

On Sunday, June 9 1940 ,we are in Lion-sur-Mer, in the Villa Maurice. As we come out from Mass, we notice the sky obscured by a black cloud so thick one is reminded of an eclipse, since the weather is beautiful. It is the oil reservoirs of Rouen which are burning. A sinister light, first signal of alarm.

Towards evening, as the cloud dissipates, the first refugees from Rouen arrive, announcing that the Germans have occupied their city and that the bridges have been blown up.

Paul goes back to Paris, by way of the train in Caen, leaving the Citroen with me, with the mission to drive the children to Rilly-sur-Loire, where Madame de Korewo (an old family friend, also known as "tante Berthe") has her country residence. He will inform me there by mail when I must try and join him in Vichy, the official evacuation site of the Paris Bourse (Paul Tiger at the time worked at a family brokerage in Paris).

That night, as every day at 10 pm, bombs and artillery shells are dropped on Le Havre. Anguished full of worries for the difficult trip ahead of me, I go to bed without dinner.

Up at 4 am, on Monday June 10, I pack some provisions in cloth bags made with kitchen towels: rice, coffee, noodles, etc..., as well as the silver service. Then I wake the five children up for a rapid sorting of indispensable clothes, precious objects, all the material for the two month old baby: crib, bottles, alcohol stove...

We also need to take with us sheets, blankets, 5 bicycles. Al is roped up in haste by the three older children (from 10 to 13 years old) on the Citroen family sedan, which must also have enough space, besides the 5 children, for their mother, their grandmother, and Alex the maid. At 1 pm, the car starts, and crosses with great difficulty the railroad tracks of the narrow gauge train in front of the villa. That first victory encourages us.

To avoid having to cross Caen we head for Bayeux; we soon join on the highway the caravan of refugees; during this first day, we are stopped 11 times for verification of our documents. The advance is also hindered by obstacles set on the road by the army, tree trunks, or sand bags. We encounter British trucks, loaded with soldiers, headed in the opposite direction at high speed, and that slows us down.

At 9 pm we reach Alencon. Naturally, no room in any hotel; I look for gas but without any success. The streets are full of cars just as heavily loaded as ours, and I have great difficulty finding a parking spot. We have dinner in a hotel (180 francs). At the next table, some British officers are drinking champagne, to celebrate their departure for England. The radio announces that Italy has declared war.

I manage to put Marie-Brigitte to bed in an arm-chair; all the others lie down on the floor on a sheet; the salon of the hotel is full of sleeping people; our neighbors snore, dogs bark, but our littlest one sleeps like a good girl without disturbing anyone.

On Tuesday June 11th, at 5 in the morning, I prepare the bottle on the sidewalk; Grandmere (Adrienne) had spent the night in the car, to keep it safe. We leave without having found any gas: we have less than 10 liters left; all the gas stations are closed, and on the highway, people who have run out of gas ask us for some!

At 9 am, we are in Le Mans, where we find gas. Just in time, as the gauge shows empty. We line up at the pump and leave 3 hours later with 40 liters (196 francs) and one can of oil (36 francs).

We arrive in Amboise...at the same time as the Air ministry! and a short time later we enter Madame de Korewo's place in "La Borde", where there is already a throng of people; we settle down with the Stolz who have joined us (our first cousins).

Brigitte is settled in a drawer, and I share my bed with Marie-Noelle. Marie-claire, Eliane (Stolz) and Grandmere settles down on two beds. The other Stolz sleep on a sofa and the living room rug: our nephews leave at dawn, and I give them 10 liters of gas, as their tank is empty; a very selfless gesture in such circumstances.

We spend the whole of Wednesday June 12th at La Borde. We all wanted to rest a bit, but we had to constantly unpack and repack each necessary item. On Thursday June 13th, we still stay with Madame de Korewo, without any noteworthy incident.

Finally, on Friday June 14th, I receive a letter from Paul, announcing that he is in Vichy. Having bought a Ford V8 for the brokerage firm on June 10th, he left rue Pierre-le-Grand (our apartment in Paris) the same day at 8 pm with several bags containing 5 million in stocks, in company of two other brokerage employees, my father (Adrien Deseilligny) and uncle Felix Rabeau.

At midnight, he stopped just outside Fontainebleau, parking the car on top of a hill, and left the next morning at 5 am.

I immediately decide to join him in Vichy. We plan to leave after lunch, at 2 pm. Everyone is ready, we say our farewells, but the car refuses to budge. We stay for two hours in the back of the park, soaked by rain, far away from the main road where we might have found some assistance. Impossible to push the Citroen, it is far too heavily loaded.

We call on the farmer of La Borde, who blows some gas into the carburetor, and we start on our way two hours late. In Bracieux, we come upon a flood of cars from the direction of Paris; we are stuck behind a pile of rocks, and cannot bypass

the obstacle, since the road is narrow and the cars are forming an uninterrupted parade. No rear view visibility at all, but with a beating heart, I decide to back up anyway into a side street. We are freed, and a bit further, we joined the main road again.

The townspeople, standing at their door steps, watch us go by, with a heavy heart; they feel as though they were watching a funeral, that of our unfortunate country.

One link in an endless chain, we cannot stop to buy food: no bread anywhere, and that night, we eat a dinner of a few biscuits and some bananas.

Night has come down. In Aubigny-sur-Nerre, there is a long queue in front of a gas station, and I take a chance there too. We are there for two hours, and my turn is coming... but the attendant has had it and wants to close for the night. An officer, hearing my protests asks the fellow to help us, because of the baby.

We leave Aubigny at night; where shall we find shelter for the night? The next village is Menetou-Ratel. A priest is on this door step. I ask him "Can we spend the night here? I have 5 children, including a baby." "Yes of course, come into the school yard, there is some straw and many other cars." What a relief! I drive in, without my headlights, of course, and after a few hard knocks the car is in the school yard and we can relax.

I put Brigitte down on the straw, like a baby Jesus; the big kids lay down giggling, and I have some trouble quieting them down and settling them in the light of my electric torch, without disturbing all the people who are sleeping everywhere. More travellers arrive, with their own electric torches, everyone stretches, trips, moans, or snores.... Some refugees from Sens have seen our soldiers pass by in torn uniforms, such despair!

The night is clear but cool. The cold temperature wakes up Marino, who tries to run around to keep warm, but it is too crowded. We drink the milk of the priest, we eat the bread of the mayor, we wash ourselves (?) with the well water of the school; then we reload the car and start on the road again, full of gratitude for these kind people who will soon have to leave their own village too.

The sun is shining; we stop around noon by the bridge of La Charite-sur-Loire near the gas warehouses. I am about to prepare a bottle for Marie-Brigitte, but someone warns us of the danger, as a raid of Italian airplanes is feared, and so we leave immediately. In spite of the general chaos, we managed to eat a snack in Saint Pourcain-sur-Sioule, and, 27 kilometers beyond, we arrive in Vichy, where Paul welcomes us with joy.

The brokers association was able to attribute only 2 rooms to each brokerage. Paul's room only has one single bed: I share it with my husband, while Marie-Noelle settles on 2 arm-chairs, and Brigitte in a drawer from a chest. The second room has 2 beds, where my father and uncle Rabeau have been sleeping. Mother settles there, in an arm-chair. The broker Perquel, having seen the arrival of our car-omnibus, offers to let us have one of his rooms. The two mattresses are put down on the floor, and that is where Dominique, Francois, Marie-Claire and Alex will sleep side-by-side.

It is a great relief to find ourselves reunited. Paul and I can finally share our worries and responsibilities together. Deo Gratias! But this odyssey has been a heavy burden for me.

Juliette Tiger - Deseilligny