

Front cover:

Harry Luyckx
Légion d'honneur
Sergeant Malicien
Matricule 107.954 fought in the French Foreign Legion
Algeria

Back Cover:

Because there was in 1954 not a job available on a freighter,
Lucky signed up in the French Foreign Legion.
A choice he immediately did regret and at the first opportunity he tried to desert.
He got caught and was send to Algeria, a country in crisis.

In Légion d'Honneur we follow the life of Lucky, his training in the Legion, the confrontations
with
The rebels, the inhumanity of the war and His will to survive.

In Légion d'Honneur we follow a story of shocking and disturbing events, about the powerlessness
of the individual among cruel and fanatic men, but also of solidarity and camaraderie and honour.

The Flemish Harry Luyckx experienced all this and wrote his story honest and true.

All names of persons have been changed to protect their identity and that of their family.

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Chapter 1

August - November 1954
Getting acquainted with the French Foreign Legion

*'Hasst du vielleicht eine Zigarett?' I looked up surprised, I was leaning on the railing, which had been installed around the fishing port of Marseille, and I was busy observing the incoming and outgoing of sailing boats.

Beside me stood a tall young man, almost as old as myself, he had raven black hair and was a bit gawky. His German was very bad, but nevertheless I gave him a cigarette.

The guy inhaled deeply a couple of times while staring into the water. I said nothing. My eyes followed a small fishing boat that sputtering left the port.

After a while the young guy asked, 'where do you come from?' I turned my head to him and looked at him from head to toe. He then said, my name is Mirko, I am a Yugoslav and I came on my bicycle from Zagreb.

Why in God's name would anyone come on a bicycle all the way from Yugoslavia to Marseille? I thought, but on the other hand, why would anyone hitchhike from Belgium to Marseille.

I realized that I was just as nuts as the guy besides me, He probably had just as much of a good reason to travel this far. Or maybe he did not.

My name is Lucky and I am a Belgian, I heard myself saying, but I had to repeat myself three times before the Yugoslav understood where I came from.

I found it weird that a total stranger would come up to me and ask where I came from, or was it so obvious that I was not French?

*Bisshen spazieren ja? I still did not know what the guy wanted from me, but I agreed shrugging my shoulders.

I thought if he is as bad off as I am, we could form a fine pair.

I had not much more than a pack of cigarettes and a couple of hundred francs to my name. Shortly before, I was a conscript in the Belgian army and had deserted, for fear of getting hauled in front of a court-martial I escaped to Marseille with the intention to sign up on a Swedish ship and start a new life.

* do you have a cigarette?

* A little sightseeing huh?

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At the Swedish consulate which also serves as an office to hire sailors, I had been given the understanding that in the next three weeks there was only one ship expected. Even at that, there was the question if they needed another crew member. As such, I was stranded in Marseille and got the company of another lost soul.

We walked along the harbour in an Easterly direction and soon we saw the looming mass of the fort.

When we approached the entrance gate, we noticed the guard with his white kepi, blue waist band and the green and red epaulettes. Above the gate in the form of an arc were in green paint, the words "Legion Etrangère"

I knew already that this was the notorious French Foreign Legion and paid no more attention to it. We followed the wall along the fort and passed a hospital that was located at the end of the street in a nice and well maintained park.

Then we followed a wall that hid a large part of the hospital from view, the right side of the street ended in a rock wall.

The street made a sharp turn to the left, but a small lane went straight down to the beach.

It was a beach with boulders, but that did not deter us from wading in the water.

We did not exchange many words, but after we sat down between the boulders and smoked some cigarettes, Mirko started to relate his story about his bicycle trip to Marseille in great detail.

I had difficulty to follow his monologue, but let him go on. I was not really interested anyway.

This time of the year it was possible to sleep out in the open air, and that is what we did.

The following morning we were awakened by the blazing sun. After we had washed ourselves with the salt water and dried by the air, we started to move towards the town.

Mirko said why don't we go and have a look at the French Foreign Legion? Because I had no idea what to do at this time, I thought it was not a bad idea and we could always take off again. Where else could I go?

The closer we got to the gate of Fort Saint Nicolas, the slower we walked. We did not realize that the guard at the gate was beckoning with his head, obviously he had seen more young men wanting to join the Legion, not realizing what was in store for them.

However, we did not think about this at that moment.

The moment that we entered the gate, I remembered having read about "Beau Geste", the 1924 adventure romance novel by P.C Wren which was later made into a movie with Garry Cooper in the title role, but the misadventures of those people did not convince me to backtrack and turn around.

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A soldier with two gold stripes on his sleeves approached us with a pleasant expression on his face and asked *‘Les messieurs désirent?’ it was the standard greeting at Fort Saint Nicolas, one of the recruitment centers of the French Foreign Legion.

Mirko and I were led by the sergeant to the right of the entrance gate, to a one story building; we entered the building through a double door into a wide hallway which had only doors on the one side of the hallway and windows at the other side.

The sergeant indicated that I had to wait there and disappeared with Mirko into a small office.

On the side of the windows there were some small palm trees planted in wooden flower boxes. I thought this would be a perfect place to get rid of my identity papers and along with that, my past. I remembered stories from people who had landed in the French Foreign Legion without name or nationality and could take without any problems a new identity.

Carefully I dug a hole and dropped the papers from the Belgian occupation army in Germany, my Belgian identity card and several sailor log books from the Swedish Merchant Navy into the hole and covered the hole with dirt. I just had wiped my hands on the curtains and lit a cigarette when the door of the office opened and Mirko appeared.

Behind Mirko came the sergeant and told me to enter the office. I saw the displeased expression on Mirko’s face, but did not have the opportunity to exchange any words with him.

At the desk sat a middle aged man with an gold bar on each shoulder. Later I found out that it the rank of adjutant was.

*‘Videz vos poches et mettez le contenu sur le bureau!’ he said in harsh voice. I emptied my pockets and laid the contents on the table. After that, the sergeant who had stood behind me all this time made a step forward and patted me down to check if I had taken everything out my pockets. When he did not find anything else, he went to help his superior with sorting out my meager possessions.

* What do you men want?

* empty your pockets and put it on the desk

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I got everything back except for a small pocket knife.

The two men were very surprised that they could not find any documents on me, when they asked about it, I said that my papers were stolen while I slept the previous night.

Lucky enough, they believed me. The man behind the desk asked me politely

*‘comment appelez-vous?’ Malicien was my curt reply.

The adjutant nodded in the direction of the sergeant and he took me outside where we picked up Mirko and walked out of the building. This all took barely half an hour and it was surprising to me that it would go this quick.

As we learned later, on the left side of the main building were on the main and first floor, were most of the offices.

On the right side of the main floor were some supply rooms and above that was what they called the First Section.

One story higher and only accessible via an outside stair made of stone was the Second Section.

In the first supply room we had to take off our civilian clothes and were given a French army uniform. While we were getting dressed, I saw that the supply room attendant made a bundle of our clothes label them and throw them on a pile of similar bundles.

From that supply room we went to the next one located in the far left corner of the building, where we received our table utensils consisting of a mess-tin, a spoon, a fork, a knife and a cup. They warned us that if anything got lost, the cost would be taken out of our pay.

I raised my eyebrows when I heard that, until then I had not considered that we would get paid.

Once back outside, we walked behind the sergeant past a row of concrete garbage receptacles and up a stair made of stone, the treads were worn out possibly from thousands of volunteers who had walked these steps before me.

The stair made a sharp turn to the left and landed on a terrace. Arriving atop, we were greeted by several other volunteers. One out of the group called "Bist du ein Deutscher?*

I did not react and followed the sergeant who re-entered the building through the only door. When I turned around, I saw Mirko talking to some guys, probably some compatriots.

I found myself now in a hallway that looked like the one where we had to empty our pockets.

*Are you a German?

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On the left side there were doors to individual rooms and on the right side windows which were blocked with steel bars on the outside and with steel plates on the inside so that no one could look outside.

In the mean time the sergeant had walked into a room without looking back, by the time I entered the room; he had already left the room and had disappeared.

I looked at a few guys who were playing cards, when one guy with a kepi looked up and pointed with his thumb over his shoulder towards a corner and said: There are still some beds available, strip the blankets off, shake them out and if you find any fleas or pubic lice, come to me and I will give you some DDT-powder.

I strolled to the corner he had pointed out, there were several bunk beds. I placed my utensils on the window sill and noticed that you could look out on an inner courtyard and the entrance gate.

I pulled the blankets from the bed and a cloud of white dust rose to the ceiling, nobody paid attention to it.

Later I found out that in this department, sheets were an un-necessary luxury, but at least I did not have to sleep out in the open air.

I dragged the blankets behind me to the terrace and walked to the railing to shake them out, from here I could see exit of the fishing harbor, on the other side of the channel I saw another fort that served as quarters for a Senegalese Regiment. With my elbows leaning on the railing, I took in the scenery and surmised, was I still free to go whenever I wanted? What would happen from here on? Did I make the right choice? I decided to wait and see what would happen.

I was in the mean time a few days in the barracks, once in a while I got a glimpse from Mirko. I heard that a contingent of volunteers would part for Oran! It was the first time I heard of this place. Several guys from this floor were standing near the windows to see the departing volunteers.

While I was also looking, we were told that everyone had to come forward; it was seven o'clock in

the morning.

Roll call was held every morning, noon and night. My name was called and I was told to see someone of the "Second Bureau" the notorious Deuxième Bureau was originally established for counter espionage, as a complement to the Security Militaire, but with more much powers.

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Together with a few others, I left the quarters and went first left and then right and climbed a steep rising street. Arriving at a top, we saw several small buildings, were the offices of the Second Bureau were located. I had to enter one of the offices and take place at a desk where a man of about fifty years old was seated.

He turned out to be Flemish and he told me to tell my life story from my fourteenth year on. That was not difficult, He wrote everything down word for word, without interrupting me. I wrote that after the elementary school I had gone two years to middle school and after that I had joined the Swedish Merchant Navy. This was not a lie, but I did not tell him that had enlisted early in the Belgian Army and after a few run-ins with the Police had deserted.

I did write that I had done only a few trips and not on that many ships, this was easier to remember in case I had to tell the same story again.

From the five ships I mentioned, two were sister ships of the same company I had worked for. The man finished his writing and laid his pen down with a flourish on the desk, placed his elbows on the table and stared intently at me. He said; now tell me why you find it so necessary to join the Legion?

I replied that I had read a lot about it and wanted to experience Legion life.

He said, listen man, I am long enough in the Legion to know what goes on and believe me, it is not as great as some people think. That is why I try to convince many compatriots to return home.

Thus if you have no outstanding warrants for arrest, tell me and I will arrange that you can leave from here.

I replied, I have done nothing criminal and I do not want to go back to Belgium. I am here now and want as fast as possible get started. The Legionnaire could not believe his ears and blinked for a split second his eyes, he placed his elbows again on the desk and stared anew intently at me. I guarantee that you will get the experience of your life, the question is, will you at the end of the trip still have enough life left to return to your mother.

Get out!

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A few days later I had to go for a medical tests, the check up was like with any doctor, but far more in depth and thorough. In the nude, I had to do all kinds of movements so that the doctor could make an evaluation of my physical health. After an hour and half or so, the doctor called me into his office and said; I have been a Army doctor for more than twenty years and have never seen better results of the tests. I shall attach a note to your file that you are fit for all units after your basic training is finished. On the desk in front of the doctor lay a file folder and he beckoned me to come closer. I saw on the cover of the file folder a rectangle divided into small squares, the number 1 was written in each one. Look he said, you can see the number one in each square, this has happened only one time before.

I did not understand all of it, but was happy that the medical checkup was done and I could go outside.

I thought, well from now on things should go smoothly and felt relieved.

Indeed, fourteen days later I was allowed to collect my meager possessions and go to the First Section, I was in company of four others, all Germans.

Every fourteen days or so volunteers were moved from one section to the other until there was a contingent of about hundred men ready for transport to Oran. At that slow tempo it would take five to six months before we would depart to Oran, not pleasant to look forward to.

The wait was long, but there was little that could be done about it.

I started to think about escaping, and started to make plans for it. I had no idea what I would do once I was outside, but those were worries for later.

Now I saw the men of the Second Section every day because of all the chores that had to be done in the barracks, like the emptying of the garbage containers, kitchen duty and cleaning of the grounds.

Drip wise, more and more volunteers arrived including some Belgians and Dutchmen.

After a few weeks Pieter and Nico arrived, Pieter was from the area of Tilburg and Nico from Amsterdam who was a pimp in Paris. Furthermore, there was also Redhead Marcel, a Belgian from the area of Herentals.

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Quickly I realized that Pieter also believed to have made a mistake by coming to the Fort and from Nico I heard that he thought he would be expelled in a few weeks because he had six passports on him when he presented himself, which made the guys from the Second Bureau suspicious.

I told Pieter and Nico of my plans to escape and they promised to help me once I got outside. Marcel did not like the idea and decided to wait and see how quickly he would be shipped to Oran.

Sometime later, when I returned from doing chores in the basement of the barrack, I saw Nico being brought to the gate by two sergeants, he was in civilian clothes. At the gate he turned around and waved goodbye to Pieter who was on the terrace and disappeared into town.

Fifteen minutes later in the mess-hall, I gave Pieter a note and whispered wrap this in a rock, I believe that Nico will come around tonight and when you see him, make sure he gets this note. I could not do it myself because I was now in the First Section and was not allowed to get on the terrace anymore.

In the note I asked Nico to be at ten thirty under the window of the small room between the mess-hall and the food supply room. This was the only room facing the outside that did not have yet the iron bars on the window and the masons who did the renovations used it for a change room.

Pieter and I met around seven thirty in the mess-hall and he told me then, that Nico had indeed come just at the time that Pieter arrived on the terrace.

He saw him across the shipping channel at the base of the barracks of the Senegalese and how Nico had stripped from his outer garments and jumped in the water. Without hesitation Nico had swam to the base of Fort Saint Nicolas and Pieter then had thrown him the rock with the note.

Nico had read the note and indicated that he had understood the message.

O K I said to Pieter, it is going to happen, make sure you are ten thirty in the small room and

make sure that no one follows you, until later.

I noted with pleasure that my roommates were still in the mess-hall when I walked into the bedroom.

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I took off my vest, pulled the sheets from my bed and wrapped them around my waist, after that I put my vest back on and crawled under the blankets. My roommates stormed into the room just in time for the roll call and did not pay attention to me. I just pretended to sleep. I heard the sergeant of the guard coming into the room for the roll call and wished a good night to all. A half hour later the signal "lights out" sounded from the bugle. I slipped carefully out of my bed and out of the room. At the washroom I stopped for a moment to see if I was not being followed, then I went down the stairs and walked crouching down past the garbage bins to the little room.

There I undid the sheets from my waist and knotted them together. I barely had had opened the window and dropped the sheets outside when Pieter appeared.

I whispered: if you hold the sheet steady, then I will look below on the ship wharf if I can find a ladder.

On both sides of the fort was a ship wharf, the one somewhat larger than the other. I stood on the window sill and bend over to go outside when I heard the door open. In the door opening were two shadows contrasted against the light of the inner courtyard.

* Was soll das bedeuten? For a moment I feared that they were legionnaires, but noticed quickly that they were volunteers. They were dumb enough to have kept on the beret that was issued to the newcomers and probably had followed Pieter when he went downstairs. Now that I was in the open window and the Germans indicated they wanted to escape as well, I could do nothing else but to give in, there was no other way or else the two Germans would immediately raise the alarm.

The German who was the spokesman for the two took it upon himself to plan on how the escape would proceed from here. I had to go down first and then one of the Germans and then Pieter, we hoped to find a ladder by the time it was the turn for the last guy for fear that the sheets would not hold out.

Then when the first German was down on the ground, we saw the red head of Marcel who had decided to come as well and He was holding the sheets for Pieter and the second German.

While we were busy searching for a ladder, Marcel called out: look no more Lucky, get the hell out of here. I will make sure that all evidence of the escape is cleaned up.

* What is the meaning of this?

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Good luck and have a good trip! Marcel pulled the sheets back in and quickly closed the window. I was still angry that we had the two uninvited Germans, but lingering any longer was too danger

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Chapter 2

August- November 1954

The road to freedom

I could not understand that there was not a trace of Nico to be seen. Maybe he decided to pull back from us and did not want anything to do with us anymore, or he was arrested and sat somewhere in a police station.

It was obvious that I should take over the leadership. I followed the base of the Fort that almost formed a half circle to get to the other side, to the ship wharf.

Effortlessly we walked between the between the small boats that were laying here and there on the docks for maintenance.

It was not long until we reached the area of the hospital that was separated from the wharf with an low hedge. It wasn't long before we found an opening and were happy to make good progress on a path in the park of the hospital.

All of a sudden Pieter halted and pointed towards a shed on the right side of the path. It turned out to be stand for the patients and visitors, where they could buy snacks and drinks.

It did not take long for us to break in and fill our pockets with drinks and candy, we then resumed our trip towards freedom. I walked right up to the end-wall of the hospital area that was build at the end of the property along the street. A couple of meters from the wall was a large tree with thick branches, some of the branches hung over the wall. I took my heavy army boots off, hung them around my neck and climbed like a cat in the tree.

When I reached the top of the wall, I peered in the semi darkness, the street below was sparsely lit with only here and there a streetlight. On the other side of the street was a small square and behind that a row of homes. Left of the row I saw what looked like a side entrance to a house, I climbed down and said to them: OK I am going over the wall and run across the street to the side entrance of the house on the left side, there I will wait for you.

These were the first words that were uttered since we went through the window of the Fort.

I jumped from the wall to the street and ran across to the side entrance that led to a garden. I had barely my boots back on when Pieter came, soon after followed by the two Germans.

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When I crossed the street, I saw a little further down the street a young woman, but I pretended that I had not to see her.

The *Mof with the biggest mouth said shall we attack her and have some fun while we have the chance, with a nod in her direction.

I said do, if you cannot stop yourself, but wait until I and my mate are out of the neighborhood. I did not escape to end up in a prison cell in Marseille for a rape charge.

I walked away without giving the German a chance to open his mouth.

The woman looked at us with wonder and suspicion when we passed her, but no one spoke a word. After we had crossed the square again we walked into the steep street that led to the beach, the same street where a few weeks earlier Mirko and I had slept in the open air.

We walked onto the beach; the others followed me like sheep like as if they could not take the initiative themselves. It was clear that they needed a leader. I looked for a rowboat or something like that for Pieter and myself, because I wanted to get rid of the Germans.

I bend over to Pieter and whispered: we need to find a canoe or rowboat for the two of us, because I want to get rid of those two *Moffen.

Okay, replied Pieter and I went to walk ahead of them. About two or three hours had passed since we left, it was difficult walking on the rocks, but lucky enough there came an end to that when I saw a canoe on my right side, but did not say anything to the Germans. Ten minutes later I saw a gate, bricked into the rock face that encircled the beach. From there ran a set of small rail tracks that disappeared into the water.

That's it I thought with glee, this probably the storage place for the rescue boat from the beach patrol. With determination I walked up to the white gate and quickly removed the hasp lock. I opened the gate quietly, when suddenly the *Mof with the big mouth appeared beside me, curious as to what I was doing. I said this dory is exactly what you need, but there is only room for two men. You and your mate take this one and I will try finding something for me and Pieter. I pushed the dory on the rails and soon it was in the water. Row towards that Light buoy and we will follow as quickly as possible when we find something suitable.

The two Germans did not need to be told twice and jumped in the dory and started to row like maniacs.

* Derogatory nick name for a German person.

* Plural for above

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I waited until they had disappeared in the darkness and said to my mate: those idiots haven't a clue that they are in a rescue dory that has enough room for twelve men, I saw further back a canoe, let's get out of here.

Quickly we walked to the spot where I had seen the canoe and pushed it into the water.

Unfortunately, there was only one paddle, so we had to take turns to paddle.

The darkness allowed us to stay near the coast line, we heard the Germans, who must be now be close to the light buoy calling out to us. I laughed quietly to myself, served them right for trying to blackmail us to take them with us.

Later I heard that they were picked up by the Coast Guard after spending all night near the light buoy.

Our canoe moved now effortless on the water, every hour we exchanged place and covered quick a long distance. One would sleep while the other paddled, but by morning we were dead tired. The Sun was up when we decided to take rest and steered the canoe towards the chalk rocks. With combined effort we pulled the canoe on the rocks, crawled in one of the many caves and fell into a deep sleep.

When we awoke, we saw that the Sun was already going down, we took a dip in the cool water and

swam a bit around. Pieter dove down and came back up with a handful of mussels. They were not very big, but it did not take long to have a good supply and we enjoyed eating them. When the Sun had nearly gone down, we decided to stay one more night in the cave. The following morning we had the same breakfast, but we were getting slowly a sore throat from eating the salty mussels and lack of potable drinking water. Quickly we put the canoe back in the water, but to our consternation, the boat sank. The bottom was perforated with thousands of small holes because we had pulled it on the sharp chalk rocks. I guess that we better move further south since we were going that way already, I said to Pieter. Let's climb over the piles of rock and see what is on the other side. * "en avant"

* Forward!!

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I estimated that the rock formation was about fifty meters high. We started with the climb, but it was not easy. The rock was porous and broke off under our hands and feet. On top of that, it created also small cuts on our hands and it did not take long before they were red from bleeding. Wounded and discouraged we reached the top. There we discovered that it was part of a surrounding rock formation that formed a natural border of a valley that was enclosed by even higher mountains. As far the eye could see, there was not an exit to be seen, thus we had no other choice than to turn back. With the courage of the desperate, we started the decent which was twice as dangerous as the climb up, because the Sun had gone down and we had to go mostly by touch. In addition, because I went first, I got peppered with the small rocks that were dislodged by Pieter. I felt that my hands were wet from blood and sweat; step by step I went lower while I had to clench my teeth trying to ignore the pain. When we reached the solid ground, we collapsed on the ground and despite the pain, thirst and hunger, we fell asleep. The next morning we woke up from the sun and without ado, we dove in the sea to search for mussels. The salt water bit in the cuts we had gotten the previous day, but our need for food eased the pain. Despite the salty juice of the mussels, it did relieve the thirst a bit. However, we could not linger on and had to get away from here.

This time we moved in a Northerly direction, we came by the cave were we had slept the first time, but we pressed on. The chalk path that we walked on got smaller and smaller and started to lean more and more, the rock face on our right side got gradually closer to the sea, so that in the end only a small strip was left which made it more difficult to walk on. I walked about twenty meters ahead of Pieter when I heard him calling I turned back. My mate swung a rope that seemed to be attached somewhere above, when I got closer, I took the rope from Pieter and hung on it with my full weight, the rope held!

I hesitated for a moment whether I should let Pieter climb to the top first, but he declined and I went first.

With the first grip on the rope I crunched over, while I had gotten used to pain from the many small cuts, now I had to use a tight grip which caused considerable more pain.

I broke out in a sweat, but I realized that we had to get to the top, it was the only solution to find a way to out of this rock-wall enclosed area. I clenched my teeth, and started the climb to the top. Then I noticed that Pieter had also started to work himself to the top, it gave me for a moment a panic attack and hoped that the rope could hold the weight of two adults. Foot by foot we went higher and more than once I feared that we would not make it. I saw myself already lying down at the base of the rock-wall without chance of a rescue. The climb seemed to last forever, the blood from my injured hands was now seeping over my wrists toward my shoulders.

After a half hour I reached the top, the rope proved to be tied to steel pin that was anchored to the rock. I pulled myself with my last strength over the top and fell exhausted on my back and closed my eyes to rest a bit, I only re opened them when I felt Pieter grabbing my leg to pull himself the last bit up and lay beside me to rest.

I sat up and surveyed the area, we found ourselves on a fairly wide sandy path that zigzagged from North to South. On the right side of me was the dept that we just had climbed out of and on the left side and other chalk rock mass that rose a couple of hundred meters above us. There was not a living soul in sight, I heard myself say: I did not know there was such a god forsaken place on earth, it looks like all life has disappeared.

Pieter did not reply that happened quite often. I thought I better do not trust this guy altogether, he has no pep or initiative.

It was noon and I stretched myself and without bothering with Pieter, I started to walk in a Northerly direction, knowing that Pieter would follow.

At a bend of 90 degrees to the right, Pieter caught up with me and grabbed my arm, he shouted Look! Down below, do you see that guy? I saw him and pulled quickly back behind some big rocks.

He shouted this is our chance, he has a backpack on him!

I am sure there is something in it that we can use. Yeah, sure and if he just left the village and we come in with his stuff, I would not give one cent for our skin. No, we just leave him alone, we will see what happens. It is better that he does not see us and I crawled a bit further behind the rocks and waited until the man had passed us. Pieter wisely followed my example and a bit later the man walked whistling passed us. When the sound of his footsteps had died down, I came out of the hiding spot and walked in the direction where the man had come from. I passed a small rock formation and saw a small village consisting of a few bungalows tens of meters below.

On the small beach were here and there a few small boats, there was not one sign of life and more and more I became convinced that the village was abandoned, in any case at this particular time. This was kind of surprising as this was the holiday season. I decided to take a chance and told Pieter to go a little quicker. We reached the bungalows and entered several of the bungalows and

took whatever we needed, we drank and ate until we were satiated, cleaned ourselves up, took clothing and shoes.

We found a large travel bag and filled it with clothing, food, bottles of soft drinks and toilette items. Barely a half hour later were we back on the path, which looked like it had been made for the occasional walker because beside the man with the backpack, we did not meet anyone else. Hours later there was still no end to our walk, there was nothing left from the food and drink that we had taken with us. Ahead of us we saw the path zigzagging for kilometres between the trees. A while later I spotted on the right side a water well, it was only a few meters deep, with a leap I jumped in the well. There were about 30 centimeters of water that had a milk white color and on top floated some beetles and other insects. This did not stop me from drinking the water, a bit later Pieter came also in the well. At least we will know what the reason is if we die, I said laughing, but Pieter did not hear me. Our parched lips felt a little better and I got into a better mood.

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An hour later we passed a farm at the right side of the road and on the left side was chicken coops with a run where several clothes lines were hung. When we walked toward the house, a young woman came out with a laundry basket on her arm. When she saw us she started immediately to scream: if you do not get out of here I call my husband! Pieter and I looked surprised at each other, but wisely decided to move on.

Not even an hour later when it started to get twilight, we approached another farm that lay a little further from the road than the last one. On the sill of the door sat an old man smoking a pipe. I said, I am going to ask if we can drink some water from the well, you wait here in case the guy asks too many questions.

I walked up to the man and asked him politely if we could drink some water from the well. *'Je vais vous chenger un verre, un moment', and he was gone. A few moments later he was back returning with a glass, He looked at me and motioned to Pieter, what about him? I said, my mate is on the lookout to check if there any military coming, I lied.

He seemed to believe me and he seemed to have come back too quick with the glass to have been able to call the military. There probably was not even a telephone in the house, but he could have given someone the task to that for him.

To convince the old man and put him at ease, I told him that a couple of days ago we were dropped off for training exercise and had to try to get back to base without any supplies from the unit, we were even not allowed to tell civilians that we were soldiers or ask for help, but we are late for our stipulated return time.

That is right interjected the man, there were indeed some soldiers with two trucks and did ask if I had seen four soldiers. While he said that, he looked at me questioning and I understood that he was wondering about the other two. I said we split up to have a better chance to get back to our unit in time, but the other two a still far behind us.

We are trying to get back to the barracks on our own. I then raised my glass to indicate that I wanted to drink some and the old man nodded in assent. I motioned to Pieter to come to the well

and after we had slaked our thirst I handed the glass back to the old man. Without having to ask, the old man said, if you follow this road, than you will reach automatically the main road that runs from Marseille to Cassis.

* I'll get you a glass, just a minute.

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*Bonne chance! He turned around and disappeared in the dwelling.

Wow, that went ok I said to Pieter when we continued on our way. I told him that I heard that they were seriously looking for us, which was not surprising since we deserted from the French Foreign legion after all.

The old man had spoken the truth, because in the distance we saw cars speeding, it had to be the way to Marseille-Cassis. This knowledge gave us a new hope.

Fifteen minutes later we reached a iron bar gate that closed the road, it was only then that we realized that we were all this time on private property.

On the right side was a home with a chicken run and on the side toward the back was also water well. When we were ready to walk toward the well, a car stopped on the other side of the gate, the door opened and a young man stepped out, opened the gate and drove through. He closed the gate and was ready to get back in his car when he noticed us.

What are you doing here he asked in a suspicious tone. I told him what I had already told the old man and the young guy believed me. He said once you have drunk your water, make yourselves scarce and do not forget to close the gate. He stepped in his car and took off.

I looked at Pieter to see his reaction, but he looked disinterested at the well, I forgot that Pieter did not understand one word of French. We walked toward the well and pulled a pail of water up and drank to our hearts content. From the corners of my eyes, I kept the house in sight, except for the chickens there was not a sign of life to be seen. I pulled Pieter with me toward the house and banged a few times on the door, when there was no reaction to my knocking we walked around the house and found a window that was a crack open. Pieter gave me a lift because the window was about seven feet off the ground.

I had to move some flower pots to the side before I could open the window all the way and crawl inside. Once inside I helped Pieter to get in. In a frying pan on the stove was a large steak, I took the lukewarm steak out of the pan, ripped it in two pieces and gave Pieter a piece. After that we searched the rest of the house, behind the kitchen were some other rooms, one of them a bedroom.

* Good Luck!

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There was not too much light in the room because the windows were closed, I tried the light switch, but nothing happened. There was no other choice then to feel our way in the room by touch.

It wasn't long before we found the clothes armoire against the wall; we searched hastily for some

fitting clothes and found some trousers and socks, but no shoes. Pieter was just in the process of donning a white shirt when we heard a motor scooter stop outside, then I heard a key being inserted in the lock and a man entered and called out; Caroline, Caroline, *où êtes Tu? There was no reply.

Pieter pushed himself against the wall beside the armoire while I dropped to the floor. A few seconds later the man came inside and tried to turn on the light which did not work, it was then when he saw the white outline of Pieter's shirt against the wall. He did not need any explanation, he turned around and ran. With a jump he went out the window and screamed aux assassins, aux assassins!!

Pieter and I did not wait and grabbed the stuff and followed the guy out the window. We saw him running through the gate toward the street without looking back. This allowed us to slip away undetected and run up a hill covered with low bushes. Halfway up the hill we dropped on the ground, protected from searching eyes from the street. We got dressed and were now completely dressed as civilians except for our military boots. I looked carefully through the bushes down toward the street and saw the man returning with a half dozen men armed with clubs, guns and scythes. Lucky for us they walked into the property and it did not take long before they went the way, Pieter and I just had left and disappeared from view. This is our chance Pieter! Let's go before those guys return!

Around the property was a low brick wall topped with a foot and half of barbed wire. We raced down and jumped effortlessly over it and ran in the direction of the street. There was a lot of traffic and when a large American model car came near, I stuck up my thumb. The car came to a halt with screeching tires and the driver asked through the half open window, where to?

* Where are you?

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We like to go direction Nice and the Italian border. OK, get in quick because I am in a hurry, we are too I said quietly because I saw the men returning from behind the house and walk toward the road in search of the assumed killers of the wife from the guy who had sounded the alarm.

In two seconds we got into the car and the driver took off with great speed. I looked at Pieter beside me and said: for the time being we are safe, they did not see us getting in the car. They will see later that they had it wrong when his wife comes home.

Because Pieter did not know French, I explained what the Frenchman had screamed about when he left the house.

The driver started to chat and I told him that we were seasonal workers from Holland and because the work in France was nearly finished, we decided to try our luck in Italy.

He took us as far as Hyères and said that later in the day he would continue to Saint- Tropez and would pick us up if we hadn't gotten another ride.

It was a nice gesture, but we were lucky to get right away another ride to Saint-Tropez and right after that one to Nice. There we strolled further on the beach in the vacant beach cabanas we found

finally some fitting shoes, now we were completely dressed as civilians. We also found a fair amount of money in French Francs, German Marks, English Pounds and Dollars. Happily we exchanged the money at a currency exchange kiosk at the train station and went for a good meal in a Bistro where we ordered all kinds of appetizers before the entrée. After the dinner we looked for a cheap hotel, lucky enough, the desk clerk did not ask for any I.D. papers. After a good night's rest, we set out to go direction Monaco where we arrived at nightfall. It proved to be child's play to get a vehicle, I ask Pieter if he could ride a motor scooter when I saw one, Of course! He said, what do I look like, a dummy? Ok, jump on that one and let's get the hell out of here I replied.

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Pieter walked up to the scooter and tried to start it, but it did not start. I pushed him aside, started the motor and looked back to Pieter who without saying a word to place behind me. We left this small town in great haste..

The distance from the Principality to Menton near the Italian border was not very far and we arrived there at midnight. We left the scooter a few hundred meters from the border and proceeded on foot. I was impossible to pass the border post without proper I.D. papers, so we decided to take a chance to go via the mountains. We took the first side road at our left side which ran steeply up, after a half hour we found us high above the town on a small path that ran in a Southerly direction. Our initial good mood turned quickly to disappointment, for as much we could see in the dark, it looked like our road was blocked by slick towering mountain walls. There was not any passage to be detected and climbing it was impossible. Disappointed we retraced our steps and decided to try to get across the border via the beach. From the street we walked across the railroad tracks, across the boardwalk, the wide walkway that ran along the beach and from there we had to turn left. After about 40 meters, we saw the brightly lit up border post where French and Italian border guards were chatting with each other. It was clear to us that this route was also an impossibility and I said maybe we will have more luck if we go on the railroad tracks, as usual, Pieter did not reply, we walked back to where the rails were, which ran in a Southerly direction. At no more than thirty meters ahead of us we saw on the left of the tracks a guard house. It is now twice as dangerous I said to Pieter, make sure you step only on the railroad ties because one misstep on the gravel will wake the border guard. Pieter nodded with his head, I was unsure, but I wanted to move on. Carefully as not to dislodge any gravel I went on, everything went well and I had passed the guard house more than five meters when I was startled by the sound of footsteps on the gravel. I could barely suppress an oath, not was I only startled, but the guard came out of the guardhouse with his pistol ready to fire.

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* Qui va là ? Qui va là ?!

I walked up to the man with a feigned surprised look and asked in a forceful tone with a French-American accent: 'Excuse me sir', we were on our way to the beach, is this already the border? We were looking for our friends who were fishing, but we took a wrong turn. Could you show us

the right direction please? While giving him this tale, I took an English pound note out of my pocket and handed it to him. You must be English tourist who does not know this is indeed the border the beach is there below, Goodbye!

I turned around like I was indeed a lost tourist and walked nonchalant down to the beach without concern for Pieter. Anew we got on the boardwalk, on the left was the water that gently lapped at the shoreline and on the right were restaurants and food-drink kiosks.

God damn idiot I yelled at the Dutchman, we were almost there and you had to ruin it by being careless. Didn't you know that everything depended on getting by that guard post?

Now we have to start all over again trying to get across the border. I do not want to be arrested, get that through your head!! Smarten up or else I drop you like those two *Moffen. I was furious, how could anyone be so stupid? Or did Pieter still not realize how serious the situation was?

In any case, the Dutchman did not react and we walked on in silence.

It had been since yesterday that we had something to eat, but at this late hour nothing was open.

After some time of walking we were passing a restaurant and probably to atone for his misstep, Pieter said, wait here on the step lucky, I will see if I can scrounge up some food. The yard of the restaurant was ringed with a low wall with a double gate in the middle that had three steps leading to it. Ok I replied, but if you hear me whistle you'll know there is trouble. Be careful not to be seen and watch out when you get outside again. With that, Pieter was gone.

Tired and a little discouraged I let myself down on the steps and unwillingly my eyes closed for a bit, but not for long, I had a feeling of something impending. I opened my eyes and peered in the direction we had come from.

* Who goes there? Who goes there?

* Slang nickname for Germans

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.Sure enough, there came a dark shadow waltzing up. It had to be a border guard or police man because while walking he was using a flashlight to check the yards and gardens along the street. I started to whistle softly to warn Pieter and closed my eyes quickly, pretending to sleep. A few seconds later, I 'woke' with a feigned startle when the beam of light from the flashlight shone in my face. I rubbed my eyes and looked at the man with an asking look. Oh hi, are you a policeman, where can I find the police station? A little while ago someone told me that there was one in this area, but I cannot find it. Apparently this monologue confused the cop because he replied, yes indeed, the police station is nearby.

Just tell me, how long are you here and what do you need to do at the police station?

In the mean time he shone his light in the yard, I hope that the dummy will lie low, I thought, and said to the cop oh, I am here for about an hour, someone stole all my stuff including my tent and I was going to report it before I go to the consulate of my country for help.

The police station is over there in the second street, you can't miss it. Good luck and good night.

The policeman turned around without ado and walked toward the border. I stood up, stretched out and walked toward the police station. Only after a few hundred meters did I dare to look around.

Unfortunately, the policeman did the same just as Pieter climbed over the gate.

I started to run Pieter did as well, while the cop stated to blow his whistle.

Like an arrow I ran into the first street which turned out to be a dead end, without ado I turned around climbed over a fence and dropped on my belly.

I was now in a sort of tropical garden with big cactuses with large leaves, which hid me completely from view.

A few seconds later Pieter found me there and dropped besides me.

At the left of us, in the low light we could see the police station, less than three minutes later a dozen or so footsteps passed us. Nobody thought of looking in the yard where we were and even if they had, they probably would not have been able to see us because of the foliage. I did not say a word to Pieter and decided to wait at least a half hour before leaving our hiding place.

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Without me asking, Pieter started to relate what had happened in the yard of the restaurant. While he was searching for foodstuff, he had heard my whistle and kept himself hidden. He heard the conversation between the cop and myself, but could not understand a word of it. After he heard the cop going away, he resumed his search, but then he heard someone out of his field of vision yawning. He then ran like hell to the exit and collided with the cop.

I wasn't interested anymore and asked myself why in the blazes I had chosen to take him along.

Now a whole hour had passed, and carefully I crawled on my belly as close as possible to the side of the garden on the street side. For fencing off the yard, only two strands of steel wire separated the yard from the street. I listened intently for any sound and one look into the street verified that it was totally deserted, of course I could not look around the corner.

Yet, I decided to take a chance and crawled under the steel wire and walked to the wide boulevard away from the beach. Arriving at the corner, I checked, but it was also deserted and not a sign of life to be seen.

Pieter had followed me like a shadow, but apparently did not dare to say anything. Like shadows and keeping close to the homes we ran to the place where we had left the scooter and a little later we left the town near the Italian border.

This time, instead of taking the same route along the beach, I took a road that was higher up the hill, a little further from the coastline. Despite driving slower to conserve gas, we ran dry near Frejus and left the scooter behind. Our nightly adventure had us totally exhausted and after a few more kilometres we lay down in the ditch beside the road and went to sleep.

The following morning we woke up stiff as a board. We decided to return to Marseille and figure out a new plan. Walking and hitchhiking, we reached Marseille by twilight.

Along the way we had been able to obtain some fruit, but our bellies were rumbling and I hoped to get a decent meal soon. However, that would not happen very soon.

Lucky enough, we found an empty freight container near the harbor where we stayed during the night.

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To our joy, we were able to earn a few Francs for unloading the truck of market-seller.

Right away we bought some food and drink and walked into the harbor property.

With our backs to the wall of the warehouse, we ate the tasty sandwiches.

In the mean time I observed my surroundings I had decided to try to leave the country by ship which was probably less dangerous than going anew across France to Belgium.

The harbor was separated from the road with an two meter high iron fence, behind it where crates, bales and warehouses.

We strolled in a westerly direction, but then our way was blocked by a gate from a military base and we turned back. After about half way back, I sat down against the wall of a warehouse, at my right I saw a small building where a man on a bicycle in some sort of uniform had arrived. I thought this has to be a security guard house, I figured I better check everything out. Thirty meters in front of us, at the left side was an entrance gate, I figured that there was the street that went to the guard house.

After having observed the area for a while, I discovered something that made me happy, not even twenty meters from us I noticed on the right that some of the bars of the fence were bent, enough for someone to squeeze through. Without saying a word, I stood up and strolled in the direction of the city. When Pieter came walking beside me, I contemplated if I would tell him about my plan or wait until later. I decided not to, who knows he could ruin it all again.

Because our stomachs started to rumble again, we bought with our last francs some more sandwiches and ate them on the way to the freight container where we had slept before. We spend the afternoon sitting with our backs against the fence and when twilight came, we crawled back in the freight container.

Nine o'clock on the dot, I woke up and woke Pieter up. We walked to where I had noticed the opening in the fence, in the shadows we sat against. Pieter had looked at me a few times, but did not dare to ask any questions. Thus I decided to let him know about my plans.

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There, at the right side is a hole in the fence and over there where you see the lit up windows at the left is a guardhouse with security guards. As soon I think it possible, we crawl through the hole, crawl between the crates and bales, and try to reach the warehouse.

I think we will be safe there, I am planning on looking for a ship who's home port is somewhere in the North, maybe one from Sweden. Once on board, we'll stay hidden until the ship docks somewhere.

At about ten thirty, I saw some movement at the guard house, probably time for the change of shift. I proved to be right, some guys arrived and some others departed through the gate. The one group for home and the other for their night shift. Before the exchange of shift was completed, I dragged Pieter with me to the hole in the fence. Keep your head down and make sure not to be seen, I have no desire to end up back in Fort saint Nicolas. Watch what I am doing and do the same, got it! Pieter nodded in ascent, but I knew from experience that things could easily go wrong. That is why I decided, if he made one more a stupid move, that I would go on without him. I slipped through the hole and walked crouched over to a pile of crates and waited there for the Dutchman to join me. He came quickly and I went on from crates to bales without checking whether Pieter did follow me.

I tried to get unnoticed to the next warehouse and came to the street that went by the guardhouse and continued between the other ware-houses. I had to cross that street un-seen, on the other side were stacks of oak kegs visible and a looming form of the warehouse of a large company. I looked left and right to check if the coast was clear and with a sprint I reached the other side undetected with Pieter right behind me.

We can now walk up straight, but do not panic when something happens I whispered to him. We

walked for a while without detecting anything suspicious, but it wasn't long before that changed. When we looked back we saw someone approach with a flashlight, Pieter jumped like a rabbit behind a pile of bales, but I thought it better to keep on walking in the direction of the gate to the ware house and pretend that all was normal.

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I whistled a tune and fiddled with the lock on the gate when a cop on a bicycle passed, with a nod and without stopping, he wished *Bonne garde et bonne nuit! Et vous de même!

I replied. The cop disappeared from view and Pieter came back up. Next time you stay right with me eh? I do not know if the cop had seen both of us or just me, let's hope for the best. I knew that Pieter would not reply, but I had to let him know.

We now had to start looking for a ship to leave this country. Since I knew that almost every harbor was laid out in the same manner, I walked with a quick step further.

A little later we reached the mooring piers, there were no many ships and it took a while to find one that I was looking for. It wasn't long before I saw a ship with the words S.S. Pallas, Flenzburg on the stern, I knew this was a port in Germany and in that direction we wanted to go. The time on my wristwatch showed 11.50 pm, thus a opportune time to sneak on board since most of the crew would still be a shore in the bars etc., still the same, we had to be careful. Pieter followed behind me.

At this there was not a trace of cargo to be seen yet, we went to the officers mess and found a fridge with everything we needed. I warned Pieter not to take too much as it would raise suspicion and the crew would start looking for the culprits who had raided the fridge. We then went to the anchor hold, the most suitable place for stow-a-way's.

Like on most ships, just above the anchor hold was a small storage room for the boatswain. After we had crawled though the first trapdoor, we descended a steep ships stair and found bales of cleaning rags, burlap sacks, and sawdust for the maintenance of the ship.

Nice, now with those sacks we can create sort of a hidden lair so that we do not get discovered as soon they come in. Come on Pieter, let's get started.

In short order we made a hiding place by piling the sacks and bales in such a manner that it was closed in from all sides and large enough to lie stretched out in it.

* have a good watch and good night.

*The same to you!

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When you wake up, stay where you are, I said to Pieter. When I go for more food, you come along so that you can find your way when you go the next time.

In a few days we should be in Germany, Belgium or maybe England, with that I turned to my side and fell immediately asleep.

It was 9 am when Pieter poked me in my side and said: Lucky, listen to that noise above us, what is it? It sounds like they are loading the ship it won't be long before we are at sea. I layed back down and went back to sleep.

Tired from all the walking and difficulties, we slept like logs and awoke not until it was 9 pm. I woke Pieter and together we climbed upstairs. There was still no load on the deck and we went again to the fridge and took another supply of food, enough to last us 24 hours.

Tomorrow night I will go by myself and the next day we go together, after that I think that you should be able to find your way by yourself, I said when we returned to our hiding place. That we had not encountered anyone was a good sign, there was not much else to do than sleep. When I awoke again, I felt the ship rolling up and down, a sign that we had left port and were on open sea. That putting my mind at ease, I closed my eyes again. When I went out that night to get some more food, I got the scare of my life. On the deck were crates loaded with the word "Beder" written on them. I knew this was a shipping company from Casablanca, this was bad news because Morocco was French Colony. There was no use to mention this to Pieter, so I decided not to. Again we had a day of boredom because after a while we had recuperated from our lack of sleep. Since there was nothing to do, I decided to teach Peter how to make sailor's knots. However, it proved quickly to be a useless task because he had no aptitude for that at all. Around 6 PM we had something to eat, I said to Pieter make sure you do not go on deck before 12.30 or 1 AM because then the guards from the finished shift would have picked up their food from the mess and taken to their cabins. I know damn well what to do growled Pieter, feeling obviously being treated like a child and insulted.

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Sorry mate, I did not know you would be so easily offended, good night for now. I decided to go to sleep and turned around. A bit later I woke up startled and felt beside me where Pieter was supposed to be, but Pieter was gone. I crawled out of our improvised den and wanted to turn on the light when above me the trap door opened and Pieter called: Hey Lucky, come up they are not mad that we are on board. I looked up at the smiling face of the Dutchman, swearing silently and wishing I had left the idiot with the two Moffen! When I got on deck, I had already a story ready that I would tell the Captain, it was the same story I told the cop in Menton. Only this time I would tell him that the Belgian Consul did not want to help me and that I tried to get on my own to get back to Belgium and that this ship seemed to be the best opportunity. On deck I was met by the boatswain and a few sailors. He said come on, to the bridge, the old man wants to talk to you. While walking I saw not only the crates that I had seen before, but also Military vehicles with French markings for the French army in Morocco. So it was not England, Belgium or Germany that we were sailing to, but French Morocco. I knew that the French army was fighting against the National rebels who were fighting for independence. The Captain a man in his fifties was waiting on the bridge for us. So, so you are the stowaways, where do you come from? And in a friendly tone of voice he asked, what did you hope to achieve by coming on board? And I told him my story. I saw another man on the bridge who did not seem to belong to the crew, but was probably responsible for all the army material on board, so I realized I had to be extra careful about what I was saying. When I had finished my story, the Captain said with a chuckle, well then you have bad luck, my friend!

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We are not sailing to the places you had thought we would, but we are going to Morocco. The French government did charter us to bring military equipment to Morocco and we won't be going for the next few years to the North.

I see from your tattoo that you were a sailor, good then you can give a hand on deck and your mate can help the cook. This way you pay for your passage and food, move it!!

That was it, we had to follow the steward to the aft where we were assigned a cabin to share with a crew member.

The Captain had ordered that we first cleaned up and don clean clothes. After a good evening meal, we were able to socialize with the crew who seemed okay with us being there.

Pieter had to share the cabin of the cook, and I was put with the stoker. When I came back from a refreshing shower, the stoker looked at me from head to toe and said, man as a sailor I do not understand why you did not come right away to us you know that sailors help each other in time of need. If you had not stolen food from the mess, we would never have found you.

I realized this was the case and the worst of it was, that the Captain in order not to get in trouble himself, was obligated to report us to the French authorities in Morocco that he had stowaways on board.

If he would not do it, then the French agent in charge of the army material would certainly do that. The stoker took us to the mess and after a coffee and a cigarette, and chatting a bit with some of the crew, we went to bed.

A sailor woke me the following morning and after washing myself I went to the mess for breakfast. Most of the crew was there and they looked at us stowaways as if we were from another planet.

After breakfast I went with the sailors on deck and the cook's mate took Pieter to the galley. They gave me a scraper and together with the sailor we had to get rid of all rust spots to get ready for painting.

It was the normal order of the day to maintain the ship. While working, I fabricated a story on how we had gone to Southern France on bicycles and how everything got stolen from us while we were sleeping.

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At three o'clock we had a coffee break, just like in the morning at ten o'clock and after that we went back to work. The sailor I was working with stayed away a little longer, but I did not pay attention to it. When he came back He looked at me with a penetrating look and said, guess what I heard? My stomach cramped together because I knew what was coming. I swallowed, shook my head and said no. The sailor went on, I heard from the cook that you two escaped from the Foreign Legion, he just heard it from the cook's mate who in turn heard it from your mate.

I threw the scraper away shaking with anger and ran to the galley. Pieter was busy peeling potatoes, but sprang up as soon I entered. I did not give him a chance to say anything and my fist hit him on the chin which slammed his head into the wall and he went through his knees onto the floor. Quicker than I expected he came back up with the knife still in his hand and came at me. His right arm shot up and he caught me just above my left eye. The blood spurted from the cut down my face which made me even wilder. With both hands I grabbed him by the throat and smacked his head several times against the wall of the galley. I would have killed him if it was not for the sailor, the cook and cook's mate to come in between us. They pulled us apart and the sailor managed to calm me down.

The cook's mate was sent to the bridge to get the first aid kit, the cook had managed to stop the

bleeding a bit with a wet cloth and the sailor treated my injury.
It turned out to be not as bad it seemed at first, it was only a superficial wound.
While the men were taking care of me on the one side of the galley, Pieter sat subdued on the other side. No one seemed to take notice of him.
With a band aid on my eye we were back at work in less than fifteen minutes after the incident.
The Old Man probably will ask you what has happened because I am sure that the cook's mate has told the whole story on the bridge.
I shrugged my shoulders, what more could happen to me?
Tell me, is it true that you came from there? OK, maybe a dumb question seeing how you reacted, it had to be true.

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Of course the sailor was right, so I told him the story from the beginning to end.
That guy must really be a nut case, exclaimed the sailor pointing at Pieter.
All the misadventures along the way were indeed the fault of the Dutchman.

Shortly after it was time for lunch and everybody was in the mess hall, the mood was subdued and clearly, two opposing camps had formed.

What the hell is the matter with you guys? You stare like there was a murder committed.

Let these two fight it out and let us return to normal OK?

Everybody knew he was right Pieter stood up and left with a few other guys to the deck.

I finished my lunch, lit a cigarette and went to the recreation room. I sat barely down when the door opened, I thought it would be the sailor wanting to talk to me, but to my surprise it was a young woman.

When she saw me she stepped in the room and came to my table, she said, do not ask me why I do this, my husband is the telegrapher on board and during dinner I heard that he had to send a telegram to France to ask what to do with you two. She took a deep breath while she gave me a strange look, if I understand it correctly, they have to deliver you to the French authorities in Casablanca and take your mate on the way back to France.

According to the agent on board here, He will be expelled from France as an undesirable.

I have not heard what will happen to you. There fell a silence, we looked at each other and I felt some twinges in my belly. The woman was about 30 years old and very attractive she stood up and said, I hope this information is useful to you. She shook my hand and kept it a little longer than necessary, she then let go and quickly left the room.

What she had told me could be true it was the normal chain of events. At the time of our escape from the fort, Pieter was still in the first section and had not gone through the medical tests whereas I was already in the second section and ready for being shipped to North Africa.

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That was probably the reason they send me through to the original destination of Sidi-Bel-Abbes.

Absent minded I walked back to the cabin I shared with the stoker, he was already there and was

aware of the telegrams. Together we walked out of the cabin again to another where a mate of him was, he confirmed what everybody already seemed to know, that I would be handed over to the French Police in Casablanca. The sailor filled three big glasses with gin and said in a conspiring voice, maybe we will find a way to get you off the ship before it gets that far, what do you say to that?

Yeah, what could I say? I had tasted freedom since my departure from Marseille and was not happy to be sent to Sidi-Bel-Abbes. If that is possible, I would love to give it a go, but is that not too dangerous for you?

You do not have to worry about that, after all, you have to do everything yourself. We only tell you how you can do it. In that case, tell me all about it, I am curious now!

Yourself being a sailor, you know that there are always life vests and other supplies stored on the lifeboat deck in case of need and everybody has to abandon ship. I propose that we walk up and show you where you have to be, we will see you tonight then, but not right away after supper, it is better to wait until twilight as not to be seen from the bridge, OK?

I found that good, we went back to work. None of us had noticed that the cook's helper had been resting right below the porthole from our cabin and had heard everything.

He went right away to tell Pieter and he contacted another sailor sympathetic to him. He in turn went to the bridge to report the conversation.

Nothing happened after supper, I was on deck smoking a cigarette when the stoker came beside me. After a few hours we will pass close to the Spanish coast, the idea is to jump overboard with a life vest and swim to the coast. I found that an excellent idea, it was great that these guys were willing to help me.

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We have also placed a waterproof flashlight and a bottle of brandy, because after being in the water for a while you could use a stiff drink. Keep in mind, I am not going later with you to the lifeboat deck, as soon as the sailor on the bridge gives you the signal, you are on your own. Do not dawdle and go as fast as you can. Come, let's go.

I followed the stoker to the lifeboat deck and he pointed to a packet that was placed between two crates, together we walked back down.

The stoker stopped at the base of the stairs and said if I were you, I would go to sleep for an hour or so mate. You are going to need all your strength. I followed his advice and slept for a good hour before the man came to wake me up. I say good bye here because I do not want to see you anymore. I wish you the best of luck along the way and in Spain. He shook my hand and walked out of the cabin. I went to the place where I could keep an eye on the bridge the agreed sign was three flashes of a light. After a bit of pacing back and forth I saw the signal and with haste I went up, I opened the crate with the life vests and put it on when all of a sudden I was grabbed by six pairs of hands. I put up a good fight, but it did not take long before I was on the floor. Among the six were the boatswain and the agent of the company. My arms and legs were pressed against the deck so I could not move one inch.

Above me appeared the red turned face of the agent and he snarled: so-so, mister you thought you could just escape huh? Well it is good that we were just in time to prevent that!

They pulled me up and took me to the stern, there they locked me up in the workshop of the boatswain, satisfied the men walked away. I did not understand any of it, I was sure that no one

outside me, the stoker and befriended sailor knew anything of my escape plan. I was also convinced that they would have not betrayed me, how could it be then that others knew about it? No matter how much I tried to figure it out, I could not come up with an answer. The workshop was the only room on board with the windows covered with iron bars. I knew enough of ship doors to know that there was no escape possible, for sure not locked with a hasp-lock on the outside. Sitting between the paint cans and brushes, I realized that there was no chance of escaping because there was nothing available to force the iron bars or door. There was nothing else to do then wait and see what would happen.

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Chapter 3

December 1954-January 1955

Morocco

The rest of the trip I was kept locked up, in the morning the Boatswain and Steward brought me breakfast. In a few hours we will be in Casablanca said the Steward, more than likely the French Police will take you off the ship, in any case, I wish you luck! He shook my hand, which was not much appreciated by the Boatswain who hastily closed the door and disappeared.

Only after the ship was securely moored against the quay did they open the door and I was allowed outside. I had barely one foot on deck when I was handcuffed by the French Police.

The sun was hot and I noticed that everybody on deck was gawking at me when I was escorted by the two police men down the gangway. It was then when I noticed on that side of the ship a group of thirty or so armed men were waiting, nobody was allowed off the ship as long they were there. I walked with my escort to a jeep which was parked between a few trucks. Once in the truck, a whistle blew and all the armed men took a place in the trucks. The convoy left and I threw a last look in the direction of the ship that was supposed to have me taken to freedom.

Along the way I saw many armed soldiers and realized that France was involved in a guerrilla war with the rebels of the Moroccan freedom fighters, who fought for the independence of Morocco. That was probably the reason of the show of force on and by the ship. I surmised, maybe they do not want to send me to Sidi-Bel-Abbes in Algeria, but make me stay here and fight because I was convinced that units of the French Foreign Legion were also stationed here.

Only later I learned that even here the hierarchy had to be respected, and that each new recruit had to be passed on via Sidi-Bel-Abbes to be checked out.

After a half hour or so, the jeep and two trucks drove into the base of the Gendarmerie and I was allowed to get of the Jeep. I noticed that the policemen were now a lot friendlier than before.

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I was taken to a cell and the door closed behind me. When my eyes got used to the semi darkness, I saw a bare floor, four bare walls, a bare ceiling and a heavy and solid door.

Not even ten minutes later the door opened again and who appeared? ...Pieter.

Like a panther I jumped at him and grabbed him by the throat, but I was not fast enough to do more because the guard who brought him in pushed me back and slammed the door close again.

Damn, I swore, if they sent that guy with me, I will make sure that he never reach his destination alive.

After a while had passed, the door opened again and a policeman called come on, I trudged behind him and a little further was another cell and he pushed me in there.

The cell was the same as the one I just had left, but here there was an Arab sitting in a corner on the floor wailing incessantly. Again the door locked behind me and I was alone with the Arab, who was wailing about something I did not understand.

I stayed at least for an hour in my cell with the wailing Arab before they came to get me. A Gendarme brought me to an office where an officer told me to empty my pockets. The little money I had gotten from the stoker and sailor included. He confiscated that with saying that it would be used to pay for my food for the day. Tomorrow we will see how it goes. After we have done a thorough back ground check, your mate Pieter will be send back, probably with the same ship. You will be probably sent to an Army base, but that is not for sure yet. In the mean time you will stay in your cell.

The Gendarme returned me to my cell and I crawled in the furthest corner. The stink in the cell was terrible. Around noon they got me again and I was allowed to have something to eat in a small office, after that I was immediately returned to my cell.

Around 4 pm I got picked up again by the Gendarme, but this time we got in a jeep of the French army.

He said, your Dutch friend has been taken to another police post at the harbor and will embark on the ship. I wish you a good trip. The guy walked back and the jeep left. Besides the driver was a soldier, without a word they drove me to the other side of town, where they stopped at the gate of a small military base, the gate led to a large aisle going into an inner courtyard, but first I had to get into an office.

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An Adjutant looked at me and growled, I have no idea how long you will be staying here, but try to behave yourself. You are here in the garrison's penal department with some other convicted soldiers.

Back in the aisle a double door opened and I came into the courtyard.

Right away half dozen curious French soldiers came around me. I was still in civilian clothes and they said look a civilian among us, what did you do twerp?

The question came from a giant of a man who was clearly the leader of the pack.

I told them my story without embellishments. In the mean time we had taken a seat against the wall and the giant said, you sure had some bad luck, but that is life. Come on I will show you to your cell, go and sleep for a few hours.

This cell was also bare; there was only a small window above the door. At right against the wall

was a stone bed with the head end made of bricks, between the bed and the wall was a steel barrel that was used as a toilet. There were no sheets or blankets on the bed, but when I lied down, I fell asleep right away.

Sometime later I sensed that someone was standing over me and woke up startled; it was the giant from before, he said come on, let's go and eat. I followed him to the outside where a twenty or so men were sitting in a circle around a dinner plates and pots with food. Someone dished the food on my plate and I started to eat. It turned out that the giant was a Master-Caporal; he was being punished for public intoxication. He would be finished with his sentence by the end of next week. We chatted about just about anything until it became dark and everybody went to their cell. A little later my cell door opened and the Master-Caporal and came to sit on my bed and said my mates are busy with removing the barbed wire in the courtyard so that you can make your escape, I will come and wake you when it is done. Here is a note with an address where you can go, but be aware there is a *couvre-feu in force, that means you are not be on the street without a valid reason. If they catch you, you end up right back here.

The address is from a Jewish girl, one of my girl friends. Stay inside and do as she says, next week we will see what we can arrange.

I opened the note, in it was written that I was an old friend and that she should take care of me.

*cur-few

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I put the note in my pocket and lay down again. Not for long, the door opened and this time it was not the Master-Caporal, but another soldier who growled at me; pick up your stuff and follow me. Together we walked to the exit, at the gate was a jeep waiting who took us at great speed to another part of town. Upon leaving my cell, I noticed that all other cells were closed, was there another case of our plans being ratted out? I probably would never find out. In the new barracks they put me in another cell and because there was no one else to talk to, I fell asleep on the hard cot.

The next morning I was woken up by someone bringing breakfast; a cup of black coffee and a pair of sandwiches. I did get the time to eat at my leisure and was wondering where I was.

Around noon I got picked up by a pair of soldiers who took me to another army base. This time it was one of the French Foreign Legion, but besides the man who brought me food and drink, I did not get to see anyone. I got only to hear during my two days stay there that I was in Fez.

Toward noon of the third day they came to get me and I was told that were going to Oujda, the last town before the Algerian border.

The prison in Oujda was completely different and something I never had seen before.

After I was brought to the garrison's commandant, a soldier took me to the

*Locaux Diciplinaire. You are lucky that I am a nice guy he said, I do not know why I had to bring you here because normally Legionnaires go to their own prison cells, I did not understand one bit about it, but I replied politely **Merci pour l' information.

The guy brought me to some sort of courtyard ringed by four walls topped with barbed wire. On each corner was a watch tower, but they were not occupied. The entrance gate led to a courtyard of about thirty square meters where the dirt had been compacted, right across from the gate was the access to the cell block where I was placed in a cell. Needless to say that there were no beds or

mattresses either, like in the other cells the bed consisted of bricks.

I lied down on the hard floor and tried to think about my situation, but without any luck. I smoked one cigarette after the other and around five o'clock other prisoners came intermittently back from working outside the prison.

*Prison buildings.

** Thanks for the information.

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Because I was still in my civilian duds, they expected me to tell how I ended up there.

I told my story again with some embellishments, I saw the surprised expressions from my listeners, but also awe and respect.

Among them were a few from the Alsace with whom I chatted in German. From them I heard that I was branded as extremely dangerous. That rumor could be true because the next day the watch towers had armed guards on them. I was also the only one who was not allowed to go outside to do chores and had to stay indoors. To pass the time, I decided to clean one by one the cells of my co-prisoners. This was much appreciated by them and they got my various stuff like cigarettes and wine. The only thing I now missed was my freedom, three boring weeks passed this way.

Then one day during morning roll call we got a visit from the A.S.G

(Adjutant du Service Général) is something similar to a Regimental Sergeant Major in the British army.

He was also responsible for the day to day operations of the prison. After the roll call he looked around the courtyard and asked who of you smokes that much, looking at all the cigarette butts laying around. Without thinking I did a step forwards, while I felt the others staring at me. He gave me a quizzing look and said Aha, you are the chain smoker here Monsieur le Légionnaire?

I felt that the man was suspicious, yes adjutant that is me because I have not much else to do.

I took a half pack of cigarettes from my pocket and showed it to him, unfortunately, this is my last pack and have to quit smoking which is probably better for my health.

You could cut the tension with a knife everyone present looked from me to the Adjutant and back. The Adjutant broke the silence and reached in his pocket to pull a pack of cigarettes out and handed it to me.

These are for you, keep up the yard and I will get you more when you are finished with these. With this the incident was over to the relief of every one.

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From one of the Alsations I heard that the barracks were originally from the 2e R.E.C (Deuxième Régiment Etrangère de Cavalerie)(Second Foreign Cavalry Regiment) and they were in charge of the base prison. Now it was for one reason or another handed over to the French Army. Apparently, under the rule of the 2e REC, the conditions for prisoners were extremely harsh according to the stories. However, I took those stories with a grain of salt. It could not have been that bad.

Because of the entertaining tales of the Alsatian and having a good time, I did not ask about my impending transfer, and the Adjutant did not seem to have any news either.

More than a month had passed when one morning I got an eerie feeling when I got on the courtyard everybody was already gone to do the chores. Since that was the normal order of the day, and I was not afraid to go to Sidi-Bel-Abbes either, that could not have been the cause for the uneasiness. I did ignore the tall tales of the Alsatian and others and knew that sooner or later I would end up there, but yet. I looked at the azure blue sky while inhaling deeply the smoke of my cigarette, then it dawned on me, the guards were gone from the towers.

Of course they were there only there because of me, but now they were gone, that could only mean that I was on my way out as well.

Suddenly the gate swung open and two soldiers beckoned me to follow them, from behind them came the Adjutant shrugging his shoulders. Sorry my friend, I just heard it myself, you are going to be transported this afternoon. Two soldiers will take you to the base in Tlemchen, it is the first base located in Algeria. You will hear how it will go from there. I wish you the best and a have a good trip. With that he shook my hand. I felt it was a well meaning good bye.

I followed the two soldiers to a clothing storage building where I got fitted with a military uniform. They told me that soldiers in civilian duds were not allowed to pass the border. The sleeves had the outlines of two chevrons with the point of them to the top, probably the stripes of a corporal or sergeant.

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In the French Foreign Legion a corporal had two green stripes and a sergeant two gold stripes, which I did not know at that time.

By the time I came back, all the other convicts were back from their chores, they had asked to be present during my last hours there. Permission was granted, to stop working on the chores early. During lunch I got served by them and my last hours there seemed to pass quicker than I had expected. Then the time came to say good bye and go to a place I knew nothing about, the guys felt for me because they knew that place very well.

Two Gendarmes were waiting for me and we walked together to a Delahaye-jeep by the gate. They took me to the train station and took me on board the train car. Here they wanted to put the handcuffs on me, while giving them a grim look, I protested loudly and said; you can shoot me down like a dog if I try to escape. They insisted saying it was a standard procedure, but in the end they relented and left them off.

The trip to Tlemcen was not long, from there we went with a jeep to the base of the 5em Régiment de Tirailleurs Algériens where I was placed in the jail of the base, until a unit of the French Foreign Legion would pick me up. They would take me the home of the famous Legion in Sidi-Bel-Abbes.

My escort took me to the office of the Service General Adjutant where about eight soldiers were busy with writing, or as bore out later, pretended to do that. My escort signed a few papers and returned to Morocco, leaving me behind with a group of curious soldiers.

Sometime later an Adjutant came into the office and from his looks I could see right away that he was a bully. He was an Algerian, which I did not understand since the French Foreign Legion was engaged to fight the Algerian rebels. It was then when I noticed the soldiers were smirking behind the back of their superior, some of them tried to make it clear to me that the Adjutant was a little daft, which turned out to be true.

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I had to empty my pockets and put everything on the table. In between the contents was the shell of a 5 mm round, like a hawk the Algerian snatched the small item up and stared at me with a wild look and snarled; where is the pistol? Give it up or face the consequences, I am God around here and no one else.

Behind the Adjutants back the other soldiers were smirking and had a hard time not to laugh out loud. I had to bite on my lip to prevent the same thing. Finally some soldiers could not contain themselves and burst out laughing. This made the Adjutant even madder, he screamed are you trying to make a fool out of me? Who do you think you are?

I will make sure that you are going to pay for this! Keep that in mind.

I still had not said a word, when the guy looked at the outline of the stripes on my uniform sleeves, and to the amusement of the other guys He said; for you no more meat and wine! Their amusement was contagious and me sassy. I said if that is the case, I will notify my superiors in Sidi Bel Abbes about the poor treatment I received here. I can assure you that this is not the end of it. He looked at me questioning, who are you that you dare to speak to a superior like this? What superior? Who says that? Find out for yourself Mister know it all. My file is in front of your nose.

The Algerian picked up the file and started to leaf through it, the other soldiers had trouble not to laugh out loud when they tried to indicate to me that he could not read.

He looked at me again with his gaze fixed on my sleeves he was confused and called for a guard. Take this guy and make sure I do not see him again, move it!

The guard along with another soldier took me to a cell block 60 feet or so away from the main building. Don't pay attention to that guy, he only got his rank due to thirty years of service, but is basically good for nothing.

Don't worry about meat or wine, we will take care of that. Here you go, have this pack of cigarettes, with appreciation I took the pack, but said nothing, they did not know better that I was not a sergeant.

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The cell block was a one story building, you came through the only door visible on the outside, then through a short hallway which formed a T with another hallway. On both sides were the cells. The guard told me that the left side was for the soldiers and the right side for the NCOs'.

We walked down the right side of the hall, wait here for a sec. said the soldier to the guard I will get couple bottles of wine for the sergeant and he left.

The guard lit a cigarette and told me that on the other side of the hallway where three Spaniards who had had deserted from the French Foreign Legion basic training camp. When we are going away, I will let them out for a half hour or so and then you can have some time to talk with them. That is great man I won't forget this and gave him a nudge in the arm. The other soldier came back with the wine, and the guard opened a cell door on the other side. So, I leave the door open and lock it up again a little later. Your cell can stay unlocked.

Both men left and left me alone with the surprised Spaniards, I did recognize them I had met them in Marseille a couple of months earlier.

In broken French they told me that the training was hell compared to the life in Marseille and that they had their fill of it. What in God's name would happen in Sidi Bel Abbes?

I told them that without a doubt that there would be a rough time ahead and for me it would be a

hundred times worse. I told them not to despair because there would come an end to that too. I saw them staring at my sleeves and I gave them a Bullshit story to instill some courage even though I did not know myself what was in store for us in the home town of the Foreign Legion. I lied that because of my knowledge of foreign languages they let me work in the Deuxième Bureau and after a month I was promoted to sergeant. Shortly after, I had an altercation with a Captain and after the fight I had left him more dead than alive. So I deserted and came as a stowaway on a ship, this is how I ended up here. For that reason the punishment for me would be far more severe than for them.

I told them not to worry, I wish I could believe that myself.

Not that I was afraid for what was in store for me in Sidi Bel Abbes, but yet?

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Chapter 4
Same time frame
Sidi-Bel-Abbes

I spoke longer than a half hour with the Spaniards, the bottles of wine were finished and I locked them back in their cell. I thought for a fleeting moment that I could escape, but looking at the barbed wire atop of the wall I realized that it would be impossible.

Maybe I could talk the guards into it? I let go of that idea because what could I do without any means in a country I did not know. Why did I escape in Marseille, if they had been a little quicker in Marseille, I would not have landed in this trouble.

The Spaniards had told me that it was really hard in the training camp, especially for those who did not speak French, so why would I worry? I decided to let things run its course it probably would not be that bad.

Around five pm I got a warm meal with a large portion of meat and three bottles of wine. I gave one to the Spaniards and the other I drank during the course of the night.

The breakfast we got the next morning was great, but we were barely finished when we were led to the gate of the base where members of the 5e REI (Régiment Etrangère d'Infanterie) which was also based in Tlemcen. In front of the gate were a few trucks on which we took a seat, not a word was spoken. The platoon was under the command of a lieutenant and when he came out of the office with a bunch of papers, we left with the convoy. I saw that there were a couple of Jeeps, Dodges and some smaller trucks with soldiers, for the escort. Not for us, but for protection in case the rebels would attack us who were very active in Algeria.

Shortly after departure, the Spaniards got into a discussion with a couple of other Spanish Legionnaires. They asked for all the details about their desertion. My companions translated that we should count ourselves lucky that we did not fell in the hands of the rebels. If they had taken instead of the French Army, they would have cut off your nuts!!

The road was extremely bad and we were shaken up like rag dolls, clouds of dust rose up to hundred meters in the sky and could be seen from kilometres away. However, nobody let on how lousy it was for us. The speed of the vehicles was very fast compared to those who used the paved roads, without stopping the trip took only a couple of hours.

We drove into town from the west side and turned left into the courtyard of the base.

The guy next to me said we are going to take you the Petit Quartier, on the other side is what we call Le Grand Quartier from the base Vienot. However, you will learn that all in good time. It is new and we do not know ourselves what it looks like, because none of us have been there yet. You will get acquainted with CP 3, I wish you the best.

The vehicles drove on for another hundred meters along the main road of the Petit Quartier and turned right in front of some buildings. There we had to disembark where some guys from CP 3 were waiting for us. As soon we got inside they pushed us against the wall, we had to keep our nose against the wall and were warned not to move or else.

What in God's name was this? Were those Spaniards telling the truth?

We stood there for three hours or so and some of the cadre took turns standing behind us and every now and then hit the Spaniards really hard so that it was not long before all three were bleeding from a broken nose. To my surprise they spared me of that treatment, later I understood that it was because I had escaped from Marseille and not from the basic training base. Technically, I was still an EV (engagé volontaire). I would stay that way until my training was finished and received my white Kepi.

*CP 1 (Compagnie de Passage 1):

Was for Legionnaires who had finished their basic training and a collection company for Legionnaires assigned to other regiments and for those who returned from furlough and returned to their unit.

CP 2:

Was strictly for those who had completed their contract and waited to be shipped back to France, it was also called company of the liberated.

CP 3: Was strictly for new comers from Marseille who had to go again through the medical tests and Deuxième Bureau. Then wait to be assigned to one of the training centers. In those days there were three training centers, Mascara, Bedeau and Saida

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After the Spaniards were severely beaten up, an Adjutant came up and asked something from the first one. The guy turned around to answer and got right away such a hard hit in the head that he smacked into the wall, I thought his head would split open.

The Adjutant screamed, stay with your nose against the wall, I do not want to see your face. He whispered oui, oui and again he got a hit, it is 'Oui mon Adjutant'. The other Spaniards took that order to heart, but even so, they got some of the same punishment.

Someone came and stood behind me, I braced myself for the blows I expected to get. So, you think

you can play Mister Don-Juan with your long sideburns, we'll know what to do with those. I found it the better part of valor not to reply and stayed with my nose pressed against the wall. Why did Mister Don-Juan escape from Marseille? Was it not good enough there for Monsieur? Without taking my nose off the wall I replied, it was taking so long there that I decided to come here on my own.

The reply evoked some sarcastic laughing behind me, but they left me alone.

After some time the first Spaniard got a kick in the behind and was told to turn left and run, every ten minutes the next one had to go and finally me. We were taken to the Barber and got our hair all shorn off. Then we had to follow a Legionnaire, we left the CP 3 and Petit Quartier. Once we crossed the road, we entered Caserne Vienot and passed the office of the A.S.G on the right side. There were some small buildings with offices, among them one of the chaplain, something I did not know at the time.

Then we walked between two buildings, on the right side was a lower building with the showers and on the left the tall buildings from CP 1 and CP 2.

Building materials was laying everywhere for the buildings in progress, a group of Legionnaires were busy cleaning the place up.

We walked into a sort of street from Quartier Vienot, on the end of it was a large green gate with a small door in it.

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As soon the door opens, you start running and stay on the pavement this will take you to the office of the Master Sergeant. Between you and the wall of the building is a ditch, stay at attention and press your face against the wall, then scream as loud you can your name. Then wait and see what will happen, you get it! I looked at the Legionnaire and nodded.

In the mean time we had reached the door and the Legionnaire knocked. The door swung open and I ran as I was told. The asphalt path made a 90 degree turn to the right and after 50 meters to the left and there I saw the Spaniards, all three stiff like a board standing at attention. They were standing on the right side of the door so I placed myself on the left side. I jumped to attention and screamed my name; Legionnaire Malicien, Master Sergeant! I waited to see what would happen, but did not dare to look at the Spaniards. From the corner of my eye I could see the swollen faces from the beating they had received in the CP 3. The Master Sergeant came out of the office he seemed to be a jovial sort of man. He planted himself with his feet wide spread in front of the door and looked in my direction. Since when are you a Legionnaire? Are you daft? As long you do not have the white Kepi, you are no more than a low life E.V. got it!

I yelled as loud I could; oui Master Sergeant! Present yourself again and better do it right this time Allez!

I yelled again engage volontaire Malicien, Master Sergeant! This time it seemed to be OK, because he muttered something and disappeared into his office.

It was already getting dark when the first Spaniard got called into the office. We heard a question and a reply, followed by a resounding smack. The other two Spaniards were shaking like a leaf in the wind hearing that.

The Master Sergeant called a Sergeant from outside and exchanged a few words then the sergeant went outside again and disappeared from view. A few moments later he came back with another

guy dressed in a khaki shirt and pants: this was the attire for the regular convicts (P.N.-punis normaux).

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Both men went back in the office and we heard them talking again. The guy the sergeant had brought turned out to be a translator. The Spaniards were led one by one into the office and again they received more beatings. I had to go inside and stand in front of a desk, the Master Sergeant looked at me and asked, did you not like it in Marseille that you escaped? Sure Master Sergeant, but it took them so long to get me processed that I thought they did not want me anymore, so I decided to come here on my own.

The cockamamie story seemed to work. Aha, maybe you had hoped that we would send you back to Marseille eh? Well that is not going to work, we will keep you here for a few weeks and check out if you have a criminal record and then we will see Allez, go!

At least he had listened to my story and I escaped a beating.

Later I learned that the Spaniards not only got these beatings for having deserted from the training center, but also for not being able to speak French by now.

We had to wait for another hour or so, then the fat Sergeant ordered them to take off their socks and shoes, the Spaniard looked at me to see what I was doing because the translator kept his mouth shut. He screamed, on my command run! Follow the legionnaire. We were in a courtyard of about twenty five meters square, along the sides were the cell blocks. The first block on the right side was for the NCO prisoners and near the office was a block for the regular convicts. The third one was for those convicted by a court martial to be sent to Compagnie Disciplinaire, (C.D.) or were still waiting to be sent to a court martial.

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In the same bloc were also guys waiting for the Tribunal Militaire, for a transfer to a civilian prison or had already finished their prison term and were sent to the CP 2 to be thrown officially out of the Legion. The fourth bloc was for solitary confinement, which meant no talking to anyone or doing chores. The only ones allowed to do chores and talk with each other were the regular convicts. (P.N.'s)

We were taken to the solitary confinement block and locked up.

The door had barely closed when someone knocked on it. I turned around and saw the light of a lit cigarette through the peephole. In one step I was at the door and took the offered cigarette, I looked through the peephole, but saw no one.

While smoking, my eyes got used to the semi darkness, like in all French cells, the bed and pillow were made of bricks and no sheets or blankets were provided, but the mattress was made of alfalfa grass which grew in abundance in Algeria.

In the wall across from the door was an iron barred window, standing on the bed I could see a

corner of the courtyard and the office of the staff sergeant. Above the door was another iron barred window, the walls were white washed and beside the door was the bucket of about thirty inches high to serve as a toilet. I lied down on the bed and fell in a deep sleep.

The next morning I awoke to the sound of slamming doors and mess tins, however my door stayed close for the rest of the day.

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The same the next day, I found it strange, but I wasn't hungry or thirsty yet. The next day my door was opened and the Garde -de -Couloir (hallway guard) indicated to pick up my bucket and empty it in the shit pit. There was a water tap to rinse the bucket and I took the opportunity to stick my head under the tap and take a few slugs of water.

The hallway was full of running convicts doing all the same thing, everything was done on the run. I got locked back up in my cell and fifteen minutes later the door opened and I got a chunk of bread with some sardines and a mug of black coffee. It tasted delicious.

From my bed I looked at the courtyard, some convicts were busy tending to the flower beds while the guards walked around with their hands folded behind their backs. It looked peaceful, had I not been in a cell I could have imagined to be in a nice peaceful place.

Around noon I heard some fast footsteps in the courtyard, I jumped off the bed to see what was going on. Several men carried a heavy litter with several big kettles and some others carried large pitchers.

In front of the office was a large concrete wash tub where normally the laundry was done for the convicts. Now they had planks on top and it served as a serving table, it was loaded with mess tins, there were also some on the ground.

Then I heard someone yell something I had heard before, "en place pour la soupe"!

(in place for dinner) all the doors were thrown open and immediately closed again, I waited to see what would happen because now I was hungry. My door opened and the fat sergeant and yelled: come here you idiot! Stay with your nose against the wall beside the door and scream your name as loud you can, the Chef should be able to hear you in the office, got it?

I ran to the door and planted my nose against the wall and screamed: Engage Volontaire Malicien, Sergeant! I was allowed to receive a mess tin, which was handed to me with the handle in an open position so that it was easier to grab.

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I walked to my bed and set my mess-tin down, I saw that the soup, potatoes, vegetables and even dessert was all mixed in the mess-tin together, but that must have been done on purpose. I didn't care and took big scoop of the "stew", barely had I begun to eat when I heard yelling: En place pour les gamelles! (Get in place for the mess tins). I could not believe my ears, I did not even get the time to find out what was happening, when my door opened and a legionnaire stormed inside and grabbed my mess-tin.

Taken aback I sat down on the bed.

That night I got a chunk of bread and coffee for supper and nothing else.

I cleaned a spot of my bed with a piece of my t-shirt and some coffee, so I had a place to use as a table and dinner plate at the same time. They would not get me another time off guard! The next day I was ready for the call to supper, I took the mess-tin and emptied on my improvised dinner plate. Three minutes later the mess-tin was taken away, but I had kept the spoon. However, not for long because the hallway guard had noticed the missing spoon right away and taken it back before I could use it.

So I used my fingers to eat all of it, including the soup, sauce and dessert, it did not take away from the taste.

Shortly after supper someone knocked on the door, I went to it and the hallway guard gave me some cigarettes through the peep hole, even though I had not asked for it. It seemed to be the custom to help out newbie's. Just as I turned around to walk back to my bed he whispered through the peephole; not so fast my friend, I'll give you some matches and a half razor blade, cut the matches and hide them in the wall. I did the same with the strike-paper. Find out for yourself how to go about it because I have run out of time.

In any case, try to not get caught. Salut! He was gone before he could hear my mumbled 'mille fois merci' I managed to cut the matches and went to search for a hiding place.

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Carefully I checked the white-washed wall for any indents or former hiding places with the tip of my fingers, pushing and scraping the layer of chalk.

I quickly realized that I needed a sharp object to be able to scrape the cement off, but what? The bed was made of concrete and the cover and handle of the toilet bucket were too bulky.

Suddenly I found a soft spot in the wall. I removed some of the chalk and found a wax covered opening of about six millimeters. I could not clearly see in the semi darkness if there was still anything in the hole, neither did I have a pointed tool to probe the hole for contents. I replaced the wax and smeared a little chalk over the spot and took note of the exact location of the spot.

From the bed I could observe and learn the daily routine from the prison, every day the P.N.'s (regular convicts) were send out to do chores, it had been the same in Oujda. It has been only four days ago, but it felt like a month.

Around noon the convicts came back and had a roll-call in front of the office of the staff-Sergeant. Most of the time they were allowed to go back to their cells. Sometimes they had to strip naked and the cadre would search each piece of clothing. The severest punishment was for cigarette butts and those who had them, had to run around the courtyard. Depending on the mood of the one in charge, they had to drop down, crawl, run and walk like a duck. Most of the time they would not get any food that day and had to stay in their cell the next day too.

One morning I managed to exchange a few words with the hall-way guard and learned that the holes in the wall were made with the half of a razor blade. If you were careful, you could cut the razor blade in half again, this way you could create a handy tool to retrieve the stashed cigarettes out of the hole.

Every two weeks we received a piece of Dutch cheese which was encased in red wax, the wax was used to cover the hiding spots and it was easy to cover the wax with the chalk scraped from other places so that it was nearly impossible to see the spots.

That day I discovered that as a rule, the P.N.'s got a minimum of eight days, but there was no fixed maximum. There were cases of guys who spend a year or more in jail.

The only time I was allowed out of my cell was in the morning to empty my toilet bucket and to wash my face. Once a week we had a collective shower, shave and a haircut when needed.

The only chance to exchange a few words was with the hallway guard. The Spaniards were gone and the hallway-guard refused to tell me anything about them.

Nineteen days after my arrival in the *Locaux Disciplinaires (L.D.)* from Sidi-Bel-Abbes, I had memorized every hole in my cell wall and had become a master at hiding stuff.

Around ten AM that day the Sergeant opened my cell and ordered me to follow the hallway-guard on the run. In front of the office a stood a legionnaire waiting for me.

After I had presented myself with a loud voice, the Staff-Sergeant came out of the office and scrutinized me, he then said, I do not want to see you here ever again, GOT it!!

Oui, Chef! I screamed back. You don't have to scream that loud imbecile! Go!

Without delay I followed the Legionnaire past the buildings of CP 1 and CP 2 past the offices and through the gate of Quartier Vienot. We crossed the road and reached the Petit Quartier we then passed the guard and some other buildings and entered CP 3.

From there I went with another Legionnaire to the clothing-magazine where I received a complete new set of uniforms.

Back in CP 3 I had to figure out for myself what I had to do, they expected that I did know what to do.

For the next five years we all would get to hear: *"T'u es une Legionnaire? Alors, demerdes-toi!"*

I went to search for an unoccupied bed, climbed the stairs of the three story building and found one on the second floor. It was a strange feeling after all this time of confinement to be able to do as a I pleased albeit in a limited manner. I even could go to the Foyer (the bar on the base) to have a beer. In the room where seven other guys of new-comers, who had come a few days earlier from Marseille, most of them were divided on the other floors.

Together with these guys I would be part of a company to be sent to one of the training centers. I

did not see any familiar faces and wondered what had happened to Rooie Marcel, the guy who had helped me to escape, who himself failed to do so.

Maybe he had already arrived in Algeria, I hoped to see him some day again.

I decided to check out the building, maybe I would meet some compatriots. I noticed that the majority of new-comers were Germans, Spaniards, Italians and Frenchmen. Frenchmen could not enlist as Frenchmen and were given generally another Francophone nationality. Less represented nationalities were Dutch, Belgians and Brits, however of the latter were very few.

The first guy I met who spoke my language was Ghijs, a skinny Dutchman who hailed from Amsterdam. I met him in the bathroom where he was busy shaving and swearing in the typical dialect from Amsterdam.

We clicked right away and after he had put away his stuff, we decided to find some other compatriots. We went down to the courtyard, nearly everyone was there already. An NCO near us asked if we did not want any pay. Pay?? I asked, I had forgotten about that.

* You are a legionnaire? Sort it out yourself!

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Go quick and stay in line until they call your name.

Pay? It probably would not be a whole lot, but every nickel counts. At a table an Adjutant had taken a seat and each time he called someone, they had to reply '*Présent, mon Adjudant!*', and then they would receive their pay in cash.

I was startled when the Adjutant called my name, Malicien! I screamed back '*Présent, mon Adjudant!*' and went up to the table. The guy gave me a puzzled look and looked again in the books and said; aha, that is why you get more, you started service when you landed in Casablanca after your pleasure trip across the Mediterranean, here you go, move it!

In comparison with the others I had gotten a lot more, after all, I had already served two months more than them and had not received one cent during that time.

Back to the group I listened if I could hear a Dutch or Belgian name called out, when that happened, I would try to remember his face so that I could get acquainted with him later.

Together with Ghijs I went to the *foyer where I bought some items I needed and waited for the arrival of compatriots or Dutchmen. It did not take long before they came, when I heard a group talking in Dutch, I went up to them and introduced myself; I am Lucky from Antwerp and this is Ghijs from Amsterdam. The others knew Ghijs already from seeing him before, the biggest guy from the group introduced the others to us; this is Rene Chamart from Wallonia, this is Jean van Boekel and I am Etienne Dienart. Pleased to meet you, lets go and sit at a table. I learned quickly that Jean and Etienne had served together in Korea and that Jean had received the American Purple Heart medal, which he refused to wear. At another table was the small Chamart in an animated discussion with some Frenchmen, immediately a good rapport developed between the Frenchmen and us.

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*recreation hall

In CP 3 we had to do the same thing as in Marseille, Medicals, Deuxième Bureau and chores. It was quickly known that at the Deuxième Bureau you better told exactly the same story as in Marseille or else they would ask some pointed questions.

It did not take long before several cliques had formed among the various nationalities.

One of them consisted mainly out of Germans who were telling tall stories about their exploits, one or two would distance themselves from them and stay by themselves.

The group of Frenchmen that Chamart had been acquainted with consisted of odd types, Fanny was a small man from the Northern France and he was courageous and did not let anyone boss him around. Padore was a Corsican who became angry if you called him a Frenchman, you could not mention that Napoleon Bonaparte was a Frenchman, or else he would fly into a rage. Baerdy was the *risée from a small community, he was constantly taken advantage of by everyone else despite that his mates tried to protect him, but they were not always nearby. Baerdy was not very intelligent and you could easily dupe him, but nevertheless, he was a nice guy.

One day an incident caused us to acquire a new member to our group. We were at the bar drinking beer when a caporal came in and stood beside Baerdy. After a few times of eyeballing him, he blurted out in an unmistakable tone: Hey my little friend, how about paying for a pint for me? Baerdy glanced furtively in our direction, something the caporal did not seem to like. 'Hey, hey! Friend, if I talk to you, don't turn your head away, that is very rude. I told you to order a pint for me, how about it, ob wass ist?? Some of the Germans standing a little further were smirking with glee, beside them stood an Italian of almost two meters tall. It was clear that he did not like the last words of the caporal, he slammed his pint on the counter and went to the Caporal. His French was hard to understand, but what he said was clearly understood by everyone. Are we here in the French Foreign Legion or the German army? Speak French or we won't understand what you say, *Capice?*

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*laughing stock

The language was clear, but too much for the Caporal to handle, after all he was the superior and a recruit could not question his authority that was *insubordination* and could result in severe punishment. At least fifteen days in isolation, and I knew all about what that meant.

It was clear to everyone that the Caporal felt ill at ease, but even so, he swung a fist to the Italian. The Italian grabbed the arm of the German and twisted it in one move around his back. With a scream the Caporal went down on his knees then the giant pulled the arm from the caporal with such a force up, that everyone thought he ripped it out of the socket. The scream that followed was inhumane like.

Our group got up and while some others helped the caporal up, I tried to calm the Italian. I whispered, you better ease off my friend, you don't know how bad it is in the base prison. However, the Italian was calm, he just could not stand it that someone would abuse an innocent man.

In the mean time the caporal muttered, just wait and see I will get him, nobody get me on my knees without punishment! Etienne said to the caporal, how about if the man apologizes and pays for some beer, can we let bygones be bygones? The caporal looked around, we were with seven guys around him, how could he work things out? If he walked out, every chance for us to get out of punishment would be gone, he knew that as well we did. Lucky for us we got some unexpected help from the barman.

Tiens caporal, bois-en une de ma part et laisse les gamins tranquils.

Obviously the Barman and Caporal were friends because his suggestion seemed to work. Etienne whispered in the ear of the Italian giant that he would do good to offer his apologies to the caporal. He stepped toward the caporal and said: let's forget this incident, it was not meant to get out of hand like this. We have also a little too much beer, I hope you understand. With that the Italian shook his hand and pulled Baerdy along with him.

The barman winked at Etienne and went to sit at the table with the Italian and Baerdy, a long discussion followed.

* Here caporal, have a pint on me and leave those kids alone.

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A guy of two meters tall is always welcome in our group.

During the conversations with other groups I learned that there had been an American who had come up to Sidi Bel Abbes, but during another round of questioning by the Deuxième Bureau it was discovered that he was a deserter from the American occupation army in Germany. The next day he was sent back to Marseille, we never saw him again.

The days passed very slow, but finally came the moment that there were enough recruits who had passed the medicals and questioning by the Deuxième Bureau. There was an air of trepidation when the next morning during appel, an Adjutant gave us the long awaited news. All the names that will be called are approved for service in the French Foreign Legion. You are all going to the supply stores and get a complete new kit, one word of warning! Make sure to do everything in an orderly manner! With that 160 names were called for those who would be soon sent to one of the training centers in Algeria.

Accompanied by several Sergeants, Caporals and Legionnaires we were led to the supply stores that were located just outside of CP 3. There were several staff members and an Adjutant who called off the name of the item we had to take from the piles of uniform items that were already laying on the tables.

First we had to take a duffel bag and a back pack after that each item of the uniforms was called and we had to hold it up in the air so they could check if we had the right item.

The stores personnel would keep an eye out if we took the correct item each time.

After a few hours we had our dress, combat, and sports uniform, underwear, socks etc.

Then we went back to CP 3 and got until three o'clock to sort everything out and then we had to be in dress uniform in the court yard in rows of four facing the CO of "Petit Quartier".

He spoke with a few guys from the front row and asked their name, nationality and why they joined the Legion.

I heard the CO saying to another officer; strange, all those Frenchmen and Belgians are all born in Brussels and on the same street address. The other officer smiled knowingly, because since the creation of the Legion in 1831, the Legion was not allowed to accept Frenchmen.

So they were accepted under a false name, date of birth and address.

Ghijs was standing beside me when the officer asked from which nationality he was, He called out loud: *Hollandais, mon Commandant*, He then asked me the same thing,

Belge, Flamand, mon Commandant, I replied.

He looked from Ghijs to me and asked if we could speak a little in our own language, of course that was no problem.

Say Ghijs, you think that they can't understand us? We better be careful about what we are saying, you never know. I'll be careful said the Dutchman, did you hear that all Frenchmen and Belgians are all born in Brussels and live all at the same address? Well, in any case I am not, I am a true blue *Amsterdammer* we had to laugh and I thought to have spotted a smile on the face of the CO. Maybe he did understand after all?

The CO finished his inspection and a half hour later we went back to *la section*.

There we were told that the next morning the roll call would be with all our kit and we would depart to the 3ieme Compagnie d' Instruction in Mascara, about 60 miles east of Sidi-Bel-Abbes. Since most of us had already packed everything, we had some time to spend some time with those who stayed behind. Right on ten o'clock we were in bed reflecting on the past days and the time ahead.

Would the training be really as hard as the *Anciens* had told us?

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That the weaker guys would just succumb and that there was only place for the strongest men? Nobody of us knew the answer, men like Etienne and Jean were not worried they had already experienced extreme hardships and were not easily rattled. However, how about guys like Baerdy? Or did they not care one way or the other. There were a few of the 160 men who wrote letters to family and friends.

Chapter 5

Time line February-May 1955

Mascara

The bugle woke us right on 6 o'clock and a half hour later we were loaded and ready in the courtyard for our trip to the new unit.

In front of the gate of CP 3 were many trucks waiting with running engines. Breakfast was handed out in the courtyard and had to be eaten right there.

While we were still eating, names were called of those who had to climb on the trucks. They had to grab their kit and run to the assigned truck, some of them did not have had a chance to drink their coffee and had to empty the tin or burn their mouth while drinking it on the run. At 8 o'clock we were all on the trucks and they took off right away. In front of the convoy was a halftrack followed by some jeeps and a Dodge 4x4. In each truck were also a few armed Legionnaires for protection of the unarmed men.

Once outside the city, the trucks increased speed. The road was bordered by miles long wine yards and in some places interrupted by orange and olive trees.

This green area came to a sudden stop when we entered the mountains, called Djebel by the native population. The road meandered through this landscape of giant rock formations which had a strange red-pastel color.

Etienne who was in the same truck as me, mentioned dryly that this was the perfect place for the rebels to lay in an ambush.

We drove along deep canyons and chasms and the terrain became more and more desolate.

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Even all the green foliage was gone except for some cactuses and a bush here and there that could reach 12 feet in height according to some Legionnaires.

The truck drivers had some problems trying to keep the trucks on the road because the pavement was covered with a layer of black, red and yellow dust that got thrown in the air in big clouds by the wheels of the trucks. The dust penetrated through everything, including our shirts and jackets. Every now and then we passed some Arab farmers who looked at the passing trucks with suspicion. They were invariably dressed in the traditional *bournous*, a long cloak made of coarse woollen fabric with a hood and a turban which made them all look alike.

The baggy pants the men wore, had a low crotch at knee height and gave cause for some amusement for the new recruits.

In different places the desert gave way to Orange and Olive trees and wine yards, but at several kilometres from the edge of town all foliage was removed. In the distance we saw the white homes in the blazing Sun.

We drove into town and after several turns we went through the gate of Quartier Soyer.

This was the home base of the third training company; Compagnie d'Instruction de la Legion Etrangere, (Cl.L.E).

Two driveways, one on each side of the entrance gate sloped up in an angle towards the Parade Square. Between those was a large water well covered with heavy beams and the ground was covered with fist size rocks.

The entrance courtyard was about two meters lower than the main parade ground.

Beside the gate on the left was the guards house and farther down the lane were some smaller buildings who served as storage facilities for the kitchen services.

Farther atop were the kitchens and other small rooms like the areas to wash the dishes etc.

Past the kitchens were the lavatories where the laundry was done by the troops and the bathrooms. At right was the main building of the recruits and offices of the cadre.

At the end of that building was the shower area ringed by a wall. The next building was for the administration offices, they had nothing to do with the training itself.

Beyond there was a small firing range for small arms such as the US carbine .22 cal. and the p.m. (pistolet-mitrailleur) aka mitraillette. Past there was the end of the Parade ground and you had to go down via the driveway on the right side. There were the prison cells with the office of the A.S.G. and those in charge of the garrison prison. Only occasionally would there be a regular French soldier, because they had their own prison system.

Right across the entrance gate was the main building, on the first floor was the mess hall for the NCOs', the cafeteria and movie theatre, on the second floor were the rooms for the new recruits with the bathrooms and showers.

After we got off the trucks, they left the base toward Ben Daoud, another base of the Legion where the second and fourth training company was based.

All the new recruits were now assembled in three rows facing the street. A few officers and NCOs' stood in front of the flagpole and the A.S.G welcomed us in name of the colonel.

We then had to lay out our complete kit in front of us on the ground and each item was called to check if we had all of our required kit.

This went a lot faster than in Sidi-Bel-Abbes. Shortly thereafter platoons were formed of about forty recruits, each platoon had four sections of about ten men each.

I spoke to the German Caporal we had gotten to know in the Baerdy incident and was now amicable toward us.

Him and Caporal Benger, a Dutchman from the town of Tilburg was able to get most of the Belgians and Frenchmen together in one platoon.

After that the commanding officers of the company introduced themselves.

First lieutenant Damine was a skinny man with eyeglasses, one we would not get to see very often, the second in command was the only other officer of the third company a second Lieutenant named d'Main Ruiz, he was from old French aristocracy, he was also the commanding officer of the third platoon, the one that me and my mates were part of.

Besides these two officers, were: Sergeant-major Greus, Sergeant Machiali, Sergeant Segelav, Caporal-Chef Bock, Caporal Benger and a Flemish Adjutant named Vandenberg. He became the commandant of the fourth section, Caporal-Chef Bock was assigned to another function.

The Belgians, the Dutchman and some Frenchmen formed the third section of the third platoon of

the third Company commanded by Sergeant Segelav and Caporal Benger.

Sergeant Segelav was a Bulgarian with the resemblance of a Hun and was a top soldier, but after five PM he would go home to his wife and kids.

The Belgians, Dutchmen and Frenchmen were thus in one section while the other sections had all nationalities-Spaniards, Italians, English, Poles, Rumanians, and Yugoslavs Frenchmen and Swiss. The last two were interspersed through the platoons to help other recruits to learn French, one of the main requirements in the Legion.

Our section was soon called the Boudin section (blood sausage) because of the refrain in the official Legion song which goes as follows: *'Tiens, voila du boudin. Pour les Alsaciens, les Suisses et les Lorrains. Pour les Belges, il y en a plus. Ce sont des tireurs au cul.'

The Boudin refers to the bedroll carried in earlier times of the Legion, much like the Australian Waltzing Mathilda.

*Here is the blood sausage for the Alsatians, Swiss and Lorraine's. There is none for the Belgians because they are the laggards at the end.- I believe this relates to a time when there was an agreement between the French and Belgians not to have the Belgians on the front lines during the Franco-Prussian war of 1870

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The third platoon to which I belonged to, was composed as follows: the C.O. second Lieutenant d'Main Ruiz,

First section C.O. Sergeant-major Greus with Yugoslav caporal Ferencz.

Second section C.O. Italian Sergeant Machiali as C.O with the Spanish caporal Banco,

Third section C.O. Bulgarian Sergeant Segelav, with the Dutch caporal Benger,

Fourth section C.O. German Caporal-Chef Bock with the Finish Caporal Velga.

The third section of the third platoon of the third training company from Mascara consisted of: Sergeant Segelav, Caporal Benger, Lucky Malicien, Ghijs, Van broken, Dienart, Fanny, Baerdy, Fontani, Chiari, and the German Navrosky.

Our assigned room for the whole platoon was on the second floor of the main building, the man in charge of the room was caporal Benger.

The main building was located about six meters from the surrounding wall, behind there was a flat and bare area created, that stretched all the way to the first rows of houses of Bab-Ali.

When you got inside the building, you faced the stairs, on the right side were the lavatories for washing and shaving. On the first floor was the office of the C.O. of the company and some administration offices, the armory, clothing magazine and some rooms for cadre who did not live in town. Most of the NCOs were married and if not on night duty would go home after five PM. The second and third floor were for the four platoons, the second floor on the left side was where the third platoon was housed and the fourth platoon was on the right side of the second floor. The beds were located on both sides of the room. On the right side was a window that looked out on

the inner courtyard and on the left was another window that gave a good view of the open area and Bab-Ali.

Later we would discover that there was a wide road around the base where in the daytime a patrol would pass every hour and at night every half hour.

It became quick apparent that the small Caporal Bengener was a despicable overbearing guy with homosexual tendencies.

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Being the appointed supervisor of the room and responsible for the orderly operation of business in "his" room, he gave his directions first in poor French, then in Dutch and then in even poorer German while walking around like a peacock controlling his flock. He left no illusion as to who was the boss.

He dictated how our clothing was to be folded and placed, the shoes had to be placed in an exact manner under the bed and we could never deviate from this rule.

His explanations were interrupted by the sound of the bugle that sounded the time for lunch. Lunch was always taken in the réfectoire (mess hall) located beside the bedroom and offices. We went there with our mess tin and tin cup, where several Legionnaires handed out the food. After lunch we had to have the obligatory siesta, usually until 2 PM.

The cadre went to the cafeteria while we had to go to our rooms.

At 2 PM Bengener started the instructions where he had left off. We started with the folding of the notorious *paquetage*. (Kit)

Everyone had wide blue flannel band of sixty centimetres wide and 150 centimetres long that had to be wrapped around the waist when wearing the Parade Uniform. The band had to be wrapped tight and therefore required the help of a mate, it also served as a outer wrap of the actual *paquetage*. It would be folded in half and laid out on the bed and then all items of clothing not worn on a regular basis would be packed inside of it.

The whole class observed how a *paquetage* had to be made as was explained by Bengener in minutia detail. The idea was to get an exact cube of 15 centimetres high, 30 centimetres deep and 40 centimetres wide. All sides had to be perfectly straight and all corners had to be exactly 90 degrees without one crinkle or fold.

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Then the perfect cube would be placed atop the locker above the bed.

When Bengener finished his demonstration, he tore the cube apart and we had to make our own *paquetage* He walked from one to the other and if it was not done to his liking he tore it apart and we had to start over again. In French he said; you get until tonight to make your *paquetage* and whomever is not able to do it will be in deep shit.

Even though his French was very poor, everybody understood what he had said.

He told some us that we could use some pieces of carton to get nice straight lines, but some of us knew already that it would never be easy going between us and caporal Bengener. It proved to be like

that when one of the Germans had already made his bed, which was not to the liking of caporal Bengener. He pulled everything off, grabbed a shoe from under the bed and beat the hell out of his head. He screamed; I did not tell you to make up the bed and on top of that you did it wrong, fold it back the way it was.

After that he turned to us and screamed, from now on you do exactly what, when and how I tell you to do things. I am the boss and no one else, got it!! Nobody said a word.

Because Bengener had assigned the beds, it became quickly clear that he had a soft spot for the younger guys among us, particularly the more feminine ones. Like those with little hair growth and rounder forms.

There were three in our platoon who fulfilled this description: Heinrich, Navrosky and Chiari. Heinrich was blond and a little plump, he got a bed beside that from Bengener. Navrosky was a little skinnier, but everybody could see from his manners that he must have had some interaction with homos before and probably was one himself.

His bed was across from my bed and I noticed that while undressing he did so in a striptease manner. From his waist down he looked more like a female and you could be sure that other homos would like that.

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Chiari was fine boned and his face had female characteristics, but he did not behave himself like Heinrich or Navrosky.

A few recruits who were busy with their *paquetage* near Bengener, noticed that Bengener had finished the *paquetage* from Heinrich and heard him say; now that I have done something for you, you do something for me. Heinrich smiled and followed Bengener out of the room.

Chiari who had also heard the exchange of words, but did not understand any of it, looked at his compatriot Fontani. After a short look of understanding, he left the room with Chamart and followed the two outside. Just then they saw Bengener and Heinrich disappear in another room at the end of the hall.

Getting closer, Chamart and Fontani saw that it was more like a temporary storage room for obsolete items with an door made with rough boards. Anyone who passed could see through the cracks of the boards and what was happening in there.

When Fontani and Chamart got closer, they saw Bengener kiss Heinrich on the mouth and tongue him, he then nibbled on his ear and pushed him down on his knees. Judging from his performance it was clear that it was not the first time for Heinrich.

Fontani and Chamart returned to the room and gave a knowing look to the others from the third section to let them know what had transpired.

A few minutes later Bengener and Heinrich came back in the room, Bengener started right off again with screaming at the recruits without realizing that from now on he would be in a weak position vis-à-vis the third section.

The screaming and bugging from Caporal Bengener was interrupted by the sound of the bugle indicating it was supper time.

When we were nearly finished eating, some of the cadre came and explained how everything was going to be done. One section was picked to clean the mess hall and then wash the pot and pans in the wash cubicle that was built against the kitchen, then they had to be brought back to the kitchen after cleaning them. The same section was also charged with taking care of the *petit casse-croûte**, The small breakfast that got served in the rooms and consisted of a chunk of bread, with had everyday a different sandwich spread and black coffee. Usually it was nothing to complain about. There was also a *deuxième casse-croûte*, a second breakfast that got usually served in the field when we were busy with instruction, or on the base itself.

It also happened that midday supper was served in the field, this was served by the staff of the Service d'Ordinaire, and they would bring it in hot meal containers.

Further we were told that each section would get individual instruction as long there was enough staff available. Each staff member would take care of certain a part of the curriculum and would go on to the next section when finished with his part.

If for example we would have had one hour of instruction from sergeant Segelav who went over all the different ranks of the French army, then the next hour would be with sergeant-major Greus, who would show us all about the handling of various weapons.

We had to learn how to handle, disassemble and reassemble all types of small arms.

Each of us had a personal weapon, a Mauser which had to be picked up from the armory located beside the refectory. The maintenance and cleaning was our responsibility and it was to our detriment to make sure it was done well.

We also were told that most of us would stay six months in Mascara. After one month of training we would get a test and those who passed were allowed to wear the white kepi.

After four months of instruction one part of the group was selected to go to Sidi Bel Abbes for specialist training such as medic, chauffeur, radio operator and the others would be sent to other units. The specialty training was two months and after a short stay in CP 1 they would be sent to a definite operational unit.

*Breakfast

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When all information was dispensed and we were told that the next day instruction would start, we were allowed to go back to our room.

There we got to hear from Bengier that he would appoint every week a new room guard who would be responsible for ensuring that everything was done according to Bengiers instructions, like the room tidy and everything in its place. Anything amiss was to be reported to the man who wielded the scepter. The normal service hours were from 6.30 AM to 5 PM, after that we were free to do what we wanted.

However, since we did not yet have the right to wear the kepi blanc, we were not allowed to go town.

For now we had to do with the green and red, the official legion colors wedge-cap.

In order to get the Kepi Blanc we had to know enough of the French language, being able to march

in the proper time (88 steps a minute), know all the ranks of the French army, do guard duty, patrol in and outside the town, be proficient in handling the Mauser and the MAT-49, run flawless the obstacle course and grenade throwing. We had one month to get that all done.

Until then we could go during the evening to the cantina, but we could not buy beer or stronger drinks until we had our kepi.

The first floor of the main building had at the front two doors. The first led to the mess hall of the NCO's "the Popote", a place strictly forbidden to be entered by recruits, the second door led to the movie hall where every night a film would be shown and was open to everybody.

One door further was the cantina where you could buy snacks and soft drinks. This was a little strange because with the mid day meal we got a half liter red wine and with the evening meal a half liter beer.

Right off the start we were told that blind obedience was a must, and you never questioned a higher up when he gave an order, even if you did not agree with him.

This strict discipline was necessary with an army of foreigners.

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The next morning it happened that some members of our group were together in the wash room. There was no one else around besides Etienne, Fontani, Fanny, Ghijs and myself, we were standing in a group when Ghijs suddenly spoke up: If the incident from yesterday becomes the norm, then it won't be long before this place is flooded with homos. For a moment it stayed quiet, Fontaine had told us what he had seen the day before and we did not know for sure how to react to this situation.

It was Etienne who broke the silence, what do you propose Ghijs? Should we do something about it?

I am not saying that something has to change; I am merely stating that something like that is possible here. Maybe we had the wrong image of the Legion?

Would it change something if we were to talk to the company commander? What do you guys think?

Nobody knew for sure how to reply to that, we did not know how the commander would react to that. It would be possible that he would ignore the facts because Bengier was a staff member and we were only recruits with less than 24 hours on the base.

Ghijs said that it would be best to wait and see, maybe it was just a onetime incident and after all, we did not know Bengier that well. I said, Bengier did not give me the impression of being very intelligent; maybe we can use some psychological pressure on him? But maybe not from the first day on, better wait until later.

I agree said Etienne, who knows what lays in wait for us in the form of discipline.

That example yesterday with that paquetage was only a fore taste of what might be in store for us and he is only a caporal.

I said it is important for us to stay together as a group, we know what to expect from each other and can watch each other's back. If we get too many guys in it, we run the risk of being "noticed" and is easier to take action with a small group than with a whole platoon.

Everybody agreed and we decided to protect each other and keep an eye on the doings of Bengher. When we entered the room, breakfast was served and a half hour later everybody was back in the refectory where lieutenant Damine went over the benefits of an extended time of instruction.

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He hammered on the fact that everybody had to do their utmost best and accept the discipline to become a good Legionnaire.

I know that for most of you it will be very hard, but think about it, it will be at most six months to become a member of this elite unit. After that you will be sent to your respective regiments where life will be somewhat easier.

Damines's speech took more than 15 minutes, after he had departed the platoons were split into sections and the real training started.

It became quickly clear that the training would be done in various stages and that the platoon would not always be divided into sections. That was only done when necessary to make it easier for the instructors. It is much simpler to deal with ten men than with forty.

The third platoon got divided into four sections and was sent to different departments.

Greus went with his section to our room to start with the French language lessons. Machiali and his section went to the refectory to teach them the rankings of the French Army.

For the first hour, Segelav took his men outside and showed them where all the departments were located, where they could go if needed.

In a corner of the parade ground Bock had started to teach how to march correctly.

Every hour the instructor got replaced by another so that each member of the cadre got to know all the recruits.

The first day went quick; most of us thought that it wasn't too bad after all. Because of having four platoons, there was not enough space to have them all training at the same time inside the base.

The third platoon had a designated training place outside the base; it was an open area in the easterly direction beside the route going from Sidi Bel Abbes to Relizane.

Once we walked past the last homes of the town, the street became hollow; meaning that on both sides there was a ditch with the sides sloping up to some meters above the road deck.

The place itself was in easy walking distance of about three KM. The area was not very large, about five hundred meters long and wide it bordered on a deep ravine.

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In the far left corner was a target practise stand and in the right corner an obstacle course that went across the whole length of the area and was about two KM long. The four sections were divided across the whole area so we could exchange places without losing too much time, the lessons continued until the *Equipe Ordinaire brought our mid day meal. They also brought a container with hot water to wash our mess tins.

During the first weeks we did not get a whole lot of punishments; however it became quickly known that master-caporal Bock took great pleasure to pester the guys to the point of physical confrontation. He then quickly changed his demeanour and made it look like he was just joking.

Soon after that the punishments became daily routine; it would start with the morning roll call. If you had not shaved well enough, then you would get routinely the **Tenue de campagne*, that was certainly nothing to laugh about, particularly for those who had their room on the top floor, this punishment along with the **corvée d'escaliers* was the lightest punishment you could expect for minor infractions of discipline. Everyone had four types of uniform of which you had two sets; combat, dress, parade and sports. The combat uniform was worn for the daily instruction. It had been made of thin linen in ordinary military colour, khaki. The dress uniform was the ordinary Sunday dress uniform and consisted of shirt, tie, trousers, socks and shoes. The parade uniform was almost the same, with the difference that it had a blue flannel waistband that had to be wrapped around the waist. Leather cartridge pouches were worn on top of that, there were also white gaiters worn over the boots, and green epaulets with red fringes, the colours of the Foreign Legion. Those who had received the punishment of *Tenue Campagne* had to start that immediately after supper on the same day. They had to present themselves on the parade ground to the one who had given the punishment. He then would tell them in which uniform and in how much time to come back and present himself again. The poor sod had to race to his room, change and race back to present himself again.

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The guy would be standing with a stopwatch and would then tell him; that took too long and orders him to come back in another uniform. Every time he came back he would get the same story. The whole affair could last until 10 PM, depending on the mood of the guy. It speaks for itself that his mates would help him with changing the uniforms. Sometimes it happened that the duration was cut short if the man in charge was called away or if he thought it was too exhausting for the recruit. The *corvée d'escaliers* was not as tiring, but even so, it would last until 10 PM. The punished one had to carry a pail of water and tooth brush to the top floor. They would throw a big lump of soft soap in the pail and he had then clean the stairs with the tooth brush. It was because of this, that all the stairs in the buildings of the legion were clean as a whistle. The following days were spent getting familiar with using weapons, how to handle, cleaning, taking apart and re assembling with a blindfold on. Further there was learning how to march in step, learning all the ranks of the French army, learning the French language, grenade throwing, firing all small arms, and going over the obstacle course as quickly as possible, sneaking up on an enemy, guard duty, and walking on patrols in and a outside the base. In short, anything necessary to be a proficient soldier.

After 14 days we went on our first march of 15 KM, loaded with full kit, weapon and live ammo. It was not just a march on even terrain, but on paths covered with rocks and up and down the *Djebel* (mountains). The march ended near a long slope that stretched out several hundred meters and was covered with soft grass. At the bottom of the slope was a road where the trucks were waiting to take us back to base.

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Etienne, Jean, me and a few others came in first.

Lieutenant Damine stood there waiting with a smirk on his face; well done men, now look back. We did and saw that more recruits had arrived, and left, right and center from the road where they came from were pieces of equipment strewn all along the slope: ammo pouches, backpacks and even rifles to make their load lighter. He said; you are fit enough to collect all that stuff, *Allez, en route!*' We had to turn around and collect all the equipment the others had thrown off. While doing that, each incoming recruit had to show if he still had all of his equipment and it was carefully listed who was missing what. Later on the base Lieutenant Damine told them that this time he would let it pass, but that the next march would be seventy KM and whoever chucked one piece of equipment would be shot. We have no use for weaklings like that, is that clear!! This is not an idle warning, go!! We wondered if Damine was really serious, would he really go that far. None of us could really believe that, but this was the Legion, so who knew?

The training went on in a normal routine, on El-Court the area near the road to Relizane. El-Court was an uneven area ringed by an Oued, a shallow and sometimes dry river bed. There were also some bushes and here and there a lonesome tree.

After first training with the US M1 carbine on the small weapons range on the base, we went to the rifle range in the left corner of El-Court which was mostly used for the larger calibre weapons. We had to shoot from one side of the range across the ravine where the targets were. To get the results, we had to climb down to where the targets were and then back up. A couple of meters from the ravine was an area arranged to throw grenades.

All parts of the training were intense and extensive, so that the instructors would be sure that we turned out to be good soldiers.

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It speaks for itself that the drill is one of the most important action, We had to repeat hundreds, maybe thousands of times the same action, whether it was throwing grenades, shooting, marching or handling of weapons; we had to be able to do it blindly.

The obstacle course was the hardest to do; many of us had a hard time with it. However, even the weakest recruits managed to do it in a reasonable time. You have to be a former soldier to understand what an obstacle course really is. With a total length of 2 KM, the obstacle course of El-Court was the longest that Etienne and Jean had seen and also the most difficult. There were pits of three meters deep and walls of three meters high, besides that, there were rope ladders, barbed wire run of thirty centimetres high, too many to mention all of them. The toughest part was that the course had to be done in a specified time with full kit, including weapon, ammo, and water field bottle.

Under no circumstance could anyone get exemption from doing the training exercises, if someone

said he was sick, the doctor would send a report to the CO of the company.

Then regardless if he was found sick, he had to do the *tenue de campagne*.

This news spread like fire and the result was that almost no one dared to call in sick. The days passed quickly, once in a while the routine of the training was interrupted with an amusing incident that everybody got a kick out of. Baerdy; the klutz of third platoon did always something wrong and provided us with some amusing incidents. With every order he got he did something wrong, depending on the mood of the cadre who gave him the order, there would be laughter or yelling and screaming. Like one day when the whole platoon had to practise marching for the first time as a whole unit with sergeant Segelav. Before this we had learned only how to march with small groups. The rest of the cadre stayed on the side of the road observing the show. This happened on the road where there was little traffic.

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Within five minutes everything went wrong with Beardy, sergeant Segelav pulled him out of the ranks and yelled; will you ever learn, you lame duck? Don't you know what left-left means? Or is it because you do not want to listen? No sergeant screamed Beardy staring straight ahead of him. What!! No! that you do not want to listen? No Sergeant! Screamed Baerdy now confused. What do you mean!! No! Do I need to kick some sense in you?! During this sergeant Segelav looked at the rest of the recruits with a smirk on his face like he was saying "watch this, now you will see something" he then turned back to Baerdy and screamed; move it!! And Beardy started to march ahead. After he had marched a thirty meters or so, Segelav yelled again, left...left. Beardy made a quarter turn left and marched straight up to a barbed wire fence surrounding a cow pasture where he stayed marching in place to the amusement of the rest of us. Did I ask you to stop! To which Baerdy shook no with his head. Get the hell over that fence before I get hold of you! Au nom de Dieu!! Baerdy nodded, climbed over the fence and continued on. Segelav seemed to get now really a kick out of it and looked at us with a smirk. Baerdy had in the meantime moved so far that any moment now he could disappear into a dip in the field, Segelav yelled; half a turn right! , but apparently Baerdy did not hear him and kept on marching like there was nothing wrong. Come back you idiot! Half a turn right! Segelav screamed, to no avail, Baerdy disappeared down the dip in the field. However, not for long because he must have finally realized that something was not right because he appeared again and climbed back over the barbed wire. Segelav stood with his hand over his eyes shaking his head like he could not stand it anymore. Everyone could see the cow shit on the legs of his pants, but he did not seem to care. For Segelav the fun was long gone out of the incident and he ordered Baerdy to fall back in line, which he did right away. Page 84

Without saying a word, He looked around with a sheepish look like he did not understand what he had done wrong. The marching went ahead, but the cadre figured it was no use to single him out and left him alone and did not bother him anymore.

The last few days Chiari's behaviour had become strange, to the dismay of Fontani who had himself appointed as the protector of this feminine looking young man. Despite the huge Italian's urging to tell him what was bothering him, he uttered not one word.

One morning everyone noticed that Chiari had not slept in his bed and when everyone had washed

and shaved, ready to storm down for roll call, he appeared. He avoided any eye contact and ran down with us without saying a word.

The instruction took place like almost every day on El-Court and there during lunch hour Fontani managed to take Chiari aside. He whispered, what is the matter with you my friend? The last few days you behave yourself like we all have some dreadful disease. I have kept an eye on you and it is about time you tell me what is going on, particularly now that you haven't slept in your bed. You know that we are your friends, but you have work with us so that we can help you.

Come on; tell papa Fontani what the matter is.

The young man did not dare to look at him and stared blankly in the distance. Fontani did not let himself dissuaded by this and pressed on. I want you to know that I am your friend and want to help you; there is nothing that is so bad that you can't tell me, I won't let you down.

He laid his arm on the shoulder of his little friend and felt Chiari shudder from the touch. Chiari looked now Fontani in the eyes, but still said nothing.

OK, I can see that it is difficult for you, so tell me first; where did you sleep last night.

It was difficult for him to talk about it, but he did. He related his story like he was talking about somebody else; right from the start immediately after arrival in Mascara,

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Benger saw something in this feminine looking man. He made it immediately clear to him that he could provide an easy time in the base as long he did what Benger desired.

In the beginning Chiari was able to keep Benger at a distance by staying close to Fontani, but it had been no problem for Benger to separate them. It happened when the two Italians had K.P.

Benger had another recruit call Chiari away to get to the office of lieutenant Damine. Of course, nothing was said about the fact that Benger was there waiting for him. After the young man had entered, Benger locked the door and went to sit in the chair of the lieutenant. He ordered Chiari to crawl on hands and knees toward him until his head was near his knees, he then forced him to unzip his pants and take his penis in his hand' OK now stroke it, Yeah that feels good! Now get up and kiss me. Not like that, stick your tongue in my mouth; did you ever kiss a girl? I shall teach you and with that Benger gave the young Italian his first lessons in erotica. The end of the story was that Chiari had to give Benger a blowjob and had to swallow all the sperm to the last drop.

From that day on, it became a routine and when it became clear that master corporal Bock had also an interest in Chiari, it was an easy task for Benger to send him to his room.

Bock introduced Chiari into the various homo practises and did rape him for the first time.

This last event had happened the night before, which was the reason Chiari had not slept in his own bed the night before; he had shared the bed from Bock like a man and woman.

Fontani was furious, but he said; you have experienced quite something, you should have come to us right from the time Benger started to bother you. For the time being, say nothing to the others, I am the only one who knows outside of these two bastards. Yeah, like Chiari was going to blab his tale to everyone, not!

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After these last words, Fontani stood up, dusted the dry grass of his pants and walked up to the cadre. At about ten meters from them he sat down again. He was waiting for the instruction to start again and Bock and his section had to go to the shooting range. When Bock moved aside to go for a leak, Fontani snuck behind Bock, my comrades and me kept at some distance away and kept looking. While the cadre moved to their sections, the big Italian placed himself quietly behind Bock. When he was finished with his leak, he zipped up and turned around. It was then when Fontani hit him hard in the face with the force of a sledge hammer. He fell backwards and hit his head on a rock. Bock jumped up and stormed at Fontani, but he did not give Bock a chance, he hit him again and he went down again. Now Bock started to squeal like a pig for help, the rest of the cadre came and pulled Fontani away. Bock got up again and wanted to start beating on Fontani, but Sergeant Segelav came in between and said, No Bock we will not keep him restrained so that you can beat the hell out of him. Maybe you and your friends would like to beat him up, but we will not take part in that. First I want to know what is going on and why you guys are scrapping. That piece of wasted sperm attacked me without provocation! Ask him what is going on screamed Bock.

The sergeant looked at Fontani, OK; you tell me why you attacked Master-Corporal Bock. Fontani replied; he knows himself very well what the reason was, and I guarantee that there is more to come if he does not stop doing what he has been doing in the company.

We don't get nowhere like this, one of you two has to explain what is going on, or the commandant will have to sort it out.

Next time I'll rip the filthy swine apart with my teeth, was all the Italian replied.

OK, we'll continue with the instruction interjected Greus and tomorrow you are going to the commandant on rapport, GO!!

The entire cadre knew exactly what was going on and were waiting to see if any of the recruits would file a grievance against Bock and Berger, but none of them dared to do so.

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In those few weeks they had learned that each had to fend for himself and it was better not to step in for someone else.

The next day Bock made it sound like that Fontani had assaulted him, to humiliate him in front of the other recruits. The Italian did not defend himself because he was not aware of this. The result was that his head was shaved bald and he got eight days in the jail.

Fontani was taken to the Locaux Disciplinaires by a staff member and handed over to the man in charge; a big Bulgarian with an even bigger moustache, his name was Lepcheck.

Like mentioned earlier, the cells where on the right side of the entrance gate and right in front of the gate was a sort of water well covered with heavy planks. The ground around the well was covered with rocks. The idea was that the prisoner walked around the well with a tree trunk on his shoulders, at least the first few days. There where tree trunks in all sizes and weight, and Lepcheck decided with which one the prisoner had to start. The first tree trunk he chose for Fontani was about one and half meter long and forty centimetres thick. The weight of the tree trunk was about seventy kilogram. Generally you had to walk with that from 8 AM to 10 AM and after a 15 minute break, start again until noon. It depended totally on the mood of Lepcheck whether it was to continue in the afternoon or not.

From the moment Fontani had assaulted Bock, Chiari realised that he would have to fend for himself. Benger came two days after the incident to tell him that he had to go to Bock, but the young Italian refused to do so. Benger could not believe his ears, and went to tell his buddy. Aware of the reason for Fontani's assault, Bock decided to wait with his revenge on Chiari. Thus they left him alone for a while, besides, they had found quickly another recruit who did not resist sharing his bed with Bock; the feminine ass wiggling Navrosky. With Fontani in jail and Chiari who let no one know what had gone on, nobody knew what was going on. We decided to wait until Fontani was finished with his jail term, he could tell us then what had happened. While the big Italian was venting his anger on the tree trunks which got heavier and heavier, the rest of the recruits of the third company were getting ready to throw grenades.

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It was in preparation for a contest between the four training companies which would occur on El-Court. The previous times the third company did very poorly, because we ended up every time last place.

During the training we used offensive grenades; they made a lot of noise, but were not as dangerous as long you did not find yourself too close to them when they exploded. However, this time it was decided to practise with defensive grenades D.F.'s. They are heavier than the offensive grenades and always extremely dangerous. The offensive grenades were easier to handle because they were a little lighter than the D.F.

To make it more difficult, the officers decided to pull the pin of the D.F grenade and let go of the safety lever before handing it to the recruit. This went all well until it was the turn of a Greek recruit Apostolos Kouvros. It was lieutenant d'Main Ruiz who handed the grenades to the recruits. Like many times before, he had the safety pin removed and let go of the safety lever when he handed the grenade to the Greek. He took it and raised his arm to throw the grenade when the grenade exploded. The hand was torn off the arm of the Greek and the lieutenant got a load of shrapnel in his abdomen. Men from all sides rushed in to help, they wanted to take care of the lieutenant first, but he told them to look after the Greek first. Get him to a hospital, quick! Greus bend over the Greek and put on a tourniquet to stem the flow of blood and they took him to the vehicles where the lieutenant was already placed in one. The vehicles raced off with some members of the cadre as passengers to keep the wounded company. The vehicles were barely gone when the instruction resumed like nothing serious had happened.

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When Fontani came back into the company, he related all what had happened between Chiari and his abusers. We have to stop those guys from their sadistic behaviour said Etienne, everybody agreed. I added; we will keep an eye on these rapists and keep each other informed on whatever we see. From that moment on, Bock and Benger could not make one step that we did not know about. It wasn't long before Fontani had another run in with Bock, it happened on El-Court. The other guys heard clearly Bock saying to Fontani; hey! Meatball, you are not here in the Italian army. To which Fontani replied screaming in Italian "Tedesco", which merely means German and is not a

derogatory term. Bock faced off right away with Fontani and snarled; you dirty rotten slime ball, shut your gob when a superior talks to you, one more word and I beat the crap out of you, got it!! The Italian who was two heads taller than the corporal shrugged despising his shoulders and turned halfway around to walk away. Bock was furious, made a fist, hauled off, and smacked him square in the face. Without batting an eye, Fontani grabbed Bock by the scruff of his neck, lifted him off the ground and threw him like a ragdoll back down. Bengier who was nearby jumped on Fontani's back and hit him several times in the neck. The Italian tried to shake him off, but Bengier called Bock to help him. Bock crawled back up and hit Fontani several times in the abdomen. Again the cadre came running up and pulled them apart. Again it was Greus who after calming the situation, asked what, was going on. Fontani replied that Bock had sworn at him and challenged him to fight. Some of the recruits nodded their head in agreement; Greus nodded as well and took Bengier aside. Listen pal, you know that I am opposed to physical abuse, in particular from your abuse of power. These guys are not going to stand for it like you were used to from others. From now on, I will not back you and Bock up anymore. Greus knew Bengier long enough to know that he was a power tripper.

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However, Bengier seem to ignore the advice from Greus and he had not told his mate about it either, because a few days later Bock found another prey. On the rifle range of El-Court, a recruit could not load his rifle because the breach had gotten stuck. That was enough reason for Bock to start right off with kicking and punching. He marked up the face of the recruit so bad that he was hardly recognisable, but none of the cadre stepped in. However, our group took duly note of it and wrote it down in a journal ref: Bock.

We went on a regular basis on night exercises to teach us how to adapt to all circumstances. One night we were given training in on how to sneak up on the enemy. Sergeant Segelav and Etienne were going to give a demonstration. Everyone had to sit in a semi circle on the edge of the ravine and keep an eye out for everything that could happen. As soon one saw the "enemy" we had to yell that we had spotted one. Segelav and Etienne were going to try to climb up from the bottom of the ravine undetected and sneak up on us as close as possible.

Everything was done in total quietness, a half hour into the exercise I nudged Jean and Ghijs who were seated beside me and ask them; did you see something move straight ahead? Wait, I'll pick up a white a stone and throw it in the direction where I think I saw something, so you can follow it. With that I picked up a white stone and threw it in the direction of the shadows I saw. The stone hit one of them because he jumped up and yelled; who was the idiot who threw that rock? To my surprise, it was Segelav. I stood up and said, it was me sergeant, I did not mean to hit you. Segelav looked at me and said; why did you do that you knuckle head that nearly broke a tooth. I wanted to show my mates where I saw something. Segelav was pissed off, but walked away. However, Bock appeared and stood in front of me. You would not have gotten away so easy if it had been me you idiot, I would have kicked the hell out of you. Do you understand nitwit!

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'I yelled, yes caporal!' The face from Bock turned red as his fits hit me square in the face, while he

screamed 'it is Master Caporal' idiot!

I hauled off and hit him back right on the nose. Obviously I must have been liked better by the cadre than the other recruits because Lieutenant de Main Ruiz as well Segelav came between us. The lieutenant pulled Bock away and Segelav whispered; I read in your files that you never served previously in the military, but I think that you will do well. Try to stay away from Bock because he can be very dangerous. I can be dangerous too sergeant, Bock better keep that in mind. I saw a twinkle in the eyes of Segelav. It looked like that Bock had another stripe against him.

Sometimes during the fourth week on the de base Soyer, when after five o'clock we were busy washing our laundry at the laundry tables, Jean nudged me and Etienne. Look, who is looking at us nodding toward the space between the main building and the kitchen. On the parade ground stood a young woman, she was petite with long black hair and she had a twinkle in her eyes when she looked at me. Both my friends whispered; psst Lucky, she seems to be interested in you.

Just for a fraction of a second our eyes crossed, she smiled and walked on.

She probably was on her way to the mess hall of the NCO's, we could not see the entrance, but where else would she be going?

You guys think that she likes me? I said laughing. My friends smirked back. Ten minutes later a door opened and a guy came out and walked up to us. He handed me a piece of folded paper and left right away. Curiously I opened the paper. Jean and Etienne were looking over my shoulder to read along with me. It said; Sir I do not know you yet, but wish it to be different. If you are interested, come after eleven PM to this spot. There was nothing else, no name or any other instruction.

What do you guys think, is it a joke or shall I go for it?

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If it is from that young woman, I would be there for sure there after eleven, said Etienne, you never know. She looks like a nice piece, Jean nodded.

Beside the laundry room was a set of stairs that led to an area where there were clothes lines, we hung our laundry up to dry and went to our room. I hesitated, should I go? What if it was just a joke? I sure would be made out to be the fool. However, Jean and Etienne convinced me to go, so what if it is a joke? You are not going to die from it said Jean.

Didn't you get a good look at her? She is definitely worth to take a chance; she is probably married to one of the NCO's, but who cares, was Etienne's reaction.

It took a long time before the bugle blew "lights out", but at last it came. A half hour later I dressed myself and left the room. I did not think about anything when I went down the stairs and reached the laundry room. There was not a soul to be seen. I walked to the space between the two buildings and looked over the parade ground, there was no one either. Feeling a little more at ease, I lit a cigarette and walked back. Left passed the laundry room, in the corner of the surrounding wall near the toilets, I heard someone cough. I looked up, but saw nothing, but when I walked a little further, a shadow appeared. It was the woman, she was a head shorter than me and I am not that tall. She stopped me by getting hold of my arm, are you the one they call Lucky? Yes, why? Well that is Ok then, I did not want to meet anyone else. She paused for a moment took in a deep breath and told me her name. My name is Carmen. I do not quite know how to start; first of all I want you to know that I never have done this before. I was surprised, I thought I was going to meet a woman

who had a habit of getting involved with young recruits on the base, but that did not seem the case. At least if I were to believe her. Often these types of women are born comedians. I still had not said anything and she came closer to me. Come on, let's not stay here, I know a better spot. She took my hand and led me to the laundry room beside the kitchen. I wondered if this was her steady spot, but went willingly along anyway.

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When we got inside, she quietly closed the door. She looked at me and took my face in both hands. She said; I am happily married, but when I looked at you I got a **coup de foudre*, you find that strange? I do not understand it, but it is true I want to kiss you. It was a long and tender kiss. It felt like that she never wanted to let go. She hugged me and her hands were everywhere, I caressed her and we were soon on the floor doing what comes natural. She pressed her lips on my neck to dampen the sounds of pleasure. She kept on caressing me and kissed me everywhere. Then abruptly she got up and said; I have to go now, I would like to stay all night, but my husband would start to worry what happened to me. Let's get together here every Saturday at the same time, can you do that? It probably would not be a problem for me, but would your husband not wonder where you were? No, he goes always to town with his friends and then picks me up here at midnight because he knows I do not like the pubs in town. Here I can talk with the wives of the other NCO's. Don't worry, as long you are here, I belong to you.

I looked at her intently and asked; and when I am gone, are you going to take someone else? Right away I was sorry I had posed that question. Don't get me wrong, I do not think badly of you, but I think I am in love with you. She replied; I assure you that this has never happened to me before. I was love-struck from the moment I saw you, your eyes.... I have no words for it, but I am nuts about you. Believe me, you are the only man with whom I cheat on my husband. Again we hugged.

Back in the room I noticed that Bengier despite the late hour was not there, being bi-sexual and liking women equally as young guys, he had gone to town and had not noticed my absence. Besides the recruits, cadre and other Legionnaires could get permanent night permit to stay off the base. Still relishing the experience, I fell asleep and woke up late in the morning the next day. Sundays was a day off and everyone could sleep in, except if you had guard duty or patrol duty. While waiting until I could get a permit to go out for a night, I saw Carmen every Saturday at the same time and place.

*love on first sight (literally, hit by lightning)

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Often it was raining when we went on a march or running the obstacle course. Sometimes it rained a little and sometimes it was a real flood. However that was not a reason not to do the exercise. It went ahead like there was no rain; it wasn't too bad during a regular field exercise or march because at most you would get wet or slipped. To run the obstacle course during rain was a different matter, it was hardly a pleasant experience. However, the cadre thought differently about that, to them it was much more fun.

Like stated before, the obstacle course was about two kilometres long and had all kinds of

obstacles. There were posts about 30 centimetres high and at various intervals. The idea was that you had to run over them without touching the ground. When wet, the tops would be slippery and many guys would slip and fall into the mud.

Then there was "the wall" it was built with several levels, the first was one and half meter high, once on top of that one, you had to go to the next level which was another two meters high, the next one was another two meters higher. Once on top, thus five and half meters high, you had to jump down in a hill of mixed dirt and sand. When it was raining, this hill became a pile of mud. It was then difficult and dangerous to jump from that height and permission was given to jump from the second level instead of the top level.

The barbed wire run was real difficult to do, the barbed wire would be stretched about 30 centimetres above the ground and we had to crawl under it with backpack and rifle. During rain it became a real mud-bath. Then there was a net stretched at five meters high, we had to climb up and reach with two hands over the top and drop down. Here also was a hill of mixed dirt and sand to soften the impact, but of course this one was also transformed in a mud-bath after it had rained. Once finished with the obstacle course, you could be sure that everyone was completely covered with mud, including uniform, kit and weapons.

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Everything had to be cleaned as quickly as possible because shortly after the run there would be inevitable a thorough inspection. It has to be said, that the cadre despite the lousy weather, always showed how it had to be done, just to show that they did not feel good about it either.

A few days after my first encounter with Carmen, the town got hit with an act of terrorism. Everyone had heard or read about that a French airplane was hijacked by the top rebel leader Ben Bella and his men. Upon arrival in France, they were immediately taken prisoner and locked up. However, it gave the Algerian sympathisers also the courage to rise up against the French oppressors. Some of them denounced Ben Bella for it, but others saw him as a hero and followed his example.

We then learned that there were two groups of rebels active in Algeria who strived for the same goal. The first one was Movement National Algerian (M.N.A.) and the second one was Front Liberation National (F.L.N). The latter one was the most dangerous and violent; they saw themselves as the freedom fighters, which would clear the country of their French overseers. The M.N.A was more a political organisation who tried to come to a political debate and solution to get Algeria's independence without spilling blood.

Around 10 PM there was a loud bang that was heard throughout the whole town. Right away a few units went out to investigate and it wasn't long until they discovered that someone, probably a rebel, had thrown a bomb at a cafe on the market large place of Mascara that was flanked on three sides by homes. Along the fourth side was the main road, from there you could keep an eye on the immediate area of the district Bab-Ali.

It was a common attack whereby several civilians were wounded and one soldier was killed. The soldier was a German adjutant, the A.S.G. of the base Soyer. It was known to that he gave preferential treatment to other Germans from the cadre of the training center and gave them as little as possible the nasty jobs such as guard and patrol duty.

That came to an end when his successor, a short Spanish adjutant by the name of Moreno took his place. He suspended immediately the preferential treatment; their easy life had come to an end.

After more than a month all recruits had obtained the required skills and would receive the coveted white kepi, the symbol of a legionnaire. This meant that now we were considered ready to be on guard duty and going on patrols. For the guard which got always put together at the entrance gate, you had to know every rank of the French Army. No one had any problems with that; neither did we have any problems with walking patrols. It was a crucial part of being ready to be called for active duty.

We could also march perfectly as one unit, *in file Indienne** with the required space between us, move forward in open or urban areas, *en tirailleur*** , crawling on your belly, run in attack or move carefully forward.

On the Parade ground, every recruit received a snow white kepi and from now on they could call themselves *légiionnaires* instead of *engagé volontaires*. The green-red *beret-de-police* got moved down the kit bag.

Lieutenant Damine told us that from now on we would be put on guard and patrol duty. Finally we were going to be part of the best trained army in the world. This reputation was justified, no other army could compare to us, not in the past and not now. From experience, Etienne and Jean could vouch for that.

Etienne said, you only have to look at the training, in comparison with us, the Belgian soldiers are wimps and the Dutch are not much better. The Brits and Americans are not too bad, from them is a little more effort expected, but they will never endure what we do. Don't even talk about going on a march of 70 KM, they will die.

I thought, this is all good and well, but who knows what lies in wait for us, who would come out of this adventure alive? What would happen next, if the rebel issue was serious?

The clash from last week was only a minor thing, OK, there were some wounded and one dead, but what did that mean?

* In one row behind one other

** In one line, side by side

Jean spoke up, with or without *kepi blanc* we are not at the end of our adventure, we have one thing others do not have and that is that we have each other. Let's make a promise that we won't let each other out of sight and always let each other know where we are, even later when we are in our combat unit. Everyone in our group nodded in agreement. It would be at least another three months before we would get to our combat units.

For now the names of those who had to do guard, patrol and fire guard duty were listed in the hall of our room. The next day Etienne, Fontani, fanny, Chiari, Chamart, Ghijs Baerdy, Navrosky and myself were waiting for the patrol leader to show up, we had no idea who that would be this time.

Look at your right Lucky, there is someone spying on us. Can you see who it is? asked Etienne. I could not see who it was, but Etienne went on; Goddamned, look who is coming! I hope he is not our patrol leader. However, it was indeed Master Caporal Bock who came walking up to us. He placed himself in a relaxed manner in front of us, legs spread and arms across the chest and the shit hit the fan. So, is this the way you wait for your platoon leader bunch of twats? Did you learn nothing in the last weeks? Jump to attention when I speak to you! Well goddamned, are you listening or do a need to get the whip out?

We all stayed calmly at ease, we were taught that when a superior gave an order, he had to do it in a good military manner while staying himself at attention and Bock obviously failed to do so. Etienne and I saw that someone had been hiding behind a tree, the man approached without making a sound. It was adjutant Moreno and he screamed at Bock; you twat! Is that the way you give a military order? You must have been too long involved with the lazy twats of the legion. Show that you can give an order in a proper manner, or I will teach you how to do it. Get to it!! Bock didn't know how fast to jump to attention, to the amusement of the young troops he had tried to bully.

He jumped to attention in a perfect manner and faced us: on my order... section... *Garde-à-vous! We jumped to a man in line, our weapon pressed close to our bodies.

*Attention!

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Bock continued, at my order, *à droite...droite and a few seconds later: En avant...marche! In good order we left the base. It was 5 PM and we had to walk patrol until 10 PM outside the base. The patrol rounds had to be done every hour and was not to last longer than thirty minutes. After 10 PM the rounds became larger. We had to go in the street straight ahead of the gate, which sloped downward past Ben-Oued, then to the main street direction Relizane, after that was a short piece of hollow road. A hundred meters further we turned left into a sandy path that surrounded the town, to end up at the main street on the courtyard where earlier the bomb had been thrown. Inside the town we kept a distance between us of about 4-5 meters. Once outside the town, the distance was extended to about 10-12 meters. The weapons were held at the ready to fire anytime when necessary. Up to now there had not been any need for an armed intervention, but then there had not been any bombs thrown either.

Our weapon was a MAT 49 (Manufacture d'Armes de Tulle), a submachine gun good for short distances. Bock carried a revolver.

Bock was probably sure that we would say something to Moreno if something would go amiss, because he kept quiet, all orders were given correctly and he kept his "big mouth" shut.

Until 10 PM it was all quiet, we drank coffee in the guard house and checked our weapons over. On the dot 10 PM, Bock gave the order to get going. Everything was quiet up to the main street toward Relizane. After leaving the last homes behind us, we increased the distance between us automatically and turned into the hollow road. Bock walked behind, almost between the last two guys who walked on either side of the road, not suspecting anything.

After going a forty-fifty meters all hell broke loose, from all sides came the sound of firing guns and the bullets were flying everywhere. We had never experienced anything like this and threw ourselves to the ground in an effort to find cover.

In the middle of this chaos probably out of guilt feelings, Bock ran to the front of the patrol. His

place is normally in the middle of the patrol instead of at the rear. At that moment someone yelled **feu à la volonté and ten or so submachine guns started to fire. Bock got stopped midway, hung for a fraction of a second in the air and fell dead to the ground.

*Right...right, forward...march

** Fire at will

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The hissing and whistling of the flying bullets lasted at least a half hour, but after the first few minutes we could hear the sound of truck engines from Legion units who came to the sound of the firefight.

It did not take long before the whole area was flooded with soldiers, they looked everywhere for rebels. Soldiers were calling out to each other and every now and then a shot got fired.

The captain called our patrol together and looked around in the semi darkness, what did happen, are there any wounded among you? Etienne tried to lift his left arm; he put his right hand under his left elbow and lifted it up. He said, I believe that Fanny is also wounded.

The captain told them to go to the Jeep to be taken to the hospital. He turned to me; from you I expect a report on my desk tomorrow morning. Now get back to the base, go!

I got everyone together and we went in good order back to our unit, where a reported to Lieutenant Damine. The next day I took my report to the Captain of the fourth company and heard that they found a lot of shell casings, but not one trace of the rebels. Not even a dead one.

Etienne after being bandaged up was released from the hospital the same night. He just had a flesh wound.

A few days later they buried Bock with full military honours and Fanny got back to us.

Quickly everything on the base returned to the regular routine, even before Bock was buried. There was not much in the way of mourning for one guy, and certainly not for someone like the German master-caporal Bock.

A few days later there were two men missing from the evening roll call, this was reported to the Company commandant by the platoon leader, but even that did not create too much of a stir.

The new A.S.G., adjutant Moreno was even more of a Nazi hater than the members of our group. He had during his service in Indochina where the Legion fought as part of the French army, gotten into some unpleasant incidents with his German colleagues. They were mostly remnants of Hitler's famous Afrika Korps who under command of Erwin Rommel operated in North Africa and

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after the defeat of the Nazi's, they got the choice to either join the Legion with a false identity or be taken as a prisoner of war. With the Second World War still fresh in mind and the Germans who had a misplaced sense of authority or showed abuse of power, they could not expect too much sympathy.

Later I would find out that Moreno had his own theories in regard to Bock, but for now he kept that to himself.

It happened often in the following days that convoys to and from Sidi-Bel-abbes were attacked from ambushes. Every time there were some wounded and killed among the legionnaires.

Moreno did not think that the rebels were laying permanently in an ambush waiting for a convoy to pass, but that they had an informer on the inside of the base. Not a pleasant thought, but there was no other explanation for the many attacks. As not to alarm the informant, Moreno decided to bide his time and try to ferret him out.

It was well known that the Germans in the French Foreign Legion could not get along very well with other Nationalities and that they often got preferential treatment when it came to disputes. I wondered why, maybe because they were the majority of Nationalities?

Since his return from Indo-China, shortly after the defeat at Dien Bien Phu (the last battle of the French in the Indo Chinese war) Adjutant Moreno had avoided the Germans as much as possible, but now he had to deal with them on a daily basis.

That is why he had decided to stop the cushy life that the German cadre now enjoyed and since he had now a higher rank, he could do that.

He had looked already for a justification to approach us; the guys from the now well known patrol, those bleus (rookies), but luck was with him, because of the death of Bock he did not have to look for a reason.

The attacks by the rebels became more frequent and day after day our patrols had to keep an eye out for trouble in the town however, we were not much of a thorn in the side of the insurgents.

The first week after the attack we got *quartier consigné*, but after the end of the same week that order was rescinded because it was not practical to keep everyone inside the base.

However, it was not allowed to go to town alone, you had to be at least with two men.

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Like in the past, shopping was done on Saturdays interspersed with having a beer here and there.

It happened that only legionnaires were in the bars, it was seldom that civilians would show up.

The interaction between civilians and Legionnaires was somewhat of a taboo; even people in France and other colonies had the opinion that legionnaires were undesirables.

Maybe that was enough reason for the rebels to step up the attacks because a little later there were several explosions, at nearly the same time in six bars, resulting in several dead and wounded.

A general alarm sounded throughout the town and all uninjured troops raced back to the base. A

few minutes later the trucks left the gate and all roads were sealed off, not a mouse could get

through. Right away Bab-Ali and other suspect areas were combed through in search of rebels.

Check-points were placed on all strategic locations and every Arab, men and women were

searched for weapons. Any kind of weapon, no matter how small would be reason enough to

detain and take the person to the base for further interrogation. Those with incorrect identity papers would befall the same fate.

Anyone from out of town would be immediately handed over to the Deuxième Bureau d'Sécurité Militaire.

In the mean time, each Legionnaire was looking for revenge. Each one had lost at least one good friend or acquaintance during the attacks.

The Arab shops and businesses that had been closed were broken into and the people were chased outside, searched and interrogated. There were no more extenuated circumstances considered for male, female or age. In several cases excesses were committed, when a gun was found, the

individual would be shot on the spot and the body dragged to the side of the road. The luckier prisoners were locked up on the base with twenty or more in a cell meant for five. Of course there were those who had worked for the French government and had the documentation to prove it, those were immediately released. However, no one was allowed to leave the city. Everywhere was a heightened alertness and the city looked like a busy anthill. Despite all the efforts, the results were minimal, no explosives were found and only a few weapons. Etienne and Fanny were in town when the alarm sounded and had not gone to the base, maybe they were among the victims.

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The initial search operation was done and my comrades and I were assigned to guard sections of the town. Jean, Ghijs, Fontani and I were assigned by A.S.G Moreno to a position in the area of Ben-Daoud. We kept our ears and eyes open, but until now we did not catch anyone suspicious. However, trucks with suspects guarded by Legionnaires drove past us on a regular basis.

We controlled several areas of the town and heard that the French regular army controlled the whole south part of the town. They had orders to bring all suspects to the base. Ghijs and Fontani went from street to street, keeping a close watch on windows and doors, but nothing did happen. Moreno dropped by in combat uniform and talked with Jean and me for a while. He had barely gone when Ghijs and Fontani came back; they had a young woman between them, one who against the Arab customs did not look down when she approached. We saw this woman trying to slip out of a house, apparently with the idea to leave the town. Ghijs showed a pistol and said, she had this pistol hidden between her breasts. I shrugged my shoulders, at this time none of us were inclined to show any pity. The thought of our fallen comrades was enough to decide not to bring her to the base. Fontani said; I think we better do the interrogation ourselves, he was saying what we were actually thinking. Maybe we can get information from her, where their main base is located. Anyway, the guys from the Deuxième Bureau have their hands full with the other suspects. If that does not work, then we can turn her over to the Deuxième Bureau or the Military Security said Jean. What do you guys think? How shall we go about it, are we doing the interrogation right here? No way! That would be too dangerous; we have to try to get her out of town. How are we going to manage that said Ghijs, is it not too dangerous to go out of town?

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The rebels are probably keeping us under close observation. I said it is now everywhere dangerous, our biggest problem right now is how to get a vehicle. Jean and Ghijs took on the job of procuring a vehicle, the woman stayed with Fontani and me. We took turns to search several citizen, but it became so busy that we realised we could not keep it up and gave up on body searches. We then turned our attention exclusively to the woman. Luckily it wasn't long when Jean and Ghijs came back with a German; he was a red-head with an

unsavoury face. It turned out that it had not been long since he had returned from Indochina; He looked rough and walked like a Bear, arms swinging.

We have here a chauffeur with a half-track said Jean He is willing to take us as long we tell him the reason. While Fontani explained to the new-comer what we wanted, we noticed that he could not keep his eyes off the woman. He agreed to take us ten KM out of town, but he wanted a piece of the pie. We knew darn well what he meant by that, but we did not think or say anything.

The only thing he had to do was ask the vehicle boss if he could get the half-track for a while.

When he was gone to get the half-track I said; you sure brought a strange character Jean, but alas, there was no alternative because I hate to have to walk to El-Court.

We all agreed that it was better to go a few kilometres out of town because there is where the Djebel started and offered better hiding places, where we could go undisturbed ahead with what we had had planned.

It wasn't long before the driver came back and the woman was forced to lay down on the floor of the half-track, everyone else took their place and the half-track moved on with creaking tracks.

We reached the edge of town, the control posts were not manned by Legionnaires, but by French soldiers. I said; I hope they don't give us any trouble; we better have a good explanation as to why we have to get out of town. To our surprise, we were let through without having to stop or answer any questions from the Lieutenant.

It was only a few minutes' drive to El-Court and then after a few more minutes we left the road and drove into the desert.

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After a few hundred meters from the road we stopped at the edge of a deep ravine between some huge rocks, which kept us from being seen by eventual passersby on the road.

Jean and Ghijs had groped and half undressed the woman during the trip, after all it had been a long time since they had been with a woman. Now they pulled her up and pushed her out of the vehicle, where the driver and I grabbed her. Ringed by the others, I started the interrogation; where did you get that gun and where are the other rebels hiding out! She just looked at me and spit on the ground.

Jean ripped the rest of her clothes off and pulled out his bayonet, while keeping the bayonet menacing against her breast he snarled; are you going to tell us or do I have to cut off your tit? She did not let out one peep, her eyes widened, but she kept staring at Jean. For a moment Jean averted her stare, but not for long. He grabbed one of her breast and squeezed it so hard that we thought it would pop; again, she did not let out one sound even though we all knew it had to hurt like hell.

The German did now step forward and pushed Jean aside, you bunch of amateurs, if you want her to talk you have to do it right and not pussyfoot around like you have been doing.

In Indochina I interrogated a few sluts and they were more than happy to talk. Too bad there is no bamboo around here. None of us knew what he meant by that, because we had not heard many tales about Indochina and about the French occupation there. We looked at each other and thought all the same thing, she was the enemy and that was enough. Pity was a luxury we could not afford; the enemy would have no pity either.

We shrugged our shoulders, which seem to be the sign of approval for the German. He threw the

woman on the ground and straddled himself across her belly facing her feet. He then spread her legs and planted his feet on the inside of each leg so that she could not get them back together. The guy went to work so fast, that it was clear that it was not the first time he done this. He fondled her vagina and then grabbed with both hands her pubic hair and yanked it with all his might. Not one sound came out of the Arabic woman. He then made a fist and drove it nearly to his elbow in her vagina.

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His fist went every which way, but the woman did not react. She had only tears in her eyes. Suddenly the German bend over and sank his teeth in her labia, startled and upset we realised we were not yet ready to play legionnaires, we never had experienced something like that. That guy is a goddamn sadist of the worst kind murmured Jean, who had experienced one thing and another himself. We can't let him go on like this; he will devour her before she has said one word.

Fontani nodded, we now know already that she is not going to talk, even if we let him cut her to pieces; let's put an end to this. Everybody nodded and what happened next went so fast, that it was done before we knew what had happened. In a flash I saw something glitter in the hand of the big Italian, the next moment I saw it was a knife, but Fontani had already pulled the head from the German back and in one stroke cut his throat. The head was nearly cut off the torso and after a few body spasms, the guy was dead. Without ado we pulled the body of the German off the woman and dragged him to the ravine and dumped him where he disappeared out of sight.

While Jean, Fontani and I were busy with this, Ghijs went on top of the woman and raped her. Jean wanted also a turn, but Fontani and I declined. When Jean was finished, Fontani did the same to her as with the German and she also went down the ravine.

We left the vehicle and went back to town and our post; no one had noticed our absence.

Two people had died and nothing was gained by it. As far the woman was concerned, we had no choice, she was a rebel and would have killed us without hesitation, otherwise she would not have had a pistol on her. The German deserved to die for his sadistic behaviour, there are barbaric people in every army, but that does not mean that their deeds are acceptable. We were in agreement that under the same circumstances we would have killed him any other time as well.

We found that people like him did not deserve to be part of the famous French Foreign Legion. Who knows how many victims he had made and how many more just to satisfy his sadistic lust? He looked like Jack the Ripper in his heyday.

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In all, we figured we had done the right thing, our only mistake was the place where we went without more protection, and we could have been killed without our comrades knowing about it. We were not back very long on our post when Moreno showed up, thoughts flashed through our heads like; had he been here before?, had he heard or had seen anything? Moreno detected our nervousness, but we managed to act normally. Moreno asked how everything was and if we had taken any suspects to the base. Oh I replied there haven't been many people passing by and we

made tour to Ben-Oued, did we miss something?

I looked at Moreno, but his face was emotionless, this guy was an enigma, you could not tell what he was up to. Quasi uninterested the adjutant looked in to the street and then looked at each of us. He probably did try to figure out if we would be men that he could depend on, how far we would go and if he could trust us. Nonchalant he took a pack of Gitane cigarettes out of his pocket, lit a cigarette and with an expressionless face inhaled deeply. He told me then, when this business is finished and the town has become calm again, I want you guys to come to my room. I think that I have discovered something, 'till later!

We jumped to attention and saluted like we had been taught. The adjutant looked amused.

I asked myself; did he come here to tell us what he discovered? Maybe he was here before and because he did not find us, assumed that something had happen.

Let's hope that he does not know exactly what did happen and never find out either, because if that comes out he might deliver us to the guys of the Deuxième Bureau.

We agreed not to talk about it at all anymore.

It would be until next morning before we would get back to the base, there was an expectation that the rebels would send reinforcement and everybody had to stay put and be extra alert.

We got food and extra ammo and were told not to get lax. We had to be prepared for all eventualities, but it stayed the whole night calm.

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In the morning we were relieved by another company and we returned to the base. We were astounded by the large number of number of suspects that had been rounded up. Near the entrance were two groups, male and females under heavy guard. The largest group was on the parade ground, also under heavy guard. Despite the early hour, Adjutant Moreno was already present and he invited us to his room for a large glass of *anisette*, an invitation we accepted with pleasure. We quietly smoked a cigarette while Moreno looked again intently at each one of us.

Without any introduction he started with; I have been given the job of knowing everything that goes on the base, anyone wanting to start a project have to come to me first, including the highest ranking officer. I shall not expand on my job at this time, you know enough about that for now.

He interrupted himself to reflect on the words he wanted to use and take a drag from his cigarette. He then continued without any hesitation; yesterday afternoon a pretty woman was brought in by a couple of Legionnaires, I think she was of a mixed race. Later I heard that she was first locked up in a cell with other women, but not for long. Sergeant Lepcheck got an order from adjutant Lafaille to put her in solitaire lock-up. You know this adjutant of the armoury. A short time later he came back accompanied by sergeant Marchlek and adjutant Duprez. When I took a look in the hall, they just entered the cell where the woman was locked-up. I heard a lot of excited talk, like they were in a panic. He lit another cigarette and wondered if he was wise to tell then this, he then went on; I walked back to my office because I could not quite hear what they were saying and did not want them to find out that I was listening in. A short time later, the guys came back, but this time with the woman. Duprez himself took her outside the base and into his car, while the others went to the room of Marchalek.

I saw that her papers were still on my desk and looked at them, at first her name did not mean anything to me, but then a light went on.

Immediately after the start of the action against the rebels yesterday, a man got picked up who had a pistol in his possession.

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The soldiers who did arrest him got into a disagreement what to do with him. One of them chooses for them the simplest solution and shot him in the head.

Moreno pulled some papers out of his pocket. Besides the pistol, they had found also some papers that indentified him as one of the top leaders of the rebels and had been hunted by us and the police for interrogation. His name probably does not mean anything to you, but it was Messali Messaoud. Maybe I'll find later the guy that shot him, but that is right now of a lesser importance. Moreno was clearly disturbed by this event, but he remembered clearly the incident with Bock and figured we wanted to get a clean slate. Yet we could not see a connection between the dead of Messali Messaoud and the arrest of the young woman.

Moreno sensed our curiosity and continued; out of his other pocket he pulled out a picture and some papers and let it go around. On the papers that belonged with the picture, was the name Myriam Messaou-Ben Ghouman. The woman was the legal wife of the man who was executed! This is not what we had anticipated. It became clear why these NCO's went through so much trouble to get the young woman out of the prison, they were the moles inside the base that Moreno had been for so long trying to expose. We read in his eyes that he had placed his hope in us. Moreno knew instinctively that he could count on the four guys standing before him and that they were capable to fulfill a mission given to them.

It was clear that every man in the room was of the same mind, traitors, criminals and low-life's should be without exception eliminated from this elite outfit.

We were honoured that a man like him had taken us in confidence, it stroked our egos a quite a bit as well.

I propose that you guys are now going to sleep and I'll see you back later, OK? We nodded in agreement.

In our room we met Etienne and Fanny; they told us that they and a few others of the platoon were commandeered by a colonel who had given orders to guard his home. Relieved that nothing serious had happened to our friends, we told them the events of yesterday.

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After that we went to sleep.

Etienne and Fanny had approved of our action with the German and Arabic woman, to show their solidarity, they said that they wished that they had been there as well and were sorry that they weren't.

Late afternoon we, Etienne, Jean, Fanny, Chamart, Ghijs Fontani and I had gone to the room of adjutant Moreno. We had gotten the rest of the day off and Moreno refreshed our memory.

You know where this woman lives, near the base, in the first side street to the right of the market. It is up to you to find out the exact relationship between those three NCO's and her.

He did not ask for our opinion, it was a simple order, one that had to be executed in utmost secrecy. We heard a steely, bitter tone in his voice and knew that we had to deal with this

busyness. The adjutant filled our glasses with *anisette* which we drank in silence.

He said before we left the room, it speaks for itself that you have to form a plan of action and as far I am concerned, you have *carte- blanche*.

The only thing I can do is to let you know if there is going to be a surprise roll-call, so that you do not get taken off guard.

If you find out something important, let me know, but don't ask me how to go about dealing with this issue. You guys make the decisions and figure out a solution, I pre approve any decisions you make, off you go!!

Impressed with the announcement we left the room of the adjutant. After showering and evening meal we conferred, we did not do this in the bedroom. I had told Bengier that I wanted to give the others some lessons in the French language and if we could use the mess-hall. Because we knew that Bengier went to town- he had another girlfriend with whom he spend the night sometimes. This way we would be able to plot our plans in peace. We went through all the items and listed all the facts.

Etienne, who had missed the talk with Moreno started; If I understand it correctly, the three NCO's freed the wife of the rebel leader and he in turn was executed on orders of one of the three or maybe on orders of all three? We nodded our confirmation of that statement.

We better get going tonight said Jean, but lets first check carefully the routine of the patrols and write down their schedules.

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I interrupted, a good plan Jean, but we do not write down anything. Everything has to be memorised, so that there is nothing to be found if something goes wrong.

We can keep an eye on the guard post from our window offered Fanny. We know that every half hour the guards have to make a round around the base. He smiled, thinking back to the patrol along the same way we had done on foot, where caporal Bock had met with his maker.

It would be then no problem to figure out when we can go and return unseen. We were in agreement with that. By a straw vote, Etienne and Fontani were chosen to stake out the home of the young woman, Myriam Messaoud-Ben Ghouman.

When Ghijs gave the sign that the patrol had returned, Fontani and Etienne departed for their first scouting trip. Silently they descended the stairs and left the main building. First they had to climb up the roof of the small building that was build against the outside wall of the base. From there they dropped on the sand road that surrounded the base. Walking in a Westerly direction they came quickly upon the corner of the wall and went through a large opening on to the street.

Without incident they reached the home they were looking for, but because the home was in total darkness they decided that there was nothing they could do and returned to the base.

In the mean time the instruction went on, no one on the base knew that there was a small group that not only did their regular training, but also secretly the work of the Deuxième Bureau, Security Militaire and the firing squad.

Now that Bock was gone, we had the notion that Bengier sang another tune and tried his best to become best buddies with us. That notion turned out to be true, because one evening he came and sat on my bed and asked out of the blue; Lucky, what do you think of going up town with me; I

know a nice piece of Arab ass that has no aversion to Legionnaires.

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I looked at him, took a cigarette and thought; what is he up to, was this question only meant to assuage the past? I said, I thought you were only interested in young guys with feminine traits? Well, I do have a weakness for young guys, but I like also women. My affection for young guys has grown over time and stems from all the times we could not go out during training. I needed some diversion because I could not do without a woman. There were then also some homos in my room and they offered themselves. I did get a kick out of it, now I get my cake and eat it too from both sides. Anyway, what do you think? Shall we go and see Fatima? I can introduce you and from there you can arrange things further.

I promised him that I would think about it, I didn't think that the bi-sexual Dutchman was smart enough to lay a trap for me.

I looked at Jean who has been listening into our conversation. I asked Bengier, if Fatima is such a slut like you say can you arrange for a girl for Jean as well, of course without obligations he?

Bengier hastily replied, I am sure I can arrange that, probably happy that he had made a friend. I am sure that she has a girlfriend who is willing to oblige and go to her room.

Happy as a Lark he walked away. Jean and I looked at each other without getting understanding too much of his turn-around.

I put my mate at ease with, once we know for sure what he is up to, and then we will see. There is no rush, he hasn't got any friends anymore now with Bock being gone.

That is true smirked Jean, but do not forget we got the order from Moreno to do a job that takes priority over your little adventure.

Of course I understand that a Moorish woman a nicer undertaking is.

How is it otherwise with Carmen? Do you still see her? Yes, once in a while, everything is great.

Don't forget, while you were busy with helping Korean and Chinese men to hell, I was at sea and in the harbours I have seen my share of misery. Believe me, a Moorish woman is no news to me.

Bengier was reading a book on his bed when Jean and I walked to the bed of Fontani in the north corner near the window.

Etienne and Ghijs came also to us. We all knew the score.

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We played some poker, but in the meantime we were secretly planning our next move.

It is impossible to go out scouting every night with all of us said Ghijs. I propose therefore to have each time teams of two men. We all thought it was a good idea and adopted that resolution.

Again we drew straws and we created three teams of two men each, and one in reserve: Fanny and me, Etienne and Chamart, Fontani and Ghijs and Jean as replacement.

There had been another wrench thrown in, since a couple of days now the security had been

stepped up and more guards were assigned to walk patrols at the inside of the wall surrounding the base. These patrols which we had to do also, started every 15 minutes from the guardhouse, then turned left and went past the kitchen towards the wash room, turned right at the main building and then went past the administration building back to the starting point.

When two of us would go out on a scouting trip, we could only have cigarettes and matches on us. Then if Bengier then would happen to notice our absence, we could just say that we were going to another room to play some cards.

The plan was to send every night a team out stake out the house to see what would be going on, we could do no more than that, at this time.

The following morning during roll-call and raising the flag, two companies were present. There was one deserter sitting on his knees near the flag pole with a large tree trunk on his left shoulder. The base commandant, a colonel whom we got to see very seldom, said that this man would not escape his deserved punishment. He would be displayed as an example to all those present.

After that we departed to El-Court for our regular training. The day went like all other days, like always after a day outside the base; at five o'clock we assembled on the parade grounds to finish the day. The poor guy was still sitting there, on his knees with the tree trunk on his shoulder.

Moreno found it enough; the guy had done this terrible punishment and he ordered him to get up. Moreno repeated the order three times, but the guy did not get up and stayed seated like he was deaf. Lepcheck walked up to the man, probably to enforce the order and he went to grab him by the arm.

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He barely touched the man when he fell sideways to the ground. The tree trunk rolled off of him a half meter further and they discovered that the poor sucker had died; he must have been dead since the morning because he was stiff as a board.

More than likely he had gotten a fatal beating before his punishment at the flag pole and had died from those injuries.

They took him away; this example was burned forever in the minds of those who were present.

When we got back together that night, our Corsican roommate Padore came to sit with us and whispered to Etienne; I have noticed you guys planning something or another, what is going on?

It was a direct question and Etienne did not know what to reply right away. After some hesitation he said, I have to talk to the others first, but in the mean time, keep your mouth shut OK?

I was the first that Etienne mentioned the situation to and we decided to have a meeting about it. I argued; if Padore is to be trusted, I don't see any harm in letting him in on what we are doing.

If he did detect that something was going on, then I am sure that he is not the only one.

This shows that we have to be more careful and keep the group small, to lessen the risk of a leak.

Etienne got permission from the rest of us to let Padore in on what we were doing and to carefully observe his reaction. We knew that up to now, he had been associating mostly with Yugoslavs to learn their language. He had been a member of our clique in Sidi Bel Abbes, but even though he had been placed in another section in Mascara, he still slept in the same room as us.

We decided not to have anyone else join in our activities.

Just before eleven that same night, when Fanny and I stood up to leave the room, the sergeant of the week showed up with the announcement that there would be an immediate *quartier consigné*

because suspicious movement of rebels had been noticed.

Of course that made everything more difficult, but after a short discussion with Etienne and Fontani we went anyway without weapons, knowing that we could be shot on sight.

We circumvented the guard and were in no time over the wall. We walked on the sand-road behind the base when we had to dive in the ditch at the right side. We had heard voices, but had not seen anyone. We stayed down quietly and saw a few seconds later to our surprise two men in military uniform walk by.

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Even though they spoke French, we could not make out what they were saying, they were also too far from us to recognise them.

I turned to Fanny and said; I don't get how they dare to walk openly on the street, or maybe they do not know that there is *quartier consigné*, they better hope that they do not run into a patrol.

Once the guys had disappeared from view, we carefully looked left and right, climbed out of the ditch and went on. We were almost at the corner of the wall surrounding the base, when we heard again voices and nearing footsteps. I looked around, but the ditch was now much farther away.

We had no choice, there was no other way out, I set off in a sprint dragging Fanny with me and dove again in the ditch, just about the time the patrol came around the corner.

What had happened, unbeknownst to us the superior of the guard had decided send the patrol from another direction and that did not jive with the way we had things worked out.

After a few minutes the patrol was out of sight and we could move on again.

Without further difficulties we reached our goal. We landed on the North side in the yard and saw right away a light on in the house. It shone through the closed curtains, but there were about twenty centimetres short, more than enough to see through who were all there.

The young woman who had been freed from Soyer prison, lay in the arms of a much older man, he did not look like be a military person. Their conversation was clearly distinguishable; ...but what my love, if someone else wants to go with me, I have already my hands full with Marchalek and Lafaille and now Duprez wants also to be with me to bed. Can't you move him to another unit?

You have the power to do that.

She stroked through the hair of the man and kissed in the neck.

Listen my sweet child replied the man, you may thank Duprez on your bare knees that he took you out of the base, otherwise you would be keeping your husband company in the hereafter.

What does it matter anyway if you going to bed with him as well? Maybe he is better than the other two and you want him in the future all by himself.

They are the only ones who are able to keep us informed about what goes on the base and I hate to lose the money we get from the rebels.

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Another few months of patience, then we can move to South America or where ever.

We saw how the old man grabbed her and kissed her on the mouth, his hand went under her shirt and he grabbed her breast. The woman untangled herself from his grasp and said, if that is what you want, I will do it, but you have to promise me that you will not get jealous.

Of course not sweetheart, I prove that to you every day! Lucky for us that Duprez ordered the execution of your idiot husband because of his jealousy, he was just about to betray us.

If he had been caught by others, he might have confessed. I know what methods the Security people use to make prisoners talk.

Besides that, I like the fact that he does not sleep in the same bed with you anymore. The talking stopped and the man went on his knees and groped under the dress of the woman.

It wasn't long before she was half naked and the old guy enjoyed the pleasure of fondling her beautiful breasts, after which he took possession of her.

I looked on my wristwatch and saw it was quarter to two. Because of the change in time of the patrols, we did not know when they would pass again thus there was nothing else to do but wait until they came by again. We waited hidden on the side of the sand road until one would come by, we did not feel anxious, and it was like we were on a training exercise. Quarter after two a patrol marched past us and we ran to the place where we could climb on the roof of the shower stalls.

The next evening after time-out, Benguer came to pick up Jean and me to take to town, where he had arranged for three girls. I told Etienne and the rest that they should go ahead normally because Jean and I had a special night permission to go up town.

In a room in the town, not far from Ben-Daoud we met Fatima, the girl friend from Benguer. She introduced us to two other girls and we went each, without ado to a room and spend a pleasurable night with them.

I was sure that Benguer had made this gesture to become friends with us, but I soon learned that it was not the case and that he was someone without any scruples.

The next day we were back in time for the seven o'clock roll call, there lieutenant Damine told the assembled company that tomorrow there was a march of 70 kilometres on the agenda.

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On a march like that two French Gendarmes would come along to control the civilians, Legionnaires had to avoid any bodily contact with them. Algeria was still a colonial territory and after the Front Libération Nationale (FLN) officially declared war in 1954 with their colonial French masters, the situation had become very explosive.

After the first bomb attacks during which several French soldiers had died, grenades were thrown on a regular basis into cafes and minor riots increased more and more between young Algerians and the French "occupiers".

The people did not hide anymore their discontent.

The social-economic difference between the *colons of pied-noirs* and Algerians was in favour of the French colonists, they had among other things, taken ownership of large areas of arable land that had belonged to the native population. The whole economic development of Algeria was to the detriment of the native population.

Everyone got ammunition like we were going on a real war operation, also a few communication radios had to be taken. Benguer decided to give the radio of the third section which weighed about twenty kilos to a young German by the name of Uhm. The guy was maybe eighteen years old and did not look very strong. In a training company you would learn quickly who the weak links were

and often they were the ones to be picked on, it was the same this time. My mates and I thought this to be unfair and I went to talk to Bengier. It was clear that he wanted to get this weakling, just for “the hell of it”. Can’t you give that thing to someone else besides this small guy? I asked, figuring that Bengier after last night would be amenable to my request. However, the caporal turned around with a wild look in his eyes and replied; mind your own business that is how you avoid problems! It was clear enough; I shrugged my shoulders and walked back to my mates, let’s hope it turns out OK today. This day the third section was at the end of the column, thus there was no one behind us. The march went good until the first *casse-croute*. Etienne went to sit beside Uhm, who let the heavy radio slide off his back.

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I would not do that said Etienne, later you won’t be able to get this heavy thing back up. The guy did not say anything and ate his bread quietly. After 15 minutes we had to get going again, Bengier had told Uhm already twice to get up and take his position in the column. The young guy did not move and stayed seated while the rest was ready for departure. Etienne, Bengier Fontani and I were the tail end of the column and had taken already some steps while Uhm sat still in the same spot. Bengier walked back to him and screamed; are you staying here or are you still planning on taking that radio along? God-damned get up you piece of shit! But Uhm did not move. Bengier screamed; OK, Etienne you take the radio, Lucky, you take his gun and you piece of dung get up! Etienne was busy hoisting the radio on his back and after taking the gun from Uhm, I walked a few steps away thinking that Bengier had come to his senses. Nothing was further from the truth, without batting an eyelash; the caporal took his pistol, put it against the head of Uhm and pulled the trigger. The column went down as one man upon hearing the loud bang of the gun. Right away the voice of Damine crackled over the radio. What is happening at the back caporal? Are we being attacked? Reply!! Bengier jumped to the radio, grabbed the horn and replied no commandant; I shot a deserter when he tried to escape. A little later the commandant came and asked what exactly had happened. Etienne and I told him as much we knew, but could not tell him why Bengier had shot Uhm to dead. We were mad as hell inside, but there was little we could do for now and we had to wait. Bengier would get his just punishment later. The commandant ordered that the body was to be carried along by two legionnaires on a rotation basis. It would have been easy to order a chopper to pick the body up, but he found it to be a good training exercise to drag a body along for a few hours. The two gendarmes made up a report about the incident and the march continued on. The march ended without further incidents and back on the base Etienne and I told the others who were nearby at the time of the murder, but had not seen anything, what had actually happened.

We decided that Bengher had to be eliminated and thought of a plan how to go about it, keep all the trump cards in our hands and have his girl friend Fatima also play a role in it.

A few days later Uhm would be buried with all military honours.

The same night Etienne and Chamart went out to stake out the house. Before they left, Ghijs walked up to them and pushed a pistol in the hand of Etienne. It was the gun that was taken off the female Algerian rebel before we went back to El-Court; he had it hidden all this time in his kitbag and just thought about it now.

Without any difficulties they reached the house, but it was all dark in it. Just as they had started to turn back, they heard some rustling in the bushes. Soundless they lowered themselves to the ground and rolled under a large bush and waited. Now they heard some soft murmuring and a little later some shadows passed in the direction of the house.

When Etienne and Chamart neared the house again, they heard a door open and close. Getting closer they saw that there was now a light on and they got close to the window. On the sofa where four Arabs and between them sat Myriam.

Tu t'amuse bien avec ces petits légionnaires*, but now it is time for some serious business. You are Arabic, thus a sister of us and that involves certain obligations to us and your country.

The woman interrupted, nobody tells me in my house what I can do or not, and for sure not you!

It was obvious that Myriam was upset, but that did not faze the first speaker of the four. He went on with in a sweetly manner; sure, sure Madame we have come to talk about another matter. You have to make sure that old Cordonnier is going to be here at the customary time. The upper leadership has decided that he needs to be eliminated because he is costing us too much money. Besides that, you still have three other lovers. Why should we pay for information if we can get it for free? I hope we can count on your co-operation. Myriam saw in one fell swoop her dreams going up in smoke and yelled angrily; I am not going to be part of that, are you all nuts!! The leader of the Arabs did not get ruffled at all, he said listen child, it is not difficult to knock you off, but you are one of us, like your mother was before you. She was seduced by Cordonnier with you being the result. You don't believe that he is going to take you away from here do you?

*you have fun with these little Legionnaires.

You are like wax in his hands and we are going to put a stop to that.

You bunch of liars, he is not my father!! Myriam's outburst became already weaker.

The Arab continued undisturbed good; we will let him tell you himself, until tomorrow, same time.

Etienne and Chamart made sure they got out of the way because a moment later the rebels came outside and disappeared in the night. They went back to the base where Ghijs and I were waiting in the lobby. Briefly and concise they told the whole story. It is far worse than we expected I said after they finished the story. Shall we contact Moreno or not? Are you going to tell him Etienne? Now right away?

Yes of course, he told us that he would be there for us at any time, thus just go now.

Despite the late hour, Moreno was ready to listen to Etienne. However, Etienne was back a very short time later. He came and sat on the edge of my bed and whispered; I was barely inside when

Moreno lifted his hand and said I do not want to know what you have discovered, I told you that I gave you *carte blanche* and that stays like that until you have finished the job.

Well I guess we will deal with it to the best of our abilities, tomorrow we will discuss it, now I want to go to sleep.

The next day we were all day on the rifle range of El-Court and had not a chance to talk about it. Only after supper were we able to make a *plan de campagne*. Five men were appointed to deal with that business; Fontani, Ghijs, Etienne, Fanny and myself.

Tonight we will finish that job, I said. Everyone nodded. All five would take a sharp knife. We had only one pistol, but were hoping that we did not have to use it. One shot would alert the whole surrounding area, and that was something we had to avoid at all cost.

When we arrived at the house of Myriam there was no light shining through to the outside, from which we concluded that the Arabs had not arrived yet. This honed our alertness because we figured that Myriam would be looking out.

They are probably delayed on the way here whispered Fontani, but he was barely finished saying that when we heard the sound of nearing footsteps.

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We made ourselves as small we could until the rebels came by.

In a flash we jumped up and each of us took one rebel. Only one Arab managed to utter a soft groan. Four of us had broken the neck of the victims, but Fontani had cut the throat of his opponent. He was covered with blood. We took the Burnouses off of the Arabs and pulled them over our clothes and then walked up to the house.

I thought what if she does not open the door? Or what if she had notified the three NCO's?

I did not get the time to dwell on that because the door opened silently and we slid inside. Fanny closed the door behind him and we heard the woman still in the dark say; nice guys you are, you are very late and Cordonnier is being difficult.

Then the light came. Fontani held Myriam with one hand and in his other hand he had a knife which he pressed against her ear. Make one sound and you will be keeping your Arab friends company in the yard, got it? The woman swallowed hard and nodded, her eyes were big and she looked scared.

Ghijs and Fanny went upstairs to check out the premises, but they only found a sleeping Cordonnier and they came back downstairs. I stepped up to the woman and slapped her a few times. How did you get the old man to sleep? I asked. She looked at me with disdain. Maybe you prefer to be raped by a few Negroes who are waiting outside to get a chance like this.

"There is nothing worse for an Arab woman than to be raped by a Negro" Her eyes got even bigger and with disdain she snarled; Now I can see that you guys are no more than a bunch of vile Legionnaires, but you won't get far because... Again I slapped her hard, yes we are legionnaires, but not as dirty as your Arab friends or those three NCO's who betrayed their mates just so they could go to bed with you. She then confessed that she played Cordonnier and had given him a sedative. We tied Myriam up and got together in the corner of the room. OK, who want to screw her? I said she has to be whacked anyway. With the stems of the flowers from a vase we drew lots to see who went first.

We took her upstairs, dragged the sleeping Cordonnier off the bed and threw Myriam on it.

While the first one was busy, the others waited outside. After everyone had a turn, Fontani and Ghijs wanted to take her together, she did co-operate.

After that we ordered her to call the three NCO's and to ask them to come to the house. All three were single men and had a room in the administration building, near Moreno's room.

One of them was initially not interested to come, but Myriam told him that it was urgent and Cordonnier needed to talk to them about something that could not wait.

After Myriam assured us that the three NCO's would be coming and that they always came via the front door, Ghijs and Fontani took up a post by the front door. Etienne and Fanny took the woman upstairs to keep her quiet and I took a seat in the living room.

The first one who came to the door was Marchalek, as soon he stepped inside he was grabbed, taken to the living room, and hit in the head. So, here is the first of the traitors who sold us out, how much did those Arabs pay you, to sell your honour you ass-wipe??

Marchalek knew right away that he had to do with Legionnaires and brought up the courage to say; where do you get the audacity from, to treat a superior like that? This will cost you dearly when we get back to the base.

Sure, I sneered with my face close to the face of the NCO. The question is whether you will make it alive to the base you filthy bastard.

The young lady upstairs told us all about how everything was and the old Cordonnier was more than happy to blame it all on you guys. He just could not handle the fact that you guys have been screwing his daughter. My tirade was interrupted by the ringing of the door bell.

I hope it is the other two dirt-bags, let them in Fontani and hold them or knock them out until we are done with this shit. Of course, you could use that knife of yours to speed up the process here.

I addressed Marchalek again, justice shall prevail, if you have anything to say in your defence, say it now because we have no time to waste.

Fontani came back inside. They are both hog-tied in the hallway Lucky. I nodded and Marchalek said; you guys are using the same form of justice as the rebels in the mountains, who of you guys is going to execute the sentence?

Me, growled Fontani, he grabbed the hair of Marchalek, yanked his head back and cut his throat.

Within seconds Marchalek was laying twitching and choking in a pool of blood on the floor.

The same fate befell the two NCO's in the hall way and the old Cordonnier, he was the luckiest of all because he never even woke up, after that it was Myriam's turn.

We carefully cleaned up all our finger prints, Fanny turned out the lights and we walked outside in sort of a daze. The fresh air did us good; the last half hour had seemed like unreal, we went back to the base. Tired but satisfied we went to bed and went right away to sleep.

The next morning the base was in chaos, the "batman" of Duprez went at eight o'clock to wake him up and noticed that his bed had not been slept in. He found that suspicious because the Adjutant had not told him that he was staying in town. He then went to the batman of adjutant

Lafaille; he became worried when he heard that Lafaille was also missing. They became really disturbed when they heard that sergeant Marchalek was also nowhere to be found and decided to bring it to the attention of A.S.G. Moreno. Moreno called immediately for the bugler to sound for a general roll call and within five minutes everyone was present on the parade ground. The A.S.G. was calling of the names when the Colonel came running up. While walking past us, Moreno winked in our direction, meaning that he would take care of everything. Then he went to the colonel to bring out his report. They organized for an extensive search party and all the Arab neighbourhoods were searched with a lot of manpower and show of force.

In the mean time, adjutant Moreno had started an investigation in the dead of Messali Messaoud and discovered that it was adjutant Duprez who was responsible for the execution of him. That was the statement from the legionnaire who had been given the order to do the deed. The Legionnaire had come to Moreno after he heard that Duprez was missing and put two and two together when he heard that Moreno was investigating the dead of Messali Messaoud. With this information they went to the house of Messali Messaoud and of course there they found the bodies of the missing men and woman. The curfew was immediately lifted, but what exactly had happened stayed a mystery. From where did the bodies of the rebels come from? Who was responsible for their execution? Who had killed the NCO's, Cordonnier and Myriam Messaoud-Ben Ghouman? Rebels? The French? Or maybe legionnaires?

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Questions were asked everywhere in town in the hope to discover any leads. It wasn't long before the rumour went around that the NCO's were former Nazis and that was the reason that they were killed. The investigation lasted a few weeks and was closed without producing any results.

A few days after the settling of the score, I met with Carmen at our habitual spot. After our usual smooching she asked out of the blue if I knew sergeant Lepcheck. I lied and said no, why do you ask? Lepcheck is my husband said Carmen.

Lepcheck was known as a brute that had no limits when it came to beating his prisoners. Neither was he liked by the rest of the cadre.

It was a downer on our get together, but I did not let it on to this slender woman who I pressed against me. I felt the warmth of her soft skin and wanted to be caressed by her. With her head against my shoulder, she cried out, oh Lucky, I have such a need to be loved. I can't find it with him, there is not one iota of romance in that man! You have opened the world for me, what is going to happen to me when you are finished with your training and you leave for another base? I stayed silent, after a few more weeks I would indeed go to another combat unit. It would be highly unlikely that I would see Carmen again.

After that we saw each other almost daily. However, on one Saturday night during one NCO-ball while we were embracing each other, the laundry room door opened. Carmen started to push me

away and screamed; *‘lâchez-moi ou j’appelle au secours!’

Because my back was to the door, I did not realize what was going on and pressed her even stronger against me. Then I realized that there was something wrong and turned around. Before me was a giant of a man with a pistol which he poked in my side. Before he could say anything, I gave him a hard shove which made him stumble backward. I made use of that by escaping the laundry room, race up the stairs to my room, dove in bed and pretended to sleep.

*Let go of me or I call for help!

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Not long after the light was turned on and I heard someone walking from bed to bed, but lucky enough nothing more did happen.

The following weeks I avoided Carmen. I did understand that she had to handle it the way she did, but my love for her had taken a dive.

She had asked Etienne and Jean several times what was the problem with me and when they asked me, I replied that I had enough of the clandestine meetings.

In the mean time, a convoy with new recruits had arrived for the base Ben-Daoud. On a Saturday Etienne, Jean, Ghijs and me departed from Soyer to welcome the new-comers and see if there were any country men among them. We could let them know the routines and put them somewhat at ease.

On an intersection a few hundred meters from Ben-Daoud I saw Carmen, she tried to get my attention with some hand movements, but I pretended not to see her and walked right past her. Someone must have told her that we would be passing by this intersection; I looked over my shoulder towards Etienne who was walking behind me. Apparently Carmen tried everything to meet me again. Etienne looked at Carmen and shrugged his shoulders. I noticed that she had let her hair grow longer, something I told her that I liked.

Etienne caught up to me before we reached the base: I don’t understand you, what did happen between you two? I looked at him and said; I have enough of being used, as far I am concerned, she can find another lover, I won’t lose any sleep over it.

I wasn’t angry; I just told my mate what had been bothering me for a while.

Without saying another word about Carmen, we walked into Ben-Daoud.

Among the new comers were some from Antwerp and one from Ghent. We went to get a few bottles of beer from the canteen and shared them with the new-comers. We told them all about the training and what to expect during the training period and not to let them-selves being abused by the ex- Nazi’s who were also present in Ben-Daoud. Furthermore, we told them not to even think about deserting and that it would be preferable to commit suicide. With that we left to go back to our own quarters.

After the evening supper Etienne suddenly disappeared, not even 15 minutes later he was back, Carmen had told him what had happened and had said

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That I had no reason whatsoever to behave like I did.

Etienne had promised Carmen that he would have a word with me about it. This happened the next morning in the wash rooms; Carmen told me what has happened and does not understand why you don’t want to see her anymore.

She said you would have done the same thing if some stranger came up in the same situation. She also said that she would not make one more step on the base anymore if you keep ignoring her, she can't stand to see you and not been able to speak to you.

I replied emotionless; I don't want anything to do with her anymore and would appreciate it if you did not mention her name anymore in my presence. I am sorry for all the trouble you went through, but I am finished with Carmen.

Etienne gave up and stopped trying to get us back together. The result was that Carmen did not show up on the base anymore.

Back in the bedroom we heard that they had found the body of a nurse in the basement of the city hospital.

She had an affair with a rebel and the body of him was beside her, his privates were cut off and shoved in the mouth of the nurse. They found no trace of the culprits.

We heard also that a recruit was sent home, that came about when one morning Lieutenant d'Main Ruiz went in the washroom on the main floor and saw a ring laying on a shelf above the sinks. He looked at it closely and asked the recruit if it was his, where upon he replied affirmatively. Pack up your stuff and come with me to the office of the CO, I think we have to discuss something about this ring. The recruit went with him to the office and a few hours later he was on his way with a special transport to Sidi-Bel-Abbes.

It turned out that the Lieutenant had recognised the ring as family crest ring from an old aristocratic French family.

The wearer had to be a descendant of this family or else it was a stolen ring. It came quickly to light that he was indeed a descendant of that family. It was decided that he could not continue as an ordinary legionnaire and if he insisted on becoming a soldier, he should be send to a military academy and return as an officer.

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There was a period of relative calmness after the breakup with Carmen, however, that did not last long.

It became known that Bengel had been bugging Chiari again and Chiari had gone to ask for help from Fontani, who in turn told Etienne and me. We decided to take care of this matter once and for all. We knew that the horny corporal went every Thursday evening to his beloved Fatima, and we went the next Thursday to the room of the Moorish woman, long before Bengel would show up. I said; Fatima, I am sorry to tell you, but it is not safe for you to stay here anymore. We have received information that someone wants to kill you, thus it would be the best if you packed your stuff and leave before the evening sign off at the base.

Because of all the settling of scores in the last few days, she did not need any more prompting, grabbed her stuff and left the room without asking anymore questions.

We turned out the light and waited for Bengel to arrive, who showed up a short time later. As soon he opened the door we grabbed him, pulled him inside and gave him a severe beating.

We left him for dead and went to tell the others. We then played some poker until the signal for the evening roll call sounded.

Sergeant Segelav, who was the NCO of the week, did not wonder about the absence of corporal Bengel since he had a permanent evening pass. Segelav had to notify the A.S.G when Bengel did not show up the next morning for service, who ordered right away an investigation and because everyone knew where Bengel went every Thursday night, they went there to look first.

The Dutchman was found more dead than alive, but got somewhat better during his stay in hospital.

However, he had sustained a head injury that left him with memory loss and he would never walk again. He did not remember anything that had happened. He was sent to France to the Institution des Invalides de la Légion Etrangère- "Domaine du Capitaine Danjou" a home for disabled legionnaires, where they could stay for as long they wanted.

We were not happy about it; we had rather see him die instead, because this was worse than dying and we did not wish to see him this way.

There were a few more days left of our training time. I had not seen Carmen again, not even on the day that we were told that we would be sent to Sidi Bel Abbas for specialist training.

A.S.G. Moreno called me to his office. I am sorry that you have to leave, but that is the way it goes, I am sure that you will do well, but you will have to learn to keep your anger in check. Know that eliminating your enemies will not always go as smoothly as it did here. Don't worry about what happened here, no one will ever know, I wish you luck and let me hear from you once in a while. We wished each other a warm farewell and I went back to our room where the rest of the men were already packing all their gear.

The four months of training together, felt more like it had been four years.

Along with a bunch of other recruits, there were also a few members of our former group who went to Sidi Bel Abbas. Heinrich, the former "girlfriend" of Bengier and I were sent to the E.I.A.B., the Escadron d'Instruction d'Autos Blindés (the training Squadron of armoured vehicles) which was a part of the cavalry. This squadron was located in the "Petit Quartier" in Sidi Bel Abbas, but had a separate entry and exit gate at the North side of the base. It had also its own name, Quartier Youssef.

Ghijs and Fanny went to the C.I.I, Compagnie d'Instruction d'Infirmierie in the "Grand Quartier", at the other side of the large main road of the town.

The rest stayed longer in Mascara during the time of our specialist training. In Mascara they received further instruction about various sorts of land mines, newer and heavy weapons and how to use the various field radios that were used by the infantry. After that they would be sent to the various combat units somewhere in Algeria, ready for the ever increasing brutal F.L.N rebels.

Chapter 6

Period June-September 1955

Back to the Maison Mere (Mother Town)

Heinrich and I landed with several dozen other Legionnaires in Quartier Youssef in the Petit Quartier. It was known that both cavalry regiment had a shortage of drivers that needed to be augmented. The regiments were still based in Morocco, but would be soon returned to Algeria. In the Grand Quartier, at the South side of the road were for the most part the various administration departments housed. The CP 1 (Compagnie de Passage Numéro 1) and CP 2 (Compagnie de Passage Numéro 2), the Military Police, the music band, the infirmary, the offices of CO, military security, social service, the office of the A.S.G., the cavalry had their own A.S.G. thus we had little to do with his office, the post office, the prison and the NCO mess-hall. Across the "Base Vienot" was the Petit Quartier. There was the CP 3, the offices of the Deuxième Bureau, the various training units which were encompassed in C.I. (Compagnie d'Instruction),

communication, transport, ordinaire (everything that was related to food including cooks), the large canteen, the swimming pool, and central kitchen. The base had also their own movie theatre which was about thirty meters past the entrance to the Petit Quartier. It was open to the Military and civilians.

The new-comers to E.I.A.B were sent first to the uniform supply room to change the uniforms for uniforms with silver color buttons. This was to differentiate between cavalry and infantry.

We learned that here a sergeant was called a maréchal de logis; all other ranks were the same as in the infantry and parachute regiments.

After receiving the new uniforms there was an inspection to see if everyone had still all of their original kit.

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Missing pieces were replaced without getting chewed out or punishment. After that we were presented to the cadre from the E.I.A.B.

The name of the CO was Falira; his immediate subordinate was the A.S.G., in this case a maréchal de logis whose name was Bergoës, he was a true blue Breton.

The cadre that I and my colleagues had direct contact with were maréchal de logis Fournier and brigadier Heinz. Fournier was a Frenchman from southern France and Heinz a German.

The unit I belonged to was a platoon from a squadron from the 2e REC, (Deuxième Escadron Cavalerie).

Each section was commanded by a maréchal de logis, with a brigadier as his immediate subordinate. One of those brigadiers was a first class legionnaire, but those sections had not much to do with the training, at least not in the first month.

Everything seemed to go at a much easier pace, probably because most of us spoke almost fluently French.

Like in Mascara, the whole platoon slept in one room. As soon a room was assigned to us we were allowed to install ourselves in it. It did not take long for the room to become a complete mess.

There wasn't the same discipline like it was in Mascara, there was hardly any screaming by the cadre. They were there to teach the legionnaires to operate the armoured vehicles and after this batch of Legionnaires, there would be more to come.

Fournier and Heinz walked along the row of beds and gave here and there some directions.

Everyone got a mosquito net, most of us had some problem to install it properly above the bed. It had to be installed so that it could be easily lowered at night and raised in the morning.

Just like in a combat unit, the golden rule was that a siesta had to be taken from noon to two o'clock pm, during this time the net had to be lowered as well.

On the week end it happened often that the nets stayed down because no one took issue with it.

In comparison to Mascara, it was here a lot messier and the atmosphere was a lot more pleasant.

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The amount of work to be done depended a lot on the mood of the serving instructor, if he did not feel like working anymore at three pm, then he stopped the instruction and we went back to the base or sat down somewhere until five pm.

We hardly saw the CO and A.S.G.

Bergoës was like a mother hen for his company.

We got the rest of the day off to get our stuff in order and the next day we were welcomed by the CO to our new unit. He stressed the fact that we had to do our utmost best to obtain the drivers licenses in the next two months. In the first month we would start with the jeep, then the six ton Citroën, the six ton GMC and after that the Dodge 4x4. The driver training for these vehicles was done on the “Grand Terrain”, at the end of the base of the regular French army.

The second month would be for the driver training of armoured vehicles such as: the half-track, the light American M8 and the light dessert tank of eighteen ton.

Sergeant Tory and caporal Schmidtke would be giving first the theoretical lessons. Tory would later be giving the actual driving lessons and Schmidtke all the technical information of the vehicles such as all the engine components, gas tank capacities, range and maintenance.

After the introduction by the CO we went right away to the Grand Terrain, we crossed the road and followed it until we reached a gate that gave access to the base of the French army.

We saw some small groups of soldiers who were listening disinterested to the explanations of an Adjutant; some were even lying on the ground to make themselves more comfortable.

Fournier and Heinz brought us over and introduced us to caporal Schmidtke.

He was a jovial and easy going guy, who did his best to train the Legionnaires as good as possible to become good driver-mechanics. Schmidtke had his own room on the base and no one did bother him. We did ask him why the French soldiers we saw had so little enthusiasm. He explained that most of them were des maintenus* or des rappelés**

*Soldiers who had done their time, but were kept longer.

* Soldiers who had gone home already, but were recalled because of the seriousness of the situation.

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This explained their lack of enthusiasm because all that they were told by their superiors; they had heard it all before. That is why they were nicknamed the *enfoutistes**

Later I discovered that there were guys in every unit, including the Legion who did not care about anything.

Schmidtke introduced us to sergeant Torias; he said to call him ‘Tory’ because he liked that better. Tory was a plump little man with rosy cheeks, not older than 35 years of age. We got to know him as a moody person, not bad, but he could explode in a rage if an order was not executed promptly or to his satisfaction.

Schmidtke on the other hand was calm and collected; seldom did we hear him laugh or crack a smile.

However, he was an expert in auto mechanics and was a man with the patience of an angel; he would explain at infinitum the problem, until those who did not understand got it.

His expertise was evidenced by the engine he had built from glass, to be able to show each and every part. It was a master piece with pistons, valves, crankshaft and everything else that goes with

an engine.

When Schmidtke asked who was able to drive, only three hands went up including mine. Seven of us could not drive. He then explained in detail how everything worked in an engine using his glass model. It did not take long for us to learn everything about it.

After two hours Tory came and took five guys to the outside. Under a hangar was a jeep on blocks that was used to teach us how to shift gears before attempting to drive on the road. After lunch the lessons continued. After testing everyone, Tory decided that he would start with the actual driving lessons with the jeep the next day. This would occur on the terrain that was specifically assigned for this purpose. Schmidtke gave us one more week of theoretical lessons and after that he alternated that with giving driving lessons.

Before we took the vehicle on the road, we had to a pre-departure check to make sure that there was enough gas in the tank, check the oil level and if the tires had the correct pressure.

Tory made sure we performed this check every time, but it all went smooth, like we had done this all our lives.

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Now that we were Legionnaires, we were allowed to go into town without any problems.

There was much more to do there than in Mascara, but the girls and women were not interested in Legionnaires because of the bad reputation we had. We amused ourselves with going to the swimming pool, movie theatre and some of the bars where we were welcome.

Of course there was also the B.M.C; most of us did not like to let on that we spend a lot of time there because the acronym stood for Bordel Militaire Controlé. A bordello controlled by the military. In the office you would get a coupon for a quickie, half hour or an hour. A quickie was about 200 French francs the equivalent of about 28 Belgian francs or 2.10 Dutch gulden. You then gave the coupon to the prostitute of your choice. It was worry free sex because the women got every week a medical check-up thus there was no danger of catching a venereal disease.

The driver training went well until we had to drive in town, now that everyone had passed the theoretical exams. In the second week of the practical driver training we got to know how much of a nerve wracking and unpredictable guy Tory could be.

When we received our new kit, there was also the American steel helmet included which consisted of an inner helm made of Bakelite (phenol resin) and an outer steel helmet. During our practical driver training we had to wear the inner helmet and for operational duties both.

Besides the driver, there were four more students in the back of the vehicle, who could observe the driver and co-driver through the window, in this case Tory who was the man in charge.

Did the driver do something that displeased Tory; he would take the magazine of his sub-machine gun and smack the errant legionnaire on the inner helmet with it. It wasn't terrible painful, but you would be left with a slight headache.

It was my turn to get behind the wheel quicker than I expected. We drove into town and at a certain moment Tory told me to park on the right hand side, but there was a no-stop sign thus I drove a little further past the end of the no-stop area like you supposed to do. From the corner of my eye

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I saw Tory reach for his magazine, when his arm was ready to bear down, I quickly took off my helmet. This infuriated Tory and he yelled; Malicien put that helmet back on otherwise I can't hit you on the head! I looked at him and said, go ahead, hit me on the head, my head can stand that,

but the helmet might get damaged.

Tory put his magazine back and snarled; this one you will get at a time when you expect it the least. Move on you dimwit!

With that, the immediate danger of getting hit was past for now and the rest of the day Tory did not use his magazine again.

A few days later trouble started again, two colleagues had already driven when it was my turn. We had barely started to drive when the engine started to cut out, I had barely enough time to bring the vehicle at the side of the road before it stalled completely. I had my helmet already taken off before Tory had his ammo magazine in his hand. Malicien put that helmet back on damned! How can I hit you on the head if you keep taking that helmet off? I put my helmet back on, but before he could hit me, I grabbed his hand and wrung the magazine from his hand and hit him on the head. Ouch! What the hell you think you are doing, that is for me to do, not you! Get the hell out and stand with the others at the back of the vehicle!

With the four of us we stood behind the vehicle while Tory paced back and forth. He looked angry like a little devil in the baptismal font.

The man had absolute cause to be angry, the pre-departure check is extremely important, as we now found out. Like always, this morning we had done the pre-departure check, but one had to actually look in the gasoline tank because the gauges are not always accurate. That was this morning the responsibility of a young German. When it was my turn I had simply looked at the gauge and said that the tank was half full. Why I do not know because I knew better and should have looked in the tank.

You damn idiot!, screamed Tory. What is the matter with you? You all should know to check the tank yourself and not rely on the gauge. All of you get over here on the sidewalk, if you want to act like schoolchildren,

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I will treat you like schoolchildren. That is why I'll give you a collective punishment.

By tomorrow morning I want you all to write three hundred lines: *Je dois faire une inspection de véhicule avant le depart** understood!! You bunch of twats!!

At that moment Schmidtke came driving by from the other direction in a jeep with three Legionnaires in the back seat. Tory started to jump up and down while waving his arms, but Schmidtke had seen him already and had turned around. The jeep stopped with squealing brakes and Tory told the German caporal Karl-Heinz to get a few jerry cans of gasoline, these twats here didn't check the tank before we left and now we are stuck.

After our tank was filled we could proceed and Schmidtke raced off. Tory did not allow me to drive and I crawled in the back with the other two.

I whispered I am going to write those three hundred lines with pleasure; I had plenty of fun when I hit Tory with his own ammo magazine on the head. My mates had to laugh and were not mad that it was my fault that they also had to write those three hundred lines.

When we got back to the Grand Terrain and about to return to the base, Schmidtke came running up. Listen, you don't have to write those lines, I convinced Tory that it was childish to make grown men write lines for punishment like they are school kids. Promise me that tomorrow morning you offer your apologies for what did happen, particularly you Lucky. I think that he will be OK with

that because he is basically a decent guy.

As promised, the next morning we offered our apologies. Sergeant, would you please accept our apologies for what happened yesterday? We did not mean to forget the pre check and neither was it my intention to hit you, I think I was just more nervous than you and have never driven in the town. I thought that I was correct. I hope you understand, it will not happen again.

Good, this time I will let it pass, replied Tory make sure it does not happen again.

He even shook my hand and from that time on we were friends. Everything went smooth after that.

*I have to do a vehicle inspection before departure.

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Alas, the calm was finished on the base. The rebels from the F.L.N. became more daring and stepped up their attacks. They had started first with attacks in smaller towns such as Mascara, but now it became the norm in the larger towns. Before the hijacking of the plane that Ben Bella was on and his subsequent imprisonment, their actions were rather minimal, but now it became more serious. Now they were bombing bars and shops and there were a lot of civilian casualties.

The result was that the numbers of patrols were quadrupled, barricades were erected on all access roads to the town and a curfew was established. No native Algerians were allowed outside after eight o'clock in the evening, unless they had a valid reason. Most of the time they did not have a valid reason to be out in town and they would be hauled off for interrogation.

The French and other European colonists were allowed to go to the movie theatre because that was located near the base which had not been a target yet, for attacks.

Legionnaires were allowed to go into town as long they were at least with another and had their weapons with them.

After showing a permit signed by the A.S.G., we could get a semi automatic pistol from the armoury, but had to be back by eight o'clock. To go to the movie theatre you had to have a night permit. The married Legionnaires were allowed to go home for the night.

Almost every Saturday and Sunday my friends and I would go visit some friends in another department and had some beer in the canteen or in town. Or we would play some poker.

On one Friday there was a serious attack near the movie theatre, a good number of Legionnaires and civilians were after the movie standing near the exit on the side walk talking about the movie when a large American model car drove up the street, then sped up and the passengers started to fire guns and throwing grenades. There were a dozen dead and fifty to sixty seriously wounded. Right away the sirens were blaring and everything was in turmoil. All the barricades were re-enforced and the police, French troops, and Legionnaires took heavily armed to the street looking for the American car. It had gone in a westerly direction toward Tlemcen.

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One squadron of the E.I.A.B. and a platoon of NCO's
Went to chase them, but returned later back without catching sight of them. It looked like they had gone up in smoke; there was not a trace to be found of them.

The result of the brutal attack was that the native population got even more searched and checked. It was now assumed that every Arab was a *fellagha*-rebel and everyone was suspected of collaboration with the rebels.

The bomb attack was not a reason to interrupt our training and a few days later Tory and Schmidtke tested us to see if we could proceed to the E.I.A.B for training with the armoured vehicles.

Everyone passed the tests and we said our good-byes to Tory and Schmidtke, who got a new batch of recruits from Saïda to teach driving.

All ten of us were assigned to a Squadron where we would be spending a month to finish our driving training. Like I mentioned earlier, *maréchal-de-logis* Fournier and brigadier Heinz were our immediate superiors and a little later a Legionnaire first class was added to their team.

The Squadron was commanded by adjutant Fonronnet who at one time was part of a unit of the 2eme REC which was stationed in the middle of the desert near a town called In-Salah.

It was very seldom that we got to see him, only at the raising of the flag in the morning or at night when there was an inspection of the Squadron.

The fleet of vehicles of the E.I.A.B. consisted of eight half-tracks, eight full-size trucks, six AM8's (light armoured vehicles) and four tanks of 18 tons.

It speaks for itself that not all troops of the squadron could drive; there were maybe a twenty or so at any given time because not all vehicles were always available, some were taken out for maintenance. For that reason all members of the Squadron including the new chauffeurs, were assigned to a vehicle like a combat unit. For each half-track and full-size truck was a driver, a vehicle boss, three *voltigeurs* (scouts), one machine gunner, one radio operator and a medic.

The *voltigeurs* were always new-comers because they had not yet taken a course for medic, radio operator or machine gunner.

*In the Petit-Quartier were also two companies for the instruction for caporal and sergeant. They were sent from other units by their CO's. Nearly all the time there was also a platoon of NCO's for further training who would take part in operations when it became necessary.

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They could serve as scouts because that was part of basic training.

The vehicle boss of our vehicle was Fournier, Heinz was the driver and the first class Legionnaire was the radio operator. The three *voltigeurs* had to alternate learning how to drive the vehicle.

Only during the first three weeks would we take lessons in the half-tracks and full size trucks.

Later we would spend time on the AM 8's and heavy tanks.

Like mentioned before, after the attack by the movie theatre a curfew had been set up from eight P.M. to eight A.M. This meant that if any one, man or woman was found to be on the road or in the

field would be arrested and taken to the 2em Bureau of Sécurité Militaire.

Barricades with guards were placed at various intervals on the roads going into town, at eight o'clock in the morning they would be removed and traffic could flow freely again.

The barricades were manned by French soldiers and Legionnaires from the E.I.A.B. and they were charged with controlling, setting up and removing the barricades. That routine was called *L'ouverture de la route*. We would go to check the first barricade, when everything was OK we would go to the next one. Sometimes there were four barricades on one road. After checking the last barricade, we would return to town, but not on the main road. We would drive in the field and on the sand tracks where there was little traffic. There the wheel was handed over to the newly licensed drivers to give them a chance to practise driving on something other than paved roads and at the same time learn how to observe suspicious persons or things.

After our training on the Grand Terrain, Maurice, a Frenchman was added to the squadron, he had been there before, but his training was interrupted by an injury received during some altercation with the native Arabs. Now he was discharged from the hospital and he had to finish his training in the E.I.A.B.

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I became friends with him and he came often along with me to see Ghijs and Fanny.

Him, me and a third man the Swiss Zeber, were the three scouts assigned to the half-track of our section (team). After drinking our last cup of coffee at the last barricade, the whole section climbed on the half-track and we went on our way to Oran.

With great speed we went on our scouting trip, first on a rural road and then we veered off onto the rough terrain. The landscape was hilly with little vegetation; the ground was half sand and half gravel. It happened more than once that big chunks of earth would fly up when the driver took a sharp turn.

After 15 minutes it was time to hand over the steering wheel to a new-comer. Zeber was the first and drove next, after a while our maréchal de logis Fournier tapped the Swiss on his shoulder and pointed to the right. Go there soldier, I see two suspicious persons. Fournier was not the only one who had noticed them because we kept our eyes open as well for suspicious activity. We had learned what to look for.

It was an old man and a young woman. Fournier made the Zeber stop the half-track a dozen meters from them and jumped out waving his arms; 'Hey there you two! Hasma! Hasma! Arrouah annah! Arrouah anna,visa!'

The man and woman stopped, but did not approach him. When Fournier kept yelling, they exchanged some word and walked reluctantly toward us.

Where are you two going this early in the morning? The young woman said that they were going to the market in the next village while lowering her eyes. Fournier was listening only half heartedly, we saw that he had only eyes for the young woman, or rather a young girl because she could not have been older than fourteen years of age. They were now standing a ten meters or so apart.

Fournier turned around and yelled; hey you slowpokes make room because I am going to question the girl, get out of the vehicle. She probably knows something about the rebels.

Heinz was first to jump out and motioned us to do the same.
We knew what was about to happen when Fournier pushed the girl in the half-track.

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I saw on the expressions of some of the men that they found it funny, some of them were neutral about it and some did not like it at all.

Fournier called out laughing; watch that old man, I won't be long!

I was in conflict with myself whether to intervene with what Fournier was about to do, would it help the man and the girl who were about to become victims, at all? I missed the mental support from my mates in Mascara. My musings were interrupted when Fournier came out of the half-track while adjusting his clothes.

His little fun had lasted less than fifteen minutes. We had known Fournier now for a while, but none of us would have suspected that he would be this way.

He looked at us with a sneer and told Heinz; it's your turn to enjoy a bit of that vulture bait man, the recruits will have later time for that, the cadre comes first. Hurry up a bit; you are not supposed to let this nice piece of meat get cold. With a roaring laugh he walked toward the old man and told him to strip. This was not easy this time of the year because it was nearly Christmas and cold.

While Fournier waited impatiently, Heinz had hung his pistol on the side of the half-track and we saw him getting in. The *margi* (maréchal de logis) searched impatiently the clothes of the old man for money or other items of value. When he did not find anything, he told the man to get dressed.

After that he said with an authoritative tone; hop, hop, and get the hell out of here before I change my mind. The man looked at us with a fearful look like expected help from us. He then looked at the half-track which did not escape the *margi*. Don't you worry he said to the man, we will deliver her in good shape to a bordello. Start running! The old Arab realized that he was dealing with a nasty bunch of men and started to run. Like lightning Fournier drew his pistol and fired a shot and the old man dropped dead.

Shocked I pointed my sub-machine gun at Fournier when we heard noises coming from the half-track. Everyone turned around and I saw Heinz stumbling out while holding a hand on his bleeding abdomen. The German made one more step in our direction and collapsed. At the same time the head of the girl appeared above the side of the half-track and she threw a knife toward Fournier who ran in her direction. He dodged the knife with ease and fired his pistol in quick succession.

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The girl was hit and fell back in the vehicle.

I lifted the barrel of my sub-machine gun, when a salvo broke the quiet that had fallen after the last shot from Fournier. Fatally wounded in the chest the *margi* went through his knees, not understanding what had happened.

Besides me stood a shaking Maurice, who had been a split second faster than me and had delivered the well deserved and just punishment upon Fournier.

Sirens in the distance told us that the gun shots had been heard and that several companies drove

out along with the *piquet d'alerte*.*

While waiting for the reinforcements to arrive, we placed the dead together. Zeber bent over Heinz who was still conscious and he whispered '*Je ne voulais pas..Je ne voulais pas*'**

I told Maurice; whatever happens, I got your back and I hope the others will do the same.

The trucks came and we gave a report on what had transpired. The dead were loaded on a GMC and Heinz got transported to the hospital with utmost speed.

The lieutenant, who was the highest in rank, ordered that Maurice be taken into custody and we went back to the base.

Back in our room we told our roommates what had happened, everyone said that there should be no punishment for Maurice, some even thought that he deserved a medal.

Strengthened by their support, I went to adjutant Falira who let me tell my tale without interrupting me. I gathered that it was a difficult situation for him to sort out. We were after all in a state of war and each native Arab was presumed to be an enemy.

I suggested that if Fournier had taken the old man and the girl to the base, then nothing of this would have happened and there would not have been any dead.

If this was the way it really went, than we have to make sure that Maurice does not get punished, said the adjutant. Make a short report about the events, get it signed by all witnesses and bring it to me as soon as possible. OK?

'*Oui, oui, mon Adjudant!*' I replied relieved and an hour later I was back with the report signed by everyone who had witnessed the incident. The adjutant read the report put it aside and said; it looks good, I will contact the colonel right away.

*alarm response team

**I did not want to...I did not want to.

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However, I want to tell you something. He paused for a moment, picked up the rapport again and laid it on the other side of his desk, he continued; I approve of this because it is honourable to back up your brother in arms. However, with this you will also make enemies. He went on to say; what I am getting at Malicien is; try to stay out of these kinds of incidents. You back up someone, but if you get into trouble you might find that no one will back you up, not in the Legion. Look out for yourself and you will make it far.

The adjutant paused again and looked at me: I will pass this on and wait and see, maybe the colonel will want to see you and maybe not. In any case we should not force the issue.

The whole of E.I.A.B. was in a uproar which made it easy for me to go and visit Ghijs and Fanny in the Grand Quartier. My mates had already heard of the incident and heard also the various comments about it. There are Legionnaires who think that Maurice deserves a medal, but also some who think that we should have shot him on the spot. There are many guys here who have served in Indo-China and they think different about this than we do said Fanny.

Ghijs had heard things that were more disturbing, they had said; who in the hell he think he is? , Is he an Arab lover? We will get him sometime!

The next few days passed like normal, Maurice was already old news and they had lost interest in the affair because there were a lot of other things going on in town.

By the end of the week I was told to go to the offices of SM, the Sécurité Militaire.

They were located in the main building of the base Vienot, the same where the office of the CO of the 1e REI was located.

In the office was only a Legionnaire first class, who let loose with; Zo, zo, zotteke,* who do you think you are? His tone did not leave anything to the imagination which did not surprise me because he was from Brussels. From a pile of papers he had fished my report and waved it in my face.

Do you think that that this office would take the stupidity of a recruit from the E.I.A.B serious? We have better things to do. If I were you, I would quit sticking my nose in someone else's business. Now, get the hell out before I beat you to a pulp!!

To stress his point, he threw the report nonchalantly into the waste basket.

*Well well, nitwit.

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I wasn't worried; because I knew that he could not be the head honcho of the SM and left the office without saying a word.

I walked past the doors in the hall and read the names on them, I did not find any indication that there was another office of the SM and that the one I just left was the only one.

I was about to get down the stairs when another guy came up, it was the sergeant –major who looked at me sternly when he reached me. Are you Malicien? He asked, I answered affirmatively. What are you doing here? You were supposed to get to my office and wait for me there.

I just came from there chef. The man looked at me and asked what do you mean you just came from there? I wasn't there right? Who did send you away?

'Uh.. The legionnaire who was there chef'

'And what did he tell you?'

He asked who I thought I was and that from now on not to stick my nose in such business and get the hell out of the office before he would beat me up.

The man frowned with his eyebrows more and more and said at last, walk along with me Malicien and we will sort this out.

He put his hand on my shoulder and together we entered the office.

Over the shoulder of the NCO I saw that the guy from Brussels tried to make himself as small as possible, it was clear that he had not expected to see me back with the NCO.

The sergeant-major fished the report out of the waste basket, smoothed it out on the desk and then held it up ostentatious between his thumb and index finger. After that he sat down behind his desk.

He smoothed the report out again, coughed and said to the guy from Brussels: is it true what this man told me, that you sent him off in a manner that is not befitting this office?

The Belgian looked at me with fury in his eyes, stood up and said, yes chef that is true, but...'

There are no buts here damned! This time the sergeant major was really mad. In a way it was kind of funny, the NCO was barely 1.60 meter tall and the Belgian was a giant of more than 2 meters.

However, no one did laugh. Didn't I just pick the report out of the waste basket or not!

Who gave you the damn permission to act in my name? Or do you think that you are the boss around here?

Well my man you are misinformed, I am the boss around here and will be for long while yet! You are finished here, get your stuff together and get over to the CP1 and stay there until I get there. Move it! Misfit!

I was surprised by the anger from the chef. The Belgian grabbed his stuff and left the office, but not before giving me a dirty look.

The chef had become a little calmer in the meantime and said that guy will regret for a long time what did, but that is of no concern to you. If I understand correctly, you are also a Belgian? That must have made it worse to be chewed out by a compatriot.

He was quiet for a moment while he looked over the report. 'This report was from you is it not?' 'Yes chef' 'Who else know about this?' 'Everyone who signed it and our commander' All of a sudden I was not sure anymore about the whole thing.

It stayed quiet for a while in the room, but when the sergeant-major spoke again he surprised me. On the basis of this report I believe that you won't stay long second class legionnaire. I predict that before this year has ended, that you will have advanced a rank. In any case you will make it further than the nitwit who was here a little while ago.

I thought; maybe I have a chance to get the job from the Belgian if I asked for it, but then the idea of being in an office all day did not appeal to me either.

The sergeant-major filled a glass with anisette.

I will do my best to get Maurice within 24 hours out of jail, it was for that reason I was earlier at the 2e Bureau, but of course that Belgian did not know that. I have the notion that Maurice wanted to play the judge and jury and of course that can't be allowed. However, the Colonel agrees with you and he will have the last word on the matter in this unsavoury business.

I know that most men prefer not to see the inside of this office, but you are always welcome to visit whenever you are in the neighbourhood. *Allez, bonne chance!*

I went right away to the E.I.A.B. to tell my mates. After that I went to the infirmary where I looked for Ghijs and Fanny. They had already heard about the Belgian who was sent from the Sécurité Militaire to the CP1. The news of the incident had quickly made the rounds on the base and my name was well noted because of it.

'What surprises me the most is that you did not teach that Belgian a lesson,' smirked Ghijs when we were in the cantina. 'I have seen you scrapping in Mascara' I smiled a bit, Mascara was then and this is Sidi Bel Abbes.

Contrary to everyone's believe that Heinz would not survive the stabbing from the Moorish girl, he did. Fanny said that there was a good chance that he would recover completely.

'Lucky, tell us exactly how this all could have happened?' He asked between sips of his beer.

'We did not know at first what was going on, of course we did know what Fournier was planning

to do with the girl, but not that he would murder the old man for no reason at all. After that did happen, I was ready to shoot Fournier myself, but Maurice was just a tad faster.’ Ghijs and Fanny were quiet for a while. ‘What is going to happen to Maurice?’ asked Fanny. ‘From what I have heard, he will be soon released from jail, but that depend on the colonel. The colonel is supposed to leave the regiment soon, so I hope he will arrange it before he leaves.’ Back in the E.I.A.B., I had to go again to the office of Falira. He started with, ‘I never imagined that Fournier would have been capable of such things’ In any case, most of the cadre is happy that he not among us anymore. That kind of behaviour gives us all a bad name. We are all Legionnaires, but that does not mean we are animals. It is OK if the rebels fear us, but not for these reasons.’

‘I did not kill Fournier, *Mon adjudant*, but I would have if it wasn’t for the fact that Maurice was faster I would have been in jail.’

‘You know just as well as I do, that the colonel will have the last word on this, let’s hope he will make the right decision.’

The next Friday morning Maurice came back to the E.I.A.B. He was welcomed with open arms and caused quite a stir in the Squadron.

Fonronnet gave everyone the morning off, but in the afternoon everything went back to normal.

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Besides the nearly every day sound of the alarm, which happened every time shots were fired in town, it was relatively calm, but that only seemed like that, because later it turned out that the rebels had been busy dividing the areas into Zones and Wilayas*

During an alarm, the soldiers who were part of the guard would go out and blocked streets, plazas, did some house searches and chased suspicious persons.

There were also strange incidents. A little outside the town in a Westerly direction toward Tlemchen, at the end of a twisting sand road was a building that served as the training center of the C.I.C.2**. It was located a few hundred meters of a small farm which was owned by a Frenchman. The man lived there with his wife and two children and delivered routinely fresh milk, butter and eggs to the guys from the C.I.C.2.

The Frenchman had not been seen for several days and the men were worried that something was amiss. At first they did not think that it had anything to do with the rebels, but the CO of C.I.C.2, a lieutenant decided it was time to check thing out and sounded the alarm.

A complete squadron that was in the area for general exercises took part in the action which was considered as a routine sortie.

Thirty meters or so past the building of the C.I.C.2 at the foot of a low mountain which was overgrown with thickets, the sand road took a turn of about 180 degrees. Further down on a low sloping hill was the farm.

Besides the squadron, men from the C.P.1, C.I.C., and the C.I.T.*** took part in the search party. The men from the C.I.C.2 and the squadron had driven onto the yard, where everything seemed to have been abandoned. In the kitchen the table was set for breakfast. The coffee in the cups was cold, bread, butter and cheese was lying ready to be used.

There was not a trace of force being used, neither was there any sign that a fight had taken place. It seemed like the inhabitants had been taken away during their breakfast. The barns and other buildings were thoroughly searched, but there was no indication what could have happened.

* All of Algeria was divided from the Moroccan border to the Tunisian border into seven zones by the F.L.N. and those were again divided into sub-zones.

**C.I.C. = company Instruction of the cadre. Caporals and sergeants, the difference was the added numbers 1 and 2, 1 was for the caporal and 2 for the sergeant training.

***C.I.T. = company instruction transmission, the department for radio operator training. They had to learn the use of all radio equipment used by the army. This training also applied to sergeants because they had to know how to use each unit.

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The men walked back to the vehicles when they were startled by an explosion. A plume of smoke rose up at the foot of the mountain and everyone ran toward it.

An AM8 was on fire, the occupants had managed to get out. Right away other soldiers came with fire extinguishers and in a short time the flames were suppressed.

It was lucky that there were no injuries. They figured that a Molotov cocktail had been thrown from the mountain and a general alarm was sounded.

Those present did not wait for the reinforcements, the situation was explained via the radio and orders were given on how to proceed to the upcoming other units. They had to encircle and comb the other side of the mountain because they figured that the rebels were hiding out there.

In the mean time, dozens of Legionnaires had started to climb the mountain with a couple of meters separation, as not to give the rebels a chance to escape the dragnet. Every hole and crevasse on the mountain was searched and this operation lasted until nightfall. When the first Legionnaires had reached the top and made contact with units of the French army, nobody had seen a trace of any rebels. The operation was called off and we returned to town.

We did not understand one bit of it, the Frenchman and his family had disappeared without a trace, like they had gone up in smoke. Did the farmer just leave without letting anyone know?

But why then would the breakfast table have been set? The situation was a complete riddle.

Equally strange was the fact that no rebels were found.

Some of the training was nearing the end when all of a sudden the farmer showed up. He brought his eggs, milk and butter to the building of the C.I.C.2 as if nothing had happened. The cadre did not take too well to this and took the Frenchman to the 2e Bureau for questioning. Where had he been with his family? Why had he not let someone know? Had the rebels taken him?

The farmer gave the same reply to all questions; I thought I live in a free country and can go anywhere whenever I like without having to notify anyone. Or do I have this wrong?

No one could figure out where he had been, but no matter how many questions they asked the man, He gave the same answer each time.

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Tests were taken with the half-track, truck, AM8 and the tanks, everyone passed thus no one had to stay behind to redo the instruction.

My mates and I were told to pack our stuff and shortly after that we were in the C.P.1, where Ghijs and Fanny were as well. Two days later they were gone because there was a shortage of medics in all units. Ghijs was assigned to the 3em REI (Régiment Etranger d'Infanterie), while Fanny went to the 4em C.S.P.L.E. (Compagnie Saharienne Portée de la Legion Etrangère).

The troops that were in the C.P.1 were utilized in all services, that meant, Guard duty at two gates of the base Vienot, guard duty at the gate of Petit Quartier, patrols in town, alarm and fire detail and guard duty at the Locaux Disciplinaires.

To my astonishment I ran one day into Etienne, Jean, Fontani and some others who had come from Mascara. Unfortunately they did not stay long thus there was no time to share our tales of adventure. Jean and Etienne were going to the 2e REP (Régiment Etranger de Parachutistes) in Philippeville.

That regiment was created to replace the famous 2em BEP (Bataillon Etranger de Parachutistes) that had fought so valiantly in Dien Bien Phu during the last days of the war in Indo China.

The Bataillon with the legendary colonel De Vemmes as commanding officer had been decimated during the war and Etienne and Jean were proud to serve under his command.

Before they left, they promised to stay in contact.

The 1er REI (Régiment Etranger Infanterie) was under command of colonel Lennox, the man who had released Maurice from prison.

The garrison of Sidi-Bel-Abbes was the home base of the Legion. Anyone who got sick, or had committed a serious offence, or had finished their five year contract would return to Sidi-Bel-Abbes, the "mother town" (la Maison Mere).

Fontani, Chamart, Padore and I were the only ones left from the group in Mascara who were still in Sidi-Bel-Abbes. Etienne, Ghijs, Jean and Fanny were already gone, but sooner or later, we would meet again. After all, the Legion was one big family.

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It wasn't always sunshine and roses because here like in any family, there were jealous, unsavoury and untrustworthy people.

After Fontani and Padore were finished with their night guard duty, they told me the following morning how a beaten up German was brought in. He was a friend of the on duty guard commander, who had him taken to a separate room.

The two were friends in Indo-China where the German was the best man at the wedding of his mate. The woman was Vietnamese and the German had always let it known that he really liked Asian women. He had known a few Vietnamese women during his time in Indo-China, but unlike his mate he never married one.

As far the German was concerned, the wife of his friend was still a Vietcong and he hoped that she would do him certain favours. When that did not happen, he decided to wait for his chance.

What happened then was that there were not enough NCO's available in the garrison and the A.S.G felt it necessary to call up all available men including the guard commander. Normally he was in the C.I.C, but because there were no recruits available he was called to guard duty.

When the German heard that, he drank some liquid courage and went to the home of his mate.

After banging several times on the door, the wife of his friend came to the door, but did not let him in and told him to come back when her husband was home.

Whereupon the German threatened to blow the door open with a grenade.

To avoid that she opened the door, The German was barely inside when he grabbed her and tried to rip her clothes off. The woman had no other choice than to scream for help. The “so called friend of the house” had in the mean time managed to remove her panties and thrown her on the floor. When he started to grope her breasts, he was suddenly grabbed by the scruff of the neck. A passing patrol had heard the woman screaming and had gone to investigate. The patrol leader who knew that the German and the guard commander were friends, could not contain his anger and worked the Kraut over with fist and feet, thinking it could have been his wife.

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The result was that the German was brought in the guard house more dead than alive. The patrol leader notified the A.S.G. right away, who gave his permission to load the rapist in a jeep and take him to the Camisis shooting range. This was an open range where routinely firing exercises were held by all Legion units. On the side where the shooters would be were several small dirt mounds from graves. The German got shot in the head and was buried in a grave beside the last mound that had been ready for a while.

Under normal conditions the rapist would have been send to a court martial for his crime, and probably would have gotten a sentence of several years in prison and after that gotten a dishonourable discharge from the Legion.

Beside the people directly involved, Etienne and me, no one knew about it, the incident would remain a secret and got buried along with the German.

Three weeks later I and three others from the E.I.A.B. were called to the adjutant of the company. We got our marching papers to go to Oujda were the 2em REC was located.

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Chapter 7

Period October 1955-May 1956

The new Unit

At the station in Oujda all four of us we got picked up by a margi (maréchal-de-logis) who took us without much ado to the new garrison. When we walked through the gate we almost bumped into the Captain. He asked what we were doing here and the maréchal-de-logis handed him our paper work. With frowned eyebrows he read through the papers and said to the margi; I take it that you saw that only two are meant for the 2em REC? What are the other two doing here?

Ah, *mon capitaine* they probably have to be sent to In-Salah. Only from here, are men sent to In-Salah to augment their manpower.

Ok, put them up somewhere. The captain walked away and the margi shrugged his shoulders. There was a lot going on in the garrison and he took us right away to the A.S.G. Right on time margi, we are just finished the preparations for a transport to In-Salah, these two new comers can go along with them. Take them to the kitchen to have something to eat, make sure they get also a food ration for on the way and don't forget the customary *pinard** So said, so done an hour later my mate and I were in one of the half-tracks going to In-Salah. In this town, in a big oasis in the heart of the Sahara was also the first platoon of the 4e squadron. It was written as 1/1V/2e REC, the platoons and squadrons were rotated on a regular basis. In-Salah was called a *poste avancé*, opposed to Oujda that was considered a *base-arrière* or *base de implantation*.

*wine

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The platoon in In-Salah had a little more than forty men. They spend the days patrolling the town and surrounding area. Sometimes close to the town and sometimes further away depending on information about passing Nomads. It had become known in In-Salah as well that the rebels had stepped up their activities in the larger towns and that the attacks on the white colonists had increased as well. You never knew what the insurgent had in store or where they would attack; the situation had become so bad that they would even attack French people who were walking about, they would be slaughtered without pity.

From the beginning of the war there were many Algerians who joined the French army and became supporters of an Algérie Française. According to their identity papers these *Harki's* as they were called, were part of supplemental troops. They did not have modern weapons, but they were more than happy to fight with the French against those who tried to wrest Algeria away from France. It was for that reason that they were in general to be trusted and their knowledge of French and the Berber language made them valuable as guides. The situation for many of the in Algeria born French, Spaniards and other non Algerians, the so called *ped noirs*, was very dire. Often times their ancestors had taken over the land from the driven out former Turkish occupiers and developed the land into money making plantations. Their olive, orange, lemon, and date plantations and vine yards stretched from the coast to ninety or more kilometres inland. The Arabs were allowed to work the land for the so called *roumies**, for a pay that that was extremely unfair in relation to the work they did. This was one of the reasons for the discontentment of the Algerian population. According to the original version, around 1830 the Bey of Algiers had insulted the consul of France in such a serious manner, that the result was that the French send an army to punish the Bey. That expedition first over-ran the country and then started to "pacify the land". This created an uprising. Later I heard that the French presence in Algeria was according to a rebel leader asked for by the Bey of Algiers to get them to liberate the country from the Turkish occupiers, which the French did.

As a thank you they were allowed to colonize the country.

*A name that the Algerians gave to all white people and probably came originally from the time the Romans occupied Algeria.

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The rebellion would not have been so soon if there had been no oil found in the Sahara. Some Algerian leaders realized that France had been profiting from those riches for years and could no longer tolerate it. That is why they found it necessary to become independent and started the insurgency. The French had suffered a great defeat in Indo-China and the Algerians figured that they could do the same as what the Viet-Cong had achieved.

The first stretch of our convoy went via Aïn-Benimathar, Tandrara and Bouarfa toward Figuig, a border town between Morocco and Algeria where we would camp over night in tents. The distance was about 270 Kilometres in a Southerly direction and could easily be done in one day with the half-tracks. The second day went past Colomb-Béchar, a town where the Compagnie Disciplinaire known for the tough discipline and punishment was located, then Taghit, Igli and Beni-Abbès. After that we traveled to El Ouata, Guerzim, Kerzaz, Timoudi, Ksabi and Charouïne towards Timimoun, where we gave a report on the observations we had made during the trip. From there the sick and wounded could be flown back to Oujda, to the Base-Arrière if there were any.

The route went further past Tiberghamine and Oufrane, along the edge of a small river, towards Tsabil, Sbaa, El Guérara and Adrar. Past Adrar the road was difficult to travel on and we still had another 175 kilometres to go to Aoulef. The last piece to In-Salah was about the same distance. Sometimes we had to take a plane and of course then there was no chance for observations. Seventy kilometres south of Oujda the terrain started to change. Tree groves and plantations made way for formations of rock and desert grass, after that there wasn't any vegetation except for here and there a lonely cactus.

The area was strewn with stones of all sizes and form. This area had appropriately been given the name *le Caillou**, it was very difficult to drive in *le Caillou*. In Ain-Benimathar we stopped and we could stretch our legs and have something to drink, after fifteen minutes we drove on again. The vehicles did not shake as much anymore because the terrain was sandier. That stayed like that until Tandrara, where we stopped again.

*pebble or stone.

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When we left this spot, we saw a caravan along the ridge of a hill. The two last half-tracks of the convoy went to investigate while the others slowed down.

There was nothing suspicious and the two vehicles joined the convoy again after which we continued on to Bouarfa and captain Stellerman took over the wheel. Again the landscape changed,

this time the flat land was criss-crossed with sand ridges and the platoon commandant left the road to demonstrate how difficult it was to drive with a half-track in this terrain, let alone with a jeep or GMC-truck. The convoy followed him until the next big turn in the road and then went back to the road which consisted only of hard sand.

After almost two hours of driving the town Figuig came sudden into view, it was sort of hidden between several hill tops and it was noisy and dusty. The habitants jumped hastily to the side by the appearance of the vehicles loaded with Legionnaires.

We reached a large camp from the French army where we could get fresh and clear water, but there were some legionnaires who preferred a tall glass of cold wine.

While one section took care of setting up tents, two others did maintenance checks on the vehicles and the fourth one took care of the food.

Lucky enough, there was a swimming pool nearby that belonged to the French army, but we were allowed to use it. The regular French troops that were based here were much more hospitable than their colleagues in the large towns. They realized that a long trip like that was very tiring.

Everyone was dead tired, and most of us went to sleep early, besides the tents.

I saw some colleagues digging holes in the sand; I asked what that was for. 'When you sleep in a hole, the hot wind will pass over you and when the air gets colder at night the same thing. This way you have an almost constant temperature', was their reply. So I quickly dug a hole and went quickly to sleep.

The bugle of the French army woke us up, a half hour later after a bath and breakfast, we were on our way again. The men in the half-track that I was in consisted of brigadier

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Bernard, Legionnaires first class Baudouin and Schöfer, second class Röpke, adjutant Mercier as vehicle boss, Surencu as driver and Baudouin as machine gunner of the 50 cal. Browning that was mounted on a turret. Captain Stellerman, the platoon commander was in another vehicle, likewise the *margis* Bolzano and Hindemann and the master-brigadier Esopus.

The next hundred fourteen kilometres to Colomb-Béchar went without problems.

In this settlement from the French Foreign Legion we saw a glimpse of a couple legionnaires from the Compagnie Disciplinaire (CD), but there was not much more to see.

In all units of the legion there were tales about the brutality and cruelty of this CD, but no one knew for sure if it was true.

After an hour the convoy went in the direction of Fort Menouarar. This fort was more like ruins where also an Arab settlement was located and there were lot of nomads in the area.

A platoon of French *Zouaves* whose origins were from the elite Berber units, and had the hallmark wide puffed out trousers and red Fez, who supported the French army in Algeria, kept an eye out in the area. After talking to one of them, it was clear that they did not feel at ease. Most of the time they stayed near the safety of their camp and only left with several men and heavily armed or if there were other army units in the area.

The commander of the *Zouaves* was always happy when legionnaires came by because he could get them to help check the civilians of the settlement. This was done this time as well, captain Stellerman gave two sections an order to pay the *Caïd** of the settlement a visit. Adjutant Mercier was just about to go to the *Caïd* with Schöfer, when Baudouin came up with his arms full of dates

and said ‘*Mon adjudant*, I saw along the way something suspicious. A little further down are some camels tied up and when I passed, an Arab tried to hide between the camels. You want me to take a look?’

‘You can go and check it out, but take some reinforcements along and do nothing until I have spoken with the *Caïd*, maybe he knows more.’

‘*Oui mon adjudant*,’ said Baudouin and he asked me and a couple of others: ‘who is coming along for a walk?’

*Chief

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We all were getting ready to go along. ‘No, no, only two guys, how about you Bernard, and you green-horn?’

I found it strange to hear that a first class would order Bernard who was a brigadier, but that seemed to be normal.

Nonchalant we walked to the place where the camels were tied down near some date palms. We pretended, only to look for getting some dates and after getting a bunch, we walked back.

In the mean time the adjutant Mercier and brigadier Schöfer had returned. ‘You did say those camels were heavy loaded right Baudouin?’ asked the adjutant.

‘*Oui mon adjudant*, ask Bernard and the green-horn here.’ We confirmed that the animals were heavy loaded.

‘According to the *Caïd*, those Nomads are around here already for two weeks, but he did not know where they were from or where they were going. You guys wait here while I report to the commander.’, and Mercier was gone.

Most of the Legionnaires that were now my colleagues had served in Indo-China and were used to one thing and another. Still, everyone was stayed alert. Stellerman thought that this business was suspicious and he told Mercier to inform the other NCO’s and other vehicle commandants.

We left the spot as if there was nothing going on and moved in a Southerly direction. A little further and out of sight of the civilians the three sections spread out. One went in an Easterly direction, one Westward and the third toward the North. They got a half hour to set up in position. The commander stayed where he was and made his command post there.

We had to drive very slowly as not to create a cloud of dust which would give our location away to eventual enemies. The commandant got the word via the radio that all sections were in position.

Good, said Stellerman, stay where you are, I am going to inspect what those camels are carrying. Be alert to any action that may occur, over and out.

The commandant went with the first section back to the village, with the cooperation of the *Caïd* they rounded up all males and put them in one place and the women and children a little further.

After assigning the guards, the commandant went to the place where the camels where and noticed that several were missing. Via the radio he told us to be on the lookout for the missing pack-animals. He then notified the Westerly section that a group of camels would be coming in our direction.

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Like lightning Stellerman gathered his men and started the chase. The only M8 available drove

with great speed ahead of the section of Stellerman, it went over a hill out of our sight. Right after that we heard salvos of automatic weapons and some big bangs. The drivers of the half-tracks from Stellerman stepped on the gas and we followed them and a few seconds later we were on top of the hill and saw in front of us several legionnaires on the ground and the M8 was on fire.

When the tires of the vehicle started to burn, the air became black from the thick smoke that rose in the air.

Two medics stayed with the legionnaires to see if they could do anything for them and the chase was on to catch the rebels. Because of the hilly terrain, it was impossible to see very far.

The Southerly section let Stellerman know that the rebels went in his direction and Stellerman gave the orders to all units to come to that direction. All vehicles were now chasing the fleeing camels. All of a sudden we noticed a half-track among the animals; the half-track went now slower, probably to use the animals as a shield and try to escape. Some of the camels had a rider and some were packed with crates and bales. The section of Stellerman opened fire right away and some of the animals dropped to the sand. The rest of the camels ran faster and faster. The third section, the one I was in, started to chase the rest of the camels. The enemy half-track opened fire on the section of Stellerman, but that was something we missed to notice in the chaos of the chase. The high speed we drove, created some problems, Schöfer had difficulty to operate his radio with all the bouncing of the vehicle. Baudouin had to clamp on to his machine gun so that he did not get thrown out.

When the camel group noticed the danger of running into the second section they swerved to the North-West and came straight on to our section. We still had not realized that there was an enemy half-track involved, but when we saw the crew from that half-track aiming their heavy weapons on the ever closing in section of Stellerman, we realized what went on.

‘Goddamn!’ yelled Schöfer incensed, ‘that is a rebel half-track.’

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The same moment he yelled that, the enemy vehicle stopped, the crew jumped out and started to shoot on everything that came near them.

We had approached so quick that there was no time to stop and we jumped out while the half-tracks were still moving firing our guns. There was some more exchange of gunfire, but then the rebels raised their arms to surrender. However, before somebody noticed, a Legionnaire on one of the half-tracks opened fire and mowed them down.

Then the radio crackled and Baudouin screamed over the noise of the running engines: ‘orders from the commandant, No quarter to be given to the rebels!’ Schöfer nodded.

This order meant obviously the rebels of the enemy half-track only because a little later Stellerman hear from him again; more than likely the camel drivers are not armed. Try to encircle them, but keep them alive. Do your best! The order was understood and when our trucks approached them, the men with the camels knew they had no way out.

The place where the rebels were stopped was not far from the route that our convoy had to follow and Stellerman came up quick to the spot.

On closer inspection, it was discovered that the camels were transporting weapons, ammunition, clothing, medication and food supplies.

The in custody taken Arabs were nomads who were used by the rebels to guide them through the vast expanses of the Sahara. They were all taken along to Menouarar.

The M8 was a total loss, but the half-track of the rebels was still usable. In our ranks we had three dead and seven wounded. There was a red star sewn on the shoulders of one of the rebels. Later we learned that he was a lieutenant in the rebel army. We had to take everything to Beni-Abbès. Via the radio we got to hear that there would be no airplane available. Stellerman had to continue to Taghit with the dead, the wounded and the prisoners and in Colomb-Béchar the whole group would be picked up with helicopters, there was no other choice. Two hours later we stopped in small oasis, not far from the spot that was known for the rocks that were found from the Stone Age. By the time we had taken care of ourselves and refreshed, the helicopters came and everybody that had to be loaded up was.

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Stellerman decided to push the same day through to Beni-Abbès, about hundred twenty kilometres to the South-East. We reached our destination without any more problems and there we had to report from A to Z all that had transpired. At the end of it, the legionnaires shook their heads a pitying way, we did not know for sure if it was because of us or the rebels. For me and the other new-comer it had been sensational incident and our baptism by fire.

From Beni-Abbès we reached via Kerzaz, El Ouata and Guerzim and he next stop Ksabi. There we could to our big surprise, swim in a lake to our hearts contentment. Only a few of us such as Baudouin, Schöfer and Bernard had taken this trip several times and knew what to expect. However this was the first time that there had been casualties. There never had before been any problems with insurgents, but this was proof that things were changing in Algeria. After a last bath in Ksabi we pushed without stopping to Timimoun. The town was located on the South end of the Western Grand Erg, the last large sand ridge of the Sahara. There was plenty of food and dates and everybody enjoyed the meal. There were also some new-comers to replace those so called *libérales*, those that had finished their service stint and would soon go home. Around the town were many oases and two large lakes. Everything needed for roaming nomads tribes to stay for a longer time. In Timimoun we learned that the nomad caravan that our squadron had eliminated had been sighted earlier at hundred kilometres from Menouarar, going in a Westerly direction. Thus further proof that they were on the way to a training base of the Front de Libération National somewhere in Morocco.

After having spent some time in Timimoun, the convoy went on to Tiberghamine and Oufrane. Just past Tsabit, but before Sbaa we came on the road to El Guerara and Adrar. To Adrar it was still more than two hundred kilometres, a distance that took us five hours to cover. In this town Stellerman decided to do a thorough mechanical check on all vehicles before resuming the trip. After that the trip went to Aoulef, 175 kilometres further across the desert.

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It was decided to travel during part of the evening because of the cooler temperatures. Only the lead vehicle had the lights on and the rest followed as close as possible to avoid getting

lost, with their light off. It was a ruse and a safety issue in case rebels would attack the lead vehicle. Nothing did happen and we arrived around 10 pm in Aoulef. Since everybody was tired, we did not set up any tents and we went to sleep under the palm trees. The next morning we drove with great speed the last 170 kilometers. Around four o'clock we saw from the road a petrified forest, after that an oasis and right after that our final destination: In-Salah.

The third squadron was already packed and ready to take the return trip to the rear base in Oujda. Some legionnaires talked about the daily routine with the new-comers. Others dug up tall stories about the rebels and we had to tell again about the events that we experienced because it had made an impression on them.

Until now there had been hardly any treats from the rebels, but now everyone realized that it could change any time now.

By the time the last vehicles from the third squadron had left the town, we had already arranged our sleeping quarters. Captain Stellerman and his cadre started right away assigning the tasks for each platoon, so that we knew the same day what was expected from us. One ruling was that everyday two platoons had to be on the ready and the other two had to do the maintenance on the vehicles and weapons. After our daily chores we were allowed to go into town, but after several nights, most of us stayed in camp. Not only was the novelty quickly gone, the Arabs looked at us as if we were from another planet and avoided us like the plague.

The next day the first platoon went on an inspection tour; this was called the *raid policier*, it was meant to keep an eye on the surrounding area and be on alert for all possible situations.

From In-Salah it went usually to Aïn-el-Hadjhadj and from there through the desert to Il-Belbel and Aoulef and back to In-Salah. Another tour went to Tit, through the *oued** Djaret and water wells from H'-el-Krenig and Tamseguidad and back to the town.

*Shallow stream or dry riverbed.

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Sometimes we went further to Chebaba and Aïn-Gettara in the North, H'-Habadra and Amguid in the East, Tiguelguemine, Tirhalimine, Tadjmout and Arak in the South, Meredoua and the lakes Sebkha Azzel-Matti and Sebkha Mekerrhane in the South West.

The M8 and other vehicles had often problems with the loose sand and became often stuck. It was than necessary to dig them out and use the heavy steel plates that were mounted on the side of the vehicles to get them going again. It was a big job because it could take hours before a vehicle was pulled free.

Thousand Kilometers to the East was the Libyan border, but we did not have to worry about rebels from there. It did happen that Algerian rebels would cross the border from Tunisia's most southern point into Algeria and then in one line tried to reach Morocco. They would go South a hundred kilometers below Hassi-Messaoud, El-Goléa and Beni-Abbès and into Morocco.

Our squadron patrolled also the plateau of Tademaït and the plateau of Tidikelt.

The first platoon came back from their inspection patrol. They were in the area of Ain-Gettara when they encountered a group of Nomads who were in the possession of military camels. They had said that they had bought them from ex soldiers, but the Legionnaires did not believe them. Later they learned from the commandant that the *méharisten* (the camel cavalry) from the French army owned their own animals and they had all a number tattooed in their ear. When the *méharisten* left the French army, they were allowed to keep the animals and could do whatever they wanted with them. It turned out that this was the case with these camels. There was a good laugh about it and the event was quickly forgotten.

Now it was the turn of the third platoon to which I belonged, to go on the security patrol. There were not enough vehicles for each chauffeur with a specialty driver's licence from the E.I.A.B. thus for the third platoon were four half-tracks, two A8's, a dodge and a jeep left over. The vehicle boss of the half-track that I was in was Brigadier-chef (master-caporal) Esopus, and brigadier Bernard was the radio operator. The medic Coboie aka 'cowboy' because the pronunciation in French sounded the same carried a semi automatic pistol. Esopus, Coboie and the scout Michelin

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were Frenchmen. The Greek Andrea, the Italian Santana and I were scouts. Bernard was a Swiss like our driver Cesar. Together we formed the normal crew of a half-track.

Esopus was the .50 cal. gunner which was actually the job of Andrea.

Santana was the .30 cal. gunner which was mounted in the back of the vehicle.

Our platoon was under the command of adjutant Mercier, who was together with me, assigned to the squadron.

The atmosphere was kind of trepid when we drove to Aïn-Gettara, but everything stayed calm, it was the same on the routes to Aïn-el-Hadjhadj and In-Belbel and Alouef.

Just before Alouef one of the half-tracks lost a track, and the whole convoy stopped.

Lucky enough, in each section there were a couple of mechanics who could fix it, but it was not an easy task under the burning sun. To be safe, two guards were posted while we checked the other vehicles.

Because of the breakdown of the half-track, we could not make it back to the base and Mercier asked via the radio for further orders. Stellerman replied to stay the night there and continue our tour the next morning. Two vehicles were sent out to Alouef to get food and water, two hours later they were back. This was going to be my first open air overnight stay while on *opération* (OP).

This patrol did not produce any results either, but it was good for the morale of the troops to get some action now and then. To avoid boredom the platoons would take turns, where one would follow the next to go on patrol.

When it was the turn of the third platoon again, we left in the direction of In-Belbel. From there we would go north until the route to Timimoun-El Goléa and then follow the road to M'Guiden and take from there the road to El-Goléa-In-Salah.

We had barely left M'Guiden when our attention was drawn to a caravan that sped in a South Westerly direction toward the desert.

This was strange because this was not a regular caravan route. Mercier ordered to follow the

caravan at a short distance as not to raise a suspicion. By nightfall we had covered about forty kilometers and Mercier decided to camp on a

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small plateau, south of M'Guiden. He notified the base-arrière via the radio, where all units were ordered to on get ready in case an intervention was necessary.

After the night guards were posted and given *consignes** we went to rest with our weapons beside us. We had decided that each guard shift would be for two hours.

I had slept two hours when I woken up by Esopus.

*'Allez fiston, c'est ton tour à prendre la garde'***

I followed Esopus to my guard post and got my *consignes* from the man I had to relieve. The two left and I was by myself. Because the guard post was on a plateau, I could see the whole surrounding area, if something did happen, it would happen below me.

Despite the darkness, I was able to see everything fairly clear because there was not much of color variation in the sand and the moon lit up the area except when a cloud passed in front of it and that did not last long.

There was no light on in the camp and smoking was only allowed inside the tents. After one hour I had to fight to stay awake, in order to combat the drowsiness, I stared in the depths and from left to right.

Did I see it right? Did a shadow move at the foot of the plateau? I waited to make sure, two minutes, three minutes and then it moved again, very slow and imperceptible. At a short distance from the first shadow that I had kept my eye on, another shadow cropped up, then a third and fourth. It seemed that they hardly moved, but they did. The shadows crept slowly up toward the top of the plateau. I was now wide awake; carefully I let myself slide down to the camp. One of the *consignes* was to immediately inform Esopus of the situation. I woke him with my hand half over his mouth: chef, there are some shadows down there and I believe that they are sneaking up.

He mumbled, *'J'arrive'* and he followed me immediately. Back on the plateau we peered down and indeed; the shadows were now less than twenty meters from the top, but now there were not just three or four, there were at least fifty or sixty.

*Orders.

** Come on son, it's your turn to take guard duty.

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And they had camels with them!

'Ne bouge pas d'ici' whispered Esopus. I am going to inform Mercier, keep your eyes open and your weapon ready to fire if it becomes necessary, OK? Without waiting for my reply he slid down. Not three minutes later I felt Mercier breathing down my neck. Wake everybody up and let them quickly take their posts. Hurry up guys. The command was given softly, but it was clear. Mercier, Esopus and I went from man to man, told them what was going on and passed on the orders.

A little later the camp looked like a giant anthill. Everyone crept or walked quietly to their assigned posts. The fourth section had to move in a westerly direction to stop the rebels if they tried to escape in that direction. The first section had to go in an Easterly direction to cover that

area. Neither of the sections could take part in the action unless they were ordered to do so and if suspicious shadows tried to escape in their direction. No one was to fire their weapon until Mercier fired a flare that would light up the sky.

I hoped that the shadows were indeed rebels and not traveling Nomads, because then it would be like egg on Mercier's face.

A flare shot hissing into the air and lit up the whole area. Now we saw clearly dozens of people who via the North side of the slope were on the way to the plateau.

Right away all hell broke loose. I saw shadows firing which proved that they were indeed rebels. Startled by the sudden action they ran away in every direction with the Legionnaires in pursuit. Most of us were glad that the boredom of the regular patrols was broken up and fired at will. Over the sound of our automatic weapons, we heard the heavier sound of the .50 cal. and .30 cal. Men and animals were mowed down. The fire fight lasted more than an hour, and then there was dead silence.

In the distance there was still some calling and the sound of a few engines starting up. Mercier ordered to start the chase and the first and fourth section ran to their vehicles. A few moments later the vehicles raced, this time with all lights on after the fleeing rebels. Those that were caught running in front of the vehicles were summarily shot. The chase and search action lasted all night and toward the morning two more platoons drove up onto the battle field.

*Stay here, don't move.

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At sunrise it became clear what kind of ambush we had escaped. The balance: seventy rebels dead, thirty wounded and twelve prisoners of war.

Our ranks: two dead in the first section and three wounded. The two platoons who had raced to our aid took the wounded rebels and prisoners and searched the load of the camels. That consisted of weapons, food, clothing and medicine.

The same night our platoon was welcomed with a lot fanfare in our base. Beer and wine flowed freely and Stellerman, flanked by Mercier congratulated me for my alertness and behaviour during the fight. He said that he would make a recommendation for a decoration and along with that going for a month to the first platoon in Sidi-Bel-Abbes, the platoon for caporal and brigadiers training. The same night we heard that the 1er C.S.P.L.E, the Compagnie Saharienne Portée de La Legion Etrangère, would return to their former settlement in Fort Flatters. They would there take over the job of our fourth squadron, which then could leave the base and move back to Oujda. The base arrière would also pack up and the entire 2em REC would turn back to Algeria. The given date for departure was August 5 and the fourth squadron would not be replaced. Later when everything was ready for departure our commandant turned over the command to the local *Caïd* and a few trusted Arabs, until the C.S.P.L.E. would arrive in Fort Flatters.

We were a few days back in Oujda when they announced the names of those who would go on to Sidi Bel-Abbes.

Besides me there were three others who were chosen to go to the caporal training.

We traveled with the 2em squadron of the 2em REC with Lieutenant Chevalier as CO. At the station of Sidi-Bel-Abbes we heard that the commandant of the 1er REC colonel Reveron would address the troops, but my mates and I did not want to wait for that. We rather went to admire the new seventeen AMX desert tanks that had arrived by train. After we had presented ourselves to the A.S.G of quartier Vienot, he sent us to the Compagnie de Instruction du Cadre, in short

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the C.I.C, in the Petit Quartier. During the next few days more men arrived from all sixteen regiments* of the French Foreign Legion.

The training was no comparison to the training we had in Mascara. We got theoretical lessons of stuff that we had already experienced in real life: like handling of various heavy weapons, radio transmitters, first-aid, giving orders and composition of units.

For the final test you had to be able command a platoon in all possible situations on the base and in the field. Those who did not pass the test, would become automatically first class Legionnaire, but everyone in our class passed and were promoted to brigadier.

When the results of the exams were known, colonel Reveron came and congratulated everyone personally. After that he decorated us with the deserved decorations for performance. I received a 'Citation á l'Ordre du Regiment' for valor displayed. Normally I would receive this medal in my regiment, but after the ceremonies I got to hear that was going to be assigned to the 2em C.S.P.L.E that was based in Laghouat. I was disappointed because I had hoped to participate in the operation in Egypt where a squadron of the 2em REC and the 1er REP plus British troops were send to repress the uprising against the U.K..

At last we went with a dozen or so legionnaires on Saturday September 8 1956 to the 2em C.S.P.L.E in the far flung Laghouat.

*The sixteen regiments were: 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th, and 5th, Régiment Etranger d'Infanterie-1st and 2nd Régiment Etranger de Cavalerie-1st and 2nd Régiment Etranger de Parachutistes-13th Demi-Brigade de la Légion Etrangère (D.B.L.E.)-23rd Compagnie Portée de la Légion Etrangère-1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th C.S.P.L.E (Compagnie Saharienne Portée de la Légion Etrangère)-21st C.S.P.L.E.

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Chapter 8

Period June-September 1956

The 2nd Compagnie Saharienne Portée de la Légion Etrangère at Laghouat

We went by train six hundred kilometers South-East to Laghouat, the first large oasis in the Sahara. The trip went first to Oran, Relizane and Tiaret and from there we were taken by truck to our final destination.

First we drove through camp Bessières, where the army engineer and desert transport corps were based. There was a large farm that was surrounded by several buildings in a horse-shoe form. Above the entrance gate was the insignia of the unit: the Southern Cross, it was the same as the regiment insignia that was worn on our uniforms. Each unit had its own insignia. After our names and Legion number (matricule) were recorded in the office we were allowed to eat in the mess-hall. There we learned that that we would be sent to a poste avancé of the 2^e C.S.P.L.E. in Messad, about eighty kilometers North in the direction of Djelfa. From Messad we would have to leave the paved road and continue on a sand-dirt road. After that it would be another forty kilometers to our camp.

After supper we left with a food transport that went this way twice a week and arrived several hours later in our new unit.

This place had no strategic importance, besides the Legion, the only other Europeans were the administrator, the teachers and some Gendarmes.

Once a week the nomads came from the surrounding area to the market located on a large town square and often something would happen.

In the largest building was the Poste de Commande (P.C.), the main magazine the kitchen and the vehicle repair shops located. The 1st platoon was also housed there, commanded by Lieutenant Perin and the AMX platoon of Lieutenant Seigneur. The 2nd platoon that I was assigned to was located in the middle of the settlement in an old school.

Across from us was a unit

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of Harki's, the Algerian sympathisers of Algérie Française, that was also part of our unit.

Some NCO's and Legionnaires were attached to their unit to keep everything running smoothly.

The Harki's were supposed to do the same things as we did, but they had their own customs and this made it not always simple to deal with them.

Of course they were a welcome addition to our unit because they knew the area to a tee and provided a valuable service to us.

The 3rd platoon of lieutenant Balie had the least desirable accommodation because of lack of space; their legionnaires had to sleep in tents a little further down on a plateau.

To remedy this as soon as possible, each legionnaire who was not doing any other job had to work on the building of new accommodations. Every day their mates would exchange their weapons for pick and shovel to prepare the ground for construction of the new buildings.

This is how I made my first acquaintance with the 2nd C.S.P.L.E in Messaâd and got quickly into the daily routine. The center of our activities was the massif from Oued Nail. This mountainous mass was a mountain ridge coming from the Atlas Saharien and from the well-known Djebel Amour that stretched from Laghouat to Biskra where the Aurès Mountains started.

Messaâd is south-west of Tiaret and Saïda, straight south of Algiers and Bou-Saada, west of Biskra and Tougourt, and north of Ghardaïa and Ouargla.

It was a wild desert area crossed by deep valleys and huge *djebels* which were comparable to the even wilder *djebels* of the Aurès Mountains. These *djebels* were separated by deep ravines and hundreds of rivers. They formed perfect hiding places for the rebels and caravans that brought them food and other necessary supplies.

The next day I was assigned to the 2nd section and we went into the mountains with a Dodge 4x4 and a M8. Names such as *djebel* Kralfoun and El Caïd became quickly etched in my memory; I also noticed that a lot of movement was done with helicopters. That is why the unit was called Compagnie Saharienne Portée de la Légion Etrangère.

In this area there was a lot more activity by the rebels than in some other areas of Algeria.

It was hard to imagine how difficult the terrain was; from the air it looked impenetrable, with ravines of hundreds of meters deep.

Bou-Guergou, Krannfor, Aouinet-Youssef, Mimouna and other *djebels* were quickly known for combat and

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accrochages, this was a name given if there was an attack by the rebels and a firefight ensued.

The first real *accrochage* took place on November 7. A Mouchard* had reported that he had seen large groups of rebels in the *djebels* Kralfoun and El-Caïd, in no time at all troops were on board of the Sikorsky-55 helicopters. They sped to the given coordinates, but the large group of rebels turned out to be only two and they were not very large groups. Like usual they tried to make themselves invisible by using the deep canyons for cover, still the same, we managed to discover them.

Adjutant Mereus called his section commanders and gave them directions to which routes they had to follow and the coordinates they had to go to. We went down the steep slopes into the ravine.

When the rebels saw they were cornered, they opened fire. We threw grenades to get them out from their hiding places because it was difficult to determine where the rebels were holed up.

While throwing the grenades we sped down, all the while firing our weapons to prevent them getting any chance to fire back. We had made this method of attack our own and it was the only way to obtain a quick success.

On the other side of the ravine where some rebels were trying to escape, but they were stopped by our snipers. After three hours there was not one *fellagha* to be seen anymore. In our ranks we had one dead and two wounded, but on the rebel side were twenty seven dead. A large quantity of weapons was taken, including a .50 cal. machine gun which had not been used because of a lack of ammunition for it. The Sikorsky helicopters were waiting in the river bed and had to make several return trips to get everybody out because there was not enough space for all of them to land.

A period of relative calm followed, which allowed us to make good progress on building the new quarters for the 3rd platoon of Lieutenant Balie and it wasn't long when they were able to move in. Life went on with the normal routine and I had made some friends in my section.

On Friday December 7 there was again trouble in Krannfor and Bou-Guergou when rebels were seen again. Our platoon the 2nd platoon of adjutant Mereus was woken up and sent to the spots the rebels were seen. It was still very cool, but the cold and

*Informant or ratfink

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the bumping and grinding of the vehicles did not stop us from dozing off rolled in our wide *djellaba** that was part of our Saharan outfit.

The drivers could barely keep the vehicles on the sand-road as they raced past ravines, rivers, hills and dales barely preventing us from plunging down a ravine.

After the first leg of the trip we stopped to stretch the legs and have a second casse-croute. Then we went with haste to the next point where we had to search a few ravines. With weapons at the ready we combed every square foot probing every rock and bush.

After an hour of fruitless searching we went back further on the trucks to water well. When we were ready to go again, we heard the noise of a helicopter above us. A little later the colonel jumped off and called to Mereus; Hurry up! *Accrochage* ten kilometers further! Quick! Quick! And off we drove.

The Dodges and the M8 picked their way through the rough terrain. Weapons were readied for firing and ammunition and hand grenades checked.

They went up the last hill with great speed; they then saw a piper and some fighter planes flying low to localise the enemy. The pilots gave the coordinates to the commanders on the ground and all hell broke loose.

At the same time a little back to the north were the platoons from adjutant Mereus to which I belonged, had already started to comb the area. Large groups of rebels fled to the south-west, not realizing that other units of the 2nd C.S.P.L.E. were waiting for them. In the meantime we, the 2nd section snaked through the ravines and dales. Every figure or shadow was shot at and eliminated. We kept moving toward the east to close the dragnet. Our section was also used as a scouting unit and came as first to the edge of a wide and deep ravine. Forty meters below us on the bottom of the ravine walked a large number of rebels waving their weapons above their head. I glanced at the man who was in charge; he did like he did not notice anything and opened fire, an action that was followed with a salvo from the other soldiers present. Our firing was returned by fire from the

*A long robe (Burnous) worn by North Africans, usually with a hood.

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Insurgent below and I saw a couple of my friends slumping down with a sharp yell.

We did not stop with firing and pressed on with the attack, the wounded and dead would be taken care of by the medics. Our main goal was to stop all resistance from the rebels first.

Besides me a Spaniard crept toward the edge of the ravine, I saw that he had been shot in the chest and a trickle of blood seeped out of his mouth. For a second our glances crossed and the guy managed to grin, of all things. He wanted to raise himself, but his arms were like rubber and with a smack he collapsed with his head on a rock.

I jumped toward him and could just in time grab his weapon before it fell down the ravine to the rebels. I flipped around to get away from the dangerous edge of the ravine and yelled as loud I could '*Infirmier à moi! Par ici!*' The medic ran to us, but I knew there was nothing more that could be done for the Spaniard.

I kneeled on one knee so that I could look over the edge of the ravine. To my great surprise I saw a group of rebels climbing up. Quickly I pulled back and laid out the reserve ammo clips for my sub-machine gun beside me. A soft rustle made me look again over the edge and saw clearly a dozen rebels at less than ten meters from me. Without losing any time I pulled back the bolt, leaned over the edge and opened fire. I didn't stop until my clip was empty. After that I looked over the edge while putting in a new clip and saw three *fellaghas* running away. Without pity I mowed them

down and they tumbled down the ravine dead as a doornail.

A short time later I saw on the other side of the ravine two silhouettes trying to climb out of the ravine.

I estimated the distance at seventy meters, I looked through the sights and fired short burst of three-four shots. Already by the second burst I hit one of them because he threw his arms in the air and fell back into the depth. The second one looked wildly around, not knowing where the gun shots came from. I sighted in on him and fired and he went also down the ravine.

I felt a tap on my shoulder and turned around. Behind me was the face of adjutant Mereus who

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was crouched behind me, he must have been there all this time. I wanted to say something when I saw his face pull into a grimace from pain and he too slumped to the ground. I did catch him and yelled 'Infirmier à moi! Au nom de Dieu, fais vite!' The medic came running up and started to attend to Mereus.

I took the pistol of the adjutant and stuck it in my waist band.

An over flying piper dropped a few smoke bombs into the ravine. At the other side I saw men from the first and third platoon going down the ravine. Our section leader, *margi* Honoré was also wounded, but he was a plucky guy. Now came also the rest of our section, the medic took care of the *magi* and adjutant and called in for a helicopter.

With his face in a grimace of pain the *margi* told us to go down and try to make contact with the other sections and platoons and then said to Juan take command of the section. *Allez*, move! And good luck!

While the medic arranged for the wounded to be picked up, Juan looked at me and nodded to go down. I picked up my ammo-clips and went first, after a few steps Juan came beside me 'Lucky, you better take over command, after all you are a brigadier.' Oh, that is alright, that doesn't bother me.' Honoré has given you the command and I have no problem with that.'

'but that is the thing, I think that Honoré did forget that he had a higher rank in the section, I can't see how else it could be.'

'OK Juan, but let's go and hurry up. *Allez en Avant!* I added smiling.

Together we went between rocks and bushes down and fired on rebels as they came into sight.

Arriving at the bottom of the ravine, we made contact with the other units and the fight was over. It took us several hours to gather all the dead and wounded, the dead rebels were as usual laid out in a row to be photographed. After that we collected all the weapons from the rebels and threw them in a pile. There were a lot of Beretta's and Statti's among those.

Tired and sweaty we reached the other side of the ravine when the colonel arrived again.

He congratulated us with the results of the battle and announced that there were dozens of dead

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among the rebels and thirty two prisoners were taken. On the Legion side were regrettably seven dead and thirteen wounded. Honoré and Mereus were seriously wounded, it was hoped and expected that they would fully recover.

It was already near nightfall and it was decided to make camp right here, helicopters brought food and ammunition. However, that decision was not welcomed at all.

From some of the rebels we got information that further down was another camp. After you guys have eaten and had a little rest that is going to be our next target! *Bon appétit!* After that

announcement Lieutenant Perrin went to eat himself and make plans with the colonel and rest of the cadre.

The next morning would be the final phase of the operation, but I had a notion that the rebels were not going to wait until the Monsieurs of the Legion came, so that they could be slaughtered.

By the first morning light everyone got up and went to the place where the other rebels were supposed to be a few kilometers further.

And indeed, in a even deeper ravine than the last one were a large number of camouflaged tents that were difficult to spot by the piper pilot. We encircled the ravine from all sides, so that even a mouse could not escape. Yesterday we had been told the other rebels that there were also women and children in this camp. Our commander wanted to spill as little blood as possible and rather force the rebels to surrender. So said, so done. The few and poorly placed sentinels the rebels had posted were easily overpowered, we were able to enter the camp without too much resistance and they all surrendered.

Three weeks later the 'Ordre du Jour numéro 4' of December 24 was read by colonel Metz, the colonel-commandant of the Commando Opérationel du Sud Algérien. In it a mention was made about the valorous actions of all units and in particular those of the 2nd C.S.P.L.E. Adjutant Mereus, maréchal de logis Honoré and some legionnaires including me were told that they would receive the Médaille Militaire (the second highest medal in the French Forces) for courage under fire.

There was also a special mention for Legionnaire Malicien who by himself had put no less than thirty seven rebels by himself out of combat.

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For two three weeks it stayed relatively calm. Most of the legionnaires were hoping for a little more action, just to break the monotony of life in camp. I had in the mean time built a reputation that was acknowledged by all my mates. I was respected and was often asked for my opinion in various matters.

January 6 the third platoon went out on operations, but did not see any action.

January 13 we went at it again. The departure had been announced quietly and early in the morning the vehicles were already lined up in the order of the platoon, and the AMX desert tanks were up front. Everyone presented arms for the inspection by Commandant-Lieutenant Plainemon. At his sign the engines were started and the stretched out arms of the vehicle bosses indicated to everyone to take their place. In the still chilly morning the convoy left with the M8's up front with their search light on to check for obstacles along the road. The drivers drove their vehicles expertly past mountains, ravines, rivers and on the uneven roads.

After a short stop to stretch the legs and have a cup of coffee the trip continued until noon and we stopped again. This time to check a river, nothing was found this time either. The same routine went on several times every day, each time without encountering any sign of rebels.

Toward the afternoon a stop was made near a water well to wait for the supply trucks to fill up the gasoline tanks (petrol in British English) and extra reserve fuel. Jerry can after jerry can was being loaded, when we heard the sound of the Bell-helicopter from colonel Metz. The colonel jumped down before it had touched the ground and after a short talk with the commandant an authoritative and resounding '*Embarquez!*' was heard and after that an imperative '*Accrochage à dix kilomètres!*'

With lightning speed the loading was stopped and our convoy went on its way. Fighter planes were circling high above the mountain top and a Piper spotter plane at a lower level to detect where rebels were holed up and to throw smoke bombs near them, as a marker for the troops on the ground.

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Early the same morning rebels were seen in the *djebel* Mimouna and were chased to an open area by the legionnaires of the 1er REC. In the oued El Dem insurgents were chased and split apart by soldiers of the French army. Now they were fighting in small groups with courage born out of desperation and died by the dozens. It was a true *hallali* (a swansong) for the rebels.

Two days later the 2nd C.S.P.L.E went on operations again, to a spot a couple of hundred meters from oued El Dem. It proved to be an abandoned training camp which set right away on fire. The commandant lieutenant Plainemon appointed me now officially as the section leader of the 2nd section of the 2nd platoon. It was said that I had proved my worth to everyone. I became good friends with adjutant Mereus after his return from hospital. Despite my young age, I was well accepted by the *anciens*, hardened men who had fought during the war in Indochina and Korea. In the mean time the 1er REP and 2em REC had returned from the Egyptian operation and we were able to read about that operation in the Legion's monthly magazine 'Kepi Blanc'.

Because of the return of these two regiments we had again a relative calm for a while, but not for long. A little later a large offensive took place in oued Mzab, between Ghardaïa and Ouargla. The head quarters had received information that there were large groups of rebels coming together in the area of the water well El-Hobra. Several of our units and of the French army were sent there and right away all hell broke loose. We had barely jumped out of the choppers when we got engaged in the fight. The terrain looked like a moon landscape, strewn with rocks, pits, ravines and rock peaks, the famous *pitons* which were abundantly present in the mountain chains. Mereus urged us on to more speed, but when he turned around to give an order, he got hit between the shoulders. Seriously wounded he fell besides me on the ground, but motioned that I had to press ahead.

I called for the medic and put the pistol of the adjutant that had fallen on the ground in my waistband. I led the others on a rocky hill without realising, that I had

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cut us off from the rest of the platoon. A couple of meters before the top I turned around to see if they were following me when someone yelled 'Lucky, watch it! Dive!' I just did that in time, at that moment a rebel jumped at me with a bayonet in his hand ready to plunge it in my chest. Because of my unexpected move he missed and fell on the ground that gave me the chance to grab the bayonet and plunge it in his chest.

A light pain in my left elbow was an indication that I had been hit, but I picked my sub-machine up with my right hand and walked with my mates to the top of the hill. On the top we sudden looked at the backs of four rebels. They heard some noise behind them and turned around as one man and started to fire on us. Miraculously none of us was hit, but our riposte was deadly. Three Arabs

were riddled with bullets and the fourth one raised his arm right away. 'Don't shoot guys!' I yelled and with a couple of jumps I was at him and grabbed him by the collar. 'Where is the rest of your gang? Speak up or I cut your head off!'

It was only then when he dropped his weapon, in the heat of the moment I had failed to disarm him first. The other Legionnaires sighed with relief and Juan kicked the weapon away.

It was a super modern Russian sub-machine gun, great for rapid fire at a short distance.

This way the insurgent replied quivering and pointed in an easterly direction.

We took the weapons of the dead with us, left one man behind to deliver the prisoner and went in an easterly direction.

Now it went downhill and the legionnaires who walked ahead had trouble slowing down.

A salvo rang out coming from a heavy weapon. Two mates went down, the one was fatally shot in the head and the other was wounded in the shoulder.

The rest of the section dropped right away down, I saw the wounded legionnaire getting up and walking toward us. 'Sorry Lucky, but we went suddenly so fast that we could not stop'

It's OK, can you handle the radio? Take it then over from your mate because he is wounded and can't go on anymore. With his mate I meant first class Heppo who's one leg was wounded.

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I looked one more time at the man with the shoulder wound and realised that there was no way that he would be able to carry the heavy Post-300. While I looked around for an alternative, I saw that the man had fallen to the ground and lost consciousness. Another Legionnaire walked to him, knelt beside him and turned him around. The hole in the shoulder was terrible, an example of what a .50 cal. can do, but the man was still breathing. With urgency we called the medic.

I took the horn of the radio, but the radio did not work. Then I noticed some movement near a boulder it looked like the boulder could roll any moment downhill. Erwin and Gaven, two Swiss who had come together to the legion were nearby the boulder. 'Help out here guys, right there behind the boulder!' The Swiss ran to it and when they were one meter from the boulder I jumped up and stormed to it as well followed by two others. A shot rang out and I dropped to the ground. There were a couple more shots, I looked up and Gaven gave me the thumbs up that the coast was clear. I walked up and saw two rebels who had been behind the boulder, shot dead by the two Swiss legionnaires. I took up position by the boulder and motioned the others to come. The two Swiss joined, Heppo limped as best he could along and Juan and another legionnaire carried the seriously wounded man. When everyone stood together I made up the balance. There was one dead, a legionnaire with two years service. Two Legionnaires wounded and one who stayed behind with the prisoner. The rest of the section was OK.

I, Juan, Erwin, Gaven, the medic, and three others made eight men. In the mean time my left elbow had swollen out of proportion, but I did not feel any pain. Juan reached for the radio and tried to make contact with the P.C. again, after some crackling we heard a voice: Allo, Hirondelle Bleue? M'entendez- vous? Repondez! '* 'Ici Hirondelle Bleue! Je vous passe le chef de section, un instant! '** Juan handed me the horn and I passed the coordinates of our position and asked for a helicopter for the wounded. Then I asked if I had to move on or stay in place. 'Ici Hirondelle Noire! Restez ou vous etes et felicitations. Nous arrivons. Termine! ***'

*Hello blue swallow! Do you copy? Reply!

**Here blue swallow! I give you my section leader, just a second!

*** Here black swallow! Stay where you are and congratulations. We are coming, over and out!

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A couple of my mates took off their heavy ammo pouches and took a sip of water. Two others stretched out on the ground while Juan searched the area with binoculars. Only now I started to feel the pain of my elbow. I looked at it and noticed the huge swelling. Gaven saw it as well and sat beside me; with his bayonet he cut the sleeve and rolled it up. '*Eh bien, fiston, c'est du joli ça. Est-ce que tu vas nous quitter avec l'hélicoptère, toi aussi!*' *he asked.

'Shut up!' *Conard*. No one has to know and it does not hurt, got it!

It did hurt, but it was bearable and I would get through the day.

The radio crackled anew and I picked up the horn: '*Içi Hirondelle Bleue, parlez*'

'*Içi Hirondelle Noire. Passez-moi le chef de section.*'** '*C'est lui qui parle. Parlez.*'***

'Move to these coordinates. There is a large group of rebels spotted, go there to support the first and third section of the first platoon, repeat this order. *A vouz!*' I did repeat the order and did ask if there was any news about the helicopter to pick up Mereus and the other wounded because we needed our medic ourselves. They told me that a chopper was on the way and that I should leave someone with the wounded to take care of them.

I then assembled my men, took the map and told Juan what we needed to do. The given coordinates were those of a difficult spot to reach, according to the map it was a basin surrounded by high rock peaks.

We went on our way mindful of snipers who could be hidden anywhere. The destination area was exactly like it was stated on the map, only there was no mention of vegetation which gave us an unpleasant surprise. Everywhere there were thorn bushes that ripped our uniforms and made progress slow. On top of that they formed an excellent cover for the rebels. At the foot of the first hill I sought contact with the sections we were sent to support and asked for their locations. They were at the other side of the basin and they asked us to go to them right across the enemy positions. After I had given them our position, they told me to wait because the other section leaders had asked the air force

*Well son, that is beautiful. Are you going to leave with the helicopter?

**Here swallow blue, go ahead. -Here swallow black. Give me the section leader.

***it is me, go ahead.

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to drop a few incendiary bombs. I put up a few guys on the lookout and shortly later to fighter planes came. By the second pass they dropped a few incendiary bombs, smack right on the positions of our two other sections! Hollering and screaming came from the other side of the basin and everyone notified immediately the Poste de Commande Général. They send out right away Alouette helicopters to evacuate the victims. Via the radio I heard (it was not allowed to pass that kind information in such manner), that there were six men in extreme serious condition.

A little later the fighter planes came back and hit the intended targets.

I gave the order to continue right across the still burning area. Left and right rebels came out coughing and sneezing, they were dispatched to another world without pity.

A hundred meter from the hill we just had left, we saw the rebels pacing back and forth between our and the positions of first and third section. It was clear that they rather died of smoke inhalation than to surrender. Gaven and Erwin set up their .30 cal. and opened fire. There was no riposte. The radio came on again: 'Ici Moineau Un, pour Hirondelle Bleu. M'entendez-vous?*' 'Yes I hear you loud and clear, over' 'Give us as much as possible cover fire; we are going to try to eliminate the insurgents from this side. A vous!' 'Je vous couvre. Bonne chance et vive la Legion! '** With the binoculars I followed the action of what was left over from the other sections. Any sign was enough for us to open fire on anything that moved. I saw the members of the other section going down the basin without any hesitation, firing left and right. Now and then some rebels would stand up from behind bushes or boulders and surrender. In fifteen minutes time, the sections below had taken more than thirty prisoners. Now it was my turn to ask for help to pick up the prisoners and to guard them. On the map I had marked where I had to meet the other sections, but I had to wait for a sign from them. However, they had passed that point when they gave me the sign. This was a result of the competition between units. Everybody wanted to have all the glory for themselves. Since it was now up to us, I cautioned

*Here sparrow One, for Blue swallow, do you hear me?

**I will cover you, good luck and long live the Legion!

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My men to exercise the utmost caution: watch out, the fellaghas could be anywhere, shoot at anything that moves, but watch out for our guys, they are there too, forward!!

We pushed further, but to our surprise, there was not a lot of resistance anymore.

My elbow started to become very painful. A few more steps and we met up with the other units. Quickly I called out who I was to avoid them mistaking us for rebels.

At that moment Gaven called out: 'Hey, Lucky! Have a look here at what I found!' He pointed to a flat stone of about sixty centimetres across that had a hole in it in the form of a half moon.

I felt suspicious about it and told Gaven to stick the barrel of his sub-machine gun in it and try to flip the stone and then to run like hell! I took two grenades, removed the pins, threw them in the hole and let myself drop to the ground. The explosion shook the ground below us. We heard moaning coming from the hole and the heavily battered face of a rebel came in the opening.

The man got immediately pulled out, but when I saw how badly he was injured, I nodded to Erwin to help him out of his misery. He dispatched him with a few bullets. After that it was quiet in the hole, no more moaning. 'Let's wait until the smoke clears, than we will have a look to see if there is anything else below' I said to the guys who had come running up.

'Ok boss!' the two Swiss replied. They were a funny pair those two.

'I said good, I need to volunteers' 'The two Swiss looked at each other and called in unison: That's us' Erwin went first in the hole followed by Gaven. Five seconds later Gavens came back up and said; there are at least six deaths down here, what you want us to do with them?

I didn't know right away either, but then Juan came with the information that he was contacted by the PC via the radio and that we had to leave everything as it was. Later everything would be burned, even though there was enough food stored to feed a platoon for a month.

When the liberating call came of "End of operation", I was finally able to have my arm taken care

of, which proved to be broken in three places.
A few days later i got to hear in the hospital of Laghouat that

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not only did I have a broken arm, I was also infected with the dreaded *fièvre paludienne*. I had to leave the unit because of the abundant still waters and viral carrying mosquitoes here. Otherwise I would have continual problems with the illness that had the same symptoms as malaria fever.

While I was in the hospital, I had to decide to which unit I would like to go. My two best friends Etienne and Jean were in the 2em REP, thus I opted to go to that unit. My request was granted. The next day after the raising of the flag, I got decorated by the colonel with the Croix de Valeur Militaire à Titre de corps d' Armée.

I was one of the few in the French Foreign Legion who were decorated with this medal, but judging from the applause from everyone in the 2nd C.S.P.L.E. they thought I was deserving of it. I found it hard to say goodbye to these guys, because we had become good friends.

A little celebration was given whereby the officers were present as well. Everybody wished me the best. It was time for another stage.

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Chapter 9

Period October 1956-May 1959

The 2em Régiment Etranger de Parachutistes

The 1er REP (Régiment Etranger de Parachutistes), created a few months before from the 1er BEP that had just come back from the Extrême Orient* and was now based in Zeralda. The 2em REP was created from the 2em BEP which also came from Indochina and was based in Philippeville. Both regiments had been decimated in the Battle of Dien Bien Phu and Cao-Bang, they were battle hardened units.

The corps commandant of the 1er REP was Lieutenant-Colonel Brenard, the 2em REP was under the command of Colonel De Vemmes. While in the hospital I had heard already some things about my new unit. The base-arrière was in Philippeville which formed a quadrangle with the cities Bougie, Bône and Constantine. The area of operations was along the Tunisian border and was called Secteur Autonome de Tebessa or S.A.T. for short.

In the train station of Philippeville I got a happy surprise, my two friends Etienne and Jean were waiting for me. The bystanders did not think too much of our boisterous greetings, but we did not care. How did you guys know that I was coming here? I wanted to surprise you, but it is you that surprised me!

My mates laughed and said: If you just knew how good friends we are with the A.S.G. corporal, you would roll your eyes in the back of your head and if you knew how much we know about you. Together we went to the closest bar and we let the beer flow freely. 'How was it in the desert Lucky? Did you get to eat a lot of dust and sand', smirked Jean. 'Here is another beer on me to

rinse all that stuff from your mouth.’

When I finished my beer, Jean went on: you will have to get used to a few things here, because now you are in the elite corps of the Legion. The iron discipline you will experience here is quite different than that in Mascara. ‘I was afraid of that; I heard that there are more casualties here in one week than somewhere else in a month’. Jean and Etienne smirked.

*Far East
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Because they were in dress uniform, I noticed that Etienne had four medals and Jean had three. Jean saw that, and patted me on the shoulder and asked: ‘and how did you get that Croix de Valeur Militaire Lucky? Did you save the commandant from a sure dead? In any case, you were the first in our club to receive to receive that one.’

I kept quiet about the Médaille Militaire; a Croix de Valeur Militaire was not so special, but the Médaille Militaire was, but I thought it wiser not to say anything to my friends yet.

It became time to get to the base. Jean and Etienne threw my luggage in the back of a Dodge 4 x 4 and asked me to take a seat in the back. With a light shock the vehicle started to move and a second later I felt two hands on my back which slid quickly higher. When I turned around, a woman wrapped her arms around my neck and kissed me passionately. Only after she let go of me and moved her head back did I recognize her. It was Carmen. I furrowed my brow, but did not say anything. ‘She whispered I am so glad that I can embrace you again, all this time I have longed for you and there has been no man that has touched me since you were gone.’ She leant against me and embraced me tenderly.

This was the last thing that I would have expected to happen. Since I had seen Carmen the last time on the street in Mascara, I had not even once thought about her. As far I was concerned, it was a closed book and now she showed up here again. I found it annoying that my friends had not said anything.

I heard myself ask; ‘How did you end up here? Jean and Etienne must have told you that I was coming here. ‘Who else? I am here because my husband is here, but I have the feeling that you are not too happy to see me.’ I thought for a moment, Carmen had let go of me for a moment, but now she pressed herself even tighter against me which awakened a lot of memories. I did not know how far the train station was from the base, but suddenly it felt like it was taking too long to get to the base. Carmen went on, ‘I really missed you and I have a lot to tell you, ’she whispered in my ear: ‘When can we meet again?’ Without much conviction I replied that I did not know. The Dodge stopped and Carmen gave me a quick kiss and got out of the vehicle.

A little later we drove up into the base “de la France” and Etienne came

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came to get me. ‘Leave your stuff here for now mate, we are going first to the A.S.G. to let him know that you have arrived.’ Together we walked to the office of the adjutant. The man looked familiar to me. ‘Could it be that we met before adjutant? I asked him straight out.

‘Of course my good man, I was in the 2nd Company in Mascara when you and your friends went through boot camp in the 3rd Company.’ After introduction we left the office.

Etienne gave me a nudge: ‘You aren’t mad at me for brining Carmen are you?’

‘Me?? Mad because of a woman? A lot more has to happen before I get mad at you or Jean, but you should have told me that she was in the Dodge. You know what I think of her.’

‘OK, but I don’t think that she deserves to be treated like you did in Mascara. Since she arrived here with her husband, she has not been with another guy, not even flirted with one. Don’t forget that most of us here have to go to the B.M.C.’ I knew what Etienne meant; anyone who needed intimate female companionship had to go to the Military bordello, unless he was a homo.

‘She asked me if I would meet with her again,’ I replied absent minded. ‘From now on I let you be the one to take care of my dates, you old matchmaker!’ I added a little later: ‘But is stays tricky, after all her husband is a high ranking graduate.’

‘Are you not a graduate then?’ replied Etienne. ‘I am really not supposed to tell you, but I know that you have been nominated to go to the 2nd platoon in Sidi Bel Abbes. Then it would not matter anymore, right?’

Laughing we stepped in the Dodge and left the base. During the ride they told me that beside the big boss from the 2nd REP, Colonel De Vemmes, Chef de battalion Manot was the next man in charge. What was new was that the regiment was not all together, but each company had their own base.

Neither was there talk about platoons, but rather about sections, which where ten to twelve man, depending on the availability of legionnaires.

The sections where located in El Halia, Filfila, Fendek, and Douar des Ali Oua. The 1st company was commanded by Captain Meunier and was based in Mac Mahon, the 4th Company commanded by Captain Bonami was based in Saint-Antoine. The up to now most important military feat of the regiment

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was the elimination of the rebel leader Mouats Liazid by the 1st Company on Jan. 13 1956.

In the village El Hilia we stopped in front of a house that was used as a *poste de commande* and then went inside to get acquainted with Captain Cocquin.

'Sois le bienvenu chez nous, caporal. Je suis sûr que notre régiment te plairas.

*Si jamais tu t'embrouilles avec qui au quai que ce soit, viens toujours me trouver: je suis là pour cela. Allez, filez!'**

That was short and clear. We drove further to the 1st section. There we heard that we had to go on to the djebel Filfila because there was no sleeping quarters available in El Hilia. Jean and Etienne were also housed there.

Djebel Filfila was known worldwide for the white marble that was found there. Filfila was a small village with a few inhabitants, like Fendek where the iron mine was located and the school that was on the way from Filfila to El Hilia, it was under protection of the legion.

In this school were the children from the surrounding *douars***, the teachers were very pleased with them because they were doing their best.

It was also kind of nice that there had been calm in the area.

I saw that everything was made of white marble in this place. The tiles of the terrazzo’s, the stairs of the school, the building where the legionnaires were housed, even the landing place for the helicopters. It was not a question of opulence, because marble was cheaper here than wood.

Captain Cocquin went back and forth from one post to the other. At the 4th section he was always welcomed by a dog named Pataud the section mascot. Big Boy, the dog that got taken care of by the medics, was the mascot of the whole company and stayed most of the time in El Halia, where he was spoiled by everyone.

I was now part of the 3rd section of the 3rd Company of the 2em REP. In short: 111/111/2em REP. We ran at regular intervals patrols between the *douars* from the surrounding villages, which usually took several hours.

At the beach of El Halia was the rifle range, that was used only once in a while by the Legion because also the soldiers from the marines and infantry of the French army held their firing exercises there. After several hours there would be time for a collective swimming session and everyone took a dive

*Welcome to us, I am sure that you will like it here. If you have any problems with whom or why, come and see me. That is what I am here for. Go now!

**Arab villages with homes made of clay and field stones.

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in the fresh sea water. Some soldiers would play games, others loafed around. However we never forgot why we were here and if necessary we could be ready in a split second.

It was also possible to get a permit (*une perm*) to go to Philippeville. WE then could stay overnight in the base de la France or in the housing of the Escadron de Reconnaissance et de Service Auto.

It also happened that legionnaires from other units would meet there and exchange the latest news. When Lieutenant Chevreau the commander of the platoon, saw us coming he looked at me intently and shook his head. 'So, the three musketeers of the 2em REP are re united? Corporal Malicien, I hope that we will get along as good as I have with your friends. You know where to find me if you have any problems, *hein?*'

I got a place in the same room as Jean and Etienne. Here and there I picked up that they were sort part of the cadre. Although they had no real authority, people listened to them, after all they were veterans of the Korean War and they had as much battle experience as the veterans from the Indochina war. I was automatically taken in by the small group of leaders, which was kind of nice. The third day after my arrival Chevreau came in our room and wasted no time with what he had to say. 'Corporal Malicien, get ready to go to Philippeville for your Parachutist training. That is not all, after that you will go to Sidi Bel Abbes for training in the 2nd platoon so that you can come back as a sergeant. At least, that is what we hope for. Count on being three months away. Tomorrow you can go with a car to Philippeville and from there you will see how it goes. *Bonne chance!*'

Early the next morning I left to go to Philippeville and one day later I started my Parachutist training. It started with the well known *rouli-bouli*, learning how to land safely and make a shoulder roll. You had to try to land on both legs which required some concentration and whereby you had to pull at the right moment the correct parachute straps. We also had to make three jumps from a six meter high tower, while we were hanging in sort of

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harness that had to simulate the parachute harness. That took less time than a normal jump, but the landing was the same.

Already in the second week we jumped out of a plane, the notorious Flying boxcar-transport plane, known as the Nord Atlas in the French army.

A lot of recruits had difficulties making the jump with full equipment. The first jump was not bad, because no one knew what would happen and it was a total new experience. With the following jumps the adrenalin would kick in and most of us had a feeling of uneasiness or fear because now we knew what it entailed. Also new was to jump in *sticks*, jumps in groups of four or ten.

If there were jumps at night, the first jumper would have a white parachute so that the next jumpers could use him as a guide. It was handy for us, but dangerous in combat jumps because it made a big target for the enemy to shoot at.

Like all others, I mastered everything quickly and got my Para-wings or *brevet de Parachutiste* after one month.

From then on we had to wear the brevet on our uniforms except the combat uniform on operations.

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Chapter 10

Period October – November 1956

A step higher on the ladder

After receiving the brevets from lieutenant colonel De Vemmes, I departed with a few others to Sidi Bel Abbes. Besides me there was another corporal and a corporal-chef from our unit that came along. On the whole, corporal-chefs were considered as failures, but that was not always true.

Sometimes through unforeseen circumstances they had not obtained or could not get the required points on tests, but were considered to be deserving of a higher rank than corporal.

It also was given as an intermediate rank before he would be going to the 2nd platoon in Sidi Bel Abbes with the next group.

Because the CP 1 had not enough man power, it was decided that everyone of the 2nd platoon would be part of CP 1 until they were back up in strength and then start the training for sergeant. In the mean time we were utilised to go on patrol and do guard duty.

I became *caporal de relève** and would serve at the main entrance of quartier Vienot, while one of the so called 'failures' had to go on patrol. The last one came from the notorious 5em REI from Tlemcen, not far from the Moroccan border.

Around midnight shots were heard on the edge of town, direction Camisis and Tlemcen. There were only a few seconds required to get the alarm team to get ready and move out. Fifteen minutes later a few guys came back into the base, they were part of a crew at a road barricade on the road to Tlemcen. They were led by gendarmes and some plainclothes police men. The men from the alarm team had gone there to replace these guys.

Soon I heard what had happened. The commandant of the barricade, a sergeant had given the corporal the order to

*Relieve corporal.

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to take over command, while he went to have a look in the Arab neighbourhood. This was only a dozen meters from the barricade. Everyone knew that it was strictly forbidden to go out alone, particularly at night. The corporal didn't care, but barely had the sergeant made a few steps when the corporal noticed that he was followed by a shadow. The sergeant, a Frenchman with several years of service did not realise he was being followed. The corporal in turn delegated the command to a Legionnaire first class and followed the shadow.

Turning around the corner, the corporal saw the sergeant go into a home. The corporal took up post near the door and saw that the shadow had disappeared. About twenty minutes later the sergeant came out and bumped surprised into the corporal. The sergeant himself had surprised the occupants of the house and had ordered them against the wall. Keeping them in check with his pistol, he had raped the fourteen year old girl from the house. This was something he had not told the corporal, but that became known later.

At the moment he walked out of the house and bumped into the corporal, the corporal said: 'Sergeant, someone did follow you when you came here, but in the dark I could not tell who he was. In any case, he is now gone.' The sergeant looked around, but there was not a soul to be seen. Come on corporal; let's go back to the barricade, the guy is probably long gone.

The two men walked in the direction of the barricade when they heard the sound of footsteps that were quickly moving away. They turned around and ran back because there is where the sound came from. Just as quick it had come, the sound of the footsteps was gone, but the corporal heard the sound of a door closing. The sergeant and corporal walked stealthily with weapons ready to fire. Listening on doors the sergeant suddenly stopped at a door where there was a rustling sound coming from behind. He pounded on the door; from the other side was no reaction. The men looked at each other and the sergeant cocked his revolver, aimed at the middle of the door and pulled the trigger several times. The shots were ear shattering in the darkness of the night and from behind the door was a muffled groan. Together they pushed the door open and found the body of an Arab. They dragged him outside, where he died a little later. A few *gendarmes* came up and asked what was going on. The sergeant

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said that he had seen a suspect and ordered him to stop, when he refused I shot him.

The *gendarmes* believed him and took the corpse to their office, where they discovered that the victim an informant was who had given them valuable information before.

They then had contacted a few detectives and picked up the sergeant and the corporal from the barricade. The whole entourage had then come to the base for further investigation.

The following day the chef of the 2em bureau announced that the sergeant was a rapist and was immediately demoted, locked up and referred to the court martial. The corporal was declared innocent in this affair.

A few days later the effectives of the 2nd platoon were complete and we left for Tassali. We were taught to lead, but also weapon training with weapons we had not used in boot camp in Mascara. Also in the training schedule was: learn to use all radio equipment, various mines, and first aid to the wounded, reading maps and following orders ourselves. Like in the training in Mascara and the second training in the 1st platoon, our forty man platoon was divided in sections of ten men. Here too did each section get in turn lessons. Only with learning giving the various orders were platoons

combined to receive lessons, each had to give in turn orders and receive orders.

Not always did these lessons run uninterrupted because there was always something going on in town. Routinely we had to go out to come to the rescue of the men at the roadblocks that were attacked by the rebels. Another time we had to go with several units looking for a missing patrol in the area of the town.

The E.I.A.B. took also part in several actions; during one of those I met Tory who still was an instructor in Quartier Youssef. During one of these meetings I had noticed that he was not a sergeant anymore, but a maréchal de logis. Before Tory never had to go along if something was happening in town. He had a family and could go home after service hours. However, since his wife had died in a bomb attack on a shop and his kids were out on their own, he had asked for a change to be able to take part

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in the actions and hopefully get the culprits of that bomb attack.

Tory could have asked for a transfer to France or even break the contract, but he would have none of that. He now lived only to avenge the dead of his wife.

The bugle sounded the assembly and all NCO candidates went to Camisis. It was a small settlement of the legion about eight kilometers from the town in a southern direction. It was used as a firing range. The story went that it used to be an Arab settlement from which all occupants were murdered.

The NCO candidates jumped out of the vehicles when the tarp of another truck was opened and fifteen prisoners climbed down from the truck. Three candidates got the order to set up the heavy machine gun while three others were told to go with their submachine guns to the other end of the range into a small forest. The machine guns were set up the farthest from the edge of the forest. The guys with the sub machine guns had to take place behind small mounds that were made here and there in the forest. They were given extra ammo clips. One of the leaders said, in a while there will be a group of rebels coming in the forest, it is your job to make sure that no one gets out alive. Understood!!

When I heard that order, I was glad that I did not have to be part of it. To eliminate an enemy in combat was one thing, but shooting at defenceless people was another. This was simply murder on a large scale. The lieutenant turned to the rebels who seemed to accept their lot. 'You go to the forest and collect firewood in that forest. The two with the most firewood will be spared, clear? Go, run.' The Arabs ran toward the forest, when they reached the edge, the lieutenant gave the order to fire.

The gunners of the heavy machine gun did their deed and most of the defenceless rebels were mowed down. The rest tried to find cover, but to no avail. The forest consisted of Finish Pine trees and there was no other vegetation or rocks to provide cover. Some dropped and tried to crawling away to

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escape the deadly gun fire, but the barking of the machine guns kept going and was later

interrupted by the lighter sound of the sub machine guns. It turned out that a few rebels had reached the other side of the forest. This distasteful spectacle lasted two hours. After that, the lieutenant and a few candidates who had volunteered went in the forest to give those still alive the coup de grace. However, there were none.

A few days later I had to go along to town to pick up some equipment. I took advantage of it to stop by the office of the Sécurité Militaire. The pleasantly surprised sergeant-major recognised me right away and shook my hand. 'Well, who have we got here? Didn't I tell you that you would do well in the Legion, Malicien? What are you doing in Sidi Bel Abbes? And how long have you been corporal? Did you dispatch many rebels yet?'

We laughed heartily. I told him while drinking several glasses of anisette, about my various adventures and that I was now in the 2nd platoon. I had one burning question that I wanted to ask him, but I waited until the sergeant-major got into a more serious mood. Then I asked about the reason for the execution of the defenceless rebels in the forest. 'Has it been proven that they were actually rebels or were they only suspected rebels Chef?'

The sergeant-major studied me and looked at me with squinted eyes, he then replied: If I tell you that we have investigated these men thoroughly to be sure we would not execute innocent people, do you believe me then?' 'Absolutely chef, I know that you are a man of integrity. I do not need any more explanations than that. Thanks for the drinks and see you soon!'

I shook his hand and he said: once you got your stripes, come by again OK, it is always good to see a friend to become successful. *Allez, à la prochaine.*'

The training went smoothly. The food was excellent. It was no mystery that the French soldiers wanted to eat in the refectory of the legion. Everyone knew that NCO's and Legionnaires got the same food on their plate, even the officer of the guard and the colonel if he was on the base. After four weeks of studying and training we got to hear that only

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Three of the NCO candidates did not pass the exams, among them the "failure" from the 5em REI. The ceremony that closed the training, was officiated by the colonel himself and after the customary speech, he wished everyone a lot of luck and a long career in our beloved Legion.

I was aware that I was now "only" a sergeant and that I would not show off. However some of the others thought that they now were "king of the hill" and could do what they pleased. They walked around like peacocks and made sure everyone knew that they were sergeants.

They forgot that they were chosen for their deeds or leader capabilities and were thus men who had to lead by example. Others had to be able to look up to them.

Together with another newbie sergeant I went the next day to the *Popote* in Quartier Vienot. At last we were allowed to go there and we were congratulated by all the NCO's that were present and treated with drinks and party snacks. A little while ago the men from the engineer corps had transformed the Parade ground.

In the middle in front of the main building was now a monument with four Legionnaires from different time periods made of black marble, standing on each corner of the pedestal with in the center a world globe. From the monument to the front gate were flower beds ten meters wide with

all kinds of plants and flowers. It was a beautiful sight to be seen.

The next day I went again to the *Popote* in Vienot, accompanied by the same comrade of the day before. At first we did not want to go, but when we noticed a newbie German sergeant who walked in front of us. The man slowed down his pace and called a Legionnaire with a white beard who was working on the other side of the flower bed to attention. The Legionnaire was clearly a man of sixty years plus old and did not pay much attention to the new sergeant. I stopped and grabbed the arm of my mate and whispered: 'that is something that nitwit should not have done watch this' The Legionnaire who was called to attention by the sergeant was no one else than Alexandre who was known by the whole regiment, except so it seemed by the new sergeant.

The sergeant screamed: '*Eh bien*, Legionnaire, shouldn't you salute? You better hurry up before I put you on report!' Alexandre jumped to attention and gave a perfect salute to the great satisfaction

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of the sergeant. Everyone walked on. 'Tomorrow we will have to keep an eye on that guy when he goes to the *Popote*' I said to my friend. 'I am sure that Alexandre won't let this pass.' My mate did not know Alexandre thus I brought him up to speed. Alexandre had done more than twenty five years of service and had been several times an adjutant, but because of his drunken binges, he had been demoted each time. These had been sporadic events, but every time he got nailed.

Because of his service record he had become the personal assistant of the colonel and the colonel considered Alexander his friend. Alexandre was free as a bird on the base and because he had never married, he was like a fixture on the base and everyone liked him a lot. In the *Popote* I told the story to the other NCO's, who were already anticipating with glee what was to come.

What I predicted did happen, my mate and I walked behind the German and we saw that several NCO's who I had told the previous day had placed themselves unobtrusively, but so that they would not miss anything of the show that was sure to follow.

At last Alexandre came walking up. He had the medal *Légion d'Honneur* on his chest, the French army's highest decoration. Everyone knew or had to know that you had to jump to attention and salute the medal when some was wearing it.

The German sergeant had probably seen Alexandre, but did not want to repeat the scene from yesterday. 'Watch this I said to my mate, you don't want to miss this and don't forget to jump to attention and salute.' At that moment Alexander passed the German who was not aware what was going on. My Mate and I jumped to attention and saluted. Alexandre laughed roguish and called: 'Hey Sergeant, shouldn't you salute the *Légion d'Honneur*?'

Like stung by a scorpion the man jumped to attention and saluted. However, it was too late, the colonel and the A.S.G. came from behind the monument and ordered the sergeant to follow them. Most of those present knew what was going to happen. They went to the guard post and the colonel called the guard out to present arms. 'It is not a given for everyone to become a sergeant.' He told the German.

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'I have noticed that you still have to learn a lot and that you are still too green to parade in a

uniform with two golden stripes. Come here!’ The German stepped forward and stood at attention. ‘Adjutant,’ said the colonel to the A.S.G., you are hereby to witness that I relieve this man from the heavy burden of those two stripes.’ Putting action to his words, he removed the newly sewn on stripes from the sleeves of the blowhard who stood before him and said: ‘I will personally see to it that a report will go along to your unit so that the next few years you won’t have a chance to come back here, dismissed!!’

The A.S.G. turned the German over to the commandant of the guard who in turn had to turn him over to the commanding officer of the 2nd Platoon.

The punishment for this infraction was a minimum of forty days in jail and that is what he got. The story of this incident went around like wild fire and within a week all legionnaires from all regiments knew about it.

Another time I was witness to an interrogation when a rebel was brought in the *poste de police* when I went to visit a mate of mine. The man was brought to a cell and stripped. They wanted to make him talk whatever the cost because they thought that he had some valuable information. Interrogation was normally done by the 2em Bureau, but it was happenstance that my colleagues took the law in their hands. Four Legionnaires grabbed him by the arms and legs and a fifth placed a rag over his mouth and nose. A sixth poured a pail of water at the height of his mouth. Several pails went this way and a half hour later the man had an extended belly five bigger than normal. Then they asked him a question and when he did not reply, two legionnaires went to sit on his belly and pressed the water out. This tactic was repeated several times, but it did not get any results. I was often witness to similar methods, but I did not care because I was never part of it.

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Chapter 11

Period November 1956-December 1958

Finally in action

To see my mates Jean and Etienne was like always, very heart-warming. ‘Welcome to our regiment sergeant Malicien! You are the first of our group to have gold stripes on his arms. I never thought you had it in you,’ Jean said laughing while he laid his arm around my shoulder. ‘An added benefit is that you can now see Carmen every day in the Popote. Those meetings on the sly are not necessary anymore and are of the days gone by,’ winked Etienne in a conspiring way and he gave me a friendly slap on the back.

‘Guys, listen’ I laughed meekly. ‘I hope that you guys understand that I am not only tired from the trip, but also from the training time. I would it appreciate if you could take me to the base so that I can take a rest.’

Jean and Etienne looked surprised at each other. ‘No chance for that mate, we have orders from captain Cocquin to take you right away to El Halia. Apparently he was waiting for you before starting a new operation, I think you will see right away action.’

We got in the waiting jeep and left without seeing a bar on the inside. El Halia was only a few kilometers from Philippeville and it wasn’t long before we arrived. Captain Cocquin was already

waiting for me in his office. 'I knew you would come back as a sergeant Malicien,' he welcomed me warmly. 'Not only did I get positive reports from the 2nd C.S.P.L.E., but also from lieutenant d'Main Ruiz, you probably remember him from your time in Mascara. He let me know that he had the utmost trust in you and is very happy that you passed. So, now it is time to let everybody know about your stripes and in particular the men that you will be in charge of to show that you are a born leader. Good luck!'

He shook my hand and we jumped back in the jeep and drove to the *djebel* Filfila.

'We should ask lieutenant Chevreau if we could show you around,' said Jean.

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'Actually, you have no idea what it is all about around here and it gives us a little out too.'

I thought it was a good idea. After lieutenant had given permission, we drove first to a neighbouring village Douar des Ali Oua. There were about a forty people living there and they all worked in the iron ore mine from Fendek.

A little further was a property from a French colonial, close to the village from Dem El Begrat. There was the base of Compagnie d'Appui, (the support company) with a twenty Legionnaires housed in abandoned hay barns. Despite the improvised housing, everything was in spic-and-span condition. The commandant of the unit was captain Demin.

Wherever they went, be it the forests of kurkeik, the plains with undergrowth, the bogs or the djebels, the captain was always in front of his men urging them on.

A few kilometres further in the area of La Safia, was the section of Lieutenant Coprez. The legionnaires slept in small cabins of three or four men, those were also spic-and-span.

A tale went around that in the beginning days of this section; they had left to go on patrol with Coprez as leader. Before they even had left the property, Coprez stumbled over a big rock and fell on the ground, after which his US M1 carbine went off. The rebels immediately fired back.

Apparently the rebels had planned an ambush which would have had deadly consequences for the Legionnaires, had the rebels not revealed where they were with that shot.

Right away the parachutist had been set upon the rebels. Totally surprised, the rebels had retreated, but not before they suffered heavy losses, including a sought after leader Si Deradji.

The guy was ready to throw a hand grenade when Legionnaires shot him.

The owner of the property was very pleased having the Lieutenant and his section on his property and treated them well. Sometimes the men found the days boring because they were only allowed to patrol the immediate area to protect the workers during harvest or to hunt the wild boars that did a lot of damage to the crops. This activity kept the rebels on their toes. Lucky for the Legionnaires, Cocquin gave them often permission to go to Jemapes or Philippeville, where they could relax a bit.

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We drove further and arrived by the 4th company that was based in Saint-Antoine and under command of captain Bonami. After a short introduction the captain sent us on to Lieutenant Mautre.

The section of lieutenant Mautre was in Praxburg, in an old burned down farm.

They had their own Popote and a movie theatre because there was also a unit of the Colonial Troops of the French army based there.

'The next time we go out, we should go to the 2nd company of the scouting squadron,' said Etienne when we got back to our place. 'And of course we have to find out where we can go swimming as

well, nothing better than a dip in fresh water to cleanse your body!’

I learned quickly that our unit together with some other units had been busy since November 4 with the pacification of the Secteur Autonome de Tebessa. The result was that we had to go out several times per week to search for rebels and to eliminate them.

The Secteur Autonome de Tebessa started by the town of the same name, not far from the Tunisian border and stretched to the east out to Bône on the coast. From there it went to Tizi-Ouzou and back to Bou-Saada, the western most edge of the Secteur. Biskra was the most southern town of the area. In this square were the cities of Sétif, Constantine, Bougie, Batna, Souk-Arras, Guelma, Aïn-Beïda and a few other small places.

The area was very mountainous. By Biskra was the Aurès-Massif. A little farther to the south-east was the inhospitable Nementcha mountains and between the two mountain areas was the *oued* el Abiod.

In the area of Tizi-Ouzou was the mountain range Djurdjura, which was named the Small Kabylïë after the Algerian area where it was located. Between Constantine, Souk-arras, Tebessa, Batna and Sétif was the deadly semi-morass area of Ain-Beïda, where a good number of legionnaires had lost their lives in an ambush.

Thus, this was our area of operations. At the most unexpected times we had to be deployed and left us with little time to rest. Right now we were active in the area of Bougie, a week later we could be in Souk-Ahras or in the Nementcha mountains.

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The fights against the rebels was difficult because most of the time they were well armed and knew the area much better than we did.

The northern part of Secteur Autonome had forests and shrubs for vegetation, while the south was a desolate area with high rising mountains and impenetrable deep gorges and ravines.

The towns and villages were all located near the foot of the mountains, sometimes there were small settlements with a few people higher up in the mountains.

During the operations starting out from the small mountain villages, it was especially difficult to locate the enemy because they would hide out in the natural forts in numerous the deep gorges and ravines.

On December 18, five o’clock in the morning I woke up my mates after I was woken up myself by the guard of the night and got told that we had to get ready for an operation in the area of the *djebel* El Mezeraa.

Just before departure the Captain had told us that we would do the operation together with the 2nd company. Etienne, Jean and I had the use of a jeep with a driver and were in the shortest time on location. The *djebel* was known for the deep gorges, ravines and mountain ridges which were difficult to get through because of the dense undergrowth.

Reaching the foot of the first mountain, I jumped out of the jeep and walked up to the jeep of captain Cocquin. ‘What are my orders, *mon capitaine*?’ ‘Wait for lieutenant Chevreau’ he replied while sitting behind the wheel of his jeep and studying a map. ‘I have not been contacted by the PC yet.’ A little later lieutenant Chevreau came running up. ‘Quick Malicien, get your men together and try to get on that ridge, there seem to be a couple of hundred rebels on there. Don’t take any unnecessary risks, *Allez!*’

Jean, Etienne, Fère the driver, me and two other men from lieutenant Chevreau were ready to move when I noticed that we had all kinds of weapons, but no machine gun. I went to Chevreau and asked: '*Mon Lieutenant*, can I get a F.M.?'* 'Of course son he said, *Hé Philippe, par ici! Tu vas en route avec le sergent Malicien. En avant!*' A big guy came walking up with a machine gun on his shoulder and replied:

*Hey Philippe, come here! Go with sergeant Malicien, Go!

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'A vos ordres, sergent!'

We stormed in the direction of the mountain. By the foot we stopped and crouched down. 'OK guys, we are going up *in tirailleur* *. Shoot at anything you see moving, no pity, no prisoners, en avant!'

When I jumped up, shots resounded, I swore 'goddamn.'

'I think that they have seen us already Lucky!' yelled Etienne.

I looked around me and with arm movements I made it clear to the guys that they had to stay at the same height and make an encircling move to the right.

I couldn't see Jean or Etienne, I yelled 'Etienne, Jean! Where the hell are you?'

'To the left of you, but we can't see you, what is it?'

'We are making an encircling move to the right trying to fool them. Don't go higher if you are not sure! Okay?'

'All right! Good luck!'

In such situations it was good to be able to use your own language, so that the conversation was lost on the enemy.

I crept carefully farther, I touched a leg, it was de one from Philippe. He looked at me, held his finger on his lips and pointed up. Damn!, not ten meters up were two Arabs with their back turned to us! It was probably them who fired the shots when they had heard something earlier. Philippe asked me with gestures what he was to do. I gave him a sign to wait and crept a little farther until I was sure that outside these two, there were no other rebels.

I gave Philippe a sign to go ahead. He rose up and saw that the two *Fellaghas* were still facing the other direction and opened fire. The tracers formed lines in the darkness of the morning, but we saw the two falling down.

Suddenly the sound of shots came from everywhere. There was total mayhem, grenades were exploding and someone shot off a flare which lit up the whole area. The surprised rebels tried to find an escape. Fère, Jean and Etienne stormed up the mountain and opened fire. At the same moment Philippe and the two other

*In one line side by side

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guys that Lieutenant Chevreau had given me along, ran up the other side of the mountain.

Quickly they reached the top, but there was not a trace of the rebels to be seen.

The two dead rebels did have a pistol and some hand grenades and a big pile of ammunition.

Because I did not have a radio, I send one of Chevreau's men down to let him know about the situation up here and ask for further orders. The rest of my men were spread out across the mountain ridge keep eying the darkness and weapons ready as not to get surprised by an attack.

Fifteen minutes later Chevreau came with his radio man. He was in contact with the PC and a little later sat down beside me on the ground.

‘You took care of that quick Malicien.’

‘It would have ended quite different Lieutenant, if those rebels had waited with firing until they saw us; we walked almost right into their arms!’

‘It’s all good I guess you have a hard time accepting a compliment?’

‘Excuse me Lieutenant, I did not realise it was meant as a compliment, as you can see, I have a lot to learn.’

Chevreau smiled and patted me on the shoulder.

The darkness made quick way for the daylight and we lit a cigarette. The radio crackled, the lieutenant took up the horn and heard that we had to go to scout out the next mountain.

‘Be alert, don’t let them get you,’ he called after us because we had suffered also some casualties.

‘I called my men, come on guys, time for some action, be sure to check behind every rock and bush because the rebels could be hiding everywhere. At the least sign of danger, shoot!’

En tirailleur we descended the mountain along the east side. The distance between us was about ten meters, just the right distance for this type of situation.

Suddenly Etienne stopped, bent down, looked at us in a telling way and pointed down. I looked, but did not see anything. Fère gave the indication that he had seen what Etienne had pointed out. He raised three fingers and made a cross over his belly indicating that there were three heavily armed *fellaghas*.

I gave them the sign to go on, but after several steps Etienne stopped again and motioned that we had to lie down. He took a hand grenade, took out the pin, threw it,

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down and dropped to the ground. The explosion made my ears ring. Carefully we crept in the direction of Etienne and Fère had seen the rebels. All three were lying on the ground, two dead. The third one was still breathing, but he was seriously wounded. Etienne looked at me and I gave him a nod. A short burst of his sub-machine gun put the man out of his misery.

We collected various weapons, among them a big bore Russian made automatic rifle.

I looked to the top of the mountain, from where Chevreau indicated a job well done and that we had to go on.

We came, skin intact to the small river bed that separated the two mountains. It was densely overgrown and like in the other area, strewn with large rocks. The terrain was well suited for an ambush and we checked every rock and bush in a line of a hundred meters before I would give the sign to go farther and climb the next mountain.

We checked meter after meter, usually in half bend over stance.

A machine gun rattled and we heard the bullets whizzing by us. We dropped right away down on our bellies. I asked Jean if he had seen where it came from, but he replied negatively, Fère had not seen anything either. Here we were, it was for sure that the rebels knew where we were, but we had no idea where they were hiding out. We couldn’t go by the sound because there was gun fire everywhere. Suddenly another salvo resounded nearby and then another one. I lifted myself up to look at the top of the mountain, but nothing moved, no enemy, or friend.

We heard the familiar sound of an engine, and a little later a Piper Cub plane came into view. The plane circled a few minutes above the mountain and took off again.

It was annoying that we just had to sit there without being able to do anything.

Fifteen minutes later I felt someone touching my leg; it was the radio man who had earlier stayed behind with Chevreau. 'Twenty meters above you there is a machine gun nest with five or six men, Chevreau want you to eliminate them as soon as possible. I have to go back, until later!' I crept to Jean and told him what I just had heard and whispered: 'Notify the others quietly and tell them move up when I fire three times in the air.' Jean left and after I was sure that he notified the others, I took my pistol and fired it three times in the air

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and we then stormed up the mountain. Chevreau's second guy, Fère and Jean were few meters above me and fired their weapons. I heard some muffled screams, but had no idea from who they were. A grenade exploded a few meters behind me, followed by a short silence. Then again there sounded a few salvos and I heard someone calling above me 'Sergeant! Sergeant! *Par ici!*'

When I got on top, I saw that Jean had a gunshot in the arm; the rebels had all been eliminated. 'Damn Jean, what happened did they catch you by surprise?'

He smirked, 'yes of course, or do you think that I asked them to shoot me?'

'It is not as bad as it seems, I have no problem to keep on going if you can just bandage it up.'

From the first aid kit that every legionnaire carries on his helmet, I made a garrotte to stem the blood it was not easy, but I managed to slow down the blood loss. 'I find that you look a little white Jean, Don't you rather stay here?' Jean looked at me, 'You want to get rid of me or what? I keep going sergeant!' I put my hand on his shoulder, but stayed quiet.

All immediate danger had passed. Later we heard that the rest of the fellaghas, who were trying to escape at the other side of the mountain, had been intercepted by our other units.

The operation was called to an end and we went back to our bases.

Jean went to the hospital to have his arm taken care of and was back after a couple of weeks.

Beside our two wounded, Jean and Chevreau's second man, there were three dead in the 1st company: Lieutenant Meurret got shot in the head, the two legionnaires who were on either side of him were fatally shot in the chest. They were the German Legionnaires Träumel and Krein and like lieutenant Meurret, had several years of service and were veterans of the Indochina war.

The rebels had that day 300 dead, and 212 weapons were taken with tons of ammunition.

Jean and Etienne had taken me a few times to Philippeville. It surprised me that they had started going to the B.M.C., the Bordel Militaire Controlé. I remembered that they used to look for their preferred pleasure outside this milieu. Jean said it happened this way; 'We went for the first time to the B.M.C.'

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and were invited by two of the women to play some cards. So we kept doing that and we became friends.'

The prostitutes would give them now and then some pocket money, but in return my mates were not to go with any of the other women to bed because the women considered them now as their protectors. Jean and Etienne would thus go to the B.M.C. to play a few games of cards and after closing time they would escort them home. Most of the other legionnaires snickered about that, but that did not bother my friends.

When I entered the first time the B.M.C., all the girls kept looking at me. That did not come as a

surprise to Etienne and Jean because in the bars and cafés of Mascara the girls would also circle around me.

We went to sit at a table and a slim and nice looking half breed girl came toward us. The girlfriends of Etienne and Jean took also a place at the table. The young half breed said to Etienne, 'aren't you going to introduce me to your friend?' Etienne smiled and stood up. 'Miara, this is my best friend sergeant Malicien, Lucky to his friends. Lucky, I like to introduce to Miara, an acquaintance from us.' I stood up and shook her hand. 'May I sit beside you?' asked the woman demurely. 'Of course young lady, there just happen to be a chair free.' With that I turned around and grabbed a chair from another table. Everyone laughed about that and Miara sidled up to me.

From that time on we went on a regular basis to Philippeville. Before this time it had been difficult for Etienne and Jean to get a night permit, but now that they had a sergeant for a friend, it was somewhat easier.

I saw Carmen also regularly, but our trysts were not as intense as they had been in Mascara.

Yet, after a while she did ask me to marry her.

'You are not going to tell me that you are divorcing your husband are you?' I asked alarmed.

'Yes darling, I realise now that I married too young and with the wrong man, I want to go on with you.'

'And then after some time to fall in love with someone else again

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and realise that you made the same mistake with me? No, I am too young to get married Carmen.

Let's keep doing what we do now and then after a few years we'll see again.'

'You can't expect me to keep cheating on my husband for another few years?'

'Well, in that case, leave him!'

'He is so jealous that he will chase me down wherever I go and God knows what he will do then!'

'You think he will leave you alone if you were to marry me? No Carmen, I believe we would be fooling ourselves if we believed that. Maybe it is better if we just stopped seeing each other.'

'No, no! I will be patient, I can wait. Let's wait and see. Come, hug me like you used to do in Mascara.' 'I kissed her tenderly, but I realised that our affair was on its last legs.'

With the year-end in sight, everyone hoped that there wouldn't be any large scale operations, but for the rebels it was business as usual.

In nearly all of the Secteur Autonome de Tebessa there were series of operations, whereby we got to know cities and *djebels* such as Ouenza, Clairfontaine, Morsott, Cheria, Negrine, Elma el Abiod, Bir el Ater en Ras el Euch and Guentis. These were new and exotic places, but also very dangerous places. The same was true for Zitouna, Anoual, Kfif Mesloula, Troubia, El Mezeraa, Bou Djellal, Sif, Bou Gaffer, Rhifouf, etc.

A general alert was sounded on February 12 1957. Every company was present and all vehicles, helicopters and spotter planes took part in this operation. Our target was the notorious dangerous *djebel* Bou Gaffer. Everyone knew that there were always many casualties in that area because of the treacherous and impenetrable terrain. However, that did not stop the 2nd REP. The 3rd company was put in place by helicopter, they had to block the escape of the rebels and that was the reason

they were placed farther than the attack units.

The 1st and 2nd company entered the inhospitable area from the west, while the 4th company had to out-flank the rebels from the north.

That day I was assigned to *chef de pièce* and had Ostokan, a FM* gunner at my service. He in turn had a *chargeur***. His name was Meunier and he was loaded with ammunition for the FM.

*Fusil-mitrailleur (7.5 cal. light machine gun)

** Loader for the FM

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He was supposed to stay at all times with the gunner of the FM.

Lieutenant Chevreau assigned everyone to their job and gave the coordinates of the posts we had to occupy and called: 'remember, don't let anyone through, and take no prisoners, we have no use for them. Good luck!'

This time I did get also a radio operator with a Poste 300 radio. The complete 3rd company had taken up position at the outermost out-runner of the djebel and waited tensely.

We had left five o'clock in the morning, but it was clear daylight when the first shots were heard. Everyone was right away extra watchful. The shooting intensified and the mortar shells sent the rebels fleeing.

The spotter planes kept observing the area and reporting rebel positions to the PC. There were also helicopters, the well known Alouettes, but they were used to evacuate the wounded. At times we spotted five or six, which meant that we had a lot of casualties.

Toward the afternoon the radio started to crackle, Jean the radio operator came to sit beside me and I took the horn. '*Piece deux, ici Hirondelle. Tenez vous prêts de prendre action. Un groupe de rebelles vient dans votre direction. A vous!**'

*'Ici piece deux. Je vous entends. Message compris. A vous**!'*

'O.K. Ici Hirondelle, terminé!'

'Ok guys, it's time to keep your eyes peeled, the show is about to begin, they expect the rebels to come our way.' I said to the FM gunner and his mate.

The four of us scanned the area in all directions. A shot resounded and our gunner was hit in the leg, he fell down with a grimace on his face.

Suddenly the loader yelled; 'Look Lucky, over there, I think they could be there'. 'What shall we do?' In this condition I figured that Ostokan would not be able to operate his FM. I ask Jean to contact Hirondelle and ask for an Alouette to pick Ostokan up.

'No, no man that is not necessary' said Ostokan. 'I hardly feel any pain and we got work to do here.' 'Are you sure Ostokan? It is no problem to get you out of here, but if you say you can manage...' When the gunner tried to get up, more shot were fired, but now from a closer location.

*Second machine gun, here Swallow. Get ready for action. A group of rebels is coming your way. Over!

** Here 2nd machine gun, I hear you, message understood. Over!

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Like lightning we dived down.

Meunier rolled on his side, grabbed his sub-machine gun, went on one knee and fired. In the distance there were several screams. Our loader carefully stood up, not even ten meters farther two rebels stood there clutching their chest. Without hesitation Meunier fired again and the two fellaghas fell back against the rocks.

With a couple of jumps the loader was at them and he kicked the weapons away. Both rebels were dead. Beside the Browning .30 cal. heavy machine gun, each had a sub-machine gun, a pistol, a supply of ammunition and hand grenades. It was a nice catch and I patted Meunier on the shoulder, 'good work man, it speaks for its self that this will be reported and I will make sure you will get a medal for this.'

Via the radio I reported to lieutenant Chevreau. I told him that we had not reached our objective, but we did eliminate a machine gun nest.

'Ok, stay where you are Malicien, it is possible that there are more rebels coming your way. You guys did a good job. Over and out!'

I lowered myself to the ground. 'Do we have anything to eat Jean? I am hungry enough to eat a horse' It was the norm that every one brought their own casse-croute, but today there was only one man and that was Jean, who had to carry that beside the heavy radio, which was about twenty kilograms. Happy that he could lighten his load, he started to dole out the bread which was in the shape of a turban and some tins with sardines. There was no coffee or other drinks, but it did not matter to us. We ate in quietness without slacking off our vigilance.

I looked at the FM gunner and asked 'how is your leg doing Ostokan? Just let me have a look at it.'

I removed the bandages and saw a nasty wound. 'That does not look good, I am going to get you evacuated and I do not want to hear any grumbling, you are going to the hospital.'

Not ten minutes later an Alouette arrived and Ostokan was despite his protest, tied on the litter that was mounted on the side of the helicopter.

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The chopper had barely lifted off when we were shot at again from somewhere nearby.

Again we dropped to the ground. 'No one wounded?' I yelled. 'Not me' yelled Jean, Meunier called that all was OK with him.

'OK, I am going to try to get the FM from Ostokan, keep your eyes open and give me cover!'

On my belly I crawled to the FM and checked the ammo clip and cocked it. I looked questioningly at my mates; they gave me the same look back, they didn't what to do next either.

I had seen in a western movie how someone put his hat on a stick to fool the opponent.

I took my helmet and used my switchblade to stick it up in the air and wave it a bit. Sure enough, a couple of shots rang out and hit the helmet. I looked at the spot where the bullets had hit and could tell from which direction the bullets had come. Calmly I took one of the hand grenades from jacket, took out the pin and gave my mates a sign that they had to be ready. Then I threw the grenade to where I suspected the rebels to be.

The sound of the blast was not finished yet when I jumped up with the FM and pulled the trigger without stopping. While firing, I swung in an arc of hundred eighty degrees, from left to right and back. The weapon rattled and rattled until the clip was empty. There was no movement or sound to be detected from the area I had shot at. My mates where a couple of steps from me and i yelled;

*'En tirailleur les gars! Allons voir ce qui en reste!'**

Spread out we walked into the riverbed; we knew how dangerous this could be. There was not much vegetation, but a lot of large rocks and boulders which would make a perfect spot for an ambush. We walked in the direction to where I had thrown the grenade. Cautiously we progressed meter by meter, our eyes focussing on each outcropping or rock that could provide a hiding place for the enemy.

We had walked nearly fifty meters, but had not found any dead or wounded rebels.

*In one (line side by side) let's go guys! Let's see if there is anything left!

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“Impossible! I shouted. Those guys could not just disappear from the face of the earth? They have to be somewhere!” Jean and Meunier had no idea either what could have happened.

Later we would learn how it had been possible.

Jean's radio still worked and I got him to call Hironnelle. The *oued* that we were in was half way in the direction of the coordinates that I had received from Chevreau. When the Lieutenant came on the line, I gave him a report on the evacuation of Ostokan and our progress. I got permission to keep going. ‘Just watch out Malicien, I am sure that there are still more rebels in that area, we don't have them all yet. Be extra careful. Over and out!’

‘This is going to be a tough job guys,’ I said to my two companions. ‘Look up; there is no cover on the whole mountain side, not even a single rock. If we have get up there, snipers could pick us off like ducks in a shooting gallery.’ ‘Can't we get up from the other side Lucky?’ thought Meunier out loud.

‘You think there are no rebels there? However, we could try. Let's hope that the rebels have not advanced that far yet.’

We walked behind one other through the *oued*, in a westerly direction. It was indeed to hope for that the fellaghas had not arrived there yet, otherwise it would prove to be a real bad situation for us. After more than a half hour marching, we reached the opposite slope of the mountain and started the dangerous climb up. Once in a while we would walk backwards to make sure there was no treats coming from below us.

It was scary; the danger could be lurking everywhere. I found myself in a precarious situation and was not at ease at all. Half way up the climb I lowered myself to the ground. My mates followed my example. We laid down flat on our backs and lit a cigarette. A *Mouchard* * flew over

And a few seconds later the radio crackled. ‘*Içi piece deux, je vous écoute.*

‘*Içi Hironnelle. Malicien did you give me your correct coordinates?*’

‘*Oui mon lieutenant.*’

‘*What is your present position?*’ I took a quick look on the map and gave our new coordinates.

‘*Good, thus you are on the slope just past your previous coordinates?*’

‘*Yes Lieutenant.*’

‘*Get quick to the top of the mountain because I just heard that four rebels are on their way up there too. Don't take any risks! Over and out!*’

*Informer, but in this case the spotter plane

Almost in a run we went up without worrying about cover for our back. Out of breath we reached the top..., at the same moment as the four rebels. We opened fire all at the same time and then dropped to the ground and slide down the slope. Meunier was wounded in the chest and Jean was grazed by a bullet in the head. I felt two bullets slam in my right leg. I pushed myself up on my left leg and right knee to look over the top.

Two rebels were dead, one was wounded and tried to get up. The fourth one who also appeared to be wounded was trying to help the wounded man. I took my pistol in my right hand supported by my left hand, aimed carefully and fired twice. The wounded rebel who had tried to get up looked at me with a bewildered look and fell forward across his mate. I dragged myself farther and shot the second wounded dead from close up.

I crawled back to Meunier and Jean, took the horn of the radio and called for Hironnelle.

'Çi Hironnelle, parlez!'

'Çi Pièce deux, mon Lieutenant.'

'All three of us have been wounded, only one can still walk, four rebels eliminated. Request medi-vac, over.'

'Stay where you are Malicien, two Alouettes are on the way. Over and out.'

It wasn't long before my mates and I were strapped in on the litters from the choppers. A little later the Alouettes took to the air.

It was a strange sensation to be whisked through the air in this position. A half hour later I was lying on the operating table in Philippeville.

Over all it had been a successful operation. Many weapons were taken and forty rebels killed. Unfortunately we had also some casualties, among them Lieutenant Messoïn, the young chef of the 3rd section of the 1st company. Once more the 2nd REP was in mourning for an officer. The *djebel* Bou Gaffer had again demanded a deadly toll.

After that there were several operations in quick succession: Operation Guentis on 1 and 2 March 1957, one I did not take part in because of the wounds received. Then there was the operation *djebel* Sif on March 6, where a lot of *fellaghas* lost their lives. Following that we had the large operation in the *djebel* Mesloulâ on March 18.

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We had another operation in the *djebel* Kifène on March 29, where Lieutenant Previer from a section of the 3rd company was killed. Lieutenant Fallier from the 2nd company died a month later from his injuries.

I had sworn that I would take part in the next operation, but I had not sufficiently recuperated from my leg injuries.

My stay in the hospital as a convalescent was pleasant; I got regular visits alternately from Carmen and Miara.

A few times it created a lot of hilarity when one or the other came first and the other came next like a revolving door. Neither one was aware of the existence of the other. My mates in the sick-

bay got a real kick out of it. They would joke, 'Hey Lucky, how long have you been busy setting up your harem? We know a few girls if you need more for your collection.'
'Jealousy will get you nowhere; I can't help it if you guys can get only visits from guys, you bunch of landlubbers! Unfortunately for you, we can't be all handsome like me!'
Of course my good friends Jean and Etienne came also regularly for a visit.
Because they were in another platoon, we could only exchange stories on the base after coming back from an operation.

Finally I was allowed to leave the hospital. I went more and more to Miara. It became more difficult to see Carmen because her husband, Lepcheck was more around. When he had asked for a transfer to the 2nd REP, he had been given a *planque**. He did not like it and figured he might as well have stayed in Mascara. Lepcheck had protested this assignment and was waiting for a decision from colonel Vemmes. Carmen could still get out during the day, but at night time it had become more difficult because Lepcheck had started to become suspicious. She told me regularly that she really wanted a divorce, but I did not want to commit myself with promises. Strange enough, I could not stand the idea that she could just leave her husband.
I was equally convinced that there was no use talking to Lepcheck.

**Planque*, a non combat job such as administration. Someone who had a planque was considered less worthy by Legionnaires who daily faced the dangers of combat.

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He would probably rather strangle me than to give Carmen a divorce.
With Miara it went a lot easier, if I did not see her in the B.M.C, which was not often, I could find her in her room in town. I spend many a night with her and found it was time to put an end to my relationship with Carmen, but how? I had not that much experience with women and particularly not with married ones. I decided to talk with Jean and Etienne about it; they probably had more experience with matters like this.
I had to exercise a little patience for that because our company together with a detachment of the 1st REP were slated to take part in the Parade in Paris on the 14th of July, the national celebration of the storming of the Bastille in 1789. Etienne and Jean were getting ready for the trip, but I could not go because I had not completely 100% healed from my injuries. I decided to stay with Miara because there was of little use for me on the base anyway.

After I was completely healed and had to listen for days on end to the tales from Jean and Etienne about their adventures in Paris, there came some respite when we went to the area of El-Milia to take part in a large scale operation with the 3rd REI. El-Milia was a small place on the flanks of the valley from the *oued* Kebir, a small stream that never went dry and cut through the landscape. The whole area was overgrown with huge forests with cork trees, a rich part of the economy of the land.

Our theatre of operations stretched from the Collo peninsula to past El-Milia. We drove straight to the theatre of operations, the corps of engineers, the artillery and the armoured vehicles were already there.

Above us in the sky flew not only the *Mouchards*, but the sky was also criss-crossed by fighter jets. Every road and path was blocked by soldiers. All inhabitants were taken out of their huts and

homes and evacuated to an area far outside the combat zone.

All farm animals were herded to the navigable oued where they were picked up by the French marines and taken somewhere else.

The whole area was declared *zone interdite* and not long after that the shit hit the fan.

It was action, quiet, and action again. Then there was sporadic back and forth gunfire, but each time it was of short duration. It probably came from

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rebels left behind to protect the retreat of the bulk of their force, the end of the operation came quick and unexpected.

This time my section did not have spectacular firefights, but on the other hand we did not have any dead or wounded either, which suited me just fine.

The weeks and months flew by, if we were not on operations, we would be busy on the base with maintenance of our kit and vehicles. Usually on the weekends we go to the beach, our favoured pastime.

The transport company had usually the most work to do with the maintenance of all vehicles, occasionally a platoon would be assigned to help out. This was something that was done in the usual spirit of legion camaraderie, always ready to help out comrades.

One day we were called back to Secteur Autonome de Tebessa. One part of our unit went by train and the other on trucks.

We were warmly welcomed by the population upon our arrival, a loud cheering rose up from the crowd that had assembled at the train station where also the trucks had arrived to go on from there to our final destination.

Despite the many sightings of the rebels in this area, for some time now, the attacks had diminished and for more than a month it stayed quiet. It seemed that the rebels had changed their tactics and avoided an open confrontation and were now working more on the administrative and political fundamentals of their organization. Perhaps they thought it would provide better results.

Nevertheless, a few days later there was an *accrochage* in the *djebel* El Mezeraa. The 1st, 2nd and 4th company made contact with a group of rebels they had observed in a small passage of the *oued* Hallail, near the area of the *grotte du Juif* (cave of the Jews). The confrontation lasted all day and the next night, whereby the fellaghas tried to escape the deadly grip of the French Foreign Legion. There was heavy fighting, but the 2nd REP triumphed and the insurgents had heavy losses. They had 35 dead, two wounded were taken prisoner and they lost a lot of ammunition and rifles.

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In the 1st, 2nd and 4th company were six dead.

On September 07 1957 was another confrontation, this time a large group *fellaghas* had been observed in the area of the *djebel* Darmoun. After the helicopter drop of the 2nd company on the tops of *djebel* Darmoun, the 2nd company faced off with the rebels and the battle started.

The operation did not last long, in a few hours the 2nd company managed to take 21 rebels prisoner, among them the much sought Lieutenant Amri Amra.

Together with some other units we had some more operations in Kemakem, Anoual, Misteri and Troubia. A period of calm followed, after which we were told that captain Bonami would leave

the regiment and be replaced by captain Couman. There was a small farewell party in the officer's mess attended by the officers and NCO's. Bonami was transferred to Pau in France where he would continue his career as an instructor for the *Troupes Aéroportées*.

During operations in the last five months the 2nd REP had killed 362 rebels and made 26 prisoners of war. A large quantity of weapons was taken, among them 7 heavy machine guns, 4 FM's (light machine guns), 40 sub-machine guns, 136 rifles, 10 hunting rifles, 7 automatic pistols, 1 mortar and one long range canon. On the Legion side were 2 NCO's and 18 Legionnaires dead and 44 wounded, among them 2 officers and 3 NCO's.

With Christmas and New Years coming up soon, the top echelon had decided that the 2nd REP could celebrate the holidays in their base camp Pehau in Philippeville.

It was an opportunity for Jean, Etienne and me to have a party with our girlfriends in the B.M.C. Carmen was on vacation with her husband in France, thus I did not have to worry about her.

In any case, I had decided to break it off with her because I had enough of the complex situation and also that my friends had made it clear to me that it was unfair to Miara.

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On December 28 it was time again to on operations again. This time it went to the now well known sector of El Milia, while the 1st REP would undertake a large operation in the Guelma sector.

Captain Bonami had in the meantime departed with some other officers while new replacements filled the ranks of the 2nd REP. Lieutenant-colonel De Vemmes was replaced by lieutenant-colonel Manot and lieutenant Gestuin became the new commandant of the 3rd company.

Gestuin had been a section commander for a long time and everyone in the company knew him because he always wore a white *chèche**. If you saw the lieutenant, you would see the *chèche*.

Gestuin was also one of those officers who would always be walking up front with his men during operations. It was because of his intervention that Jean, Etienne and I were together again in one section.

Since there were not enough officers, some NCO's got the command of a section which was usually twelve men strong.

My friends and I slept again in one room, together with our former section mate Ostokan the gunner who was wounded in the previous mission..

*A white neckerchief or shawl.

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Chapter 12

Period January 1958-December 1958

Among the rebels

It was during this period that my prestige was at an all time high and my friends and I were always together. A large border battle took place in April 1958 North of Constantine, still inside the

Secteur Autonome de Tebessa (S.A.T.) and in the vicinity of the city Souk Ahras. There had been several intense fire fights in the area from which the 2nd REP came out clearly the winner.

Often those firefights were in the area of the well known Black Mountains of Algeria, close to the eastern border which was covered with dense forestation and often the area where the battles between the rebels and the 2nd REP took place. Our *base-arrière* was Guelma, a town known for its beautiful ancient Roman ruins, located between the mountains of Alouara, Beni-Mezzeline, Debar and Mahouna.

The mountain sides had alternatively low undergrowth and strewn with small rocks and gravel. A large operation was about to begin, everyone knew it was going to be an extremely difficult task. Several other units of the French army were going to take part, a contingent of the 151st R.I. (regiment Infantry), one of the 3rd Dragons, and a unit of the 18th Artillery.

It wasn't long ago when the legionnaires of the 1st REP had left the town and was now in the theatre of operations south of Guelma, to be precise, in the *djebel* of Taya.

They were about to have a huge victory in the battle when the Alouette of the commander of the 1st REP Lieutenant-colonel Jeanpierre was shot down.

There was a great sadness in every regiment, Jeanpierre was a man who was always on the front lines with his men during battles and was respected by every Legionnaire.

Before this tragic event our unit had many successes in the *djebels* of Mézeraa, Anoual, Ourès, Troubia, Rhénadjé, Kifène, Rhifouf en Fedjoudj.

Now we went to the famous caves and ravines in the area of Guelma.

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There I had an experience with lieutenant Gestuin which would have had consequences for the Company commandant.

That day, July the 13th, one day before the French National holiday a couple of *voltigeurs* (recon) went to Gestuin and informed him that they had seen a large group of rebels disappearing into a cave. It was too dangerous to follow them in the cave. 'If that is the case' said the lieutenant, 'get a few kilos of TNT and we blow the cave up, go!' His orders were followed to the letter and a little later the sappers were busy placing the explosives at the entrance of the cave.

When they came back they told the lieutenant that the cave was at least 150 meters deep. They had not seen any of the rebels, thus they suspected that they were deeper in the cave. When they were finished placing the TNT, the Lieutenant ordered everyone back and detonated the charge.

The whole surrounding area shook from the explosion and thick smoke came out of the cave.

'Sergeant Malicien take your men and check the cave,' ordered Gestuin.

'Mon lieutenant, it has been my experience that it would be better to wait until the carbon-monoxide has dissipated, maybe we should wait for an hour or so.' Gestuin did not react; he turned around and called for five volunteers. He then turned back to me: '*Tu t'y connais toi?* *

We shall see!' He then told the volunteers: 'go guys and have a look what you can find!'

Nobody was willing to listen to me; I could hardly countermand the order to stop them from going into the cave. Worried I went back to my section. 'What now Lucky' asked Jean.

In the meantime lieutenant Gestuin went himself with some men to the cave. By the entrance he called to the five volunteers he had sent before: 'hey you guys, did you find anything?' When he did not receive a reply, he and his men entered the cave.

I looked at my guys with a sad look and said: 'I better call in the medics.' I took the horn of the radio and called the poste *de commande*, explained the situation to the colonel and asked for a dozen or so medics. Fifteen minutes later colonel Leport, the replacement for lieutenant-colonel Manot, came by helicopter. The medics arrived as well.

*What do you know?

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Nothing was heard yet from lieutenant Gestuin and his men.

'Allez,' I ordered the medics. 'Put on your gas masks and get like lightning down there, run, *mille de Dieu!*' With haste the medics followed my order. They called on the radio to give a report on the drama that had transpired down in the cave. Ten Alouettes flew up and the rest of the medics made preparations to deal with the victims. The first group of medics that had gone down the cave came now out. On litters they carried the bodies of Gestuin and his men; they all had the gray skin color of death.

'Why did this happen sergeant Malicien? Was Gestuin unwilling to listen?' asked the colonel Leport.

With sadness I looked at him. '*Non mon colonel*, I could not stop him from going in right away. I would have ended up facing court martial and no officer would have believed me. I am sorry that I could not convince the lieutenant of the danger. As you know, Lieutenant Gestuin always wanted to be first in case of danger.'

Leport put his hand on my shoulder, 'it is not your fault sergeant, I know the way Gestuin was and find it unfortunate that he did not listen to the voice of experience. *Allez*, we call off the OP and tomorrow we will check the cave again.'

The death were transported to the base, where everybody got to hear the full story of the event that had transpired at the cave..

The next day the cave was thoroughly searched and the soldiers found forty dead rebels, large quantities of weapons, clothing, medication and food supplies.

The burial of Lieutenant Gestuin attracted a lot of people and a lot of soldiers from other regiments came to pay their respects. Everyone in Philippeville knew the tall man who before his Legion command, regularly toured the town as a patrol commander. He was buried with military honours. His replacement was Lieutenant Themar.

From that day on Etienne, Jean and I were even more inseparable. If you saw one of us, you would see all three. We never went out alone. If one had guard duty, I would make sure that the other two had also guard duty. I could do that because I could get along with everybody and certainly with the A.S.G. of the company.

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I could get everybody to help me out when needed. I had a special place with the veterans from Indochina; these battle hardened guys regarded me now as an equal. Even some French Regular troops knew about me and we got along real good.

One day in the area of Guelma, a large concentration of rebels had been sighted and we were parachuted in. This did not happen that often anymore, most of the time we were transported by helicopter if the area was inaccessible or if quick action was required. Neither did we need to wear the heavy steel helmet anymore, more and more we would wear the *Béret-Vert* (Green Beret), brush-hat or Kepi.

In general these operations were short and intense, because it had been discovered that these types of battles were more successful than the long drawn out sieges. If rebels were sighted in a certain area, then they would dispatch a few units to keep an eye on them assisted by the Mouchards who would fly over the area.

The drop zone for the 2nd REP was about two kilometers from the first mountain ridges. The idea was to gather there all the troops and from there to walk *en tirailleur*.

More than likely the rebels kept the foot of the mountain ridges covered, everybody was worried that we had to storm up the mountain, but wisely, it was decided not to go that route.

It became soon clear that the Compagnie d'Appui would be providing support with Mortar fire and a blanket of fire with the 75 mm *Sans Recul* canons (75 mm recoilless canons). The air force would also participate; *Mouchards* flew around at different altitudes, while B 26's and Mistral planes dropped bombs on various targets. It looked like a huge fireworks. We were on the South side of the mountain ridges, while the 3rd REI was positioned on the East side. When all units were ready, they went ahead *en tirailleur* with a distance of about five meters between every one.

When we got to about two hundred meters from the foot of the mountain ridges, all hell broke loose. It looked like that the whole south wall was jam-packed with rebels because their gun fire was intense and they were well prepared.

The fellaghas did not flee right away by seeing so many legionnaires and the terrifying bombing planes.

Everyone was now down on the ground while the commanders radioed for new orders.

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The *poste de commande* was still in the drop zone and they send an Alouette to scout the area from above. It became quickly clear that there were hundreds of well entrenched and well armed rebels on the mountain sides.

“Hold your positions and wait for reinforcements,” was the order from Leport. There was still no reinforcements after one hour, but the artillery and bombing became more intense and in quicker succession.

Suddenly the voice of Leport came over the radio, ‘We are going to lay a smoke curtain from the bottom to the top, get ready to move, it probably will be man to man. Good luck to all and *en avant la légion!*’

We saw various airplanes flying dangerously low while dropping smoke bombs and within fifteen minutes the lower part of the mountain was hulled in a thick white cloud.

The few hundred meters that separated us from the enemy was quickly but silently covered.

Lieutenant Chevreau moved forward and was the first one to whack a rebel with a pistol shot.

Then it seemed like the sky came down, from everywhere fellaghas appeared and the battle became indeed man to man.

My group-Etienne, Jean, Ostokan, Meunier, Fère and I stayed close together to make sure to be able to watch each other's back. If one was attacked, then the others could jump in to help him out

of the predicament. It was against the principles of combat strategy, but for us it was the best way to protect each other in close quarter combat. In less than a half hour we had eliminated twenty rebels.

Etienne, Ostokan and Meunier were wounded, but not severe enough that they had to stop fighting. Chevreau advanced further and further, by the time we were half way up the mountain side, most of us had been wounded in one way or another. Only a few had escaped any injuries.

Without realizing, we were separated from the group of lieutenant Chevreau and other groups.

We were now totally on our own. The smoke curtain had cleared out in the warm sun and we dove in some bushes to get a little respite and check our ammunition supply. 'I urged my men on, OK guys, we have wasted enough time, let's go!' I turned on my right side with the intention of getting up, when Meunier who

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was lying at a little lower spot, yelled out; 'Lucky, watch it, right above you!'

Like lightning I turned around to get up, a rebel was just about to hit me with the butt end of his rifle. In reflex I lifted my arm to ward off the blow. The force of the blow on my elbow made the rebel stumble back, losing his balance and he fell right on top of the bayonet of Meunier who was about to fire his rifle at him. The bayonet went clear through his chest and came right out of his back.

I winced from the pain and I tried to take my vest off, Etienne helped me and we saw that my elbow had already swollen and turned black and blue. 'May the devil get me if that is not broken,' said Etienne. 'You might as well forget about going on Lucky, shall I ask for an Alouette to come and pick you up?' 'Don't be daft man; you think that a broken arm is going to stop me? Then you don't know me too well. Come on, we have wasted enough time, those rebels better watch out, I going to slaughter them like pigs. *En avant la légion!*'

We went right away; I kept my sub-machine gun in my right hand, while my left arm was hanging useless beside my body. We had barely made a few steps when Jean collapsed through the knees; he had been hit with two bullets from a large calibre weapon that had gone clear through his right thigh. Ostokan and I applied a tourniquet, but it would be impossible for him to keep on walking, let alone fighting. I asked Jean if he could still operate the radio. He said he could because a few months ago he had finished a course for radio operator in Sidi Bel Abbes.

He called for an Alouette and I wished him good luck. I did not like to leave my friend behind, but the battle was not finished yet.

The enemy came now from all sides, but we defended ourselves well and scores of rebels fell while there were no casualties on our side.

The Mistrals flew low and strafed the thickets with firebombs, teargas and bullets.

Soon an immense wall of fire blocked us from going forward and we had no choice but to wait until the rebels tried to escape the inferno, we could then eliminate them as they came out.

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Soon they started to come out and in no time the area was covered with the dead rebels.

Etienne came beside me and handed the horn of the crackling radio. 'Here the PC! All sections report your positions with coordinates and your casualties, over!'

I saw the lieutenant a little further also on the radio and I nodded to him. I then passed on my

coordinates and told them that my section had still enough strength in manpower.

It was a different story with the section of the lieutenant, he got the order to stop fighting and return to the point of departure. Grumbling he followed the order.

Not long after that we got isolated from our platoon; I had no idea where we were. According to the coordinates of other sections that I heard on the radio, at least two of them were in the immediate area, but we could not see them.

Nearly all of the mountain range was wrapped in a heavy cloud of smoke, it was difficult to identify or do anything.

Quicker than expected the signal was given that the battle was over and we were told not to kill anymore rebels.

Those that came out had to be taken prisoner and sent to the base for interrogation.

After all was over, everybody assembled and we heard that over 200 rebels had been killed and at least the same number had been taken prisoner. A large quantity of weapons and ammunition was also taken.

Among the men of the 2nd REP were seven dead and 26 wounded. In the 3rd REI it was worse, there were nine dead and 32 wounded, but the battle was won. I was taken to the hospital where they discovered that my arm was broken in three places and they had to insert a steel pin to repair the damage. It took six weeks to heal completely.

It was almost Camerone, the most important celebration of the French Foreign Legion and everybody was busy with the preparations. As usual, parades were held in the town. Officers and NCO's were to serve legionnaires in the mess-hall. The roles of legionnaires, NCO's and officers were reversed. Legionnaires could give orders to them, much to the amusement of everyone. After the parade on the day of Camerone, Jean who had also quickly recuperated from his wounds came into the room with a white bag. He looked at us smiling and said; 'Now we are going to celebrate Camerone our way, look what I got.' He pulled out the epaulettes, the kepi, and the swagger stick of the colonel and laid them on the table.' 'We are going to paint the town on the tab of Leport!'

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'It would not be wise to do that, you know that practical jokes are only allowed on the base and moreover, this one goes too far. You don't know what we'll get into if we are caught.'

'Ah well said Etienne who was in for the prank, what are they going to do, put us in front of the firing squad? Or are you afraid that you will get demoted?'

I went along, I had less than a year service left on my five year contract, what could happen?

I was in high regard by everyone, even by the colonel.

We went quickly to town, Etienne got the swagger stick, Jean the kepi and I put the epaulettes on.

We went from bar to bar and drank anisette until it came out of our ears, all on the tab of colonel Leport. It was well after midnight by the time we returned to our room and fell right away asleep.

The next morning we were a lot less happy. The whole regiment was assembled for roll-call and as always, the *effectif complet* * was announced by the A.S.G. Then the flag was raised. Before everyone could leave to go on their daily duties, the A.S.G. came forward again and called out loud; 'The people whose names I call out are to present themselves to the colonel. Sergeant

Malicien! Corporal Dienart! Legionnaire Van Broeken! *Venez par ici!*

We looked each other and knew right away the reason. In proper military step we walked to the center of the parade ground of camp Péhau where the higher ranking officers had taken place for the daily ceremony. We jumped to 'attention' for colonel Leport who ordered us right away 'at ease.' He put his hand in his pocket and pulled out a handful of receipts. 'This morning I got these bills from a few bar owners, bills that were made on the day of Camerone! Bills that you guys incurred and are responsible for. You know darn well that this is a celebration of the Legion and not for the civilians. I have paid these bills, but you are going to pay every last franc back, understood!

'*Oui mon colonel!*' we replied in unison.

'That is what I thought, I know that sometimes strange things happen in the spirit of Camerone, but this went too far.

*Confirmation that all men were accounted for.

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That is why you now will get your punishment. Take off your uniform jackets so that no one can tell what rank you are. At this moment you are plain legionnaires.'

There was a light drizzle, thus the pavement was wet. The colonel made a step forward and yelled; on the run, the full length of the parade ground, go!' a few moment later; 'drop...drop!

Crawl...crawl!' The officer let us drop and crawl to the end of the parade ground and then we had to turn around and crawl all the way back. At the place where the officers were, we were allowed to stand again. Our uniforms were ripped to shreds from crawling on the wet asphalt. Only our belt and underwear was more or less intact. While we stood at attention, Leport spoke sternly; 'let this be a lesson not to pull any more pranks like this. *Allez*, dismissed!'

A few moments later the A.S.G. called the roll-call to an end and yelled:

'*Régiment.... rompez les ranks!*' *

With that the issue was settled. Jean looked a little embarrassed at Etienne and me. Etienne had a hard time not to laugh and I said with a pretend mad voice: 'bunch of idiots! I will see you later in our room.'

I left and went directly to the office of the colonel to apologise. '*Mon colonel*, I did not plan this, but let myself sucked into this scheme by my friends. I do not blame my friends and I should have stopped them from doing it. I am grateful that you didn't take too bad; I hope there won't be any more reprisals and that all is forgiven.'

The colonel looked at me with a glitter in his eyes. 'No Malicien, this affair is finished. I think it took some balls to pull a stunt like that. Make sure it never happens again, dismissed!'

Back in our room I gave my friends a stern look. I can't believe I let myself cajoled into doing a stunt like that you bunch of nitwits, I will get you for this!' All three of us laughed and that was the end of it.

Carmen did not try to get me back anymore because she knew what I thought of marriage and because of my involvement with Miara she gave me free reign. She probably thought that my relationship with half-blood would not last long. I was satisfied with Miara, but did not find it totally OK that as a prostitute she went to bed with everyone despite that she took good care of herself.

*Regiment...dismissed!

In September came the notice that Etienne would be going to the platoon for NCO and Jean to the platoon for corporal. When they were gone for almost a month, they send me temporarily to a platoon of the 2nd company because they did not have enough personnel in the cadre.

I knew most of them and they knew me, but yet I felt like an orphan being separated from my friends.

I was barely with my new unit when the platoon was send with urgency by helicopter near the Moroccan border. Not far from a place called Marna we were put down. A unit of the French army was waiting for us with an adjutant as commander. The lieutenant of the legion took over command right away; to the displeasure of the adjutant, but that is the way it was done.

Rebels were sighted in the mountain ridges of *djebel* Amour. Our lieutenant wanted to wait for the arrival of the Mouchards before he undertook anything. That was very much against the wish of the French adjutant who ignored the order of the lieutenant and went with his men ahead.

He was gone fifteen minutes when three *Mouchards* showed up and surveyed the area.

They did not detect any danger, after which the lieutenant decided to move on as well. When he was about to leave, gunfire came in, coming higher up from the slope of the mountain we had to climb. On top of this mountain was a huge rock. This colossus was partially hidden by undergrowth that covered the slope.

The gun fire had stopped and after a short exchange with the Mouchards we moved *en tirailleur* onwards. Halfway up the slope we came under heavy gun fire. From everywhere came bursts of gun fire and single shots. The lieutenant hastily contacted the *Mouchards*, but they not could give him any information, they did see nothing suspicious. 'How about that gun fire, it has to come from somewhere *nom de Dieu!*' he yelled in the horn of the radio. 'You can't see any rebels?'

Mad as a hornet that we had been taken by surprise. We were still laying flat on our bellies and waited.

'*Par sauts en avant!*'* screamed the lieutenant, outside himself with rage and had now to rely on intuition. We obeyed and jumped up, did a few short runs and dropped again. We used this tactic several times while the gun fire went on, but we did not see the enemy.

*forwards with jumps.

This made the lieutenant even madder.

Grenades exploded left and right of me and I looked down the slope to the men who were with me. The guy right below me gave me a sign that I should look up. When I did, I saw a pair of boots right in front of my nose. I looked up and stared at the face of an Arab who had his pistol aimed at me.

'There is no use to resist any longer sergeant,' said the man, 'you have lost.'

I noticed that there was no more gun fire and the noise from the engines of the *Mouchards* was gone too. There was an eerie quietness that got interrupted by the man in front of me.

'Get up and come along' he ordered. From the time of the first shots, about a half hour had passed. 'Follow me sergeant, I want you to show something.' The man had a red star sewn on his shoulder,

which meant that he was a lieutenant in the liberation army. I followed him close and realized that I still had my sub-machine gun. However, there was no point in using it, we were still surrounded. Together with my men I was surrounded by twenty or so rebels who led us to an open area between the bushes. To my consternation I saw a row of corpses of legionnaires, among them the lieutenant and the NCO's of the platoon. I counted 34 in total, almost the whole platoon; there was not a trace of the *Mouchards*.

I turned around and saw the *Bananes*,* who had not noticed anything of the debacle. I was one of the six who survived, looking at the corpses. We had left with 42 men that meant there were still two unaccounted for. Either they were hiding or they were left behind wounded without the rebels finding them. Hopefully those two would not start firing on the rebels because that would mean a certain death for all of us, we all understood that.

'Tell me with how many men did you came here sergeant?' asked the rebel lieutenant. 'We came with 40 men' was my reply.

The man seemed to be satisfied with that reply.

In the meantime the rebels took photos from all the victims, just like the French army

*The H-21 C helicopters somewhat like the Chinook helicopters because it had also twin rotors.

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and the French Foreign Legion did to keep records and archive the photos of the dead rebels. The rebel lieutenant made a gesture to follow him, 'you and your mates follow me sergeant, we are in a hurry.' He went ahead of us up the slope to the huge rock atop the mountain. Hidden behind another rock that was lying in front of the huge rock was an opening of a dozen centimetres in diameter visible, one that was easily missed by anyone walking past it.

Now one after the other, rebels passed through the opening and we were told to follow them in. Since we had no choice in the matter, the six of us went through it and we came in a sort of hall that gradually became larger and ended up in a huge cave of several hundred meters long. The cave was about fifty to sixty meters wide and at least twenty meters high. We saw piles of bags, bales, boxes and crates that probably contained weapons, food, ammunition, medicine and clothing. We stopped in front of a door, 'please follow me sergeant,' asked the lieutenant politely. Inside was a completely furnished office. The lieutenant took place behind the desk and put away his pistol. 'Please hand over your weapon sergeant' I handed over my weapon, still astonished what had happened to us the last hour. When I finally overcame my astonishment, I asked 'could I ask you something lieutenant?' 'Of course' said the man probably amused that I called him by his rank. 'You can ask all you want, whether I'll answer them is another question.'

'How did you know we were approaching and why didn't the *Mouchards* see anyone of you on the slope?' The man smiled and stood up and he walked to the rock-face wall of the office. There was a wood panel that went up to the ceiling of the room, in there was a small door that he opened. To my astonishment I saw a periscope behind there.

He pulled it down and invited me to take a look. I could observe the whole slope of the mountain and saw the still waiting *Bananas* and trucks from the French army waiting. Now that I thought about it, were did those guys go? I had seen neither hide nor hair of the French adjutant and his men.

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‘You won’t see those soldiers back sergeant’ said the lieutenant smiling, as if he had read my thoughts. ‘Those were our people, camouflaged of course. In a while the trucks will be gone and no one will know of their existence. The rest our people will stay hidden underground until they are needed for action. Does this answer your questions sergeant?’

‘Not quite lieutenant, what is going to happen to us?’ ‘Our people will take you from here to Morocco and from there to Spain. Don’t worry; we will not hurt you in any way, shape or form. The only thing we ask of you is: once you are back in your home country to publicly let them know how you were treated by us and the justness of our fight for independence. We have nothing to gain by killing you all, I know that you do not realise what you are fighting for. You are in the Foreign Legion and you are expected to fight where and when you are told. We will take your weapons and try to get you out of Algeria without any harm befalling you. Do you have any more questions?’ I did not, I was allowed to go to my mates and tell them what was going on. They were; Euren, Merl, München, Karl-Heinz and Van Verderen. The last one was a Belgian first class, Karl-Heinz was a corporal, München was also a first class, Euren and Merl had just come from boot camp to the regiment and had not much experience.

‘I think we better keep calm and do as they ask, escape is impossible because we do not know this area and then we run the risk of getting killed. Are you all in agreement?’ The men nodded. We were given food which was actually tasty. Toward the evening we were told to follow a few of the rebels. At first it was difficult to keep up with them in the half darkness, but we got quickly used to it.

The path that we were on, snaked right across the djebel. It went up and down and the rebels walked faster and faster ahead of us. Judging by the stars, I figured that we were going in a northerly direction, we kept going in this direction until the morning without a rest. We were beat, never had we marched so long without any rest, not even during boot camp.

We now approached a *mechta*,* where the rebels knocked on one of the doors.

* A small Arab home(s) in rural villages.

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An old man opened the door and let us in. München, Karl-Heinz and me could follow most of the discussion because we knew a fair bit of the Arabic language. Of course we did not let it on and listened intently on what was being said. ‘We have here a few prisoners who require shelter until they get picked up again. Take care of feeding them. Probably tonight someone will be here to pick them up and take them to the border.’ The old man nodded and said he would take care of it.

We were allowed to sit down, got tea and Arabic pastries. The rebels who had taken us here disappeared and the old man called someone. It was a boy of about twelve years old and he got told to take us to the ‘hiding place’. We went outside and followed the boy to a field of alfalfa grass. In the middle he stopped, looked cautiously around and bent down to remove a large flat stone that was laying there as if it was just there by chance. The stone covered a large opening of a hole in the ground. ‘Crawl in here’ he said in French. ‘Maybe I will bring later some more food and something to drink. In any case you are safe here, once you are inside I will put the stone back on. Remember, you can only open it in case of an emergency. I will see you later!’

We crawled in the hole and after we were all in, the cover stone was put back on. It was pitch

black, but we found some candles in a corner which we lit, we looked like ghosts.

‘This is one way to learn how they hide themselves’ said München, one more reason for them never to let us go. I guess we have to take their word for it that they will take us to Morocco and Spain and hope that they do’

Karl-Heinz and I agreed. It was a strange feeling to learn how the enemy operated.

An hour later the boy came with a couple of bottles of fresh water and *galettes* with onions and dates. Galettes are flat unsalted pancakes made of maize or buck-wheat flour, but it tasted good to us and after we fell in a deep sleep.

At night the boy came to get us and we were taken to the *mechta** were we had arrived this morning. We got a full meal of chicken, rice and a to us an unknown vegetable, but it was tasty.

*A small Arab home(s) in rural villages.

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A few guys came in who brought us footwear made of car tires and woven rope.

‘Put these on,’ said the man who was apparently the leader of the group. ‘You will be able to march easier than with your jump boots and not tire as quickly.’ After a cup of coffee we left. Again we marched in a northerly direction and I could swear that we were in the area of Tlemchen. Again we marched the whole night and after that we were put again in a hole in the ground.

We moved in this way for several days from one *mechta* to another. I got the impression that we were marching in circles. That turned out to be that way because our escorts were waiting for a heavily armed rebel escort to take us to the border, but they did not show up.

One day we went with the six of us into a *mechta*, together with our escorts. Inside were a few freedom-fighters who did jump immediately to attention. I asked why they did that and was told that every soldier of the freedom army had to show respect to every legionnaire they met because they were ‘the real soldiers’. We had to shake hands with everyone and everyone smiled.

Once in a while we had to pose for pictures with the rebels while holding the weapons of the rebels, to suggest that we were part of their group.

A few days after our capture we got a letter of freedom, it was written in French and Arabic.

If we got separated from the group, we could go to any *mechta* on our way. In it was the message that they had to help us because we were no longer part of the French Foreign Legion and that we had decided for ourselves to go home. Of course that was not true at all, but there were enough hotheads among the rebels who would otherwise make a short shrift from a few lost legionnaires.

Another time the occupants of a *mechta* asked München what we liked to eat, he replied that chicken would be nice and gave the owner two hundred francs. Three days later we were overtaken by a rebel officer on horseback. ‘Did any of you order food in the *mechta* over there? Yes? Here is your money back. Our people have been told to provide food and drink, but we do not want you to pay for that.’ With that the man left.

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Through this experience we learned that every Algerian was a rebel. They were all of one mind and stuck together. In their mind, those who as *Harki*’s had taken up military service with the

French were probably children of the higher class of Algerians or people who hoped that it would be to their advantage in the long run. Who knows, maybe they were promised that they could settle in France in the event that the war turned out bad for the French.

On the thirtieth day of our capture, we were in an *oued* in the area of Marina which was apparently a gathering place for all deserters and prisoners like us. We were now with a total of 140 men. Most of them were conscripts of Algerian descent called up for duty, but who refused to serve in the French army and tried to get to Morocco to get their military training there and to join the F.L.N.

A few young men discussed the idea to go on their own to cross the border and soon we heard that they had gone.

In our group were also a few guys who were sought for sabotage in some of the larger Algerian cities. One of them was a certain former garage owner from Tlemcen by the name of Mohammed Boucli, he had to use a donkey to get around because he had been shot in right leg with a sub-machine gun and he could not walk properly anymore. The bullets had not been removed and caused a constant sharp pain. I associated often with him and he taught me to read and write in Arabic.

The *oued* in which we were hiding ran from east to west and had fairly steep banks. Euren had also made friends with a few Arabs and stayed often with them in a hut on the north bank of the *oued*. Fresh food supplies were regularly delivered by the local population of this isolated area, so there was always enough to eat and drink.

The same night the young men who had gone to cross the border had come back, they had gotten hopelessly lost. 'Tomorrow night there will be an armed escort to pick us up,' said the spokesman for the group. 'Let's exercise some patience and wait.'

Indeed, the next morning an armed escort showed up, consisting of... a young boy of about fifteen years old armed with hunting rifle from the time of Napoleon!

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I looked at my mates and shrugged my shoulders. The man in charge gathered everyone together and explained that the young man knew the way very well and would take us in a few hours safely across the border.

A few hours later the entire group of 140 men left the hiding place in utmost quietness and moved in a westerly direction right across the *zone interdite*, which we as Legionnaires were very familiar with.

We moved up a hill in a south-west direction and then we came between two mountain slopes on a broad sand road that went from east to west. In the distance at the left we saw the light of a French army post. From this spot on, there used to be a strip of eight kilometers wide that ran up to the Moroccan border which we called the "burned zone". All vegetation had been completely burned off in this area. Every soldier was allowed to shoot anyone who ventured in this area; only military personnel were allowed to be in there. In the meantime, some plants and trees had started to grow again. We had covered one kilometer on the sand road when the young escort told us that there was no need to be quiet anymore and it was safe to talk. Everybody started to talk, we sounded like a bunch of clucking chickens.

Left of the road we were on was a fairly wide stream that made a sharp turn the right and cut across the road, we had to wade through it and follow the road at the other side that went in a

south-north direction.

Walking beside the donkey of Mohammed Boucli, I traversed the stream and reached the other side when suddenly search lights came on, flares were shot in the air and heavy machine guns opened fire.

The rebels stormed in panic into every direction. Boucli's donkey ran off and I dropped quickly into the river that I just had crossed. I lifted my head out of the water just high enough to hear when the sound of the flare had stopped. That did not take long, the hiss of the flare died off and I got up and broke into a run. Right in front of me I saw the form of Boucli; I guessed more than I saw, because the poor guy was on his knees waving his arms. I grabbed him under the arms and lifted him off the ground and as quickly I could, I dragged my Arab comrade away from the danger zone. After fifteen minutes I decided to cross the river again and hide there until the next morning. I struggled with Boucli through the shallow river and looked for a hiding place under some bushes that had started to grow leaves again after being burned down. Tired we fell asleep.

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At daybreak we were awoken by the sound of engines and we looked around, on the other side of the road that we had followed the day before, drove several trucks and jeeps toward the French Post we had seen that day. Quickly I got rid of the freedom letter and the pictures I was on with the rebels and buried them under the bush and waited, but for now there was not one soldier who dared to take a look at this side.

'It is clear that they are going to comb the whole area,' I told Boucli. 'I wonder if they also will come over to this side.'

'Let's hope not' replied the garage owner. It was my hope as well because I would be shot on the spot if they caught me in this rebel attire. I looked from top to bottom like a rebel except for my skin color. However, there were rebels with the same skin color who hailed from the Kabylie mountains and they were indistinguishable from Europeans.

That day none of the soldiers dared to comb this side of the river. They drove back and forth, but probably did not want to get their feet wet.

It became evening and night; I decided go return to the oued we had left before. I looked for the bush where I had buried the letter and photos and put them back in my pocket. Again I struggled with Boucli across the river and with caution I followed the way back we had come. At the point where the road made a sharp turn to the right, in the direction of the French post, we had no choice but to climb the mountain slope on the left side. By morning we were near the top and decided not to go any farther in case there were sentinels atop. The morning twilight made way for full daylight and we nearly died of thirst. There was a small trickle of water from the mountain going down and Boucli proposed go up and to have a look at the water well. 'Let me go first to make sure it is safe,' I replied. 'Maybe there are French soldiers and it is easier for me to retreat alone than both of us together. If I am not back in a half hour, then you know that there is something wrong, OK?'

Boucli nodded and I went carefully up. When I came to the water well, I saw to my surprise a girl of about eight years old.

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I scared the girl too, but I made it quickly clear that she had to get help for Boucli. She understood me right away and went to get help.

I went down to where Boucli was and helped Boucli up the mountain slope as best I could.

We just arrived at the water well when the girl returned accompanied with a man. There followed an animated discussion between Boucli and the man, from which I understood that several fleeing rebels had passed here, but also French soldiers looking for them.

They had left the man and the girl alone because they knew they had been living here already for a while in a nomad tent.

After drinking some of the fresh clear water from the well, the man took us to the other side of the mountain where a donkey was waiting. With Boucli on the back of this beast of burden, we went on to the tent of the nomads.

Here we could rest and got something to eat. After an hour or two, the man took us back to the *oued* where we were before, which had to be close by. While walking through the high alfalfa grass, suddenly a *Mouchard* appeared and flew several circles above us. It left as soon it had come, but I knew that he would report seeing us.

Without any problems we reached the *oued* where we were welcomed by the rest of our group, among them Euren and Merl who had managed to escape the murderous machine gun fire of the night before.

Boucli spoke of the courage that I had displayed by picking him up and staying with him while his countrymen had left him to his own devices while fleeing for their lives, but that was the least of my worries.

I knew that the French were aware of our hiding place and it would not be long before they would undertake actions to get us. The *Mouchard* had in the meantime made some more passes, but the majority wanted to stay put until the next day to see what would happen.

‘If you guys decide to wait, then we will stay as well, but be aware that the French will come at the latest tomorrow morning to comb the area.’

I was sure that there were already some units laying in wait on the northerly hill and had regularly contact with the spotter plane.

It became dark and I went with the other legionnaires to the hut on the northern slope, where we fell from tiredness asleep.

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The next morning we were rudely awoken by the yelling of soldiers, exploding mortar grenades and the noise of fighter planes. A few of the rebels who were with us raced outside and down the slope, followed on their heels by Euren. ‘Quick, hide your papers guys!’ I yelled, realizing that if we had them on us when taken prisoner, that we would be seen for sure as deserters.

I buried them under a large flat rock and the rest followed my example. Seconds later we heard a voice a few meters from the hut calling: ‘*hey legionnaire, kommt ihr mal raus, wir wissen dass ihr da sind!*’*

Merl wanted to run outside right away, but I stopped him. ‘Don’t run outside boy, they will shoot you on sight!’ The boy replied: ‘Aren’t they Germans? They won’t do anything to us.’ ‘That is what you think,’ I whispered, ‘They think that you have fought with the rebels against the French army. Or did you forget what kind of clothes you have on? Where did your friend run to?’ ‘I have no idea; he told me that one of the rebels knew a hiding place where they could go.’

In the mean time I saw through the cracks in the walls of the hut that the soldiers who had called us in German had gone in the *oued* chasing the rebels.

The minute the mortar grenades exploded, most of the rebels had fled up the opposite slope where the machine guns had been set up; they were now mowed down like pins in a bowling alley.

For a short time it was quiet. Again it was Merle who wanted to go outside and again I kept him from going. 'Where are you going boy?' 'Outside, you can see that they are gone.' I shook my head. 'Boy oh boy, that was the right flank. They are now going after the rebels who jump up like you and chase them; they think the same way you do. Then the left flank will come down and the game is over. They have us in pincers, don't you get it? Not even a mouse will be able to get through.' A few minutes later we saw through the cracks that the left flank had come down. They were soldiers of the regular French army. One soldier threw something on the roof of the hut and we dove down on the ground, thinking that it was a hand grenade.

*Hey Legionnaire, get outside, we know that you are in there!

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Lucky for us it was only a rock. A few seconds later a soldier came and opened the door. When he saw us he took a step back and screamed '*Venez ici, au secours, il ya des felouses ici!*'* While he stepped back he tried to load his rifle, a lieutenant showed up and almost knocked the soldier down. 'Idiot, can't you see these are legionnaires?' He yelled and to us, come out with your hands on your head!

We had no choice but to obey and with our hands on our head we walked up the north slope of the hill. Along the way we met some rebels who had their ears and nose cut off because they had refused to walk any farther. The culprits of this sadistic deed were from a unit comprised of Vietnamese and Senegalese. In the background I heard Boucli calling: 'Allah Akbar, Allah Akbar!'

A soldier said to his superior; 'there is one over there who refuses to walk, what you want me to do?' 'Check his identity papers and then knock him off.' The soldier went and a little later we heard several salvos of his sub machine gun and he returned excited. 'Mon lieutenant, look what I found on the guy!' He gave the lieutenant Boucli's billfold and papers. He looked at them and turned mad to the soldier, 'Idiot! This was a prominent saboteur; you should not have killed this one! You even spend too many bullets on him! Get out of my sight you idiot!'

A dozen or so meters from the top of the mountain we stopped and we had to sit down. Two *gendarmes* came fifteen minutes later. 'What are your names and from which regiment are you?' 'We are prisoners of war and...' I started, but one of the *gendarmes* interrupted me. 'Shut up, we don't like deserters!' 'We are not deserters,' I tried again, but the *gendarme* aimed his pistol at my chest, thus I stayed quiet. The other *gendarme* came closer with a note book in his hand. 'OK, name, number and regiment,' he asked Merle who gave it to him right away. The man went down the row and when he came to me, I looked at him straight in the eyes and said: Sergeant Malicien, 3rd platoon, 3rd company, 2nd Regiment Etranger de Parachutistes

*Come here, help there are felouses (a derogatory name for rebels) here!

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from Philippeville, *en mission de guerre*, number 107.954. *Je proteste!*'

The man looked disinterested at me and shrugged his shoulders and walked to München, Karl-Heinz and Van Verderen, who said the same thing. It looked like the *gendarme* was incapable to think for himself because he did not react. A commandant came and told us to stand up straight. From the corner of my eye I saw a dozen Vietnamese take place a few steps in front of us and take the safety off, of their sub machine guns. The commandant asked the *gendarmes* if they had all the information and when they nodded affirmative, he made a step sideways to give the order to fire. Before he could open his mouth, a colonel came and yelled; '*Ohe, ohe, arrêtez-la! ne tuez pas les légionnaires qu'ils sont cherchés!*' Merl understood enough French to understand what the colonel had said and passed out. Van Verderen, München, Karl-Heinz and I looked at each other and let out a sigh of relief. That was in the nick of time!

The Vietnamese put the safety back on their weapons and slinked away. Under guard we went farther up the hill and not long after that, a Sikorsky landed to take us to Tlemcen.

Because it was known that the 5th REI never took back deserters alive, we were temporarily taken to the *gendarmerie*. We were allowed to wash up and the wife of the commandant gave us a good meal.

'Madam, would you mind asking your husband if I could have a talk with him? There is a lot hanging in the balance for us, particularly since we heard that we have to go with the 5th REI into the mountains tomorrow.

The woman promised to give her husband the message and before three o'clock I was taken to the commandant. 'It is not allowed here that we talk with you, but as long nobody can see or are aware of our talk....' started the man.

'I know that *mon commandant*, but I have for nearly five years looked dead in the eye on a daily basis and I like it to be known how everything was.' The man listened intently to my story and said at the end: 'the only thing I can do is to notify the commandant of the 5th REI and relate your story, he will have to let your unit know because I am not authorised to do that.' 'What a load of crap I thought to myself, how hard can it be to make a phone call to my regiment? Then we would be out of this predicament and would be treated differently.

*Hey wait, don't kill those legionnaires, they are being sought!

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Back outside, I let my comrades know what was going on and added: 'Let's hope that the commandant of the 5th REI believes him, or else it won't look too good for us. I have heard strange things about the 5th REI.'

München and Karl-Heinz had heard similar tales, but for now there was nothing we could do about it. We had to sleep in cells, but on orders of the commandant we were given mattresses, sheets and blankets.

The next morning we were woken before dawn by a *gendarme*, who took us across the street where the base of the 5th REI was located. We were locked up in a bare cell and stayed there for about an hour and then we were rudely taken out of the cell and pushed in a truck.

'Watch out will you! We are not deserters we were taken prisoner by the rebels!' I said angrily. It almost resulted in a fist in the face from a Legionnaire, but my angry look stopped him from doing it. The truck started to move, there were four young Arabs with us who trembled with fear. I knew

that they faced a certain death. The trucks drove fast through the mountains and suddenly stopped. Everybody had to get out and the Arabs had to carry the SCR-300 radios to the top on a broad rock peak. There they set up a large binocular and we had to tell them exactly where we had stayed. Van Verderen tried to localize the place, but München and I said that we had only moved in the night and did not recognise anything. The officers were incensed, that they could not get any information. Finally they ordered München, Karl-Heinz and Van Verderen to take the radios from the Arabs and go back down to the waiting trucks. I had to go along, while the young Algerians stayed behind with some unsavoury looking legionnaires. We had barely reached the trucks when we heard a few salvos of sub-machine guns. As quick we had come, we returned to the town to be transported the same day to Sidi-Bel-Abbes. During the whole trip nobody said anything to us and neither were we allowed to talk.

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We drove into quartier Vienot and stopped in front of a green gate, one that I knew well from five years ago. On the run we went to the office of the sergeant-chef who came out soon and called; 'shoes and socks off! Quick! Quarter turn left...left! Run...*en avant... Marché!*'

I knew it was the drill for deserters. Drop, run, crawl, drop run, crawl; it all belonged to the routine. After an hour we had to step up to the office and I was called inside.

'I remember you from a long time ago.' 'Right sergeant-chef, it was in Marseille when I took a run for it, now almost five years ago. However, this time we did not desert, we were taken prisoner by the rebels, you have to believe me.' 'I do, but first you have to be interrogated by the Deuxième Bureau. In the mean time I will ease off the harsh treatment, but may God have mercy on you if you lied to me, dismissed!' After they had shaved our heads bald we were returned to our cells, but this time in isolation. At least we were lucky to get regular food and a blanket because the nights could be very cold in Sidi-Bel-Abbes.

Early the next morning I was taken out of my cell and brought straight to the Deuxième Bureau in the Petit Quartier. There sat like on a throne, a fat adjutant behind a desk. I noticed right away that he was a German, because he fired right off with; 'tell me man, why did you desert the Legion? Didn't you like it here?' 'We did not desert, but were taken prisoner by the rebels *mon adjutant* I repeated. 'Call our regiment and then you will find out that I speak the truth.

The man took a stick from behind his back, not just any stick; it looked like a club with on the end the heads of nails sticking out. 'You know,' he started, 'where the saying a *une tête carrée** comes from?' Without further ado the fat blob started to beat me on all sides of the head. I lifted my arms to ward off the blows, but then felt a sharp kick in the back. I had not noticed that a few legionnaires had entered to give the adjutant a hand. Within moments blood streamed down my face, but that did not stop the kraut from going on with the beating.

*A square head.

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The beating lasted about a half hour and I was nearly unconscious when the man snarled at me: 'You can now go back to your cell and come back tomorrow to confess. If you don't, then I have a few other surprises for you. Here at the Deuxième Bureau we are very inventive on how to elicit confessions and confess you will, dismissed!'

The Legionnaire, who had to take me back to Vienot, set off on a run so that I was still on the one side of the street when he was already across. Two passing girls grabbed each one of my arms and helped me across the street and called the legionnaire: 'hey, does this guy belong with you? Then take him with you!' With a red face he came back and stayed with me until we were back at the

Locaux Disciplinaire. The sergeant-chef whistled between his teeth when he saw me coming in with my bloody head. ‘What the hell did they do to you? Didn’t you tell them what you have told me?’

‘Yes of course, but those guys from the Deuxième Bureau always think that they are right.’

‘Go wash your head with cold water and return to your cell.’

I washed my painful and dizzy head that was now twice the normal size. Back in my cell I got right away bread and coffee. It was clear that the sergeant chef knew in what kind of a wasp nest I had gotten into and commiserated with me. The next day the same thing happened, but this time I did not let out one peep. It went on like this for fourteen days, sometimes it was my head, sometimes they pushed me back and forth between them like a beach ball while hitting me on every spot they could. Another time I had to sit with my knees on angle iron from which the top was slightly rounded off. While sitting like that, my toes were placed higher on a stool so that my full weight was on my knees pressing them on the angle iron.

At the same time I had to sit close enough to the wall to keep a piece of cigarette paper between the wall and my nose. If the piece of paper fell on the floor, I would receive a blow to the head smacking my nose against the wall. Lucky enough that happened only once.

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The fifteenth day I was pushed in a hard-top car by the adjutant and two of his mates and taken to the Camisis. I knew the shooting range from before, I saw that two graves had been dug, the one was filled in and the other still open and they placed me in front of it. With making a show of it, the adjutant of the Deuxième Bureau pulled out his pistol, pulled back the breech and held the weapon against my temple of my head. ‘I am going to give you to the count of hundred to give you enough time to confess that you are deserters, if not, then this hole will be your grave. Speak up, what will it be?’ I looked at him with a despising look and hissed: you can ask me until you are blue in the face, but I am not a deserter. Go ahead, shoot you piece of shit.’

The adjutant was enraged, but did not make good on his treat and let me get back in the car.

On the sixteenth day my mates and I, which I had not seen or heard from all this time, were taken out of our cells and we had to line up with the regular prisoners who were incarcerated at the Locaux Disciplinaire.

The green gate swung open and a parade of officers came in with in between them one man on crutches and one on a litter. I almost yelled with excitement, where those the two that had gone missing on the day of our capture? I fervently hoped that it was the case.

The troupe walked past the lined up prisoners, the two wounded men recognised us and pointed us out to the officers. One by one they had to step out of the line-up; I was the last one they pointed out. After all five of us were identified as their brothers at arms at the Moroccan border and were placed in a half circle, the colonel ordered the other prisoners back to their cell and said: ‘To start with, I offer my apologies on behalf of the legion for the mishandling you all have experienced. However, you know as well as I do that there are many deserters who desert our ranks. I personally offer my apologies to you and will see to it that this injustice will be corrected. Ok?’ I made a step forward and said; *mon colonel*, it would have been a small effort on the part of the services we have dealt with to contact our own unit, then all this would not have occurred. Did you have a look at my head? Is this the thanks I get for nearly five years of service in the legion?

The man did not really seem know how to respond to that.

Another officer came to his aide: 'You are right sergeant Malicien, but what is done is done. The various services could have indeed contacted your regiment, but as a rule this is not done. From now on we will do our best to prevent situations like this and take quicker the word of our own people as the truth.

We were right away released from the Locaux Disciplinaire, but not before I said farewell to the sergeant-chef. I thanked him for his sympathy and shook his hand.

Later I heard that the two wounded men who had recognized us were found by the French army. The helicopter pilots had after a long time waiting finally realized that something was wrong and notified their superiors, who in turn had notified another French unit. They had sent a part of their regiment to the mountain where they found the two wounded men and taken them to the hospital in Tlemcen.

The whole affair had been swept under the rug and not a word about it had been disclosed about the terrible experience of the 2nd platoon of the 2nd REP.

After getting dressed in my brand new uniform, that I on orders of the colonel himself was allowed to pick out from the magazine and pinning my medals and badges on my uniform, I went to the Petit Quartier directly to the offices of the Deuxième Bureau.

The fat adjutant sat behind his desk and beside him where a couple of his colleagues. He looked up in total surprise when I stepped in his office. They did not know yet what had transpired.

I placed myself in the middle of the room and snarled: 'look who we got here! All the sadists of the Legion in one pile! No wonder if you are led by someone of the ex Nazi regime and know all the dirty tricks to make someone talk. I won't waste any more words on any riffraff like you, but know that if I ever see you anywhere that it won't be the best day of your life!'

I turned abruptly to the four legionnaires who were leaning against the wall like bags of potatoes: 'Jump to attention when I speak to you goddamned!' Which they did instantly looking scared at their boss, but he was too flabbergasted to open his trap. 'Oh yes, and if we ever go again to the Camisis adjutant, I will make sure that it will be you standing in front of the hole. You can be sure that my pistol will be loaded and that I shall not hesitate to pull the trigger!'

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With one step I was outside again. I felt completely relieved. For a week in the C.P. 1 we were able to recuperate from the hardships we had endured the last few weeks and then left for Philippeville, where everybody knew about the chain of events. We were received in camp Péhau with loud cheering. The event was now past forever, but I had a new perception about the rebels and the French Foreign Legion. I would have never thought that the Legion would treat me so shamefully.

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Chapter 13

November 1958-May 1959

Lead in the shoes

Jean and Etienne had been promoted in the meantime. They really felt for me because of the terrible events that had befallen me. 'How was it possible that those idiots did not take the trouble

to call? That defies all logic!' said Jean.

'There is nothing more I can do about it.' I replied with resignation. 'Let's forget everything as soon as possible; the girls are waiting to celebrate your promotion. Come on, put on a happy face guys!' We went into town and had a good time with our girl friends. It was toward morning when we got back, but that did not matter because the next day was Saturday and we had the day off.

There was a general alarm a week after my return and the troops of the 2nd and 3rd company were transported by truck to the airport. Quickly the parachutes were handed out and in less than a half hour we were in the air flying in the direction of Kabylïë, to the north of Algeria.

Again a large group of rebels had been spotted that had come from Tunisia with a lot of weapons and ammunition; it became a regular routine for them to cross the border.

This would probably be one of the last operations for Jean, Etienne and me. We had only about four months of service left to do. After that we would be *libérales* and could after five years, come and go whenever and wherever we wanted.

The transport plane, a Nord Atlas, circled around the drop zone and soon the green light came on indicating that we could jump.

Without any hesitation stick after stick jumped out. Etienne was below me and Jean was just above me. We stayed always together when we had to jump, this way we could look out for each other.

As always, we had plenty of ammunition and hand grenades which were attached to the breast pockets of our vests and easy to reach in time need.

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We had our weapons ready to fire because the sound of heavy fighting came up from the ground. The closer we came to the ground, the louder the sound of blasting weapons, it sounded like hundreds of rifles, but we could still not detect any rebels.

On the ground grew some thorn bushes and here and there some tufts of alfalfa grass.

Everywhere there were large rocks spread out, that you would make you think that you where on the moon. A gust of wind made us veer off course a bit and suddenly I saw two rebels aiming a machine gun to the sky. A salvo echoed in the air, I yanked on my right control line to escape the bullets, I was missed the by a fraction of a second, but above me a heard a muffled oath. I looked up and saw Jean holding his stomach with both hands. Now I swore as well, while I looked for Etienne below me. He had it noticed as well, and was yanking on his rigging like mad. Without thinking I took two hand grenades from my vest, pulled the pins and threw them in the direction of the rebels. They fell right between the two guys. Seconds later I heard the loud explosions, the grenades had destroyed everything in a radius of three meters and the rebels were thrown about by the blast. A few moments after that I hit the ground and landed beside Etienne and together we caught the serious injured Jean in our arms. We laid him gingerly down and notified the *Poste de commande*.

We got told that a medic was on the way, but that was not necessary anymore, Jean died in our arms without regaining consciousness. For a long time we sat stupefied looking at our comrade, hardly believing that he was dead, neither of us could utter a word.

During the few minutes that Etienne and I sat together there, we were only thinking of the true and honest deeds of our comrade and the good times we had together. That was all wiped out in one fell swoop by the bullets of two rebels. At this moment I wished that I was somewhere else, miles away from this place. Etienne let the tears flow freely.

In the meantime a medic had arrived; he closed the eyes of Jean and left us for a while alone with our sorrow without saying a word.

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The sound of low flying helicopters brought us back to reality and we got ourselves together when another section came storming over the top of the hill. Screaming and firing they went in the direction of the dead rebels, but there was nothing more to see there.

A few dozen meters behind them followed the dependable Lieutenant Chevreau. 'Etienne, Lucky come, there is nothing more we can do here. It is time to avenge your friend.' It was not an order, Chevreau knew Jean for a long time too and knew how we hung together.

Etienne and I left Jean in the hands of the medic. We picked up our weapons and followed the section, but without haste. At the foot of the hill were the other men of Chevreau looking at something. We looked in the same direction and saw what the others had already noticed; up the slope from the hill across from us was a unit from our company going steady up the slope, but on this side a thirty meters or so from us were rebels in the process of setting up a heavy machine gun to fire on our guys. At that moment Chevreau saw us and motioned us.

Etienne shook his head and pointed to the other side. Chevreau knew right away what he meant and notified his men. This happened like a flash. Etienne and I started to go down the steep hill until we were less than a stone throw from the fellaghas back who were ready to pull the trigger of their machine gun; we opened fire killing them all.

On the other side our men had also noticed the danger and had gone for cover. We left Chevreau and his men and went on.

Coming into a small dale, there were sign of heavy fighting, everywhere were weapons, pieces of weapons and many corpses, all Arabs. Among them even a few children. We sat down on an empty ammunition crate and lit a cigarette. After a few drags, Etienne said; 'what the hell are we doing here Lucky? I wish that I had never ended up here and had stayed home!' We felt empty and despondent.

If there had been a rebel, he could have shot us, without us realizing it. We did not even have the strength anymore to lift our weapons.

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Suddenly we heard a sound behind us. We turned around and looked in the barrel of a large calibre pistol. It was in the hands of a young woman. We looked at her with disinterest, if she was going to shoot it would be over for us, but she did not. With an unsure and restless look she looked at the bodies at her feet. Then she let the pistol slip from her hands and collapsed on the ground.

Etienne and I came to, out of our apathy and bend over her. At first look she was not wounded, but she had lost consciousness. We picked her up and took her to a hollow in the hill side. It wasn't big, but it was hidden from sight by a large rock so that she was hidden from friend and foe.

Etienne tried to get her to drink something out of his field bottle and she managed a few sips. The Algerian woman looked at us, but did not say anything and lowered her eyes. Neither one of us felt that there was a need to kill her, even if she was the enemy.

For a while we sat without saying anything. Suddenly Etienne said: 'she can't stay here, if the

others find her then she is a goner. How do we get her away from here?’

‘The question is if she even wants to get away from here.’ I said quietly, what goes on in her mind? Maybe one of those dead is her husband, a brother or another family member? Jean was not family from us, but you know how we felt. I don’t know either how we can get her away from here.’ We sat for quite a while in complete quietness. In the distance we heard uninterrupted salvos, sowing more dead and decay. ‘I said,’ after a pause, ‘I think it is best to wait here until the night, by that time the operation might be called off and then she can try to slip away. I am sure she knows the area better than we do.’ We informed the woman of our plan and in fluent French she thanked us. Clearly, she was not a woman from a rural area, but probably from a large city. ‘There is one thing I do not understand,’ she added to her thanks. ‘You are Legionnaires, why spare my life?’ ‘Because of the actions of your friends, we just lost our best friend. We were like brothers and we realize just now that we are wasting our time here and take a chance to lose our life for something that is none of our business. Of course we could kill you and some more of your friends, but we won’t get our friend back with that right?’

The woman nodded silently and said: ‘I shall indeed hide here for the night.’

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If they do find me, that would be too bad, but I shall not forget you.’

Did we handle this correctly, or not? In any case, it was so that from that day on we could not shoot at the enemy anymore. Because of the events over the last months, we had gotten to know the rebels better and realize that these people fought for a just cause. The French would rebut that with: ‘look what we have done for the Algerians! Build roads, schools, homes created a thriving agriculture, what is wrong with them?’ What they do not say is; that the roads were mostly useful for the French because most Algerians could not afford a car, they could not live in those homes either because they were occupied by the French and the *Pied Noirs*, and work? Yeah, for peanuts and a few kicks in the arse.

One day Miara made me aware that I had still a lot of holidays coming to me and indeed I did. During the more than four years I had not taken any vacation days even though we were entitled to vacation days. Miara had overheard some other legionnaires making vacation plans and that gave her the idea to convince me to take mine, particularly since my service contract with the Legion was nearly finished.

Etienne and his girlfriend went along and together we left by train for Algiers. Our plan was to spend a large part of our time on the beach and in between to visit other attractions in the town. Normally legionnaires who went on vacation could get lodgement in one of the army bases, but because of our lady companions we decided on a room in a hotel. We went regularly to the *Popote* in one of the neighbouring bases because we did not want to waste money senselessly.

One evening Miara did ask: ‘what would you say to staying here with me Lucky? I can work here and you won’t have to do anything.’ ‘That sounds very nice,’ I agreed, ‘but if I stay here before my service time is finished, then I will be a deserter. Just imagine when we are laying on the beach and a few legionnaires walk by who happen to know me? They would not say anything, but would go back to the base and come back with a sub-machine gun and kill me. I am not willing to take that risk, not even for ten beautiful Miara’s.’ She understood my point of view and we did not talk about that again.

During one week, Etienne and I were sauntering through the Casbah, while the girls were shopping for some clothes. From nowhere some Arabs came, grabbed us and took us through a maze of very small alley ways to the underground city. Every legionnaire had heard about it, but no one knew how to find it. We landed in a large room that was set up like a court of justice. On one side of the room was a long table set up and at the other end where a few benches. At the table were three men and a woman seated. When we got closer, the woman smiled at us and asked; 'don't you recognize me? It hasn't been that long ago since we met...' She looked from Etienne to me and back. 'You let me go after you had taken me prisoner over there in the mountains, you remember?' Despite that the woman wore men's clothing, something started to come back to me. 'Because you spared my life then, I shall do the same for you. It is against our rules, so I have you blindfolded and have you taken out of the Casbah.' Nothing more was added, we were blindfolded and in no time were led out of the Casbah. Except for our girl friends, we told no one about this.

We had crept through the eye of the needle so to speak.

Just during that period three French soldiers who had gone up town on furlough, had been killed by the rebels. There were protest rallies in all of Algeria about this event. A few days later general de Gaulle came to Algeria.

A week later our vacation was over and we returned to Philippeville. Etienne and I had gotten over the sorrow of the loss of our friend.

We returned to our unit, but did not say a word about our experience in the Casbah from Algiers.

When we came in our room, there was a guy sitting on the bed that had been Jean's.

Etienne and I wanted to rip him off the bed, but Ostokan stopped us with; 'come on guys, you know that Jean was also my friend, this man can't help it that our friend died. How harsh it may sound, this bed is now free.'

Ostokan was right. The new-comer was a German master corporal, who listened to the name of Metzger. Etienne and I felt right away that he was a "no-good", but we kept that to ourselves and decided not to get involved with him.

In any case, he took up more with Ostokan anyway, who had become a corporal in the mean time. At the burial of Jean, we did have still a hard time, but the worst of our sorrow was weaning away.

Whenever Etienne and I took part in operations, it happened more and more that we shot over the heads of fellaghas or in another direction. After a while Metzger seemed to have gotten a whiff of that and had decided to keep a close eye on us. Lucky for us, he had talked about it with a friend of ours and he informed us about it.

'We better watch out', said Etienne, 'or else we will be facing court martial.' Of course he was right about that.

One night the whole company was woken up and we had in record speed to assemble on the inner court yard. From the base we went by truck to the airport and from there with helicopters in a southerly direction. Everybody had the notion that we were near the Tunisian border, but no one

knew what exactly what was happening or where we were.

We did know that rebels were getting military training in various places of Tunisia and Morocco. The general staff in Algiers had learned the names and places of some of these locations and had decided to teach them a lesson because neither Tunisia or Morocco were willing to do anything about it, despite repeated requests from the French government.

Of course the general staff could not openly use French military personnel for something like this and the decision was made to send a 'unit of fellaghas'. For that reason the helicopters landed a few kilometers from the border and we had to don rebel uniforms. Also all fire arms and identity papers were to be left behind. The only thing we could take were knives, daggers cigarettes and a lighter. From the upper command came the order to turn off the electricity to several hundred meters of the electrified barbed wire so that we could cross the border safely. Every platoon had gotten the coordinates and individual orders as to what they were expected to do. My section was responsible for the defence; we had to lay a cordon around the place that was going to be attacked to make sure that it was impossible for anyone to escape.

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The order was to kill without mercy everyone who tried to escape, without exceptions.

As said before, no fire arms were to be used, it was plain slaughter, and no one had a chance to escape, not a sound or scream was heard. The whole operation lasted three hours, after that all troops returned to the forward post across the border and changed back to their own uniforms. They then raced back to the airplanes.

We got only a few hours rest because shortly after, we had to go to the area of Laghouat. There was a geological expedition that had been attacked by a group of rebels. All troops were engaged to find the insurgents, but after a few hours it turned out to be a fruitless task. The commander ordered the complete company to get in one line abreast and comb out the area.

The legionnaires with rifles had to attach their bayonets and probe the ground. Every now and then a shot resounded and every shot killed a legionnaire, we could not figure out where the shots came from.

Lieutenant Chevreau made a target of a dead legionnaire to see where the shots came from, but right away there was another shot and another legionnaire fell dead.

Late in the afternoon the commandant decided to call off the search, he had already lost too many men without finding even one rebel.

By the time we returned to the base, the news papers were full of the slaughter that had occurred in the villages across the Tunisian border. The result was that the Tunisian government had long dialogues with the rebels and their training camps were taken out from Tunisia. The strategy of the general staff had produced the wanted results.

Morocco, who had recently become independent, took heed and decided to have a "scorched earth zone" where Moroccan soldiers would shoot anyone who ventured in that zone, before the French could undertake a punishment expedition against them. This way the Moroccan government was one step ahead of the French government.

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Chapter 14

Operation Edough

The 3rd company got a replacement commandant by the name of Garry, because commandant Themar was with vacation at the time we were on operations in the area of Constantine. Etienne and I were assigned to the *poste de commande*; there we were responsible for the communication. At least that was the designation, but in truth we coordinated the whole operation. In the heat of the battle master corporal Metzger came with a woman prisoner by whom he had found a pistol. The short heavysset commandant Garry got right away the officers and NCO's together. The officers at the left and the NCO's on the right side. Like a peacock he strutted in between them, while continually hitting his thigh with his swagger stick. 'I need a volunteer to interrogate this rebel woman,' he called out, while squinting his little pig eyes. Together with another German, Metzger had already hung the woman by the wrists, naked and with her legs tied spread eagled a few centimetres above the ground. Suddenly Gary stood still, turned to the NCO's and pointed at me with his stick. 'You there, let's see what you are made of, you do the interrogation.' I shook my head, 'I am not going to do that commandant, I am not authorized to do such a thing.' Garry got red up to his neck with rage. He made a step in my direction, while he changed his stick to his left hand and with his right hand he opened the holster of his pistol. Before he could make another step some of the officers approached him and whispered something in his ear. Like hit by lightning, Garry stopped and closed his holster and screamed; 'take this guy away! He is under arrest for refusing an order in time of war!' *Allez, emmenez-moi ça, nom de Dieu!* The officers had whispered to him that 'sergeant Malicien was nominated for the Légion d'Honneur', the highest medal awarded for gallantry in the French army, approved by the French president himself.

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They had added; 'If you kill Malicien, you would be summoned to Paris to explain why you killed a nominee for the Légion d'Honneur, *mon commandant*.' This explained the strange reaction of Garry.

At this time I was not aware of this memorable news because lieutenant Chevreau was going to tell me at the end of the operation. Two officers came up to me and said: 'Let him rant on, Malicien. We don't know him too well yet, but it probably won't be too bad once he has calmed down.' Because Chevreau wasn't present, I was handed over to a couple of NCO's who took me to prison in a jeep to Constantine. The next day I was transported to Philippeville. In the prison there I was not allowed to get any visitors. After three days I was taken by the military police to Algiers to wait for my day in court by the Tribunal Militaire. I was not to have any contact with anyone or even allowed to write letters.

A week later I was visited by a lieutenant-lawyer. 'When can I go back to my own unit lieutenant?' Was the first question I asked. The man looked doubtful and replied; 'I am afraid that is not going to be easy sergeant Malicien. Tell me first about all that did happen.' I told him in detail what had occurred.

'Didn't you know you were nominated for the Légion d'Honneur? And didn't any of the officers know that Garry is a member of the Deuxième Bureau and thus has the right to ask an intermediary to interrogate a suspect? Apparently you were the intermediary of his choice.'

I replied negative. The lieutenant whistled between his teeth. 'We will see what we can do, but I do not promise anything.'

'What is the normal sentence for insubordination, *mon lieutenant?*' The man looked at me in the eyes. 'Refusal to follow an order in time of war usually means the execution squad, my friend, but we are not that far yet. Besides, there are a lot of witnesses who can vouch that no one was aware of the special status of Garry.'

For two days I heard nothing from the lieutenant-lawyer. Then I was taken out of my cell and in another room I could put on my Parade uniform with all medals.

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Two men of the Military Police took me in a jeep to the building of the Tribunal Militaire. The lawyer was already there and said encouraging: 'it might not come to the execution squad. Just reply normal and clear to the questions they pose.'

'Sergeant Malicien, *matricule 107.954, c'est vous?*'* I replied affirmative and took place on the bench for suspects in front of the three judges.

'You understand that your misdeed always means a demotion sergeant?'

'*Oui mon Colonel,*' I replied with resignation.

An officer came and cut the golden stripes from my sleeves.

'Tell us exactly what happened that day Legionnaire.' I told my story clear and concise.

'Did you know that you risked facing the execution squad?'

'No *monsieur le president*, I did not think of that and I never did interrogate anyone, I was trained to fight and did not get any training to interrogate someone.'

The lieutenant nudged me in my side and said; 'don't say too much Malicien, let them pose the questions.' The judges conferred for a short while. Then the foreman spoke again, 'seeing that you have an excellent service record, we have decided not to impose the death sentence and to give you a chance on rehabilitation Malicien. How much longer do you have left on your service contract?'

'A few months more *monsieur le president.*' Again they conferred. 'We will give you the chance to rectify your mistake. You are allowed to return to your unit and finish your contract, what do you say to that?' 'I refuse *monsieur le president.*' A stirring went on among the spectators. The lawyer poked me in the back and hissed: 'idiot! Do you know what you are doing? If they send you to the execution squad, then there is nothing more I can do for you, *nom de Dieu!*' The men in togas needed now more time to confer. Finally the fore-man asked: 'And why would you not want to go back to your unit Malicien? Do you have a good reason for that?'

'Of course *monsieur le president*, all the years that I served in my unit, I had built up a certain reputation. I don't think I could handle it mentally to go back as a second class Legionnaire.'

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Everyone would make a fool out of me and laugh behind my back. That would be worse for me than facing the firing squad.'

Surprised but understanding the three judges looked at me, I thought that I detected a hint of respect in their eyes. This time their conference took less time. They stood up and ordered me to do the same. 'Here is the verdict that we have decided on: Legionnaire Malicien, number 107.945 because of the breaking of his contract, will be removed from the ranks of the French Foreign Legion. Furthermore, you will not be allowed on French soil for the next five years. Infraction of this decision will result in a prison sentence. This tribunal has decided, this court proceeding is now closed.'

Down, but relieved I let myself sink back on the bench. The lawyer did not have to say one word during the proceeding and he patted me on the shoulder. 'Maybe it is the best this way Malicien. It could have been far worse, I wish you the best.'

The military Police took me back to prison of the base. Three days later I was allowed to go without escort with the train to Sidi Bel Abbes to present myself to the A.S.G. of Quartier Vienot. He took me personally to the C.P.2 where I was given a bed. I could write letters and was even allowed to go in the town. The next day I received several thousand *francs* in back pay. From a bar in the town I telephoned the Bordel Militaire Controlée in Philippeville, trying to contact Miara, but she was not in. I gave the message to her girlfriends that Etienne would tell her the whole story, they promised to pass the message on to her.

Two days later I was taken to the service S.M.O.L.E., where I got a suit and a pair of shoes. They were not my taste, but I had little choice. Breakers of contracts and deserters were not particularly liked and could not "demand" anything. The fact that I had been highly decorated a sergeant made no difference.

The next day I was taken to Oran from where I would go with the troopship Pasteur to Marseille, Nearly five years after I left the *Provençale* town like a thief in the night.

The commandant in an office in Fort Saint-Nicolas gave me my service booklet and the rest of my back pay which was a very tidy sum.

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'Would you be interested to become a member of the "Yellow Hand", Malicien?'

'Maybe you would tell me first what the "Yellow Hand" is *mon commandant*.'

'We are an anti terrorist group which is very active in all of Europe, what do you think of that?'

'Look in the back of my service booklet, *mon commandant*.'

He leafed through the booklet, read the last page, nodded and gave the booklet back to me without saying a word. Once on the street, I took a deep breath. And that was it; I walked slowly to the train station, bought a one way ticket to Paris and stepped in the waiting train.

