

him. On the other hand, he didn't make any difficulties. It was just that it was difficult to watch while he ate, and it seemed to us that he was eating non-stop, while we were continually hungry.

I found new friends among the other deportees who were working with me. I got to know Biener, always ready to help, a young man of my age with his father and his uncle, Nandor Grünberg, a sick but tough bootmakers' apprentice able to cope with any situation; and his colleague and friend the strong, optimistic Lemmi Friedmann — I did not know his real name — who sang happy songs even if he was tired and hungry, who worked for his weak comrades, who once carried a comrade for miles on his back because he could not stand on his injured leg, and who collected mushrooms wherever he went and always shared those he had fried or prepared in some other way, and who once all but died from mushroom poisoning. This shocked the whole group out of its lethargy. Everyone wanted to do something good for him, to save him. We worked together for four or five weeks. We got used to each other and learned to respect each other. Then the wood unit was disbanded. Chance determined who went where, it depended on the mood of the Camp Elder, of a unit leader or the order of the CAPO. In my next work unit I was together only with Lemmi Friedmann and then I lost him from view as well. Later, much later, I discovered that he died in the course of the winter. Hunger, cold and exhaustion killed him, maybe he fell victim to typhus. I do not know. He disappeared without trace, almost unnoticed like so many others. You hardly noticed if and when a friend vanished if you didn't work immediately next to him. For weeks, we had no opportunity to make enquiries, nor did our strength permit us to; and then, when we began to search, we became aware that he no longer existed and that nobody knew what had happened to him. If you were separated from somebody for just a few days, it was mostly forever. I lost sight of the three Bieners. I never met them again, I don't know what happened to them ...

Anise Postel-Vinay

A Young Frenchwoman's Wartime Experiences

I. The Resistance

On 10 May 1940, the German army invaded Holland and Belgium. The fall of Paris followed on 13 June.

Although Paris was our home, my mother, my three brothers, my sister and I had taken refuge in the town of Rennes, in Brittany. My father, on the other hand, opted to stay in Paris and continue his work as a doctor.

On 17 June, Marshal Petain announced in a trembling voice that France would not defend herself to the last. We felt shattered, horrified, deeply humiliated. My father drove down to Rennes to join us. We scarcely recognized him: he had aged ten years in the space of a week. His cheeks were sunken and he was seething with anger, with the kind of dumb outrage that one only sees in people of his normally quiet disposition. My father was the son of a peasant family in the Jura mountains, and in addition to the mountaineers' natural calmness and patience, he had inherited their capacity for violent rage.

My mother's family was from Alsace. After the annexation of Alsace by the Germans following the war of 1870, her father and her uncle left the province. She was a tall, blonde, attractive woman with a fiery temperament and an exceptionally keen intelligence; her attitude to the Germans was hostile, and she hated the Nazis. With a mounting sense of unease she had observed the rise of Nazism, as documented not only in the newspapers, but also in the publications of anti-Nazi Catholic thinkers such as von Hildebrandt and F. W. Foerster. In Paris she had taken in and helped a number of Catholic and Jewish refugees from Hitler's Germany.

My mother was familiar with the books of Rauschning, Strasser and Ernst Erich Noth, and with the French literary scholar Robert d'Harcourt's *The Gospel of Violence*, and had given them to us children to read as well. Both my parents were firm Christian believers and staunch Republicans. To them, respect for one's fellow human beings was a sacred principle for which one should be prepared to risk one's life if necessary. The fact that France had fallen to the Nazis deeply depressed me and my family. We knew that this was the beginning of an era of hitherto unparalleled terror and violence.

We did not ourselves hear General de Gaulle's BBC radio broadcast summoning the French people to continue the struggle against the Germans. However, with or without de Gaulle, we would have continued to defend France to our dying breath. Who was this general with the heroic-sounding name who had set out to salvage France's honour? At the time, we knew nothing about him, apart from the fact that he was saying things which urgently needed to be said.

Deeply dispirited, we returned to Paris. My father bought a new radio, the very latest model available, and immediately the BBC broadcasts from London became the focal point of our lives, despite the Germans' constant attempts to jam the transmissions.

I had begun to study German at the University of Rennes and continued my studies at the Sorbonne. As the autumn semester began, the anniversary of Armistice Day on 11 November was approaching, the traditional day of remembrance for the dead of the First World War. Although any public assembly of more than three people was strictly prohibited, the students decided to hold a march up the Champs Elysées to the Arc de Triomphe and attempt to lay a wreath at the tomb of the Unknown Soldier. That year, Remembrance Day fell on a Monday. The previous day, I had been on a long hike with a troop of Boy Scouts in the countryside near Paris. Keeping pace with the long-legged boys had been far from easy, and on that Monday morning the muscles in my legs ached so much that I could hardly walk. Nevertheless I set off to the Metro and took the train to the Eroile station. After struggling up the stairway, I emerged at the exit on the corner of the Avenue de Wagram and found, to my astonishment, that the Place de l'Eroile was completely deserted. I walked on a few yards and suddenly caught sight of several groups of German soldiers hastily assembling machine guns on the pavement at the end of the Champs Elysées. I tried to run back to the Metro, but my legs were hurting too much, and all I could do was to hide, unheroically, behind the trunk of a plane tree. Salvoes of machine gun bullets came sweeping up the street, skimming the surface of the road. The students fled down the Champs Elysees, raising their hands in surrender to the Germans. To my horror, I recognized one of them; he was a Jew, and I had an uneasy feeling that we would never see him again.

The demonstration had been entirely futile. I felt that gestures such as daubing the Cross of Lorraine on walls were silly and infantile; the practice of collecting and passing on jokes about the Germans seemed equally ridiculous. Apart from reading a few leaflets and banned periodicals which fell into my hands, I had no contact with any of the Resistance groups which were being formed at the time. How, I asked myself, could I make a useful contribution to the Resistance movement? I decided that the best thing to do was to try to get to England and join the Free French army. My mother was

prepared to support this plan on condition that one of my friends went with me. However, I was desperately disappointed to find that not one of my friends, either at the university or in the Scout movement, was prepared to go along with my suggestion. Eventually I fell in with a girl from Alsace who had fled to Paris and was highly enthusiastic about the idea of going to England. Unfortunately, though, the plan failed: despite long and involved enquiries, we were unable to find any means of putting it into practice. One day my mother revealed that one of her friends was involved in Resistance activities and suggested that I should go and see her. Her name was Simone Lahaye; she was a professor of philosophy, and one of her colleagues, a teacher of English, had put her in contact with a former Navy officer who was passing military secrets on to London. I was given a sheet of instructions with the abbreviated designations of all the various weapons used by the German army, and my first task was to find out the type of gun mounted on the German tanks based at Fort de Vincennes. It was a task for which I was wholly unfitted: I could hardly tell a corporal from a general, let alone distinguish between different types of cannon.

Summoning all my courage, however, I rode out on my bicycle to the Vincennes woods and set about measuring the width of the tank tracks in the mud with a tape measure. My descriptions of the guns with which the tanks were equipped were anything but exact. Something told me that this was not the way to tackle the business of resisting the Germans.

My second task was to find out all I could about one of the barrage balloon units near Paris and enter the information in a map. Again, I went on my bicycle, this time with a fellow-student from the Sorbonne. Together, we recorded all the details of where the balloons were moored, the type of balloons used, and their Luftwaffe serial numbers.

The map in which we entered the information, and which I had compiled with the help of one of my younger brothers, was to be photographed on microfilm. Together with a number of further documents supplied by other members of the group, it was to be smuggled in a matchbox into the unoccupied zone by a priest who was sympathetic to the aims of the Resistance. From there, via Lisbon, it would eventually end up in London.

At the end of July 1942, I was sent to Le Havre to observe movements in the harbour and at the railway goods depot. The main aim of this exercise was to find out exactly where the bombs had landed in the recent English air raids.

On 15 August 1942 I succeeded in crossing the border of the restricted zone along the coast, travelling in an overcrowded train and carrying in my rucksack a map of Le Havre containing the information which I had been asked to obtain. The sun was shining when I got out of the train in Paris. My orders were to ring up the leader of our group, a Navy officer, before handing

over the information. I had never actually met this man, who was surrounded by an aura of mystery and massive importance, and I was extremely shy about the idea of encountering him, so I decided instead to go straight to my friend, the English teacher. This failure to obey orders was to prove my undoing.

II. Arrest

When I reached the apartment block where my friend lived, I noticed a beautiful red open-top sports car parked by the side of the road. I thought to myself: 'Since driving on a Sunday is prohibited, the owner of the car must be a German.' But then I dismissed the idea as over-cautious. There was an official pass on the windscreen, which indicated that the car might belong to a doctor on his rounds. In high spirits, proud of myself at having come back with a new collection of military secrets, I climbed the staircase up the live floors of the building and rang the doorbell.

A tall young man in shirt-sleeves opened the door. Inside, another man was rooting around in my friend's possessions, which were spread out all over the floor of her apartment. I immediately realized what was going on, but it was too late: I felt my face go white with fright.

'You've gone quite pale,' said the Gestapo man. Playing for time, I answered: 'Well, it isn't exactly a pleasant surprise to come visiting a friend and discover that her apartment is being ransacked.' My cheekiness fooled nobody. I tried to escape by racing back down the stairs, but the Gestapo men were fitter and faster than me. A driver materialized on the scene, and the three of us got into the back of the red sports car. My rucksack was on my knees, with the rolled-up map of Le Havre sticking out of the top. The sun was still shining as we drove onto the Pont de la Concorde. I decided to snatch out the map and throw it into the Seine. But as soon as I began to move, my captors pushed me roughly back into my seat.

When we arrived at the Gestapo's headquarters, located in the offices of the Ministry of the Interior in the Rue des Sussaies, I began to despair. My map disappeared into one of the offices. I waited all afternoon. The police didn't seem at all curious about me and the document I was carrying: they knew the whole story already. In the evening, the Gestapo men reappeared and held a murmured conference, occasionally pointing in my direction as they talked. I gathered from the conversation that they were going to deport me to Silesia. Once more, we got into the elegant car, and I looked at the wonderful evening sky over Paris with the melancholy feeling that I might perhaps never see it again.

An unseen hand opened the heavy iron-bound door of the La Santé prison and closed it again behind us.

III. The French prisons

La Santé

In the prison reception area my watch was taken away from me and a list was given me to sign. To my horror, I saw that the name before mine on the list was that of my father. How had they managed to arrest him so quickly? And it was all my fault.

Men with pale faces, some of them clearly betraying fear, leant against the walls of the grey, dirty cell. It took all the energy I could muster to fight back the sense of despair which threatened to overwhelm me. As the hours passed, I began to hear the voices of men and women talking: at least there was some sign of life in this huge tomb of a prison.

Eventually the door opened with the loud rattle of a key turning several times in the lock, and a German soldier informed me that I was to be shot the following morning at half-past four. I was by no means surprised: I had been engaged in military espionage, and the normal penalty for that was death. I also now understood why the Germans had not interrogated me. But the prospect of dying at twenty — or at any age for that matter — is difficult to accept. I had no desire whatever to become a martyr. Why, I asked myself, had I not simply got on with my studies, keeping well clear of any trouble? But on the other hand, as I told myself a moment later, it would have been entirely wrong to surrender to the enemy — especially this particular enemy without putting up a fight. Although I was as yet unaware of the full extent of the Nazis' crimes, I rejected Nazism utterly. There was just one more night to get through. I tried not to think of my mother and how desperately worried she must be; instead, I endeavoured to see myself as simply one more small cog in the machine of the war which was shaking the world to its very foundations.

The great clock of the La Santé prison struck every quarter of an hour. That night, time seemed to stand still. At about three o'clock I knelt down by the iron bedstead and began to pray. I said one Hail Mary after another, the only prayer which seemed suitable for the occasion, since it ended with the words 'in the hour of our death.' All other thoughts were extinguished as I concentrated on fighting back the fear which gnawed at my bowels.

Half past three, a quarter to four, four o'clock, quarter past four, half-past four ... I was waiting for my executioners, having combed my hair and smoothed down my skirt. Nobody came. Quarter to five, five o'clock ... and still nobody arrived. At about seven o'clock, the prison began to stir. At last the door of my cell opened. My heart was thumping in my chest. But all that happened was that somebody brought me a cup of coffee. I began to

realize that this time, at least, I had been spared. Either my death warrant had been countermanded, or I had been the victim of a standard procedure for demoralizing new prisoners.

In old prisons like this one, the lavatories in the cells — the 'Jaruzel', as it is called in today's prisons in Poland — consisted of only a hole in the floor with no flushing device. In order to speak to your neighbours, you had to lift the wooden lid and stick your head inside the hole, watching out for the lumps of excrement in the water. Using this means of communication, I often spoke to Dédé, a young and militant Communist of seventeen or eighteen. He was an exceptionally brave boy with a wonderful sense of humour, as lively as a pack of monkeys and twice as cheeky. It was the third time he had been arrested; he was in a cell on the second floor, in handcuffs. But Dédé was a skilled metal-worker who had been working in factories since he was twelve, and using a piece of wire from the broom used for sweeping out his cell, he had managed to make a key which would open his handcuffs. As soon as the guard had done his rounds, he would have the handcuffs off in a trice. He had made another key for the prisoner in the next cell, smuggling it in by hiding it in a pile of dust and rubbish. On one occasion he had briefly caught sight of his neighbour while his cell door was ajar. 'Tall, fair-haired, distinguished-looking, a proper intellectual,' was his description of the man. 'We'll call him René,' he suggested. René was a high-school student who whistled one Brandenburg Concerto after another, all day long.

Dédé had broken off one of the flaps in the ventilation outlet of his cell and suggested that we do the same. He would jump up like a cat, grab hold of the bars on his window, just below the ceiling, and entertain the two of us by telling us a constant series of jokes and stories. He succeeded in making contact with 'Auguste', an older Communist of whom we were very much in awe. All we knew about him was that he was a former plumber from Paris who had fought in the International Brigade. One after another, Auguste and his comrades had been dragged before an examining tribunal and come back to their cells, condemned to death. They were waiting to be executed, with no indication of when the sentence would be carried out. Every evening Auguste climbed up and spoke to his comrades through the ventilation system, particularly addressing the younger members of the group. Time and time again, he told them what a normal thing it was to die for the freedom of one's brothers and sisters, that noble causes often demanded the sacrifice of one's own life, that their deaths as martyrs would encourage others to take up arms against the Germans, and that their country, France, was worth dying for. These stirring words deeply moved me, and I added a silent, heartfelt prayer for each of these young people. It was the first time I had encountered real live Communists. And these people were supposed to be materialists? I was quite astonished.

Very early one morning, several cell doors were opened at once, with a loud rattle of keys. From each of the cells, interrupted by the shouting of the guards, came the sound of voices singing the 'Marseillaise'. Then the whole prison fell silent. We never heard Auguste's comforting voice again.

Dédé resolved that the prisoners in our 'corner', as he called it, should not go meekly to their deaths; instead, he proposed that we should make one last desperate attempt to escape. His idea was to use the cover of a stormy night, when the noise of the rain would prevent the sentries from hearing us. René, whose cell was at the end of the corridor, was to lure one of the guards into his cell, knock him down, take his key and open the cell doors of eleven prisoners. The rest would be child's play. Dédé provided a club, patiently removing one of the legs of his iron bedstead, which was to be conveyed to René's cell by means of the 'sock'. This was Dédé's personal goods lift, which he had made using one of his socks and a rope manufactured out of odd bits of cloth. One unforgettable evening he had used the 'sock' to lower down to me two pieces of buttered spiced bread from a food parcel sent by his mother. This time it would contain the leg of the bed, which had to be manoeuvred into the ventilation outlet of René's cell. The problem was that it had to be lowered past the cell of another prisoner who could not be let in on the secret. This man, who had been arrested for selling flour on the black market, and whom Dédé had christened 'The Miller', had shut himself off in his cell in the hope of getting remission for good behaviour. This escape plan was foiled by the fact that several of the people involved were transferred to other prisons: the women were taken to Fresnes.

Dédé and René remained in their cells on the second floor. Meanwhile things were looking bleak for René, and Dédé decided to try and escape with him via the roof. Every evening he would lower the 'sock' with the bedpost down to René's cell so that René could saw a bar out of it, kicking up a rum-pus in his own cell in order to disguise the noise of the blunt hacksaw. The guards intervened several times until they finally realized what was going on.

The two boys were beaten until they were half-dead and then handcuffed hand and foot. After several days of trying to get at the food which had been deposited in tin containers on the floor, they were both struck down with fever: sweat poured off them, mingling with the urine and excrement which seeped through their clothes. A week later they were rescued by being transferred to Rennes.

René was shot four months later. His real name was Lucien Legros, and he was a lycée student from Paris. Dédé survived Schirmeck, Dachau and the typhus which he caught in the last days before the liberation of the camp. His real name is Désiré Bertieau and he is now a professor at a technical university. 'Auguste's' real name was Raymond Losserand. A street was later named after him in the 14th *arrondissement* of Paris where he lived.

The cries and groans of the prisoners in the cells adjacent to mine filled me with horror. They would come back from interrogation sessions with swollen and sometimes dislocated limbs. I was terrified by the prospect of being interrogated myself. I had dreamed that they might question me in my own cell, which they sometimes did, bringing in a table and a typewriter. In my dream, I had tamed and fed one of the rats which scurried around in the sanitation system and hidden it under the washbasin, throwing in the faces of the Gestapo men when they entered my cell.

However, my interrogation took place in the Rue des Saussaies. Somebody from my group had talked. The Gestapo knew almost everything. Instead of going to London, my intelligence reports were sitting there on the table. In addition to the map of Le Havre, a notebook with a sketch of a street in Chantilly had been found in my possession. In this street, the ambassadors Aberz and de Brinon lived in two large mansions directly facing each other.

There had been a plan to have the two of them assassinated by the Resistance. I had simply entered the initials A and B on the map of the street, in the assumption that if anyone asked me about the notebook, I would easily be able to find some innocent explanation of what I had been up to. But in the interrogation room, my mind went completely blank. All I could think of was the names of the two ambassadors, and I realized how easy it was to betray information unintentionally. The tone of the interrogation sessions became increasingly unpleasant, but to give the man questioning me his due, no violence was used. His name was Weinberger. One thing I did resent, though, was the fact that he had stolen my father's brand-new radio, which was sitting in front of me on his desk. Who was the person who had betrayed us? This question was finally answered after the end of the war as a result of the detective work done by a female comrade, the anthropologist Germaine Tillion. All the men in our group, apart from my father, who was deported first to Buchenwald and then to Dora, met their deaths in Mauthausen. Germaine Tillion's mother, who had been arrested at the same time as us in August 1942, was interned in the so-called 'Youth Camp' at Ravensbrueck and sent to the gas chamber at the beginning of March 1945. Germaine was absolutely determined to find the traitor in our midst, just as she had been determined, before our arrest, to discover the identity of the person who had betrayed the 'Musée de l'Homme' group. It eventually transpired that the traitor was a young clergyman from Luxembourg, the vicar of the parish where the Tillions lived. He had offered his services to the German counterintelligence service: he had a number of expensive mistresses and needed money. I never found out exactly when the matchboxes with the microfilms landed in the Rue des Saussaies. Father Allesch was condemned to death after the war and executed in 1949.

Another thing which I only found out after returning to France was that the small anti-Nazi group to which I had belonged and which had been smuggling military secrets to London was part of an intelligence network which called itself 'SMH Gloria', SMH being the initials of His Majesty's Service spelt backwards. In 1941-42, the expressions 'reseau' (network) and 'Resistance' were unknown to us. We simply regarded ourselves as part of a group of people who were engaged in 'certain activities'.

Fresnes

On 13 October all the women from La Santé are due to be transferred to the prison at Fresnes, a suburb south of Paris. The dream of escaping together recedes into the distance. I am furious and decide immediately to escape on my own, under cover of the confusion caused by us all arriving at Fresnes together. I shall use the plan hatched by Dédé: the next morning, when the wardress opens my door for me to sweep out the cell, I shall lure her into the cell on the pretext that there are bugs in the bed. And then I shall creep up behind her and give her a mighty whack on the head with the handle of my brush (which happened to be made of a very hard wood). The idea is merely to put her out of action, though — I don't want to kill her. I shall stuff a piece of cloth in her mouth to stop her from screaming, take her key and her white uniform blouse with the German eagle on the breast pocket, carefully lock the door behind me and walk calmly to the gate.

The following morning, the clock strikes eight, half-past eight, nine o'clock, nine-thirty, and nobody comes to open my cell door. The waiting is unbearable. As I stand there behind the door, with my brush in one hand and the gag in the other, my courage begins to ebb away. Do I really want to go through with this? Fear gnaws at my nerves. At last the key turns in the lock and a wardress of indeterminate age appears. She readily allows herself to be lured into the cell to look for bedbugs. I quietly close the door behind her in order to shut out the inquisitive gaze of potential onlookers. She bends over the bed, an ... bang! ... I hit her over the head. But the blow

1 Although De Gaulle used the word 'Resistance' in his broadcast of 18 June 1940, the word did not pass into common parlance until after the liberation of France. The underground broadsheet published by the opposition group at the Musée de l'Homme in Paris was entitled *Resistance* from 1940 onwards, at the suggestion of the museum's librarian, a Protestant woman from the *département* of Drome who remembered that the word had been scratched on one of the stones of the Tour de Constance in Aigues-Mortes by the Protestant women incarcerated there by Louis XIV.