



MEMORIES OF THE WAR
(Translated from André's account)

MEMORIES OF THE WAR

November 1944 at SAINT DIE

(THE EVACUATION – BURNING OF SAINT DIE – DESTRUCTION OF MY HOUSE)

I was 7 years old and I lived at 63, chemin de l'orme SAINT ROCH 88 SAINT DIE, with my mother and my 2 year-old brother.
My father had been deported to Germany, at MANHEIM

The American troops had taken position in the mountain of <la MADELEINE> which dominates St-Dié and regularly bombarded the German troops; our house was just across from this mountain, at approximately 4km.

Every night, we took refuge in the concrete basement of a house just 100 m away and returned to our house in the morning.

And one day, we were surprised to realize that during the night, the door had been broken and our house was invaded by German soldiers who had retreated from the front, tired, wounded, exhausted!!!!

My mother who wanted to go in was questioned rather violently by a German officer, in his briefs, who no doubt didn't appreciate being awakened at 8 o'clock in the morning. Fortunately, my mother spoke fluent German and succeeded at convincing him to gain entrance to recover a folder of personal papers, and some clothes for her children.

We, the two boys, had stayed outside and stared at the German military policemen who were shouting DRAUS DRAUS SCHNELL which was German for go, go, hurry! We called these men FELDGENDARM or dog collars because they wore around their neck, a chain with an engraved plaque feldgendarm.

My mother came out of the house and said that all the rooms were filled with soldiers who slept on the floor; she was certain that some were wounded because she heard groans.

So we left with a little baby carriage with my brother sitting in it, I walking next to it and eventually we found ourselves in an endless line of refugees that the Germans directed toward a secure zone on the left bank of the Meurthe.

Approximately two days later we understood why they were doing this when they ignited fire to the entire part of the city situated on the right bank of the river, after having blown all the bridges with dynamite.

I was just on the other side of the street that separated the fire zone and I could see the German soldiers run from house to house throwing inflamed torches. French civilian firefighters obtained the authority to protect the houses in which we had taken refuge by watering them down. It was forbidden to cross over the line between the marked zones of the city but unfortunately some refugees ignored this in order to salvage things from their houses before they burned down.

In retaliation and to set an example, the S.S. shot them and I saw their bodies dragged behind tanks on the street where I was taking refuge!!!!

The bishop of Saint Dié had secured a promise from the German Commandant that the religious buildings would be spared; however, the Cathedral was destroyed with only the two bell towers standing untouched.

Once the Americans had delivered the city and installed a metal bridge on the Meurthe, we were able to return to our house 3 km. away. Unfortunately, a terrible surprise was waiting for us, our house was

partially destroyed, its contents ransacked by the Germans. The back of the house was pulverized and the shelling came from the direction of the Madeleine where the Americans were stationed.

It is likely that the Americans saw with their binoculars that our house was full of soldiers and for them a choice target. It is most certain that there were many casualties because many coats full of blood were found in the rubble. There were many pieces of shells in the furniture. I saved two of those.

Our sympathetic neighbors took us in until we found lodging and in the days that followed we returned to our house to recover what we might. Among those items, I remember my mother taking a coat that a German, the one that looked the least damaged and after washing off the blood and pieces of flesh made for her two children coats for we had no warm clothing and it was winter (end of December) et there was about 0,80 m of snow on the ground.

We soon found a small two-room apartment for a couple of months before leaving to go live with an uncle, a farmer in Haute Saône. My father was still deported in Germany and we were without news. Fortunately for us children, we entertained ourselves near an old fire barn where the Americans were stationed. They offered us lots of food and I remember two things:

-they gave me chewing gum, rations of lemon powder, and toothpaste in a tube.

-I was a little afraid the first time I saw soldiers with black skin; they were very tall and big!!!!

My father had the fortune of coming back alive and upon his liberation in 1945, we went back to our house where workmen with my father and some neighbors rebuilt the walls and improvised a roof of some sort. For better or for worse we lives in it that way for about three years before it was reconstructed around 1948. There was no longer water or electricity. Water, we fetched from a fountain 50m away and for light, my father made little oil lamps like the drawing included.

We heated the house with wood that my father cut in the woods nearby and we ate vegetable my father grew in his garden. For meat, we had rabbit that we raised in the back of the house.

This was written for
Francine Hardy and Bob French
Taintrux Rougville, March 5, 2007

André Grandjean



L'arrivée des américains

Raymonde Marchal remembered watching American planes fly over during the summer of 1944. To frustrate German anti-aircraft defenses, they dropped packets of small, thin pieces of aluminum foil, called *chaff*, to create radar-jamming metallic "fog." She and other children collected and played with these silver-colored foil pieces that shimmered as they fell and looked like butterflies.¹

"In the course of the aerial battle, a plane was hit and fell toward Saint-Léonard," Raymonde recalled. "Some bombs fell near la Bource [three kilometers south of the center of Taintrux]. This was a curiosity for us; we went to see the damage."²

Children then, they didn't date their liberation to the day, but rather in terms of weeks. During October and early November 1944, the German defenders used the heavily wooded hills and cold, wet, foggy conditions to slow the American advance up the Rouges-Eaux Valley to the col du Haut Jacques to a bloody crawl. Just south of the Taintrux Valley, the 36th Division's push eastward stalled when a battalion was cut off for a week behind German lines on a steep ridge called *Trapin des Saules* (the Willows) in the rugged *Forêt Domaniale de Champ*. Taking heavy casualties over five days of fighting just meters at a time, the Japanese American 442d Regimental Combat Team famously rescued the 211 surviving men of the celebrated "Lost

Battalion.”³

The weeks leading up to liberation were particularly hard. Then 13 years old, Maurice Lipka of Saint-Dié recalled, “We had no food left to eat. We ate whatever we found.”⁴ “That time seemed very long,” Raymonde Marchal thought back. As the American troops pushed closer, the sound of gunfire reverberated off the mountains. Artillery fire flashed and boomed like thunder through the nights. ¹ MARCHAL, entrevue, 20 février 2008. ² MARCHAL, entrevue par Veilleux, 17 février 2010. ³ ASAHINA, *Just Americans*, 161-193; Clarke & Smith, *Riviera to the Rhine*, 329-332. ⁴ Maurice LIPKA, entrevue enregistrée, 8 février 1994.

“When the Americans took the village of les Rouges-Eaux, we knew they weren’t very far away,” She recollected. “Some brave young men from Chevy secretly established contact with the Americans and brought back cigarettes and food. It was very risky.”⁵

On 10 October 1944, American artillery began to rain down on the Taintrux Valley, killing three people out harvesting potatoes: Mme Mangel, M. Sarviat, and Emile Mathis, Raymonde’s grandfather.⁶ A lull of several days permitted their families to properly bury them. Later the dead would have to be temporarily buried in house gardens. In the weeks leading up to liberation, American shelling killed nine Taintrux residents.⁷ It was said some 30,000 shells rained down on Taintrux in the fighting to liberate it.⁸

Mme Quirin recalled hiding in the cellar on their farm in the hamlet of les Moitresses and not knowing what was happening outside.⁹ Raymonde described that time of taking shelter and protracted waiting:

*The families actively prepare, take up house in their stone cellars, a variety of provisions, cots, a small oven with pipe out a cellar window, potatoes, pork— whatever the Germans hadn’t seized. We had buried things of value, dishes, and important papers. The families assembled in the best cellars, no one moved around. The bombardments resume: when the Germans fire artillery rounds, the Americans fire back even more.*¹⁰

Raymonde and her mother quit their grist mill along the Saint-Dié—Taintrux road and took refuge in a neighbor’s house across the brook under the brow of a hill. Living in the cellar for six weeks, Raymonde recalled the “very sinister” sounds of war—the whistling and crump of artillery shells around them and the drone of planes above:

There were eight people in the cellar, and during the bombardments some Germans joined us.

At our house there remained a cow that we had to go feed in between artillery exchanges.

⁵ MARCHAL, “Liberation de Chevy et de l’Epine par les américains—automne 1944,” histoire inédite, février 2010. ⁶ Ibid. ⁷ LAURIN, *Libération des Vosges*, 462. ⁸ GAUDEL, “Taintrux et son histoire.” ⁹ Simone QUIRIN, communication personnelle, 22 février 2008. ¹⁰ MARCHAL,

“Liberation de Chevry et de l’Epine.”

This lasted to around 16 November. The Germans decided to retreat—they told us they wanted to blow up the bridge over the Taintroué to slow down the American advance—and this permitted us to bring back the cow and we welcomed the milk.

During the bombardments, some lights indicated houses were burning. In the middle of the night before they left, the Germans set fire to our neighbor’s house. Monique who hardly slept saw the light from the fire. We needed to rescue our neighbors. The house burnt.

The next morning a man was in front of the house with a radio apparently communicating with a plane overhead. During the day a tractor arrived carrying tree trunks, and a temporary bridge was rapidly built for their jeeps and trucks to pass over.

For many weeks we were separated from our families. In an American jeep, we went over toward Chevry, where my grandmother and family were. Because of the lack of hygiene and the humidity of the cellar, I had impetigo and boils.

On one side of her grandmother’s farm in Chevry, the Americans installed an infirmary, which treated her and other people and “was much appreciated.” On the other side of the farm, the Americans set up a kitchen. Dug in across the road was an artillery piece that “rumbled loudly from time to time.”¹¹ After the Americans left, people collected the spent artillery shells and piled them like firewood to sell as scrap metal. Brass artillery shell casings remain common curios in Taintrux Valley homes.

Though the fighting moved on, the tools of war continued to exact a toll. Raymonde saw German prisoners pass by toward Mézay, where the Americans had them clear mines. One was killed in the process, she said.¹² In just one upland field that had been in Suzanne Conraux’s family, 99 German mines were found. Unexploded ordnance lay about in heaps. A pile exploded and killed two of Suzanne’s cousins who had skipped school and probably tinkered with it.¹³

11 Ibid. 12 Ibid. 13 Suzanne CONRAUX, communication personnelle, 19 et 22 février 2008.



Letter from Noëlla Durant

May 13, 2007

Dear friends,

Yes, I was born in the house in which we now live on September 11, 1938.

We heard the church bell; the men had to go to the town hall and the Germans were collecting all of them, even the men who were on their way to work and they drove them to the train station to put them on trains of destination unknown.

So there remained women and children; I was little but I remember well.

We had a nice basement well-buried under the house, a sort of shelter so two neighboring families came to stay with us – it is certain they had no basement to protect themselves from the shells.

As soon as the war began we children and mothers proceeded to barricade the small basement windows with large logs and big stones to protect ourselves from the shelling. We understood it would be bad. We quickly brought down food to the basement – potatoes, carrots, cabbage, etc... also blankets and some clothing – the Germans were already in our house when the first shells fell. They set up an infirmary in the kitchen for the Germans. I remember the stretcher bearers, men covered with blood, cut legs, faces full of blood. The

Germans made us go down to the basement; they were saying "Raoutchel" meaning leave us alone, go away.

The basement was divided in two parts, one for the Germans who set up office on one side and who talked between themselves; they had equipment that must have been some sort of telephone. The other side of the basement was for us; that is where we slept on top of potatoes with some blankets.

We had no light so we had to use candles and no water so we ran to the outside fountain between bombings. For our bathroom needs, we used a bucket that we emptied on the manure pile outside. We also disposed of our trash outside.

We covered our ears when the bombs and the shells fell at least two or three times a day. One shell fell in the back where we had a stable but we were sheltered in the basement. Each time a shell fell, we said to ourselves that it wasn't meant for us this time; it was a blow to our nerves. This lasted for over one and a half months.

We didn't have much left to eat. As soon as the Germans would leave, we collected food they hadn't eaten and we became sick.

One day, in their basement office, the Germans were running everywhere and their 'phone' were always on. We understood some of the words, "the Americans are coming". In fact, we understood that the Americans were here to save us; they had arrived on one side of the Chaumont and on the other mountain in the back of Mr. Grandjean's house. The Americans were chasing the Germans and we were very happy. They gave us food and drink and helped us out of the basement - our eyes were hurting.

It was so sad to see the damage; the fields were filled with shells and bombs. We had been liberated but in spite of ourselves, we were very suspicious.

The Germans were quick to leave in their trucks and with cars and bikes from local people. There was no food left and no livestock. The Germans had eaten all the cows, pigs, fowl, and rabbits. They inflicted much pain upon us.

Other men came after the arrival of the Americans, some white and some black. I don't remember who they were but they were mean but at least they didn't stay very long.

Here is my story which traumatized me and now I suffer from nervous depression <<a desire to die and nervous disorder>>.

My father had been away as a prisoner of the Germans for five years. Many of them didn't return but my father was on a farm and he was well. One day his friend proposed that they escape and try to come home. They left during the night, crossed many countries always through the woods and walking in streams to ensure that the dogs would lose their traces. It took them many, many days. When Papa came back, I was afraid of him, he looked like a bum with a dirty beard. I was only 6 or 7 at the time, I am not sure.

Here is my story of war which touched my heart greatly but at the same time I think that God was always with us. We hope that we will never see this again.

I think of you; please allow me to kiss you both and also my husband. Perhaps one day we will see each other again.

Goodbye.

Ps – This is not a letter, it is a sad book.

Noëlla

Near the monument Blanchard near our home or rather next to the restaurant Haut Fer there are horses and men buried.

