresse, and during the célébrations held to commemorate that anniversary, I was made an Honorary Citizen by decree of March 22nd 1985.

ABBREVIATIONS

1 RIC	First Régiment of Colonial Infantry.
13th DBLE	13e. Demi Brigade de la Légion Etrangère. 13 Half Brigade of the French Foreign Légion.
2DB	2e. Division Blindée, 2nd. French Armored Division.
AFL	Association des Français Libres – Free French association
BBC	British Broadcasting Corp.
BCRA	Bureau Central de Reseignement et Action. Free French bureau that controlled clandestine opérations in occupied France.
EA	"Eleve Aspirant", Cadet of the 2nd. Semester.
FF	Free French.
FFF	Free French Forces.
FTA	Force Terrestres anti-aériennes Anti-aircraft artillery
GM2DB	Groupement de Marche de la 2e.DB One of the units that was sent to Indochina.
IV RMT	4th. Battalion of the Régiment de Marche du Tchad.
R&R	Rest and Récréation.
SAS	Special Air Service
TD	Tank Destroyer.
WAAC	Women's Auxiliary Army Corps.