

THE HORSE WAR  
A Story of the Fall of France



by  
Jacques Riboud

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## **EDITOR'S NOTE**

In 1979, shortly before her death at the age of 78, my mother, Mary Gwinn Bowe, was getting her affairs in order by cleaning house. She handed me a loose-leaf and dog-eared type-written manuscript and said I might find it interesting. If I didn't, I was to throw it out.

She told me it was Jacques Riboud's account of his experience as a French officer in the horse-drawn artillery fighting against the Nazis and their tanks in the battle for France in 1940. Jacques Riboud, then 32, had married my mother's youngest sister, Nancy Gwinn, in the quieter year of 1933.

Following the Nazi victory in France at the beginning of World War II, Nancy had fled with her three young children by way of Spain to the refuge of her family's home in the Mount Washington section of Baltimore, Maryland. Later, after some time as a German prisoner of war, her husband was able to join them.

It was quickly agreed the two sisters would get together with their families for a reunion in Connecticut on Long Island Sound come the summer of 1941. And so they did. Though the war still raged in Europe at that time, with Hitler invading Russia in June, the United States was at peace. The Japanese attack at Pearl Harbor was still a few months' away.

In this atmosphere of deepening conflict, it didn't take long for the extraordinary events in France to be recounted in detail. And it didn't take long for my mother and Jacques Riboud to get the extraordinary story down in writing so it wouldn't be lost in memory's haze.

The collaboration took place everyday above the beach on Long Island Sound, with my mother typing the oral narrative that flowed forth chronologically in English. My mother helped as much as she could with English syntax and grammar as they went along but getting

the tale down on paper had clearly taken precedence over producing polished verbiage.

As I read the yellowing manuscript nearly 40 years later, I was immediately astonished at its overall power and clarity. Although couched as a simple tale of a lost regiment in the horse-drawn artillery, Jacques Riboud's story clearly transcended this level. It did nothing less than explain the fall of France in 1940.

The tactical descriptions of small unit action also rose above their context. Together with Nancy Riboud's first person account of a family seeking refuge in the midst of German tanks, a perspective emerges of what the war was really like for civilians as well as soldiers. Finally the narrative was inspirational in its reflection of the indomitable French spirit.

Down was not out for France in 1940. And so the story stood, too, as a parable of the ultimate triumph over adversity for others, in different times and places.

Struck as I was by the story, I decided to edit it by weeding out the many awkward phrasings and grammatical constructions that remained. The edited version was then retyped and bound to serve as a more permanent family heirloom, able to symbolize the closeness over the generations of the American and French branches of our family.

The story had no name. I gave it one. I am also responsible, at this point, for whatever errors of spelling, translation or content distortions that remain.

William J. Bowe  
Chicago, Illinois  
Summer, 1983

PREFACE

(e) →  
p 6

This narrative concerns the experiences of a reserve officer in the horse-drawn artillery during the battle in France early in the Second World War. The story begins and ends in Paris. In between lay the "Phoney War" on the Maginot Line in Alsace, the great tank battles in the Somme, the inglorious retreat through Paris to the south -- capture, and life in German occupied Paris.

It is really a simple the story of an artillery regiment; a regiment like many others; a regiment given a task beyond its strength. The only merit of the account in my view is that it is a faithful and accurate description of exactly what I saw and heard.

There is little glory in defeat. The soldier who returns from the battlefield beaten knows that to the hardships of having fought an uneven fight must be added an aftertaste of bitterness born of defeat.

But among those fighting men who lived to share defeat was savored a deep pride in the memory of their lost regiment. And they and the populace of an occupied country steeled themselves to further trials, knowing that a people strong in adversity will in the end triumph.

Jacques Riboud  
Short Beach, Connecticut  
Summer, 1941



PART ONE

Paris -- 10:00 a.m. -- September 1st, 1939.

*Present* +  
I was in the office of M. Latreux, an official of the Ministere de Finances (Treasury Department). He was in that section of the Louvre which had not yet been converted into a museum. We were in the midst of a heated discussion when suddenly a treasury employee entered the office and said he had just learned that the Germans had driven into Poland early that morning. It meant war. The hesitations and doubts of the last week were now swept away.

We broke off our conversation immediately and I drove home. In the streets there was no excitement, no apparent reaction to the latest news. On the Avenue de l'Opera, however, at the door of a commissariat, women and children were waiting <sup>in line</sup> for the distribution of gas masks. In front of the headquarters <sup>of the</sup> Communist Party on Rue Lafayette, helmeted black gendarmes were on guard. The doors were shut and windows were already broken.

*equipment* Arriving home, I put on my uniform, took my pack (which had been ready for several days) and went to the station. Mobilization had not yet been declared and my standing orders did not require me to report for duty until the second day of mobilization. So it was

my intention to go to Savoy first, where my family was vacationing and say goodbye to them.

I had made preparation for this day long before and had no need to call on my friends now. We had recently held a farewell party in anticipation of just this. Everyone present then: an engineer, a doctor, a lawyer, an architect, all of them reserve officers, knew what lay in store. The hesitations of the year before at Munich and the deep divisions which had then separated the French were gone. Everyone agreed that this time Hitler must be stopped, that if he were bluffing we had to call the bluff; and if he were not bluffing it meant war.

I went to the Gare de Lyon. The station was as busy as usual, but there were very few men in uniform. The train bound for Savoy was nearly empty, since few people planned to take refuge in a province so close to the Italian frontier.

In the Savoyan village where our family home was located, everything was quiet. The farmers in the vicinity still refused to realize that the fateful day had come and were sure that at the last moment something would happen, as had occurred once before, to sweep away the nightmare of another war.

The walls of the mairie (city hall) in the center of the village were covered with posters calling

up those men whose mobilization papers bore the letters M or D and summoning farmers to bring their horses for requisition. Saturday, the secretary of the mairie, hung up another poster proclaiming a general mobilization starting the following midnight.

On Sunday, the whole machine began to turn, according to plans prepared long in advance. Young farmers carrying small suitcases walked to the railroad station and crammed the small salle d'attente (waiting room). My old friend the stationmaster, conscious of the vital importance of his job, kept an inscrutable countenance. Trains heavily loaded with artillery guns and carriages began to roll by.

Before leaving, I went down to the Lac du Bourget which is close to our house and where I had spent many happy hours swimming while on vacation. I took a last glimpse of the snowy mountains reflected in the quiet waters. Everything was peaceful and lovely. Then I said goodbye to my parents, my wife and my children, and drove to Dijon where my horse-drawn artillery regiment was to be formed.

I had been very young at the time of the mobilization for the First World War in 1914. However, I had a vivid memory of it and our elders had often told us about it: the regiments parading with flowers in the muzzles of their weapons and the crowds jamming

the railroad stations shouting, "A Berlin!" as the troop trains departed.

The country had come out of that war victorious but exhausted. A million and a half men had not returned; the flower of the nation's youth. In every school and college the plaques bearing the names of the alumni who had fallen for their country reminded all of their sacrifice. Whole classes had been almost completely wiped out.

And now mobilization again. There were no flowers in the muzzles of the guns this time, and no shouts "A Berlin."

It was not so much the thought of the ordeals lying ahead which oppressed the people, but rather the sense of an inexorable fatalism against which men were powerless. Everything had been done to make the First World War the last. Everything had been tried: peaces, treaties, pacts, leagues and alliances, sanctions and concessions, fortifications, monuments to peace, military parades and anti-war meetings. But it was all in vain. It was the tragic destiny of the men of France to fight again. They could not escape it.

However, on that day, September 4th, all the people I met on the road showed both a reluctance to believe that war had finally come as well as a fierce determination not to yield "this time."

At Macon, the service station attendant who filled up my car professed to be a communist. He was sure that Stalin had obtained a formal promise from Hitler to keep peace. In Dijon, the streets were crowded and traffic was jammed in front of the offices of the main newspaper, where the latest news was projected on a screen.

I went to the barracks in Dijon where I had trained and served as a reserve lieutenant in the First Regiment of Artillery. The "First," as it was known, was a splendid regiment which boasted of once having counted Lieutenant Bonaparte in its ranks. The room in the barracks in which he had lived was still visited. The regiment had already left for the frontier and the large yard was empty. I was directed to a little village in the neighborhood of Dijon, where the new regiment to which I was now assigned was being formed.

I reported for duty to Major Chaviere, the commandant of the battalion. I found him in the village school. He was sitting at the teacher's desk in front of a dusty bust of Marianne and fumbling around with the "mobilization book," in which were given minute by minute instructions of what to do and where to go.

During the next three days, horses to pull the artillery guns kept pouring in from surrounding farms. Men arrived, received their uniforms and registered with the sergeant, who had set up his desk in the square close to the First World War Memorial. Little by little the battalion took shape. The men, at first bewildered and homesick, soon became accustomed to the new life; the sergeants and corporals learned the names of the men in their squads; and the officers got acquainted with each other and busied themselves filling out the numerous records required by the quartermaster. Within a few days, this originally confused and heterogeneous mass of men, guns, carriages and horses, had become the Fifth Battalion of the 237th Field Artillery Regiment.

On our fourth day together, the battalion held its first drill and for the first time took the road to a nearby field for maneuvers. The horses, unaccustomed to the chest belts (used in the artillery in place of a collar), kicked in their harnesses. As a whole it went off surprisingly well considering that eighty percent of the men were reserves and only twenty percent belonged to the regular army. Our 155-mm guns, left over from the First World War, were fired again. I sighted the hits which came fast and accurately.

I had been assigned to the post of "lieutenant observer," one of the most interesting the artillery can offer. An observer really sees what happens, whereas the men in the batteries and even the major at his headquarters see almost nothing. Furthermore, an observer is quite independent; he is in command of a small squad of men and noncommissioned officers and thus can live in close contact with them. He is often placed close to the infantry and so can acquire very direct information concerning the other branches of the army. Finally, the observer belonging to the staff of the commandant is not held down by the routine of the battalion. He has a chance of being given miscellaneous jobs. For example, I was later put in charge of the construction of shelters and of the organization of our emplacements on the terrain.

On our seventh day together, September 10th, the regiment was ready to leave for the frontier. In every battery the captains assembled the men in a large square, called them to attention and told them the glorious history of the regiment, which had gone through all the major battles of the last war. They then read a letter from the former commandant, now a retired colonel, who commended the virtues of the soldiers he had commanded.



During the night, in total black-out, the regiment moved to a small country railroad station where several freight trains were awaiting us. At two o'clock in the morning we left for an unknown destination.

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The next afternoon the train rolled through Alsace. The commandant stood at the window and recognized with delight the place through which he had passed with his cavalry regiment of 75-mm artillery pieces in the first days of August, 1914. He told us how as a young corporal he had jumped on his horse with enthusiasm when the much longed for order for departure had been shouted. His regiment had paraded through the streets of Toul, cheered by the people. A few days later they had passed through the country which we were now crossing. They had entered Alsace, realizing a long dream of his generation. The 75-mm had done their work well and the commandant described the lines of Germans mowed down in the fields by accurate waves of fire. But then one day his division had run into a strongly fortified German line, and had taken terrible punishment from long range heavy guns. They had been forced to fall back, an unpleasant reminiscence.

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The next morning, we arrived in the pretty village of Greenviller, twenty miles north of Strasbourg. Here we were to spend the following three weeks working furiously, since we expected at any moment to be thrown into the gigantic battle predicted by the newspapers. The commandant insisted throughout that we were far from being fit.

The commandant was an energetic, rugged, wiry man of fifty, who had spent his entire career working with the horse-drawn 75-mm. He often swore that the heavy 155-mm were much too slow for a horseman such as himself. I still see him, short, slim, straight as a reed, legs apart, face tanned and wrinkled, his kepi on the back of his head, examining the horses with the veterinarian and carefully pointing out every bruise, every trace of gall. He had been wounded three times during the last war, including once in the skull. The last wound had left him with nervous jerkings and twistings, which were particularly noticeable when the conversation turned to the Quartermaster, the Air Force, the General Staff, the Health Service or the Engineer Corps. These were his <sup>pet</sup> enemies, against which he seized every opportunity to air his prejudices with a richness of expression which amazed every newcomer. Dear commandant! The whole battalion worshipped him. He was a good officer, always concerned with the health and comfort of his men. Also he was a good artillery man and few could equal him in finding a mark so quickly.

The men were of good stock and it was the easiest thing in the world to command them. Eighty percent were farmers from Burgundy --- slow, quiet, unemotional and never tired. The others came from

Paris and the north. Many were known as "P.R.s" (Propaganda Revolutionaries), which meant that they were Reds. These men were more alert than our good Burgundians and quick to grumble, but as soldiers, they were just as good and we never had trouble of any kind about discipline. Every officer knew that he could absolutely count on them, provided that he knew his job and took care of them.

Our "sergeant-observer" was a thirty-five year old tax-collector named Durancain. He came from a small town in central France. He had insisted on being an observer, telling me that he considered the war a good opportunity for taking some outdoor exercise and he meant to make the most of it. Unfortunately, having been a tax collector, he was later transferred to an administrative job in the supply column and I lost track of him.

*+  
a memory*

Every day during September, I took my little squad out to drill in the fields surrounding the village. Greenviller was built at the foot of a hill upon which the Germans had erected a fortress to protect the valley from a French invasion fifty years before. The guns with which they had equipped the fortress were still in place. They bore Russian inscriptions and probably had been made by Krupp for the Tsarist Army. Undoubtedly the change of policy of Nicholas II had prevented their shipment to Russia.

+ | The fortress was intact, the ammunition left  
by the Germans was still there and French artillerymen  
were now striving to put the fortress back in shape.  
Unfortunately, the guns were pointed west, toward the  
former frontier, whereas the enemy now threatened from  
the east. The emplacements couldn't be turned around,  
but the guns had been removed with a great deal of work  
and had been swung around so that they all faced east.  
↓ | All this, however, neither brought the fortress up to  
date nor made it very strong. It was nevertheless in-  
corporated in the famous Maginot Line.

At ten o'clock on the first Sunday morning of  
our stay in Greenviller, the men, fine-looking in their  
new uniforms and shiny black boots, packed the small  
church of the village. The pastor welcomed them in his  
Alsatian dialect and Lieutenant Bertrand said mass.

Before the war Bertrand had been vicar of the  
Cathedral of Bourges. Now in the regiment, he was in  
charge of the food supply and at the same time he gui-  
ded the the morale of the troops and supervised their  
recreation. In all these functions he was wonderfully  
successful. As a matter of fact, the priests mobilized  
in the army succeeded well in their functions as offi-  
cers.

It seems that priesthood is good training for  
army officers. Not only do priests possess a great

knowledge of human nature, which is useful in leading men (soldiers as well as parishioners), but also the necessary initiative and capacity for organization. The church's requirements were not dissimilar to the army's.

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We saw this particularly when Bertrand was put in charge of planning recreation for the battalion during the winter to come and later on when he had to assure our food supply during the retreat that lay ahead. Every day of the retreat in June 1940, he was to go out riding in his car, accompanied by a few men in a truck, dodging the German patrols and managing to keep in touch with the quartermaster service. Even in the most difficult circumstances he always succeeded at the last moment in finding boules (army bread), heavy and stale perhaps, but excellent. He was critical to the splendid morale that the men kept up until the last day. But all of this was yet to come.

Among the many tasks of Lieutenant Bertrand was that of chief plane-spotter. His friends used to tell how he came to assume this function. One day the lieutenants of the regiment had gathered far in the rear in a little field of maneuver to attend an aviation show. Planes of different types were to pass over them. The purpose was to acquaint everyone with the types of aircraft used by the allies. After a long

wait, the roar of planes was heard. Just at that moment a group of girls happened to pass by on their way to school. Then (as was later sadly reported), all the lieutenants switched their eyes from the sky to the road. I said all, but I am wrong. Bertrand was the only one to keep staring at the sky. That is how he happened to be promoted chief spotter of enemy aircraft and how his comrades lost their only opportunity of ever seeing allied planes in the sky.

During our stay in Greenviller we sometimes had an opportunity to go to Strasbourg to purchase necessary equipment. The city was empty and dead, but had not yet been damaged by the war. On the large avenues the blinds were drawn. Many stores were still filled with goods which had not been removed. This was due to the swiftness of the city's evacuation. Police officers patrolled the streets and verified the identities of the few soldiers who were allowed to enter the city.

We ~~also visited the nearby frontier town of~~  
Kehl. <sup>of Kehl</sup> The bridge on the Rhine here had not been blown up and machine guns, set behind piled sand bags, faced each other on both sides. The French captain in command of the place told me that not one shot had been fired and that even a few days before, on the other side, a German military band had assembled in a square

and given a concert. He told us that they were ordered not to fire. A veteran of the last war, he kept repeating that this one was "really something new." It was new, from the beginning to the end.

By the end of September, 1940, already the war seemed to be taking a bad turn. Poland was blown to pieces under the panzer onslaught. Our offensive in the Saar was petering out and, little by little, the prospect of a quick victory faded away. Whenever the news was broadcast we gathered in a little cafe and waited impatiently. Sedove, who was in charge of telephone and radio transmissions, put on earphones (we had no loud speaker). After listening to the communique, he gave a faithful report of what he heard. But it was too faithful and too depressing and soon the major refused to believe him and took the earphones himself. We all kept silent while he listened and tried to guess what was happening from his movements, facial expressions and exclamations. "Hogs!" -- he was certainly referring to our enemies. "Stupid!" -- we were almost certain it was about our general staff. Anyway when the broadcast was over, we always heard from the commandant an invariably optimistic summary.

At the end of the month, the battalion presented a good appearance and the major complained and



scolded his men less frequently. In fact, everybody had shown good will and had quickly learned again what had been taught him during his earlier service. The men grumbled of course, but that is a tradition as ancient as the army itself. I never saw any whose comportment was affected by his political opinion. Communist or royalist, officer or private, we all belonged to a machine which, in spite of anything that might have been heard or said before, we always loved and respected. This machine was the Army.

On September 30th, only one month since Hitler's invasion of Poland, we received the order to leave Greenviller. For a week we kept moving through Alsace, seeing little of the country, since we traveled by night and slept by day.

We finally arrived in a sector of the Maginot Line. Though we had made many detours, the journey had been useful. I remember, for instance, that it took several marches to discover that one of the motorcycle messengers who maintained the liaison between the colonel and the commandant was totally illiterate. But the man liked his job, was proud of parading along the column and had always managed to find someone to read the sign posts on the road for him.

The sector of the Maginot Line where we were located, included one of its most powerful fortresses, but we were not in the fortress itself. Inasmuch as the forts were underground, the surface, as well as the intervals between, had to be defended by "armed surface troops", as opposed to "fortress troops." Ours was a "surface" division.

My observation post (P.O.) was set on the last mountain of the Vosges. From this point I had a splendid view of the Rhine valley with the mountains of the Black Forest rising in the background. Although

the frontier was some distance away I could often see the Germans working on the Siegfried Line, even though they were usually cautious enough to set large screens out to obstruct our view. A few hundred yards in front of the P.O. were three turrets of the fortress and all around were infantry positions guarding the surface of the terrain.

Two young infantry lieutenants, who had been lawyers in Paris, had their observation post close to my dugout and we quickly became acquainted. Their life in the woods, far from having the comforts of civilization, was quite rough, but they seemed to enjoy their situation very much. Their only distraction was to go occasionally to Haguenau to act as attorneys for soldiers who had gone A.W.O.L. and were being tried by the military court. Their company was composed of men from this part of the country who all spoke the Alsatian dialect. The first night it had been surprising to hear patrols approach with muffled conversations punctuated by "ja" and "Hoch."

When I was on duty, there was not much to do. Yet I was never bored simply because I had the company of my men. I liked to speak with them and to hear of their life, their ambitions and their sorrows. I will say something about three of them who were typical and of whom I was very fond.

Mazelot was a stone cutter in Paris in civilian life. He was twenty-five years old, very intelligent and a true Parisian. His jokes brightened the faces of his comrades. It sometimes seemed there were very few things for which he had any respect but, as a matter of fact, he was highly spirited and quite sensible. He was clever and a hard worker and I had absolute confidence in him.

Carron was a farmer from the Nirvernais, in the central part of France. His mind worked more slowly than Mazolot's and he sometimes failed to understand the tricks played upon him by Mazolot but Carron was quiet, full of good sense and perfectly unemotional.

Lacuyer was a hot-headed man from the north. Though he had to be held with a strong hand, he was very devoted. I understood that Lacuyer had had some trouble with his foreman as he professed a strong hatred for the "bourgeois." Sometimes I tried to explain to him that his officers were "bourgeois" in civilian life, but I doubted that he could ever put the two ideas together.

In all, the men made a good team and adapted themselves well to their new life. It was fun to see them making the fire to cook lunch, fixing the dugouts and arranging with initiative and great ingenuity the log house that served as a shelter when it rained.

Observation in itself was not of much interest since not a round was fired during the two months we spent in the sector. However, many of us who had lived in cities saw autumn for the first time in the country and enjoyed the new and marvelous sight of the leaves gradually turning yellow and red.

7/12  
As long as the shooting had not begun, the battalion had been authorized to occupy the village of La Perstock. The village had been evacuated by the inhabitants a few hours after the outbreak of the war. The rush to evacuate was unnecessary and had caused many bitter complaints from the people, who rightly protested that they should have been advised before or given more time. They had been obliged to leave most of their belongings behind in their homes.

During the first days the gendarmerie kept the houses closed and the troops were obliged to sleep outside. But as soon as the rains started, it became very difficult to refuse the soldiers the right to occupy empty houses. The result was that, too often, in spite of their orders, the soldiers made quite a mess. The men of my battalion, I must say, behaved very well and took it as a point of honor to keep the houses in perfect order. But unfortunately, the occupation of empty houses along the Maginot Line did not do the army's reputation any good.

reached the middle of the plain. Then, by means of salvos, alternating long and short, little by little he brought the rounds closer together. He surrounded them in a circle of fire and pushed them into a small wood which he proceeded to hammer at without pity. Very few escaped. Alas, I cannot describe the gestures and interjections which accompanied his story, but even the most peace-loving individual could understand the soul of the artillery man in the face of such an objective.

Stories of the past were not the only subjects of conversation. We talked, of course, about daily events and politics. Janvier, a professor of science with a broad knowledge of history and a pronounced sense of humor, was quite remarkable for his pessimism. It contrasted sharply with the commandant's invariable optimism. Unfortunately, as we realized later, Janvier was too often right.

The Maginot Line particularly provoked Janvier's most bitter criticism. He used to say that the line, and in fact the whole organization of our defense, showed the total failure of the country's policies. He said that the Maginot Line was a monument on the frontier proclaiming the tragic inferiority of French strength. "The whole system," he would explain, "on which peace had been made in Europe by the Treaty of Versailles, rested on one idea - that one country,

Germany, in the center of Europe, owing to its population and its industrial resources, is potentially stronger than each one of its neighbors, considered individually. This country, all the more dangerous in that it has shown repeatedly in the last hundred years its will for conquest, has to be kept disarmed by the union of the surrounding powers, acting all together. But acting together means taking the offensive. If these nations refuse to take the offensive, it makes it possible for Germany to swallow her opponents one by one. The Maginot Line has marked the abandonment of this attitude and the first shovel of earth on the fortress has told the world that France, the strongest among the neighbors of Germany, has renounced the policy of helping her former allies. The consequences are becoming quickly apparent."

At that time the utterances of Janvier could have been called defeatist but, in fact, many thought as he did and when urged to explain on what they counting for a victory, they had to admit that they were hoping a miracle.

Fortunately for the morale of the group, there were others, unlike Janvier, who felt perfectly confident. Baderaut, a young captain of the regular army, in command of the third battery, did not like the Maginot Line either, but it was not for any historical

reason. He simply could not wait for the shooting to begin. As a regular, he was in an artillery regiment of a cavalry division and had no desire other than to command par un faucher deux tours. He was a good counterpart to the commandant and both of them could be imagined under the bonnet a poil of Napoleon's Guard. Baderaut was not contaminated with philosophic reflections on war and peace or the destiny of man and the like. Before everything else, he was an artillery man and few things counted besides the artillery and the army.

Sometimes Baderaut's mood got him into trouble with other officers who objected to his encroachment on their functions. At the observation post for instance, Captain Baderaut, with no regard for the observers, was likely to monopolize the place at the slit for himself.

Like the commandant, Baderaut found the 155-mm too heavy for him and changed to the 75-mm. He left at the beginning of the following June. His battery which made a beautiful showing against the tanks, was wrecked on the Soome. Later he was captured.

As I have said, nothing happened in the sector and not a round was fired. However, we kept busy organizing the position and digging shelters. The ground was of clay, which made the work difficult. All



day we toiled knee-deep in the mud. Our lack of equipment showed itself clearly. The men had only one uniform, no overalls and only one pair of shoes which soon wore out. Only a few received rubber boots. My commandant, always worrying about the comfort of his men, made one report after another, asking for new pairs of shoes. At last we were advised that the battalion had received a huge shipment of boots and shoes and we went to inspect what the quartermaster of the division had sent.

The commandant almost had a stroke when he saw that his much sought after boots were the old-fashioned black, button type, of thin calf's leather, usually worn by young men on Sundays in the provinces. The commandant swore once more at the quartermaster, the headquarters, and even the engineers corps, though the latter had little to do with it, and he formally refused to take what he called Chaussures de Premier Communion. He was finally forced to accept them, but could never get whole-heartedly accustomed to the sight of his men walking delicately along in civilian shoes.

Since we could get no overalls, the uniforms were a problem too. When the uniforms got wet, the men were obliged to wear overcoats over their underclothes, until the uniforms dried. As the material was very absorbent, this took forever and many sent home for

civilian clothes. Though the commandant was deeply shocked by the sight of any civilian garment around his guns, he refrained from showing it out of consideration for the welfare of his men.

Our equipment and tools were also deficient; we had only a few shovels and one pick axe. It was a headache to organize the work so that each one of our precious tools was constantly in use. The rarest of the tools was the "long saw." This was invaluable for making the <sup>main skeleton of constant ~~le~~ ~~so~~ ~~system~~</sup> lumber framework of the shelters. Each battery had only a couple of saws and was quick to "borrow" those of its neighbors. So at night each was carefully brought back to its storage place and watched like a museum piece. In spite of this difficulty, we had organized a good position by the end of November with comfortable, bomb-proof shelters. It was a fine piece of engineering of which the commandant was rather proud. It was destined never to be used.

f7B → I cannot speak of this period of our army life without mentioning the Maginot Line, although it is now a very old story. The job of observer often took me inside the line. Indeed my P.O. was a part of a larger network and I frequently exchanged information with my <sup>own</sup> fortress fellow observers.

The Maginot Line was composed of a number of fortresses of varying sizes including blockhouses occupied by a few men with a machine gun and huge fortresses manned by two thousand, like the Hochwald Fortress next to which we were stationed.

The Hochwald Fortress was built inside the last mountain of the Vosges, which drops abruptly down to the Alsatian plain. Like an enormous plant with its repair shops, its hospitals, its miles of railroads, the fortress was constructed at a depth several hundred feet below the surface. From it emerged artillery turrets and infantry battlements with their machine guns and anti-tank guns. Outside, the Hochwald revealed itself only by a few <sup>domes</sup> cupola, <sup>mylonite</sup> set in a wide, <sup>ru</sup> bare space from which all vegetation had been removed to provide for a broad field of fire. This <sup>depoillee</sup> clearing in the forest, however, made the spot visible from a great distance.

On the surface around the fortress, linking one blockhouse with another, were deep anti-tank ditches and long rows of rails planted upright at uneven heights. Thick, wide barriers of barbed wire, bristling with land mines, completed the defense. To reach any of these embankments or the entrance to the fortress was a complicated affair. One had to follow long paths through barbed wire and, after many detours,

having passed over a slope, one arrived at a bridge leading directly to the entrance. From that point on I had a guide named Le Jeune, a young observer of the fortress who had been an engineer in civilian life. After taking many corridors, stairways and elevators, all well-lighted and well-ventilated, we arrived at the artillery turret of the 75-mm.

Le Jeune told me that the first time the guns had been fired, the barrels blew up, as the tubes had been unable to withstand the high pressure of the charge. They had been replaced in a hurry and now each turret had several spare tubes.

*L.H.B.* → Supplies, munitions and food were brought from outside to the stores. From the stores they moved to the turrets by means of a subway, several miles long, which crossed the mountain from one side to the other. The entrance to the tunnel was at the flank of the mountain and was heavily guarded by anti-tank guns.

Le Jeune's room was two hundred yards underground, a small but comfortable place, which reminded me a little of a cabin of a man-of-war. Indeed the whole fortress reminded me very much of a capital ship and even included the much-advertised fire-director room in which, around a huge table, a dozen non-commissioned officers always stood ready to make calculations.

Everything moved at great speed. The terrain all around the fortress had been studied and topographically surveyed. It was divided into small sectors, each with a number for reference. When the P.O. of the fortress sighted an objective in one of these sectors, it was transmitted immediately by telephone to the fire director, who at once calculated the elements of fire and sent the elevation and deflection to the turrets. Our battalion had nearly the same method of operating, but there was a difference. Whereas the gunners of the fortress had five inches of steel above their heads, and the calculators were five hundred yards above the ground, the field artillerymen had nothing like this. Though the men in the Hochwald Fortress might have been safer than we were, we did not envy our comrades. They had only a couple of hours outdoors every day and their faces were always pale, reflecting a life spent underground under electric light.

One the whole, the Hochwald gave an impression of great strength and it seemed that no attack could ever storm it. Being one of the most powerful fortresses of the line, it was greatly advertised and often visited by foreign dignitaries. The picture of the midnight mess which appeared in Life magazine had been taken at the dramatic intersection of two tunnels of the subway.

The Maginot Line will be considered in history as a gigantic failure, but, as a matter of fact, a test of its strength was never made. The only blockhouses which were attacked and sometimes taken were not in the main line but in advance of it, sometimes not even connected by telephone and not protected by materiel barriers against close approach. One can easily recognize these forward defenses in the description published in the German magazine Signal. The purpose of the advance blockhouses was merely to give the alert and to slow up the enemy advance. I doubt very much, in spite of the skill of the German engineers with their highly developed new weapons like flame-throwers and so forth, that they could have stormed the fortress or even the blockhouse of the main line in a few days.

Another historical myth is that the Germans, after the Armistice supposedly removed the heavy guns from the fortress and set them on the Channel coast intending to use them against Gibraltar. Yet the Maginot Line itself had no heavy guns. The heaviest caliber was 35-mm. and the long range artillery was outdoors and did not strictly belong to the Line.

To complete my own observations from the P.O., I had at my disposal not only the information

from Lieutenant Le Jeune, but also the reports from the observatory balloon. This balloon, or "sausage" as it was called because of its peculiar shape, was very popular among the soldiers, who appreciated the thrilling game of hide-and-seek the balloon played with German planes. As a rule, a few minutes after it began to rise, we were sure to hear the roar of enemy aircraft. Then the balloon would be hurriedly pulled down. But the ground crew could not always match the speed of the plane and one day a German aviator set the balloon ablaze in a volley of shot. The show was quite exciting, and most of all for the observer himself, who had to bail out and was machine-gunned as he came swinging down. We picked him up in the field, unhurt, but with his basket riddled by bullet holes.

While on the subject of balloons, I am reminded of the story of my good friend Levoir, who was a lieutenant in the naval observation corps. I had always thought that since the observer in a stationary balloon never traveled, he must feel jealous of his colleagues of the air force who can fly. Levoir said I was mistaken and that quite often before the war his ropes had broken and his balloon had been carried away by the wind. He said it was an exquisite sensation, provided the wind was blowing in the right direction. Once when Levoir had been in no hurry to land, he had

let his balloon carry him from Dunkirk all the way to Toulouse.

To complete the picture of our observation system, I must say a few words about the observation plane of our army corps. The airfield of the squadron was located close to Haguenot, twenty miles away from our position. Janvier and I went to see their captain one day to check a report made by the P.O. and to compare it with their aerial photographs. I found the pilots very cordial, but like the observers, they were far from cheerful. Their planes were old and slow, and in the first days of the war, they had lost three out of eight. They had just received two modern potez, but one had been damaged in a fight and the other had developed motor trouble, so both of them were kept on the ground. The pilots tried to find some consolation in the successes carried off by their comrades in the pursuit squadron who claimed a ratio of ten to one in their favor. But, as was later proved, their planes, most of them American-made, were far too successfully oppose the overwhelming number of German aircraft.

On my way back from the airfield, I stopped at Roeschofen, the theatre of a famous battle in 1870. A monument commemorated the heroism of the buirassiers



who had charged bravely out, vainly in an attempt to dislodge the Germans from the village's streets. There had been a terrible lack of preparation in that war and dreadful mistakes had been made by the high command. Janvier and I could not help wondering whether the lessons learned in 1870 would be remembered.

On December 2nd we were relieved by another division. I presented my P.O. to my successor and we went to rest in a small village fifteen miles from the front. This rest meant drilling more than anything else and also a lack of comfort, because little room was available. However, the inhabitants did their best to make us enjoy our stay. The men were generally pleased to leave their former position. They were tired of seeing only uniforms and now made many friends among the villagers.

The two months of our stay there were among the coldest we had ever known as the snow and ice were never less than two feet high in the main streets. Our daily routine differed little from that of peacetime: inspection of equipment, inspection of arms, review of the guns and drilling. I was charged with training the observers and the weather sometimes made it very difficult. Day after day in the icy wind, we climbed the hills around the village, froze our hands setting the

topographical apparatus in the ice and shed tears searching for imaginary objectives through our telescope.

We had a general exercise once a week which seldom proceeded without trouble. One day several guns got stuck on the road between two hills, unable to be moved forward or backward. The guns remained there for two days.

*+  
breakthrough*

War was impossible in this weather, but our general wanted us to be fit for the spring. I remember his talk, after a particularly laborious maneuver. He gathered the half-frozen officers and asked them to explain what they would have done in case of actual fighting. One said that he would have dug trenches; another that he would have attacked at dawn. The general listened in silence to each man and then said that the Germans, like the French, would have given themselves a respite and would have settled down in farmhouses and warmed their feet.

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The monotony of our stay was broken by the Christmas feast, which we tried to make a big event in an attempt to forget how far we were from home. Almost every man received packages of food from his family, which helped to make the meal better. Many civilian associations were very generous and sent bundles to men who had received nothing from their families. I

remember one of our men who had been a tramp with no family. He had never eaten as well as a civilian, as he had as a soldier. In the army he had had the best time of his life. His case had excited the pity of his comrades, who gave his name to several associations, so that a little before Christmas he received so many packages that he got terrible indigestion.

With a small truck, which was part of the regular equipment of the battalion, we made several trips to Haguenot and used the bonus of the canteen to give the men a Christmas dinner. This consisted of oysters, turkey, pie and champagne, which they talked about for days before and after, Christmas Eve, soldiers in well-brushed uniforms, Alsatian girls with their butterfly head dresses and old Alsatian farmers with their fur caps, all packed the old church for midnight mass. Children sang Christmas songs alternately in French and in the Alsatian dialect. In spite of all that was done to cheer up the men, it was easy to see that their thoughts were far away with their families.

To give a complete idea of our life in the village, I again must mention our popote. It was set in a cafe where the walls were adorned with life-size caricatures of every prominent personality of the regiment, with the exception, of course, of the commandant. His was omitted not because of his rank, but because

his nervous gestures and jerkings made it impossible for him to pose long enough.

Some officers who had been confined to the rear when the regiment was in action, later joined our popote, so we all had the opportunity to become better acquainted. Among them was a senior doctor, a short, nice fellow and, I think, a good doctor. He belonged to the military Crops de Sante. For many years, his consultations with an average of thirty men a day (of whom at least twenty-nine tried to fool him) had given the doctor a great distrust of human nature. Seeing his schoolmates promoted ahead of him also had not contributed toward smoothing his feelings. He was a good friend of the veterinarian and asserted that the prescription of medicine in the army was the same for the men and the horses -- it was only a matter of the dose.

+ — We had the pleasure of having with us not only the doctor, but also Lieutenant Hay, a forty-year-old veteran of the last war who was in charge of the supply column. He was doing his job very well but made no bones about the fact that he disapproved of the war. As a civilian he had been a gentleman farmer and owned a big estate near Paris. Lieutenant Hay was very wealthy and we knew that he had a chateau, an apartment near Place de l'Etoile in Paris, two American cars and two riding horses. He supplied the popote very

liberally with pate de foie gras and other delicacies. ~~We liked him very much.~~

But Hay had become a little softened by the comfort of his luxurious home and felt miserable in the unheated rooms of the village. The lack of a bathroom and other conveniences in every place he had been since the outbreak of war had affected his morale. One day in spring, he asked to be transferred and was sent to Dijon to enter the cadres of a regiment of workers.

I met him in Paris after the war and he told me what had happened to him. He seemed to have had a terrible time in Dijon. Instead of a regiment of workers, he had been assigned to a bureau of censors where he had to decipher, ten hours a day, hundreds of letters from rookies to their girl friends complaining that the time seemed very long. In spite of having found a room with a bath, Lieutenant Hay thought he would go crazy.

In June, 1940, when the German drive had reached the outskirts of the city, Hay gathered his squad of examiners, non-commissioned officers for the most part, put them in army trucks and rushed them out along the road.

He had many experiences, but resented none more bitterly than the criticism from a civilian, assailing him for "not fighting." He said he answered

by pulling a blue pencil out of his pocket, regulation equipment of the examiner, and demanded how could he fight panzers with such a weapon. By the end of the retreat Hay had lost twenty pounds, though he had a good many left. When he finally got back to his beloved chateau, he found there were Germans everywhere. Nazi soldiers were riding his horses.

When I met Hay in Paris, we lunched together at the famous Cafe Weber on Rue Royale. Hay grabbed the menu only to discover a new rule which forbade a customer to take more than three courses. He became pale with emotion. I hope if he ever reads these lines he will not feel hurt, because he was kind and we were fond of him. I am very grateful for his having given me at the beginning of the winter of 1940 three hundred kilograms of potatoes. Without them I do not know how my family would have pulled through.

The long winter was interrupted for many of the officers and non-coms by training courses offered in various cities, far from the front. Such courses were much appreciated and applicants were not lacking. I was sent for a week and a half to <sup>Salzburg</sup> Salzburg, for a course in observation and anti-tank artillery. Salzburg is a pretty city on the line separating Lorraine from Alsace. It is splendidly located at the foot of the Vosges Mountains; clean, narrow streets and sharply

inclined roofs, blanketed with snow, provided a typical picture of an Alsatian city.

The house I lived in belonged to a kind, old woman who told me in a strong Alsatian accent that her two sons were graduates of St. Cyr and that her daughter was married to a reserve officer, now in Tunis. She remembered 1870 very well, when the French and the Germans had fought in the streets of Salzburg. She had seen the soldiers in red trousers again in 1914 for a short while and had nursed the wounded in the hospital. This was the third war she was experiencing.

In my room there was carefully polished Alsatian furniture and two feather comforters piled up on the bed. On the walls hung many portraits of French generals, of various periods, from Desaix to Foch. Among them was a picture of the Kaiser, with an acknowledgement of the good service of Karl W., her husband.

In the parlor, where she offered me a glass of Kirsch, I noticed a large picture showing an Alsatian girl holding a wounded French soldier. The woman explained that, by moving a vase of flowers nearby, she could cover up the French soldier, leaving visible only the Alsatian girl. By this trick she had passed through the inspection of the German police during the 48 years of German occupation. She feared the Germans greatly and asserted that they would strike

one day with their power and would never let us impose upon them a war of attrition.

The anti-tank and observation courses were very interesting. There we saw new guns and equipment, all of which were excellent. Several days after the beginning of the course, someone discovered that one of the professors, an artillery captain, came from the garde mobile. The news created quite a sensation. Since February 6, 1934, the reserve officers were extremely resentful towards the garde mobile, who they accused of behaving like brutes during the outbreak of civil unrest. For my part, I had been wounded on the Place de la Concorde in Paris and I had no sympathy for them.

We expressed our feelings to the captain of the garde mobile, who told us his side of the story. His men had been on duty in the cold for hours. They had been stoned, and were exasperated after a month of daily outbreaks, all the while fed with stories about the "enemies of the Republic." The captain had been unable to hold his men back. This now seemed very far away and we wondered whether these discords, which had separated the French, had not been senseless and perhaps fatal.

Our training courses were useful and provided a pleasant intermission -- but they were too short, and



only a few of us were allowed to benefit from them. The days passed slowly for the men in Dredsviller, in spite of the excellent radio set which had been provided by the government. So the commandant put Bertrand in charge of organizing our recreation. The latter requisitioned a barn and managed to get musical instruments, costumes, and all, and a show was given with enormous success. This was followed by a dance, which the doctor opened by waltzing with the mayor's pretty daughter.

Bertrand had been fortunate in finding a few quite talented men in the regiment. None was better than Boulet, a private in our battalion, whose job was to drive the commandant's reconnaissance car. Before joining the battalion, Boulet had been a movie actor who played minor roles. Certainly the part of a private was not in his repertoire. He was the most sloppy man in the whole battalion. His leggings, when he wore them, hung down over his shoes, though he usually preferred slippers. And no matter who he had to drive in the car or where he had to go, he never shaved or combed his hair more than twice a month.

We did everything we could to make Boulet change his habits, but with no success. When we tried to shame him, he displayed (without being requested) a splendid picture of himself from some movie in which he

had a role. There he was, in a gleaming uniform of a Hussard captain, shaking hands with Maurice Chevalier. It was easy to see that our lieutenant's uniform seemed to him rather miserable! How he happened to be the commandant's chauffeur was a mystery that was never solved. And how he kept his job for ten months was even more baffling. Boulet had no idea of what a motor was. He had no knowledge of how to change a tire. And he drove so badly that he kept the commandant swearing the whole way, screaming that he would fire him that very day. But Boulet, deaf as a pot, remained perfectly passive and was back at his wheel the next day.

We once received a visit from the Maginot men who performed some of the "numbers" in the show. They were professional actors mobilized in the fortress, who the staff used to provide recreation for the troops. They were highly successful at performing and their last number was quite a hit. At one point the speaker announced that an important man was coming in and asked the audience to stand up. The commandant jumped to his feet nervously assuming that it was the general who had arrived. Then the man appeared -- Hitler, who made a thunderous speech in Alsatian dialect, punctuated by the "Heil" of the band. For some of us, it was not as funny as was intended; the imitation was too perfect, and the harsh voice resounded in our ears for a long time.

Rumors concerning our next departure began to circulate at the end of January, 1940. Boulet asserted he had heard something about it from the chauffeur of the general. The cuistot (cook) was more positive and gave out the day of the departure "for sure". The commandant said all this was completely false and we were to stay in the village another month. The colonel kept mum. On the day announced by the cuistot, we took to the road. Everybody was fed up with drilling and glad of the change.

The march was hard. The horses slid on the frozen road and several broke a leg and had to be shot. The commandant could not bear to see one of his horses killed and fussed around the captains of the batteries, who in turn became harsh with the sergeants. But all that did not prevent a gun from sliding into a small ravine while taking a corner too sharply, pulling with it its four teams of horses. Finally we arrived at sector of Seltz, which was assigned to our division. The guns were placed in position, and we began to dig in.

This sector of Seltz is located at an angle. On one side is the Lauter River flowing west to east, and on the other side is the Rhine, flowing on a line south to north. The frontier, running along these rivers, formed a sharp angle. But the Maginot Line,

for an obvious strategic reason, did not follow the frontier. It linked the Hochwald on the west, with the Rhine on the east, making a large arc that cut across the Hagenau forest, in some places as much as fifteen miles from the northern frontier.

The terrain in advance of the Maginot Line, had been abandoned at the beginning of the war. The general staff now changed its plan and decided to occupy the terrain and organize new defensive positions. Hence the infantry was placed in several lines parallel to the Lauter and while our artillery was behind the infantry, it was still forward of the Maginot Line.

My P.O. was set two miles north of the Forest of Hagenau, on the top of a hill completely lacking in natural camouflage. But it had a marvelous view. On all sides extended the rolling plains of Alsace with their endless fields of beets, which the year before the farmers had not had time to harvest. To the south lay the black mass of the Hagenau, concealing the Maginot Line and our batteries. Beyond, when the weather was clear, one could see on the horizon, the tower of the cathedral of Stasbourg. In the east was the valley of the Rhine, but the river itself was hidden by vegetation along its banks. On the right bank,

small German villages lay scattered and I could see Radstadt very well, tucked in at the foot of the Black Forest. I sighted the Hochwald on the east, scarred by the Z of its anti-tank ditch. In the north were the hills and hidden behind them, small Alsatian villages, of which only the tips of its church-spires could be seen.

Owing to the total lack of foliage, the P.O. was too much in view, so we decided to build something stronger to defy the German artillery and thus to take advantage of the complete tranquility of the sector; a tranquility which had been broken only incidentally in the course of two months.

The P.O. was made of a shelter of steel arches and wood, where three men could sleep, with a concrete observation tower protruding above. The cage was of concrete. Its walls were fifteen inches thick and its roof forty inches thick. I cannot recommend this the kind of steel frame too strongly to any engineer looking for high resistance construction. The tower was large enough for two men to stand side by side. On the walls of the tower parapet were topographic maps of the countryside with all necessary artillery indications.

The observers who built the P.O. were farmers, stone-carriers and steel-workers. They were

quite in their element and the work went rapidly. A month after the ground had been broken, Mazolet gave the cupola the final touch with his trowel and the men traced their names with their fingers on the fresh cement.

The battalion was very proud of the P.O. and we had a little inaugural celebration. In the shelter, by candle light, the commandant and his men drank champagne and toasted the glory of the regiment. Carron was red as a tomato when he touched his glass to that of the commandant, but Mazolet was not so shy and explained in detail the particulars of the construction. Afterward, they were stationed there for many days with little to do but hunt rabbits. Hunting was absolutely forbidden! (I do not know why), so rabbits were plentiful. The men always refrained from showing me their triumphs, though they knew very well I did not care, provided they fulfilled their duties as observers.

No observer worthy of the name is satisfied with only one P.O. He sets up several others, topographically suitable, summarily constructed, but occupied only occasionally. These secondary observatories are chosen to provide a more complete view of the sector or for the purpose of a second defensive position. For the secondary posts of observation, we used some of

the tallest trees in the Hagenau Forest. Ladders of a sort were constructed by the engineer corps and to climb them was a great sport, especially when the wind was high. On the summits sixty feet above ground small platforms were set, sometimes without even a railing, but always with a rope, which seemed to be part of the regular equipment.

Janvier used to say, with his usual pessimism, that the rope was there "for the purpose of carrying down the corpses." The place seemed very unsafe indeed, but as I realized later, it is easy to observe from the top of a tree, even during heavy fighting.

The trees were quite appreciated as a means of recreation and we never missed an opportunity after a good, heavy dinner to send up the top staff officers, who might be visiting the sector, assuring them that only from the top could they accurately reconnoiter the enemy positions.

Two miles from the P.O. was a small village, which the inhabitants had left at the outbreak of the war. A company of engineers from our division now has garrisoned these. Their captain, a fine gentleman, had been an architect and artist in civilian life. He felt a little lonely in this place, so he enlivened his mess hall with life size caricatures of the well-known

Fenouillard family. He also carved a series of life-sized wooden figures, which in the manner of Charlie McCarthy, were made to sit at table with us. There was the mother-in-law, the country cousin and the ill-bred little boy. He made them talk with considerable humor and asserted, that with their help, he felt quite at home.

This captain was not only a wit, but also a first class engineer, and he was doing a good job of erecting pill boxes along the Saurer River, as more outposts of the Maginot Line. He complained bitterly about the lack of tools and materiels. Having almost no weapons, he was quite concerned about a possible coup de main from the enemy line. He showed me the rifles of his men. Sadly, they were of a type first used in 1875, though they had since been remodeled with a new caliber. They were far too heavy.

At the time the P.O. was being built, I was busy making a village of log-houses for the battalion in the forest. The commandant was as exacting in his requirements for the comfort of his men as for himself and we had a great deal of work. But the men loved it and the village quickly sprang up.

For days in this forest it was difficult to realize there was a war. This was not an artillery

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Since the beginning of his service the cost of meals had steadily increased and finally he was discharged.

At the end of March the snow melted and we began to work on the shelters. As we had done in the fall, we took considerable pains to build comfortable bomb-proof shelters to make up for the lack of tools and materials. I realized once more how ground construction, so important for the heavy artillery, had to be planned carefully in advance. For the main problem was that of transportation. An enormous amount of materiel was engulfed and for days columns of horse-trucks, loaded with cement and pebbles, clogged the routes through the forest. I tried different arrangements and finally adopted one made of arched steel and big logs, set deep in the ground. Above was a huge shell of concrete with no vertical walls, separated from the shelter itself by a layer of sand twenty inches thick. This type of construction was not in accord with the rules, but had the advantage of being easily built and of not requiring skilled laborers. The commandant heartily approved of this method. He never listened to my technical explanations, but he loved the idea of doing something not in accordance with the rules of the engineer corps.

One day we were told that General Barra from the engineer corps was going to inspect our yard. The

commandant put on his best fighting mood and, after the general had visited the shelter, the commandant launched into a long explanation in which he made clear that the engineer corps knew nothing about fortifications. General Barra listened in silence and bluntly asked me the thickness of the pied droit. I must admit that I did not know what the pied droit was, and was discourteous enough to ask him. The general did not seem to like my question and finally said he did not know either, but he had often heard it mentioned by the engineer officers. The problem would not have been solved if his ordnance captain, who accompanied him, had not explained that the pied droit was the technical term for the shelter "walls". Then my major was triumphant. This was the point. We had no pied droits and, in the manner in which he pronounced the words, he expressed his total contempt for the unfortunate people who built such shelters. The general did not reply but looked bewildered.

General Barra had a high reputation in the army and deserved it. He was a stocky, energetic man and showed excellent judgment. We learned to appreciate him later, during the retreat. At that time he managed <sup>to</sup> get constant, accurate information to lead us as safely as was possible. I have occasionally

heard uninformed men criticize the staff which sometimes settled itself many miles from the front lines. But we preferred to know they were in a relatively safe position and able to give us correct information and judicious orders. We had no desire to see them among us, where they would only have been a bother.

One morning we noticed that buds had sprouted overnight and a few days later the trees were covered with tender green leaves. Then there was no longer a problem of camouflage and therefore we were relieved of a constant worry and a lot of work. The enormous heaps of yellow sand especially had to be concealed, as well as the paths and the roads, which the frequent comings and goings of trucks and wagons had transformed into a black mire. We camouflaged them by stretching steel wires between trees and poles and clamping the wires with the sawed-off tops of pine trees. Under this artificial cover we maintained our freedom of movement. The desired effect was to conceal the hole made in the forest by the work-yard. The use of pine tree tops served the purpose of giving a necessary sensation of relief from aerial photographs. This proved successful and later on, when the bombardments really began, the errors of the enemy fire proved that we had not been detected.

By the end of April, the forest was beautiful and the sight of spring in the country, as autumn had been, was a novelty for many of us. Sometimes it was difficult to remember we were at war. This group of disciplined and uniformed men, lost in the midst of the woods digging, foraging, chopping timber and building houses in the shade of the ancient trees of the Hagenau Forest, was more reminiscent of a community of monks in the Middle Ages than an artillery battalion of the twentieth century.

On May 7th I left the position for a much longed-for ten days' leave. No vacation was ever more desired than this "permission." I arrived in Paris May 8th. People were concerned with the Norwegian war and the atmosphere was gloomy. Those whom I talked to close to the government gave me a dreadful picture. The fabrication of new planes was almost at a standstill. Dautry, the armament minister, was in need of workers and tools. The staff needed men and equipment. Our tragic inferiority in both was clearly perceived by many. When asked what the "front" thought, I reported what I had observed: the morale was excellent, the men were fit, but we were completely lacking in modern equipment.

At Nice, where my wife and children were staying, life went on as usual. Restaurants and night

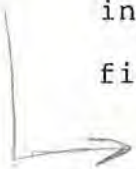
clubs were crowded. But the shadow of the war weighed down upon the city and the general feeling seemed to be that this period of inaction -- the "phony war" -- would be over soon. Troops were passing on their way to the Italian frontier. The forts on the hills around the city were being manned. The Italians, numerous in that part of the country, kept saying that Italy would never attack France.

On May 10, 1940, in the morning, the radio announced that the Germans had entered Holland, and that all leaves were cancelled. War had actually begun. At 10:00 a.m., I received a wire from my regiment calling me back. By 1:00 p.m. I was on a train for the eastern frontier. It was full of soldiers and officers and everybody was glad at the prospect of seeing some action. Next morning I joined my battalion where I found everybody <sup>but satisfied</sup> cheerful. During the long winter we had carefully developed and often rehearsed every part of our plan. During the spring we had worked hard to build a powerful position and at last we had the opportunity to test it.

What happened afterward showed that the war was not the kind for which we were prepared; that instead of our 155s, we would have had more use for anti-tank guns; that instead of concentrating on such things

as the effect of humidity on an 11 kilometer trajectory, we would have done better to train in pistol and rifle shooting.

The first day of my return I experienced an attack by plane which machine-gunned a column of our horses. The only effect was to frighten them, and several fell into a ditch, from which we had great difficulty in pulling them out. This was an unimportant incident, but I mention it because it showed us for the first time how inadequate horse-drawn artillery was.



On May 13, the Germans attacked the first line of our division and succeeded in reaching it at several points, but were repulsed by a counter-attack. One of the young officers, whom we knew very well, was shot, blinded and captured with fifty of his men. As our battery thundered all night at the enemy, it took a severe punishment. The forward 75-mm were subjected to a hard pounding and three officers were killed. Our division received the order the next day to fall back to our second line of defense. This was quite a surprise, because we were under the impression of having done well and there was a lot of grumbling. Later, we learned this was part of a general move to free troops that were urgently needed on the northern front. Moreover, the staff expected a powerful attack in the sector and believing the first line was too far ahead of

the second, preferred not to wait to fall back. In this way, the second line became the first line, and ours became the forward observatory. But this new first line was weak. And the infantry center of resistance, in which our P.O. stood, consisted of only a few shallow trenches. No shelters had been built for the infantrymen and their lieutenant had only a small dug-out, propped up with thin boards and covered with tar paper.

*was Dunked*  
This officer was a young man, fresh from St. Cyr and full of energy. I liked him very much and we were good neighbors. He used to say the presence of artillerymen gave his infantrymen great confidence. He looked enviously at our observatory *is better* and explained to me why the infantry position was so weak. He explained that there had never been enough men to do all the work, that they were fatigued by night patrols, and moreover, that they lacked implements and a means of transporting materials. As I myself had realized the importance of such matters, I understood his explanation well.

For its defense, the center was equipped with a few heavy and light machine guns and had a 25-mm gun to rout the tanks. The position of this gun (for it was the only one, I guess) had long been a matter of discussion and had often been changed. No sufficient

ground protection had been built up; besides, its form, as of every regular field gun, is such that it makes it very difficult to build an efficient parapet around the gun, since it must cover a wide angle in its sweep.

To complete the description, I must mention that the center was surrounded with barbed wire. But this wire was more symbolic than anything else, for it would not have kept out even the cows which had been abandoned at the outbreak of the war and were now wandering wild in the fields.

The worst of it was that, being a forward position, it was two kilometers from the main line of resistance and no connecting trenches had been dug; and as there was no cover, the operation of relieving the main line was always a problem.

I must say that though there were no communicated trenches, we had the good luck to find a small ditch, dug for telephone wires, which often proved useful. It was surprising to see sometimes how quickly a fat man could slide into so narrow a space.

We soon learned how to recognize that they were coming toward us by the shriek of the incomings and, in that case, to fall flat on the ground in a flash. For the veteran officers, it was a familiar sound, though they had not heard it in twenty years.



I remember one story the commandant used to tell. At the end of 1915, he had been wounded in the battle of Champagne and taken to a luxurious hotel in Dinard which had then been transformed into a hospital. He had arrived, covered with mud and blood, but able to walk. Once in his room, the first thing the nurse did was to turn on the water in the bathtub. Steam came from the faucet with such a whistle, that the commandant, obedient to a well-trained reflex, fell flat to the floor to the great consternation of the nurse.

The intensity of the bombardment of the center where our P.O. was placed was variable. Most of the time we received 105-mm shells, but the P.O. was not much affected. We had only to remove earth, dislodged by the concussions, to rebuild the entrance, which had received a direct hit. Though the P.O.'s strength was satisfactory, its size was not and it was too small to shelter all of us.

On the morning of May 16, we were advised by headquarters that, according to intelligence, the Germans were to attack with tanks at 3:00 a.m. the next day. I asked Duval, the infantry officer, what he intended to do. He said he was positive he could hold back two infantry regiments with his company, but he was not at all sure of being able to hold a single tank. At the same time, with a fatalistic gesture, he

<sup>démunis</sup>  
pointed to the bare hills and to the hole from which  
the 25-mm, for some unknown reason, had been taken away.  
The center, at our left, was commanded by a former  
officer of the Foreign Legion. I went to ask him for  
some munitions for our light machine guns. He was a  
nice fellow with a rugged face, full of energy and  
fire, like the young St. Cyrien. He could tell good  
stories about fighting in the desert, but he also  
lacked confidence in fighting the tanks. We did trust  
the Maginot Line, but it was 3 miles behind us. The  
75-mm batteries were 2 miles at the rear and therefore  
were rather inefficient in indirect fire against tanks.  
Our main hope rested on the land mines which the infan-  
trymen had filled the valley with and the barrage of  
the 155-mm, which I was charged to start at 200 yards  
in front of our line.

<sup>brèves</sup> All night the forest was illuminated with  
flashes of our guns, firing toward the places through  
which the Germans were expected to bring their at-  
tacking troupes. At 3:00 a.m., just before dawn, the  
observers were scrutinizing the foot of the hill, the  
infantry had their fingers on their triggers, and my  
radio man with his telephone headgear on, stood ready  
to buzz the signal for the barrage.

But nothing happened. We wondered what the  
intelligence for the expected attack had actually been,

and if the Germans had ever really had an attack in mind. The day after, two German prisoners told us that during the night, three times in succession, they had been ordered to pack and three times they had had the order countermanded. For one who knows how carefully the Germans prepare an attack, it seemed as though they either had not planned one, or had changed their minds at the last moment.

During the following days, action was limited to engagements between patrols. In one of them, an infantry lieutenant was killed. He had narrowly escaped capture a short time before when a German patrol had surprised him, <sup>dark night storm</sup> sleeping, in a little village of No Man's Land. Ordered to dress quickly, instead of putting on his helmet, he had struck the German officer with it, <sup>from under it</sup> knocked the flashlight out of his hand, grabbed his pistol and forced him to flee.

As for us artillerymen, we kept busy pounding the enemy position and any villages occupied by the enemy. Our system worked well. The target was first located in direction and when possible its distance was gauged <sup>by</sup> means of the angle of site. Generally several P.O.s worked together, calling each other in order to check the findings. Their information was

transmitted to the "bureau director of fire" of the battalion (the computation square of the fire-direction center), which made calculations and sent the elevation and deflection information to the batteries. Little by little, and not without great distress, we saw the lovely Alsatian villages demolished and burned. Once more a part of French soil was ravaged by war.

I remember particularly a very lovely church-spire, one kilometer away from our P.O. It had become familiar to us during the many days of observation. As it was an enemy observatory or, at least, so headquarters said, the spire had to be destroyed. We adjusted the fire, hoping none the less that we would miss it. The blow which struck it in two made us feel miserable.

As far as observation was concerned, we could not rely on our air force. German wings ruled the air without opposition. Once in a while, one of our pilots tried to fly over the German lines, but usually he was chased back by a pursuit squadron and was obliged to land in the fields. Our aviators did what they could, making attempts at dawn or at sunset, of raze-mottes. But the promptness with which the adversary's planes were warned was remarkable. As for German observation planes, they flew above us almost continuously. They circled like vultures, indicating their objectives by swaying their wings.

While speaking about anti-aircraft defense, I want to say a few words about the training of our machine-gunners; just in case it might be missed by posterity. This training, the importance of which has been emphasized, consisted of carrying the targets, small wooden airplanes mounted on tall sticks, in front of the machine-gunners, who merely watched through their gunsights and of course did not fire. Janvier used to add a pleasantry of his own. By hitting the machine-gunner over the head with this stick, he pretended to give him the impression of dive-bombing.

As I had no confidence in the efficiency of our anti-aircraft defense, I was amazed one day, when an enemy plane, which had been circling us suddenly lost control and turned back, hobbling, to the German lines, where it probably crashed. As it turned out, our anti-aircraft defense with even the simplest means -- a machine gun and rifle -- proved to be really efficient and forced enemy planes to fly at high altitudes where they lost a considerable part of their effectiveness.

While we were becoming rooted in a war of position, the Germans had crossed the Meuse in the Sedan-Givet sector and broken through the Allied front. It may have been because of the relative ease with which they had crossed a river considered impassable,

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work-yard, I found the camp unusually animated. The regiment had been ordered to an unknown destination. Through the newspapers and the radio we had learned the bad news of the northern armies and we were quite sure we would be sent to the east or the north to plug the gap made in our lines by the German onslaught.

In order to prepare all the details of our departure, I accompanied the commandant to the colonel's Poste de Commandant. Looking very grave and preoccupied, the colonel congratulated me on the work of the P.O. and refrained from making any comments on the situation. But nobody could ignore the bad turn of events.

On May 23, we said farewell to our shelters, our trenches and the newly completed barracks and started our night's march to the railway where we were to board a train. The only incident was provided by parachutists. We had been warned that some of them had descended in the forest, so the column was carefully patrolled. The parachutists were found, but they turned out to be our general's messengers, who had put on white overalls.

At two o'clock the next afternoon, under a scorching sun, the regiment boarded the train. We were

surprised to be carrying out this operation in daylight. I guess the reason was that the volume of traffic was so heavy that the departures had to be spaced throughout the entire twenty-four hours. As we expected, German planes kept circling over us, but they did not attack. The infantry regiment of our division, which departed after us, was not as fortunate and seven men were killed by machine-gunning.

Before leaving, we bought Alsatian dolls, with their large butterfly caps and their ample black skirts, final souvenirs of the province so dear to everyone of us.



PART TWO

As every soldier knows, the main distraction in a troop train is trying to guess its destination. By watching the railroad stations it is usually possible to figure out the general direction. But when the train makes many detours, rides along secondary lines and stops at unheard of stations, you can't count upon any clues besides the landscape. Twenty-four hours after having left Alsace, the countryside began to change. The wheat fields, meadows, and pine tree woods of the Vosge gave way to vineyards and soon there were rows of blue vine plants covering the hills as far as we could see. We were in Burgundy! A certain excitement spread among the men, who were glad to see their homelands again. Some were able to get tip-offs from railroad employees and managed to notify their wives by phone, who often came to the next station to see them. Whenever the train stopped we got off to take some exercise. The people were all gloomy -- there was no cheer -- the Germans were at Boulogne!

In the evening, with the train running at slow speed, we skirted Paris. The next morning we got off in a little village, in the Somme, not far from Montdidier. In the pale light of dawn, the commandant and the veteran officers looked thoughtfully at the great stretches of wheatfields, interrupted here and

there by meager groups of trees. For most of the veteran officers the Somme was a familiar place. Their thoughts traveled back to twenty-three years before: to the long nights of watch, when they would stand knee-deep in mud while masses of steel and fire criss-crossed the sky. The commandant expressed the general opinion by saying, "To hell with the republic!" Like most of the anciens combattants, he blamed our political regime for not having been able to keep the fruits of a victory which had been dearly won by nearly five years of hard fighting.

Soon the guns and wagons were pulled out of the train, the horses were harnessed and we started our journey. The first village we came to was deserted. Many houses were destroyed and the road was cut by an enormous bomb crater. Our column, divided into groups of two or three vehicles, kept moving all day through a dead looking country. The few civilians we met seemed in a stupor. One of them told us that the radio had just announced the surrender of the King of Belgium. He added that Paul Reynaud had accused the king of treason. We did not believe it. King Leopold had made the dreadful mistake of preserving a strict neutrality in the vain hope of keeping his country out of the turmoil; but he was a soldier and if he had surrendered he must have had good reason for it.

For three days, sometimes by night, sometimes by day, we moved along the roads of this region which seemed to belong to another world. We were amazed at the total absence of troops. We never met one complete outfit, just small groups of trucks carrying supplies to the lines or a battery of 75-mm -- at the most -- changing its position. The dreadful inferiority of our forces was showing more clearly than ever.

Even when we moved by day, hostile planes did not bother us. But we had been notified by headquarters that enemy squads composed of several armored cars were running unchecked far in the interior of our lines and wreaking havoc with artillery and infantry supply columns. It had seemed very strange to us at first, especially to the old officers, who thought of the front as a tight line. There was indeed a front, but it was not tight, as was shown by what followed. Furthermore, there were few troops in the rear, and most of them had no means of stopping armoured cars.

Once in a while we passed groups of refugees returning home. They had fled a week earlier, and were now coming back, reassured by the confident words of the President and urged to return by the Prefect. Several times we met a whole village en route: at the head

1° - Cele

FIN

3°

the mayor, usually a rich farmer, and behind him the villiageois, with their cattle and their sheep, which they had a hard time keeping together. They had piled their belongings on heavy farm wagons. The people looked grave and even among those who were coming back home, there was no rejoicing. War was devastating their country again and how uncertain was the future for them!

I remember one refugee, an old man, who made us feel then, more than at any other time, the tragic destiny of this province. We found him alone in a barn with a cow, a sheep and a cart. He was not going back home for the place where he lived, near Peronne, was in German hands. But the man was on a journey toward the south. He had stopped for a rest in the barn. His wrinkled face showed little emotion. He was not very talkative, but the commandant put him quickly at his ease and we thus learned that the man's farm had been destroyed by a bomb and he had scarcely had time to evacuate it. This was not the first time.

In 1914, the German onslaught had forced him to move. Even at that time, he was too old to be mobilized, and he had taken the same road with almost the same baggage, seeking refuge in the south. When he came back in 1918, he found a pile of bricks in the place where his farm had stood. He had then built a

new farm, a modern one, with American farming equipment. Now, again, it had been destroyed, the tractor and machines wrecked, the cattle lost. He remembered what his father had told him of the invasion in 1871 -- hostages taken and menaced and houses put afire. None of us could object when he bitterly denounced those who had not been able to keep his homeland safe from still another invasion. There was bitterness, but no desperation in his words; he would come back and build his farm again.

Once, in the Mairie of a little village where Janvier and I had stopped to get some information, we met a man in a dark uniform with many gold stripes. This man turned out to be the prefect of the department who, having taken over his job a few days before, was inspecting his new domain.

There had been a great many and often unfair shakeups among the prefects and other officials. Many were accused of having been too quick in putting their administrates on the road of exodus and many others of having been too slow. This prefect was trying to bring everybody home, which shows that up to that time the government and the quartier general were still confident of being able to hold the line. The prefect seemed to be very pleased to see us, as he had seen no troops during his trip, and wondered where the army

was. We told him that as far as we were concerned, we had high hopes of stopping the onrush of the Germans. This is a good example of what propaganda can do, for none of us would have been able to explain how we would accomplish it.

On May 30, we went up to the line, to relieve the Seventh Colonial Division, which held the sector in front of Amiens. This division had borne the brunt of the fighting of the last two weeks. A few days before, it had attacked in the hope of reducing the "pocket of Amiens" and destroying the spearhead which the Germans, with incredible boldness, had thrown behind the north armies in Flanders. The division had succeeded in pushing the enemy back 10 miles and had now dug in, four miles south of the city. They had suffered dreadful losses and were to be sent to the rear for a rest.

As usual in these releves, we stepped into our predecessors' boots. The commandant got the headquarters of the major of the 155-mm battalion who was there. The batteries settled in their dugouts and I went in the avant-post line to see their P.O., get acquainted with him, and get useful information before his departure. He was in the avant-post line, in a village called St. Fussien located on the road from Amiens to Paris. St. Fussien had been long since abandoned by its inhabitants, and was already partly destroyed by bombardments.



In the north of the village, in the center of a large park was a chateau apparently unoccupied for a long time. All around it the infantrymen had placed their machine guns, their mortars, and their 25-mm. The north exit of the village on the route to Amiens was barred; beyond it was No Man's Land; and further, along the slopes of the hill in front of us, were the German trenches.

The observer whose place I was taking was a short fellow with bright eyes and a pale face. He had not left his dugout for a week. He told me what the offensive, launched by his division against the pocket of Amiens, had been like. They had attacked at dawn with very little artillery support and only a few Somua tanks (light tanks.) For the first few kilometers it had been all right. The tanks easily destroyed all machine gun nests. Then the wave of attack reached cote 111 -- he pointed out a small hill in front of us, behind which lay the city of Amiens. The Germans had had time to reinforce this hill with many anti-tank guns, which rapidly had made shambles of the few Somuas. During this time, the French artillery had been unable to follow and the hill was attacked without an artillery barrage.

What had happened proved once more that infantry is helpless without tanks and artillery support. The French had been caught on the slope of the hill

under a cross fire of machine guns and had been forced to fall back, to where we were now, and to dig in. They had lost nearly one-half of their forces, most of the officers had been killed or wounded, and several companies were now commanded by sergeants.

Several months later I came back to this place and visited cote 111. The farthest line of advance was marked on the ground by the tombs of the men, who still lay where they had fallen. Along the edge of the woods in the wheat field, their tombs were scattered, like driftwood thrown up on the shore by the high water and left when the tide recedes.

The young observer had nothing but praise for the black troops who constituted the bulk of the division, but said that while they were good in attack, they were not as effective in withstanding a bombardment. At night in the dark they were apt to become alarmed and would shoot sometimes without reason.

The next morning the colonial troops were relieved and replaced by the Royal Suedois\* an infantry regiment of our division. The Germans must have gotten wind of this for the village was subjected to a fierce pounding which caused more losses.

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\*The Royal Suedoise was so called because in the 17th Century it belonged to a Swedish prince.

I was glad to be once more in a P.O. and together again with the infantrymen. The name of the infantry battalion major was Trehardi, which sounds like the name of a famous warrior who served with William the Conqueror. This tall man with his sharp-boned face had not only the name and appearance of a warrior, but also the fierce fighting spirit of the famous Conquerors. The infantrymen were proud to have him as a chief.

Immediately after arrival we began to dig in. The French defense organization was not made up of an interrupted line of trenches, as in the First World War, but of strongholds or centers of resistance set in villages or woods. These centers of resistance were very far apart. Indeed, our division stretched along a 20 kilometer line, whereas 6 kilometers is the rule.

The principles of centers of resistance were not complicated. The villages or woods have some natural defense against tanks, such as houses, trees, ditches or garden walls which will to some extent bar the tanks. Moreover, these places can be strongly manned, and can offer great resistance. A continuous line of defense would have to be stretched very thin and with the open fields, they would be without natural defense against tanks and therefore extremely vulnerable. This concept of centers of resistance was, I

still believe, sound. As a matter of fact, there was no other choice. But the immense stretches of land between the centers offered no resistance whatsoever to the enemy tanks which, as it turned out, could easily encircle and penetrate the centers.

Our batteries were set in a village called Estree, 5 kilometers behind the avant post line. The batteries had had some difficulty in finding places to hide because the Somme is a flat country with little opportunity for camouflage. The ~~road~~ which links Estree had now been razed by the bombardment. In the street lay what was left of a 75-mm gun and its tractor, caught there by the bombing.

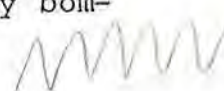
Only the church of this village was still standing, though a bomb had fallen against the walls of the choir area, leaving wide cracks in it. One day Bertrand and I entered it. It was old Romanesque church. The thick walls had been erected in the 13th Century to resist the attacks of the barbarians. We were attracted to a beautifully sculptured marble tomb, in the middle of the choir area. On top of the tomb were two life-size statues of armed men lying side by side. Bertrand explained to me that they were the patron saints of the neighborhood, and he told their story. In the fourth century, St. Fussin had come to

Amiens to evangelize the pagans. At the time of the Roman persecution, he had been forced to flee and had taken the road to Lutece (now Paris), the same road over which our artillery <sup>company</sup> fourgon were not rattling. A Roman centurian was sent in pursuit of St. Fussien, and caught up to him at the village not named after him. <sup>Tomb</sup> Struck by the virtue of St. Fussien, the centurian <sup>chose</sup> decided to flee with him. Both were caught a little further on, in the village where we now were, Estree. They were beheaded and their remains now lay in this church that was later erected in their honor.

Bertrand and I stood there for a long time, our thoughts <sup>tourner</sup> wandering through a much beloved and respected past. <sup>des vols blancs, des vols blancs, des vols blancs</sup>

My P.O. in St. Fussien was set in an <sup>verger</sup> orchard. It was just a hole dug at the foot of a tree, covered with a board made of an old door on which a few shovels of earth had been thrown. Around it the infantrymen had set their machine guns and dug their trenches. At one corner, a few feet from <sup>mon</sup> my <sup>trou</sup> hole the 25-mm anti-tank gun had been set in a kind of <sup>fosse</sup> pit covered with balls of pressed hay, a good protection against bullets and splinters. My two-way radio set had been put in a shallow hole, in the middle of another orchard, 50 yards to the rear, as was prescribed. But this was not

a good location for it and it was to cause me trouble later.

From the P.O. I had a good view. Just in front of me was cote 111. Through it partly concealed Amiens, I could see the spires of the famous cathedral. On both sides of the P.O. lay the rolling terrain of the Somme covered with woods and fields. To get a better view of the enemy position I often went up to the bell tower of the village. From the top I could see a large section of the city of Amiens. My position was not very comfortable -- one foot on the rung of a ladder, the other on the <sup>post</sup> yoke of the bell -- but the view was superb. The tower had been destroyed by bombardments and the walls were riddled with holes. 

The bombardments were sporadic and occasionally very violent. The German artillerymen seemed to be good marksmen notwithstanding what we had been told. They were not content with zoning or shelling, but chose their objectives, particularly the observatories and machine gun nests. My comrade of the regiment of the 75-mm, who was in the same village, had chosen the water tower for an observatory, but he was quickly detected and caught by a bombardment before he could descend. He was severely wounded.

On June 3, we received information that the German troops facing us were composed only of a Landwehr regiment. We wondered why we did not make use of

this opportunity to attack and reduce the defense of Amiens. Most of the young infantry officers who were with me in the center of resistance used to say that they preferred to attack rather than hold a defensive position, assuming that fresh troops new to fire would do better on the offensive than on the defensive. When our general visited our front line the infantry officers expressed this opinion, but he dismissed it, pointing out the weakness of our position and the impossibility of attack. Indeed, our division was stretched along a 20 kilometer front, whereas it was the rule that for an offensive, the front for a division should not be over 3 kilometers. Moreover, our armament was considered pitifully insufficient for attacking, although satisfactory for a defensive fight. However, even this view proved false, for our defensive weapons proved to be of use only against infantry troops and not against tanks.

Our armament was composed mostly of heavy and light machine guns. The anti-tank weapon was a 25-mm gun -- a good weapon against <sup>veh. ABV-</sup> armored cars, but inefficient against <sup>the Panzer - way</sup> tanks. Moreover, there were too few of them and <sup>the</sup> the Royal Suedois was far from having received its regular allotment. The French Army had another anti-tank gun, the 47-mm. It was an extremely efficient weapon thanks to its high initial velocity. The

*47-mm anti-tank*  
47-mm belonged to the artillery, whereas the 25-mm was  
part of the regular *armour* equipment of the infantry. There  
was one battery of eight 47-mm guns per division. This  
meant, *you'd see a 47-mm* that in my division there were four sections of  
two guns each for every 20 kilometers; one section for  
every five kilometers. Five kilometers is a long dis-  
tance! *W.A.* Incidentally, I never saw one of these 47-mm  
guns anywhere, except at the artillery school.

*Good*  
Besides the 25-mm gun the infantry had  
another, the trench mortar. *weapon* It was quite an effective  
weapon, though of no use against tanks. The mortar  
looks like a gas pipe. To fire it, the shell must be  
dropped backward into the muzzle. Upon contact with  
the firing pin, connected at the base of the barrel,  
the propellant charge explodes and throws the projec-  
tile. The feeder who drops the shell into the muzzle  
must be quick to pull his hand back, otherwise it could  
easily accompany the shell. We artillerymen used to  
make fun of the trench mortar. But it was a very effi-  
cient weapon and amazingly accurate.

To make up for our deficiency in anti-tank  
guns, we used the 75-mm. But this gun, despite its  
remarkable qualities, had major defects in anti-tank  
work, as I found out later.



Our regiment of heavy field artillery not only lacked anti-tank weapons, but even such simple infantry weapons as rifles. The possibility that artillerymen might have to fight tanks or troops had evidently been <sup>overlooked</sup> overlooked, probably due to the deeply rooted idea that these men are always far behind the front lines and are never involved in hand-to-hand fighting. For this reason, my battalion had, besides its 155-mm pieces, no anti-tank weapons and only a couple of machine guns for anti-aircraft defense. One man out of five had a mousqueton, or short rifle, but it was considered as obsolete as a sword; besides, few had had any practice with it. Only a few non-commissioned officers had any pistols.

Every officer was supposed to have a pistol of his own, so at the beginning of the mobilization I had received one. It was an old fashioned double-barrelled revolver of Spanish manufacture. I was told by the quartermaster officer who gave it to me, that it had formerly belonged to some Spanish Reds and had been taken from them when they had had to flee and cross the French border at the end of the Spanish Civil War. It may have been a valuable museum piece, but it was inadequate for this sort of warfare. Once in a while I practiced with it, but I had to be careful, since it

was inaccurate and had a tendency to jam. My ordnance, Carron, who changed the targets, used to say that the only safe place was where I was aiming.

*ow* ✓ I have already said that we had not many anti-tank weapons, but we received instructions that were supposed to make up for this deficiency. A note from Headquarters, which we received early in June explained the importance of tanks in modern warfare, and advised us to use our ingenuity to stop them. It gave us examples. I recall a few of them. The first was to jump on the tank, open the trap door and shoot the occupant inside with our pistol. What we should do if the German tank crew had locked the door from the inside was not mentioned. Another way was to duck in a hole, let the tank pass over and slip an iron bar in between the treads. Just try it! The third means was to throw a flaming bottle of gasoline at the tank. I heard a lot about this, but was never able to do it. I guess it was a reporter's idea. I don't want to accuse the high staff of having believed in the feasibility of what they wrote. It just showed their embarrassment at the total lack of adequate anti-tank defenses.

While I am on the subject of "modern" warfare, I might mention the new "secret" devices used by the Germans. I must say that we were not taken off-guard. We had received elaborate warnings of the new

secret weapons used by our foe. We enjoyed it so much that I cannot refrain from repeating it. The sentinals were advised that sometimes at night they might see a glowing statue of the Virgin rising up from the German lines. This trick weapon was used particularly when the Germans had a regiment of Bretons in front of them. The Bretons, as is well known, are very pious and exceedingly superstitious. This was supposed to frighten them. Another trick was a lion's roar. A special loudspeaker imitated this roar, as well as those of tigers and other wild animals. This weapon, of course, was aimed at the colonial black regiments. Finally, for the consumption of ordinary regiments, there were special firecrackers which imitated the "tac-tac" of machine guns. They were thrown behind the lines to give the impression of an attack from the rear. Unfortunately, our regiment was composed neither of Bretons nor colonials but just plain Bourgundians. We never experienced any of these new tricks. We were probably considered too skeptical.

Often, when the night was quiet and we didn't know what to report in the hourly message which had to be radioed to the battalion, we broadcast, "No whisper of the lion heard yet" or "No suspicious religous apparition sighted."

On June 4, at 4:00 p.m., I was busy at my observatory, trying to locate my German colleague who, from the other side of the lines, was directing his fire with dreadful accuracy. Suddenly I saw in the German line, at a distance of about 4 kilometers, a column of vehicles heading for Amiens. I climbed up a tree from which I had a better view, and from there I observed for hours an uninterrupted line of tanks, trucks and other motor vehicles, pouring into the city from all directions.

I immediately called the battalion and reported what I had seen to the commandant, who in turn transmitted the news to the headquarters of the division. The 3rd Bureau of the Intelligence Department of the Corps d'Armee replied that I must be having hallucinations. But finally they were convinced of the truth of my report and a barrage of 155-mm began to crash down on the indicated points. The fire was difficult to adjust and not as accurate as I wished. It annoyed the Germans and caused heavy losses, as they told us later, but it did not stop them.

It was evident that the barrage of 155-mm, though extremely efficient against infantry or for destruction, could not stop armored vehicles. When night came we stopped our firing. I could not longer see anything, but all night, by straining our ears, we

heard the hum of motors, the clatter of tank treads,  
and the sound of shifting gears as they climbed up cote  
111 in front of us to reach their jumping off place.  
There was no doubt that a great offensive was in prepa-  
ration. We had just learned a few hours before that  
the evacuation of Dunkirk was over. The whole might of  
the German armies, practically intact, was now to be  
turned toward the remnants of the French armies on the  
traditional route of the invasion, the Somme and the  
Aisne.

At midnight, patrols of infantrymen left  
their trenches and went a few hundred yards into No-  
Man's-Land to bury land mines. All night I sent the  
same message to our headquarters every 15 minutes,  
"Tanks gathering in front of us . . . tanks gathering  
in front of us."

Our messages were sent by radio and tele-  
phone. Before the war, in peacetime manoeuvres, we  
feared that the radio posts, so numerous in the field,  
would interfere with one another. But this was not the  
case. As a matter of fact, the radio worked marvelous-  
ly well, whereas the telephone was of no help. The  
wires were constantly being cut, in spite of being laid  
"in scale" (two wires laid parallel and connected every  
50 meters).

It was not yet 2:00 a.m. when the enemy artillery began. What they had given us in the days before had not been light, but now it seemed like rosewater. The Germans had probably sighted our little spot and ascertained that it was a stronghold of the infantry. 105-mm and 150-mm shells fell so densely that we could not distinguish one explosion from another. At 3:00 a.m. the explosions stopped for a while; but as soon as we had extricated ourselves from the earth which had partly filled the trench, the pounding started again, so violently that we thought all hell had broken loose. The hole where we were was narrow and not deep, but it was protected by a tree which proved useful. A shell fell on just the other side of the tree, knocked us down, and half buried us with earth. I emerged from the rubble and was amazed and relieved to find my non-com and the other man only a little shocked but unharmed. The tree was at a dangerous angle, half uprooted by the shell which had hit it right at the base.

In another instance, the trees not only failed to give protection, but proved harmful. While I was in a trench with an infantryman (a nice man whom I had gotten to know in the course of these last days) a shell burst in the branches of the tree behind us. Hearing the whistle, we ducked. I felt him leaning on

my shoulder. He did not seem hurt and I asked him what the matter was. He was pale and did not answer and fell on his knees in the bottom of the trench. Then he called feebly, several times, "Mama." He died a few minutes later. There was no apparent trace of his having been hurt, not even a drop of blood on his overcoat. For a short while I thought he simply had been knocked out by the explosion. But after careful examination, we found on his back, at the level of his heart, a cut about as long as half a match. He had been killed by a splinter, projected by the burst of the shell in the tree. It had entered his back and penetrated his heart as he was ducking into the trench.

At 4:00 a.m. it was clear. The shelling suddenly stopped. We peeked out of our hole and looked at the enemy lines. Then we saw what looked like swarms of big black bugs crawling down the sides of cote 111 -- tanks. The infantrymen shouted a hooray, relieved that the bombardment had stopped, and believing that it would not be resumed. In this they were wrong. They also had great confidence in their 25-mm. In this too, they were wrong.

It is a fact that much can be expected from troops fighting tanks, provided they have sufficient weapons. Their spirit is very different from the kind

of apathy which is usually prevalent during a heavy shelling from an enemy whom they don't see. When they see the tanks, they are filled with a furor like the excitement of a big-game hunt. But this feeling disappears quickly, to be replaced by a sometimes unjustified fear once they have discovered that their weapons can not damage the tanks and once they have been chased into the fields and hunted like rabbits.

From my P.O. I was in an ideal position to watch the waves of tanks approaching us. At one time I counted about 60 in the fields. They were of different sizes and they came in groups of five and ten and in no apparent order. They soon reached the bottom of the valley, disappeared for a while from my view, and then reappeared at my left. When they reached a line 200 yards north of the village, I started the barrage of our artillery.

Our shells came accurately and fast. The barrage was narrow, about a half a mile wide, and quite dense. No infantryman in the open would have had a chance. But it did not stop the tanks. I could not see very well what damage was being done to them, but certainly the tanks were not prevented from reaching the outskirts of our village. It was easy for them to make a large detour and approach from the rear, which



they did. Our 25-mm was instructed to fire only at short distances and on nothing but the small-sized tanks. Soon the opportunity for action came.

Two tanks, headed to the left, passed in front of us. Our 25-mm opened fire at 20 yards. One tank was stopped. The other tank, though it was hit, seemed to be unaffected and ran off. Our 25-mm shot repeatedly at the tank which had been stopped and got as an answer a machine gun volley. But our 25-mm had the last word. The tank stopped firing and we saw two shadows slip out of the tank. The smoke was so intense that, in spite of the short distance, we could not see very well. I do not know what happened to the German crew.

*repeated*

The other 25-mm at my right was not so lucky. The tank it had chosen to fire on remained unharmed and returned fire with its 37-mm. At 50 yards distance, the infantry gun and the tank repeatedly exchanged blows. It was a splendid but uneven duel. The 25-mm gun was not protected and had not much chance against a tank with armor that was two to three inches thick. Soon the 25-mm stopped its fire, its crew wiped out. The tank had won.

*period*

The fight continued for a few hours. To get a correct picture of it, it is necessary to bear in mind its extremely sporadic nature; periods of lull

alternated with moments of intense action. This was always the character of every tank fight I witnessed: tanks in different size groups, heading in a given direction, turning back, coming forward again, turning off to the right or left, but never attempting to penetrate our center of resistance. In fact all sorts of obstacles, big and small, houses, trees, and garden walls seemed enough to keep them off. They could have passed through, of course, but rather than risk stalling, they seemed to prefer to circle and cover their foe with their fire.

At 7:30 a.m., as I remember, the fog and smoke which had greatly hindered our visibility, cleared. I again could see in front of me cote 111 and I was rather surprised to see a dozen tanks climbing the hill, going back to their lines. I did not know and still wonder why they fell back. Had they had some trouble and were they in need of repair? Or were they returning to replenish their ammunition or gasoline supply? Anyway, I sent a message to the commandant, asking him to stop the barrage and claiming that the tanks had been successfully repulsed. Afterwards, my comrades often kidded me about this message. For as the commandant was receiving it, his batteries, 5 kilometers behind us, were being surrounded by tanks, and our supply column, 15 kilometers in the rear, was

having a skirmish with other tanks. As could have been expected, the tanks had plunged into our lines, bypassing the village where I was and they were now running wild and unchecked in the fields wrecking supply columns, isolating headquarters, destroying artillery batteries, blocking roads, cutting communications, and creating everywhere the utmost confusion. That I learned later. I did not know it when I sent the message and in spite of the losses we suffered, we were not dissatisfied with the success of our resistance.

A short while after the tank attack had ceased, the Germans resumed their bombardment by artillery. Their fire was accurately aimed at precise locations, and this led us to believe that the tanks had some means of communicating to their support artillery, the spots they had found most difficult to crack. I later learned that the German tanks indeed had an extensive means of communication by radio and that there were forward artillery observers who even rode along in the tanks with the crew.

A month later I was told by a friend who had fought at Dunkirk and had been charged with defending the airfield there, that the columns which were pursuing him did not bother to code their messages. With his radio he had picked up several messages and was thus able to find out some of their plans of attack.

on the very edge of the village. At the same time I widened it so that it covered the perimeter like a screen. Although it had some effect, it was not sufficient and the Storm Troops kept pouring through the breach the enemy had made in the north of the village.

Soon hard hand-to-hand fighting developed in the chateau close to the P.O.. In the park the Germans progressed in short jumps. The machine gun on my right opened fire, but not for long. A tank (there were some still wandering around the village) had seen the flash, and with a few volleys of its 37-mm had silenced it. Little by little, through the crash of the grenades and the tac-tac of the guns, the shouts of the Storm Troops came nearer, "Rentez-vous, comrades francais." It took us quite a while to discern through the Teutonic accent that they were inviting us to surrender!

The infantry lieutenant ordered his men to refrain shooting until the vague d'anaut reached the wall of the orchard, so that they would have a better chance at hitting their mark. When the Storm Troops reached the wall, the lieutenant ordered fire.

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With this information he was able to take the necessary measures to hold his position and throw back the attack on the airfield successfully.

*11* → *B. 11* By 9:00 a.m. our 25-mm had been put definitely out of commission. Except for two wounded, the crew was unharmed, thanks to the huge bales of pressed hay which had been piled around the gun. After having lost their last means of defense against the tanks, they faced another kind of attack: Storm Troops. Already the Storm Troops had succeeded in getting a foothold in the northern part of the village. They had reached the *MMMMMM* edge of St. Fussien on motorcycles and troop carriers. I had not seen them from my observatory. Later on in the course of the war, I saw some of these troop carriers and understood how the Storm Troops were able to cross the field which lay in front of the village underfire. The process was simple and rendered ineffectual the whole system of infantry defense. The traditional defense consisted of barrages of artillery and machine gun fire to stop the attacking infantry. Such barrages, for four years in the First World War, had been considered impossible to cross. But now most machine guns were neutralized by the tanks, and the shells which were left, were inefficient against troop carriers.

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frontal attack, but the Germans were not coming from the front. They were coming from the side. The P.O. and the radio set were now covered by enemy fire and I could not give information to my commandant much longer.

I sent a message, giving the position of the enemy, saying that the Germans had penetrated the center. I added that they were 20 yards away from us, that we were isolated and that I could not hold the place very long. Nestling in the hole no more than ten inches deep, our noses against the radio apparatus, we could see German helmets peeping out from the other side of the wall and disappearing after having emitted a volley with their tommy guns. I shot several rounds with my pistol, to help hold them back while we waited for our commandant's reply. My radio corporal, a man named Cotton, who had done a wonderful job all night manipulating the buzzer and radioing messages, was not long in deciphering the answer. We were ordered to retire and to join the infantry commandant and await his orders.

As soon as we received the message, I destroyed the radio set by firing two bullets into it and crawled to the edge of the orchard to a communicating trench through which I finally reached the command post of infantry commandant Trehardie, 50 yards behind. I

gave him an account of what had happened and of the order I had received.

There I stayed with him and admired his sang-roid and ability in organizing his defense, reinforcing the places which were weakening and organizing a counter-attack. His command post was set in a small garden on the main street. The Germans were on the other side of the street. Our infantrymen were crouched behind the wall of the yard in which they had made a fewl small holes. There was uninterrupted fire between the two sides. The Germans were very close, but as they appeared and disappeared like jumping jacks, it was difficult to pick them off. Once in a while we succeeded. The corporal next to me took his time in aiming, and a gray mass falling from the wall proved that he had aimed well.

From snatches of conversation with the infantrymen, I gathered that the Germans had succeeded in occupying the entire northern part of the village, though there were many spots which had resisted stubbornly -- notwithstanding their being surrounded!

On our left, the Germans were attempting to filter into the large garden. The infantry lieutenant who was in charge of the defense had been ordered to fall back slowly to the houses of the village. In spite of the fact that the gardens were difficult to

defend, he did pretty well. His men were scattered behind trees and hedges. After having fired volleys with their fusil mitrailleur, they moved off to other places of cover and fired again. This infantry fight was quite new to me and very different from what I had always imagined. There was no bayonette charge, though sometimes the enemy was less than 20 yards from us. All that we could see was the flash of a gun and the round shape of a helmet.

I saw no tanks while I was there. I suppose they had finished their task.

For hours the rumble of the fighting rolled from one part of the village to the other, dying down in one place and flaring up again somewhere else. The infantrymen put up a splendid resistance, but their position, isolated and without supplies, was not good.

Near noon, the places which had been isolated seemed to weaken, as the Germans kept pouring troops and Minen-werfers through the breach that they had opened in the north end of the village. Commandant Trehardie thought it imperative to dislodge them from that part of the village or at least to render their situation more difficult there to prevent them from using their position as a spring board for a new attack. This could not be done without artillery support. But as I have said, the village was isolated and



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He decided to send me back to my regiment in order to ask for an artillery barrage and to indicate the zones of the village which had to be hammered. I took leave of Commandant Trehardie and, with Cotton, prepared to rejoin my artillery regiment. My non-com and the other men of my squad had been sent off earlier to make liaison with a 105-mm regiment. I was never to see Commandant Trehardie again, nor any of the infantrymen who defended the village.

The distance to the battery was not very far -- 4 kilometers. However, I have never made a more arduous trip. In the wide open fields which lay between the centers of resistance, tanks were moving freely around, in groups of 5 or 10 or more, forcing us to be constantly on the alert.

However, we managed to reach the second line of defense, one kilometer away, without much trouble. The infantry lieutenant whom I met in this line told me that they had been caught off guard by the attack of the tanks on the village and had suffered some losses. However, his machine guns had escaped destruction. The tanks had not stayed long. They had crossed the village by the main street and had not come back yet.

After leaving the village the journey became more difficult. A group of about 10 tanks patrolled the

road and seemed to have no intention of freeing the passage for me. We lay flat in a ditch waiting for them to leave. On the road lay the bodies of several soldiers, liaison agents or telephonists surprised while repairing the line. Twice the tanks passed close by us. One of them had not closed the turret. As they passed, I could not help thinking of that famous instruction I spoke of which advised us to jump on the tank and shoot the occupants. Here the promoter of the idea had all the necessary elements for a demonstration.

Finally, I realized that if we attempted to jump from one ditch to another it would take hours to cover the distance that still lay before us. This would not only delay the urgently needed artillery barrage, but would offer more of a chance of being caught. The best way would be to find some way to go very fast.

I found two bicycles at an abandoned farm and this made the attempt possible. When the tanks were a little further off, we seized the opportunity. We jumped on the bicycles and pedalled off along the road as fast as possible for two miles. This procedure was successful, but as we saw later, it had its inconvenience. The tanks did not see us, or if they did, they did not care. Soon we reached the last hill, behind which was set the battery of the other battalion

alternated with moments of intense action. This was always the character of every tank fight I witnessed: tanks in different size groups, heading in a given direction, turning back, coming forward again, turning off to the right or left, but never attempting to penetrate our center of resistance. In fact all sorts of obstacles, big and small, houses, trees, and garden walls seemed enough to keep them off. They could have passed through, of course, but rather than risk stalling, they seemed to prefer to circle and cover their foe with their fire.

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road and seemed to have no intention of freeing the passage for me. We lay flat in a ditch waiting for them to leave. On the road lay the bodies of several soldiers, liaison agents or telephonists surprised while repairing the line. Twice the tanks passed close by us. One of them had not closed the turret. As they passed, I could not help thinking of that famous instruction I spoke of which advised us to jump on the tank and shoot the occupants. Here the promoter of the idea had all the necessary elements for a demonstration.

Finally, I realized that if we attempted to jump from one ditch to another it would take hours to cover the distance that still lay before us. This would not only delay the urgently needed artillery barrage, but would offer more of a chance of being caught. The best way would be to find some way to go very fast.

I found two bicycles at an abandoned farm and this made the attempt possible. When the tanks were a little further off, we seized the opportunity. We jumped on the bicycles and pedalled off along the road as fast as possible for two miles. This procedure was successful, but as we saw later, it had its inconvenience. The tanks did not see us, or if they did, they did not care. Soon we reached the last hill, behind which was set the battery of the other battalion

of my regiment. We stopped on the hill and asked the way. The battery was busy defending itself against tanks. The only thing to do was to wait, which we did.

From our improvised observatory we followed the battle. On one side two tanks tried to cover their foe with fire. On the other side, another tank moved back and forth. They seemed to be much more prudent in this action than they had been with the infantry. They feared, I suppose, the riposte of the 155-mm guns.

The battle lasted about 10 minutes. The tanks moved, stopped, fired a few salvos, and moved again; probably seeking a safe place from which to take the guns from behind, without risking a riposte. I could not see every phase of the battle, and the camouflage of the battery prevented my seeing what they were doing with their 155-mm. They must have been doing pretty well, since the tanks suddenly turned back and went off. Later, I learned that the gunners of the battery had defended themselves with their machine guns and had succeeded in turning one of their heavy 155-mm in the direction of the tanks. This was probably why the tank had given up and run off.

So the time had come for our final dash to the battery. Everyone who has had any experience with tank fighting knows that when the tanks have stopped, you have to stay quiet and hide. But when the tanks

are in motion, their visibility is bad, and that is the time for you to move. This is what we did, as soon as the tanks began to move away, we dashed. We felt as though we had wings. To us the battery seemed a harbor in a tempest, albeit battered by the waves, but at least there we would find a resting place and familiar faces. We had no idea of the sort of welcome we were to get.

As we approached we were stopped by a French sergeant and his squad, who pointed their guns at us and ordered us to halt. As I have said, I had only seen the tanks coming and then going off. The camouflage of the battery had prevented our seeing what had actually happened during the battle. In a flash, I deduced that these "French" soldiers were in fact disguised Nazis. (We were still being fed with 5th columnist stories.) Clearly the battery had been taken by treason. I had my revolver in one hand, and Cotton had his mousquet. We had no intention of allowing ourselves to be captured by "traitors," so we covered them with our guns. We stood thus, each covering the other, waiting to see who would shoot first. I did not feel too much at ease and wondered how we could get out of this trap. I had often seen similar situations in American movies where the hero pulled through in a masterful way, but I did not feel I had the necessary ability.

A couple of minutes passed, then the sergeant renewed his warning to surrender and explained, "I saw you get off the German tank thirty yards in front of me. You are a disguised Nazi and cannot escape your fate of being shot." Then I began to have my doubts and wondered whether we were not mistaking each other for traitors. The trouble was that we came down the hill too soon after the tanks had begun to roll away. So I answered that I belonged to the same regiment as he, only in the other battalion, and he had better be careful. He was not convinced and asked me as proof of my bona fides for the name of the commandant of the other battalion. It may seem stupid, and I am ashamed to say so, but at the moment I could not recall the name of my commandant. The affair was about to take a bad turn when the captain of the battery arrived. He recognized me and put things right. Later on the sergeant took a liking to me, under the pretext of having saved my life.

I have mentioned this incident, because it shed light on this strange sort of warfare. Indeed, it may seem incredible that two men, in French uniform, belonging to the same regiment, should take each other for traitors. It could not have happened, but for the sudden and deep penetration of the enemy force into our lines. I must add that in the same regiment, men of

different battalion rarely knew each other, which helps make such a mistake understandable.

After having given information to the captain of the battery concerning the situation, I reached the command post of the commandant. I could rightly consider myself lucky in having thus completed my trip, since my colleague from the other battalion on a similar trip between the avant-post line and the battery was severely wounded. I found the commandant in best form in the yard of a farm near the post. On the map we pointed out the coordinates given by Major Trehardie. Iffron, the lieutenant in charge of directing the fire, made the calculations and sent the deflections and range to the batteries.

But their firing power was already diminished and they did not bring as much relief to the village as we had hoped for. After I had a short rest, I was sent to assist the 75-mm, which was to defend our little spot against attack.

In order to get a better picture of tanking and fighting inside the lines, it is first necessary to understand the regiment is set up on the terrain. An artillery regiment is composed of many groups: headquarters of the commandant, batteries, groups of avant-trains (prime movers), and supply columns. Each one of

these little units chooses a place in the field first, with consideration as to its purpose, second as to the possibility of camouflage, communication facilities and natural defense. Each of the units organizes itself for its own defense.

As I have said, for defense we had only a few old machine guns or as was the case at the headquarters of my commandant, a section of 75-mm. Between each of the units (which communicate with the other by radio, telephone or messenger) lay long stretches of fields, in which the tanks freely moved around.

A  
Tank fighting was very sporadic. They gathered around the places that were hard to crack, destroyed what they could, ran off as soon as they found themselves in difficult positions, came back a while later and started again. When attacking their objective, they took their time, planned their moves and placed themselves in the most advantageous formations. Generally, they did not mop up. Those units which were set in farms, in woods, in trenches, and which did not open fire, either because they had no weapons at all or because their weapons were too light, did not have much trouble with tanks. But those which fired, as did our artillery guns, had a hard time.

During the morning, our two batteries already had been pounded fiercely by enemy artillery. The



enemy fire was adjusted by a small enemy plane, which kept circling above the batteries. Our gunners had suffered severe losses since they had to stick to their guns in order to execute the barrage I was asking for from my P.O.

Later, when the tanks had arrived from the left, the 155-mm at the extreme left of the battery was turned, and they managed to fire it point blank at one of the tanks, and knock it out. But under the machine gun fire of the other tanks, the gunners were not able to stick to their guns, and had to take refuge in the trench. The tanks approached within a few yards distance and with their 37-mm demolished the sight apparatus, the breach and other parts of the gun, trying to put them out of commission. At the same time, with incendiary shell, the gunners set the gargousse (bag of powder) aflame. Ducking into their hole, the men were seared by the high flame of the burning gargousse, but they escaped the fire of the tanks. Then the tanks had departed. The men jumped from their hole, ran back to their guns, only one of which had been definitely put out of action, and resumed fire. An hour later the tanks came back. But this time they came from the rear and completely escaped the riposte of the 155-mm.

Instead of leaving his men in the trenches where they would have been massacred, the captain made

them fall back thirty yards and placed them so that they could use their rifles to prevent the tank crews from descending. Quite a few of the captain's men escaped, but the cannons took a terrible beating. It was not so bad, however, that the gunners were prevented from resuming their fire as soon as the tanks went off once more. The procedure took place five times in succession, until the last gun had been silenced.

We never understood why the tanks weren't able to finish the job the first time. It seemed as if it would have been safer for them. It may have been that they underestimated the power of the cannons, or that they did not want to stay too long in the same place for fear of the riposte of an unseen anti-tank gun. Anyway, by evening none of the eight guns was in condition to fire. Only two were still able to be moved; the others had collapsed on their wheel or their axles had been frozen.

Gun losses were heavy. Among the wounded was the captain of the battery, a veteran of the last war. I saw him while he was waiting for the ambulance to carry him away. He told me that his men had put up a splendid fight. They had been worthy of their infantry comrades.

The battle of the 75-mm against tanks, in which I was most directly involved, was almost as

bloodly as it was unequally balanced. The 75-mm is constructed in such a way that it is very difficult to build up ground protection. Moreover, in order to serve the cannons, the gunners have to expose the upper part of their bodies. Lastly, the guns were too often placed in an open field, with the purpose of providing a broad range for shooting. It is true that when the 75-mm had the luck to hit first, the tanks seldom recovered, but too often the gunners did not have time to find their mark. As a rule, because of the gun's flash, the tanks located the 75-mm first. The fact that the gun was camouflaged made no difference. The tanks covered the area with their machine gun fire, forcing the gunners to dive into their trenches. The tanks then approached and finished the job. That is what happened to our 75-mm and to many others as well. The sergeant and one man was killed, several other gunners were wounded.

Generally, if caught by surprise under the fire of a 75-mm, a tank would run away, seeking to conceal itself under shrubbery, in hollows, or behind clumps of bushes. As astonishing as it may seem, there are a great many spots in the countryside, even in a flat countryside, where tanks can hide themselves for at least a few seconds. But these seconds are precious, because while you are looking for the tank,

it knows your location and while you are hesitating and trying to guess whether the tank is behind this bush or that group of trees or on the opposite side of the valley, the whir of bullets can be heard all around. And then from where you never expect it, you see the flash of that tank's machine gun. Then you think, "This time I'll get him!" and you begin to move the trailer, but already the tank has moved off to disrupt the adjustment of the riposte.

On the whole, the fight between the tanks and the 75-mm was completely unbalanced. On one side, one or several tanks, all mobile and armored with multiple guns; on the other side, the 75-mm, usually slow, immobile, and with practically no protection. We wondered why the grievous inadequacy of the gun had not appeared more clearly to us before. Perhaps it was that, without being fully aware of it, we had based our method on two primary concepts, both of which proved false: the idea of surprise by the artillery and the idea of a head-on attack.

The gun is hidden, easily camouflaged and can see the tank which can not see the gun. But this is true only as long as the first shot is not yet fired. If the gun misses its mark (which is generally the case) then the tank runs off and often succeeds in hiding itself. Then the situation becomes reversed:

the tank sees the gun from its flash and the gun does not see the tank. The effect of surprise by the artillery has vanished.

Of course, one might say that, if the gun waits to shoot until the tank is very close, it will not miss it, and then it can take full advantage of the effect of surprise. But it must not be forgotten that even if a tank is stopped by a direct hit, a tank is not always incapable of shooting. And if a gun shoots only on very close objectives, the area it checks is then too restricted. And finally, tanks seldom attack singly. They move in groups. One or two of them could be caught, but the others would overpower the gun.

It was also more or less assumed prior to the war that the tanks would charge their opponents, as a bull charges a toreador. In this case, providing the artillery crew had the stamina, the guns would possess the full advantage. Indeed, because the tank comes head-on, the guns rapid fire would be very accurate, whereas the fire of the tank, in motion, is erratic. But the tanks, at least in the sectors where we were, did not charge. They circled around, seeking a dead angle, and in trying to reach the road, stopped, aimed and fired. It may have been that we had focused so much attention on the great capability of the tank to go through any sort of ground and crush and push down

material obstacles that we more or less overlooked the other tank characteristics: its firing power and its armor.

Once the French artillery had been neutralized, the tanks had an easy job. As I have already said, the different groups of our regiment were soon isolated one from the other and were left with radio and messengers as their only means of communication. I remember a succession of messages sent by the colonel from his command post set in a farm in the woods about two kilometers from us. I can reconstruct them, approximately, as follows:

3:00 p.m. -- Please reestablish your liaison with the battery.

3:05 p.m. -- What news have you from your supply column?

3:07 p.m. -- Fifteen tanks are spotted heading toward my command post.

3:10 p.m. -- The tanks are 200 yards off.

Then a silence of a few minutes. Then another message.

3:12 p.m. -- They have passed the farm, have destroyed one of my reconnaissance cars, and have left now.

3:14 p.m. -- Have you reestablished the liaison with your batteries?

From his prison, the colonel tried to direct the shooting of his regiment. Twelve hours after the beginning of the attack, his batteries were already more than half destroyed, and like a body with arteries and nerves cut, the batteries were almost completely paralyzed and unable to hold back the panzers.

I mentioned, as an example of the depth and swiftness of the penetration of the enemy forces into our lines, that the men of our supply column, fifteen kilometers behind the front line, had had a skirmish with some tanks a few hours after the beginning of the offensive. Lieutenant King who commanded the supply column told me about it.

As is the rule, he had set up the camp in the woods quite far to the rear. The supply column is made up mainly of wagons and horses and is in charge of carrying the ammunition and baggage. It has no guns.

The men, most of whom were conducteurs, were practically without weapons and none of them ever dreamed of actually having to fight. As the men left the woods that morning to water their horses, they saw tanks, which they believed to be French, coming toward them. When the tanks opened fire, they rushed back precipitously to their camp. Though they did not abandon their horses, theirs was a sort of panic and it

took several minutes until the lieutenant could regroup his men. Once the first moment of fright had passed, they regained confidence and repulsed the Germans who had gotten out of the tanks and were chasing the French into the woods with their machine guns.

Nothing like this had happened to our battery gunners and still less to our infantry troops. I think this instance is typical of the effect a sudden attack can have on unprepared troops who were repeatedly told, sometimes with a degree of scorn, that they were at "the rear." If they had been put in the front line, they would have behaved as well as their comrades. Afterwards, throughout the many incidents that marked our retreat, they remained calm and were always in perfect order.

The impunity of the tanks literally exasperated my commandant. But his fury reached an all time high when he saw some tanks stopping at quite a distance, the crew descending and sitting down on the grass to examine their maps or eat a sandwich. This was really too much, so my commandant sent a few men to approach and open fire. But the Germans saw them when they were still at a distance and quickly drew back into their shells and returned the fire.

Tank crews never failed to become aware of an attack of this sort, because they always stopped in a



place that gave them a broad field of vision. Only when tanks are isolated or stalled in places where the ground is impassable or where an unobserved approach would be possible, have attacks by grenades or similar weapons had any chance of success. An example might be found where an isolated tank is stalled in a ravine or on a narrow village street. But on the whole, such cases were rare, because the German tanks moved in groups and carefully avoided localities where their field of vision was limited.

When you speak of ambush, do not suppose that tanks are the only victims. As a matter of fact, tanks hid in ditches at the corner of a road or in the shadow of trees at the edge of a wood, and from these places awaited their prey. One was warned, but too late, by a volley of balls coming from an unexpected place. The only thing to do was lie down flat in a ditch, and if they couldn't find you, you had little chance of escaping. This is what happened to Lieutenant June of the 15th battery who, within a few seconds, received four bullets in his body. Fortunately, none of them were fatal.

For some it was unbearable to lie helplessly in a ditch, watching tanks pursue their destruction.

The nervous strain was too much for one of our sergeant observers, who was a nice man but excitable. Once while the tanks were wandering around us, he jumped from his hole, with revolver in hand, saying that he had to do something. He thought that with his pistol he could shoot through the slits into the tanks. He was killed immediately.

Our junior doctor felt the same way. This man was named Gary, was twenty years old, and had not yet graduated from medical school. The Convention of Geneva forbids doctors to carry any weapons. It used to make Gary sick. Anyway, he did not need to have a pistol to do a wonderful job. All day long he rode in his ambulance through the fields from one battery to another and from there to the poste de secours, giving first aid to the wounded and cheering them. The tanks did not interfere. I doubt that he could have done this if the Germans had not refrained from firing on the Red Cross painted on his car.

I must say, that in our sector, I never saw any of our men crushed by tanks nor did I ever hear of any such cases. It would have been easy, however, for our enemy to have done so.

One evening when I was giving a report to my commandant, we got word from our scouts that a swarm of

tanks were heading toward our positions. I went to an improvised P.O. in the attic of a nearby farm and sighted a column of eighty vehicles heading toward us at a distance of one kilometer. The column was composed of tanks of different sizes and of vehicles which looked like buses. I recognized the latter as troop carriers. The commandant sent a message of alert to the batteries, placed the men who were armed in the trenches, and put the others in the cellar of the farm.

I stayed in the attic with Sedove and communicated to my commandant the latest news of the enemy's progress. We stayed there not so much to observe -- observation was of no use -- but to be in a place which we thought would be safer than a cellar. At that time we still expected tanks to charge and pass over any obstacle in their way. Since the farm was built of one layer of bricks, a tank could have passed through it as through a paper hoop. The idea of being run over in the cellar did not appeal to us, and we figured that by staying in the attic we would have a better chance of pulling through, even though we might find ourselves sitting amid the debris on the top of the cupola of the tank.

All these precautions were of no avail, since the tanks did not attack the farm. The column passed by and disappeared toward the south. That rather surprised us. Though later we recognized it as being one

of the famous spearheads thrown ahead by the enemy far into our line. We had no idea at that time that such a bold move could be carried out and had we had efficient anti-tank weapons, it would not have been possible. Indeed they made splendid targets, this caravan of tanks and troop carriers passing by, silhouetted against a sky, red in the glowing sunset.

On the afternoon of the second day of the offensive, the entire artillery of our sector had been wiped out. The centers of resistance of the infantry were isolated and hard pressed. Most of them still resisted and the battle still raged in St. Fussien. But, cut off from all supplies and help, their situation was hopeless.

The colonel who came to see us said that on our left the front was holding well, and that the few tanks that had been put at our division's disposal had counterattacked and freed a number of centers of resistance.

As far as we artillerymen were concerned, our task was finished. At first the colonel told us that we would receive some new guns, but finally we were ordered to fall back; new guns would be given to us later.

During the night we removed the two guns which could be transported from their positions. We

noticed that certain parts of the guns were glowing. The reason was probably that the Germans had fired incendiary shells. These shells contain phosphorescent products and that is undoubtedly what made our guns look like the "phantom apparitions."

At night the battle quieted down. Once in a while the sky was lit up by rockets. Many shot up from places far inside our lines and were not in our code. They were probably signals sent up by the Germans to indicate to their base their actual position. The German tanks would stop at night, group themselves in a square, and start off again in the morning.

Later on, after the armistice, our colonel happened to meet the German general who commanded one of the panzer divisions which had attacked us. When the general saw our regiment's symbol, the German rose, on the colonel's coat collar, the general saluted and warmly congratulated the colonel on his defense of Amiens. The general told him that in spite of our inadequate material, we had done a splendid job and had cost him great losses.

In the Division Journal is an extract from a German newspaper, praising the resistance offered by the "glorious 16th Division."

But however fierce the 16th Division's resistance had been, it had not succeeded in holding back

the German onslaught and, in the course of two days, the division had been completely annihilated. We were outnumbered three to one in troops and ten to one in material. To overcome these odds was a task beyond our power.

A few months after our war was over, in the Fall of 1940, Janvier and I went back to Amiens and spent an entire day wandering over the battlefield. We looked for the emplacement of the German batteries which had done us so much harm. One had been located in the garden of a convent very close to the front line. A nun showed us the place and told us that the Germans had suffered heavily from our counter-fire. The barrages were so accurate that the Germans were sure there was a spy among the sisters and they evacuated them. Of course, this made no difference. As a matter of fact our shooting was not very accurate because my view of the German batteries was not good enough. It simply proved that for the Germans, as well as for us, when shells fall all around, one is apt to think that he has been detected, and that the enemy's fire is abnormally well-adjusted.

Afterward Janvier and I went to St. Fussien. The trenches were already partly filled up, but the orchard where my P.O. had been was still littered with

branches sheared from the trees during the bombardment. There were many graves of French and German soldiers. In the fields, in the gardens, along the wall of the houses, along the sides of the roads, the dead lay just where they had fallen. Janvier and I looked for the graves of some of our men who had not been identified. We found them. On the crosses were inscriptions in German. They translated: "Here lies an unknown French hero, buried by his German comrades." We wrote their names on the crosses and stood for a while in silence, in memory of our fallen comrades. Stretched out all around us, as far as we could see were the slightly rolling plains of the Somme, covered by wheat fields and woods. There was a sadness about the landscape; the fields which had been green in the springtime were now a uniform yellow-grey. Low black clouds hung over the sky and a sharp cold wind was blowing.

The morning of June 7, we found ourselves on the road, 25 kilometers from the front. We still had nearly all our horses and most of our heavy wagons. The battery had lost just a little more than one-fourth its fire power, but we were of no more military use than a flock of sheep.

During the day we received an order to push ahead and to increase our usual speed of four miles an

hour. The day was marked by a few incidents, the most serious was the bombardment of long range artillery of one of our columns. The fire of the German artillery was adjusted by a small reconnaissance plane, which had circled above us for days and which our men had nicknamed "Le Poux" -- the louse. It was very slow and seemed invulnerable. An incredible number of rounds were shot at it, but did not prevent the plane from continuing to circle quietly around us, adjusting at leisure the firing of its artillery. One of our columns was suddenly caught, the lieutenant was seriously wounded and several men were killed.

All day we continued our march toward the south. The road was beginning to be filled with columns going in the same direction. The whole army was retreating. I met Baderaud who, as I have said, had been transferred to the 75-mm. He still had his horses and his former carriage, though his guns were gone. They had been wrecked like ours but only after he had destroyed seven tanks.

To escape shelling, the vehicles were grouped in two's and three's. How slow, inadequate and obsolete they seemed to us, these columns of heavy artillery, plodding along the road under the burning June sun.

The Germans had command of the air and with no apparent interference, groups of planes continually



passed above us, though they seldom attacked us. However, we often had to stop and take protection in a ditch. On both sides of the road, as far as the eye could see, lay wheat fields and pastures. The inhabitants had left and the abandoned cattle wandered through the fields. In an inclosure, hundreds of sheep, who had had no water for days, seemed to be drying up.

Disquieting rumors began to spread through the column. Liaison officers had passed us saying that Germans were in the vicinity. Many of us did not believe this. We knew the "front" was still holding 40 kilometers behind us and we knew the other battalions of the regiment, which had not been destroyed, were still in position.

Once in a while we passed through completely razed villages. The process by which such thorough demolition occurred was amazing. In front of Breteuil we were forced to stop and there we saw the Stukas at their best. There were about 60 in the sky, circling over the city at a high altitude. Every five seconds, one plane separated itself from the group and dove almost vertically. When the Stuka had fallen to an altitude of approximately 500 meters, it straightened up with a sharp shriek and at that very moment dropped its load of bombs, five or six at a time. We could see

the bombs falling from the plane, followed a few seconds afterward by the rumble of the explosion. By then the Stuka was already climbing back to its place in the group. Before it could circle around again another Stuka had dived and let loose its load of bombs. Without interruption the Stukas followed one after the other, like links of a chain. In a few minutes the little city was blanketed with flames, smoke and dust.

Once the Stukas had finished with Breteuil, they moved in on other prey and, one after another, columns of smoke arose from each in the villages of the valley. Of these villages there would be little left. We passed many of them and generally the church, in the midst of a pile of stones, would be the only building left standing. This resistance of the churches was probably due to the fact that their construction was heavier. In the bombardment of Breteuil we were not surprised to find that our men there were for the most part wounded. They had taken refuge in the cellars and the houses had collapsed over their heads like a pack of cards.

PART THREE

On June 9, 1940, the end of the day's march drew near as our carriages rattled over the paving stones of the main street of Persan Baumont where we were to cross the Seine. The approach to the bridge was defended by some middle-aged territorials with a few machine guns, but no anti-tank guns. If a German armoured column had tried, it would have had no trouble in reaching the bridge ahead of us and capturing it. The march had been long and the day hot.

Our men were tired and distressed to see that "Paris" was now appearing on the sign posts. Paris, the beating heart of the country, was now in danger. Those who were from this part of the country could recognize the little cafes on the river bank where they used to come on Sunday with their girls. On both sides of the bridge were the ruins of houses, still smoking from a recent bombing. German planes were still flying above us, but they were high, and seemed to pay no attention to us. The inhabitants standing on the sidewalks watched what was left of our division plodding along the road: a staff, a few infantrymen and two artillery regiments without guns. The people looked grave, perhaps realizing that the Germans were close behind us, that the battle of the Somme was lost and that they would soon be forced to evacuate their homes.

We passed through Persan Baumont and went into a wood where we were to spend the night. Once more we filed along totally dark roads with the artillery wagons. The usual troublesome incidents occurred. In turning too sharply, one wagon fell into a ditch and had to be emptied, put back on the road and re-loaded. At last the camp was set up. Horses and men were so tired, they were not even awakened by the heavy explosions made by our engineer corps as they blew up a bridge.

In the morning the colonel gathered us and gave us instructions about our next operation. We were to make a stand on the Oise. (Our staff was devoted to all natural barriers, particularly rivers.) Our guns were taken to the repair section of the division. Their breeches were jammed, trailers were welded to the axles, sighting apparatus was bent and there were finger-deep holes on the tubes. The mechanics tried to take them apart and to make one new gun from the pieces. In spite of their skill, they did not succeed.

While the work was on, the major was nervous. (I guess that an artillery commandant with men, horses and ammunition, but no guns, is always nervous!) Fortunately, he later learned that his third battery, which had been taken away from him on the Somme and

given to another regiment, was safe. The battery's four guns were salvaged and in good condition and were to be returned to him.

At midday I met Socle, a lieutenant in the major's former battery. Socle was just arriving. He was weary and covered with dust. He told me that the road from the Somme to the Oise had been hard and he had been bombed and machine-gunned all along. He said he was getting pretty used to it by this time. He had reached the bridge early in the morning, with much difficulty, only to find a mass of wreckage. After a skirmish with enemy motorcycles, Socle's battery had succeeded in reaching another bridge, still intact, farther up the river.

The guns were put in position in the forest and we received fire direction maps of 1/20,000 scale. These were the last of this kind that we ever received. Afterwards we had to be content with Michelin road maps, when they were available. While the artillerymen organized this position, the infantrymen, which we were charged to support, scattered on the left bank of the Oise and began to dig a few trenches and set their machine gun in place.

The infantry was composed of a few units which had been kept in reserve during the battle of the Somme and reinforced by newly reorganized companies which had joined us at Beaumont.

It was now time for me to search for an observation post. I took Mazolot and the other man of the squad with me and headed toward the places which a preliminary review of the map had shown as the most likely to make a good P.O. During the night the small town and even smaller neighboring villages we were passing through had been abandoned by their inhabitants. The streets were deserted and the blinds drawn. We began to walk through the country. In the fields cattle and chickens wandered aimlessly.

Searching for an observatory is the pet job of every artillery officer. In order to have as wide an outlook as possible, the observatory may have to be set on the roof of a house, on a bell-tower, on the top of a tree, or, more generally, on the summit of a hill. All the possible places are tried one after the other and seldom is a definite choice made until a considerable area has been surveyed.

At Persan Beaumont, the Oise River passes through a wide arc between a cliff on the left, where we

were located, and a broad plain, on the right, which the enemy now occupied. This was an ideal position for us and I had no trouble in finding a spot on top of a hill from which we had an immense panorama. We decided to put the P.O. there.

Close by was a two-story brick cottage in the middle of a park. We entered and were more than a little surprised to find a woman sitting contentedly in the sun, with her knitting. Her five children, three girls and two small boys, were busily organizing a sort of dugout in the nearby rocks. M. Renier, the father of the family, a kindly middle-aged broker from Paris, explained to me that his eldest daughter had been in Paris with the Red Cross and had come home with dreadful stories of wounded children and sick women lying without care on the sides of the roads. So he had decided it was better to stay at home waiting for the Germans than to go on the roads crowded with refugees, subject to aerial bombardment and machine gun attacks. He had arranged a natural grotto in the rocks with his children and intended to take refuge there in case of necessity.

I congratulated him. This was the first time I had seen a civilian stay at home. True, M. Renier's reasoning would have been more sensible if his house



had not been located on such an exposed spot. But as long as there was no bombing, we were happy to find such company. Mazolot and his comrades began to dig a trench near the grotto which the Reniers were arranging. During that time I observed on the other side of the river the fire which our artillery was pouring on the villages and on a narrow passage through which the enemy had been forced to bring its troops. As a matter of fact, I don't think we held the enemy back very much, since they waited until night to move in force.

In the afternoon the P.O. was visited frequently. Battery commandants came to adjust their firing and staff officers came to reconnoitre enemy positions and infantry men located nearby and to ask for the help of artillery barrages. Our gracious hostesses contributed a note of refinement to the observatory, which generally is an austere and crude place. At five o'clock they brought us some tea. Mazolot stopped working, took a cup in his muddy hand and, perfectly at ease, kindly told Miss Renier that he liked her tea every bit as much as his pinard.

Janvier began telling us the history of Beaumont, which now lay at our feet. He recalled that Montaigne had passed there on his way to Italy. We chatted at a table that had been set beneath the trees.

The weather was superb, and since the Germans had not yet brought their artillery into position, we were for once on the good side of the battle.

The lull was welcome and we began to relax from the strain of the previous day.

In the evening we settled ourselves in the trench to watch the rockets which the infantry were to send up.

While we were spreading the bottom of the trench with straw we saw a senior officer coming to the P.O. Without a word he began to dig his own foxhole. He was the commandant of a 75-mm artillery battalion in which all the guns had been destroyed. His conduct had been brilliant and he had fought like a bulldog but was finally defeated like the rest of us.

About this time, the Renier family retired to their grotto to spend the night. The cave was quite large and perhaps some inhabitants of the country, thousands of years ago, had already taken refuge in it before, also from wild beasts. The floor was made of sand. Mattresses and blankets had been placed on one side and on the other side reserves of food in huge boxes had been piled up.

The children had enjoyed arranging all this, as if they were playing Robinson Crusoe. But now the

game was over. At midnight a battery of 105-mm 500 yards behind us, began to shoot above our heads. The girls, in spite of their courage, could hardly endure the sound of the guns. The 105-mm is the most disagreeable to hear and they had not had the same impression from our own 155-mm. At dawn, when the German artillery really began to pound our positions, the girls started to cry. M. Renier's resolution to stay, weakened. I called the colonel for an ambulance. We packed the family in it with as many of their belongings as we could gather and said goodbye, assuring each other that we would meet again after the war.

Later a comrade replaced me at the P.O. and I went to give my report to the colonel. His headquarters was two miles behind the P.O. in a white brick and stone Louis XIV chateau. His operations room was set in a beautiful salon, furnished with Aubusson. The captain was careful not to let anybody walk in with muddy boots. Motorcyclists rolled along the fine gravel of the splendid park designed by Lenotre. The huge stables, which long since had been transformed into garages, were retransformed to their original state and sheltered the horses of the regiment.

The colonel asked me to stay for lunch. We hung our helmets on the deer's antler in the hall and

sat around a table in a beautifully panelled dining room, in which the walls were ornamented with portraits of Magistrates in wigs and powdered Marquises. During lunch, the bombing of the city became violent. The window panes shook continuously and the explosions came closer. We watched the colonel, but he remained impassive and did not give the signal to take refuge in the shelter.

Count Gerard, landlord of the chateau and mayor of the city, sat with us. He told the story of the little town of which he seemed to be the guardian angel. He had founded many social work societies and wanted to be the last one to leave yet his gardener had refused to abandon his vegetables and the count was reluctant to desert this faithful friend who was his own age and who had been brought up with him. The problem was finally solved by the colonel, who ordered the chateau evacuated and packed the gardener off in one of the regimental trucks. Count Gerard turned the chateau along with its collection over to the colonel and left in his Buick. Already a First Aid Station had been established in the cellar, and the first wounded were being brought in.

The Deputy Mayor, a doctor, had put his own house at my disposal before leaving the city as he had

no illusions about what would happen to his belongings under the German advance.

He advised us to help ourselves to all we needed from his wardrobe. We profited largely from the doctor's generosity, as we were completely lacking in extra clothing since the affair of Breteuil in which all our baggage had disappeared. <sup>at Breteuil</sup> I acquired a suitcase, soap, and a wonderful thick blanket, of which I had the most urgent need. The men helped themselves <sup>freely</sup>, perhaps too freely, and I came upon one of them, with a week's growth of beard, <sup>at Breteuil</sup> lavishly scenting himself with some violet perfume.

Not far from the doctor's house was the P.O. of the 75-mm which we now used for close observation. <sup>at Breteuil</sup> The P.O. was set in a house on the river bank, and to reach it we had to drive through an open space and run <sup>along</sup> in front of a wall which was completely <sup>crude</sup> papered with bullet-holes. <sup>Indeed it was not possible to get to the field of our observation</sup> The Germans kept the wall under fire from the other side of the river and immediately after each jump we could see the walls covered with fresh scars, (but always late enough to miss us!) <sup>partially</sup> The infantrymen behind their sandbags were busily trying to <sup>repair</sup> locate the machine gun and properly answer it.

At 4:00 a.m. on the morning of the last day of our stay (June 12th), the enemy bombing of the P.O. became severe and all along the opposing left bank could be seen the white bursts of the minewerfers. We answered them and hammered all the places where the enemy was spotted by the infantrymen or where we sighted them. At 10:00 a.m., the right bank became gradually covered by a thick artificial fog. We pounded it continuously, but accurate observation at long range became impossible. Though the Germans did not cross the river at any place along the front of the division, we still were ordered to <sup>refuse</sup> fall back again. My battalion, whose only battery had been once more turned over to another division, left early leaving me behind.

A little later, I was relieved by an officer from the other battalion and was allowed to go catch up to my unit.

When the moment of our departure came, however, we could not stick our heads out of the trenches and we had to wait two hours for a temporary interruption in the bombardment. Finally I left with the 6 men from my squad and reached the rear of the line. There we got into a Citroen sedan, which the colonel had put at my disposal, to join my battalion which was already well along on its way to Paris. The car had been found

abandoned on the road and was in good condition. When it gave me some trouble with the starter, I exchanged it for a better one which had also been found abandoned.

On the way we passed a farm in which the occupants were just ready to depart. I tried to dissuade them from leaving. The farm was built around a huge tower, the remnant of an old feudal castle. It had walls 4 feet thick, and would have made an excellent shelter in case of bombardment. I attempted to explain to the family that it would be better to stay, that they would run much less risk than on the road, and that they could avoid losing a thousand chickens, sixty cows and innumerable pigs -- their entire fortune. But they refused to listen. After giving us as many chickens as we could fit in our automobile, they placed a freshly killed and salted pig on top of their already fully loaded wagon. Then the women, in black taffeta dresses, and the men, in their Sunday best, departed with no emotion showing in their numb faces.

I finally joined my battalion in a little village that had already been abandoned. In the house where I found my commandant, toys were still scattered over the floor. The children had not had time to put them away before leaving. At 1:00 a.m. the next

morning, we received the order to march. A German column was approaching. Once more I had to interrupt the good doze that I was having on the floor of a dining room. The departure was one of the most strenuous that we ever made. In total darkness the horses were harnessed and the wagons were pulled from the forest road.

Dawn found us on the way to Paris. The roads were now nearly deserted, through the day before, a stream of refugees had poured along.

Near Etanges we were caught by a bombardment but the rain of bombs dropped far beside the road and did us little harm.

About 8:00 a.m. we reached the suburbs of the capital and the names of the places we passed through, sounded more and more familiar to our ears: Ecouen-Stains, Le Courneuve and St. Denis, with its shrine of France's rulers. Some workers on bicycles overtook our columns. On one side of the road we saw an airplane factory that had taken heavy punishment from the German bombers.

A little before noon we passed through Pantin, a suburb close to Paris. In the background, only a few miles away, we could see the white silhouette of the



Sacre Coeur. Gloomily we observed the newly organized defenses, formed mostly of small concrete embankments behind which stood guns of a type which attracted Janvier's attention. He said that he had never seen such ancient guns except in the Museum of the Artillery School at Fontainbleu.

After making many detours in the narrow streets of Pantin, we stopped and assembled the horses and wagons in an old ruined factory where we hoped to hide from view of the planes.

Pantin is a well-known communist stronghold and a part of the famous "Red Ring" of Paris. Its narrow, poorly paved streets, and small delapidated houses proved that not enough had been done to this unhappy section of the "Greater Paris."

At midday we had a short lunch. A man who lived nearby put his house at our disposal where our orderlies heated coffee in the kitchen. The walls of the house's miniature dining room were covered with cartoons ridiculing the capitalists, the "200" families and the army officers. But the political dispute seemed far away and senseless, now that the Germans were at the outskirts of the capital. The owner of the house, a fat and red-faced fellow in shirt sleeves, offered us some of his old cognac and now drank with us to our country and its army.

At 2:00 a message from the General Headquarters advised us that the Germans had reached the suburbs and that we might be attacked any minute. We formed a square around the old factory and placed our three light machine guns in the corners to fight off the attack. Mounds were made with heavy stones which had fallen from the ruin of the old factory. The men who lay behind the mounds, were ordered to let the motorcyclists approach and to open fire at fifty yards. Four men out of five had no arms whatsoever and, with their hands in their pockets, they watched their comrades, armed with rifles, defend them. Some had been able, by chance, to pick up weapons. One proudly exhibited a lady's revolver inlaid with mother-of-pearl. We did not insist on knowing how he came into possession of it. His revolver was every bit as effective against the tanks as our own.

After a while, the colonel's messenger brought us the order to proceed to the boulevards which encircle Paris in a certain itinerary. It was at this moment that a man appeared who we later called our "fifth columnist," though we never had definite proof of his treason. This man came in the guise of a police officer of a nearby suburb. He had on a green uniform and wore a forest guard's cap. He addressed himself to

the commandant and said that he had been sent by the Mayor of Noisy, a town already occupied by the Germans, to give us a new itinerary by which we could reach the Boulevards. He gave satisfactory answers to our questions and it appeared that he was in charge of guiding all the oncoming troops. His attitude was one of embarrassment, but we attributed it to the impression made by the commandant's four stripes upon a simple policeman. He had finished giving us the explanation when we heard the tac-tac of machine guns. We jumped to our posts. The "guard" left. Later, we bitterly regretted having let him go. First, because he might have been a traitor and deserved punishment -- and we would not have waited for the court martial -- and second, because we would have cleared the point and could have been sure of at least one case of "fifth columnism."

The scouts who were patrolling arrived and said that a German armored column was moving in the surrounding country. The departure was ordered anyway. I look anxiously for several of men who had been given short leave to see what had happened to their families in Paris. The men arrived just in time, red and out of breath, in a taxi-cab, just as though they were catching a train.

The column got under way. I stayed with the protecting crew of the rear guard and made them fall back an echelon at a time, so that there would always be one machine gun in position. Everything seemed to be going along very well and the column proceeded smoothly. Suddenly I heard the familiar noise of a fight at the head of the column and received a message from my major saying that at that moment they were approaching the canal of Pantin and they had fallen into an ambush. I left part of my crew in the rear guard that was in the command of a non-commissioned officer and proceeded to the head of the line. The men all along were in perfect order. Each one was immobile at his horse's head.

On my way I met Duracais, the tax collector in civilian life, of whom I spoke of earlier. (He used to contend that the war was a good opportunity to take some outdoor exercise and that he wanted to make the best of it.) Duracais begged for authorization to come with me and showed me his pistol which he had borrowed from one of his comrades. I took him with me and finally found my major who was stopped before a barrier of dead horses and upset wagons. The doctor was evacuating the wounded men in his motor ambulance. On the other side of the barrier of wagons and horses was the canal bridge. The major explained to me that the cyclist scouts had crossed the bridge safely, but when

the first horse-drawn artillery wagon had arrived, it had been fired upon by men on foot and by an armoured car, hidden in a little side street at the approach to the bridge. The mistake of the scouts had been to go too far in advance, leaving too great distance between themselves and the first wagon.

The situation was difficult. In the narrow streets, it was difficult for a column of horses and heavy wagons to make a right about-turn under adverse fire and it was more difficult easy to force their way forward with horses, wagons and broken 155-mm for offensive weapons. The commandant said that the first thing to do was to see exactly what the opposing force consisted of. I took Durancais and three men with me and we crossed the barrier. On the other side we found a squad of about fifteen German soldiers lined up at thirty yards distance against the wall of a house. The Germans were kneeling behind sandbags which must have been put in place previously by the French for the protection of the bridge. The Germans did not open fire when they saw us. I was soon to understand why. While we were setting our fusilmitrailleur behind a mole on the other side of the street, I saw a man in a blue French uniform (which meant that he belonged to the territorial troop). He puffed toward me unhurriedly, stopped, and said, "My lieutenant, you are encircled. Your situation is hopeless. Surrender!" I

answered, "You are crazy." Later on, I was sorry not to have seized this beautiful opportunity to make an historic answer like the one of Cambronne.\*

The man then turned back and joined the German patrol. I deduced that he must be a traitor and fired at him with my pistol, which, for once, did not jam. At that moment, the armored car which was on the side street opened fire, but much too high. The shell, a 77-mm, I presume, crashed into the second floor of the house against which we were standing. We were beginning to open fire with our F.M. when I heard the major on the other side of the barrier calling me. We crossed back without being caught, which proves that good luck favors the scouts, and found the major and Sedove busy with a 75-mm. The major was gesticulating and excited. As usual, Sedove and a sergeant took command of the crew with the gun. Sedove comported himself as if he were just unrolling his telephone cable.

As soon as Sedove saw us reappear, he ordered "Fire" and shot; first point-blank at the barrier and then at the enemy behind. The effect of the shells bursting inside the dead horses was rather disgusting.

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\* Cambronne at Waterloo answered the British order to surrender by a simple five-letter word, Merde!

I wondered how our major had arranged to get hold of a 75-mm, but later I learned that this gun had lost its way and, as a result, had joined our column. It was certainly a break of luck, for without it we could not have made our way clear of the ambush.

The shooting of the 75-mm was unusual. The gun had not been abattu, as it was impossible to fix it to the stone pavement. So after each shot, the gun jumped back at least twenty feet. This was little trouble for Sedove who had put six men twenty feet behind it to catch the wheel at the end of its recoil and bring the gun back into position.

While the "artillery" was in action, Lemoine with his men, and I with my squad, played the role of the "infantry." We endeavored to enter the houses on both sides of the street in order to open fire from the windows of the second floor, above the barrier. But the houses were empty and locked and the breaking of the doors delayed us. When we reached the second floor, we set our rifles on the windows, but it was too late. The Germans had had enough of the firing and had turned back. Lemoine, however, said he was sure that he caught some, but we never knew what their losses had been.

Momentarily free from the fear of an attack, but rather dubious as to the safety of this itinerary,

the major decided to reach Paris by another way, and ordered a right-about turn. At this time I took position with Durancais and three men on the canal bridge of Pantin to guard it against a counterattack. But the sound of the 75-mm seemed to have been effective and the Germans did not come back. At the spot where their squad had been, I found two French helmets, a bicycle and a French coat. Were they disguises or pieces of uniform belonging to some captured troops? We never knew. I patrolled around the bridge, but everything was quiet. Some inhabitants who had gone down into their cellars at the sound of the fight were beginning timidly to peep out.

I admit that if the Germans had returned I do not know how we could have seriously held them back, but Durancais was confident and spoke of our "victory." I asked him what he thought of the "outdoor exercise." He said that he liked it and would never become resigned again to returning to his archives and his compatibility. We stood on the bridge for a while, waiting for the major's message to me that the Germans had withdrawn far enough. As it turned out, I never saw the messenger, who must have lost his way.

After waiting long enough, I decided to quit the guard. But by then the battalion was far away and



there was no opportunity to catch up with it. I had heard, however, that it might go to Juvisy, so we took off in that direction.

Then the four men and I, taking turns carrying the "light" automatic rifle, entered Paris. We began to hike in a quarter-circle from the Porte de la Villette to the Porte d'Ivry.

It was a bright spring afternoon. In a stream, three columns abreast, the Army was flowing down the boulevards. For the most part, the soldiers in trucks, did not look too weary. The war had been too short to leave its mark on them. On the side sidewalks, a dense crowd, <sup>calme</sup> quiet, dignified and sad, saluted its Army. <sup>un homme</sup> One of my men <sup>un colonel - j'ai vu un</sup> who had been in the center of Paris told me that it was completely empty. But where we were, <sup>des gens qui restent</sup> in the populous section, it seemed that only a few people had left and I noticed few of the iron shutters had been pulled down. Most shops were open. The shopkeepers emptied their stores as they gave the soldiers chocolate, wine, and cake. A fat and affectionate cremiere insisted on my taking a bottle of Cahteau Yquem. With tears in her eyes she said, "Take it, my lieutenant. The Germans must not drink it!" I hated to refuse her, but I would much have preferred a glass of water. Everybody seemed quiet and I wondered whether they knew the Germans were at the Gates.

We passed Porte de Lilas, Avenue de Bagnolet, Porte de Montreuil and Porte de Vincennes, the site of the Exposition Coloniales. Nowhere was there any defense, not even the barbed wire which in 1914 had been unrolled in order "to break the legs of the uhlan's horses." Never had Paris better deserved to be treated as an open city. One after the other, we followed the boulevards which bear the famous names of Napoleon's Marechals, Serurier, Davout, Mortier and Soult. On each side were beautiful, new buildings, surrounded by new schools, gardens and parks. We went close to a plant where I had once worked. I recognized the bakery where I used to buy a croissant at five o'clock after work. At the summit of Boulevard Mortier, not far from the Pere de Chaise, we stopped for a while to rest. We looked out over Paris, lying at our feet.

In the background, high above the roof and trees of Montmartre, standing clear against the lovely gray-blue sky, was the white bell tower of Sacre Coeur.

At the foot of the hill I could easily find the Lycee Rollin where I went to school. I could even locate the streets where, for ten years, I had walked as a child, then as a man.

We took a last look at the city and then began again on our march: Boulevard Soult. A group of men

stopped me on the sidewalk and told me that they had received an order from the Prefecture to leave Paris immediately. But they didn't know where to go. They had seen the stripes on my sleeves and asked my advice. I told them to stay quietly at home.

We crossed the Seine by the Pont National and left the city by the Porte d'Ivry. We were tired by then and wondered how we could ever find our unit. Fortunately, I recognized the number of an infantry regiment of my division on the collars of men passing by and was reassured. By going with them I could join our battalion. The four of us jumped on a wagon of an infantry supply column headed toward Fontainbleu.

Those who saw that road on the day the Germans arrived in Paris will not forget it. Across its entire width, it was solidly packed with a heterogeneous mass of automobiles and people afoot, all slowly flowing toward the south, all at the same speed of three miles a hour. The military column which we had joined had a hard time keeping in formation and endlessly stopped and started again. It was dark by then, but the stream moved steadily on. The only noise was a continuous murmur. Once in a while a car tried to light the way, but was immediately enjoined to observe the black-out. The wagon in which we rode was uncomfortable, but the

jolting helped me stay awake. We kept our eyes wide open trying to recognize our battalion. We had almost fallen asleep when we heard two detonations close by. Durancais jumped to his F.M. and I siezed my pistol. It was a false alarm: merely a cavalryman who had shot out some automobile headlights which a driver had refused to turn off.

Finally, at about midnight, I found my unit stopped at the side of the road. I quickly gave my major an account of what had happened. Always energetic and showing no trace of weariness, he returned to supervising the watering of the horses. The teams had not been unharnessed and the men were advised to lie down in the shelter of the wagons and snatch a little sleep. The precautions were necessary to insure that no one would be left behind in case of a sudden departure in the morning. This had happened all too often before and we had lost too many men that way. The recommendations were not sufficient, however, and the next day I realized too late after our departure, that Thomas, a corporal of whom I was very fond, and all his men were not with us. I know they were dead tired because they were not mounted and had to walk. Such things were to happen many times again. Once in a while some of the men succeeded in catching up with the

battalion. But it was always a stroke of luck, since our direction was constantly changed during the march, and our speed was usually too fast for men afoot to catch up.

At 2:00 a.m. the next morning everyone was ordered to get up. We had to start again. A message from headquarters had advised us that the Germans were very near.

The river of refugees had not diminished and only the greatest vigilance prevented the column from being cut apart by the fleeing civilians. The crowd was as dense as the day before. It was a strange sight in the pale light of dawn, to see people from every walk of life: all classes of society, mingled together on the road, driven out of their alveoles by the war. A gray-bearded gentleman, presumably a professor, was pushing a baby carriage loaded with an old telescope suitcase. A large motherly woman, in the traditional full pleated skirt, was propelling a push-cart on which she had piled up her modest furniture. In big automobiles, driven by liveried chauffeurs, were little old ladies whose bewilderment was painful to see. Their big cars were not to go very far. Delivery trucks for Byrrh aperitifs were carrying away full loads of women

and children. Men on bicycles were riding in bands as though they were going on a Sunday picnic. There were even a few fire trucks which could no longer command priority on the road.

I interrogated a sergeant and he told me that his unit had successively received orders to stay and counterorders to go. Finally, some of them had been ordered to leave. All of these people kept moving slowly. They did not look distressed. They did not want to show it.

The non-coms were kept busy patrolling our column. They had a hard time preventing women and children from getting on our wagons. The traffic flow was impeded with cars that had had a breakdown or had locked bumpers or were simply immobilized by lack of fuel.

Our column kept starting, stopping and starting again. The drivers alternately cracked their whips or stood up on their stirrups, pulling back on the reins. The horses, with their noses at the backboard of the wagon which preceded them, strained forward on their harnesses, or jerked backward.

The commandant sent me ahead of the column with my squad and charged me to clear the way. This was not too difficult. Everybody was anxious to give

priority to the military move. The only time some trouble occurred was when a large, red-faced middle-aged man at the wheel of a good looking car, obstinately refused to comply with the command. I put four men on each side of the car and they gently slipped it into the ditch. He, however, was an exception. The crowd was remarkably well-disciplined. A common tragedy had united all these poor people.

The road along which we were were walking was very familiar to me. I had often taken it during the year I spent at the Artillery School in Fontainebleu. I recognized the stiff grades where my small second-hand Peugeot, which never had more than three cylinders out of four working, had a hard time climbing up. But this route also evoked memories of another kind. It was one of the great avenues of history and was marked with many monuments. A fountain where we watered our horses in the morning, at the bridge on the Oise River, was a famous monument erected at the beginning of the 18th Century to glorify the souverain (Louis XV) who ordered its construction. The Pope had come to crown Napoleon at Notre Dame. Later, L'empereur took this road with the remnants of the Garde Imperials, of which he was to take leave a few days later at Fontainbleau.

In the morning we noticed black clouds of smoke on our left. We presumed it was coming from gasoline storage tanks which had been set afire. A little further on, near Essones, we saw a unit cover the countryside little by little. We wondered if the General Staff had not ordered an artificial fog laid down to cover the retreat. Months later we learned this fog had actually been generated by the Germans in one of their tentative efforts to cross the Seine.

A few hundred yards before a crossing, I stopped with my men and waited for my battalion. For the first time I saw Mazolot looking gloomy. With his head down, he watched the people of his native city being driven away. I did not interfere when he endeavored without success to persuade a woman who was resting in a ditch with her five children to return to Paris. After having waited a long time, surprised not to see the battalion following, we backtracked only to discover that they had taken a shortcut. My major was wise in doing this, as the secondary roads were practically empty. The refugees seemed fearful of ever leaving the main artery. Being on foot, it was practically impossible to catch up with the battery. But we were lucky enough to find a laundry truck which agreed to help us overtake the others. He told us that



Paris was occupied by German troops and that they were already there when he had left. He had seen machine guns set up on the Champs Elysees. (This is what he said, but I never had any proof of it). There had been no fight, no destruction. The French police officers were still directing the traffic. He was now fleeing with laundry in his truck which he had not had time to deliver.

We finally found our battery stopped at the side of the road. Some men were sleeping in the shade of the trees, others were opening cans and heating coffee. We had a lunch in a little inn. The owner, a pleasant country woman, opened her carefully stored preserves for us. I reported to the major what the laundry driver had told me, that Paris was occupied by the Germans. He was silent for a long time. Then he said that, in the last war, we had gone from one defeat to another until the victorious end.

When I recall our state of mind at that time, I realize that with having to keep the battalion in good condition, the men fit and in good morale and the horses fed and regularly watered, we were too busy to be overcome by the defeat. We had to keep the battalion in fighting condition and ready for action as

soon as it received the new guns, which we still believed were about to be delivered to us. This was our primary task and so far we had fulfilled it. However, many of us already felt that the war was lost. Still we felt confident that the British Empire could hold out and later turn the tide. We did not at all feel humiliated at having been defeated, knowing that had we had the proper weapons, the story would have been a different one. This confident state of mind was far from the discouragement we were later to hear so much of after the end of the war.

In the afternoon we arrived at a chateau near Fontenay. The wagons were gathered beneath the trees and the horses were tethered to the gates. Tents had been set up in the park by some Parisians. During happy weekends in previous years they had camped here for fun. They had a good opportunity to make a practical use of their hobby.

The chateau was partly occupied by the engineer corps of our division. We talked with them while they were getting ready to leave. They all seemed gloomy, faced as they were by impossible tasks. The demolition of bridges, upon which our defense

seemed more and more to rest, was becoming increasingly difficult. They were always confronted by the same dilemma, whether to blow up the bridge and cut off the French retreat, or to leave it open to both French and Germans. This had been unforeseen, and occurred because there was no longer any front, no line of demarcation between the retreating army and the invaders. The only thing it seemed sensible to do was to leave the bridges open and organize strong resistance at the bridgeheads. This way, the massing troops could be filtered through. However, the engineer corps said this was impossible, due to the lack of effective weapons. We later verified the truth of this assertion.

A soldier in arms was permanently stationed in the hall of the chateau. He was charged with preventing any unauthorized visits. (These were becoming too frequent in houses abandoned by their owners.) This was an efficient measure and everything was kept intact. The chateau, a large and indifferent looking building in the usual Louis XVI style, was strangely furnished inside. In one of the rooms we found enough old costumes to disguise our entire battery.

In the nearby village, tired refugees were forming queues at the door of the bakery. They seemed

nervous, which was easy enough to understand, given the strenuous trip. Now they were forced to wait for bread. We distributed some of our provisions among them.

The following morning, the hope of receiving new guns was shattered once more. We learned that there was no longer any question of making a stand along the Seine. We had to turn toward the Loire as the next possible barrier. Thus, we took to the road again. The shouts, "Attention!", "On horseback!", and "March!", came in quick succession and the line of horses and vehicles began to move once more.

The commandant stood at the chateau gate, neat and as well-shaven as usual, stiffening his jockey-sized figure and watching the battalion pass before him. In succession came the heavy chariots de parc, loaded with ammunition and drawn by three pairs of horses, and then the fourrageres, less heavily loaded and pulled by three horses abreast. The major watched the horses with a keen eye since all our movements depended on them. He looked particularly for those which limped or had bruises on the flank or for those whose harnesses were too tight. He proudly compared our horses to those of his 1914 artillery regiment. At

that time he had moved by forced march from Lorraine to the Marne and for one month had been unable to unharness them. He once had told us, "When the saddles were taken off, you could see three-inch deep wounds full of worms on their flanks."

The men passed, some riding, others afoot. They looked a little tired, but healthy and clean. While passing in front of the major, they looked him straight in the eye as is the rule.

I must not forget to mention the last wagon, which belonged to the rear guard of which I was in charge. The wagon was a wooden carriage, equipped with a machine gun on a platform eight feet above the ground. It was manned by three tough men. They constituted our anti-aircraft defense and also had to repulse any sudden attack from enemy motocyclists, a danger that was constantly feared. This splendid equipment would scarcely have been effective against the elephants of Hannibal.


The defense of the column was rounded out by groups of men with rifles at the head, middle and rear. The problem of providing protection against armored cars gave us a real headache. The only effective way would have been to scatter over the countryside, but by doing so we would have been forced to abandon the

horses and equipment. This my commandant hated to even think of doing. So the men were instructed to scatter only when ordered. But, as had already happened in the Somme, the order was to be given too late.

After we left Fontenay, we headed south, leaving Fontainebleau on our left and riding along deserted roads. We passed a railroad station where an escadron of Spahi cavalry was embarking in freight cars. They were leaving their beautiful horses. The Spahis were distressed at this and begged us to take as many of their horses as we could. Soon many of our men found themselves, somewhat ill at ease, riding the fast thoroughbreds. Up to that time they had never had a chance to trot on their own big Percherons. I took their captain's horse, with its beautiful saddle, but I would have preferred a motorcycle. Later on, these horses proved to be weary and unable to keep up the pace. One by one they had to be given away to farmers. Now they are doubtless carrying poultry to market.

A little before noon, we were joined by a lieutenant on the colonel's staff. He told us that the Germans had crossed the Seine and already were ahead of us. We changed our itinerary and increased our speed.

It was becoming very warm. Just as the men were becoming increasingly thirsty, we luckily happened to cross a little village where the owner of the cafe was distributing red wine to all comers. We did not even try to restrain the men from helping themselves, and they filled every receptacle at hand, even their helmets.

The only incident during the afternoon was an air attack which machine-gunned us ineffectively. 

At dusk we arrived at the outskirts of Malsherbes. We settled in an empty barn where we found several families from the north with their children, all looking miserable. We gave them all our chocolate and brought bales of hay on which they could sleep. While we were there, our mechanic repaired the car of an elegant woman who had been stranded at the intersection of two main streets for the past three days. She explained to us that she was afraid to leave her car and had spent each night in it. From the doubtful privacy of her observation post she had watched the varied assortment of vehicles and people going by.

At three o'clock the next morning, we were on the road again. We had been notified during the night of a great Panzer spearhead in the vicinity and we were ordered to keep on going.

At the moment of our departure, the commandant received, as usual, a message from our headquarters giving us the itinerary. It would have led us directly west. The colonel's staff and the part of the supply column which departed first, following the original order, were never seen again. They must have fallen into the midst of the German column or, more likely, had reached the Loire and been captured. Soon cavalry scouts reported the route was inadvisable for the rest of us. So the commandant wisely undertook to change our direction. This was the only time headquarters gave us incorrect instructions. Usually, they furnished us with accurate information, which was surprising because they lacked aerial observation. (As I have already said, we never saw any allied planes, but from dawn to dusk the sky resounded with the strident roaring of the German motors.) In spite of the swiftness of the Panzers' penetration, the telephone and telegraph were quick to spread all information. They seemed to be well aware of the presence of motorized German forces.

Before leaving, the commandant had sent our best agent de liaison to the colonel to give the warning. This man had been a messenger for the well known



Hachette publishing concern before the war. He possessed an extraordinary sense of orientation, which would have been the envy of any artillery officer. He was completely scornful of the German patrols from which he had already escaped innumerable times. But this trip was to be his last. He was so tired from lack of sleep that he could scarcely walk. My commandant hesitated to send him, but the man insisted. A month afterwards, we learned that he had fallen into a German column, escaped, and finally fallen from the exhaustion on the banks of the Loire. Here he slept for twenty-four hours in the bushes, only to find upon awakening, that the country was occupied.

The trip that the battalion took that day, June 16, 1940, was the most arduous of the war. From 3:00 a.m. that day until 2:00 a.m. the next, the horse-drawn column pushed on from Malsherbes to the bridge of Cahteaneuf on the Loire. It was country as flat as Texas. At the same time the Panzers were racing along the road of Pitiviers, constantly out-distancing us. Not until later did Lieutenant Socle, who was heading the column, or I, who was scouting, realize the proximity of the Germans. This was true even though we were especially well placed to observe the technique of the Panzers at their best.

Sometimes behind the column, sometimes ahead, I kept moving with a few men. Most of the time, I traveled by bicycle, but on other occasions in the reconnaissance car or on the rear seat of a motorcycle.

The highway we had taken in the early part of the first morning was totally empty. The stream of refugees had diminished and the bulk of the retreating army was ahead of us. The infrequent villages through which we passed were held by a mere handful of men.

At Clifon we stood for a while watering the horses and awaiting further instructions. The village was occupied by a company of colonial troops which was in charge of the village's defense. At both ends of the street the troops had erected barriers of agricultural implements, such as harrows and plows, chained together. These were supposed to stop the armorers cars. Only half the road was barred. The other half was ready to be closed by wagons heavily loaded with paving stones. Their light machine guns had been set up around the town behind <sup>cellar</sup> windows. The riflemen were occupying some of the houses, whose thick, white stone walls offered some measure of protection. One of the troop's two 25-mm anti-tank guns was set at the north entrance behind an embrasure in the garden wall. It was trained on the road. The second one was placed

a little aside, behind a mound, and its crew had already dug a good sized trench. I noticed, though that, when lying flat beside the gun for firing, the field of vision was narrow and obstructed by trees and grass. The non-commissioned officer who was in charge of the gun recognized this too. There were no 47-mm or 75-mm whatever and, as the surrounding country was completely empty and defenseless, it was likely to be easily circled and cut off from the rear. This did not seem to bother the infantry commandant particularly, for he showed the utmost confidence in his troops and in his weapons.

Although the village of Clifon was more strongly defended than any of the others we had passed through previously, and in spite of the optimism of the Coloniaux, the situation seemed gloomy to us. We felt deeply distressed at not being able to support the troop. We regretted more than ever that our own guns had been wrecked and we would have gladly exchanged all our wagons for a couple of 75-mm or a 47-mm.

We had been waiting for quite a while when a motorcyclist from headquarters arrived and gave us final instructions. He told us that he had sighted a German motorized column on the road a mile north. After the column had gone, I waited in the village to

get more information about the enemy and their direction.

Shortly afterwards, a few German cyclists came speeding down the road toward us. The infantrymen opened fire with machine guns, but at too long a range. The cyclists turned back, left the road and vanished behind the trees. Almost at the same moment we heard, on the west side of the village, the slow pounding of the 37-mm. No one could understand how this tank had been able to circle the village without being seen. Then at the entrance to the town, shells of a 37-mm or 88-mm began to burst, wrecking roofs and setting the houses afire. The conflagration spread so rapidly that we were sure they were incendiaries. I quickly left to join my unit. So far, the town had not been surrounded and I had no difficulty. From a distance, I saw four armored vehicles, rather far apart, moving rapidly behind the trees. In the fields, helmets were moving above the wheat. My last glimpse of Clifon was a huge spiral of black smoke rising in the sky.

I soon caught up with my group, which, though not motorized, was doing very well with its horses. I joined Socle who told me that while I was still at Clifon, he had sighted, at short distance, a long

German column of motorcyclists, armored cars and trucks, all heading south at fifty kilometers an hour. Thus, they had circled the village before attacking it and without our being aware of it. The situation for us was hardly reassuring. From all sides of this flat plain we could have been machine gunned without hope of resistance. Never did the heavy, horse-drawn artillery seem so slow and the Beauce so flat. On both sides of the road, as far as the eye could see, lay wheatfields, not yet ripe. On our right ran the blitzed highway, bordered by rows of trees.

We had to cross this highway twice. We succeeded without incident. As far as we could see, the highway was absolutely deserted. A short time after our second crossing, however, we saw a column of German cars returning to the north. Were they carrying wounded or keeping the liaison? We did not know.

Thus, for hours we kept marching at our slow pace. We knew we were no match for an armored outfit, but to change our direction was impossible. In order to reach the Loire before the bridge was blown up, we had to take the shortest route.

Occasionally we would pass small groups of soldiers who had lost their units. Some of them were so tired they could hardly walk and we put many of them in our wagons.

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Later we joined a horse-drawn 47-mm and a 75-mm and arranged with the officer that one tank be placed at our head and the other at the rear.

Except for these encounters, the roads were deserted.

Every now and then, we passed piles of dead horses, swelling under the blazing sun, and the refugees' upset wagons with kitchen utensils, bedding, clothing and all the rest of their possessions strewn along the road.

Squadrons of German planes streaked across the sky. They seemed to pay no attention to us. Only once, at the end of the afternoon, did they drop a load of bombs, but they fell from a great altitude and missed us by some distance.

While scouting ahead, hot and thirsty with the heat and dust, I entered a half-destroyed farmhouse, searching for water. Inside I found two infantrymen who had stopped for the same reason. They were drinking cider. Two others hunting in the garden showed me the horribly mutilated remains of the family and explained that a bomb had fallen just when the family was ready to leave, blowing them to pieces. These soldiers, perhaps simple farmers themselves, felt

obliged to collect as much of the bodies as they could and give them a decent burial. I sent for Lieutenant Bertrand, who came and conducted a short ceremony.

Soon after, I met an officer of the other artillery regiment of my division, who told us that while riding alone with his commandant in a scouting car, he had run into a squad of twenty German motorcyclists. I had often heard this commandant (who had been a prisoner for four years during the First World War) say that no torture could be worse than captivity. So, it was not surprising that they had attempted everything possible to escape. The motorcyclists had pursued them over the fields, keeping themselves in the form of a crescent. Suddenly the commandant, had turned his car sharply about, driven right into them, and successfully gotten away without a shot being fired by either side.

But the strangest escape from the Panzers was told to us by a short, sunburned fellow who appeared before us, stripped to the waist and wearing only shorts. He told me that he was a captain in the engineers. I regarded him suspiciously and told him that without a company behind him and three stripes on his sleeves, a man could scarcely be accepted as a captain. He explained that the stripes were on his tunic, that

the tunic was with his baggage, and that the baggage was carried off by his company, which was now in the hands of the Germans. He felt terribly embarrassed at being the only one not captured and told us how it happened.

He had absented himself in a nearby wood for a moment, when suddenly he had heard the noise of a fight on the road where he had left his company. Immediately he had rushed back, only to see his men being herded into trucks under the menace of machine guns. He told us that they had but a few old rifles and could not offer much resistance. As for himself, in shorts and sandals, he had evidently no means of doing anything. He hoped, though, to join a motorized cavalry squadron which was in the vicinity and which he hoped would catch up with the German column and free his men. We wished him good luck and took advantage of the information he had given us.

We halted the column. Its path was carefully patrolled and men were placed on either side of the road to give the alert.

After a while, the order to march was given again. Men and horses were beginning to feel weary. They had slept very little during the last three nights. That day, they had marched with few interruptions for sixteen hours under a hot sun on dusty roads.



But they had to push ahead. The day after would be too late. The drivers whipped their horses and the column began to move.

Riding a motorcycle, I patrolled our right flank. On a highway nearby I sighted a long line of dark gray vehicles and to the south I heard the tac-tac of the machine guns and the explosions of artillery shells.

An ambulance passed by, which I later encountered waiting to enter Chateauneuf. One of its occupants was a pale young infantryman whose arm was bandaged. He told me how he had been wounded. That morning, his company was ordered to defend a little wood near Orleans. He set his machine gun at the edge of the wood bordering a wheat field. Sounds of a violent fight in the vicinity were heard, but not until 4:00 p.m., did something occur. Then a squad of Germans crossed the wheat field on foot a hundred yards from him, apparently unaware of the infantryman's presence. After the foot soldiers came an armored vehicle, followed by running men. The infantryman opened fire on them. The vehicle disappeared on his right and a few seconds later small shells began to crash around him. His sergeant was killed and his companion wounded. He could see the flash of gunfire

from a distance that he estimated to be one hundred yards. His machine gun was set in a hole behind two logs and could not be turned far enough to the side to be aimed at the tank. Therefore, he took his rifle and lay behind a tree trying to see and shoot at the men on foot, whom he believed to be with the tank. At that moment, a bullet struck him in the shoulder, completely disabling him. Soon after, he was evacuated.

Now I must return to the events of that day.

By 8:00 p.m., we began once more to see the long column of refugees. They were stopped, strung out along the right side of the road in an uninterrupted line for ten miles. They were waiting for the opportunity to cross the river over the bridge of Chateauneuf. We recognized that they were almost all from the north by their immense platform on two big wheels which is a type of wagon used in the north to carry farm goods. On the platform, judiciously balanced, were sewing machines, wardrobes and beds, as well as plows and reaping machines. At the rear, stacks of chairs were roped securely together. On top, high above the ground, were mattresses and clothing, and on these sat the babies and the aged people who were too old for work. Pulling the heavy load were six horses, three

abreast. Enormous animals, their long flowing manes made them appear even larger. Young farm girls held the bridles and strived to keep the horses still, while our artillery fourgons passed them on the left side of the road. The refugees told us they had been there several hours and that the bridge had been bombed. They did not seem resentful of being forced to give priority to the army, although it gave them little chance to reach the bridge in time.

It was pitch dark when we arrived at the outskirts of the city. For some time we had seen the great glow of a fire in the sky. This turned out to be the cathedral and the houses around it. They were burning like torches. In front of the cathedral, the radiating heat was so intense that we had to cover our faces with our hands. The roof was an immense crackling furnace. Toiles, stones, shattered stained glass windows, and melted lead fell on the parvis. Although it was late at night, the entire area was as bright as day. The helmeted soldiers, urging on the horses and cracking their whips in the dancing light of the flames, composed a fantastic picture.

A little further on, we were forced to stop by a traffic jam in the narrow streets of the town. Sedove and I walked ahead on foot to clear the way. We

passed around a huge funnel-shaped hose and found an officer at the entrance of the bridge regulating the traffic. Just as we asked him to let our battalion pass, a bomb threw us to the ground covering us with dust.

All around the entrance to the bridge, houses burned. The light of the flames illuminated the passing troops, making the black-out worthless. Fortunately, the bombing was inaccurate. On the bridge, the traffic went forward in spurts. Infantrymen were crossing when we got there and we mingled in with them.

Across the river we found a wagon obstructing half the road. The horses pulling it had been killed. Sedove and I gathered a few men and tried without success to remove the huge carriage. A few minutes later, Mazolot and his scouting squad joined us and we succeeded in sliding the wagon into a ditch -- a job which could scarcely have been done under less critical conditions.

A few minutes later, the battalion itself started to cross the bridge. The lieutenants and sergeants were busy along the length of the column trying to maintain regular intervals between each fourgon and prevent the line from being disrupted by speeding civilian automobile drivers. The se conducteurs pushed

the tired horses and strove to make them advance to a pace of six miles an hour which is top speed for heavy artillery. Bombs were falling in the river and on its right bank. The Loire is wide at this point and it must have seemed even wider to most of the men. But they did not show it. They were now well seasoned and it is possible they thought this child's play compared to a tank attack.

When we crossed to the left bank of the river, we saw a great number of civilian vehicles of every description bunched up. This made it difficult for the military units to get through. Everywhere, women, children and old men had fallen beside their automobiles or wagons, in exhaustion or sheer relief, having left behind them the most dangerous spot. The crossing of the Loire by the troops was completed. Now followed the confused stream of refugees. In the night, terrorized infants cried out. Mothers called lost children and searched wildly for them in the flashes from regularly falling bombs. The doctor busily bandaged the wounded. A pitiful sight was a one year old baby who had been hit by shrapnel in its foot. The mother's arm was also badly hurt.

The battalion stopped to await instructions. This side of the bank was not being bombed and we had time for a little food.

After a two hour wait, the order came to move again. At last we resumed our march. Several horses were so exhausted that they refused to go further and had to be abandoned. The drivers leaned forward low on their horses. Many of them, asleep in the saddle, maintained their position only because they had fastened their boots in their stirrups. I, myself, was very tired and afraid of falling on the road unconscious.

Finally we came to a permanent halt. We had been on the road for twenty-two hours and had traveled nearly a hundred kilometers, almost four times the regular distance of the 155-mm in march. When we stopped, many of us fell asleep without even removing our helmets.

Later, we often thought about that day, wondering how a defenseless horse-drawn column of heavy artillery at the rear of the army which had plunged into a panzer spearhead, had escaped. Constant and accurate information from headquarters and scouts had helped, but we could scarcely believe that the Germans had not seen us. Why had they not attacked us? Possibly they did not know how disarmed we were or perhaps they did know and felt we were not worth bothering

about. Evidently their main purpose was to reach the Loire, occupy the bridges ahead of the bulk of the French army and bottle it up in a trap.

The next morning, well rested, we were able to move forward again. The last day had shown that it was too much for a horse-drawn column, with all its heavy equipment, to try to keep pace with the motorized corps. We were therefore ordered to drop all unnecessary implements in order to become as mobile and flexible as possible. We sank our ammunition in a pond. This was a terrible blow for the commandant who until then had hoped to receive new guns from the arsenal of Chatellerault. His hope was at the vanishing point.

While we were preparing to leave, drinking the bad coffee our field kitchen offered, Mazlot came to me with a long face and told me that his men had not had their breakfast. Sedove, who was dejour (the officer in charge of the food for that day, was as miserable as Mazlot. He told me that Bertrand and he had already visited all the farms in the vicinity, but had found nothing to buy. It was an unpleasant situation. One can ask anything of men, yet only when they are fed.

Our personal provisions, small as they were, would have helped a little, but these had been lost in

the ambulance. During the previous night our ambulance had broken down. After trying to repair it, the doctor had abandoned it by the side of the road, intending to return the next morning. The following day, however, the site was under fire by German machine guns located on the other bank of the river. Although the doctor hoped desperately to recover the ambulance, it was far too great a risk to attempt to repair it in such a position. The colonel forbade the doctor to take the chance and instead gave him a supply truck. As the young doctor was also the popotier, our personal provisions were in a compartment of his ambulance and thus were lost.

Finally, it was decided to open the "war reserves." These are food rations for three days which are carried by every unit. They must be used only in case of absolute necessity and with written authorization of the general. These conditions proved somewhat contradictory. When there is absolute necessity, there is usually little chance to get the written authorization. In our particular case, it was not so much the fact that we could not get the written authorization which disturbed us, as the fact that the biscuits were rather hard. Anyway, we had to be content with them. Thus, for several days we had meager food, although we



were never really hungry. After these few days, Bertrand managed to get some supplies from the quartermaster and the situation went back to normal.

Despite the incredible tide of refugees and soldiers that virtually caused one-half of the country to flow into the other half, I believe very few people, if any, actually starved. The great fertility of the land and France's large reserves prevented this starvation.

Our departure was delayed by a small incident which was quite typical. In the farmhouse where we had heated our coffee, there was a woman with several children who were all in one bed. They were well and had enough to eat. However, we gave the children what biscuits we had left. This was not a good idea for, while we were getting ready to leave, the woman, who had been deeply disturbed by the recent events, misconstrued our kindness and hoisted herself and her children up on one of our wagons, stubbornly refusing to move. The soldier had been forbidden to take any civilians aboard, but felt reticent about using force against a woman and five children. The adjutant was undecided about what action to take. The lieutenant of the battery, who had young children of his own, considered this not to be his concern. No military ruling

forced him to do what was the specific job of his captain. The captain, unrelaxing in his discipline toward his men, was still reluctant to be considered cruel in his attitude toward the poor family. He called the commandant to his rescue. The commandant was never afraid of anything and was full of confidence in his eloquence. Addressing the woman and her five children, who were still obstinately perched atop the wagon, the commandant launched himself into a long expose of the dangers they faced in staying with a battery constantly sighted by German planes. Using the finest logic (based on a comparison of the trajectories of the shrapnel from bombs and from shells of the 75-mm, 155-mm and other calibers) the commandant proved irrefutably to the astounded woman that she would be safer in the farm than on top of the wagon. But it was to no avail. She still refused to leave. In despair, the Lieutenant Bertrand was called. He climbed on the wagon wheel and, patting the children's cheeks, told the woman in a soft voice that he would call the blessing of God on the farm. She did not resist further and jumped off with the children.

In a similar case, things had not turned out as well for Captain Silvere, commandant of the other battalion of the regiment. The story was told to us

later by one of his officers. They were riding down the road when they happened to pass a group of mulatto girls on foot. These girls were acrobats and belonged to a circus in Paris where they performed somersaults on horses. They were tired and looked with envy at the horses. In each team, only one of the two draught horses is allowed to ridden. The one which is not ridden is called the sous verge (under the whip). The girls thought the sous verge were just what they needed. Before any sergeant had time to open his mouth, they had jumped on the horses. This was not to Captain Silvere's liking. He commanded a halt and summoned them down. But the girls felt quite at ease on the horse and refused to obey. In this case there were no children and the captain had enough worries in leading his battalion without starting an argument. He simply ordered his men to take the acrobats down "gently but firmly." This was done, but only after a struggle. The girls in their anger lept at the captain trying to scratch his face and spit at him. It was a beautiful fight and I understood that everyone enjoyed it, even the captain.

That day was not marked by any incident worth mention. We trudged along the roads of Solgne, through a land of farms, forests, and long stretches of brush,

cut here and there for small fields of oats. The country is neither fertile nor populous, but it offered us valuable cover against an attack by planes or tanks. This was more to our liking than the rich Beauce which we had crossed the day before, with its flat, bare and endless wheat fields.

We were not subjected to attack by aircraft. However, we soon found evidence that the Luftwaffe had been operating in the area not long before. At the village of Vanne, we counted more than a hundred bomb craters in the fields and we saw on the road a long line of wrecked or burned automobiles and wagons, with their dead horses still in harness. A little further on was the body of a man kneeling against his car, killed while he was trying to mend a flat tire, a tool still in his hand. In the center of the village on the gray stone parvis of the old ogival church were twenty-five bodies of young women and children, all lying in a row. This was a sight that none of us could ever forget or forgive.

In the afternoon, we passed a group of refugees who told us that the government had asked for an armistice. Nobody said a word. I asked Mazolot what he thought of it. "My lieutenant," he said, "if the rest of the army is in the same condition as we are,

with half our men lost, without guns, we're all helpless. Even those who still have their guns are about as effective as a troop of boy scouts with their sticks. This has been proven. We have played the game and lost it. We must accept the consequences. What is the sense, after all, of continuing the marches on the roads, day after day, if we cannot fight? Even if we could, it would be too late." I asked Mazolot what he would think of going to North Africa as Paul Raynaud had formerly announced. He hesitated before answering and finally said that he didn't like the idea of leaving his wife and children in German-occupied France, not knowing if he would ever see them again.

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Soon after, we halted in a wood in front of a pavillon de chasse. While the horses were being watered at a nearby pond (where many a hunted deer must have been driven for the kill), Sedove and I entered the house. We were received by a white-haired woman who offered us, as she did to all of us who stopped, a cup of tea with toast and cakes. We sat down for a few minutes in the delicate chairs of her salon, embarrassed to be in our rumpled uniforms and dusty boots. Her kindness put us at ease. We told her in a few words what we had seen of the tragedy which was shaking France.

The kindness and good will we received from all we met along the road -- peasants, gentleman farmers, and country workers -- was a surprise to us. We had imagined that the peasants, in particular, were more confined and were guarding their privacy more closely. But as a matter of fact, everywhere in this four hundred mile journey we found the houses opened to the soldier as well as to the refugee. Often they gave their beds to children whom they did not know and on their tables they served their most precious preserves.

At dusk that day, we saw ahead of us a glow against the sky, apparently produced by fire. As we approached we found the flames were coming from the exhaust pipe of a thirty-five ton French tank. It was the first one of this type that I had seen. We halted close to it and one of the officers of what remained in the battalion of chars de combat, told us that he had been in the battle of the Aisne. They had attacked and hurled the Germans back twenty kilometers the first day, but the tanks were too scattered to be able to destroy all the enemy's strongholds. Consequently the infantry had not been able to follow through. The officer considered it an easy matter to destroy the

machine gun nests, but he believed that the Germans had as many anti-tank guns as machine guns. More than once he had been under the fire of several anti-tank guns at the same time and he had succeeded in circling and destroying a number of them. It seemed to me that he had adopted the same tactic the Germans had used against us: to keep moving, to stop once in a while to locate the flash of the guns, to close in on them, to stop, to aim and to shoot. He said he never needed more than three rounds of his 75-mm to silence any anti-tank gun. He kept repeating, "If there only had been more of us." He did not know what orders they were about to receive or if they were to be put into action again, but he had only a couple of tanks left and the battalion of the infantry which was teamed with their battalion had been completely annihilated.

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In the same village was a group of a hundred German prisoners. They looked numb and indifferent, although they were certainly aware that their captivity would be short. The refugees looked at them with hatred, seeing them as the ones responsible for all the misery. I wondered what the thoughts of a German prisoner accompanying the French army in its retreat might be. I recalled the words of a young German aviator, 18 years old, about whom my hostess in Salzburg

had told me. He had fallen in flames behind the French lines. When he had awakened in the hospital, his first words had been, "My Fuehrer will come and get me."

A friend of mine who also served as a reserve officer later told me the following story concerning German prisoners. During the last months of the war he had been put in charge of several German officers. After the armistice, when they released the Germans, he accompanied his former enemies to the railroad station and wished them good luck. At the last moment these Germans, with good intentions, had the unfortunate idea of offering the French officer a certificate affirming the fact that he had treated them well.

The sight of French tanks and German prisoners was enough to cheer some of us and raise the hope that the situation was not as bad as it looked after all. But the commandant had no need of this sight to keep up his full confidence. He would not admit defeat and tirelessly cherished the hope that at one moment or another we would take the offensive. "In 1914 we had been falling back for a month. Then one day we made a half turn and moved forward," he said, shaking his fist. Although the commandant usually enjoyed speaking of the general staff in scorn, he was sure that this time it had kept huge masses of troops and materiels in



reserve, ready for the attack. He explained the so-called "pocket" strategy.

You first fall back in good order. (So far we had fulfilled this condition.) Then you induce the enemy to proceed into the bottom of the pocket while your troops are massed on both sides. When the enemy's lines of communication are extended enough, the pocket is closed. To demonstrate, the commandant cracked his fists together. "Afterwards comes the mopping up," he said. No one misunderstood what he meant as he swept the air furiously with his arms.

The pocket strategy had become a legend in the regiment and was quoted on many an occasion. Actually, the commandant was well aware of what was happening, but preferred to ignore it and conceal it from us in order to maintain the morale of the troops.

One June 19th, we moved forward all day at four miles an hour. We passed along the roads of a province where a famous past had left beautiful red brick chateaux and white stone ogival churches.

We passed Loche on our right and Chenonceau on our left. Janvier shivered at the idea that the lovely Chateau of Queen Catherine might have been destroyed. Before crossing the Cher River, another "natural

barrier" as we were told, we saw the refugees in their wagons for the last time. They and their belongings were in horse-drawn carts. Since the carts were heavily loaded, the refugees moved as slowly as we did. They kept to the rear of the civilian exodus as we kept to the rear of the military retreat. I remember one of the refugees whose enormous wagon was loaded with nothing but bags of fertilizer. Beside his field and house, this was all of his fortune and he had taken with him all that could be carried. He probably came back after the armistice and spread his fields with the fertilizer he had earlier transported a thousand miles through many of the provinces of France. We saw but few automobiles. The drivers who had been able to find gasoline had long since driven further south. The others had either abandoned their cars by the side of the road or were just waiting. This was the case with a mother, her three children and their nurse, whom Sedove and I found sitting in their Citroen. The mother begged us to give her some gasoline or at least tow her car with our horses. She was obsessed with the idea that the Germans would take her away from her children. We quieted her fears, reasoned with her and she finally agreed to stay where she was. We opened an empty house for her and there she settled.

One the morning of June 20, while we were moving along a deserted road, our colonel came up and informed us that a German column was running abreast of us three miles west. Soon after, we heard the sound of battle. Once more, we adopted the pitiful tactic of our defenseless column. We changed the direction of the march. I hoisted myself up in a cherry tree, back to my former duty of observer. For two hours I waited there for the panzers, eating the delicious cherries, a specialty in this part of the country, but I saw nothing.

Later that day we moved along small country roads, crossing the main highways only after having had them carefully patrolled. From the few people we saw, we gathered all possible information.

The only artillery unit of our army which we met was a regiment of 155-mm "GPF" guns in a forest. The regiment had halted and the huge machines obstructed the road. We talked with some of the men while they were making room for us to pass. They told us how they had been in position on the Somme, when they had been attacked by German tanks. They had managed to destroy several of the tanks. This amazed us since we

had always considered the GPF useful against tanks only as a barrier and not as a gun. From the Somme, they had gone from one position to another and were now completely out of ammunition. They still had all their guns but one and now they were engaged in a game of hide-and-seek with the Germans. Since they were drawn by tractors they had found this easier game than we.

A little further along the road, Commandant Socle and I, who were ahead of the column, decided to wait for the regiment to catch up. <sup>E. and C. with the 1st Battalion & 1st Lt.</sup> We stopped at a crossing, on the Blois highway. This highway was also deserted, except for a few refugees going south. We had been there for a while when we saw three queer looking men going north. It was not their queer appearance which caught <sup>page</sup> our attention, since we had already seen every possible sort of people or equipment, but it was that they were going north to Blois, whereas everyone else was going south. It seemed as strange as <sup>reminded me of</sup> a cork floating upstream in a river. We soon had a <sup>parsons</sup> explanation. The men were lunatics from the Maison des Fous of Blois. The doors of the asylum had been opened before the advance of the Germans and the thousands of <sup>had done it before</sup> inmates were now wandering everywhere through the <sup>country</sup> country. This was explained to us by a soldier on the road who was formerly <sup>nurse</sup> a nurse at the asylum. He called

the lunatics by their names and told us that only a few of the thousand were dangerous. However, this was a pitiful example of panic, freeing these poor men in a country covered with refugees, mostly women and children, who were camping everywhere and often far from any help.

Usually lunatics are not funny at all, but this time one of them was. He took a fancy to the commandant, slapped him on the back, and asked him if his wife was a "nuts as ever." The commandant answered jokingly, but later expressed the opinion that the lunatics should not have been released without first having received at least elementary instructions on military courtesy.

The next day we again moved along deserted roads, always at the same pace of four miles an hour, the men swinging at measure with the gait of their mount, under the hot June sun. Following instructions from headquarters, we advanced slowly through the Indre, a rich province covered with fertile wheat fields, bordered by rows of oats.

Now the enemy aircraft dropped no bombs. They dropped leaflets instead. I can remember what one of them said, "French, the glorious Marshall Petain, hero

of Verdun, has said that to keep on fighting is senseless. Cease resisting. Our Fuehrer has promised to our valiant enemies an honorable peace."

We did not bother putting the wagons under cover any longer. Once, we were so bold as to put them in several rows, carefully lined up in the center of a village -- as for a parade.

It was in this village that a marechal des logis, looking for a place to set up camp, found a baby girl about three years old in a wheat field. We could not understand how she happened to be there. She looked all right and was unafraid. All we could learn from her was that her name was Jacqueline and that she lived in Versailles. We would have liked to keep her with us, but we thought better of it and gave her to a farmer for safe keeping. She cried when she had to let go of the hand of the sergeant who had found her. The sergeant himself was striving not to show his emotion. Two months later I read an advertisement about the little girl, who had not yet been claimed by her parents.

We took advantage of the momentary lull to shorten our marches and recover from the fatigue of the previous weeks. Very soon the batteries looked better.

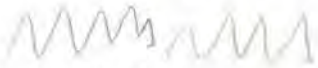
The fourgons were cleaned, the horses groomed, and the harnesses washed. The drivers sat straighter in their saddles, to the great satisfaction of the commandant. Janvier began to compare the major with Brigham Young, both having led their people to the promised land. Mazolot, whose humor still served him, began to tease good old Carron, extolling "the numerous advantages of this trip through the most beautiful provinces of France, at a pace which made it possible to see everything in detail, with thrills at every corner."

Everyone took advantage of the slowed pace of the marches and of the longer halts by washing and cleaning their clothes. We were in great need of it. Our uniforms, which we had not taken off for nearly four weeks, were rumped and covered with dust. My coat was in less than good condition and its tears were bigger than ever. We had all lost much weight and now enjoyed swimming in our clothes. A chemist girl, who was keeping the pharmacy while her husband was mobilized, repaired my coat. I was ahead of the column and as I waited, she patched the tears. Afterwards, she offered me a good breakfast, with excellent coffee. I appreciated it all the more because the country had been cleaned out and coffee or chocolate could not be

found. In the back of the pharmacy were several refugees whom she had sheltered and fed for the last week. I report this little detail as another example of the spirit which animated the population of the provinces through which we passed.

On the evening of June 22nd, we stopped to spend the night in a little town called Les Angles, whose ruined castle dominated the valley. We were quickly told its history. It had been taken, lost, and retaken several times by the Anglo-Normans during the One Hundred Years War. (Thus the name of the village.) The area had never seen another invader since that time. The people of the village were very much concerned about enemy parachutists and they wanted to know how to deal with them. They asked us for some advice about this. "Chutists" were the least of our worries, we told them, and they seemed shocked at our indifference. The only "chutist" we came across was in the Somme. One morning we were preparing to leave the forest in which we had spent the night when, we saw in the sky, very high and very small, a parachute gently sailing down to earth. Immediately, a unanimous cry arose, "We'll get that one!" Each of us took his gun or pistol and anxiously watched the descending parachutist, hoping we would be first to catch him. But



while all eyes were fixed on his chute, it stopped descending. Then it began to rise again. As it turned out, this was not a new trick of the Germans, but rather the parachute of a lighting bomb, thrown up at night, and now flying freely in the air. 

On the 23rd of June, we passed a little village on top of a hill, where the artillery school of Fontainebleau was not momentarily quartered. The aspirants (trainees) told us that their infantry school comrades at St. Maixent had been thrown into the battle of Tours with their training weapons and had suffered heavy losses.

The column halted on the main square in front of the church. At 11 a.m. the doors of the church opened and the faithful who had attended the service came out. Mingling on the square in the bright sun were country women in their Sunday costumes, elegant refugees in the latest Paris dress, and evacuated Alsatian girls who had been there since the beginning of the war, distinctively wrapped in the ample fichus.

A little further on we found the largest amount of equipment I've ever seen. In a large field, spread over a surface of a hundred square yards, were hundreds of havresacs (packs), uniforms, boots and the like -- all of them in good condition. On the

havresacs were marked the names of the men who had worn them. Inside we found letters and identity cards, things which soldiers are most reluctant of all to lose. We found no wrecked vehicles in the vicinity and could not understand how all the uniforms had come to be there. Our sergeant and brigadiers wasted no time refurnishing their wardrobes. I found Carron in a splendid new pair of Russian leather boots and Mazolot wearing a brand new officer's coat. Though the next day, Mazolot's new coat was on a sergeant, who after all had more right to it, and a week later the executive captain had borrowed it. Three days later the commandant found that the coat fitted him perfectly.

At Rivenais we stopped for awhile and took baths in the river. The village was quiet. The children were playing on the green beneath the trees and old men were fishing along the banks of the river. The past month seemed like a dream.

An old woman put her dining room at our disposal. On the walls were photographs and medals belonging to her two sons, one graduated from St. Cyr and one from St. Maixent, both killed in the last war.

I slept on the floor of the dining room. At 2:00 a.m., I was awakened suddenly by Carron who

shouted in my ear, "My lieutenant, hurry up! The German column is reported three miles from here!" In the night we could hear the familiar poum-poum of the tank guns.

The horses were harnessed in the dark and we were again on the march. A short while after leaving the village, we ran into a long line of D.L.M. (Light Motorized Division) trucks which we were to find again later. It was the first time in a long while that we had seen a complete unit in fighting condition. All day we kept going, following the now familiar pattern. Sometimes we moved at a slow pace, sometimes accelerating and often changing our direction, which proved that the headquarters were hesitating on which directions to give us due to the fact that the country was already infested with enemy detachments.

We arrived in a little village where the erection of a huge powder plant had been started and then abandoned. Rails and machinery of all kinds were lying on the ground.

We ran into intelligent looking and well-bred men passing by. Although it was summer, many were wearing the heavy coats with belts such as are worn in central Europe. They carried suitcases covered with labels from every part of the world. They were Austrian Jews who had been assembled in a nearby camp and

had just been released. I will never forget the expression of anguish on one of them. He was a man about sixty years old, a professor, looking very tired. He stopped when he saw us and putting down his suitcase, he asked with a strong German accent, "Are THEY still far behind?" We answered in the negative. Lifting his suitcase with a bent back, he again proceeded along the road.

At 9:00 a.m. on June 26, we arrived in a little place called St. Benet, 30 miles southeast of Poitiers. The village was occupied by a detachment of the light motorized division which we had run into the day before. One of the men of the detachment, who was a mechanic in civilian life, had been in the battle of Flanders. He described the first days of the battle to us while he was setting his 25-mm anti-tank gun in place. His regiment had rushed through Belgium. His comrades, all young men between 20 and 25, and the officers, had been full of enthusiasm and confidence with their brand new materials. They had not been bombed the first few days. Later they were engaged near Tirelemont against far superior forces. Their 25-mm guns had been too few and, although they were able to stop the light-armored reconnaissance cars, they were inefficient against the tanks. Nearly all of

their 25-mm had been destroyed in a day. The company had fallen back and successfully covered its retreat, mile after mile, with only its light machine guns. They had never lacked gasoline, in spite of the disruption of their supply system, thanks to fuel reserves stored in the country. At Dunkirk, the man who recounted the story had embarked on a destroyer which had only narrowly escaped being sunk by Stukas. Finally, he had landed in England and then had been transported by train to Portsmouth. This railroad journey was his best memory of the war. All along the route they had been cheered and presented with tea, cigarettes, and marmalade.

At 11:00 a.m., the motorized division received the order to move south. The young sergeant removed his 25-mm gun from the trench where he had put it, hooked it up at the rear of his truck and left.

Having not yet received such an order ourselves, we stayed put. The colonel, who had now joined us, waited anxiously for new information from headquarters. He knew that the Germans were on all sides and that we were almost cornered. The information for which the colonel waited never reached us. The officer from the general staff who was bringing it, fell into a German detachment.

While we were waiting, we heard new rumors about an armistice from the people of the village. We were told that French and German delegates had met in Compiègne, but at the same time we could hear the battle raging within ten miles. Later we heard details of this fight from an officer who was subsequently captured with us. But I will tell of this later.

While the battalion was waiting, Janvier and I inspected the village surroundings. In a mill, we found an old man who offered us some eggs. His only son, though he had been wounded in the first World War, had been mobilized again and was now in Brittany. The old man was alone in the mill. He told us that he had seen Napoleon III and Bismark parading at Bordeaux. He also told us that later, in 1871, when the Germans were passing through France, they had taken bags of flour from the very mill where we were now.

By the time we returned to the village, the commandant told us that the armistice was signed. The war was over. He did not add anything, but he seemed more nervous than ever. We all kept silent, but most of us tried to find comfort in the thought that we had done all that we could do, and that no defeat was irretrievable.

There was now no longer anything to do but wait.

I lay down in the shade of a tree and thought of the other Armistice I had seen in 1918. I was ten years old then. That morning at eleven, the bells of Trinity Church, near which we lived in Paris, began to ring. My mother had opened the window to hear the chimes better and cried. But this belonged to the past.

PART FOUR



At the end of the afternoon, the first car of the German panzers arrived and pulled to a halt. We heard the hoarse yells of the soldiers calling to each other in the cars behind. A German officer jumped off the first car of the column with a white flag. My commandant was in the middle of the road, in his familiar stance, legs apart, the kepi on the back of his head, as straight and defiant as ever. The German officer clicked his heels, saluted and said, "Fini combat." The commandant saluted and repeated "Fini combat," and went on to say that we would fight if we were not promised our freedom. The officer said it was understood, that we could count on his word. Then he climbed up in his car and the panzers started off again.

I walked up to the vine-covered porch of a farmhouse a few yards away from the road and watched the column passing. One after another, at forty miles an hour, twenty yards apart, in perfect order, passed armored cars, trucks towing anti-tank guns and automobiles. These were followed for hours by tanks and motorized artillery. On the other side of the road, French soldiers and peasants stood watching.

During this time, life went on as usual in our camp. The horses were groomed and brought to the river

to be watered. The adjutant, as he had done every day during the whole campaign, watched the operations. Although he knew it didn't matter anymore, he was quick to point out the horse which had not drunk to his content.

At night, we all had dinner in a nearby farm. We were getting ready to leave for the assembly point for our troops, as fixed by the armistice convention, when through the dark we sighted armed German sentinels around the camp. We then realized that if we were to be free, it would not be as soon as we had thought.

Later a tall Austrian officer of the gendarmerie arrived. After saluting the commandant, he told us to assemble the battalion. The Austrian spoke French well and behaved courteously. He pointed to our horses with a smile of contempt, shrugged his shoulders, and said, "You could not have done better with these."

Then, in the dark, the battalion took to the road. Heading north, we marched past an uninterrupted line of German tanks headed south.

This scene of the horse-drawn battalion of the French slowing moving past the motorized equipment of the Germans was symbolic of the entire war.

About midnight we halted in front of the city hall of a small town and waited until our accommodations

were organized. The Austrian officer was no longer with us; an Alsatian soldier acted as interpreter. When he explained to us that the Germans expressed regret at not being able to find a bed for every officer, our commandant told us that up to the very end, the war had been different from what he had expected. So much politeness from the Germans seemed unusual to him. As a matter of fact, we had been rather comfortable our first day as prisoners of war. The following days, even the senior officers, some of whom were elderly men, received many polite words -- but only straw for sleeping.

We spent the following day in the village, watching the German panzers passing in an uninterrupted line. The materiel looked rugged, but well-taken care of and strong. And how plentiful! Two cylinder motorcycles, twice as big as ours, small reconnaissance cars for two or three men, half-track troop carriers (enormous and filled with up to thirty men), many small-sized tanks and still more anti-tank guns. What the German tank officer on the Cher River had told me -- seemed to be true and there was no time wasted in repairing the damaged materiel. Already in the village garage, mechanics were taking apart the horizontal Mercedes engine of one truck.

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On several other trucks, whose hoods were raised, we were not a little surprised to see American-made motors.

As we were able to move about freely in certain parts of the village, we took great interest in observing the free demonstrations provided by the victor. Every small detail of its war machine seemed to be well studied. Some soldiers took pleasure in showing them to us. How, for instance, their overcoats (made of some sort of artificial green rubber) could be worn so as to make an overall, practical for motorcycle riding; how the sides of the reconnaissance car were of oiled canvas and could be detached instantaneously to let the men jump off -- a useful precaution in case of a sudden attack on the road; how the gasoline cans could be piled up and carried as easily on the backs of the motorcycles as on the fenders of cars. Even their helmets were coated with an absolutely dull paint, whereas ours had to be splashed with wet mud because we never received any non-gloss paint.

There seemed to be no restriction on gasoline for the Germans, and automobiles and motorcycles whizzed by at top speed. (Later we found some of the vehicles had encountered unexpected telephone poles.)

The village where we were was strongly guarded by sentinels, but within the boundaries of the village we could move about freely. The freedom was such that I was able to have a shave in the barber shop while, in the seat next to mine, a German officer had a haircut.

Our kits had been assembled on the green of the village. We recovered them and discovered that they had been opened and the most valuable things removed. We protested to the German officer in command, who said that he was very sorry but that the kits had been pillaged by some Senegalese troops the night before. From faithful Mazolet, who had managed to join us, we learned that many of these "Senegalese" had white skins and blond hair and wore grey uniforms. In the afternoon the packs were inspected, officially this time. The arms which they contained were removed. So far, I must admit, we had had a fairly good impression of the organization of the German army, but in this case we saw for the first time a situation which had not been foreseen by the Germans. The feldwebel who was in charge on inspection had no manual describing which weapons were dangerous and had to be taken away, and which were harmless and could be left. He was embarrassed and showed it. Take a razor, for instance, a Gillette? It is safe, of course, but in hostile hands

it could be dangerous. Nobody had thought of it until the question of the commandant's razor arose. The commandant had two razors, an old fashioned straight razor and a safety razor. He wanted to keep the former. None of us had any doubt that he would find convincing arguments to do so. Indeed, he ably demonstrated with appropriate gestures, that this rasoir a lame was the safer of the two. His logic was so powerful that the feldwebel did not even need the help of an interpreter and let the major keep both his razors. →

And what about pocket knives? At what size does a pocket knife become dangerous? This problem arose when the pack of a recently arrived anti-aircraft regiment captain was inspected. This officer must have made a hobby of collecting pocket knives, for he took six of them from his kit and placed them in a row. Some had two blades, others as many as six. After a long discussion, the feldwebel agreed that whereas six knives in the hands of one person could be dangerous, he could not say the same for one knife per person. So the pocket knives were distributed among us.

Receipts were delivered for revolvers which were personal possessions and the owners were promised payment for them. This procedure also applied to anti-aircraft officers who had brought their own cars with →

them. The commandant was less fortunate. Both his thoroughbred horses, which he had brought along from his personal stables in Lyon, and which he had kept with him throughout the campaign, were taken away without compensation. At least he had the satisfaction of seeing a German sergeant, who tried to ride one of them, break his arm and require care from our doctor.

The next morning we moved to Charroux, a small town of Poitou. We saw our men again, but it was for the last time. They had been well-treated and were in good condition. Later we parted. This separation was hard for us and I believe it was hard for our men too. One of my most precious memories of my regiment is that of the special feeling which united the officers and the men: affection and esteem on one side, respect and devotion on the other. During the long winter months of 1940, living closing with I had learned to love these young men. Though all in the same uniform, they still retained the peculiar characteristics of their origin -- the slow and quiet farmers from central France, the hardboiled and grumbling men from the North and the jolly and clever men from Paris.

Under fire, a definite merging of the men and the officers had taken place. At times of danger, even

the most cocky soldier keeps his eyes on "his" officer. (And it is at that moment that the possessive "My Lieutenant," according to army regulations, takes on its full meaning.) He knows that he will fix his conduct according to what his officer will do; he knows it is upon his officer's wisdom and decision that his own fate depends. An officer in such circumstances needs nothing more than this knowledge that his men will await his order, and that they will trust him entirely with their own fate.

But now we were not able to be with our men anymore. In captivity, officers and their men are separated.

I return now to our journey to Charroux. In the fields along the road some of the farmers were already back at work. All along the way to Charroux we passed German cars and even a few farm wagons. I remember one of the latter with a small load of hay accompanied by a surprising number of young farm hands. Their horses had callouses on the chest and not on the wither. This meant that a few days before, they were pulling artillery fourgons. The party was going south and I guess there were uniforms underneath the hay.

The house in Charroux where we gathered, had formerly been a kindergarten. It was a two-story



building, well cleaned and furnished with desks and benches for small children. An inscription on the wall explained that it was the purpose of the benefactress to receive only children less than seven years old. The generous old woman who had founded the school probably thought she was very clever in having had everything built for the specific use of children under that age. Not only the desks, but the toilets, the blackboards, everything was at one-third scale. Only the mistress' chair was normal, and by comparison seemed colossal.

There we were, about sixty officers of every rank, from aspirant (trainee) to colonel, of every age, from nineteen to seventy, and of every branch, artillery, infantry, engineer. For the first meal, we assembled the desks and sat on the children's benches. The table was presided over by the colonel, who had been presented with the mistress' chair, from which he had a general view of the assembly. Our commandant at first thought it very amusing, but soon he became exasperated and confided to any complacent listener that it was quite enough to be a prisoner without having to be locked up that way in a "doll" house.

We were not lacking comfort, however. In the former classroom, fresh straw, provided by the inhabitants of the village, was scattered on the floor and served as our bedding.

On the afternoon of the first day, we received a visit from a German officer. He spoke fluent French and sat with us for a while, trying to make friends and answer our questions. He talked about the latest developments of the war and confided to us what his Fuehrer had planned for us. "Everything is simple and clear," he said. Peace will be signed in a month. Alsace and Lorraine will be returned to Germany, with the exception of certain French settlements. England will be invaded in the next three weeks and forced to make peace." Then, addressing us in the most convincing manner: "Why don't you French join us to fight those perpetual trouble-makers? After all, who burned Jean d'Arc and imprisoned Napoleon? England! You worry about Italy? Don't." And with a smile, he said, "They will not get much. Your colonies? I see for them a wonderful future. You are great colonizers. We will give you large slices of the British Empire and the French Empire will be larger than before the war. And then there will be a new order under our Fuehrer and we will all live in happiness."

The way he said it was simple, clear . . . and stupendous. After he left, we looked at the commandant, expecting him to burst, to explode, to yell or at

A  
least to launch himself into one of those demonstra-  
<sup>de pureté</sup> tions of his that we loved. But no. The commandant  
did not say anything. It was the first time we had  
seen this. It was simply too much for him.

<sup>Tout</sup> Little by little, <sup>commandant</sup> life in our prison became  
organized. We could not leave the school, but for-  
<sup>comme de coutume</sup> tunately we could use the school yard, which was shaded  
by the thick foliage of chestnut trees. Food was good  
and plentiful. We received not only the meals fur-  
nished by the Germans, but also extra food prepared in  
the village. The German meal at noon consisted of a  
soup of rice, beans and meat. It was heavy, but tasty  
and very nourishing. In the evening, we had sausage,  
cheese and bread. This was the ration of a German  
soldier and was sufficient. The <sup>chef</sup> cook in the field  
kitchen was delighted when we sent him our compliments  
on his cooking. In the village, no coffee, sugar or  
chocolate were available, but meats, bread and vege-  
tables were still plentiful.

B  
Thanks to this regimen, we quickly recovered  
the weight we had lost during the last months and began  
to feel the necessity of taking some exercise. The  
<sup>jeu</sup> schoolyard was an ideal playground and Lieutenant Le-  
<sup>plateau de football</sup> moinse, who had been a coach at a well-known universi-  
ty, soon organized ball games and gym instructions.

Twice a day, we jogged around in the yard for an hour,  
touched our toes or did jumping jacks. At the begin-  
ning, the senior officers watched us sceptically, but  
in the last days many of them joined us.

Our coach, Lieutenant Le Moine was a tall, blond and handsome man, a marvelous athlete. He was always meticulously groomed as if for a parade. After the affair in Breteuil, in which most of our baggage had been lost, Le Moine, who had been more fortunate and had saved his pack, thought it wise to wear his best uniform and his best boots, instead of keeping them in the kit. So he went through the entire retreat in his gorgeous uniform of which he took scrupulous care. Since he was not able to take it off at night to sleep, it was a wonder how he had been able to keep it for so many weeks in such perfect condition. His "petit coucher" always attracted a great deal of curiosity and lieutenants and privates enjoyed seeing Le Moine carefully putting his tunic on a clothes hanger, which he hung on the branches of a tree, before wrapping himself in a blanket and comfortably nestling in a hole in the ground which the ordinance had filled with hay.

Always smiling, always cheerful, Le Moine was not only the best liked of all our comrades, but an

excellent battery officer as well. Most of the time he had to stay on the road with the column, which was far less pleasant than scouting, and he spared no energy in keeping his men fit and in perfect discipline. He had a great prestige among them; no doubt physical strength had something to do with it. I remember one day when one of his men was a little crazy and insisted on having the direction of the column changed. At first Le Moine laughed, and his men laughed with him. Piqued, the man took his own route and left. But Le Moine picked him up by the belt and carried him at arms' length to the rear of the column and put him in the care of the adjutant, much to the amusement of the entire battery.

Now, in our prison, Le Moine also contributed to keeping us in good humor. But it was not really necessary, for our general spirits were high and none of us showed signs of depression. I recall our state of mind at the time very accurately. I cannot describe it better than by comparing it with the feelings of a boxer, who prepared for a twenty-round bout, is knocked out at the first round. When he wakes up, his strength is still intact, and he feels that something is wrong somewhere. We had been knocked out by the first blow, but we believed that if we had had space, time and

proper weapons, we could have done a good job. This belief, combined with the impression that the campaign of France was just the first battle of a gigantic World War in which most of the forces were not yet engaged, left room for much hope and confidence. How many times we discussed this, while sitting on benches in the sunny yard of the school, or at night, stretched out on the straw which covered the floor of the classroom. This battle was lost, but the War was not. To prove this, each of us drew from his own personal fund of knowledge.

Bertrand, with his Christian creed, could not believe that God would let this new paganism of the German Nazis spread over the earth. Janvier, in spite of his fundamental pessimism, was pondering over the strength of the United States and England, and was convinced that they would ultimately overwhelm the German juggernaut. As for the commandant, he did not need any reasoning -- he was sure of an ultimate victory. His indomitable spirit left room for no other possibility.

From our windows we could see the old Abbey, a church founded by Pope Urban II almost a thousand years before, the glory of the little city in which we were settled. The main tower was of octagonal shape and its

small windows, decorated with Romanesque arches and columns, stood out over the slanting roofs of the old city. In the course of our long wanderings, we had passed by monuments built by centuries of work and faith at every step. It seemed as though our ancestors had set up these stone markings throughout the countryside to remind those who would come after them of what they must defend or reconquer.

Besides the sports and the political discussions, the only distraction we had was to look over the wall outside our jail, which I guess, every prisoner has done over the course of the ages.

On the other side of the street, on a hill, was the camp for privates. On the top of the hill were the white soldiers. At the bottom were the black soldiers from the colonial regiment.

The officers were rigidly separated from the enlisted men and consequently I never saw my dear friends Mazolet, Coron and the others. However, we had news of them from the few orderlies who moved between the camps, as well as from the doctor who attended all of us. Apparently the officers were well-treated and had enough to eat. There were not enough tents for all of them and most had to sleep outside. But they were used to it and the weather was fair throughout the week we stayed there.

The camp of the Coloniaux, down the hill, was set in a park which we could see from our windows. Inside were all the prisoners belonging to colonial troops, Algerian Spahi, indifferent and disdainful under their turbans; and black Senegalese, with their red chechias, smiling and cheerful. They attracted a great deal of curiosity from the German troops (who, after all, were members of the "master race"), and a stream of visitors in green uniforms flooded the grille (fence) of the park without interruption. This infuriated the colonial officers who were with us. They were incensed to think the Germans should visit their soldiers as though they were animals in a zoo.

While the colonial troops were well-treated by the Germans, it was plain to see that the Germans were awed by them, as shown in the following incident. One of the young colonial officers who was with us, a veterinarian from Tunis, with a crescent on his kepi (cap), was summoned by a German major to take care of his regiment's horses. The veterinarian stubbornly refused. Short of arguments, the German menaced him with the threat that he would turn him over "alone" to the Senegalese, apparently thinking these men were cannibals. Of course the idea of being with his men delighted the young officer, who continued to refuse



the German's orders. However, the German officer never carried out his threat.

One day, my colonel was told that our men were complaining about the rude manners of a young French infantry officer who was in charge of commanding them for chores. As the men were evidently working half-heartedly, this French infantry officer had menaced them in a rough manner, quite differently from the way they had been accustomed to taking orders. The officer, who was just out of the infantry school of St. Maixent, seemed to be on very good terms with the Germans and even served as an interpreter for them. He had paid us visits several times and we had been perturbed to hear him say "we" in speaking of the Germans as well as of the French. (The period of the collaboration had not yet begun.) We could not make up our minds whether he was German or French, but one thing was almost sure -- he was a traitor. Our colonel lost no time in asking for an interview with the German colonel of the regiment which was occupying the village. He pointed out to the German officer that it was contrary to the military honor of both nations to have such a man remain in French uniform. The German colonel listened very courteously and agreed. The next

day the "traitor" was wearing the grey uniform of the Germans.

My colonel was devoted to his men and did everything he could for them in his quiet and efficient manner. He often had to deal with his German colleagues in arranging minor details. One of his visits to the Kommandantur did not turn out well. He had taken a young Alsatian officer of our division along as an interpreter. In the antechamber of the Kommandantur, the young Alsatian aspirant (junior officer) recognized that the handsome breeches a German sergeant was wearing were the very ones which had formerly belonged to him. Angry at finding out what had happened to these breeches, which he had no doubt dreamed of wearing in a parade down the boulevard of his hometown, he could not refrain from showing his indignation. This was an unfortunate occurrence, for he was promptly expelled from the presence of the Kommandantur without a word of excuse. As a result, my colonel was obliged to look for another interpreter.

We were not without news of the outside world because of two daughters of a cafe-owner, who brought us dishes prepared by their father. They told us that, little by little, life was returning to normal in the

valley, although the Germans were everywhere. The great topic of conversation, according to them, was the famous ligne de demarcation. This line was not far from Charroux. Innumerable problems were arising for the people of the village, who constantly had business on the other side of the line.

This line seemed to be a new frontier and since we might have to cross it without permission, for escape or otherwise, we tried to get all possible information concerning how it was watched. The officers of the French anti-aircraft regiment, who were still imprisoned with us in the kindergarten, were even more interested in knowing where the line was laid out, but for another reason. At the time of the armistice, they had been so close to the line that it was difficult to know on which side they were. If they had been on the far side of the line at the time of their capture, they were to be freed immediately; if they were on the other side, they were to share our fate and become prisoners of war. It was like a tennis game where one wins or loses by inches. The discussion between the Germans and the anti-aircraft officers went on for a long time. Official dispatches and maps (German ones, for we had none of our own) were scrutinized carefully. At last one day, a bus stopped in front of our prison. The

anti-aircraft officers got in and rode away. They had won their case. *I' n' l'le gal di enise*

We said goodbye, but coldly. To justify our reserve, I must say that their colonel had insisted a little too ardently that none of us should try to slip away with them. *with help of assistance* *gliss*

We spent only nine days in Charroux, and though we were physically comfortable, it was still a prison. We looked longingly at the woods around the city and thought how good it would be to go walking there once more. The German troops guarding us were changed often. The only permanent ones were the gendarmes, who wore a piece of steel in the form of a crescent pendant from a chain around their neck.

On a Sunday morning, we were notified that on the following day, we would be transferred to Poitiers and released. *derivable* *realise* The escapes which some of us had been plotting immediately lost all their attraction.

Now I can disclose the scheme. We knew that on Sunday morning we would be allowed to go to Mass. *office* During the Mass we intended to climb up to the bell-tower. There we would find civilian clothes, brought there by accomplices, who we had easily found in the village. Wearing civilian clothes, we would escape

that night. This scheme had been devised for our amusement as much as anything else. As a matter of <sup>no doubt</sup> fact, we did not really doubt that we would be released soon. Since the war was over, we had no idea that the Germans had any intention of keeping us prisoners.

I suppose that many of the 1,500,000 Frenchmen who are now stagnated in Germany thought the same at the beginning.

Mass was celebrated by Bertrand in the little church near our kindergarten. We all attended the service, the colonel in the front pew. Bertrand, in this last sermon, said that the country had to carry her cross, that each one must take his share of her <sup>plight</sup> <sup>plight</sup>, but that there was no reason for despair, for suffering <sup>source</sup> <sup>gratitude</sup> makes people great. He concluded, "Our country will emerge <sup>stronger</sup> <sup>stronger</sup> and better for this trial."

The next day, we <sup>embarked</sup> <sup>embarked</sup> into a German military bus and were driven to Poitiers. On the way, the bus stopped at the scene of a battle which had taken place on the day of the Armistice. This was the battle we had heard from afar. The German soldiers who had been killed that day were buried here. Among the graves was that of the colonel of the first Panzer

unit. The German sergeant who accompanied us and his driver stopped in front of the graves. They faced the wooden crosses capped with German helmets, clicked their heels and gave the Fascist salute.

Later on, we heard some details of the battle.<sup>combat</sup> The village had been defended by a handful of French cavalry men with a 25-mm. They had opened fire at short distance on the first car which appeared on the road and wrecked it. A short while afterwards, the 25-mm was demolished by a tank, firing at short range. The cavalry men retreated to a farmhouse at the side of the road, but were overwhelmed<sup>surrounded</sup> after offering fierce resistance. The Germans were angry and asserted that since the Armistice had already been signed, the French had broken the rules.<sup>captain in the 1st group</sup> They seized several French officers,<sup>four</sup> one of them badly wounded, and made them ride in their tanks as hostages.<sup>1st</sup> We later learned that the armistice had indeed been signed, but was not effective until that evening. So much for the rules of war.

We arrived at Poitiers at 5:00 p.m. The bus climbed up the hill<sup>hills</sup> where the artillery school is located and stopped at the cour d'honneur. Many of us had spent a year there as junior officers.<sup>company</sup> In this very court we had<sup>defile</sup> paraded and received our commissions as<sup>gala</sup>

officers. Through the gates we could see the whole city spread out below.

In the cour d'honneur all the barracks but one were filled with German soldiers. In the empty barrack, a dormitory had been assigned to us. It seemed that everyone was struck by breathing once again the peculiar odor of the barracks -- the smell of grease, leather and dust, all so characteristic of the chambree.

In the salle d'honneur (reception hall), nothing had been changed. The walls were still adorned with the texts of the battle citations of the school and the pictures of the generals who had been at its head. In the main amphitheatre, shell specimens used in the courses were still on the professor's desk. On the blackboard, a German artist had drawn the portraits of his comrades.

The menage was filled with French soldiers, many of them from colonial regiments, Spahi, trai-  
leurs, dragons, artilleurs. They looked dejected and many were unkempt. It was the first time we had seen troops looking like this. As far as our men were concerned, they had seldom looked finer than on the last day of the war. But what was true for the unit did not hold true for the isolated soldiers who had lost their

regiments. Later, we were to read much about the pitiful condition of some parts of the army. Some people even asserted that they had seen soldiers throwing away their arms. However, my men, to whom I promised extra rations of rum, wine and chocolate for every rifle they could find (we needed them badly) never found me any as far as I knew.

We took our meals in the mess where we met some of the officers belonging to the school staff. Before the Germans had come in, the school staff officers had received orders to move out which were then followed by counterorders to stay. Finally, a skeleton staff had stayed in the school and ended up greeting the Germans. Now they were working with the Germans in trying to solve the many difficult problems of assembling the prisoners, supplying food to the populous and sending the refugees home. Our colonel negotiated the details of our liberation. It was not an easy thing to do and he spent many hours in conference with the local German and French authorities. We often saw him, thoughtful and silent, as he strolled the corridors of the barracks. Thirty years before, when he was eighteen, the colonel had enlisted and received his first uniform in this school. Now he was probably



thinking of that day when, for the first time, he had passed through the gates and looked at himself in the mirror which hung on the walls of the corps de garde. He had seen a boy of eighteen dressed in the culottes a bazane and a black tunic with brandebourgs. The old man never confided any of his thoughts to us, but we could easily guess them, and his sorrow touched us.

We stayed in Poitiers for two days, expecting to be released at any moment. But for one reason or another, the much-longed for moment was always postponed. We passed the time pacing back and forth in the yard, waiting impatiently for the latest news of the conferences which Janvier called the "conclave." The commandant was especially exasperated with the delay. He paced endlessly around the cour d'honneur gesticulating and damning the high staff, the quartermaster, the engineer corps and the Germans. Then gradually from his perplexity, an idea emerged. He had been with the army of occupation in Germany for eight years and he asserted that no German feldwebel can fail to open a gate and present arms to any troop, provided the troop is in order and walking in step. Based on this, the commandant formulated an easy plan of action. We drew ourselves up in ranks of three. Calling out, "One, Two, One, Two . . .," we turned around the courtyard in

PART THREE FOUR

perfect order and arrived at the gate. But here the  
+ commandant's plan was shattered. The feldwebel would  
not let us pass.

Still the plan might have worked. A friend of  
mine told me the following story. He and his comrades  
had been prisoners in the barracks of Rennes for  
several days. One of his roommates, becoming bored,  
made a bet that he could have a drink in the cafe on  
the other side of the street. Drawing himself up to  
parade posture, he marched to the door, stared the  
sentinel straight in the eye, saluted and passed  
through the door. He had his drink and returned. But  
it was not enough to have won his bet; he decided he  
might do better. He packed his belongings, put on his  
musette, placed his knapsack on his back, his helmet on  
his head and marched again to the gate. Here he salu-  
ted once more and for the second time passed through  
the door. But that time he didn't come back.

While at Poitiers, we tried once more to see  
our men, but it was not possible to do so. They were  
to be taken to the demarcation line and released there.

At length, we received our pass, worded as  
follows: "In accord with the German authorities, the

French Commandant \_\_\_\_\_ of the \_\_\_\_\_  
Department sends Lieutenant \_\_\_\_\_ back  
home."

We piled our belongings on a cart and left the barracks. We had been told that in the occupied zone, only officers of the medical corps were permitted to wear their uniforms, and that we had one hour in town to find and put on civilian clothing. Because of the tremendous demand for such garments from the demobilized men and from refugees, this was not easy to do. We scattered about the town and searched diligently for civilian suits so as not to run the risk of being taken back to the "school."

In Poitiers, the streets were jammed with German motorcycles and cars going at top speed. Trucks loaded with bags of flour were stationed in front of some of the bakeries. We were told that during the first days, the Germans had ordered the bakeries to open and have given the bakers fuel for their trucks. Bread was plentiful. In the public market, where we went for provisions for our trip, vegetables were available, but butter and milk were nonexistent. The stores were depleted of their wares and it was impossible to find cigarettes, matches, coffee, sugar or chocolate.

THE HORSE WAR  
A Story of the Fall of France

by  
Jacques Riboud

PREFACE

(e) →  
p 6

This narrative concerns the experiences of a reserve officer in the horse-drawn artillery during the battle in France early in the Second World War. The story begins and ends in Paris. In between lay the "Phoney War" on the Maginot Line in Alsace, the great tank battles in the Somme, the inglorious retreat through Paris to the south -- capture, and life in German occupied Paris.

It is really a simple the story of an artillery regiment; a regiment like many others; a regiment given a task beyond its strength. The only merit of the account in my view is that it is a faithful and accurate description of exactly what I saw and heard.

There is little glory in defeat. The soldier who returns from the battlefield beaten knows that to the hardships of having fought an uneven fight must be added an aftertaste of bitterness born of defeat.

But among those fighting men who lived to share defeat was savored a deep pride in the memory of their lost regiment. And they and the populace of an occupied country steeled themselves to further trials, knowing that a people strong in adversity will in the end triumph.

Jacques Riboud  
Short Beach, Connecticut  
Summer, 1941

PART ONE

Paris -- 10:00 a.m. -- September 1st, 1939.

*Present* +  
I was in the office of M. Latreux, an official of the Ministere de Finances (Treasury Department). He was in that section of the Louvre which had not yet been converted into a museum. We were in the midst of a heated discussion when suddenly a treasury employee entered the office and said he had just learned that the Germans had driven into Poland early that morning. It meant war. The hesitations and doubts of the last week were now swept away.

We broke off our conversation immediately and I drove home. In the streets there was no excitement, no apparent reaction to the latest news. On the Avenue de l'Opera, however, at the door of a commissariat, women and children were waiting <sup>in line</sup> for the distribution of gas masks. In front of the headquarters <sup>of the</sup> Communist Party on Rue Lafayette, helmeted black gendarmes were on guard. The doors were shut and windows were already broken.

*equipment* Arriving home, I put on my uniform, took my pack (which had been ready for several days) and went to the station. Mobilization had not yet been declared and my standing orders did not require me to report for duty until the second day of mobilization. So it was



my intention to go to Savoy first, where my family was vacationing and say goodbye to them.

I had made preparation for this day long before and had no need to call on my friends now. We had recently held a farewell party in anticipation of just this. Everyone present then: an engineer, a doctor, a lawyer, an architect, all of them reserve officers, knew what lay in store. The hesitations of the year before at Munich and the deep divisions which had then separated the French were gone. Everyone agreed that this time Hitler must be stopped, that if he were bluffing we had to call the bluff; and if he were not bluffing it meant war.

I went to the Gare de Lyon. The station was as busy as usual, but there were very few men in uniform. The train bound for Savoy was nearly empty, since few people planned to take refuge in a province so close to the Italian frontier.

In the Savoyan village where our family home was located, everything was quiet. The farmers in the vicinity still refused to realize that the fateful day had come and were sure that at the last moment something would happen, as had occurred once before, to sweep away the nightmare of another war.

The walls of the mairie (city hall) in the center of the village were covered with posters calling

up those men whose mobilization papers bore the letters M or D and summoning farmers to bring their horses for requisition. Saturday, the secretary of the mairie, hung up another poster proclaiming a general mobilization starting the following midnight.

On Sunday, the whole machine began to turn, according to plans prepared long in advance. Young farmers carrying small suitcases walked to the railroad station and crammed the small salle d'attente (waiting room). My old friend the stationmaster, conscious of the vital importance of his job, kept an inscrutable countenance. Trains heavily loaded with artillery guns and carriages began to roll by.

Before leaving, I went down to the Lac du Bourget which is close to our house and where I had spent many happy hours swimming while on vacation. I took a last glimpse of the snowy mountains reflected in the quiet waters. Everything was peaceful and lovely. Then I said goodbye to my parents, my wife and my children, and drove to Dijon where my horse-drawn artillery regiment was to be formed.

I had been very young at the time of the mobilization for the First World War in 1914. However, I had a vivid memory of it and our elders had often told us about it: the regiments parading with flowers in the muzzles of their weapons and the crowds jamming

the railroad stations shouting, "A Berlin!" as the troop trains departed.

The country had come out of that war victorious but exhausted. A million and a half men had not returned; the flower of the nation's youth. In every school and college the plaques bearing the names of the alumni who had fallen for their country reminded all of their sacrifice. Whole classes had been almost completely wiped out.

And now mobilization again. There were no flowers in the muzzles of the guns this time, and no shouts "A Berlin."

It was not so much the thought of the ordeals lying ahead which oppressed the people, but rather the sense of an inexorable fatalism against which men were powerless. Everything had been done to make the First World War the last. Everything had been tried: peaces, treaties, pacts, leagues and alliances, sanctions and concessions, fortifications, monuments to peace, military parades and anti-war meetings. But it was all in vain. It was the tragic destiny of the men of France to fight again. They could not escape it.

However, on that day, September 4th, all the people I met on the road showed both a reluctance to believe that war had finally come as well as a fierce determination not to yield "this time."

At Macon, the service station attendant who filled up my car professed to be a communist. He was sure that Stalin had obtained a formal promise from Hitler to keep peace. In Dijon, the streets were crowded and traffic was jammed in front of the offices of the main newspaper, where the latest news was projected on a screen.

I went to the barracks in Dijon where I had trained and served as a reserve lieutenant in the First Regiment of Artillery. The "First," as it was known, was a splendid regiment which boasted of once having counted Lieutenant Bonaparte in its ranks. The room in the barracks in which he had lived was still visited. The regiment had already left for the frontier and the large yard was empty. I was directed to a little village in the neighborhood of Dijon, where the new regiment to which I was now assigned was being formed.

I reported for duty to Major Chaviere, the commandant of the battalion. I found him in the village school. He was sitting at the teacher's desk in front of a dusty bust of Marianne and fumbling around with the "mobilization book," in which were given minute by minute instructions of what to do and where to go.

During the next three days, horses to pull the artillery guns kept pouring in from surrounding farms. Men arrived, received their uniforms and registered with the sergeant, who had set up his desk in the square close to the First World War Memorial. Little by little the battalion took shape. The men, at first bewildered and homesick, soon became accustomed to the new life; the sergeants and corporals learned the names of the men in their squads; and the officers got acquainted with each other and busied themselves filling out the numerous records required by the quartermaster. Within a few days, this originally confused and heterogeneous mass of men, guns, carriages and horses, had become the Fifth Battalion of the 237th Field Artillery Regiment.

On our fourth day together, the battalion held its first drill and for the first time took the road to a nearby field for maneuvers. The horses, unaccustomed to the chest belts (used in the artillery in place of a collar), kicked in their harnesses. As a whole it went off surprisingly well considering that eighty percent of the men were reserves and only twenty percent belonged to the regular army. Our 155-mm guns, left over from the First World War, were fired again. I sighted the hits which came fast and accurately.

I had been assigned to the post of "lieutenant observer," one of the most interesting the artillery can offer. An observer really sees what happens, whereas the men in the batteries and even the major at his headquarters see almost nothing. Furthermore, an observer is quite independent; he is in command of a small squad of men and noncommissioned officers and thus can live in close contact with them. He is often placed close to the infantry and so can acquire very direct information concerning the other branches of the army. Finally, the observer belonging to the staff of the commandant is not held down by the routine of the battalion. He has a chance of being given miscellaneous jobs. For example, I was later put in charge of the construction of shelters and of the organization of our emplacements on the terrain.

On our seventh day together, September 10th, the regiment was ready to leave for the frontier. In every battery the captains assembled the men in a large square, called them to attention and told them the glorious history of the regiment, which had gone through all the major battles of the last war. They then read a letter from the former commandant, now a retired colonel, who commended the virtues of the soldiers he had commanded.

A mixed and dense crowd of French, women and children mostly, and German soldiers, jammed the sidewalks. The Germans behaved politely, but the French already had acquired "the vacant stare," which was later typical of the Parisians.

All the houses around the railroad station were wrecked and on one track, <sup>2 - voir d garage & resto</sup> the remains of a burnt train had been <sup>gone</sup> shunted. Some rail traffic had been <sup>reprise</sup> re-established and a few trains were announced. In the yard of the station, a dense crowd of refugees was waiting, in hopes of being repatriated. Most of them were waiting for northbound trains. <sup>l'en retour</sup> They left <sup>brutalement</sup> dejectedly when a poster was put up announcing that the bridge over the Loire had not yet been repaired.

The moment of our separation drew near. Sedove bought a bicycle, which he intended to <sup>pedaler</sup> ride home to Burgundy. Bertrand was going east. <sup>au sud</sup> The commandant was going to Bourg. As for myself, I had no idea where my family was, although I knew that Savoy, where our old family home was, was occupied by the Germans. Anyway, I decided that I would go there, via the southern route, since traffic was presumably better that way. At 5:00 p.m., we divided into several groups and, with the commandant and a few others, I took the train to Bordeaux.

On both sides of the track, telephone wires were hanging, torn from the poles. Bomb craters bore witness to the recent bombings. However, the tracks themselves had been repaired and the train maintained good speed.

In the evening we arrived at Bordeaux. The Germans had occupied the city only a few hours before. Under huge glass <sup>verre</sup> roofing, still intact, <sup>roulent</sup> trains were passing loaded with German equipment. The French railway employees were at their <sup>postes</sup> jobs as usual. In the canteen in the station, women in dark blue uniforms <sup>distraire</sup> gave us hot bouillon, coffee and sandwiches.

The next day, after a good sleep in the waiting room, we had <sup>jeton coup d'oeil</sup> a quick look at the city. The usually <sup>je</sup> gay and <sup>amuse</sup> cheerful population of Bordeaux seemed to have emerged from a nightmare. But life went on as usual. All the shops were open. At a fruit stand in front of the station, the big mama who always sold her bananas at five times their value, <sup>le fa - surcoût double</sup> had now doubled that price. With her <sup>chant</sup> lovely southern accent, she told me that the city had been bombed a few days before the armistice.

Later, a friend told me more about the last day of the war in Bordeaux. Crowds of refugees had besieged the prefecture, <sup>implore</sup> begging for gasoline tickets



for a little fuel to allow them to go further. A sort of hysteria seemed to have seized some people. They were panic stricken at being <sup>acculé</sup> cornered in this last place of refuge. We had not witnessed anything like this, for the refugees we had <sup>so liberal from 2000 and 2000</sup> seen were orderly. But of course it is also true that the panzers had partly <sup>débarrassé</sup> cleared a way before us. *MMM*

At noon, we boarded a train for Toulouse. The train was clean, comfortable and nearly empty. It was running fast, on a <sup>Régulier</sup> peace-time schedule. We could hardly ~~believe~~ <sup>believe</sup> our eyes as we <sup>N. zone</sup> tested the elasticity of the first class seats with delight. After the departure, the controller came and checked our passes. We wondered whether we were not awakening from a long dream. But at Langon the train stopped and we realized for the first time what the line of demarcation really meant when German soldiers came on board and checked our passes. At the next station, the train stopped again. On the platform, sentinels in arms were on guard, but this time they were French. We stood at the windows of our car and watched them all the while the train stood in the station. *Caraculor*

Toulouse, Carcassonne, Beziers. <sup>put up down - C. 2000</sup> The stations were crowded, but there was no apparent trace of misery or disorder. The soldiers appeared well-groomed, the

cilivians, neat and correct. There was no excitement, but a quiet resigned attitude, as if everyone had been <sup>Even beyond the</sup> struck with stupor.

Near Toulouse, we saw hundreds of pursuit planes in an airfield, lined up next to one another. We had never seen any in the sky. I had some friends in the air force who told me that they tried everything possible in order to get new planes delivered to them.

At Vienne the train stopped. We were told that we could not go further, since the Germans were still at Lyon. The next day, I left the rest of the group and boarded a local train for Grenoble. During one of the numerous stops, I got off and had a chat with the locomotive engineer. This man was an employee of the eastern railway and had formerly lived in Belfort. He told me that he too had taken part in the exodus, but in accord with the orders he received, he had taken his locomotive with him. He had gone from one roundhouse to another, from Belfort to Besancon, from Besancon to Digon, and then to Bourg. He said that the roundhouse of Grenoble was jammed with locomotives from all parts of the country.

Grenoble seemed to have escaped the evils of war. Stores were full and there was plenty of food of

every kind. And, wonder of wonders -- the windows of the tobacco shops were overflowing with all brands of <sup>magique</sup> American and British cigarettes.

The reason for this was that few refugees had gone to Grenoble, since it was too close to the Italian frontier. However, the city had not been endangered by the Italians, but by the Germans. The latter had been stopped by fierce resistance on the road of Voiron. The colonel of the French regiment of Alpine troops which had put up a beautiful fight, had been killed. His <sup>obsequies</sup> funeral took place in Grenoble, while I was there.

I reached Chambery at night and was unable to go further. The <sup>big afternoon</sup> forefront of the German advance passed right in front of the city. St. Drieux, where I was going, was still thirty kilometers further to the north. I was told that the Germans were <sup>si préparé</sup> getting ready to leave, so I made up my mind to wait.

Chambergy was full of French Alpine troops. At that time there was still some talk of an Italian occupation, but the only Italian I saw was a Berseglie officer drinking a cup of chocolate on the terrace of a cafe. Several boys were standing around him admiring his <sup>resplendant</sup> gleaming uniform.

At 9:00 a.m. the next day, having learned that the Germans were <sup>à l'aller</sup> leaving, I rented a bicycle and rode

down the road in their "pursuit." This was a new sensation for me. I arrived at Aix-les-Bains a few minutes after the last German had left. A gardemobile stopped me and I was again obliged to wait.

In the streets, people were <sup>police</sup> congratulating each other that the occupation was at an end. The city had not suffered, but the stores were thoroughly cleaned out. My old friend, the jeweler, told me that during the ten days of occupation, the German soldiers had waited <sup>for a queue</sup> in line at the door of his shop and that the police had had to <sup>intervene & surround</sup> stop in to keep order. He had never had so much business before in his life, not even during the American rush in 1929. He told me that he had removed his best rings from the <sup>store</sup> window and put them in the cellar so that they would not fall into German hands.

At the beginning, there had been some doubt as to the exchange <sup>law</sup> value of the mark in francs. One morning some soldiers entered his shop and told me that during the night their colonel had decided that the mark should be exchanged for 25 francs instead of 20. They were already fixing concupiscent eyes on his best diamonds. But my good old friend, a dealer in jewels for sixty years who had sold his watches to Americans at three times their value, could hardly resign himself

<sup>margin</sup>  
to less than 400% profit from the Germans. He immediately called in an officer and the soldiers had to renounce their expectations of a bargain.

At last I was told by the garde mobile that the road to St. Drieux was clear. I jumped on my bike. The only news I had of St. Drieux was that a fight had taken place there. No one had been able to give me any information about my family.

I was riding now along the Lake of Bourget, on a road whose every turn and stone I knew well. I had taken it every summer since my childhood. The road had been blown up by the French at its narrowest points between the lake and the <sup>palaise</sup> mountain, but an emergency <sup>passerelle</sup> bridge had been <sup>just</sup> constructed. Every so often, I had to turn aside to avoid shell holes. Never before had I pedalled along this road so fast. Now I even caught up with the last German car. Soon I could discern the spire of the village church.

The road was deserted now and everything was quiet. The lake was a blue as ever. In the background, the dark majestic mass of the Colombier rose against the horizon. It was difficult for me to think of war in this countryside. In the Somme, in Alsace, in all the other places I had been, everything spoke of war. The churches which bore <sup>hardly a scar</sup> scars of former bombardments and the houses, rebuilt after the last war and <sup>local</sup>

the very names of the cities; they were all remindful of war. But the country where I was now, bore connotations of only happiness and peace.

*15 June + Garrison*

Arriving, at last, in the village of St. Drieux, I stopped and anxiously sought to get some information from the grocer's wife. The grocer's wife raised her arms in surprise when she saw me, but I could not take time to tell her how I had come. In answer to my questions she assured me that everyone at home was safe. I descended the hill and reached the gates of the park. The pavillion at the gate had been destroyed by a shell. Later I learned that a sergeant of the colonial troops had been killed there. I walked up to the terrace. The entire family was in the dining room finishing dinner. I could hear the voices of the children. The shutters were drawn; I opened them and said, "Hello."

The house had become a shelter for 26 people, among them, 14 children. Members of my family and relations who had taken refuge from other parts of the country were all here. For many of them, these months of May and June, 1940 had been laden with adventure.

My parents had never left St. Drieux. On June 18 they were told that the Germans would soon reach the Rhone River, three miles away. Since their house was

situated on the main road, they fled to a chateau in the mountains. When the Germans had passed the village, they returned to their own house.

During the months of May and June, my wife had been caught up in the gigantic whirlpool which threw the population from one frontier to another, finally drawing them to the center of France and then to the south. Her wanderings are typical of what happened to millions of people. I will let her tell the story:

"At the beginning of the war I was in St. Drieux with the children. Then, in the spring, I spent three months on the Cote d'Azur, fifteen miles from the Italian frontier. Mussolini, having made clear his intention of stabbing France in the back as soon as she was unable to defend herself, had caused most tourists to leave by the end of May. But the inhabitants, neighbors of the Italians for a long time, asserted that the Italians would never carry out their threats, and most of them stayed where they were.

"I packed the three children and the nurse into the Citroen and drove along the Rhone valley towards St. Drieux. This happened to be a day the Germans had chosen to bomb the valley, but we were fortunate in not seeing any bombs and the only effect we felt was that the road was cleared, so that the trip was easier for us.

"When I arrived in St. Drieux, I found everyone upset. A German twin-engine bomber had been brought down the day before, a few hundred yards from the village. The story is worth telling since it will go down in the annals of that little village, which had lived a peaceful life for the previous thousand years.

"When the plane crashed, a young boy of eighteen rushed home, took his father's hunting gun, jumped on his bicycle, pedaled to the scene and single-handedly captured the four aviators. A few days later he received the Croix de Guerre from the hands of the general on the village green.

"Italy declared war on June 10, 1940, and feeling that we were too close to the frontier, I again packed everyone into the car three days later and started for the center of France. I fell into the midst of the great rush and was pushed along by the stream, from one city to another. Finally, I found one room in the little city of Noire Etable, where our entire family spent two weeks.

"This Tourist Hotel, small, but quite comfortable, and with an excellent cuisine, was managed by a young woman in her thirties. Her husband was an army officer, stationed at that time in the Alps near the Italian border. She was left alone to direct and manage the inn. This she did with unusual efficiency.



"For the first few days food was plentiful, but when the hordes of refugees began streaming by in an uninterrupted line which lasted for three days, the food diminished little by little. The rather large dining room was filled three times for each meal, and every day the directress served free breakfasts to all the poor people who stopped at her inn. At the end, there was no more sugar, no more fresh fruits or vegetables and we lived on rice, noodles and dried prunes. While the vegetables lasted, all the clients of the inn gathered in a circle in the reception room every afternoon to shell peas, string beans, and generally assist the overworked cook. The children, and there were many of them, all played in the garden together. Each time they heard planes overhead, they shouted, 'Here come the Americans -- They've come!'

"The third day of the exodus we saw, mixed in with the refugees, army trucks filled with soldiers from all different divisions. Some were wounded and all were without armament. They were heading for Clermont-Ferrand, where they expected to be assembled to form a new army. Some of them stopped for a moment at the hotel and I recognized three from my husband's regiment. I questioned them, but they had long since been cut off from their units and could give me no

information. This exodus was an unforgettably depressing sight.

"Then around the 20th of June, there was a lull. A number of the clients at the inn set out in their automobiles for points further south. Those who were left behind and the hotelier, lived beside the radio. The news became more alarming and distressing each hour. At last a passerby announced that the Germans had already taken the next town and would probably be in Noir Etable by evening. That very afternoon, three tanks from a Panzer division rumbled through the street, followed by a scout car in which a French officer, taken prisoner, was seated as a hostage. The following morning, a group of storm troopers arrived and established themselves in the town. They were all of the S. S. division and many had armbands marked 'Adolph Hitler.'

"The commandant and his staff lodged at the hotel and the children's Swiss nurse acted as interpreter during their three day stay. The commandant set up his office in the garden and spent much time advising the refugees who came to question him as to which route they could take to return to their homes, which bridges were down, which roads free and so forth. He was a tall, serious, kind young man, highly educated,

as were his officers. They had all received and given instructions as to the necessity of good deportment; these instructions were followed to a 'T.' The morning of their departure, the commandant, who had taken a fancy to my children, sat with them on his knees and had his picture taken by one of his officers.

"That day and the succeeding night, the town was filled with the roar of motor trucks, motorcycles and vans, as the Germans moved on, pushing their way as far south as possible.

"The next day found the clients with their worn tired hostess, grouped around the radio, listening to the sad news of the armistice. It was all over, but no one could or would believe it.

"I was nervous and anxious to return home. We were strongly advised not to set out, though, as we did not have enough gas for the trip and the movement on the roads was uncertain. Still, we took the chance and exactly two weeks after having left home, we started back again.

"That was an unforgettable day. The trip should have take us six hours -- it took thirteen. The car broke down 20 miles from Noir Etable and it took three garages to make the motor run. We begged for gas in 12 different places, but as there was practically

none left anywhere, only two places could give us small amounts. We took the normal route home, but several times we found that the bridges had been blown up. So we were forced to detour, burning up extra quantities of our precious gas. Our motor spat and exploded and ran at half speed although I kept the accelerator pressed to the floor. All possible lodgings along the way were filled with refugees, so that it was absolutely necessary for us to reach our destination that night. I couldn't imagine my three children, Chesley age six, Betsey three and Olivia eight months old, spending the night in the car, although for many others that had been the only alternative. I was lucky in having Mlle. <sup>Ps</sup> Hersh, the nurse, with me, for I always felt that if anything went wrong she would know what to do.

"Finally, we crossed the swamps near our village. The last bridge over the Rhone was crossed, and we were home. How relieved we felt after the strain of the day. How glad I was to see my mother and father-in-law again, and how good it was to slide into bed, even though we found our own beds occupied by the numerous relatives who had taken refuge in the house.

"There had been a small battle in our village and the room in which I slept that night was riddled

with bullets and the windows were broken. The Germans had spent only one day at our house, but had found time to empty the cellar of wine, empty the closets of provisions and relieve us of our best valises.

"Exactly one week later my husband returned."

\* \* \*

One day I paid a visit to my commandant at Lyon, where he had joined his former regiment. I found him in the yard of the barracks of Breteau. He was standing there in his familiar pose, legs apart, his kepi pushed back on his head. He wore the tunic which he had borrowed from the captain. He did not say much when he saw me, but a grin on his sun-tanned face showed that he was pleased.

He took me around and explained that he was in charge of rehabilitating the war material left in the country. I accompanied him on one of his tours in the surroundings of the city. In some places there had been skirmishes when the Germans came. At one place, a humble shopkeeper stopped us and said, "Why did you fellows fight here instead of going to a battlefield?" "Why in the world didn't we think of it?" answered the commandant.

During the few days of occupation, the Germans had shipped off numerous trains full of material. Up to now, neither the freight cars nor the locomotives had returned. All private automobiles had been taken except the commandant's. I think he felt a little hurt that they had shown such contempt for this famous automobile which he had talked about so often to us. We all knew, from often having heard the story, that it was an old completely out-moded small car, but "it could beat any of these new-fangled American automobiles." We were a little surprised to find that the tanks in a gasoline storage vat were still full. The foreman in charge said that he had only filled the tanks of two German automobiles.

From the commandant, I learned the latest news of my comrades. Lieutenant Henri of the 75-mm, who had been wounded and captured on the Somme after a splendid fight, arrived one day at the barracks dressed as a peasant with a pitchfork on his shoulder. He said that he had been taken by the Germans to a hospital in Amiens, where he was well cared for. As soon as he felt better, he escaped and, thus attired, walked 500 miles back to his former regiment. He was now assigned to a post in the city civil service. The commandant

was duly amazed at the idea of this daredevil in civilian service.

We talked about the general situation. The commandant's confidence in the final outcome had not diminished by one iota. He had taken from the regiment's library all books about the United States and was computing the number of divisions the United States could field and the number of airplanes they could manufacture.

He laughed when I spoke about the famous "pocket;" the strategy which he had often expounded to us. First fall back in order to lure the enemy to the bottom of the pocket. Second, position your troops on both sides. Third, quickly close the pocket. We had never accomplished more than the first part of the scheme.

Dear commandant! There is nothing we wouldn't have done for him! From a heterogeneous mass, he had welded a good fighting unit. He had led us through the long winter of Alsace and then led us into fire. During the retreat, thanks to his fair judgment, he had saved us from destruction. And his indomitable spirit had cheered everyone to the end.

He has now reached the age limit for retirement. At present he must be raising horses, as he hoped to do. But I know what his dreams are.

On my way back from Lyon, I met a young man named Raymond. I had known him at Epinal where he had taken a course in anti-aircraft artillery. In civilian life, he was a director of agriculture in one of the largest provinces of France. During the course, he had shown remarkable qualities.

What he had done since leaving school, I did not know, but I supposed he had played a part in the anti-aircraft effort for which he had been instructed. I asked him how many planes he had brought down during the months of May and June, 1940. He seemed greatly surprised, as though my question was incongruous. Planes, he said, had been the least of his worries. After leaving Epinal, he had been put on duty in the agriculture section of his division. The staff, having noticed that all along the Maginot Line there was an immense area of uncultivated fertile land, they decided to put it to use. It seemed all the more judicious, since many of the soldiers stationed there had been farmers. Raymond was selected to direct the work. He had created a great number of vegetable gardens and had planted many acres of land. But the war was over too soon for him to collect the harvest. Among his favorites, was a certain type of radish. "It should be ripe just now," he said.



PART FIVE

During July and August, 1940, the country gradually awoke from its stupor. Families scattered all over France began to reassemble; news from prisoners filtered in; and information came from the other side of the demarcation line concerning the strange life there. The lists of missing persons in the newspapers, which had occupied a full page, began to decrease. But for many months to come we were still to read, for example, the notice of Mr. Van den So and So, of Amsterdam, telling his family that he was safe in a little village of the Pyrenees; or that Mr. de la So and So offered a reward to anyone giving information about his mother, who had disappeared on June 14, while crossing the Loire.

For several months, refugees poured steadily into Lyon and the principle cities of the south, and besieged the Prefecture in an effort to secure places in trains heading north. But many had to wait months before being repatriated. The anguish of waiting was aggravated by confusion concerning the line of demarcation. Strange rumors were circulated: sometimes the line was said to be passable, sometimes not; no one could say why.

At last, one day in August, I was able to board a train of demobilized soldiers bound for Paris.

We crossed the line of demarcation during the night. In the morning, the train stopped at Chalons. We again saw the green uniforms and steel helmets. In my compartment was a demobilized officer, an aviator. He was wearing his former uniform. The buttons had been removed to give the necessary civilian appearance. He talked about his return from the war in 1918 and described children throwing flowers, people stopping him on the streets and cheering, and everywhere an atmosphere of relief and welcome. We arrived at the Gare de l'Est in the afternoon. German soldiers guarded the gates and, in the yard, taxi cabs had been replaced by pushcarts.

At home I found my concierge in her loge; a fat woman, none too kind, but most reliable. She said she had not left when the Germans entered Paris. She described the first days of the occupation -- streets empty, shops closed and the quarter deserted. For a week, she lived on canned food and preserves. Then, one at a time, the shopkeepers had come back and the food supply had improved. She gave me news of the other tenants.

The Jewish refugee on the sixth floor had gone to Monte Carlo. The lawyer on the third floor who had been mobilized in a cavalry regiment had been killed;

his wife and three children had moved to the country. The Russian on the first floor seemed to be on good terms with the occupants and was called for each morning and brought home every evening by a German military "W" car. She had received no news from the landlord, who some time earlier, had retired to the south with his famous collection of paintings.

On the stairway, there was as much dust as ever, but the reason for it was new. "C'est la guerre, Monsieur". The elevator was not running and could not be put in order due to the lack of grease. My apartment was intact, just as I had left it on September 1, 1939. The furniture was covered with sheets, the carpets were rolled up, the books in the library were still on the shelves. It was hard to believe that not even a full year had passed since I left. So much had happened.

The following day, I made a tour of my quar-  
tier, visiting the garage first. My Renaud was still there -- all alone. The proprietor told me that the Germans had come several times and each time had tried to make it run, but never succeeded. This car, indeed, had always been erratic and had often betrayed me. But not this time!

The garageman was busy fixing old bicycles. As there was no gasoline available, no private automobiles were running and it was already very difficult to find a new bicycle. I was lucky enough to find an old one in my cellar, which had been unused for fifteen years. My friend scraped the rust off, repaired it and on a "brand new" machine, I pedalled back and forth, from the Place de la Villette to the Bois de Boulogne.

My first visits were to my friends. From them, little by little, I gathered the news. One cousin was in England, wounded; a close friend, a brilliant engineer, had been killed in the explosion at Rennes. Another cousin was a prisoner and a third was safe in the south.

I also found some of my army friends. Janvier was back at his job. He had not lost his sense of humor, but I discovered that he had turned into an optimist. When I seemed surprised, he explained that, on a local scale, he was still a pessimist, but on the international scale, he was optimistic. He argued as much as ever and never missed a chance to expound his theories. When he returned, he had had a hot discussion with his father, a former infantry colonel, who had fought brilliantly in the last war and thought this one had been a little bit short.

Janvier pointed out to his father that, in the First World War at the Marne, the French had won by a trifle. If the Germans at that time had not had a third of their army on the eastern front, the war would have been over by September 15, 1914 and the vainqueurs de la Marne would have been the vaincus de Charleroi.

But our situation in 1940 was much worse than in 1914. The numerical advantage of the Germans, already considerable in 1914, was even greater in 1940, thanks in large part to their high birthrate. Moreover, as for the shock troops made up of men from 20 to 25, the disparity was even greater. Germany had managed to keep up its birthrate during the First World War, unlike France.

As if all this were not enough, we had to defend the Alpine frontier in 1940. This was unnecessary in 1914 and, moreover, no Russian Army intervened then to weigh the scales against the enemy. That covers the numerical side of the question. As far as armaments were concerned, German industry was far more powerful than ours and Hitler had kept it working at full capacity for years, while ours was crippled by internal disputes.

According to Janvier, it was difficult to find one factor advantageous to the Allies. The Germans

were favored by: (1) number of soldiers; (2) production of armament; (3) strategic position; (4) preparation; (5) will for conquest and resulting initiative; and (6) unity of command.

The mistakes of the staff and the errors and hesitations of our policies were not as much the cause of our defeat as the fundamental fact that the military strength of Germany was superior to ours -- owing to population, preparedness and industrial resources. Indeed, it would have been as great a wonder if we had won a war of such movement as if a lightweight champion had beaten a heavyweight. The surprising thing was that so many people thought it possible.

In spite of these evident facts, blistering criticisms of the army were not rare, particularly from young men who preferred to stay in the rear consolidating civilian morale. I remember one young bachelor of 28 who had been in Brittany throughout the war as superintendant of a military store. He "could not understand why we were unable to hold them better --- only 120,000 killed!" It did not seem to him that this was at all serious. In fact, he was bitter: during the first part of the war he had been called an ambusque; during the second part he had been bombed. Thus, by managing to stay behind the lines, he had received both

contempt and bombs and, on the whole, felt it had all been a bad deal.

As every Parisian was obliged to do, we resigned ourselves to the sight of German soldiers tramping along the sidewalks of the capital -- in the Place de la Concorde, the Etoile, the Trocadero -- they were everywhere. At the door of every building they occupied, two sentinels stood at attention. They adopted a pose which, at the beginning, amazed and later amused the Parisians. The legs wide apart, faces immobile, the look deliberately blank, they reminded one of statues. In front of both sentinels, a sergeant usually strolled back and forth, rhythmically blowing a whistle whenever an officer passed. Then the statues became robots. Simultaneously both rifles moved down from the shoulder in a succession of gestures. The heads jerked at right angles. The officer passed, returned the salute. Then, like a movie shown backwards, everything returned to its former place: rifles to the shoulders, heads to the front and expressions to their perfect vagueness.

In the Place de la Concorde, the Ministere de la Marine was now occupied by the German Admiralty. On the other side of the Rue Royale, in front of the Hotel Crillon, where the sidewalk was roped off, a French



policeman stopped me with the warning that I could not pass. Janvier, who was with me, told him he hoped that he would soon be directing traffic in Berlin. The policeman did not answer, but grinned.

Along the Rue Royale, hanging from the balconies, were many flags with the swastika. Windows of bookstores displayed German "literature" -- notably Mein Kampf. In the Place de l'Opera, the autobusses, so familiar to every American -- AD, AF, and IE -- had been replaced by huge troop carriers. The bank at the left was transformed into a corps de garde and, before it, the Cafe du Bresil was still selling coffee -- unmistakably no longer coming from Brazil.

The Avenue de Champs Elysees, a section of the city especially cherished by the Germans, was now crowded with German soldiers on leave instead of the former tourists. Slow, quiet, correct and dull, soldiers in grey uniforms and black boots moved along the Avenue. Peugeot and Citroens, freshly painted grey and occupied by officers, raced up and down. Around the Arc de Triomphe, Germans poured from busses and, in bewilderment, tried to decipher the familiar names of German cities which commemorated Napoleon's victories there.

Every day at 12:30 p.m., the Place de l'Etoile was deserted by the French and the German crowd increased. This was the time when the German Company of Honor saluted the French Unknown Soldier. The company, garrisoned in a nearby hotel, assembled in the street, then made a complete tour around the Arc to the sound of drums and fife. Never did the complete lack of understanding between the French and the German mentality appear more clearly. The Germans thought they were paying a tribute to the French soldier; the French always considered it an insult.

In the "Bois," soldiers were drilling and goose-stepping, probably in anticipation of a parade. There was a crowd around them constantly watching with great interest. The goose-stepping was especially fascinating. First, each man practiced the step alone. Then in couples, they goose-stepped from one corner of the field to the other. Then in groups of three, they marched until the whole section was goose-stepping together. Personally, I am not fond of the goose-step, though it may be impressive when practiced by a troop. But executed by an individual with all his equipment, especially a German soldier, grave and serious as only a German can be, it was absolutely ludicrous. Nor was I the only one of this opinion, as was proved by the enjoyment of all those watching.

Place due Trocadero was another favorite spot for the soldiers. They liked the view of the city from the terrace. I was told that on the first day of the occupation, a Nazi flag waved from the Eiffel Tower. By the time I returned, it had disappeared. The new theater, which was located beneath the terrace, was often adorned with long red swastika streamers whenever a play was given for the German soldiers. Along the Avenue de Bois, staff officers rode on horseback. Once in a while we could see a squadron of the Garde Republicaine, with their white trousers, black coats and plumed helmets. This was the only French uniform which the Germans allowed in Paris.

In the streets, the green uniforms of the Germans could scarcely pass unnoticed. However, the people of Paris seemed to have made up their minds, one and all, not to see them. They had quickly acquired the stare a l'occupant. This stare was about the only way for the people of Paris to express their feeling publicly.

As John Driscoll describes it, it means, "I do not wish to see you here." It is the coldest, emptiest, most dead-pan, least cordial stare ever given by a human being to his fellow man. It penetrates to the rear collar button of the occupant and slips away into

endless time and space. It is a stare softened by no smile, shrug of the shoulders or apologetic gesture of the hands. It is a fishy, frosty stare which says that the owner thereof dislikes your presence and wishes you back where you belong.

But if one tired of this method, there was another which indicated, "I do not see you. You are the invisible man. You do not exist for me." Janvier explained that, scientifically speaking, in order to see an object, just as to take a picture of it, you have to point toward it and focus. If you don't point or focus, you don't see. That is simple. In this way the huge German army of occupation was reduced to a thin number of unwelcome visitors.

However, what was possible in the streets did not hold in the Metro. The subway was the only place where the two nationalities actually came together; just as for many years it was the only place where people of different classes were intimately thrown together. There, swayed up by the shaking of the train and invariably pressed closely together, all the more so now that surface transportation had disappeared, the French civilian and the German soldier rubbed shoulders. Occasionally the Metro provided the citizens with distractions. I remember seeing a stout German

caught in one of the doors which automatically close off the entrance to the platform before the train arrives. The soldier was obliged to remain in this inglorious position until after the train had left.

As a rule the Germans behaved very well and incidents were rare. I heard of only one incident from Janvier. At the Place d'Italie, a German captain leaving the subway station stepped on the foot of a passenger who promptly protested. The German offender announced that the occupants were always right; the Frenchman retorted that this was only temporary and that a time would come when he, in his French uniform, would ride in the Berlin Metro. The German officer then ordered two soldiers to seize this rouspeteur.

I think most Parisians agree that of all the hardships imposed upon them -- lack of food, lack of coal, lack of work and the constant presence of a hated uniform -- there was hardly a more bitter sight than that of the German-controlled press. The newspapers, as they were published in Paris, were such that they could not be digested; even by the old sceptical natives who, while always prepared to find anything in their feuille de choux, are also prepared to believe nothing.

The articles by Deat and others of his ilk were the subject of amazement every morning. I recall when posters first appeared on walls claiming, "Those who had not wanted to die for Danzig were reading l'Oeuvre." (Deat's paper.) Many were unable to believe it and thought it was a joke. Most editorials were simply literal translations from the German, often badly done; and the sentences smelled suspiciously of German construction.

I remember reading an interview with a French sailor whose boat had supposedly been forced to shore by the British and held for several days close to an oil refinery. "The odor of petroleum was so awful that every man of the crew got sick and many of them will remain crippled for life." These constant and often absurd attacks upon our Allies helped increase the already pro-British feelings of the people.

Every day we could read some new detail about British atrocities taken from past or contemporary events. Perhaps Dr. Goebbels found that these stories failed to have the expected effect, so he turned to an old trick which has always been successful with French readers -- newspaper contests.

Each paper daily offered its readers a bitter fusitgation of the British taken from the works of a

famous or even obscure Frenchman, or from the speech of a general or statesman. During the Hundred Years' War with England, many harsh opinions toward perfidie Albion had been pronounced and it is true that Dr. Goebbels had found an inexhaustible mine. The object was to guess the author whose name was to be sent in to the editor. Prizes for correct answers ranged from a pair of stockings to a ham or, more simply, a year's subscription to the newspaper. This last was undoubtedly the booby prize.

It may seem strange that the newspapers from beginning to end were always consistently pro-German. A few recalcitrant reporters often slipped into the disciplined ranks of the editorial staffs and managed to write what they believed. For example, in one issue of Paris Soir, the German movies were lauded on the front page, while on the fifth, the critic bluntly said he had never yet seen a good German film and that the Nazi movie industry was far from reaching the high standard of the French.

A friend of mine, H., a publisher of a newspaper in Dijon, described to me the process which the Germans used in order to gain control of the press. They did it gradually, not brusquely. For a few months after the Armistice, his newspaper was not published at

all. Then my friend returned from the war and asked the German authorities for permission to resume publication. They granted this, imposing no conditions, not even censorship. Two weeks after the first issue appeared, he received a note from the Kommandatur, asking him politely to take a more anti-British attitude in his editorials. He neither answered nor complied with his wishes. Two weeks later, a letter arrived, the tone of which was a little stronger. It had no more effect than the first.

He was then summoned by the Kommandatur and presented with a ready-made article, violently anti-British, which he was forced to print on page one. This he left unsigned. In another article, under his own name, he hinted that what was on the front page was just "an opinion."

The officer, angry now, ordered my friend to publish another canned article, this time under his own name, or be put in jail. H. chose a third solution, which was to flee. He is now in the Free Zone.

Generally speaking, German propaganda failed to come up to the expectations of the French, who looked for marvels of slyness from this much advertised machine. In the first months of the occupation, every Frenchman unfolding his newspaper was prepared to turn



his critical intelligence against the subtle and insidious material he was to read. Alas! There was no more subtlety displayed by the Germans in the Parisian press than by an elephant in a china shop and those who anticipated the pleasure of seeing through the German smoke screen were quite disappointed. As a matter of fact, a Parisian seldom complained that his newspaper was not telling the truth, but he strongly objected to its stupidity. He felt that his intelligence was insulted, because a lie, well-presented and cleverly disguised, is interesting; but a crude and naive deception is proof of contempt, which he bitterly resents.

The posters with which the Germans generously adorned the walls of the capital were of the same mentality. Seldom had so poorly and inartistically designed material been shown to a critical public. One of the pictures showed Jeanne d'Arc, Napoleon and others, all as British victims. The unanimous feeling was that Jeanne d'Arc was badly misrepresented.

Throughout the country, these posters sometimes suffered a sad fate. One of them, for example, pictured a wounded French soldier walking down the street of a demolished village. To one side was a typically British officer, smiling. The caption was: "We owe this to him."

At Chalons one morning, the inhabitants noticed that during the night a little mustache and a wisp of hair had sprouted on the British officer on the poster, who thus suddenly personified the Fuhrer. The result -- two weeks of a 7:00 p.m. curfew for all the citizens.

While talking about propoganda, I must say a few words about the theater. Newsreels were made in a most collaborationist spirit. They didn't hesitate to show Goering flying over England and, after that, Marechal Petain reviewing Alpine troops. Of course the crowd did not react as the Germans had expected and many incidents occurred. The Germans retaliated by closing the movies, but this did not help. Finally the newsreels were shown with the lights on, with several Gestapo agents watching the audience.

Now and then the hatred of the population for the occupants was softened. Strangely enough, the First World War laid the groundwork for the French and Germans occasionally getting acquainted. Here was a typical example. A German sergeant went to visit a small factory in the suburbs of Paris, managed by Jean Lacour, one of my friends. This sergeant, a tall, sad-looking man of forty-five, inspected the plant and took charge of all the material. He was shown around by

Lacour, a reserve officer who in the First World War had been a storm troop captain, at the head of which he had accomplished many coup de main. Speaking about the War of 1914, the German sergeant mentioned that he had been captured with his company, June 16, 1918. The Frenchman said that was the very day he had attacked with his troops and made a splendid coup de filet. They compared places; they were the same. The sergeant had been captured by Lacour's company. The captain's men had been a little rough, which the German had not forgotten, but he held no rancour and was full of respect.

The inspection went smoothly. There were so many common memories to evoke! Finally they went to a cafe for a bottle of beer. In civilian life, the sergeant was a shopkeeper in Berlin. In spite of his age and five children, he had been mobilized in 1937 and made no bones about longing to go home. Lacour felt no embarrassment in sitting on the terrace of a cafe with a German, but many civilians would not have understood.

This feeling could sometimes be found among former soldiers, but there was no trace of it among civilians, particularly women, who had dragged themselves along the roads from north to south for a month, bombed daily without pity.

One young woman, secretary of the Tool Makers Association, told me that on the road to Autun, the column of refugees was machine-gunned by a low-flying plane. The women and children immediately scattered and threw themselves on the ground. She did the same, but even so, she had received a bullet in the shoulder. Carried to a nearby farm, she spent two days there with very little care. When the Germans arrived, they treated her well enough. She said the major frequently apologized and did everything he could to make up for her experience. But this could hardly be forgotten.

She spoke with admiration of her uncle, Dr. Martel, a famous surgeon at the American Hospital, who shot himself to death when he saw the first German motorcyclists riding down the Avenue of Neuilly from his laboratory window. She approved of his suicide, although he himself realized what a loss it would be -- and personally he had nothing to fear. But she was convinced Dr. Martel had given the Germans a slap in the face and his memory would be honored forever.

All efforts, which the occupants made, to win over the population had little effect in the face of memories like these. For example, there would always be bitterness in the heart of Mazet, a foreman in our plant in Boulogne, whose seventeen-year old brother

recently had been shot. They had found him taking food to a British soldier who had hidden for several months in the woods when the retreating army left him behind.

It would not be true to say that the discipline and the regulations imposed by the Germans were abnormally hard, at least in Paris. Everywhere it was not the same, however. For instance, in Noisy, a suburb of the capital, the population had trouble because the occupants objected to their mocking attitude, especially on the part of the young men. They were threatened with deportation unless they showed due respect for the officers in charge. The Germans did not mind being hated, but they dreaded ridicule. Being funny was beyond their power to understand or appreciate. Germans seldom found anything funny, so why should other people?

Most of the trouble between the two people was centered on the telephone wires. It was surprising to see how many wires the Germans could lay even in the smallest village. Some people said this was done as a provocation, in the hope that they would be cut and thus afford an opportunity to crack down. Indeed, they were frequently cut! As a result, everyone was fined and the men of the town had to take turns standing guard over the network of wires.

The most serious offense was the possession of illegal weapons. Almost invariably it brought death. I knew a notary in Normandie, who unfortunately had made some enemies in his town. One day the Germans, having received an anonymous letter, searched his garage and found several boxes of ammunition, several rifles and a machine gun. My middle-aged friend, with a respectable beard and five children, was nearly floored by the sight of this arsenal in his own house. In spite of vehement protestations, he was arrested and taken to jail. But the authorities themselves soon realized there was something fishy. The German lawyer, assigned to his defense, succeeded in proving he was the victim of a malicious frame-up and he was released.

In October, 1940, yellow labels began to appear on shop windows, stating that the owners were Jewish. This was done in accordance with French law, the text of which had been published in the Journal Officiel. The Jewish shopkeeper at the corner of our street did not feel that he had to comply and told me that as far as the law was concerned he could not be considered a Jew. It was evident that the French lawyer who had drawn it up had taken great pains to give a precise definition of who could be called a Jew and who could not. But the Germans were dissatisfied with the

results and soon announced that they considered everyone a Jew who was publicly known as such. This was indeed more simple. The yellow labels were soon replaced with others, announcing that by order of the authorities, the shops had been taken over by a "French Aryan." This was how a young friend of mine of Algerian descent (whose dark skin and black curly hair had never seemed particularly Aryan to me) was charged with the management of several formerly Jewish shops.

Needless to say, the French population, which had never been anti-Jewish or pro-Jewish, immediately felt a deep sympathy for those who were persecuted.

At the end of December, 1940, I received a letter from my bank, asking me to attend the "inspection" of the vault by German authorities. I was there with my safe deposit key on the specified day. After a long wait until everybody summoned had arrived, we all went down to the basement, preceded by a German officer and the bank manager, an old friend of mine. I opened my box and the officer saw that it was empty. I had wondered what the people would do who had lost or forgotten their keys. But it was simple enough. The German was accompanied by a gentleman with a cap pushed over his ears, slippers on his feet, a scarf around his neck and an inimitable Parisian accent. With remarkable dexterity, he opened everything, with or without a

key; and so dispelled all doubts concerning his real profession. I told the manager that there was really no occasion for such a fuss over lost keys, but he answered that the Germans were more clever than the bankers and knew how to use the right man in the right place. He watched the officer and the mont-en-l'air working together around the vaults and whispered that it made a happy combination.

For those who had only French money it was easy. They could keep it; the Germans were not interested -- you can easily guess why. But gold and foreign securities were immediately frozen. Now and then, a vault revealed something besides cash or securities. One of the customers had to show several packages of letters for inspection, all beginning with "My beloved," or a similar salutation. All were in different handwriting.

Many wondered why the Germans, professing the deepest contempt for those backward nations which clung to the gold standard, had frozen all gold assets and forbidden trade in gold coin or bars. The major effect of these latter measures was to deeply disturb dentists and their patients.

I realized it when my dentist required me to furnish my own gold to make a crown. The only gold I



could find was in an old, perfectly hideous family jewel which had belonged to a great-aunt. The idea of transforming this heirloom into something so useful was delightful, but it turned out to be purest copper. Had it not been for this mortifying discovery, I should certainly have willed this ten cent jewel to my grateful nephew. However, all this was small consolation and my need of gold was as pressing as before. I was seriously considering melting my gold chain when I managed to get a gold coin (through the black market, naturally) and the dentist finished his job.

One morning, I passed several groups of unmistakably British-looking people on the street: brick-faced gentlemen wearing knickerbockers and ladies in flat-heeled shoes. They were accompanied by one or two garde-mobiles, often carrying their suitcases. This sight was very unusual. I learned later that all the British had been gathered together to be sent to Besancon. It was with sadness that the people of Paris saw them leave. Many had made their homes in Paris and had been there for years. They were very popular. I heard of an eighty-year old nun who was ordered to leave her convent within one hour. The Germans took great pains to explain that this was merely a retaliatory measure.

At the same time the province of Lorraine was

emptied of part of its population. Everybody known to be particularly patriotic was ordered to leave and was forbidden to take any belongings or more than 2,000 francs. Crowded trains arrived daily at Lyon. Marechal Petain, inspecting the city one day, greeted them and consoled them with the assurance that their sufferings endeared them still more to the heart of every Frenchman. The following day Parisian newspapers hinted that the Marechal had uttered in Lyon, words not quite in the Montoire spirit.

Toward the end of November, I went to Les Andelys in Normandie where I had spent many happy weekends. I wanted to visit a cousin, the Abbe Rene, an intelligent, high-spirited young priest, who was an instructor in a boy's school. The institution was established 100 years before by Charlemagne. In the ruins of the main chapel, young boys were clearing away the debris and already had erected new barracks. Rene lived in a smaller chapel, terribly cold, where he had set up a bunk for himself. The garden was torn up with trenches and strewn with barbed wire. A wooden statue of the Holy Virgin lay broken on the ground.

Rene described the exodus. They had been ordered to leave a few days before the arrival of the Germans. With their belongings piled in a cart, Rene

and all the boys walked day after day for four hundred miles, first to Brittany, then through Paris to the south. They had almost no money, but always found generous people who fed them. The armistice found them in a little village near Toulouse where they stayed for a couple of months, helping the farmers. They came back in early October to start the new school year. He said that during the three months' exile, their health had never been better nor their spirits more hopeful. On their return, they found the city destroyed and the school in ruins. Many boys had not yet received any news of their parents. My cousin was happy and full of confidence in Providence. Like Bertrand, he considered that the country could emerge from this ordeal, purified and closer to God. I asked him about his relations with the Germans and he said he had had no trouble at all. They did not interfere with the direction of the school. However, they had requisitioned the cathedral every Sunday for one hour to hold a service for their own soldiers. Rene added that he had gotten acquainted with several young German priests and was surprised to find them good Nazis or at least claiming to be good Nazis.

In the afternoon, he showed me the city -- what was left of it. Les Andelys had been razed and

burned in the middle of June when the Germans had reached the Seine (now the cathedral stool alone amidst ruin). It was a beautiful, cold Sunday and people were strolling along the streets as they had done every Sunday in the past. We looked for the place where a hostelry of the fourteenth century had formerly stood. We had often admired its handsome fireplace, adorned with the strange sculptures of that period. But we found only piles of blackened stone. In how many cities of the north was this scene duplicated!

And where were the people of these ruined villages? The women, the children, the aged were scattered over the countryside. The men were gone, too -- some forever, some as prisoners of war -- in Germany and even in France itself.

Escape from German camps was almost impossible. In France, one had a better chance, but to remain at liberty was another problem. The story of one of my schoolmates bears this out.

Marcel, having survived the battle of Dunkirk, was transferred with other French troops to Brittany where he was finally captured a few days after the Armistice. He was taken to a camp in Tours and set up in former barracks. Bored with the inaction, he soon decided to escape.

7  
Revised text

A truck running on charcoal gas brought in materiel every day and this gave him an idea. Charcoal is a cumbersome product and each truck using it was obliged to carry many bags. These sacks were very tempting. It was nothing for Marcel to get to the truck unobserved and to crawl into an empty bag. He waited all night until finally, in the morning, the truck started off. He felt rather uneasy because the German sentinel on guard at the door of the yard now and then took it into his head to poke the bags with his bayonet. But this time, fortunately, there was no proding and Marcel got through. At a safe distance he jumped off and cleaned himself up -- which he needed badly. Then he bought civilian clothes and went to a little beach on the west coast, where he presented himself with a vacation.

He remained there for a week and enjoyed a good rest and the distraction of the Germans, practicing their invasion of England on the beach. He boasted that there was nothing more pleasant than to lie on the sand in the sun entertained by his former custodians (who had probably never seen the sea in their lives) crammed on an unsteady pontoon. The climax of the show would be reached when a pontoon, after many critical swings, would be turned over by a wave. And the last

act had the soldiers with all their equipment emerging from the water.

After this happy recreation, Marcel returned to Paris and resumed his former occupation of selling life insurance. He felt perfectly secure because, before leaving prison, he had provided himself with a false name and description. So it seemed there was no possibility of tracing him. But he was wrong.

One day in May, 1941, his brother-in-law was called to the police station. He was kept there as a hostage until Marcel gave himself up. Now Marcel is in Hambourg. It is doubtful if the Germans would have acquired any proof of his identity, but he talked too much and someone gave him away.

Some evasions were more elaborate. A friend whom I met later in the unoccupied zone told me how he had escaped. Le Simple had lived in Germany several years and spoke the language perfectly, even acting as an interpreter in his prison camp. In the beginning, his comrades were suspicious of him. They should have known better.

One day he learned that the German gendarmerie in charge would soon be relieved by another company. Le Simple quickly devised a plot and submitted it to his friends. Some accepted, others refused to take a

chance. Thanks to his job as interpreter, he had full liberty to come and go. He succeeded in getting into the warden's office and getting hold of the files in which he found the names of the prisoners, their descriptions and so forth. He removed all the cards of the men who planned to escape, made a new list and forged a few passes by imitating the signature of the German colonel. He then liberally stamped them with official cachets. (As I mentioned before, it was not impossible to get away, but afterwards one was very likely to be caught. It was necessary therefore to remove every trace of one's presence.) When the time came, the German officer turned the files over to his successor. During this exchange, Le Simple and his comrades broke out. Next day at the call, the sergeant checked the prisoners and reported that everything was okay. But twenty men were gone and not even missed.

Paris, during the first winter of the defeat in 1941, was covered with snow and ice for months. The unlighted streets were still completely dark at 9:30 a.m., since the occupied zone kept Berlin time. In going to work every day, I could see long queues of pale women and old men, with their coat collars turned up, freezing in the icy wind. They had waited hopefully since early in the morning in front of closed

shops. Often their wait was useless and they would find the store empty or at the last minute a notice would be posted stating that the expected shipment had not been received.

When it rained or snowed, the long line seemed to melt into the walls and during the night one could hear the continuous murmuring of these wretched people confiding their worries to each other: the child with a cold who had been taken to a hospital where the doctor said he would recover only if he got plenty of food (but they could find nothing to give him but yellow turnips); the boss who said that business was so bad he would soon be forced to shut down his plant and discharge his employees; a brother or husband imprisoned in Germany, who was asking for food.

The food situation, which was bearable at first, became very acute within a few months. Even potatoes, the staple food of most families, disappeared from the stands. The Germans gave tremendous ballyhoo to the shipment of a train of potatoes from Germany, but they neglected to mention the train of cattle which was running in the opposite direction. The announcement about the potatoes was made at the time the ashes of the Duc de Reichstadt were returned, and I must say that the Parisians were more concerned with the food



than with the Duc. But neither effort toward conciliation made any change in the public attitude.

As a matter of fact, the only vegetable available during these winter months was turnips, but it is surprising how many ways a French cook can prepare this delicacy.

Speaking of the food situation, I must mention the Black Market, which flourished more widely than the liquor market in the United States during Prohibition. Few people refused to buy through these channels; their scruples quickly disappeared, since it was not a racket, but simply a way of concealing food stocks from the enemy.

Many other reasons could be given. For example, the small shopkeeper could truthfully say in his defense that the sale at regular prices of the small quantity of merchandise he received was inadequate for a livelihood. Hunting for food became great sport and I will never taste a better turkey than the one I was able to find for Thanksgiving in 1940. Through several go-betweens, and after many obscure conferences, I was directed one day to go to a certain address and walk up to the fourth floor. I followed the instructions and rang the bell. Through the half-opened door, I received the package but never saw who handed it to me.

Everything during that winter seemed to aggravate the misery of the population. The weather was particularly severe and there was practically no coal available. The fuel rations were very small and were usually unobtainable. For many days, thick sheets of ice covered the windowpanes in the apartments and it was not unusual to see icicles on the ceilings.

There was a sadness in Paris, but strangely enough, neither desolation nor despair. The empty streets of Paris were as beautiful as ever and even the presence of the Germans was unable to impair its majesty. Notre Dame, the Louvre, and the many monuments built by centuries of civilization gave the people reason to hope. They had passed through many reverses and had looked back upon as many recoveries.

I liked to wander about with Janvier, among the column of the new Museum of Modern Art, which had been erected three years before. I remember one evening especially. We entered the large terrace and walked down the steps of the piece d'eau. Not another soul was about and we admired in silence the grace of the sculptures, the harmony of the gardens and the shining marble walls of the palace.

Janvier pointed out that this was the kind of construction we had chosen, rather than the making of

armaments. Although events had proved us wrong in our selection, it was nevertheless a proof of our civilia- tions. Force alone may check a strong people, but it cannot destroy them.