

# **AUS RUSSLAND ZURÜCK**

**10 years in the life of ARMAND BUNDT**

*Some pains are not ours, and to want to share them nevertheless  
just makes them more difficult to endure.*

*To help us keep the memory.*

*With my very best thanks to LON LINDO for his invaluable help for translation and editing.*

## PREFACE

"Aus Russland zurück" is the title of an article dated June 5<sup>th</sup>, 1949, in the now defunct Alsatian magazine "CIGOGNES." It was conscientiously kept by my grandmother, and later by my mother, and now by me, as a true relic of the tragic misadventure that WWII was for my father.

I say misadventure because, as for so many youngsters of my father's generation, war has been a heroic adventure, maybe difficult and dangerous, but a true adventure, which exalts them and leaves imperishable memories. For my father, on the contrary, this period of the war beginning in September 1939 to his return from Russia in May 1949 –almost ten years of his life- was a real drama, the consequences of which he carried all his life.

He came back from Russia in May 1949, but I can say that he left in Russia a part of himself. All his life, much of his behavior, his attitudes or his anger could be traced to the irreversible effects of those few years. His reactions, as well as his fascination and repulsion for both Germany and Russia, only can find their explanation in that experience. Even his insatiable appetite, his total respect for bread or his incapacity to throw away any leftovers of meals, even if out-of-date, find their origins in the hunger he suffered during these years. His approach to life has often been dictated by the lessons he learned during these terrible years. One look in his workshop, full of scraps and spare parts, all kept like treasures is enough evidence of his passion for conserving resources. One can also consider his ability to "jury-rig", or to solve problems by unusual methods as further evidence of the attitude he acquired during his war tribulations.

As far back as I can recall, I remember my brothers' and my curiosity for that period of his life. He only related to us his story by scraps, keeping some secrets until his last years of life. He told us quite willingly some episodes, almost always the same; but complete periods remained hidden. He told some other members of the family some facts he never wanted to tell to his children, and which I ignore.

His death, after a long illness, definitely imposed a silence on that painful episode; during the last days and months of his life, a lot of memories came back to the surface, and troubled his sleep and then his long agony. Even in these moments, he could not or would not share them.

For a long time I hesitated to relate these events, at the risk of keeping old wounds open. It might have been wiser to let these memories blur slowly and to leave in our memories only imprecise traces of a forgotten story. Wiser to leave to my children only scraps of their grandfather's past and to definitively wipe off the events that determined his destiny. But witnesses of the past are the pillars on which the future is built. This is why one must dare to write and relate, not to judge, but to explain. Our own story does not belong to us; we prepare it for our children. Exactitude of the facts is not as important as perpetuating the memory of my father; he who was for me a castaway of History.

I have written down these events from recollections I have of his stories. For the few last years, I wrote down his stories, whenever he talked a little longer than usual. Three or four times, mainly on the occasion of some important events –the death of a member of the family, or one of his long stays in America or in Africa- he happened to relate longer episodes of his story. Of course, I was burning to take notes, but I knew he would have immediately stopped talking. So each time, as soon as I left him, I tried to write down, as fast as possible, everything I could remember of what he told me.

So there are probably some errors amongst these memories, sometimes because my father himself mixed up names or dates, sometimes because I myself was confused or made wrong interpretations.

I have also voluntarily enlarged the frame of that story, without limiting it to the strict period of the war and captivity. I have completed my father's story with historical elements connected to his own experiences: explanations of the political, military or cultural context, comparison with similar experiences of other "Malgré-Nous<sup>1</sup>", cross-checking with different archives. For this, I did a lot of research at the National or Departmental Archives or at the National Library in PARIS, METZ and STRASBOURG. Because of the short delay since these events (less than 100 years), I had to get special permission to consult some rare documents, most of the others remaining unfortunately inaccessible.

Some investigations that could seem simple to handle caused in fact many difficulties. Information like the simple numbers of the units to which my father was posted was simply not available. My father probably remembered the numbers or names of the main regiments he belonged to, but he never gave me this information. Thus, I had to find his military file at the WAST in BERLIN, the archive office for the members of the Wehrmacht. Unfortunately all these units were completely destroyed during the different operations, and with them their entire field registers, like, for example, the regimental logbooks. Thus, I only could find some information by investigating the German Federal Archives (Bundesarchiv-Militärarchiv or Deutscher Suchdienst), where some details are available about the divisions to which these regiments belonged. The division headquarters, because of their relatively protected position behind the lines, could often save their archives, although these are usually less detailed than regimental logbooks.

Of course, I found a lot of information in the various books published on this subject, and in the testimonies of other "Malgré-Nous." I was able to find some other "Malgré-Nous," whom I surveyed about their own experiences. I was also able to find one survivor of a camp where my father was, but no survivors of the battles my father participated in. Lastly, all the descriptions of the political German organization, the composition of German units or precise details of military operations, notably the BAGRATION operation, could be found on German, American or Russian Internet sites, on which much information about WWII is available.

Information about POW camps in Soviet Union was much more difficult to find. No file relative to ARMAND could be found among the thousands of POW files handed by Russia to France after 1990 (the "Malgré-Nous" files are managed and studied by the Haut-Rhin Departmental Archives). While numerous books are available about the Gulag, almost no documents about POW camps in USSR are available. However, a university institute in Austria did important research on the subject and it was by that means that I was able to get statistical information about these camps. It was also through this institute that I could get some research done on the Russian Archives about the camp of CERPOVEC, and that I was able to get some rare but expensive information...

Lastly, a very recent discovery helped me to correct several points I had taken about this history. I was lucky indeed to find two precious documents: the report of ARMAND's questioning by the Director of the Repatriation Center of KEHL, made on the same day as ARMAND's arrival in France (May 22, 1949); and an informational note established by the Renseignements Généraux (Intelligence Service) based on this interrogation. I had to apply for a special authorization to get to these still classified documents. They do not bring much more information; but, more contemporary to these events than the late accounts of ARMAND, they bring fresh information about dates, places and memories, which became hazy with the years. Dates of his transfers between different camps, of which ARMAND had no recollection, all come from this document, where they are precisely mentioned.

I also added to this account some details, most of which I learned from my father, about the story of my grandfather that I regrettably knew so little of. This story, too, is worth being known and not forgotten. My father and my grandfather both had to struggle with Germany and Russia –and with France during the post-war period. And though my great-grandfather MARTIN BUNDT, born in 1863, certainly was too young to have been a soldier during the

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1. "Malgré-Nous": literally "against our will". Name given to the Alsace and Lorraine nationals enlisted by force in the German armies during WWII, and by extension during WWI.

1870 war, I would not be surprised if his own grand-grandfather MARTIN, born in 1791, would have been a veteran of NAPOLEON'S Old Guard, and would have fought on the same edges of the BEREZINA that ARMAND did 132 years later...

Another MARTIN BUNDT, nephew of the precedent, went to Mexico and died in the 1863 campaign of Emperor MAXIMILIEN, and thus traced the way of those who, in our family, went one after the other to fight under flags that were not theirs...

When I arrive at the decline of my life, I will be turning back to throw a glance over the life which I will have lived, I fear to see only very few things that I could be proud to tell to my children. My father and my grandfather, though, like numbers of their ancestors, left behind them the history of a life built around a painful experiment that marked their whole existence. I should maybe be happy to have the chance to be exempted from these experiments, where the sufferings and misfortunes drown the joys and happiness. But these sufferings modelled their lives definitively, and I somehow have the impression that our own lives, so quiet and so banal, are not completely whole...

It is strange to note that often survivors of these wars return home wishing only "never again," while their own children, who avoided these sufferings, only dream to experience them when their turn comes... For me, I do not regret not having lived them, but not having shared them... Although I know that to share these sufferings would not have made them easier, because suffering is the only feeling in the world which, when shared, remains always as painful and heavy...

## CHILDHOOD AND YOUTH

ARMAND GUSTAVE BUNDT was born on the 18th of September 1924 in METZ. A native of the BITCHE County and more precisely from LAMBACH, how did he come to METZ?

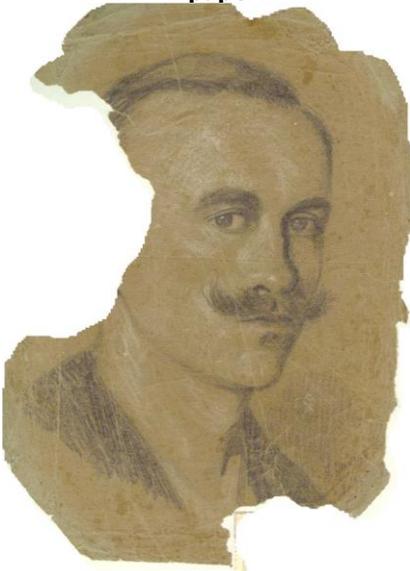
**JEAN –ADAM,  
German soldier in 1914:**



His own father, JEAN-ADAM, the eldest of nine brothers and sisters, was born in 1894 in LAMBACH, in a family of workmen and small farmers. At that time, a good part of the local population works " Im Müntztahl ", in the factory of Saint-Louis Crystal, which employs more than 3.000 people. JEAN-ADAM begins his training there as a glasscutter, then as a glass engraver. The work is hard: after getting up at 3:00 AM, JEAN-ADAM meets his colleagues from SIERSTHAL, LAMBACH or ENCHENBERG, who walk to work through forest paths (over 7 miles each way). After ten hours of daily work, they return home. But the workday is not finished; it is now time to work in the fields...

The 1914 war suddenly ends that hard school of life. Drafted into the Prussian Army, in the 131<sup>st</sup> Infantry Regiment, called Lothringischer (Lorraine) Regiment – Lorraine is part of Germany since 1871 – JEAN-ADAM, by nickname "D'r HANS ADAM" or "Le SCHENGELE<sup>2</sup>" arrives in East Prussia, and very soon is on the Russian front in the 3<sup>rd</sup> Company of Infantry Regiment 97. On the 10<sup>th</sup> of October 1915, he is wounded during close combat in the trenches, and is sent to the Reserve Hospital of HELMSTEDT. He leaves the hospital on October 30<sup>th</sup> 1915 and rejoins the 97<sup>th</sup> Regiment in MÖRCHINGEN<sup>3</sup>. Then, with various units, he covers the battlefields of RUSSIA and PRUSSIA, where he finally is captured in August 1918 by British troops.

**Charcoal portrait of JEAN –ADAM,  
drawn by one of his trenches'  
fellows on a combat ration packing  
paper:**



A few days before the armistice in November 1918, still in captivity, he is severely wounded by his English guards. He spends several months in a military hospital, then in a prison camp in LONDON, and is finally freed in March 1919. He is not immediately demobilized: he is first sent back to his regiment in Silesia, then spends three more months in a military hospital in LIEGNITZ, in Oriental Silesia, and is finally demobilized in June 1919. He stays a few more weeks in a camp in STRASBOURG, where demobilized Alsace and Lorraine natives are regrouped before being reintegrated into the French nationality. He comes back home in August 1919, an invalid of the war, his right arm completely stiff<sup>4</sup>, and unable to return to his

former job as a glasscutter.

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2. Literally "Little Johnny".

3. According to the mains archives of military hospitals in BERLIN.

4. JEAN-ADAM, who died in 1965, had his right arm bent and completely paralyzed, as a consequence of a bad elbow wound... ARMAND related what happened: while his father was in the English prisoners' camp, in the very last days before the armistice, English guards regrouped some prisoners and aligned them in front of a

At the end of the 1914-1918 war, Alsace and Lorraine come back to the bosom of FRANCE. JEAN-ADAM, like all Alsatians and Lorrainers, is "fully reintegrated in his rights of French citizenship," as indicated in his military file, established in 1924. The "Malgré-Nous" of WWI are treated a lot better than those of WWII will be treated. France tries to facilitate reinsertion of the former annexed populations; JEAN-ADAM, with a 50% disability, gets a "reserved employment" as a railroader in the French Railroad Company, at the railroad station of BITCHE.

Married in April 1921 to ANGELIQUE METZ, one year older than he, and also a native of LAMBACH. JEAN-ADAM is soon transferred to the Railroad Depot of THIONVILLE (near METZ), where he rejoins his brother-in-law SEBASTIEN METZ, a railroad man like him. Living at first on Romain Drive, than Sarrelouis Drive in BASSE-YUTZ, the family soon grows with the birth of ERNA in 1922, ARMAND in 1924, and MATHILDE in 1926.

JEAN-ADAM's handicap causes him many difficulties in his job. Since, because of his stiff arm, he is unable to ensure his own safety during the maneuvering of trains, he finally resigns to ask for his own demotion to the grade of brakeman, with a lower salary. Despite that, the family slowly improves its lot. Salary and disability rent progressively allow buying some furniture, and finally they are able to buy a house on Kuntzig Drive in HAUTE-YUTZ, just next to SEBASTIEN's housing. The family moves in July 1930.

SEBASTIEN loses his wife in 1933; his son ANDRE is only 5 years old. From now on, ANDRE will grow up in the BUNDT family, becoming for ARMAND the brother he did not have. ANDRE and ARMAND will keep for all their lives a very strong relationship, stronger than friendship.

ARMAND likes to talk of his easy and pleasant youth. Family pictures of those years show a happy and close family, with numerous friends. The official status of JEAN-ADAM guaranties him certain stability, and allows him to go through the 1929 depression without major problems. As a railroad man, he gets free train tickets, which allow him to send his children for summer holidays with his family, in BITCHE, LAMBACH or ENCHENBERG. On their arrival at the railroad station in ENCHENBERG, they are met by their uncles or aunts who pick them up with their ox carts. With their numerous cousins they spend the summer's months helping in the fields or caring for the cattle. The family is not rich, and hungry youngsters assault the dinner table; but everybody gets healthy and natural food. JEAN-ADAM and ANGELIQUE both come from families with nine children and innumerable cousins. ARMAND tells in a joke that in the morning, the last person up "only gets the grandmother's bra to dress up," since all the other clothes had already been given out!

ARMAND will tell a lot of his boyhood memories, which will remain for him among the most beautiful days in his life.

In 1936, he is lucky to come with his father to the harbour of LE HAVRE; they come there to meet KATHERINE ILLIG, wife of JOSEPH ILLIG and sister of ANGELIQUE. JOSEPH (JOE) had left for the States in 1912, and so far never came back to France, to avoid to be enlisted in the Army for the military service. Her son VICTOR accompanies KATHERINE. The little boy is

**JEAN -ADAM BUNDT  
and 14 - 18 War:**

Eingezogen 11.8.1914, 4. Komp.  
Ersatz Depot, Infanterie Rgt 131  
Am 9.10.1914, 3. Komp,  
Feldregiment 97.  
Am 9.10.1915, Reserve Lazarett in  
Helmstedt. Am 30.10.1915, zurück  
zu Regiment 97 in Mörchingen.  
Dann: 10. Landsturm Inf.  
Ersatzbataillon Magdeburg (IV 28);  
Inf. Rgt 369, Inf. Rgt 329  
Am 24.8.1918 in englische  
Gefangenschaft  
Am 4.3.1919 zurück nach Grenadier  
Rgt. 6 in Liegnitz.  
Vom 13.3.1919 bis 19.6.1919 Res.  
Laz. Liegnitz  
Entlassung 28.6.1919

The disability certificate mentions:  
Musketier im Aufl. Kdo, Ers.  
Bataillon Gren Rgt Graf Kleist v.  
Vollendorf I Westpr.; "Folgen der im  
Nahkampf erlittenen  
Knochenverletzung"

Wounded in Action Medal in 1928

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wall, hands over their heads, to shoot them for an unknown reason... One after another, they shot the prisoners in the neck. But, completely drunk, they missed JEAN-ADAM's neck, and shot him in the elbow of the right arm raised over his head... JEAN-ADAM always kept from this episode an easily understandable Anglophobia, which certainly explained much of his later attitudes and convictions.

one year older than ARMAND, and the common summer games will make them friends for life.

In JUNE 1938 he passed his basic school certification, and started, in November 1938, a three year apprenticeship in the SIMCA garage of Mr KIEFFER-MULLER in THIONVILLE. In several months, his work will be to take apart and to fix cars requisitioned by the Germans.

## THE 1939 EVACUATION

The 1939 war threatens... Very close to his parent's house in YUTZ, a little airfield is installed, and ARMAND admires French aviators in training. He soon will be fifteen, and the coming war promises to be a great adventure...

But reality will be much different. For several years, French authorities have prepared an evacuation plan of the border counties, those of the front area, called "red zone", between the German border and the Maginot line, but also of some areas behind the line. Even before the war declaration and general mobilization on the 1<sup>st</sup> of September 1939, all the zones near the border must be evacuated. Although situated further behind the red zone line, the town of THIONVILLE, with its industrial installations and its rail junctions, becomes an important target for the Germans Bomb Squadrons. Therefore, French authorities have prepared a partial evacuation of the switchyard. Railroad workshops are transferred with men and materials to BORDEAUX. JEAN-ADAM and SEBASTIEN are transferred with some other colleagues to TOURS<sup>5</sup>.

JEAN-ADAM, who fears for his family whose house is only a few hundred meters away from the airfield (which is bombed as early as September 1939), does not want to leave them there alone. The second wife of SEBASTIEN worked some time ago for a Parisian lawyer who owned an empty house in OUCHAMPS, some twelve kilometres from BLOIS. The lawyer agrees to lodge the BUNDT family, as well as ANDRE and his stepmother. The family abandons the house in YUTZ, and heads for TOURAINE. They will spend several months there, which will be, despite the tragic circumstances, a prolonged vacation for the BUNDT children. Every weekend, JEAN-ADAM takes a bike ride to meet his family.

On the 10th of May 1940, after over eight months of "quiet war" called "la drôle de guerre", the German offensive is launched. Thousands of retreating soldiers and civilian runaways jam the roads to the south of France. Total evacuation of THIONVILLE is decided the same day, and the inhabitants of YUTZ clutter up the last trains to LA ROCHELLE. The BUNDT family in TOURS is a helpless witness to this disaster and to the signature of armistice at the end of June 1940.

At the end of August, German authorities, now new rulers of Alsace and Lorraine, call the evacuees to return to their houses. The railroad company, now under German control, sends the transferred workers back to YUTZ. So the BUNDT family returns home; JEAN-ADAM alone for the first time with the rest of the family, after a quite incredible journey through all of France. In YUTZ, the house is almost intact among the ruins; but one must now learn to live under the new German rules.

## THE FORCED CONSCRIPTION

Immediately after the annexation of Alsace and Lorraine, German authorities endeavor to Germanize the conquered lands. However, to keep legal appearances, it is done step by step.

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5. See Appendix 1.

According to international regulations, annexation is an illegal action, in violation of the armistice conventions. To avoid this, Germany proceeds progressively...

For the beginning, political structures based on the Party are installed. The country is divided into areas, searched, and political executives are gradually put in place. All persuasive means are used to bring people to adhere to German ideals. Notably, veterans of WWI are tugged at their heartstrings: there still is in JEAN-ADAM's old files a letter in which he is invited to rejoin the veterans association of his former Prussian 97<sup>th</sup> Regiment. Finally, as early as June 1949, JEAN-ADAM is appointed, perhaps willingly, as "Blockleiter", and then as "Zellenleiter"<sup>6</sup>.

Did JEAN-ADAM shameful defeat of long before that date: growing up German, even one word of veteran, it was to feel himself German campaigns and his Anglophobia definitely brothers-in-arms. will, he accepts his adheres to the NSDAP

If many people German as early as blamed for being German Alsace-opportunity to to the French muddle, understandable in after being in the years, are in many compared to other social security; level of comfort; and, not the least, upholding of the concordat<sup>7</sup>. On top of that, the accelerated return to French rule of Alsace-Lorraine had been accompanied by overzealous measures<sup>8</sup> hardly accepted by a population legitimately proud of its heritage.



become pro-German with the France? He probably was born of German parents, speaking German (and not French), and a Prussian Army absolutely legitimate for him rather than French. His WWI easily understandable attach him to his German Half-willing, half against his assigned functions, and (Nazi) Party.

become definitely anti-1940, others can not be Germanophiles. Born in Lorraine, they had the compare the German efficacy and their preference is easily 1940. Alsace and Lorraine, German bosom for over fifty ways much more advanced regions of France, such as:

This dilemma is clearly illustrated in JEAN-ADAM's family, where among nine brothers and sisters, some rally the to the German and others to the French camp, yet not causing any quarrel between them<sup>9</sup>.

Once Nazism had clearly taken over, the choice of some for German affiliation was revealed to be the wrong one. But it then was too late... It notably seems that JEAN-ADAM and his family, profoundly Catholic, came to deal with terrible dilemmas as soon as the Nazi ideology showed in its true light. But repressive measures were already in place to avoid any change of attitude. Thus, one should not judge with hindsight the choices made in 1940 circumstances!

Notice should be made too that membership to the "Opferring"<sup>10</sup> (name of the Nazi Party in Alsace) was obligatory for all state officials, which was the case for JEAN-ADAM, a railroad

6. Blockleiter, Zellenleiter: block leader, unit leader.

7. Separation of state and church took place in 1905, making France a secular state at a date when Alsace and Lorraine were German. Upon their return to France in 1919, the former status of concordat remained valid for those two regions, and actually still is, as opposed to all of the rest of France.

8. As for example the fact that the certificate of reintegration in the French nationality was to be paid!

9. As an example the case of JOE (mentioned above) who easily bristled as soon as someone talked to him as being from his native country France. For him, he was German in 1912 when he immigrated, and he remained German! For nothing in the world would he accept to be considered as French. The memory of the behavior of French custom officers at his crossing of the French-German border (in NANCY!) still made him upset!

10. Literally "Circle of Sacrifice".

man in the State Railroad Company. In Alsace and Moselle, the function of "Ortsgruppenleiter<sup>11</sup>" was more or less honorific, and to ensure their total submission, Nazi German officers doubled most of Alsatian and Lorrainer Ortsgruppenleiters.

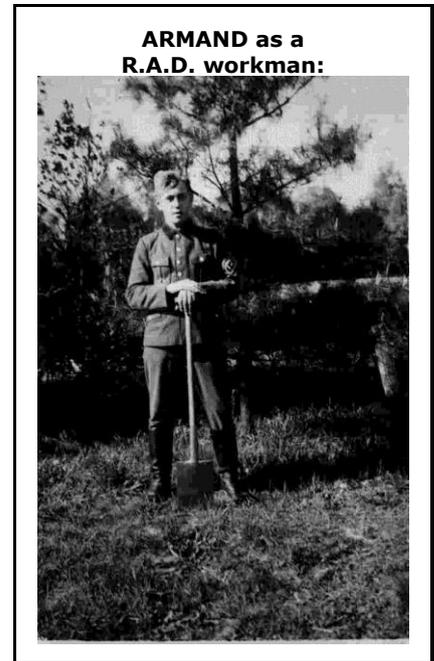
Progressively, under the efficient Nazi steamroller, the BUNDT family takes its rank in the new organization. ERNA, who just was about to pass her French teacher exams, cannot continue her studies, because now they are given in German... She resigns to abandon her job, and starts to work as a secretary in the THIONVILLE railroad station. She also assists her father in the administration of his Ortsgruppe. ARMAND, like all youngsters aged 10 to 18 years, joins the Hitlerjugend, and ERNA joins the B.D.M., the "Bund of Deutscher Mädeln<sup>12</sup>". MATHILDE on her side joins the Red Cross, and is appointed to the hospital of ALGRANGE, where she will work until 1944.

But Germanization had to go further... Like in the rest of the Reich, Alsatians and Lorrainers are called as early as February 1941 to volunteer for the R.A.D., "Reichsarbeitsdienst", the work duty of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Reich. This is not a neutral measure: at the R.A.D., youngsters are put under oath, and thus pledge their affiliation to the Reich...

At first, only volunteers are called, and recruitment campaigns are organized all over the country. But this appeal soon appears as a bitter setback, as well in Lorraine as in Alsace<sup>13</sup>, and Nazi authorities are forced to make R.A.D. service obligatory. Thus, with the first enlistments, in the summer of 1941, violent incidents immediately take place, and several of the unwilling conscripts are sent to the prisoners' camp at SCHIRMECK, near STRASBOURG...

In the beginning, the Army Command avoids recruiting these R.A.D. levies for the Wehrmacht. The German Army is still quite mistrustful of these "new Germans of the West Marches," as their new designation calls them. Experience of the last annexation left bad memories: a lot of the forcibly enlisted Alsatians and Lorrainers during WWI had an anti-German attitude, and there were very many cases of insubordination and non-compliance. But at the end of 1941 and beginning of 1942, the need of men becomes daily more important, mainly on the Eastern front where forces move forward into conquered territories and need more and more occupation units. Thus, voluntary recruitment campaigns for the R.A.D. soon give way to recruitment campaigns for the Wehrmacht. But not much comes out of these campaigns, even though German propaganda tries to hide the small numbers of recruits...

German authorities hesitate: the Gauleiters want to accelerate germanification, but political spheres fear the bad effects of an eventual forced incorporation. Finally, in August 1942, the ordinance making military duty obligatory for the 1920 to 1924 levies is promulgated, regardless of all international laws. That forced incorporation does not go through without complications: forced enlisting in the R.A.D. certainly went against Francophile sentiments, but involved no risks of life; but forced enlisting in the Wehrmacht now involved the risk of giving your life for a country which is not yours. Thus, a lot of violent demonstrations take place all over the two departments, mainly at enlisting formalities and train departures. Very soon, there are more and more violent episodes, and more and more clandestine border



11. Civilian Community leader.

12. League of German girls, equivalent of the Hitlerjugend.

13. Germanization (Gleichschaltung) of Alsace and Lorraine was attributed to two Gauleiters (region leaders, one for Alsace, one for Moselle), who had certain latitude to organize it, and who took different means at different speeds to set it up. The Gauleiter of Alsace was much more "Germanic" than his colleague from Lorraine, and this among other reasons explains why there were less "Malgré-Nous" in Moselle than in Alsace.

crossings, sometimes for very important groups. These usually end in shootings, arrests, deaths, and, from the beginning of February 1943, with the first court-martials and executions in the first French concentration camp at STRUTHOF.

During all that period, the dragooning in the Nazi political system continues. JEAN-ADAM is forced to accept, in May 1941, his nomination as Ortsgruppenleiter of YUTZ, in place of his former chief of staff, dismissed for embezzlement. ERNA becomes "B.D.M. Führerin", chief of the B.D.M., the "Bund der Deutsche Mädel".

ARMAND, now 16, changes his "Hitlerjugend" uniform: he becomes "Fähnleinführer," i.e. leader of a company of the "Deutsche Jungvolk"<sup>14</sup>. A picture shows him in his black winter uniform, with the sewn-on badge of the "Westmark" area, and with the white rune (which is half of the SS rune) worn by the DJ's in place of the Hakenkreuz armband of the HJ. He wears on his shoulder the white-green Kordel of "Fähnleinführer", and has the "Fartenmesser", the DJ dagger issued to members who have fulfilled their leadership tests. JEAN-ADAM does not hide his pro-German penchant. His soul is German, and he will stay German. Soon after the events of MERS-EL-KEBIR, he shows his Anglophobia<sup>15</sup>. But his submission to German authorities starts to show some weaknesses. He continues to assume his duties diligently. He does not refuse to wear the black Ortsgruppenleiter uniform, but avoids entering the spiral of exaction and violence of the regime. Despite all accusations based on rumors and gossip, testimonies in his 1947 trial will be eloquent: he does not stop anybody from speaking French, although he suggests caution; he does not force anybody to do the Hitlerian salute, but there too, he sometimes recommends caution. Several witnesses will confirm that deportations of Francophile families will immediately stop with his nomination as Ortsgruppenleiter.

Thus, the risk of being insubordinate at ARMAND's official incorporation becomes evident. Caught in his own trap with his grade of Hitlerjugendführer, son of a local notable, his eventual draft dodging would have had dramatic consequences for him and his family. Even though ARMAND, didn't actually sign up voluntarily, he probably was not uncomfortable completing his R.A.D. duty. But, there is no doubt that the first serious military setbacks on the Russian front and the dramatic defeat of STALINGRAD made him wary. This surely led him to envision his desertion from the Army, not because of anti-German feelings, but more likely because of inevitable war risks! But the merciless repression set in place by Nazis as from 1943 is strong enough to dissuade anyone tempted to try insubordination...

It is true that the ordinance about "Sippenhaft", (i.e. the whole family of a deserter becomes legally and collectively co-responsible and is immediately deported to Germany) will only be promulgated in October 1943, and could not –theoretically– effect ARMAND's decision to respond to his enlistment. But in fact, as early as February 1943 –exactly the date when ARMAND is drafted– there are massive escape attempts by draftees. The draftees and their families are immediately punished by expulsion and deportation. Important publicity is made of these events to ensure their dissuasive effects. ARMAND notes as an example the case of his direct neighbors, deported after desertion of their son. That example dissuades him but makes him jealous to do the same...

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14. The DJ, the "Deutsche Jungvolk" is the junior branch of the HJ, with youngsters aged 10 to 14. The DJ is organized in "Jungzug", (platoons) with their "Jungzugführer" leaders, aged 14 to 16, and in "Fähnlein" (companies) with their "Fähnleinführer" leaders, aged 16 to 18, coming from the "Hitlerjugend". The "Fähnleinführer" was the local DJ leader in villages and small towns; in larger communities, the leader was a "Jungstammführer" responsible for several "Fähnleins".

15. One of his accusers in the files of his 1947 trial reproaches him to have said the following words in 1942: "you are pro-English, but you make a mistake if you believe they will come save you!" (In the MERS-EL-KEBIR harbor, on the Algerian coast, English Air Forces bombed the French fleet to prevent it from being used by the collaborationists).

## THE REICHSARBEITSDIENST

ARMAND, born in 1924, should have been drafted with his class in October 1941, in his 17<sup>th</sup> year; but at that time he continued his apprenticeship as a mechanic. Thanks to his boss MR KIEFFER, German authorities allow him to defer his induction for six months, in time to finish his contract. The deferment ends on the 30<sup>th</sup> of September 1942, and allows him to get his apprenticeship certificate. He also passes his driver's license in October, but, at the date where his deferment should normally end, it is postponed again: in the meanwhile, the 1914 to 1910 musters have been called in their order. (Older than his class, they should not have been incorporated, as they already had passed their duty in the French Army. But the need for men and the defeat at STALINGRAD will send thousands of former French soldiers under the Nazi flag).

ARMAND is finally inducted on the 18<sup>th</sup> of February 1943, in the R.A.D. camp of OSTBEVERN, not far from the cities of OSNABRÜCK and MÜNSTER, in northern Westphalia.

The camp is situated north of the town, close to the AA River. Days are spent landscaping the banks of the river, and digging trenches, but most of the day is devoted to training, drill exercises, shooting, and sports. Very few souvenirs are kept from that period, except the final certificate<sup>16</sup> and a few pictures: assemblies, exercises with a shovel (R.A.D. is supposed to be a civilian and not a military unit, hence the equipment does not include a rifle, but a shovel), and also swearing-in ceremonies.

## WITH THE WEHRMACHT TO RUSSIA

The R.A.D. duty, initially six months long, is now shortened to three months, as the need for men becomes dramatic: the STALINGRAD defeat for example costs the German Army over 70,000 KIA and 91,000 MIA (of which only 6,000 will come back!).

Back home in YUTZ on 10<sup>th</sup> of May (he remembers it clearly: it was a sunny Sunday...) he enjoys a short furlough. He takes the opportunity to get some pictures made in his new Wehrmacht uniform; he also makes some pictures with the whole family. Although it is not the time for victorious departures: the fates have already turned on the German Army, and the anxiety for the coming unknown grows. ARMAND does not know yet that he will only see his family again in six years...

He is incorporated into the Wehrmacht on the 16<sup>th</sup> of May 1943, into the Assault Squadron of the 176<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment (ID #1960, Sturmkompanie, Grenadier Ersatz Battalion 176), and is on the 18<sup>th</sup> of May already in HEILSBERG<sup>17</sup>, in the former Oriental Prussia<sup>18</sup>. The journey was made in special trains, and the meal for the three days trip consisted in one loaf of German bread and a sausage! In HEILSBERG, the classes only last three weeks!

On the 6<sup>th</sup> of June 1943, -he is not even nineteen years old-, he is in Russia: transferred to the 206<sup>th</sup> Reserve Infantry Regiment, then further transferred to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Company of the 162<sup>nd</sup> Reserve Infantry Regiment (Res. Gren. Batl. 162), he immediately is posted to

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16. Reichsarbeitsdienst Entlassungsschein: "Hermann BUNDT, geboren am 18. 9. 1924 in METZ (Westmark), war vom 18. 2. 43 bis 10. 5. 43 Angehöriger des Reichsarbeitsdienstes. Er wurde am 10. 5. 43 nach OBERJEUTS Kreis DIEDENHOFFEN Künzigerstrasse 21, entlassen.

17. Actually the town of LIDZBARK-WARMINSKI, in the northeast of Poland, approximately 60 miles south of the city of KÖNIGSBERG (KALININGRAD).

18. Alsations and Mosellans are almost systematically sent to the Russian front and are generally incorporated into the Wehrkreis I, the 1<sup>st</sup> Military Region, the Prussian one, the closest to Russia. There are some rare cases of incorporation in the Afrikakorps, in the Kriegsmarine or in the Luftwaffe, but almost none into German forces elsewhere, this to prevent desertions to Allied Forces. From February 1944 however, all Alsatian and Lorrainer "Malgré-Nous" will be systematically enlisted in the Waffen-SS (and not in the SS), which explains the frequent confusion according to which Alsations and Lorrainers all were SS.

"Partisaneneinsatz", the defense against partisans, and to the surveillance of the railroad track that joins MINSK to SMOLENSK<sup>19</sup>.

The months spent at the defense against partisans are, in fact, the real training and drill periods for the young recruits. The need for combatants is so dramatic that training can no longer be made behind the lines, but is made in real combat conditions.

The headquarters of his company are in MOLODECNO, 31 miles north of MINSK. The 50 man company is in charge of the surveillance of a 5.5 mile section of the railroad, in the middle of woods and swamps. At both ends of that section there are two wooden forts, in which the main and secondary personnel camps are installed with fifteen men each. Between the two personnel camps, two more forts cut the railroad into three sections of 2 miles each. The main fort is secure: water-filled ditches, barbwire fences and mine fields. During day, the tracks are surveyed from watchtowers and from bunkers, where two soldiers wrapped up in blankets take a two-hour watch. Also, little traps are set in the sector. During the night, from 5:00 PM to 6:00 AM, men have to check the security by patrolling the tracks, one walking one side on the way up, and the other side on the way back, the other staying in the bunker. On each patrol, the sentinels change passwords each time they pass each other. During the night, the walk is difficult on the ballast: all the rails are built on top of an embankment, to allow the snowplows to push the snow off on both sides. The guards, perched and backlit on top of these mounds, become perfect targets... The two hours seem so long when you are alone in the night and when Ivan can spring at any time out of the dark! ARMAND tells that, during those terrifying nights, he clenches one hand on the trigger of his gun, the other on his rosary in his pocket...



Fortunately, traffic on the rail to SMOLENSK is quite important, even in the night. It helps to fill the long guard stands, but it becomes very tiring to roll on your stomach each time a train passes, as instructed: sabotage is frequent! It is so frequent that a train has to sustain over a hundred explosions each way! The sides of the tracks are real cemeteries of destroyed wagons and locomotives... To try to counter the saboteurs, Germans put in the front of the train, empty wagons, supposed to trigger off the explosions; then, when the partisans delay the explosions, the Germans vary the number and the positions of the empty wagons. During the day, the men of the company rest or train in the main fort. They sleep, eat, maintain their weapons, chop fire wood and practice shooting on all sorts of guns (French light and Russian heavy machine guns, riffles, mortars). Small groups (twelve men, one sergeant) stay on alert, feet booted, belts buckled, guns and grenades ready. But at the front, logistics are almost unable to reach the units, especially with the constant destruction of the railroads. ARMAND says: " we had barely enough to eat: although too much to die, but not enough to live..."

Among his comrades, he does not know any Alsatian or Lorrainer compatriot. He happens to meet some during his several transfers, but he never really has opportunities to talk with them.

The " Partisaneneinsatz" lasts from June to December 1943; in the mean time, he is again transferred to the 6<sup>th</sup> Company of the 206<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment. Very few details are available

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19. That means at the very front of the German advance in Russia. A letter from these days, with which his commanding officer sends all his personal papers back home, is dated "O.U, 18. June 1943", postal sector 44 480 C. The letters O.U. are for "Orts Unterkunft", which means that they are barracking on the population.

about that period; but according to cross-referenced information of the WAST archives and regiment logbooks<sup>20</sup>, ARMAND stayed from June 1943 to December 12<sup>th</sup>, 1943 with the 206<sup>th</sup> in "White Ruthenia," and more particularly in the area centered on SMOLEWICZE, a few miles north of MINSK, and in the area of DEMIDOV, east of VITEBSK. On December 12<sup>th</sup>, he is transferred to a marching battalion to reinforce Feld Ersatz Batallion 6, but this unit is soon dismantled. At Christmas, ARMAND enjoys a furlough (probably in place, perhaps in MINSK?), and is then transferred to the 3<sup>rd</sup> company of Grenadier Regiment 37, in which he will stay until his capture. He remembers it well; he is back in his front-line bunker on 1<sup>st</sup> of January 1944, at 5:50 in the morning...

## THE RUSSIAN FRONT

Arrived in his Infantry Regiment, he soon is promoted to Gefreiter [private]. He has only a few memories about that period, and only gives some sparse details. ARMAND mainly tells about the difficulty of finding food, and how, with his comrades, they beg some eggs in the Russian villages by trying to mimic hens laying eggs...

For his equipment, he has the K98 rifle with 20 cartridges in a pouch. He is a good marksman, and sometimes uses the new semi-automatic sniper gun, although he is not posted as sniper. Sometimes he also is posted as loader for the heavy machine gun, the famous MG42.

The winter is hard, but unlike other badly equipped units, his regiment recently received fur lined clothes, as well as the "Tarnanzug", the white reversible camouflage battle-dress. ARMAND tells how less lucky soldiers wear straw-woven boot covers that they soak with water: the freezing water builds a protective coating over the shoes...

ARMAND remembers that he has quite a long furlough in April or May 1944. During this time he happens to hear through a radio communiqué that the front has been pierced exactly at the point where his unit was stationed just prior to being relieved... When he comes back from his furlough, he is unable to find his regiment, which has been lost in the turmoil (or has been transferred to another battlefield). He is sent to a replacement unit, assembled from survivors of dismantled or lost companies.

ARMAND will never say anything about the fighting during the months he spent here. This battlefield was one of the bloodiest of the East Front. He only evokes the haunting memory of his comrade who runs in front of him during an assault, and who suddenly is killed by the explosion of a grenade... He will never forget the soldier's scream and his terrified eyes when he sees his gaping chest just before collapsing...

Why will ARMAND never say anything about these battles, while he will more willingly talk about his captivity? Are the reminders of those fights so terrible? The question has no answer...

## LETTERS FROM THE FRONT

Only three letters, among the many ARMAND sent home from the front, are still kept in the family archives. ARMAND numbered them, and only numbers 36, 51 and 54 survived. Did others never make it to their destination, or did they get they lost? ARMAND only relates

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20. "WAST": German office established to collect all information about WWII soldiers, mainly to help solve KIA and MIA cases. See bibliography at the end of the document.

insignificant details: does he want to avoid worrying his parents with dramatic elements, or does he fear censure? Probably both...

The first of those three letters is dated the 19<sup>th</sup> of May 1944, and is sent from "In Erholung" [from his furlough position, not far from the battlefield]. Since the beginning of 1942, numbers of Alsatians and Lorrainers take the opportunity during furloughs at home to desert and not go back to the front. Hence, the Army Command is reluctant to grant further furloughs to the "Malgré-Nous," and rather organizes "Erholungslagern", rest camps behind the lines.

ARMAND relates his timetable: naps, walks in the country and reading. Is it because he needs rest, or because there is nothing else to do? He also details his menus: "Erbsensuppe, echter Bienenhonigschmierer, eingemachten Kirschen"; pea soup, real honey –not ersatz-, candied cherries.

In the second letter, with an unreadable date, he relates that he received a "Führerpaket für die Grabenkämpfer," a Führer parcel for the trench soldiers supposed to improve soldiers' moral. The parcel contains some sweets, biscuits, chocolate, fruit jelly, and cigarettes. ARMAND also notices that there is "Urlaubssperre" again, no furloughs allowed...

The third and last letter is sent from "Im Osten," "from the Eastern Front"... ARMAND tells how they write these letters, hidden in the trenches or under the tent, by the light of a "Hindenburglampe", a small candle supplied to the soldiers. He relates: "Monday afternoon. I hasten to write this letter, since I do not have much time left. We are packing, without knowing where we are going." The letter is dated the 19<sup>th</sup> of June 1944, the day before the huge offensive of the BAGRATION operation, during which he will be captured with thousands of comrades, victims of the greatest defeat of the German Forces. That letter will be the last sign of life from ARMAND for many years, and the date of June 19<sup>th</sup> will be used as the official date of his MIA status.

**ARMAND is transferred to Grenadier Regiment 37, in the 6<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division made of following units:**

Grenadier-Regiment 18  
Grenadier-Regiment 37  
Grenadier-Regiment 58  
Artillerie-Regiment 6  
I./Artillerie-Regiment 42  
Füsilier-Bataillon 6  
Panzerjäger-Abteilung 6  
Pionier-Bataillon 6  
Nachrichten-Abteilung 6

Commanding Officer of  
66th Infantry Division:  
Gen.Lt. **Walter Heyne**,  
from 01.06.44 to  
19.06.44

His command will last  
only the time of the  
BAGRATION operation,  
which ends in the total  
dismantling of the  
division.

## DER KESSEL VON BOBRUISK

How long does ARMAND stay on the front? In what conditions? He does not give many details, but the battle on this front line position will last over six months. SMOLENSK falls into Russian hands in September 1943, but the front at BOBRUISK will resist a lot longer. From the end of December 1943 to the beginning of summer 1944, the front remains quiet, sometimes without even one shot. The units take this opportunity to refill their ranks decimated by the previous battles. New officers, young recruits and veterans fill up the squads in preparation for the inevitable return to battle.

The contact line between Russians and Germans is made up of several fronts: in the north, the LENINGRAD front; in the center, the Baltic front and the Byelorussia front; and then, in the south, the Ukrainian front. On that line, the Byelorussia front stands roughly 90 miles out to the east, forming a pocket, which represents an obvious danger for the Russian forces. This pocket, with in its center the town of BOBRUISK, goes towards the east, up to the two towns of VITEBSK and GOMEL, on the edges of the DNIEPR River. By order of HITLER, the three towns have been equipped as "Fester Platz", i.e. fortresses, with a solid defense made of an imposing system of forts and bunkers. The entire Byelorussian front is held by the Center Army Group of Fieldmarshal BUSCH, whose defense plan covers 155 miles.

After the June 1944 OVERLORD landing operation in Normandy, Soviets estimate that the Western Front is sufficiently holding back German forces: HITLER has been forced to send to Normandy several divisions that nevertheless would have been necessary on the Eastern Front. Thus, STALIN decides to launch a general offensive on the whole front; it will be the terrible "BAGRATION<sup>21</sup>" operation. Several weeks beforehand, diversion attacks manage to convince Germans –and mainly HITLER– that the main offensive will take place further south, on the north part of the Ukrainian front. HITLER considers that, on that part of the front, penetration of the Russian forces into the German lines is deep enough indeed to be used as a good assault base for an attempt to pierce toward west. That "maskirovka", or diversion operation, fulfils its goals perfectly: the Soviets' attack beginning on June 19<sup>th</sup> (exactly the day ARMAND writes his last letter) for several days is considered by the O.K.W. (Oberkommando der Wehrmacht) as a diversion to the real assault that will take place in the south. This dramatic mistake will cause HITLER to refuse to call the reinforcements that might have stopped the coming disaster.

In that Byelorussian world of deep woods and insalubrious swamps, several hundred thousands of partisans permanently weaken German forces and attack their communication lines. The "KORMORAN" operation launched by the Germans in mid-May against partisan groups ends the long silence of the previous months. From now on attacks and destruction will not stop, and the permanent guerrilla warfare lowers troop morale.

On June 19<sup>th</sup>, partisans receive orders to intensify their attacks and their sabotage of the supply lines<sup>22</sup>. Then, on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of June, Soviet troops launch offensive reconnaissance actions to determine precisely the contact line. And finally, on June 23<sup>rd</sup>, at 5:00 in the morning, the biggest artillery barrage ever known starts; its goal: to break German first and second resistance lines.

On the southern front, the 9<sup>th</sup> Army, commanded by General JORDAN, holds a field section that goes from the banks of the DRUT River (an tributary of DNIEPR) to the PRIPET swamps. In the middle of this plain, the XXXVth Army Corps of General WIESE covers the BOBRUISK town. In the very front of the plain, the 6<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division of General-Leutnant HEYNE occupies the battlefield between the edges of the DRUT and of the BEREZINA, close to the town of SLOBIN. In the first line, in the middle of the swamps, is the 37<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment, and, in its ranks, ARMAND, is set up in trenches and bunkers.

In the face of the 9<sup>th</sup> German Army, the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Byelorussian Groups, commanded by Army Generals ROKOSSOVKIY and ZAKHAROV, align on a 180-mile long front from POLOTSK to BOBRUISK, with strength and armor twice that of the Germans. It is 124 Soviet divisions against 63 German divisions, 5,200 tanks against 900, 30,000 heavy guns against 10,000, and 600 planes against an almost non-existent Luftwaffe.

In the beginning of the offensive, the German front resists and stands; but very soon, on the night of the 23<sup>rd</sup> to 24<sup>th</sup>, Soviets succeed in piercing the front in two places: in the upper north, near VITEBSK, and in the south, at the junction of 9<sup>th</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Army, occupied by 134<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division. Despite a fierce resistance, Germans units are overwhelmed, and the breakthrough expands. Very soon, VITEBSK is almost surrounded, as is the XXXVth Corps in the south. But Marshall BUSCH refuses to withdraw the threatened forces; HITLER, for his part, refuses to evacuate the overrun zones: the fortified towns must be held without discussion...

The Russians do not hesitate very long: they now have the opportunity to trap the enemy in a pincer movement. VITEBSK is surrounded on the 25<sup>th</sup> of June, and, in the center, Soviet Infantry Regiments rush towards the BEREZINA. Until the 27<sup>th</sup>, HITLER continues to believe that this attack is a diversion, and that the main attack is still to come further to the south. Stubbornly he refuses any reinforcement to the besieged units. Marshal BUSCH now begins

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21. From the name of a Russian general who fought against the NAPOLEON army 1807 in HEILSBURG. The close town of EYLAU, notorious because of important Napoleon's battlefields, was renamed in BAGRATIONOWSK by the Soviets.

22. In the only night of 19<sup>th</sup> to 20<sup>th</sup>, over 10,500 explosions of rails, roads and bridges.

slowly to believe his staff, and wants to move his troops back before it is too late. On the 26<sup>th</sup> of June, in the middle of the battle, Marshal BUSCH and General JORDAN take a plane and fly to HITLER's headquarters to try to convince him to withdraw to avoid a catastrophe... It is a waste of time: on the 28<sup>th</sup>, BUSCH is relieved of his command, and replaced by Marshal MODEL who until this time was in command of Army Group North.

But it is too late now: in the night of the 27<sup>th</sup> to 28<sup>th</sup>, Soviet armored forces cut the last road that would still have allowed retreat; all the attempts to break the encirclement fail, and the German counter-offensive is stopped by the air superiority of the Soviets. The trap is closed on what will be henceforth called "Der Kessel von BOBRUISK", the pocket of BOBRUISK, a zone of roughly 15 miles in diameter, at the east of BOBRUISK between the edges of the two rivers. The fighting is terrible; the mere 21-day life expectancy of a young lieutenant sent from his officer school to this part of the front proves to be longer than reality...

Almost 40,000 men are surrounded from all sides in the middle of the swamps, with neither provisions nor ammunition. Amongst them, men of the 37<sup>th</sup> and ARMAND... The Soviets crush them with no mercy: 10,000 are killed, 6,000 are captured. A very few commanding officers, simulating communications breakdown, disobey and take the initiative to attempt to break through the encirclement with their troops. They will be the only units to avoid capture and to succeed to flee to BOBRUISK. But unfortunately, the town is now also blocked to the south, and Soviet units achieve their junction on the edges of the BEREZINA: BOBRUISK is also surrounded, and the trains that try to escape from the town are bombed mercilessly!

HITLER at last sends reinforcement troops, including, armored units coming from the north. He also allows abandonment of the town... German encircled forces try to pierce again: code name of this last chance maneuver is "NAPOLEON", and the orders are simple: every man for himself... only 15,000 men will pass through Soviet lines, leaving behind 3,500 wounded comrades... BOBRUISK falls on the 29<sup>th</sup> of June. Soviets keep going ahead and rush towards MINSK, trying at the same time to dismantle the last resistance nests they pass on their run forward. German troops surge back in an indescribable chaos through the only remaining practical pass on the BEREZINA: it is at BEREZINO, the exact spot where NAPOLEON's pontoniers distinguished themselves during the famous Russian retreat... Thousands of vehicles and guns are abandoned on the banks of the river. Men fight to cross the river at any price, despite the continual air bombing. BORISOV is taken and, on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of July, MINSK falls into the hands of the Soviets after the flight of the last survivors' trains...

It is the end of the Army Group Center. Germans have lost 30 divisions; 17 others are only shadows of themselves. 350,000 men have disappeared: 200,000 have been killed in action<sup>23</sup>, 150,000 more have been captured. Half of them will die on the way to captivity, before even arriving at the camps... In the midst of the XXXVth Corps there is 70,000 killed and 30,000 prisoners, of which twelve are generals.

It is the biggest defeat for the German Army during WWII. In less than two weeks, the onslaught has destroyed more divisions and material than the STALINGRAD battle sixteen months before. However, after the victorious Allied landing in Normandy, which German authorities have tried to hide, and then to minimize to the eastern soldiers, these successive disasters are not yet tolling the knell of German Army. It will still find enough resources to hold on for almost one more year!

## THE LOGBOOK OF REGIMENT 37

The German Military Archives hold only very few documents about these events. The total destruction of the units and of the supply convoys (and among them those of the administrative services of the units) explain that not even a single report survived the battle.

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23. Soviets will have to form special units to bury the tens of thousands of bodies.

Regarding the 37<sup>th</sup>, nothing remains of the BAGRATION operation reports; but a two page typed record miraculously survived the disaster, and allows us today to learn something about these dramatic hours. It is a report about events of June 25<sup>th</sup> to July 1<sup>st</sup>, written a posteriori by Lieutenant IMSIEPEN of 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion of the 37<sup>th</sup>, probably on demand of his superiors:

"On June 25<sup>th</sup>, 1944 at 11:00 pm the Gren. Rgt. 37 left its position on the edges of the DNEPR River, at about 7 miles north of SLOBIN, and headed west. On the 26<sup>th</sup>, at about 9:00 am, the enemy made violent contact with us. The position assigned to the 37<sup>th</sup> was already partially occupied by the enemy before our arrival. Enemy flank attacks delayed the arrival of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion, and the contact line had to be held by only the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion. On this day the commander of the 37<sup>th</sup>, Colonel BOJE, was killed during a counterattack. But the position could nevertheless be held until the assigned time of withdrawal. On the 27<sup>th</sup>, the regiment took up a position near a little tributary of the BEREZINA, at about 10 or 20 miles east of BOBRUISK. At about 11:00 am the enemy attacked our position with overwhelming force, supported by fighter planes and tanks; the withdrawal order came at noon. My own radio gear was out of service, so I only belatedly learned about this order. The enemy encircled the left and right flanks of my company, and only a very few soldiers could escape capture. We succeeded in rejoining the main road to BOBRUISK. There I met the commanding officer of Gren. Regt. 18, Colonel HÖKE, who walked with his Battalion towards BOBRUISK, along the SLOBIN-BROBUISK railroad. All the division trains<sup>24</sup> were on the main withdrawal axis, together with elements of the 6<sup>th</sup> Art. Rgt and of 20<sup>th</sup> Panzer Division. The road was under Soviet artillery fire. In the afternoon, between 5:00 and 7:00pm, the enemy attacked the whole convoy with over 300 fighter planes. At about 7:30pm the order was given to set fire to all the vehicles. Everything was destroyed, including all of the equipment, tanks and guns. During night the remaining units forced their way onto the railroad bridge through the lines towards BOBRUISK. But in the early hours of the 28<sup>th</sup>, the bridge was put under Stalin Organ fire [tube-fired rockets]. The enemy blocked the main road to MINSK, but he did not succeed in entering the town. On the 29<sup>th</sup> of June, at 3:00am, the main part of the 9<sup>th</sup> Army (6. J.D., 36. J.D., 134. J.D., 383. J.D., 20. Pz. D. er 297. J.D.) made a sortie in force out of BOBRUISK toward the west. There were 5 generals with us. I have not seen any more of General HEYNE, commanding 6<sup>th</sup> Division, in BOBRUISK. The 37<sup>th</sup> was commanded by Captain RICHTER. While on this sortie, we still had as heavy weapons: 5 tanks of 20<sup>th</sup> Pz. Div., a few light armored vehicles, an anti-aircraft platoon with three 88mm guns, a 20mm anti-aircraft gun and one anti-tank gun. The enemy blocked the roads and the bridges over the railroad with tanks. On the 29<sup>th</sup>, the commander of 10<sup>th</sup> Company of the 37<sup>th</sup>, Lieutenant DORSTEWITZ, was killed; Lieutenant KÖSTERS of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Company and Captain SCHULTE commanding 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion of the 37<sup>th</sup> were wounded. At about 10:30pm the Division moved again, but the wounded were abandoned in the little church in a village; we then reached a little wooded area near the village of SLOBODA. This village was strongly held by the enemy. At about 12:00pm the village and a little way westward through the forests were under our control. Once again we lost many soldiers through the severe artillery and Stalin Organ fire as well as through the air attacks. The wounded could not be treated any more because of the total lack of medical supplies; we had to leave them there. The area was strongly infested by partisans, who encircled the swamps and the woods. At about 6:00pm the division again moved westward, and reached a little forest north of OSSIPOWITSCHI and west of the BOBRUISK-MINSK railroad. The column was very stretched out because of the exhaustion of the soldiers. Several exhausted soldiers refused to go ahead and stayed in place. For myself, I had been wounded in the throat by shrapnel, and I had a lot of difficulty breathing; thus I walked slowly and I lost contact with the regiment. In the afternoon of the 30<sup>th</sup>, some airplanes dropped first aid material, ammunition and gas. But the gas fell into the Russian hands. During the night we infiltrated with scout platoons toward the road to OSNIPIN-MINSK, and we were able to put in place a strongly held pass through the Russian lines. On the 1<sup>st</sup> of July at 5:00 in the morning our last tanks attacked a strong Russian support position west of the railroad,

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24. <sup>24</sup> Regiment or division trains: convoy of all the support units' vehicles (logistics, medical supplies, staff, etc). These units were still partially equipped with horse drawn vehicles.

and succeeded in opening a passing to the road. For myself, I moved with a group of six men in the direction of the road; I captured a Russian soldier and forced him to show us the way through the lines. But, while we were progressing, we suddenly met a powerful Russian assault group, and we were soon captured. Immediately the Russian soldiers took my boots, my rank stripes and my decorations, as well as my Soldbuch [Soldier's Handbook] and all my papers. The commanding officer of the assault group was a Lieutenant who spoke perfect German; he explained that we were not to be shot, but that we were to be sent to Russian plants to work. We had to sit down, and the guards remained all around us. Suddenly, at about 5:45am, combat noises rang out behind us. The guards turned in that direction and we immediately took the opportunity to escape. The shooting continued behind us, and we heard dogs tracking us. Further west we found a big cornfield, where we hid while continuing to move toward the road. We finally met and joined a column of marching comrades. I was still able to see a column of 100 or 200 German prisoners with raised hands guided by a Russian officer. We continued to walk towards MARINA-GORKA, and in the afternoon we finally met a protection unit in position just in front of the main road from BOBRUISK to MINSK. There were also at that place a few tanks of the 12<sup>th</sup> Pz. Div. We were ordered to continue walking towards MARINA-GORKA. Once there, we were loaded onto trucks which drove us to a little railroad station north of MARINA-GORKA; from there, we were sent by train to WIRBALLEN, through MINSK, MOLODECNO, WILNA and KOWNO. In WIRBALLEN the wounded were unloaded, deloused and transferred to several hospitals. The remaining elements of 9<sup>th</sup> Army continued to GRODNO where they were to be regrouped. For me, I was supposed to be sent to a hospital in TAPIAU near KÖNIGSBERG. But as all the hospitals were full, the reassignment group sent me to a hospital back home. From there, I then was sent to the Grenadier Ersatz Battalion 37 for the rest of the medical care. The troop received its last supplies on June 26<sup>th</sup>. From that date we lived on only cigarettes and swamp water. The food on the way to WIRBALLEN was very bad. I heard, but I do not know if it is true, that Colonel HÖKE and General HEYNE were killed. I did not see or hear anything of the 58<sup>th</sup> Rgt<sup>25</sup>".

The author of this report is sparing his words, but the extent of the disaster that destroyed the regiment cannot be hidden. The survivors of this catastrophe will be so few that the whole Division will be dissolved. It will be reconstituted in August 1944 in the SEENLAGER Camp, in Germany, from members of the Volksturm.

## THE CAPTURE

It is with the 37<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment that ARMAND learns about rout and capture. The regiment, in the midst of the 6<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division, takes a defensive position south of SLOBIN, after the difficult battles of the "ZITADELLE" operation near MINSK and the withdrawal back to GOMEL. It keeps this position until the beginning of June. Then the BAGRATION operation starts and, with it, the retreat to the edges of the BEREZINA. And then the end is signalled when BOBRUISK is surrounded ...

ARMAND only gives very few details about the circumstances of his capture. He remembers it well, but is reluctant to talk about these difficult days when, surrounded by the Soviets, he and his fellows try to hide in the moist and infested swamps, without provisions, with no place to rest. Permanently harassed by the enemy, they are forced to snatch some food from the few Russians peasants they meet.

With his platoon, ARMAND has to hold a position on the west edge of the DRUT, which serves as defense line. The men dig trenches and build small forts and bunkers. With his comrade, he has to take a support position with the heavy machine-gun: they install it on the piling of

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25. The third of the three Infantry Regiments of 6<sup>th</sup> Division, with the 37<sup>th</sup> and the 18<sup>th</sup>.

a destroyed bridge. In order to be quickly alerted of enemy movement, the regiment decides to leave a bridgehead on the other side of the river. They dig out around the piling so that it is surrounded by water. Then they install sandbags and bring food and ammunition to their position with a shuttle of little boats. And there they wait for the assault... But a sudden flood tide threatens the position, and they abandon it rapidly.

Very soon his unit is dismantled, and the leftovers of his company try to avoid capture in front of the Russians who have crossed the DNIEPR and cut the 37<sup>th</sup>'s lines near TELUSHA, in the middle of the route from BOBRUISK to SLOBIN. From early July, they wander between the edges of the two rivers, trying to avoid the Soviets who comb the battlefield and who search for the scattered German survivors. Their leader is a young Feldwebel, a sergeant who does not really know what to do, and who, despite having a compass, does not know which direction to go. The biggest problem is finding food. When they find an isba or a hamlet, they cautiously draw closer, and beg for some eggs, bread or milk. If the poor farmers refuse, the hungry soldiers use force... One evening, however, they luckily find the shells of a bombed convoy. In the burned out trucks they find some food, and even some bottles of French Cointreau, which they quickly shared. ARMAND also finds a cask of sugared molasses. He has no container to store it in, so he sticks some handfuls in the pockets of his backpack.

After a few days of roaming, and long sleepless nights on the swampy ground, the little group, disagreeing about the direction to follow, splits in two. Some want to stay with the Feldwebel; the others rally around a veteran, a simple corporal, who seems to have much better feel for this area of Russia. ARMAND, with eight other survivors, decides to follow the corporal.

It is now the 4<sup>th</sup> of July. The small troop stops for a few moments in a mossy glade, under some big trees. Weariness and discouragement overwhelm them all. The corporal is exhausted and sits down against a tree to rest a little. He takes off his helmet, and soon a shot rings out; the corporal is dead- a bullet between the eyes. Immediately Ivan appears from everywhere. Resistance is impossible, and the survivors raise their arms. The Soviets disarm them harshly, and smack several of them in the face. A gun butt swells ARMAND's lips; nobody dares to move under the blows and the screams. For several hours Soviets ill-treat them and threaten to shoot them. Their last pieces of equipment are stolen; pockets are emptied of knives, wallets, watches, pens, water flasks and other treasures. Boots and shoes are stolen, and soon equip the feet of the victors. ARMAND is barefoot, his wallet and the last pictures of his family are gone, as are his rosary and his watch. Then, under the screams of "Davaï, Davaï!" [Hurry up!], they are pushed toward the Soviet lines, where they soon meet dozens of other German prisoners.

ARMAND is captured on July 4<sup>th</sup> 1944, close to the little town of SLOBIN, about 30 miles southeast of BOBRUISK.

A few hours later, the Soviet soldiers transfer their prisoners to a guard squad. Very soon, they move on foot to a gathering zone, where more and more of their fellow prisoners arrive. After a while, the pitiful and disparate crowd is put on its way to the camps. It is the beginning of a 280 mile walk to the northeast, up to MOSCOW, following the MINSK-MOSCOW highway... The unending walk lasts ten days, with no shoes, no socks, nor even "Fusslumpen<sup>26</sup>": 15 to 25 miles a day, their feet blooded, and their stomachs tormented with hunger and thirst. ARMAND sucks the very last drops of molasses out of the seams of his backpack. Soviets shoot and finish off the stragglers who fall behind in the rear columns. Several times the miserable prisoners trample cadavers mashed in the mud and dirt: those who fell in the front of the column, and could not stand up fast enough to avoid being run over by vehicles or the thousands of prisoners' feet. ARMAND will later

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26. Rectangular pieces of cloth used as socks in the German army: the cloth was put on the bottom, and the four corners were folded over the foot.

say: "it was like mashed and half dried out hedgehogs on the street, except that they were human beings..."

Finally the survivors embark in freight wagons, and travel for three more days. Can one imagine what thoughts mull in the mind of these unfortunates who see their world falling apart around them?

They arrive in an apparently big city; they discover they are in MOSCOW. What are they going to do there? The guards push them into an overcrowded stadium, with several thousands of prisoners. They must stay on the lane, which is covered with coal slag and ashes; it is strictly forbidden to walk on the grass. The weather is beautiful and hot. Each prisoner gets an empty food can and a wooden spoon; some receive sackcloth espadrilles or rubber shoes. Field kitchens are installed around the lane; white clothed prisoners serve concentrated soup coming from American combat rations. They also receive still warm loaves of bread. After several days of with just scraps to eat, this menu is a real treat! But very soon, stomachs and bowels unused to this diet protest and the first cases of colic and dysentery appear. This will last several days; fortunately, the weather is not too bad, and everybody is able to sleep on the ground, using only a jacket as a blanket.

In the early morning of July 17<sup>th</sup>, a huge commotion wakes up every body in the stadium: guards gather prisoners by columns of 40 with 25 abreast (platoons of 1,000 prisoners!). There are uniforms of all types: infantry, artillery, Wehrmacht, Luftwaffe, SS. The Soviets are organizing a huge parade – which later will be called derisively by the Germans a "negative triumph" - of over 57,000 prisoners in the streets of MOSCOW, with, in front of the parade, over a hundred generals... ARMAND vividly remembers this pitiful march of thousands of ragged wretches, their faces black with soot<sup>27</sup>, holding their cans in their hands and dressed in all types of uniform scraps, some still barefoot. Behind them, pump tankers hose the streets to wash up the excrement. Hundreds of prisoners indeed are tortured by diarrhoea; it is forbidden to fall out of the column. Many pull their pants down; their neighbors hold them by the arms, and pull them forward while they empty out their intestines poisoned by violent colic. The spectators scream, throw stones and beat these poor creatures that Soviet propaganda has labelled "vermin." On a platform, authorities of several countries admire the rout of the German army, among them, several French generals who ignore the fact that in the middle of the parade many of their compatriots suffer with the German fellows...

A movie of this parade exists, made by the Soviets for propaganda. The thousands of prisoners do not seem to be really aware of what their destiny will be. Would we be able to recognize ARMAND among these thousands of crazed and desperate faces?

## CEREPOVEC

On the same evening, the guards break up the crowd of prisoners into several smaller groups. ARMAND and his group head to the railroad station where they are loaded in cattle wagons, destination unknown. Is ARMAND immediately transferred to CEREPOVEC<sup>28</sup>? Probably not- several clues may indicate that he passed through a first camp, probably a consolidation camp. But how long does he stay there? It is not clear. Generally, a Soviet unit with captured prisoners on the front line sends them to a consolidation camp determined by the Army Corps. If the battlefield near that place is relatively stable, the Army Corps does not move very much, and the prisoners stay there. If not, the Corps usually does not drag

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27. Soviet propagandists know their job: to give the German devils an appearance of wild animals, they kept them for several days in a stadium with coal-dust spread on the running track where they slept. With no water to wash the dirt off of their faces they quickly attained the desired untamed look to frighten the spectators...

28. Pronounce "TCHEREPOVETS". Why is ARMAND transferred to CEREPOVEC, while most of the other "Malgré-Nous" are headed to camp 188 in TAMBOW? Several other "Malgré-Nous" confirm that they are transferred directly to TAMBOW, at the end of the same parade. It will stay a mystery. Over 2900 soldiers captured during the Bielorussian battle are transferred to CEREPOVEC in June 1944. See Appendix 4.

the prisoners with them, and sends them immediately to camps behind the lines. Note that the Soviet Union did not sign the Geneva Convention; the treatment of prisoners of war is very harsh.

Almost everybody knows the famous novel "Gulag Archipelago" by SOLZENITSIN, that describes the Soviet system of thousands of working or reeducation camps dedicated to political or criminal prisoners; but very few know the existence of the equivalent "GUPVI Archipelago"... GOULAG comes for "Glavnoe Upravlenie Lagerej", which means "Central Service for Camps"; while GUPVI comes for "Glavnoe upravlennie po delam voennoplennykh i internirovannykh", "Central Service for POW and Interned". Besides the known archipelago with huge numbers of "civil" camps, there is a less known, but much more important archipelago with over 4,000 POW camps, established in 1941 all over Russia. Also notable is the fact that usually officers and enlisted troops are separated in POW camps. In Russia, many German officers were scattered in with their troops. Many of them had torn off their rank to avoid being recognized and brutalized by the guards. Hence, most of them ended up anonymous in the crowd and had to regain their privileges with quibbling.

CEREPOVEC is an important town, approximately 250 miles north of MOSCOW, on the edges of one of the huge lakes (the RYBINSK Reservoir) the VOLGA passes it on its way from MOSCOW to LENINGRAD and on to the Baltic Sea. Downtown, not far from the freight station, a "hospital" for POWs is installed in a simple residential building called "the white house," where actually only some beds and stretchers are installed. The hospital is known as camp #5091. There is a second POW hospital outside of the city, camp #3739, also called "the red Lazaret". Three miles from town, in the suburbs, there are two more POW camps called "das altes und das neues Lager" (the old camp and the new camp). The first one, camp #7437, is dedicated to political prisoners and to officers; the second, camp # 7158 (or 158), is the principle camp, crowded with over 9,000 prisoners. This second camp is also called, in the prisoners' vernacular, the "Todeslager," the death camp. Who needs more explanation?

ARMAND is first sent to the "old camp", das altes Lager. After his long stay in the hospital (das rotes Lazarett), he will then be transferred to the "new camp", camp 158.

ARMAND is sick, extremely weak; he is almost unable to work. He is posted to a kolkhoz, in charge of shovelling the snow. Sometimes he also has to cut wooden nails, used to nail shoe soles. Other times, he spends hours spinning the huge crank of an engine used to cut tiles out of wooden logs<sup>29</sup>.

Three times a day, the meals consist of the same half-quart of a more-or-less clear broth. On rare occasions, a precious vegetable (mostly potatoes, cabbage or carrots) floats on top of the brew. More often, though, nettles are on the menu. Nettles will forever be repulsive to ARMAND, although, thanks to their high vitamin content, they probably contributed to saving his life.

Roughly a half pound of bread is distributed with the soup. The bread is dark, heavy, and moist. Each end of the loaf was divided separately because it had an different consistency. Quite regularly, a pinch of tobacco and  $\frac{3}{4}$  of an ounce of sugar are also on the menu. Meals are served in the canteen, a huge wooden barracks with large wooden tables. Prisoners are organized in "Kompanien" of 10 groups of 10 men, eating in turns. The soup is served in all kinds of tins or cans, coming from all armies of the world. Some also use little wooden buckets manufactured by Finnish prisoners. Often, the food supply is late. During the first days of the month, the missing rations of the previous month are shared all at once. Then, during the rest of the month, bread rations decrease to less than a quarter of a pound a day...

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29. A confidential report about the CEREPOVEC camp, found after difficult research in the Russian archives, gives interesting details about the organization of the camp. It mentions that, because of the constant arrival of prisoners in 1944, the fact that this was a huge captive workforce was largely ignored. But later, to "avoid idleness" of the prisoners, many workshops were started for production of ropes or shoes, watch repair, basketry, etc.

Nothing is out of the question when it comes to supplementing this starvation diet. Theft is frequent, as are all kinds of "harvests." ARMAND often eats sorrel leaves rolled like a cigar, and chews them all day long. Sometimes, the labor "Kommandos" in charge of cutting heating wood discover a crow's nest. The eggs or a fledgling then end up in their backpacks, even if it is necessary to cut down a whole tree. Some prisoners even catch earthworms, clean and grill them... ARMAND also collects birch sap and uses it like honey on his bread. Water is also lacking: there is neither running water nor a well in the camp. Twice a day a Kommando party is sent to fill up big wooden tanks at the river, and pull them up to the camp with an old cart. The rest of the day, one must endure thirst...

A whole year passes like this, but this regime quickly saps ARMAND's health. Winter 1944-1945, the first winter of captivity, is extremely tough. Temperatures lower than  $-35^{\circ}\text{F}$  are frequent, but exemption from works only starts at  $-40^{\circ}\text{F}$ . The prisoners sleep on wooden slats, without even a straw mattress. There is only a thin rug as cover.

ARMAND'S only clothing is his uniform pants, shirt and jacket, as well as a cap. No underwear and no more shoes; all stolen by the soldiers! No socks either; he only saved what he calls his "pipes," the remaining ankle parts of his socks which long ago lost their soles. He manages to make a pair of sandals: wooden soles and two pieces of string. It is impossible to walk with them, but they are appreciated during the "prowerka", the roll call that takes place twice a day and lasts every time for several hours.

Like so many other prisoners of Soviet camps, ARMAND notices the total inability of Russians to have a roll call correctly count their prisoners. The counting –often made with help of an abacus- starts over again several times, always with different results. Thus, they last for hours, in summer and in winter. ARMAND tells how he soon learned, as did so many other prisoners, to constantly move his fingers and toes, without stopping for a second. It is the only way to avoid irreversible frostbite at  $-30^{\circ}$  or even  $-40^{\circ}\text{F}$ <sup>30</sup>.

There are two infirmaries in CEREPovec: one is used for the examination of wounded and sick, the other for the work aptitude tests. In the first one, where prisoners often come even without authorization of their barracks leader, medical care is given by a very friendly female

**Eat to survive:**

In his book "Five uniforms to win a war" Germain RUDY relates: " For breakfast we received a hot drink (tea made with plants) and a ration of a heavy, dark and moist bread, made with bran and buckwheat. For lunch a hot soup, clear, with some pieces of potatoes or cabbages, and sometimes some fish. A spoonful of cacha, a thick gruel of husked millet, completed the menu. A sacrosanct ritual managed the weighing of the bread. In a corner of the barracks a rudimentary but precise balance was used with a one pound brick, used as weight. The square shape breads were cut in eight rations each as close as possible to one pound. Once the 50 rations were cut, the crumbs were also shared in 50 parts. The two ends of the breads were distributed by turn, as they were more consistent than the other sides. It was the same thing with distribution of the soup. It was served in big wooden buckets; a prisoner kept mixing, and the thick and consistent bottom of the bucket was served by turns to the last ten prisoners."

Red Army doctor, and by a German medical orderly speaking perfect Russian. According to the prisoner's state, the doctor decides his work exemption, or eventually his transfer to the hospital. Bandages and care are relatively hasty. For the patients the only diet is... half the quantities of the usual rations!

In the second infirmary a medical commission led by the woman doctor regularly

visits the patients<sup>31</sup>. Prisoners have a quite significant expression for this visit: "die Archbackenuntersuchung": the buttocks examination... The prisoners go into the barracks , completely naked. The doctor pinches the ribs and the buttocks, and determines if they are flabby or well rounded: unfit or fit for duty. Once a month approximately the same commission gives an injection to all the prisoners. An injection of what, and what for? ARMAND has no idea<sup>32</sup>.

30. The survivor of CEREPovec mentioned in the preface has all of his toes amputated...

31. In his book "How many Russian soldiers did you kill?", the anonymous author also mentions this medical commission and the woman doctor.

32. According to experiences of other camps, probably glucose injections against avitaminosis and malnutrition.

On March 27<sup>th</sup>, 1945, ARMAND, underfed and physically completely exhausted, is transferred to the "Stadtlazaret," the POW hospital in town. For more than three months he fights dysentery; pleurisy atrophies half of his lung. Scurvy loosens his teeth; he tries to wedge them with little cotton pellets torn off his jacket. Food is even worse than in the camp, and medical care is non-existent.

ARMAND stays for several months under those conditions. He now has a water retention problem: his feet, legs, hands, and soon his whole body swell up. Of course, he worries about it, but at the same time he is relieved: as long as he stays in the hospital, he will be exempted from work kommandos. In the last weeks, more and more men do not come back from these wood-cutting kommandos, and ARMAND worries about having the same fate befall him. But the swelling increases every day. Finally, the doctor gives him some pills. ARMAND wants to keep avoiding the work kommandos, so he hides the pills rather than take them. After a few more days ARMAND's face starts to swell badly too, and he resigns to take his medication. His condition improves immediately; he does not stop passing water, but fears the diagnosis of good health. He is indeed declared healthy and immediately sent back to the camp, but, by coincidence, the wood cutting kommandos are discontinued at that exact moment..

Yet at the camp, the daily life continues to be a permanent struggle. Prisoners drop dead daily from the working conditions. ARMAND remembers well that, out of about 1000 patients, the least deaths in one single month were 13, the most, in the middle of winter, were 135! Quite often, in the morning, a fellow does not get up from his bed; he passed silently during the night, unbeknownst to his neighbors. Several patients die from unorthodox care: when, unfortunately, they faint because of their general weakness, the medical staff tries to resuscitate them by applying a camphor cataplasm on their mouth and nose; many of them die of suffocation. The bodies, completely naked, are simply thrown into the nearby swamps; their ragged clothes will be used by some other poor devils. In winter, kommando crews dig a hole with pickaxes in the layer of ice and throw the bodies in the water. If the ice is too thick, the bodies are piled up like logs, awaiting the thaw.

After a one-year stay in this hospital, his general state finally improves a little bit. He is declared fit to work, and is sent, on March 13<sup>th</sup>, 1946, to the "new camp," camp 158.

Every day is another fight against vermin:; ARMAND says they are literally rotten with lice. Idle moments are used to find lice in the hair, in the seams of clothes or in the blankets. There is also a huge population of bugs whose bites are terribly itchy. During the night they drop off the ceiling and crawl all over the bed. The inmates' only protection is to put a blanket over their face, but that traps the lice on them! The walls of the barracks are covered with "commas" made of all sorts of crushed bugs.

Approximately once per month prisoners are allowed to take a collective sauna. In the summer big buckets of cold water are thrown on them when they exit the steam room. In winter, the naked men roll in the snow. Their ragged clothes are also sometimes "disinfected." The clothes are tossed into a kind of autoclave where lice are supposed to be killed by the hot steam. More often it turns out that the chill kills the prisoners when they slip back into their wet clothes.

At the end of the working day, NKVD officers almost daily impose hours of political "antifascist" instruction called "Antifa." All this accomplished was to shorten the precious rest periods<sup>33</sup>. Severe interrogations of the prisoners are also quite frequent.

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33. A number of prisoners, and among them several general officers (as for example VON PAULUS, the General defeated in STALINGRAD) will adhere more or less to the antifascist theses. A lot of them will be the later staff members of the communist system in East Germany.

In August 1945, while ARMAND is in the hospital, suddenly a new problem arises in the camps: lists are to be made of Alsatian and Lorraine natives who will be regrouped in preparation for their repatriation. Unfortunately, at that time, ARMAND is in the hospital, deathly sick, unconscious and with a high fever. He lies in a bed in the corridor; the rooms and dormitories are over filled. Six days pass; when he finally wakes up one morning, he learns that the convoy of "Malgré-Nous" has left without him. He was considered unfit to travel.

After his recovery and his return to the main camp, another German prisoner, KARL, a fervent Protestant, tries to convince him to go to the camp authorities to explain his case: he is "Malgré-Nous" and he has missed the repatriation convoy. This behavior is quite exceptional for a German prisoner. Most of the German captives want to force "Malgré-Nous" to share the common destiny of German natives, and try to prevent them from being freed because of their status as involuntarily conscripted soldiers. ARMAND hesitates a while, then makes up his mind. He first presents his case to the camp chief – a former Gefreiter-, and then to the Soviet political commissar who welcomes him quite warmly. But it is in vain. KARL argues with ARMAND, and convinces him to try again. ARMAND tries it two more times, before being rejected harshly. After that, he decides to keep quiet.

ARMAND stays in CEREOVEC approximately two and a half years. It is quite easy to say "two and a half years," but can anyone imagine how long that would feel to a 22-year-old man living under these conditions?

## AN ADVENTURE WITHOUT EXPLANATION

ARMAND relates a quite strange and incomprehensible story...

He is a little unsure of the date: maybe near the end of 1945 or beginning of 1946. According to his description, it might actually be the spring of 1946, as the lakes are free of ice, but it is still freezing weather<sup>34</sup>. To explain this strange adventure, ARMAND personally believes in an almost miraculous intervention of Robert SCHUMAN, which will be described further below. However, these two dates are incompatible, as it is only during the second semester of 1947 that Robert SCHUMANN interceded for ARMAND, after a postcard had proven he was still alive. Thus, there is no explanation to this episode.

One day, several prisoners are called, gathered in different groups, put on a train, and sent to the unknown, each group accompanied by only one guard. ARMAND does not remember exactly how long he and his partners travelled; but he vividly remembers that he got an entire loaf of bread for the trip. Based on the usual one pound ration, this means that the journey probably lasts a full day and a full night. ARMAND's group arrives at a rather small camp, with very small barracks and only very few prisoners. He remembers the landscape: wide areas of water and swamps, but he does not remember the name of the camp<sup>35</sup>. With his group, ARMAND has to pull huge floating logs out of the water and pile them up on the embankment. Huge rafts made of timbers tied together with a kind of rope and pulled by little boats come down the river and dock close to the camp. The prisoners untie the timbers, attach them to a winch, and pull them up the bank. From morning to evening, with almost no food or rest, the prisoners work like slaves. They are wet from head to toe and frozen stiff (it is probably there that ARMAND catches the pleurisy that will cost him a lung). No change of clothes after work either; the men stay in their wet clothes for the night, and sleep with only a thin blanket.

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34. In his 1949 interrogation, ARMAND mentioned that this event took place in May 1946; i.e., only two months after he left the hospital.

35. Here again, the 1949 interrogation gives the name of the camp: SOKOL. This camp, known under nr 193, is about 125 miles Northeast of CEREOVEC, just north of VOLOGDA. The camp was on the edges of the KUBENSKOJE reservoir.

ARMAND affirms that it was impossible to survive more than a few days in these drastic conditions. He has a frightening quote: "These terrible working conditions were more inhuman than the fighting at the front or my capture. Even as a 20-year-old, I did not fear death any more but saw it as the only solution..."

Yet, only four days later, in the evening, a soldier –not a guard (ARMAND clearly remembers his uniform and his cap)- comes to get him at the camp. He calls for "GERMANN BUNDT<sup>36</sup>." The soldier takes him to the camp chief. Without further explanation, ARMAND gets a new loaf of bread, and is sent, still accompanied by the soldier, to the railroad station. The soldier takes his place in front of ARMAND in the wagon and tells him "Sadis!" (Sit down!), and accompanies him back to CEREOVEC.

During the way back, ARMAND tries in vain to get an explanation from his guard. It is only when they get back to the camp that he discovers that they are back at CEREOVEC. The soldier turns him over to the camp guards, and while they are waiting for the sergeant, he tells ARMAND: "Scora bouda domoï, you will soon be back home." All of the prisoners know that sentence; it was said so often, and it was never true. So ARMAND answers that he does not believe it; but the guard insists: "Da, Da!" And ARMAND is sent back to his barracks.

The story ends there. ARMAND did not go home, and never got an explanation for that brief trip<sup>37</sup>. Why did he come back so quickly from this work camp in which, according to his own admission, he would not have lasted very long under those terrible conditions? ARMAND even confesses that this episode was the only one during which he seriously considered suicide...

Was his return to CEREOVEC really due to the intervention of French authorities, who tried to get him free, and who only succeeded in getting him moved to a less severe camp? Did the Russian authorities decide by themselves to keep in CEREOVEC a man for whom release initiatives were on their way? This is the more probable explanation: Soviets changed their minds after they had sent ARMAND to this terrible camp, and decided to call him back, to avoid eventual incidents. But why didn't it go further? There is no explanation... And no explanation can be found in the several documents that describe the intervention of the French authorities.

The sentence "Scora bouda domoï" was a very common statement, given by the guards as an answer to all of the prisoners' questions. Did ARMAND, in this particular circumstance, give to that sentence an importance it did not have? Did he put in it more hope than it was worth? No answer here either.

Why does ARMAND belong neither to the September 1946 repatriations, nor to the December 1946 ones? There seems to be no explanation. At that time, over 15,000 "Malgré-Nous" were allowed to return home after the intensive research missions and negotiations of the French authorities<sup>38</sup>. After these massive repatriations, 40,000 are still missing. If one takes into account that the Wehrmacht officially records 20,000 KIA, this still leaves 20,000 MIA. The further events will show that only a very few of them will return home.

In his book "Five Uniforms to Win a War", GERMAIN RODY relates: " In my barracks there was a compatriot from a little town north of Alsace. He admitted that he had been the local Hitlerjugend Führer, and he still felt a bit proud of that fact. When the 1,500 "Malgré-Nous" were selected for return to France, he refused to negotiate for his return. He said: "I cannot renounce to my convictions. I am German, and I shall stay with them." Was this the case of ARMAND too? Is this a part of the explanation of his extended stay in CEREOVEC? Shall we ever know?

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36. ARMAND, upon enlisting in the R.A.D., like everybody else, had to Germanize his first name, which became "HERMANN". Once in Soviet hands, this name became "GERMANN", as the letter H does not exist in the Cyrillic alphabet and is replaced the letter G. This will not facilitate my research, as it is impossible to know under which name he was registered in Soviet files.

37. The report about the CEREOVEC camp mentions that SOKOL was until 1947 a subsidiary camp of CEREOVEC.

38. In his 1949 interrogation, ARMAND mentions that he never heard from any repatriation missions, or from any MIA research missions.

The different lists of repatriated "Malgré-Nous," published with names, dates and places of their captivity, show that most of them were freed as early as the second half of 1945. A majority of them were prisoners for only a few months. (Incidentally, it is interesting to note that many of them were captured on the 8<sup>th</sup>, 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> of May 1945. So actually, many were captured when they should have been considered demobilized after the cease-fire.). There are only some rare cases of "Malgré-Nous" who are still prisoners in 1946 (of course, along with of thousands of German prisoners). Why did ARMAND and some others remain in captivity that long? Did they stand trial for war crimes, for which penalties were much longer? It remains a mystery...

## LENINGRAD

On December 15<sup>th</sup>, 1946 ARMAND is transferred to another POW camp in LENINGRAD. The camp, with roughly 600 or 700 prisoners, is built into a huge hanger of a former industrial plant. Two annex camps (each one with its own sawmill) lodge approximately 70 prisoners. The camp is numbered 77-49, but it will change its designation several times: 77-49, 77-31, and then 77-11.

### **Camps in LENINGRAD:**

According to his interview in the "Cigognes" newspaper, ARMAND stayed in camp 7749 in LENINGRAD, and this camp successively changed its designation from 7731 to 7711. However, in a May 1949 letter, Ministry of War Veterans mentions ARMAND's transfer from camp 7749 to camp 7716... Although ARMAND never mentioned it, it seems indeed that he changed camps several times, staying however in the area of LENINGRAD. The DEUTSCHER SUCHDIENST, D. S. [German Research Service], established from the prisoners' testimonies an index of all the Soviet camps. According to this index, there were several main camps in the area of LENINGRAD, each having many annexes, so that there were several hundred camps or prisons near LENINGRAD. According to ARMAND's description, he mentions in his 1949 interrogation and in a comparison to the D.S. reports, it seems that ARMAND first stayed in the annex camp of WOLOSOWO (7749 rather than 7731), about twelve miles south of LENINGRAD. He then was transferred to KOLPINO (7716), in the southern suburbs of LENINGRAD, where several annexes of prisons or barracks, installed in former industrial buildings changed their numbers several times.

Why this transfer? There is no known explanation. It must be noted however that this transfer roughly coincides with the period in which his family was able to launch an official search through the French government. ARMAND himself believes these steps were the cause of his transfer.

This camp is nothing like with the previous one. ARMAND compares it more to military quartering, with barracks. There are two huge dormitories with 350 men each; there are military bunk beds, and no more wooden beds like in CEREPOVEC. Each man has a mattress, a sheet, a bolster and a blanket. There are seatless toilets, a big washroom with stone washbasins, and plenty of water. Meals are ample; often corn, sometimes curdled milk. ARMAND is dressed almost adequately: shoes cut from a tire, pants made of tent canvas, a jacket from a Soviet uniform. The camp has a library, and the prisoners are allowed to go to the cinema once a month. A prison theater troop and an orchestra have shows once a week.

ARMAND above all notes that deaths are very rare in this camp. It is the beginning of the way out of hell. But he does not know yet that he will stay there for almost eighteen more months...

Soviets indeed still have a tremendous need for labor; they slowly start to realize that the huge mortality of prisoners because of deplorable living conditions does not serve their interests. They start at the same time to release the useless malingers (sick and wounded prisoners), and to maintain better conditions in the camps. But work remains the priority: the YALTA agreements are put into practice, which give to the Russians the right to use the "German Labor Forces" as war compensation. At this time, most of the prisoner camps, inclusive those of officers, become "Rabotni Lager," work camps rather than prison camps.

In LENINGRAD, ARMAND will never see prisoner abuse. Soviet guards are strictly prohibited from beating or mistreating prisoners. But quibbling and fights among the prisoners themselves are frequent.

For the first time, ARMAND is posted to all sorts of construction sites; he is alternately carrying tons of concrete with buckets or wheelbarrows; or painting facades of the rebuilt city buildings.

On April 14, 1947, ARMAND is posted like most of the other prisoners to the construction of a big telephone exchange center. Dozens of wooden crates, over 2.5 yards long, arrived from Germany; they come from a dismantled telephone center in OBERGAU, in Bavaria. The prisoners, in teams of ten men, are supposed to unpack the crates and carry the heavy switches up to the different levels of the building, where other teams assemble them and try to get them working. The work lasts for weeks, but the center will never function...

One day, ARMAND climbs into the attic of the building; he hopes to hide there for some time and rest a little bit... But he is not the first one to have that idea: an older prisoner sits there, and writes a letter. ARMAND reminds him that camp regulations strictly forbid writing. The prisoner answers: "I do not keep these papers; I write to remember better. What I write on paper is written in my head..."

ARMAND also remembers another prisoner. He is quite old, and with two other fellows, he is in charge of some of the camp bookkeeping. One prisoner reads the numbers out of a register; another notes them in a second register. Before they are finished, the old prisoner has already calculated the total. He makes a strong impression on ARMAND for calculating faster than a computer...

One day, the chief of the camp –he is Jew, and speaks in Yiddish so ARMAND understands him quite well- asks for a locksmith. KARL<sup>39</sup> tries to convince ARMAND to volunteer. But ARMAND prefers the relative security and anonymity of the general population, and he refuses. But KARL insists and he goes by himself to meet the camp chief, and tells him ARMAND is a candidate! Although he is quite worried, ARMAND is officially posted as a "locksmith!" He gets a little workshop with rustic equipment: a small lathe, a grinding wheel, and a set of files. In a corner of the shop, a heaps of electrical and telephone cabinet locks and hinges await him: he has to fix them all... He also has to make little sheet-metal fire buckets. Very soon, this job proves to be providential; it helps ARMAND to rehabilitate and gives meaning to his prison life.

He gets a salary for his work: he is paid roughly 25 roubles a day. The camp deducts about 16 roubles for rent, food and cleaning! The rest, approximately 9 roubles a day, is kept by the administration, and paid once a month, up to a maximum of 150 roubles. The surplus is then paid every three months. So he earns roughly 150 roubles a month, and 120 or 130 more roubles every quarter.

In the camp, only "SPEZIALIST" workers, those who have a job, are paid; simple workers are not. ARMAND remembers: a loaf of white bread costs 8 roubles, 2 pounds of margarine cost 35 or 36 roubles; cigarettes are quite cheap.

Very soon, ARMAND, who always had a magic touch for all mechanical things, becomes the "BOLCHOI SPEZIALIST," the big specialist. He has to make all sorts of repairs; he becomes quite well known, and is in demand for all kinds of works, even in the town of LENINGRAD. The "natchalnik" (ARMAND calls him "the political commissar, but he is in fact the administrative chief of the camp) starts to appreciate ARMAND too...

Because of his "handyman" abilities he is often called to work in downtown LENINGRAD. Thus, frequently he gets to visit the city and to walk in the streets or parks, but he is not allowed to walk into shops or buildings. To be allowed to work in town, he had to buy, with

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39. Is it KARL, mentioned above in the chapter related to CEREPOVEC? If yes, it would mean that KARL was transferred to LENINGRAD with ARMAND, which might be possible; it is more probable that there is confusion, either in ARMAND's mind, or in the notes taken during his narration.

his own money, new clothes. He is prohibited from walking around alone; a guard always accompanies him. He remembers well the city of LENINGRAD: the town is slowly recovering from the severe damage suffered during its endless siege. The little bit of Russian he learned helps him to read posters and signs in the streets.

A born handyman, ARMAND soon finds other ways to make some money. He makes forks and knives in his workshop; he also finds a way to recycle the rags he uses as cleaning towels. Most of the rags come from a sock manufacture. There are a lot of unfinished socks, usually only the white cotton upper parts. ARMAND collects the men's socks, stitches different parts together, and is successfully able to sell the finished socks. The women's socks have another destination: he opens them, stitches several together, cuts two lateral openings, stitches two more socks on these two openings, add some hems... and produces very exceptional pullovers! They are quite garish, but they sell themselves!

ARMAND also becomes a jeweller<sup>40</sup>: he cuts and shapes rings out of a brass pipe, sets "diamonds" made out of colored plastic tooth brushes or Bakelite pieces. He puts the "jewels" on a black cloth in an aluminium box, and shows them discretely to the prisoners on their way to work, or even to civilians. Finally he gets regular orders! A "customer" brings him glass and quartz pearls to set. He secretly keeps a quartz piece and sets it in a silver ring made out of a five rouble silver coin. He wears it a while, and his spectacular jewel has a certain charm to prisoners deprived of all luxuries.

There is a little "office room" on the first floor of the dormitory building: it is the workshop of the "painter," a prisoner pampered by the Russians and who makes canvas paintings for his jailers. One day the painter sees ARMAND's ring, and wants to buy it. ARMAND wants to keep it, but soon the painter threatens to advise the guards, and obliges ARMAND to sell it.

A short time later, ARMAND makes a second silver ring, this time without a "stone," but with the engraved initials "AB". He wears it out, and has to reshape it several times, which explains why it is now so thin. He brought this ring back home and it is one of the most precious souvenirs of this time. One other souvenir: the pipe he made, out of wood and Bakelite, pierced with a red-hot nail.

Several of his fellows work like him in different companies in town. One of them is sweeper in a pasta plant. He salvages raw pasta and leftover noodles. With these rejects, the prisoners cook "pudding" and "cakes" for their own use or for sale. Others organized the gathering of cigarette butts and produce large quantities of newspaper-rolled cigars.

In the camp those who do not own anything find every imaginable way to get the indispensable: swaps, sales, and also theft... These mostly unorthodox means of resourcefulness soon gets known as "organisieren", organizing...

## FIRST NEWS FROM CAPTIVITY

It will be a simple postcard that will bring the very first news of ARMAND since June 1944.

Beginning in 1946, the camp authorities allow German prisoners to send home a postcard, through the offices of the Russian Red Cross and of the Red Crescent. It is a bi-fold card, one for the message, one for the answer; each prisoner has the right to 25 words, not one more. ARMAND sends about forty cards; none of them will ever arrive . He sends them to YUTZ, but wonders if his parents still live there. Probably not. That would explain why his mail never gets answered. How could he contact them, to tell them that he is alive?

This detail seems incomprehensible: even if his parents moved, his mail should have reached their neighbors... But in the book "The Malgré-Nous Tragedy," Pierre RIGOULOT confirms that

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40. Before becoming a mechanic's apprentice, ARMAND wanted to become jeweller. But his parents were not rich enough to pay for his studies...

all the prisoners of TAMBOW, also allowed to send one card a month, learned at their liberation that not even one card ever arrived home: they were never sent!

Pretty soon he is not allowed to write any more: it is now forbidden for Alsatians and Lorrainers. Soviets officially state that they do not hold any "Malgré-Nous" captive in Russia; it would be embarrassing if mail sent by them would prove to the contrary... Yet, inevitably, that is exactly what happens. The card of an Alsatian prisoner passes through controls and arrives in France with this message: "Elsässer dürfen nicht nach Hause schreiben", Alsatians are not allowed to write home... This letter, handed to the French authorities, causes some trouble in the Russian and French diplomatic spheres.

During this time, as in CEREOVEC, ARMAND tries to get recognized as a French citizen and applies for repatriation. Four times he gets an appointment with the Soviet Lieutenant who is in charge of the camp. Three times the officer listens courteously, but the fourth time ARMAND is thrown out of the office quite rudely... ARMAND's attempts will end there...

But despite these checks, ARMAND succeeds in sending some news. In the beginning of 1947, Germans are finally allowed to write a real letter every quarter. One of his fellow prisoners, a native of AACHEN (AIX LA CHAPELLE, in Germany), offers to help: his wife's family is from a little village in France, not far from THIONVILLE. He suggests sending a card in which he would write that ARMAND is alive; he is sure his wife will do the utmost to inform the BUNDT family. ARMAND at first refuses: he does not want to deprive his friend of the few words he is allowed to write; he also is reticent to take the risk. Several weeks later his friend insists again. This time ARMAND accepts. They send the postcard; along with other antiseptic news (they are only allowed to say that everything is all right...), the information passes like a message in a bottle: "ARMAND BUNDT von YUTZ lebt", ARMAND BUNDT from YUTZ is alive. In place of his own name, his friend puts ARMAND's name and address: Kriegsgefangener HERMANN BUNDT, Postfach 437, USSR.

ARMAND will only learn some years later what happened next. The postcard arrives at its destination. The parents-in-law of the German prisoner do not hesitate. Of course, they do not know the BUNDT family. Regardless, they take the train to THIONVILLE and YUTZ, and try to find ARMAND's parents. They soon learn that the BUNDT family moved to BITCHE. They send the letter to BITCHE, and, in November 1947, ARMAND's parents get the first news of their son since June 1944.

At that time, ARMAND's mother is the only one in the whole family who is still hopeful of ever seeing him again; the rest of the family has given up. All sorts of procedures and ideas were tried, but to no avail. Even a fortune teller had been consulted, with no success! Furthermore, a prisoner repatriated the end of 1945 had told ERNA that he saw the cadaver of ARMAND in CEREOVEC<sup>41</sup>... A memorial mass had been said, and official MIA records were closed in October 1946.

Thus, the arrival of the postcard sparks off real cries of joy. But the address of on the card is too vague to give enough information: Where is he? In which camp? How can he be reached? How can we help him?

Nevertheless, the family forwards the information to the DEUTSCHER SUCHDIENST, the German Department for MIA, which is quite large and efficient in Germany. In December 1947, the SUCHDIENST ensures that they can get a message to ARMAND. ARMAND will indeed receive it, but not before the end of April 1948. In the meantime, the reply from the family of his German friend arrived back to the camp with these few words: "Familie BUNDT aus BITSCH hat im vorigem August Nachrichten erhalten von ARMAND. Es geht Ihnen gut"; "The BUNDT family in BITCHE received news from ARMAND last August. Everybody is fine." Of course, ARMAND is ecstatic to get this first news that confirms to him that his family is alive and that everybody survived the turmoil of war. But why do they now have an address

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41. One possibility is that this prisoner saw ARMAND, almost dead at the CEREOVEC hospital, missing the 1945 repatriation, and thus declared him dead to ERNA. A list established by the French Embassy in MOSCOW indeed shows ARMAND's name with the notation "deceased"... Another possibility is that there was a mistaken identity: another ARMAND BUNDT is registered as deceased at the KIRSANOV Hospital.

in BITCHE? What happened that led them to leave YUTZ and move to BITCHE, near LAMBACH? Was the house in YUTZ bombed? Why does the family seem to have sought refuge in BITCHE?

In fact, at the end of 1944, JEAN-ADAM and ERNA were still working at the railway station in THIONVILLE. American troops get closer and closer. Finally, the Germans decide to withdraw men and administration behind the former German border. JEAN-ADAM and ERNA are transferred to LANDSTUHL, near KAISERSLAUTERN, and shortly after to PASSAU in Bavaria. JEAN-ADAM hates to leave his family alone, living so close to the airport and to the switchyard of THIONVILLE that the Americans are bombing daily. ANGELIQUE and MATHILDE move to their family's in LAMBACH, in an area they expect to be much safer.

Who could know that the fighting between Americans and Germans near BITCHE and LAMBACH will last over four months (until the end of the VON RUNDSTET offensive), and that ANGELIQUE and MATHILDE will spend four months hidden in the cellar of their house before the village is finally freed?

JEAN -ADAM and ERNA leave Germany and arrive home on the 6<sup>th</sup> of June 1945. The war has been over since May 8<sup>th</sup>. As soon as they arrive in France, they are arrested as collaborationists and interned in a detention house in QUEULEU, near METZ (a former 1870 Prussian fortress), and soon transferred to the collaborationists' camp of MARIENAU, near FORBACH. ANGELIQUE and MATHILDE stay in LAMBACH with their family. Upon JEAN-ADAM's liberation, the family moves to BITCHE.

Meanwhile, ARMAND hesitates: is it prudent to try to send a new letter? Finally he dares, goes to the "natchalnik," and asks for a piece of paper to write a letter. Surprisingly, the natchalnik agrees. ARMAND writes a real letter –not a postcard. This letter is the only one from captivity that is still around today. Dated May 9<sup>th</sup>, 1948, it starts with these words: " Mit übergroße Freude habe ich vorige Woche die aller ersten Nachrichten nach fast vier Jahren von euch erhalten..." I received last week with incredible pleasure the very first news of you in almost four years...".

## LETTERS AND PROCEDURES

The very first news of his family reaches ARMAND in April 1948, through his German friend. In his answer, he tells that he survived all adversity without wounds, and confirms he is in good health. He wonders why the family moved from YUTZ, for reasons he cannot imagine. He asks for some new pictures of everybody, as he lost all the ones that he had: "I have received your very first news in four years with a tremendous joy. I understand you already had news of me for a while, and I am very glad . I have sent you many letters, and I do not understand why you never got them; maybe it is because you do not live in YUTZ any more (...)".

His family, aware for several months that ARMAND is alive, has been actively seeking his release.

RENE LEJEUNE is ARMAND's cousin. His mother MARIE is the sister of JEAN-ADAM, the second of nine brothers and sisters. But the two cousins –like their parents- chose different ways: some of the uncles and aunts are clearly pro-German, others pro-French. RENE, two years older than ARMAND, chose the French camp. He is a Resistance fighter, and ends the war as FFI<sup>42</sup> captain.

This difference of opinion does not stop him from loving his family: RENE will testify in favor of JEAN-ADAM when he stands trial as a collaborationist.

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42. The Forces Françaises de l'Intérieur, part of the French Résistance.

Immediately after the war, RENE becomes very active in the political party of DE GAULLE. He gets into the close entourage of Robert SCHUMANN<sup>43</sup>; when SCHUMANN enters the French government, RENE becomes the director of his Cabinet, and then his private secretary.

RENE learns about ARMAND, and wants to help him as much as possible. Thanks to his position in the government, he is able to alert several competent authorities. Thus, he intercedes with The Foreign Office, and succeeds in obtaining the help of the Foreign Office Minister in the French Embassy in MOSCOW. The Embassy in turn intercedes with the Soviet authorities. Several letters in September 1947 and January 1948 are still available for review in the National Archives; some of them show that the Minister himself, Georges BIDAULT, takes part in these proceedings.

## THOUSANDS OF MISSING

The conflict of WWII ends, not only with millions of dead and wounded, but also with the displacement of several million people of all origins. Soldiers are sent to various areas of the world, refugees crowd the roads, deportees are stuck in concentration camps and prisoners of all nationalities are dispersed into thousands of camps. In Germany, the allied forces have freed the French prisoners of the 1940 campaign. French, British and Americans have immediately sent home these prisoners; but in the Russian zone, the same prisoners are sent to the Soviet camps, and start a second captivity with their compatriots of the "Malgré-Nous" or the LVF<sup>44</sup>...

France very soon establishes procedures to help find its displaced compatriots and help with their repatriation. A Research Mission for Prisoners, Deportees and Refugees is opened within Ministry of War Veterans. Repatriation Centers are opened in several cities, and small teams of officers are sent to all countries of the world. They have to try to locate as many MIA's as possible, and to facilitate to their return to France.

The first task is to make an accounting of all the missing, and also, of the number of missing "Malgré-Nous" enlisted against their will into the German army. It is not easy. The Germans controlled the enlisting without any French supervision, and their Archives are mostly destroyed. Before even trying to list the missing, it is necessary to estimate the number of enlisted... Alsace puts together a "Photographic Register of MIAs", while Moselle builds up an "Index of MIA in the German Units." This index, in its first version, contains 12,050 names, of which 49 are BUNDT! Nobody knows what happened to these 12,050 soldiers: killed in action, enlisted in other armies, imprisoned, etc... The index, instead of becoming shorter, becomes longer. Despite the number of known dead, every day, new MIA's are identified. The 1948 update shows 18,258 names. ARMAND, who was #1139, becomes #1749. Of the 49 BUNDT listed in 1946, 37 are now registered as dead or repatriated.

The Repatriation Centers try to collect all possible information about the missing. The officers' teams on the field visit the cemeteries to locate MIA graves, and they try to question all the freed prisoners. But this simple mission encounters a lot of difficulties: lack of information, but also the ill will of the Russian occupation troops. Soviet authorities strictly forbid the DEUTSCHER SUCHDIENST to interview the prisoners upon their arrival in the transit camps, and thus they are not able to garner any precious information about their still missing countrymen.

Other difficulties for those trying to find traces of the missing are the Cyrillic alphabet and the Russian method of assigning family names. In Russia, the letter H does not exist, and is replaced with the letter G, so HERMANN becomes GERMANN. Furthermore, Russians usually use the father's first name as the family name; for example, Peter ILLITCH, son of John

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43. A major political figure after the war. He was the main builder of the European Community.

44. Legion of French Volunteers, who enlisted voluntarily in the German ranks.

(Ivan) ILLITCH, is designated as PETROV IVANOVITCH, which means Peter, son of John, without any vestige of the ILLITCH name. Another difficulty: when he is asked to give his identity to his Russian guards, how does the "Malgré-Nous" give his name and his birthplace: in French or in German? And how do the guards understand and spell this information? A lot of examples show that it is often totally impossible to recognize the person behind the name<sup>45</sup>...

The problem is even more complex for prisoners detained in Russia. Soviet authorities categorically refuse any research mission on their own territory. Research is entirely subjected to their good will. The procedures follow restrictive ways: the repatriation centers, which are under the jurisdiction of the Department of War Veterans, write to the Foreign Office, which intercedes through the French Embassy in MOSCOW, which in turn intercedes with the Soviet authorities.

The National Archives in PARIS keep several examples of this mail; at each request, Soviets answer that there are no more French Prisoners in the USSR; to which French answer by sending lists of prisoners who fortunately could write home or give some other sign of life. In May 1948, the French Embassy sends a letter to General GOLOUBIEV with a list of 101 names of such missing men. ARMAND appears on this list with the date of his last sign of life dated January 19, 1948. Beside his name is the hand-written notation: " has written home"...

Research is also very difficult because of the numerous mistakes on the lists. On some lists, ARMAND is listed with his first name ARMAND, on others with the name HERMANN. There are three different birth dates on three different documents: 09.15.24 on the lists of the Deutscher Suchdienst<sup>46</sup>, 06.18.24 on the MIA index, and his correct birth date on the other documents.

Thus, all of these actions remain in vain. Also, several diplomatic incidents damage relations between the two states, and all the French efforts to obtain liberation of Alsatians and Lorrainers remain unsuccessful. From end of 1947 to June 1949, the Soviets maintain a total blackout about any presence of "Malgré-Nous" in the camps of German prisoners.

Several months will pass before ARMAND's liberation; the intervention of Robert SCHUMANN will probably have no effect on it.

In his 1949 interrogation ARMAND insists he is certain his name was on a list of prisoners selected for repatriation in 1948. But his name was struck off the list by demand of Robert B..., a native of OFFENBACH<sup>47</sup> near KAISERSLAUTERN. B, who was the teacher chosen by the Soviets for the "Antifa" classes, pointed out that ARMAND was not diligent in his communism lessons.

Robert SCHUMAN's actions, without a doubt, had no effect on ARMAND's transfer to the SOKOL camp. However, it seems quite plausible that this transfer was meant to hide him from the French repatriation team that visited most of the major prison camps at that time. It also seems very plausible that this intervention was the reason for his transfer from CEREOVEC to LENINGRAD. The very first intervention of the French Embassy in MOSCOW was initiated by the first postcard sent by ARMAND, dated November 1947. Less than one month, later ARMAND is transferred to LENINGRAD, to a camp that is like heaven compared to CEREOVEC...

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45. As an example, a "Malgré-Nous" is supposed to be born in DINABROLIBA, which is an approximate phonetic interpretation of NIEDERBRONN LES BAINS!; another is registered as born in BUKNOM... Only a native of SARRE-UNION can recognize in this word as the phonetic transcription of "BOUQUENOM", which is the local nickname used in dialect for SARRE -UNION!

46. It seems, however, that there was confusion in the files of the Deutscher Suchdienst between ARMAND and another HERMANN BUNDT, born in KLEINBLITERSDORF (close to SAARBRUCKEN, and thus also in Saargebiet). This other HERMANN BUNDT, born on September 15, 1924 (3 days earlier than ARMAND), was reported MIA in August 1944, not far from the Rumanian border. No trace of him could be found, in either the known Soviet camp archives, or in the known military cemeteries. He therefore was considered to be killed in action. It is most probable that he was confused with ARMAND in different research.

47. Probably OTTERBACH

Communication and negotiations will go on until December 1948. On April 12, 1949, Mr. CHATAIGNEAU, the French ambassador to MOSCOW, writes a letter (found in The National Archives) to Robert SCHUMANN: " Please find hereby a list of 1,703 names of French prisoners for whom all our interventions with Soviet authorities remains without effect". ARMAND's name is on the list, along with the number of his camp, #77/49.

## FRIENDSHIP IN THE CAMPS

ARMAND says that he did not meet, after June 1945, any other Alsatian or Lorrainer compatriots in the different camps. This statement seems disconcerting, as does the fact that ARMAND never answered the several letters from families of other MIA that he received after his return home (several letters are still in the family archives). ARMAND kept affirming that he did not know any of these missing "Malgré-Nous." At first, this assertion seems doubtful. Even after the first important repatriations, there still were over 20,000 "Malgré-Nous" in the camps, although in small numbers and in different camps. In books or stories about "Malgré-Nous" most of the authors state that they met one or more of their compatriots.

It is perfectly possible that ARMAND was the only "Malgré-Nous" in his LENINGRAD camp after 1947 (there were only 750 prisoners in the camp); but it seems unlikely that he did not meet some before in CEREOVEC. However, another "Malgré-Nous" survivor of the CEREOVEC camps confirms that there were very few of them in this camp, as they were spread out in several work kommandos, and they did not know each other.

The only person ARMAND would have liked to meet again –if he had known how to find him– was GERHARDT, a German prisoner he met in LENINGRAD. He was engineer, born in BERLIN. They worked together and were like father and son.

On his arrival in LENINGRAD, ARMAND and GERHARDT are posted to the same kommando crew. Pretty soon they quarrel with one another. ARMAND cannot stand GERHARDT's paternalist advice. After only three days, they come to blows, and have a serious altercation. They avoid each other several days, but slowly reconcile. They stay together for over 18 months. GERHARDT is about 50 years old, the same age as ARMAND's father. A solid friendship progressively grows, and they gradually become like father and son. ARMAND says with emotion that this man taught him everything, and he owes him his survival. If it would be possible, he would go to the ends of the earth to find him and thank him. This man taught him how to work:" even if it is for the Soviets, work as well as you can. If you do not work right now, you never will work right. Work the best as you can: it is not for them that you work, it is for yourself."

They never met again after war. GERHARDT was very sick and left the camp before ARMAND.

ARMAND also remembers well another fellow he met in LENINGRAD: HEINZ. Sometimes the prisoners would organize skits or concerts in the camp. There are also opportunities to go for walks or outings in town. Shattered and demoralized, ARMAND is not interested in any of this, but HEINZ encourages him: "stay alive for your parents, not for you!" Gradually, ARMAND finds the spirit again and starts to work, and after his first paycheck he takes the opportunity to attend to a BOLCHOI ballet<sup>48</sup>!

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48. In his 1949 interrogation upon his arrival in France, ARMAND twice mentions the name of EUGEN HEINZ, the chief of the LENINGRAD camp, released with ARMAND. ARMAND gives his address, and mentions that this person knows many things about the camp. This insistence, and the fact that he knows his exact address, could mean that EUGEN HEINZ was in fact this friend, and that HEINZ was his last name and not his first name. As a SPEZIALIST, it could be easily possible that ARMAND was on good terms with the chief of the camp. It has not been possible, so far, to find traces of this person or of his family, despite the precise address given in 1949.

ARMAND remembers also another friendship made in LENINGRAD... Once, as the "BOLCHOI SPEZIALIST," the so-called locksmith specialist, he is called for all kinds of jobs, even in town. And so, once his work is done, he is able to visit LENINGRAD, to attend to a BOLCHOI ballet for 15 roubles, to visit the ERMITAGE museum (for 30 roubles), and to walk around. He never ventures out alone; a guard always accompanies him. Sometimes the guard is a young boy, but more often it is a young woman who walks around with him for hours and takes him to the park! They are not allowed to walk into shops, but it seems that these strolls are quite carefree...

ARMAND recalls the memories of that young woman, and makes it understood that he was not insensitive to her charms. He even admits that he could have started a new life there, if it had not been Russia, and if his parents had not been waiting for him. Was he afraid to return home as a conquered warrior? Or was he really attached to that woman? Who knows, but the fact remains that he chose to come home...

## LIBERATION

ARMAND is released in May 1949, most probably due to the general liberation of POW camps.

Initially, in 1944 and 1945, non-German prisoners are released, often because of their status as involuntary conscripts (as was the case of the 1,500 released in July 1944). After 1945 however, Germans prisoners are freed in successive waves, while non-Germans remain in captivity, thanks to a uniquely Soviet logic: if they are still in captivity, it must be because they were not freed before, and if not, there must be a reason. All the war prisoners are supposed to be freed; only criminals remain in captivity; so, they are war criminals!

Two and a half million German and Austrian prisoners, and many other nationalities, represent for the Soviets, a phenomenal manpower potential rather than a burden. And any means to keep this work force as long as possible is desirable. The captivity of German prisoners in USSR will by far be the longest of all the captured allies.

In 1949, very strong international pressure pushes the Soviets to release their prisoners. To partially respond to this, sick or unfit prisoners are freed, but at the same time, hundreds of trials are arranged in which war prisoners suddenly become "war criminals" sentenced to 10, 20 or frequently 25 years of hard labor, and who now can be put to work with impunity. War prisoners will support over 10% of the post war reconstruction effort.

In 1950, Soviets try new maneuvers to delay the liberation of prisoners: Soviet war criminals, supposedly in the BEAUREGARD camp, are to be handed over by France, in exchange for "Malgré-Nous." They even submit a list of 54 names of Soviet citizens, supposedly detained in France, but they are unable to guarantee the spelling of their names...

Alsatian and Lorrainers returned home after war in these waves: 1,500 in July 1944, 3.200 in May and June 1945, 14,800 from August 1945 to May 1946, 1,600 from June 1946 to November 1946 and 237 from December 1946 to May 1947 (several hundreds of these freed "Malgré-Nous" are in fact German citizens or French volunteers of the L.V.F.). In 1948, only 18 return, then 4 in 1949, 1 in 1950, 18 in 1951, 4 in 1952, 7 in 1953 and none in 1954. The last released prisoner, the last of the Lorrain and Alsatian "Spätheimkehrer" [late returned], JEAN-JACQUES REMETTER, returns home to STRASBOURG in 1955. There had not been any sign of life from him since April 1944... (The last German prisoners –except in isolated cases– were released in 1956).

From the end of 1948 on, interviews with the released German prisoners confirm that all necessary steps were taken in the camps to ensure that non-German prisoners were released. French authorities therefore are convinced that all of the still missing French soldiers are in fact dead (killed-in-action or died in captivity), and that there are no more "Malgré-Nous" in the camps.

Out of approximately 130,000 Alsatians and Lorrainers enlisted by force, roughly 20,000 were killed-in-action (15%), 20,000 were missed-in-action (15%) (either died in captivity or unidentified). About 40,000 (30%) spent time in Soviet camps.

So ARMAND is among the last 35 "Malgré-Nous" returned home. Another "Malgré-Nous," a native of PETITE-ROSSELLE, will return to SARREBRÜCK one week after ARMAND.

The LENINGRAD camp where ARMAND is interned is a former industrial building, which now must be emptied and put it back into operation. This will hasten liberation.

The news of the approaching liberation is heard in the camp on April 20, 1949. But is it a rumor, one of the "Scheisshausparole" ["WC news"], regularly spread through the camp? Or is it this one the real one? There are still about 750 prisoners in the camp, almost as many as at the end of 1947 when ARMAND arrived.

Since diplomatic relations between France and the USSR end in 1947, Soviets authorities strictly refuse to liberate any French prisoners captured under the German flag. Now only Germans are released. It is no longer advantageous to claim French nationality. French prisoners now risk being transferred to another camp (to confuse search attempts), instead of being released.

In LENINGRAD, the Russian authorities prepare a list of the names of Germans to be repatriated. A wounded German pilot, GUNTHER, who speaks and writes Russian, is in charge of making the list. GUNTHER slips ARMAND's name onto the file of registered prisoners and lists him as German, a native of Saarland. And so ARMAND ends up among the 600 out of 750 prisoners who will be freed...

The sorting out of the 600 chosen ones is difficult: after the announcement of the liberation, every evening the guards closely scrutinize the identities. They try to locate SS. The hunt for tattoos starts, as well as the hunt for scars of those who tried to remove the tattoos... One must remember that after February 1944, all the "Malgré-Nous" were systematically enlisted in the Waffen-SS. This SS hunt therefore keeps many "Malgré-Nous" from returning home, although they are not SS<sup>49</sup> volunteers.

Nobody believes they will be released. Even departure preparations are only considered to be preparation for a transfer to another camp. The departure from the camp takes place on the 6<sup>th</sup> of May 1949. Several others camps open their doors on the same day, and the convoy of these 600 emancipated soldiers merges with another convoy of 600, all of them in apparent good health. The first part of the trip takes the prisoners via BREST-LITOWSK to FRANKFURT-AUF-DEM-ODER, in the Horn Camp, in the Soviet occupation zone. In this transition camp, prisoners are grouped by nationalities and the hunt for the SS continues. All sorts of trafficking goes on: theft and sale of the new clothes given to the prisoners, swaps and exchanges of the remaining roubles that will lose value on the other side of the border...

The prisoners are grouped by nationality and are directed to different destinations. ARMAND still hides his French nationality, and gives his destination as "BITSCH, im Saargebiet<sup>50</sup>"... According to their origin, prisoners are handed over to the occupation forces of their sectors.

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49. The difference between SS and Waffen-SS must be kept in mind: Waffen-SS is a regular arm of the Wehrmacht, while SS is a violent, political group of thugs completely independent of the Wehrmacht.

50. BITCHE, in the SAAR county. The SAAR is one of the German Lands, on the other side of the border near BITCHE.

All the prisoners coming from the regions of the future East Germany, and who just came out of the Russian camps, fall again into Soviet hands...

The convoy forges ahead, passing LEIPZIG. It is only on May 6<sup>th</sup>, 1949, when the doors of the wagons open on the platform of the ULM station, when he sees his first American soldiers, that ARMAND really believes his captivity has come to an end.

What about those who did not return? ARMAND has at least two explanations: the Russians, who refuse to release them, consider a lot of them to be war criminals. A lot of others decided to stay of their own free will. Why return home? To find a totally destroyed Germany, with killed or missing family members? To suffer the shame of defeat, and the continuous accusations against those whose only mistake was fighting for their country?

ARMAND confirms that his natchalnik suggested that he stay in Russia, and offered him a job: "in our country, we need BOLCHOI SPEZIALIST like you!." There are nice girls in Russia, too...

**ARMAND, on his return from Russia (in the newspaper "Cigognes"):**



## BACK HOME

In ULM the repatriates receive their first real soup and food in several years. But immediately security controls begin again. Like the Russians, Americans try to find not only the missing, but also SS or German soldiers identified as war criminals. The former prisoners (they are not free yet<sup>51</sup>...) are presented to an American officer, intense but polite, who sits in front of a huge map of Russia. All of the prisoners, even if they came from the same camp, must explain to him where they came from; where they fought, in which units, under whose command, where they were captured, and so on.

The Americans promulgate lists of released prisoners by radio. ARMAND apparently is the only French citizen. The Americans therefore decide to give him up to the French authorities, and to send him to the French zone. The CARITAS conveys him by train to TUTTLINGEN, not far from Lake KONSTANZ, and where a transit camp run by the Red Cross for "Heimkehrende" [returning prisoners] is based. It is there that he meets his first compatriots.

He is then presented to a French officer, who tries to find his name on a big register of MIA<sup>52</sup>. ARMAND indicates that his name was Germanized as HERMANN, and soon the officer finds it: it is underlined in red: "Sie haben wir schon lange gesucht!<sup>53</sup>," we have been searching you for a long time!

Glad to have found a prisoner missing for so long, the director of the Red Cross center of TUTTLINGEN personally takes care of ARMAND, provides him with new clothes, and takes

51. ARMAND will relate later that these liberation episodes were typical of the submissive habits of the German soldiers: they were officially free, but none of them took the initiative to return home on their own... They all waited for orders. ARMAND, for example, came home through SARREBRÜCK. There he was 18 miles away from home; but he quietly listened to the instructions that sent him to KEHL and STRASBOURG for three more days! ARMAND emphasises this submissive habit explains much of the comportment of German soldiers: they are so conditioned to obey that they are incapable of taking initiatives even when freed. How could they have been able to disobey to orders?

52. Most probably the "Keller register," the index of Alsatian and Lorrainer MIA established in 1945 by General KELLER's commission.

53. This little detail proves that research was initiated to find ARMAND, and that instructions were given out to field officers.

him to a little restaurant. It is there that ARMAND eats the first spaghetti with tomato sauce of his life, and that he uses his first plates and silverware in five years! He also speaks his first French in several years. The next day, after a detailed interrogation<sup>54</sup>, he is taken by train to SARREBRÜCK with other fellow natives of Saarland. A joyful reception is organized at the rail station, and the prisoners are warmly welcomed. Very soon the list of names is aired on Radio Sarrebrücken, and the local French newspapers are informed that a French "Malgré-Nous" is back home.

ARMAND, still obedient to orders, climbs onto a new train and heads for the repatriation center of KEHL. He arrives there alone, lost in an unknown city. A French customs officer spots the disoriented man in strange clothes, looking for help in the station. After a few questions, he guides him to the local police station. The policemen drive him to the Center. But it is Saturday evening, and the Center, which in 1949 is not very active any more, is closed. The policemen do not want to leave him alone in front of the closed door. They stay with him, offer him a drink (his first beer in years!) and take him to dinner at the officers' mess (his first French fries!). Later, they find him a little hotel room.

The next day, ARMAND returns to the Center. It is Sunday, and there aren't many people around to take care of him. He gets an American cardboard suitcase, pajamas, and a razor. But he keeps the suitcase he made himself (a wooden case with a self-made lock). He also keeps the Russian clothes he wears that he bought with his savings in LENINGRAD: trousers cut from a Russian uniform, and a jacket cut from a German coat. He also has a down-lined jacket and trousers, given by the Russians to the freed prisoners (his mother will burn everything except the suitcase in her garden...). The Director of the Center, rather than leaving ARMAND alone with no idea of what to do in STRASBOURG, decides to take care of him himself. He drives him to his own home in HAGUENAU, offers him lunch –ARMAND vividly remembers the kindness of his wife and daughter – and then offers to drive him to the HAGUENAU rail station for the next train to BITCHE.

In BITCHE, the BUNDT family, living there since JEAN-ADAM's return, does not know anything of ARMAND's release. No sign of life has reached them since the last news in mid 1948.

JEAN-ADAM, as "Ortsgruppenleiter," was immediately arrested upon his return from Germany, on June 7, 1945. After a short transit through the QUEULEU fort, he is put in administrative internment, initially in an internment camp in SUZANGE, and then in MARIENAU, near FORBACH. There he waits for his trial, with his compatriot JEAN AMEN, from HOLBACH, interned as journalist. MATHILDE visits them every Sunday. She takes the bicycle from BITCHE to MARIENAU, and provides them some food and comfort. Finally JEAN-ADAM is freed under parole, and put under house arrest, in Gers, in the South of France. But he finally is released from this sentence. His house and furniture in YUTZ are impounded.

His trial takes place in April 1947. Very soon his case turns out to be devoid of evidence. The accusations are based on the report of the Purge Commission of THIONVILLE established in 1945 and on the eyewitness reports of the police in 1946. The main accusation, that he supposedly took part in the deportation committee and established lists of families to be deported to Germany, appears to be wrong. On the contrary: the accusers admit to knowing only of rumors and not of facts<sup>55</sup>; and a lot of witnesses stand up to affirm that the deportations stopped as soon as JEAN-ADAM was posted as "Ortsgruppenleiter." Other witnesses confirm that he had pro-German feelings, but that nothing else can be proven. JEAN-ADAM, on his part accepts full responsibility for his pro-German choice and of his adherence to the party. He clearly continues to claim his German nationality; in fact he needs an interpreter during his whole trial.

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54. This interrogation is mentioned in a letter sent July 1949 by the Repatriation Center to the Foreign Office.

55. The prosecution's case is built only on gossip, mainly those of a so-called resistanator, E. SCH..., who settled in JEAN-ADAM's house, and who will try any means to stay in it... Losers are always guilty, and JEAN-ADAM will never get his house back.

Finally, it is only on the grounds of his membership in the party that he is convicted, with extenuating circumstances. He is sentenced to five years loss of civil rights. JEAN-ADAM only gets back his furniture that was confiscated since May 1945 in May 1948, after the lifting of the sequestration order in October 1947<sup>56</sup>. During the internment, ANGELIQUE was living in LAMBACH; upon JEAN-ADAM's return, the family moved to BITCHE, Rue Baron de Guntzer, in a three story building called "The BAUER Building." The apartment at this time was RENE LEJEUNE's flat (the resistanator offers his house to the collaborationist: blood is stronger than politics!). It is in BITCHE that JEAN-ADAM finds a job in his brother GUSTAVE's construction company; his trial had forced him to quit his former state railroad job<sup>57</sup>.

On that Thursday (the exact day that ARMAND arrives in TUTTLINGEN), JEAN-ADAM takes his daily bike ride down to GUSTAVE's work place. GUSTAVE's business is good in these post-war reconstruction times, so he can afford to hire his brother, despite his stiff arm. The moment JEAN-ADAM passes in front of Mrs SCHWARTZ's house (she is the sister-in-law of JEAN-PIERRE, ANGELIQUE's brother). She hails him: she has heard on the German radio, Radio Sarrebrücken, a list of released German prisoners, and HERMANN BUNDT's name is on it. JEAN-ADAM immediately returns home, waits for the next broadcast on the radio, and also hears HERMANN's name, but learns nothing more about the details of his liberation. So he heads to the railroad station –always on his bike–, asks for the train schedule, and waits for his son. And so he waits for each train coming from SARREBRÜCK or METZ, from Thursday to Sunday...

But during this time, ARMAND returns home by a completely different route. On Sunday, May 22, 1949, , ARMAND arrives in BITCHE by car, by way of STRASBOURG and HAGUENAU. Rather than leaving him alone at the HAGUENAU rail yard, the Director of the Repatriation Center of STRASBOURG finally decided to drive him home in his personal car!

ARMAND arrives in BITCHE, but does not know where to go: from the postcard he received, he knows that his parents live in BITCHE, but he has no address. But although he was born in METZ and grew up in YUTZ, he knows BITCHE quite well. During the summer holidays he often came to BITCHE, especially to visit his godfather GUSTAVE. So, he decides to head to GUSTAVE's house, and meets him in his yard. GUSTAVE immediately sends his son<sup>58</sup> to the railway station, where he knows that JEAN-ADAM is waiting. The new is travelling fast, and even before JEAN-ADAM arrives, a young couple comes in. It is MATHILDE<sup>59</sup>, his sister, and her husband PIERRE (who ARMAND has never met). MATHILDE falls into her brother's arms; she has trouble recognizing him: he is fat, swollen by the poor diet and by the ravages of too many potato peels!

GUSTAVE drives everybody to JEAN-ADAM's house, and, at 7:00 PM, the whole family is together again, after five years, eleven months and 28 days of separation.

A precious souvenir remains from that period: a little plaster statuette of the Blessed Virgin. She is quite damaged (she has no arms and is roughly glued). ANGELIQUE found it in the rubble of the bombed BAUER building upon their arrival. ARMAND relates that his mother, during the whole time of his missing and captivity, prayed to Mary every day with these words: "Mutter Gottes, wie ich Dich aus dem Dreck geholt habe, hole auch Armand aus dem Dreck heraus!" Mother of the Lord, I took you out of the dirt; take ARMAND out of the dirt too!

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56. He will be amnestied 1951.

57. It is also in GUSTAVE's company that ARMAND will find his first job as early as June 1949.

58. Probably GUY or ROBERT; ARMAND did not know that he was chosen as godfather of the youngest son of GUSTAVE, GERARD, before his expected birth expected in August 1949. JEAN-ADAM was supposed to represent him, but finally ARMAND came home in time!

59. Married in October 1948 to PIERRE SCHAEFFER. PIERRE remembers this day well, and particularly ARMAND's suitcase, filled with Russian tobacco and old rags! PIERRE and MATHILDE also lived in the BAUER building, next to JEAN-ADAM's flat. They could pass from one apartment to the other through a bombed out hole in the wall!

## A NEW LIFE

ARMAND will need a long period of rehabilitation after these terrible years. For several days his name appears on the front page of local newspapers. He is interviewed, and soon receives several letters sent by parents of other missing soldiers. They all ask the same question: did you know my son, my husband? How did you manage to return?

ARMAND will never answer any of these letters. He will say one day: "What could I answer? Even if I happened to know them, how could I answer that they were dead or missing, while I was alive and at home<sup>60</sup>?"...

ARMAND is back home; but a large number will never come back. In September 1949, the Ministry of War Veterans sends a letter to Robert SCHUMANN, in which they indicate 73 names of French nationals positively identified in Russia; 36 have sent a postcards; 37 others were named by returning comrades.

On May 24, 1949, two days after ARMAND's return, the Ministry of War Veterans writes to the Foreign Office (letter in the National Archives): "Since January 1<sup>st</sup>, 1948, 23 Alsatian or Mosellan Wehrmacht prisoners have been released (...). But none of these liberations seems to be the consequence of the repatriation demands we made. The latest is ARMAND BUNDT, born September 18<sup>th</sup> 1924 in METZ, who was repatriated on May 23 with his German captivity comrades because of the dissolution of prisoners' camp #77/16 of LENINGRAD. A repatriation demand for BUNDT was made in August 1947<sup>61</sup>, his presence having been noticed in camp #77/49, and another was made on January 2, 1948, after his transfer to camp #77/16 was known. All our repatriation demands had no effect, and it is only because of the dissolution of the camp that the prisoners have been released"...

Very soon ARMAND tries to turn the page, with the help of his father. In June he starts to work as an employee of his godfather GUSTAVE, who needs hands for his several reconstruction projects.

## AFTEREFFECTS

Probably during the first months of his captivity, ARMAND suffered from severe dysentery (more probably a hemorrhagic enterocolitis). He remained unconscious for several days at the CEREOVEC POW hospital, where he stayed for one year. The pleurisy he suffered later on – probably during the severe winter of 1945-1946 in CEREOVEC – had worse consequences: as it clearly can be seen on his X-rays, he completely lost two thirds of his left lung.

Upon his arrival in France, the policemen who welcomed him in KEHL recommended that he immediately have a complete medical check-up, and don't wait for a bogus military check-up. This medical check-up indeed came a lot later, and although he was recognized as being partially disabled, he was not discharged <sup>62</sup>.

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60. Among these letters, is one from Frederic BACH of SARRE-UNION, whose son will come back with the 18 who returned in 1951.

61. This is a new inconsistency of dates, as ARMAND is supposed to have been transferred from CEREOVEC to LENINGRAD in December 1947. According to this letter, an explanation could be that ARMAND was transferred in August 1947 to camp #77/49 in LENINGRAD, and transferred again to camp #77/16, always in LENINGRAD, in December 1947...

62. <sup>62</sup> After his demobilization from the Wehrmacht, ARMAND is inducted into the French Army and becomes a reservist. He never was called to active duty.

ARMAND recognizes that he signed blank sheets of paper on his arrival at the Repatriation Center in STRASBOURG. The Director of the Center argued that, as it was Sunday, nobody was available to ensure regular formalities. What were these forms for? Nobody knows.

After several medical examinations by military medical authorities he is granted a ten percent disability. In addition to the loss of lung capacity, the certificate mentions the pleurisy and scurvy after-effects.

Of course, he has other psychological after-effects, much more important than the physical ones. One of them – the less serious, but the most obvious – is his phobia and obsessive fear of winter, snow and cold, that he will carry throughout his life. Pierre RIGOULOT in his book "The Tragedy of Malgré-Nous" relates several similar cases of phobia, including cases of phobia of birches in a garden that are too similar to the birches in Russia.

Some future events also sparked psychological reactions in ARMAND. After the latest wars in Kuwait or Bosnia, the necessity of psychological support to the bewildered soldiers suddenly appeared. But who thinks of support to soldiers of an almost forgotten war? More than fifty years afterwards, all the torments of these disastrous Russian campaigns and of the terrible years of captivity remain sharp, yet where was the support? ARMAND's wife THERESE related several times that he had terrible nightmares, but he always refused to talk about them.

Very soon after his return, ARMAND discovers why his family had to move to BITCHE. It was not enough that he sacrificed his youth to a lost cause, he now discovers that his father, his sister and the whole family has to suffer shame and disgrace... He learns that the family house in YUTZ, under impound for several months before being returned to the family, was never left by the SCH... family who settled in. Emile SCH..., a last-minute resistance fighter, envious of the BUNDT's house, wrangled to rent it during the sequester period; and now, claiming his "resistor" status, he opposes JEAN-ADAM and refuses to leave the place. ARMAND wants to go to YUTZ "to kick this bastard's face in." His father has a terrible time dissuading him.

After the torments and humiliation of war and captivity, ARMAND now discovers the shame of life as a defeated warrior, and, above all, as an former pro-German in a country where suddenly everybody claims to be a Francophile and member of the resistance.... Yet, it is true that there often is more nobleness on the losers' side than on the victors'. True heroes most often are revealed in losing wars...

This humiliation will be worse than the humiliation of captivity, and ARMAND will never completely be at peace. Pierre RIGOULOT, in "The Tragedy of Malgré-Nous," also writes about the incomprehensible sufferings of Alsatians and Lorrainers torn between their two cultures and guilty of having chosen not the BAD camp, but the WRONG camp.

In 1983, after much evasiveness, Germany grants compensation funds for the "Malgré-Nous." All the beneficiaries have to register to apply. ARMAND's family has to absolutely insist that he apply; the granted sum is symbolic – or mockery-, and ARMAND considers it rather as an insult than as a reparation<sup>63</sup>... Is it an insult to be paid, 50 years later, 4.15F a day, for all the years and torments of captivity? The German army – in rout- stopped paying ARMAND from the date of his capture, yet the Soviets paid him during his stay in LENINGRAD.

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63. After many years of negotiation, Germany in 1979 unfreezes a 250 million DM credit. But payment of this indemnity is subjected to several prerequisites (restitution of the Mundat forests, lifting of the seizures of German properties in Alsace), prerequisites that France firmly refuses. In 1981 a French-German committee is convened and the funds are finally distributed in 1983. To accelerate payments, but without spoiling eventual missing beneficiaries, a first sum of 7,500F is paid to 84,000 "Malgré-Nous" or widows of "Malgré-Nous." Two years later, 80,000 beneficiaries receive a second sum of 1,600F. 4,000 died in the meantime...

## INDELIBLE MARKS

Undoubtedly, all these difficult experiences have left indelible marks on ARMAND. ARMAND will always hate to talk about this part of his life, and when he does happen to talk, he will always relate the same episodes. He will never give a complete narration of his tribulations. From time to time, in the course of a conversation, he recalled an insignificant detail. I then jumped into the breach to try to get details, but mostly without results. Only in rare cases did he relate longer episodes or details he had never related before (at least not to me). Strangely, these "confessions" often came at the occasion of one of his longer journeys or trips abroad, especially, near the end of his life: before his departure to the US, Canada or Africa<sup>64</sup>. It is in my car, on the way to the airport for his departure to Canada, that he related to me for the first time the tribulations of his father at the Liberation; he had never talked of it before. He told a lot more to other people than he did to his sons. Several members of the family may discover some mistakes or wrong interpretations in this story, but this is what I heard and what I understood.

It is strange to note that ARMAND never told me anything about his action in combat. His narration concerned almost exclusively his time in the R.A.D., his "Partisaneneinsatz" missions, a few details about his capture or the time of captivity, but nothing about "his" war... The period on the front was short for him: 6 months, from January 1944 to June 1944; but it was probably terrible... The known details of these campaigns and of the events on the front during that dramatic period of time leave no possibilities that ARMAND was just an observer... ARMAND will explain to LON<sup>65</sup> how difficult it is for him to tell what a man is able to do to stay alive: "not only to kill, but even worse... There are some things in my life that I never told to anybody, even to my wife; I'll take them with me in my grave... It is too dirty, too humiliating..."

Will one ever know how fratricidal this war was? It was a war between European brother countries; but it was even more a war between brothers and friends in opposite camps. Most of ARMAND's fellow draftees in YUTZ never came home. And fate led his numerous cousins into different or even opposite camps. One of his brothers-in-law, "Malgré-Nous" like him, captured by the Americans in Normandy, finally enlisted as volunteer in the French army. Another brother-in-law, also "Malgré-Nous," first accepted a commission in a Wehrmacht officer school only with the intention of delaying his transfer to the front (and finally deserted); he stayed hidden in the woods and in farms for several months, belonging to the "Haustalldivisionen<sup>66</sup>"...

A cousin, Gaullist and Resistor, finished the war as FFI captain; another cousin fought against the Japanese on the Pacific front; yet another cousin died on his ship- sunk by a German submarine in the Atlantic. Who of them was master of his fate? And who of us would dare judge these men thrown to such different destinies?

Will their children have more luck? It appears as absolutely doubtful if one considers how these wounds are still wide open today...

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64. ARMAND always dreamed of living FRANCE... At his return from captivity, he considered a move to the USA, where his cousins would have welcomed him. But he refused to break his mother's heart; she who waited for him so long. In 1959, he finds a job at Repal Inc, in the Sahara, where oil prospecting was developing. That time, his wife stopped him. He caught up with a little bit of his dreams of journeys in the last years of his life: he stayed with his cousins in the USA, with his godson BERTRAND in Canada, and then in Africa with his son PAUL.

65. LON is one of ARMAND's American cousins. He is the only person who was able to record ARMAND's memories on tape, in English! [ARMAND was coerced to tell his story only when LON said: "Your grandchildren need to know." Ed.]

66. Deserters hidden in cellars and in hay sheds. They were so many that they represented complete divisions missing on the front. By derision they were called "Haustalldivisionen," hay shed divisions.

## CARTOGRAPHY

Map #1: Through Europe, from 1943 to 1949

Map # 2: The front and the capture

Map # 3: The BAGRATION operation  
and the Kessel of BOBRUISK

Map # 4: The retreat of Grenadier Regiment 37

Map # 5: Captivity

## WHO CAN BE JUDGE?

ARMAND died in October 1997, after a long and painful illness. He took his secrets with him to the grave.

Often I feel guilty that I did not quiz him enough as long he was alive, and to now be faced with unanswered questions. But I know that I could not ask him these questions; he would not have answered them, and I would only have reopened unhealed wounds.

It hurts, but I must confess that I always had the impression that there was something else in ARMAND's silences than only the pain of turning the pages of a difficult story. I felt that the unsaid hid a secret. Was this secret terrible, shameful? I had no idea, but I was sure the secret existed.

I once read this phrase: "Terrible experiences pose the problem of wondering if those who go through these experiences become themselves terrible." What did ARMAND's silence hide? ARMAND explained his silence by his conviction that he would not be understood, and that he would never be able to make his actions understandable. For me, I was afraid this silence hid something else, maybe difficult secrets... I did not dare to think of shameful misdeeds, but I could not avoid thinking that this silence was guilt. It took me a long time to discover and to understand what was at the origin of this feeling, and to find an explanation of his mistrustful attitude toward all the "Malgré-Nous" associations...

Maybe ARMAND, although being in fact "Malgré-Nous," as he had been enlisted by force in a foreign army<sup>67</sup>, was not a real "Malgré-Nous"... Could it be possible that he volunteered to enlist in the German army?

Throughout the years, several clues slowly corroborated, made clear and corrected this hunch: ARMAND always categorically refused to join any "Malgré-Nous" associations; he also threw a fit of anger when he listened to other "Malgré-Nous" stories. He got especially angry as soon as anybody talked about "pro-French patriotism" on the eastern front, and of "patriotic" deeds like desertion, sabotage, or even murders of German officers killed by "errant shots"... He always maintained that one was fighting only to survive.

It is true that this reaction can easily be understood. The "Malgré-Nous" bulletins published from 1946 to 1950 give a good example of the attitude of the "Malgré-Nous" associations: they are full of thundering and grandiloquent declarations according to which, for example, every Alsatian or Lorrainer fighting in Russia had a little French flag hidden in his heart or in his Soldbuch... It might have been true for some, but certainly not for the majority! Reading these papers makes one bristle. For example, while a lot of articles deplore the government for not doing anything on behalf of the missing, no appreciation, or even mention, appears that compliments the tireless, unrelenting diplomats whose efforts led to the return of more captives as late as 1949 and 1950.

However, from another point of view, ARMAND's lifelong antipathy and aversion for Germans and Germany seemed to me incompatible with the idea that he could have been, at that time, a pro-German volunteer for the Wehrmacht.

It is only very progressively that I was able to assemble the pieces of the puzzle, although I was not completely sure that my conclusions were right.

Several little clues slowly brought me to the determination that JEAN-ADAM BUNDT and his family had been Germanophile rather than Francophile. RENE LEJEUNE confirmed to me that

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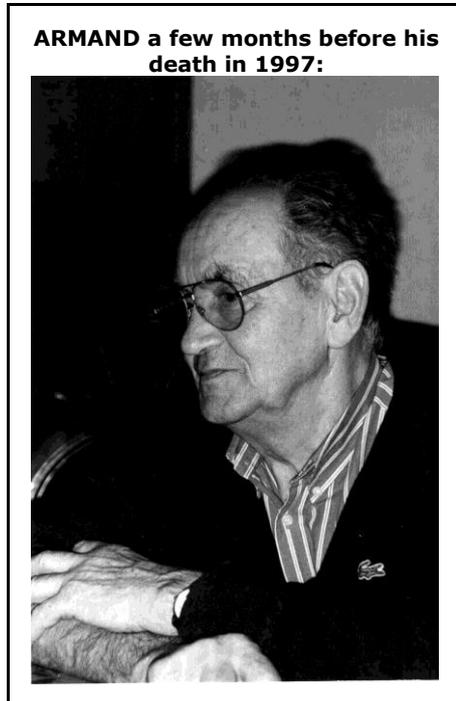
67. The legal definition of "enlisting by force" applies to those who were subject to this enlisting, not as individuals, but as members of a vanquished nation or people. This means that, even without having been recalcitrant to the induction, an Alsatian or Lorrainer has the right to claim the status of "enlisted by force" by the mere fact of his citizenship in an annexed region.

JEAN-ADAM was pro-German, and that he saw him in his black "Ortsgruppenleiter" uniform. It was true he did not volunteer for his appointment, but he did not refuse it either, like others did, who had to support the consequences of their choice.

In the rare photos of ARMAND in uniform (in the R.A.D. or during his furlough), ARMAND does not seem to be warrior's attitude, and uniform. His R.A.D. mentions that gut" [very good], have been the case of

There is a photo of "Deutsche Jungvolk" "Fähnleinführer" in the Nazi? It would be a was young (sixteen!), like to parade in true that his desire to his age, as well as his ability to measure the heavy consequences

All these elements JEAN-ADAM led his his son, to share his truth is probably volunteered for the unwilling either!



ARMAND in his black uniform. Was ARMAND, as Hitlerjugend of HAUTE-YUTZ, a hasty conclusion: he simply and at that age youngsters uniforms! But it is probably parade, perfectly legitimate at family context, tainted his consequences of his choice; which he ignored ...

point to the conclusion that family, and very particularly pro-German inclinations. The there: ARMAND never German army; but he was not

It is easy to imagine ARMAND's distress at this time: proud to wear the uniform, and, at the same time, in anguish over the unavoidable future of war and pain... Proud to completely assume the consequences of his choices, but fearful of having to die for them... The temptation to fly, hidden behind a show of pride<sup>68</sup>...

I have no evidence that allows me to confirm all of this with certitude, but I really believe it is the truth. And if it is the truth, is it a crime? Is this choice, this fact that ARMAND wore the Hitlerjugend uniform, the crime for which ARMAND condemned himself his entire life? Without being able to confess, was he convinced that he could not be understood? Can one imagine the resentment of those who, like ARMAND, only committed the crime of being pro-German and voluntarily wearing a uniform. Yet they spend their whole life ashamed to admit it to their relatives.

It is much too easy nowadays to judge those who, at that time, made that choice rather than the choice of resistance. It is important to place oneself in the context of this time: there were many Alsations and Lorrainers who kept a positive image of their region stemming from their memories of the years before 1918 when their homeland was part of Germany. After the shameful defeat in 1940, German propaganda could easily convince families who grew up in the shadow and grandeur of German power to re-embrace the Reich. Besides, who could forget the monumental mistakes made by France in the management of Alsace and Lorraine on their return in the mother country in 1919? Disillusion will come soon enough, once Germany has shown its true inhuman and totalitarian face; but by then it will be too late to turn back...

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68. What was ARMAND's mood on February 16, 1943, upon his departure to the R.A.D., just after the Wehrmacht's tragic defeat in STALINGRAD, on February 2<sup>nd</sup>? And on May 16, upon his transfer to the Wehrmacht, at the exact moment when the whole Afrika Korps was surrendering? How can one be at ease when joining an army engaged in a war in which they are unquestionably going to lose?

How many Germans, Alsatians and Lorrainers were suddenly confronted with that "examination of conscience," described by AUGUST von KAGENECK, which opened their eyes: they thought they were only losers, but not that they were also guilty? Yet their sincere adherence to the noble values of the Wehrmacht had made them unwilling accomplices to the horrors of Nazism...

I am ultimately convinced that the pain ARMAND carried with him all his life came from the fear of being also called a "collaborationist." This pain was increased, not only by the humiliation of having chosen the losers' camp, but also because of his awareness of his involuntary support of the terrible crimes of the Nazis ...

If this is right, this explanation indeed clarifies many things, many hostile reactions, and many silences. I also believe that his disillusion was terrible (to have chosen the camp of the 1940 victor, and finally to fight, not in the glorious German campaigns of 1941 or 1942, but in the dramatic disasters of 1943 and 1944). This was especially trying as he had so much time to turn it over in his mind during the long years of captivity... And how does one support the constant arrogance of those who affirm today that they were able from the beginning to make the right choice?

I sometimes imagine that there could be an explanation for ARMAND's late return from captivity: what if ARMAND refused by honor and pride to be repatriated as a Lorrainer in 1944-1945, and decided to stay in Russia?

Strangely, I always had a soft spot for losers of all wars, and particularly for those of WWII. I admire those who, for reasons that are theirs alone (and that I do not share), had the courage or the temerity to chose the German camp, especially at the time when Germany's defeat was obvious and certain. I admire those who volunteered at the end of 1943, 1944, or even in 1945 to fight for a lost cause . It certainly was crazy, and it is pitiful to see such courage led astray for such a questionable cause; but it certainly is a courage not given to everyone!

Their humiliation of the defeated touches me, although I know that their sentiment cannot be shared. And I hate even more the haughtiness and hypocrisy of the easy winners<sup>69</sup>, these last-hour resistance fighters, self-promoting elitists and suddenly heroic draft-dodgers, who so easily, albeit belatedly, give lessons in good conduct.

HELIE de SAINT MARC wrote: "To belong to the losers has at least one advantage. There are among them none of these accommodating and conniving individuals who abound around the victors; losers do not know the fever of appearances that is a fatal illness of human beings. By necessity, men and women that History denied must stay at the uppermost of themselves."

Still today our political landscape swarms with people who refer to a war that they didn't participate in, but that they won... How I understand ARMAND, who saw, by opening the newspapers, all these self-glorified veterans, while his own and his fellow prisoners' sufferings counted for nothing. As if there was good pain and bad pain; as if AUSCHWITZ's sufferings were intolerable while CEREPOVEC's sufferings were deserved! And even among those who really can claim the status of resistor, how many acknowledge, to those who chose the "wrong camp," that they did it sincerely and honestly?

ARMAND's attitude toward his three sons, officers in the French army, perhaps showed that he finally had decided to forgive, and above all to forgive himself. I believe he was really proud of his military sons, and this maybe helped him to reconcile with France.

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69. Like this authentic example of May 1945: twelve French volunteers of the Wehrmacht and the LVF are arrested by LECLERC's troops during the last battles in BERLIN. To LECLERC, who reproaches them for wear the German uniform, they answer that he too wears a foreign uniform, the American one... LECLERC immediately sentences them to death... for insolence!

It is probable that ARMAND's lifelong violent dislike of anything German can only be explained by the fact that he never pardoned this country for having abused his trust and having led him on a path of sorrow.

I also believe that the decision taken in 1999 by France to grant to killed-in-action "Malgré-Nous" the status of "Died for France" is a real sign of courage. This decision indeed, although only administrative and inconsequential, actually gives rise to some anger.

These are my feelings. Other people certainly may have other keys to the saga than I have; they may see divergent aspects of this tormented life; their perspectives of the truth might be much different.

If ARMAND never wanted to talk open to us, it was probably because he was afraid to be judged guilty by his own children. This fear must have been terrible! What a price to be paid for a poor choice made during his youth!

Today I would simply like to tell him that I love him and admire him even more, and that I better understand the terrible pain of the silence he imposed himself. Still quite recently I was eager to know "all" of his story because of a legitimate thirst for knowing; but now I just would like him to talk, not to satisfy my curiosity, but to relieve his heart.

MICHEL BUNDT  
August 1999 – August 2000

*"The experience of camps is an entirely negative experience, from the first to the last minute. The man only changes in one way: he becomes worse. And it cannot be any other way. In the camp, there are many things a man should never see. But to see the bottom of his life is not the most terrible. The most terrible is when the man starts to feel that this bottom of life is taking place – for ever - in his own life".*  
Varlam CHALAMOV, *Récits de la Kolyma*.

## APPENDIX 1

### **Exodus and Expulsions:**

*If almost everybody knows the story of the 1940 exodus, very few people know the story of the multiple expulsions of the "Pays de BITCHE" [The BITCHE Region].*

*At first, the inhabitants of the "red zone," which was the no-man's-land between the Maginot line and the German border, were forced to evacuate their villages in September 1939. They were rehoused in different areas of the Charente and Vienne departments. This evacuation, although thoroughly planned, took place in very difficult conditions: whole villages on the road, leaving behind all their belongings, and pushing their cattle in front of them (which were supposed to be bought by the army supply corps). After a several days trip by train, these crowds landed in a completely unknown region, with totally different customs, ways of life, religious practices and language. Their integration was long and difficult.*

*Several months later, the exodus following the May 1940 rout joined them; all the inhabitants who escaped the September evacuation now had to flee the enemy invasion and the bombings. Many villages of the "Pays de BITCHE" were severely destroyed.*

*After the June armistice, Germans called the evacuees to return home, which is what most of them did (except those who refused to live under German control). But very soon the Germans decided to enlarge the BITCHE military camp, and to transform it into a gigantic training camp. They decided to build the HASPELSCHIED Lake, and to empty about twenty villages of their inhabitants, like the village of SCHORBACH, which was transformed into a combat training village. The camp was then mainly used to train the Afrika Korps.*

*Thus, as were many other people, the inhabitants of HOTTWILLER and among them THERESE, ARMAND's future wife, were once again expelled. They were not sent again to Charente, but in Francophone areas of Moselle; the French-speaking undesirable inhabitants of these villages had themselves been expelled or sent for "re-education" in Germany.*

*Called "Siedlers," the German-speaking "settlers" were sent to populate several villages in the Saulnois region. THERESE was sent with her family to LIDREZING, close to DIEUZE. She stayed there until 1944.*

## APPENDIX 2

### ***Plundering and Sacking on the Maginot line:***

*The plundering and sacking of the evacuated villages in the "red zone" between the Maginot line and the border was unbelievable.*

*The French troops posted in the Maginot line bunkers helped themselves to the empty houses. Bedding and furniture were used to equip the blockhouses; furniture, timber and floors were used as heating material. These "loans," understandable but forbidden, were accompanied by large scale plundering and sacking on the whole northeast border, from SIERCK to BITCHE. The most extensive plundering took place near SARREGUEMINES and BITCHE. Entire villages were sacked, houses vandalized and filled with trash. French soldiers, and even officers, sent home boxes filled with stolen goods and food. In some places raiding parties were organized to send supplies to the evacuees who had left everything behind. But these raids often turned into organized plundering, the collected goods being kept instead being sent back... The stolen goods completely filled wagons. The French troops behaved as though they were in an enemy zone, and not in compatriots' houses. Despite explanations given about the uniqueness and rich history of these regions, the French soldiers behaved like victors in conquered countries, not satisfied with just plundering, but devastating everything in their way.*

*In some sectors, military authorities reacted immediately and stopped this disastrous behavior. But expropriation was common in most of the "red zone" and no sanctions were taken. Sometimes these deplorable facts were described and exaggerated by Nazi anti-French propaganda. Jean-Paul SARTRE, the famous French writer who was a soldier near BRUMATH, relates the many cases of plundering and deterioration near SARREGUEMINES.*

*The behavior of the Germans during the expulsions of Alsatians and Lorrainers was completely different. I have seen myself, fifty years later, the detailed inventories and the seals left by the Germans in evacuees houses. There were very few cases of German plundering. But, the behavior of the French troops was more reality than propaganda, and it contributed greatly to the hard feelings the Alsatians and Lorrainers felt against the French offenses, and pushed many to conform promptly to German authority and rigor.*

*The attitude of the Charente population (nationalistic and secular) towards the evacuees (fervent churchgoers), did not help to calm the problem...*

## APPENDIX 3

### ***The Nazi Political Hierarchy:***

*Under the Chief of Party Chancellery, the Gauleiter had authority over each main administrative region (Gau); a Party Gau Direction or Gauleitung, whose composition and functions were synonymous with those of the Party Direction for the Reich, assisted them. Under the Gauleiters, descending in the Party hierarchy, there were Kreisleiters, with authority over the Kreis district (county), and assisted by a Party Kreis Direction called Kreisleitung.*

*Kreisleiters were at the lowest level of the hierarchy completely paid by the Party. Immediately underneath the Kreisleiters were the Ortsgruppenleiters (town leaders), the Zellenleiters (cell leader) and then the Blockleiters (block leaders). Orders and instructions came from the Reich Party Direction. Gauleiters' mission was to interpret and transmit these orders to the lower levels. Kreisleiters had a certain discretionary power to interpret orders, but Ortsgruppenleiter had no political latitude and received precise instructions. Blockleiters and Zellenleiters received verbal instructions.*

## APPENDIX 4

### **Camps in CEREPovec:**

*The identification sheet of CEREPovec, established by the German war graves association, contains the following information:*

- *camp composed of two principal camps and two hospitals*
- *total population approximately 9,000 prisoners*
- *arrival of prisoners: June 1944 coming from BOBRUISK; July 1944 coming from the MOSCOW parade; May 1945 coming from DANTZIG and ZICHENAU; June and October 1945 coming from HAMMERSTEIN, HOYESWERDA and BERLIN; then December 1945 coming from the just closed RYBINSK camp*
- *transfer of 1,000 prisoners to MOLOTOWSK and of 85 Officers to KAZAN in August 1948*
- *There were only two releases of prisoners in fall 1945 and July 1948, before the camp was closed in October 1949. At the camp closing, remaining prisoners were not released but transferred to ROSTOW*
- *mortality of approximately 90% for the prisoners of the two hospitals*
- *approximately 20,000 deaths between 1945 and May 1949, principally because of epidemics of yellow fever, typhus and tuberculosis, and because of the cold and the malnutrition*
- *worker Kommandos posted to tree felling, turf collecting, metal working, field work and kolkhozes, as well as to a veterinary hospital for horses*
- *no cultural or leisure activity before 1949; from then, foreign languages, physics and chemistry classes; religious services and movies*

*Extracts of charts in a confidential report about the CEREPovec camp established 1949 on demand of the GUPVI authorities –Russian Archives:*

*NB the above categories are:*

- *Category 1: fit for hard work outside of the camp (plants, building sites, mines)*
- *Categories 2 and 3: fit for normal work, inside and outside of the camp*
- *Category 4: fit for light work (sweeping, wood chopping, snow clearance)*
- *Category OK: undetermined*

*Note discrepancies and mistakes between the totals, as well as total discrepancies with information given by witnesses.*

## APPENDIX 5

### ***The Shame of the Defeated:***

*Extracts of general orders of General Model commanding the Army Group Center: "That which the German soldier accomplished during this incessant battle (...) against an adversary several times superior in men and material will remain in the German History.*

*"But no, nothing will stay in German History. The General was making an error. Nobody will sing the glory of these soldiers, like VERDUN is sung in France, or like Flanders is sung in England. No school will teach that victory to the future officers. No monument will be built to remember the sacrifice of fallen men.*

*"In fact, the soldiers' heroism and sacrifices will be swallowed up in the defeat and the condemnation of Nazism; everything will be turned against the German people. The new generation will be taught that this army was formed of criminals; that its war wasn't fought for fatherland or country, but for the Führer and his sadistic goals. And the only monument built will celebrate the deserters' glory. From now on, the real hero will be the one who did not want to fight and who preferred to desert"*

*Extract of "Story of a German Regiment, 1941-1944", by August von KAGENECK. This book relates the story of the 18<sup>th</sup> Grenadier Regiment, which was the 37<sup>th</sup>'s brother regiment, in the same division. It knew exactly the same rout at the same time as the 37<sup>th</sup> during the June 1944 BOBRUISK battle, less than 6 miles away from their position on the Russian front.*

## EDITOR'S POSTSCRIPT

I just finished spending a few hours editing Michel Bundt's account of his father's World War II experiences. I changed some prepositions, but Michel's story, without any editing, is extraordinarily moving.

I spent seven and a half years on active duty, but I never saw anybody die. Actually the only time someone really was shooting at me was when I was in my cushy airline job on the second day of the Gulf War. I was on the ground at Dhahran doing some military support flying. I got to watch Patriot missiles intercept Scud missiles. Nobody knew at this time who was going to win this war—we lost the last war with a third world country—so I was pretty scared. I spent two and a half hours in a bunker in a full chemical suit listening to the blasts overhead. Two and a half hours cannot compare to this TEN YEAR experience. I cannot imagine.

No, I've never been in combat, but I would never fault the Lt. McCauley's of the world for their actions. I won't condone those actions, but I can't sit here in my nice home, having never seen my compatriot next to me in the trench hit between the eyes, and condemn any action of Armand or any war veteran. I have friends and relatives who are scarred by Viet Nam and other conflicts. I have a new appreciation of their trials. We have a bunch of relatives in Alsace. Are there other tales too horrible to relate? Do they feel this same guilt? Are they unaware that we would like to hear their stories; we would like to understand; we would not accuse?

My wife, who is the actually the queen of tact, once said to her Aunt Madeline, after Aunt Madeline had related the story of her eldest son dying in combat, "Oh, it's good you have other sons." My wife had not had kids of her own at that time. Of course, that is a ridiculous statement to anyone who has had kids. Yup, Aunt Madeline went ballistic. No, we don't understand war.

Oh, it's obvious Armand was not Mother Teresa in this tale. He was just trying to survive, under conditions that made that goal foremost in his mind. Right and wrong take a back seat to survival. Oh, he didn't talk much about his combat and captivity, but you don't think he dreamed about it? Agonized over it? How about when he knew he had only a few months to live?

If you are reading this, you knew Armand. How sad that such a kind, gentle man should have had such a frightening background. How sad that we could not hear his story and accept the horrors. I'm sure this is why Michel undertook this extraordinary project: so that we all may understand this wonderful man's tormented life.

Lon Lindo  
August 2000

## TABLE OF CONTENTS:

PREFACE	2
CHILDHOOD AND YOUTH	5
THE 1939 EVACUATION	7
THE FORCED CONSCRIPTION	7
THE REICHSARBEITSDIENST	11
WITH THE WEHRMACHT TO RUSSIA	11
LETTERS FROM THE FRONT	13
DER KESSEL VON BOBRUISK	14
THE LOGBOOK OF REGIMENT 37	16
THE CAPTURE	18
CEREPOVEC	20
AN ADVENTURE WITHOUT EXPLANATION	24
LENINGRAD	26
FIRST NEWS FROM CAPTIVITY	28
LETTERS AND PROCEDURES	30
THOUSANDS OF MISSING	31
FRIENDSHIP IN THE CAMPS	33
LIBERATION	34
BACK HOME	36
A NEW LIFE	39
AFTEREFFECTS	39
INDELIBLE MARKS	41
CARTOGRAPHY	42
WHO CAN BE JUDGE?	43
APPENDIX 1	47
APPENDIX 2	48
APPENDIX 3	49
APPENDIX 4	50
APPENDIX 5	51
EDITOR'S POSTSCRIPT	52

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