

**To my daughters Isobel and Camilla
and my grandchildren
Lily, Miriam, Jamie and Eliza, with all my love**

My grateful thanks go to
Isobel, Camilla, Patrick and
Colin who have given me
their encouragement, help
and unfailing support

GREAT ESCAPES

It is now time for me to write the 'memoir' that my family has so often asked me to produce. We have had a long period of intense cold and snow. The weather is now milder and sunny, maybe these new conditions have helped to warm my brain, and to settle down and put pen to paper.

These few pages will relate our 'epic journey and beyond': our escape from France and from the Germans from late 1940 to August 1941, and our stay in this country. I will tell you about the few turbulent years of World War II, years which were for so many people so stressful and uncertain.



We (my brother Patrick and I) were both very young at the time. In 1939, at the outset of the war, I was two and Patrick three. Memory is very selective. Some incidents I will have forgotten, others will have risen to the surface and others possibly recounted to us in the course of our childhood. And young children do not always remember a great deal!

Now I wish I had been more curious and had asked more pertinent questions about this most important time in our lives.

Our search on the internet to find details about the ships we boarded, their dates of departure and arrival into ports, was exciting and it clarified many areas of our journey across dangerous waters.

In 1938, worrying events were already taking place in Europe. Hitler was thought by many not to be trusted. He could declare war at any moment and was annexing Austria to Germany. During the Anschluss, Jews were asked to leave Austria. And they did in their thousands. One significant event took place in Germany on the 9th November 1938 - a time known as *Kristalnacht* when Jews were persecuted and violence broke out against them. Czechoslovakia is invaded in March 1939 and later on the 1st September Hitler occupies Poland. The following day the French Army was mobilised. On the 3rd of the same month, in England, Mr Chamberlain announced 'as from this moment this country is in a state of war with Germany'. World War II had begun!

At that time my parents, Patrick and I, were living in a small, pleasant provincial town to the west of Paris, called Bougival. Our house (page 3) which we rented, overlooked the Seine on one side and had belonged to a well-known painter, Jean-Léon Gérôme (during his lifetime in the 19th century he led a raging war against Impressionism and hated any form of modern painting. In his day he became a hyper realist painter and the new bourgeoisie loved his grandiose style). Our home was spacious, and had a precarious form of central heating but I suspect we huddled around a stove in one large room to save heating bills... On the other side was a magnificent park with several of Gérôme's sculptures. The house was partially destroyed in 1944 by a barge full of ammunition, what the French called 'un acte de guerre' and rendered unliveable.



Our home in Bougival



From left: Doreen, Dinah, Ninou, Patrick, Monique and Jacques

On learning of the declaration, my father's first thoughts were to help defend his country – Britain. Harold was refused as a volunteer on his first attempt at joining the Army: he was 40 and had injured his right leg many years before in South Africa. He consequently walked with a limp. At the beginning of the war only fit men were accepted as no-one knew how long the conflict would last. He tried again and on the 17th April 1940 he was mobilised (from Paris, see below) in the British army in the prestigious Corps, the Royal Engineers.

CERTIFIED COPY OF ATTESTATION.

No. _____ Name H. J. DUGGAN Corps Royal Engineers

so, the recruit is to be asked the particulars of his former service, and to produce, if possible, all certificates issued on Discharge, which should be returned to him conspicuously endorsed in red ink, as follows, viz. — (Name) re-enlisted in the (Regiment) on the (Date) RE.—Royal Naval, Marine or Air Force certificates are not to be endorsed.

Questions to be put to the Recruit before Enlistment

1. What is your Full Name ?	1. Christian Name <u>Harold James</u>
	Surname <u>DUGGAN</u>
2. In or near what Parish or Town were you born ? ...	2. In the Parish of _____ in or near the Town of <u>Cardiff</u> in the County of <u>S. Wales</u>
3. (a) Are you a British Subject ?	3. (a) <u>Yes</u>
(b) Nationality of Parents at their birth ? ...	(b) Father <u>British</u> Mother <u>British</u>
4. What is your Trade or Calling ?	4. <u>Sales Manager</u>

YOU ARE HEREBY WARNED THAT IF AFTER ENLISTMENT IT IS FOUND THAT YOU HAVE GIVEN A WILFULLY FALSE ANSWER TO ANY OF THE FOLLOWING EIGHT QUESTIONS, YOU WILL BE LIABLE TO A PUNISHMENT OF TWO YEARS' IMPRISONMENT WITH HARD LABOUR.

5. (a) What was your age (in years) last birthday ?	5. (a) <u>40</u> (years)
(b) Day, month and year of birth ?	(b) <u>28/12/1899</u>
6. (a) Are you Married ? (b) How many children are dependent upon you ?	6. (a) <u>Yes</u> (b) <u>Three</u>
7. Do you now belong to the Royal Navy, the Army, the Royal Air Force, the Royal Marines, the Militia (Supplementary Reserve), the Territorial Army, the Army Reserve, the Air Force Reserve, or any Naval Reserve Force ? If so, to what Corps	7. <u>No</u>
8. Have you ever served in the Royal Navy, the Army, the Royal Air Force, the Royal Marines, the Militia, the Special Reserve, the Supplementary Reserve, the Territorial Army or Army, the Imperial Yeomanry, the Volunteers, the Army Reserve, the Air Force Reserve, the Militia Reserve, any Naval Reserve Force, or in any Dominion or Colonial Force ? If so, state particulars of ALL engagements	8. <u>1917/1918 R.A.S.E.</u>
9. Have you truly stated the whole, if any, of your previous service ?	9. <u>Yes</u>
10. Are you, or have you been, an Indentured Apprentice ? If so, where ? to whom ? for what period ? and when did, or will, the period of your apprenticeship expire ?	10. <u>No</u>
11. Have you ever been convicted by the Civil Power ? If so, give particulars	11. <u>No</u>
12. Have you ever been rejected for enrolment or enlistment in the Naval, Military or Air Forces of the Crown ? If so, on what grounds ?	12. <u>No</u>
13. Are you willing to be vaccinated or re-vaccinated ?	13. <u>Yes</u>
14. Are you willing to be enlisted for general service ?	14. <u>Yes</u>
15. Are you willing to serve upon the following conditions, provided His Majesty should so long require your services ? For the duration of the present emergency, which means that you will be required to serve for so long as His Majesty may require your services in connection with the present emergency, and, if still serving at the termination of the emergency, you will be discharged as soon as your services can be dispensed with thereafter.	15. <u>Duration</u>
16. Have you received a notice paper stating the liabilities you are incurring by enlisting, and do you understand and are you willing to accept them ? and who gave it to you ?	16. <u>Yes</u> Name <u>R.O. Paris</u> Corps <u>R.A.S.E.</u>

I, Harold James Duggan do solemnly declare that the above answers made by me to the above questions are true, and that I am willing to fulfil the engagements made: also that I understand that, should my health fail or should I sustain an injury during service in the Army, I shall not be eligible for consideration for pension or gratuity on account of disability unless the disability is directly attributable to the conditions of Military Service.

Signature of Recruit.
Harold James Duggan
Signature of Witness.
W. Duggan

OATH TO BE TAKEN BY RECRUIT ON ATTESTATION.

I, Harold James Duggan swear by Almighty God, that I will be faithful and bear true Allegiance to His Majesty King George the Sixth, His Heirs, and Successors, and that I will, as in duty bound, honestly and faithfully defend His Majesty, His Heirs, and Successors, in Person, Crown, and Dignity against all enemies, and will observe and obey all orders of His Majesty, His Heirs, and Successors, and of the Generals and Officers set over me.

CERTIFICATE OF MAGISTRATE OR ATTESTING OFFICER.

The Recruit above-named was cautioned by me that if he made any false answer to any of the above questions he would be liable to be punished as provided in the Army Act.
The above questions were then read to the Recruit in my presence.
I have taken care that he understands each question, and that his answer to each question has been duly entered as replied to, and the said recruit has made and signed the declaration and taken the Oath of Enlistment.
MILITARY ATTACHE'S OFFICE, PARIS
17/11/40

A few weeks later on the 10th May, Hitler turned his war machine towards western Europe. The Germans advanced rapidly through northern France occupying the country as they went on, spreading fear amongst the population. People gathered a few of their belongings and marched southwards thus forming an exodus the like of which had never been seen. This sudden German insurgence caused the British troops who were already in France between the 27th May and the 3rd June 1940 to withdraw. 200,000 British soldiers and 130,000 French soldiers embark at Dunkirk to sail back to England under German fire – many died, many were saved.

As my brother and I were not sure what happened to our father after his mobilisation, I wrote to the Army Record Centre to find out more about his movements at that time. The records (see page 6) show that he got out of France from St Nazaire with thousands of others. On 17th June, he was due to board the *Lancastria* but had an extraordinarily lucky escape when the queue was stopped a few men ahead of him. The soldiers were prevented from going aboard the ship as it was full and in fact already had more than its quota. Twenty minutes after her departure from the port, the *Lancastria* was sunk by enemy bombs with huge losses. Soon afterwards, despite the bombing, Operation Aerial (page 7) took place when over 57,000 men were evacuated in twelve British ships (war and passenger ships) to ports in the west of England. In Harold's case, it was to Falmouth between 17th and 25th June 1940.

The Germans had entered Paris on 14th June 1940. All these facts have to be told in order to understand how French people felt at the time: how worrying and terrifying it was for them to see their country being taken over by another nation. The situation was impossible. Soon after the Germans entered Paris, Maréchal Pétain was declared 'Supreme Head' and on the 22nd June he orders French soldiers to stop fighting and signed an armistice with Germany.

(10)	PARTICULARS OF SERVICE. RECORD OF MOVEMENTS, APPOINTMENTS, ETC. (Promotions will be shown in para. (12).)				Station	Date	Authority								
	Country	From	To	Period											
(11)	Country	From	To	Period		Rank	Promotions								
				Home	Abroad		Date	Authority							
				Years	Days	Years	Days								
<p>Enlisted Royal Engineers, Recruiting Office, Posted to D.A.D. Hirings, A.A.S.P. Left France, St. Nazaire. Arrived Falmouth. Arrived No. 5 D.B.R.E., Chatham. Posted to S.A.Q.C., Sussex. Brighton. Appointed to Emergency Commission in general list. Reported to S.A.Q.C., Brighton. <i>Appointed A.O.C. Malabar (2x) in Com. Staff Allowed to go to 2nd Lt (Emergency) 17/6/43, rank comm grade II. 30th POW Boat. East-Down. Posted as S.O. 2. to N.I. CIVIL AFFAIRS UNIT, EASTBOURNE.</i> <i>See me proceeding on Repatriation (Class 'A' Release)</i> <i>→ Reg. S.O. 2 (CA) No. 1. Service Oppoin Post Offr S.O. 2 (CA) No. 1. Service Oppoin Post No. 1. C.A. Post now redesignated No. 2. CA Post</i></p>								Paris		17.4.40		A/Sgt. R.E. 17.4.41.			
								Rheims.	17.4.40		A/Capt. 11.6.41	117/line/122 AG(40) 2.5.41			
									17.6.40.		A/Majr 21. Feb 44.	SECO Sq 5841 MS. 1/CA/192. d. 16 Feb 44. Page 50			
									19.6.40.						
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Harold Duggan's army service record

Operation Aerial, the evacuation from north western France, 15-25 June 1940

Operation Aerial was the code name given to the evacuation of British and Allied troops from the ports of north west France between 15 and 25 June 1940. When the German tanks reached the coast at Abbeville on 20 May they split the B.E.F. in two. While most of the fighting men were trapped north of the German armies, the 1st Armoured and 51st (Highland) Divisions had been south of the Somme, while another 150,000 men were present in bases on the lines of communication that led back to the ports. In the immediate aftermath of the evacuation from Dunkirk, Churchill had decided that Britain was still under an obligation to help the French. Accordingly the 52nd Division was moved to France, with the 1st Canadian Division following behind.

On 5 June the second phase of the German offensive began, starting what is normally known as the Battle of France. At first the French were able to hold their new line on the Somme, but they were massively outnumbered, and the Germans soon broke through and began to push the French armies west across the country. It was soon clear that the French government would be forced to seek an armistice. On 17 June Marshal Petain asked for an armistice, and on 22 June the French surrender was signed.

The British forces in France were now under the command of General Alan Brooke. By the evening of 14 June he had decided that the situation was hopeless. That night he was able to reach Churchill on the telephone, and convinced him that it was time to evacuate the rest of the B.E.F. before it was too late. After a ten minute conversation Churchill agreed, and on the following day Operation Aerial began.

The operation was split into two sectors. Admiral James, based at Portsmouth, was to control the evacuation from Cherbourg and St Malo, while Admiral Dunbar-Nasmith, the commander-in-chief of the Western Approaches, based at Plymouth, would control the evacuation from Brest, St. Nazaire and La Pallice. Eventually this western evacuation would extend to include the ports on the Gironde estuary, Bayonne and St Jean-de-Luz.

Admiral James soon decided that he had too few flotilla vessels to put in place a convoy system, so he arranged for a flow of independently routed troops ships, motor transport and store ships to use Southampton, while coastal ships used Poole and Dutch schuyts used Weymouth.

The evacuation from St. Nazaire was not so free from German intervention. It was already more difficult because navigational hazards in the Loire meant that the larger ships had to use Quiberon Bay as an anchorage before moving to St. Nazaire to pick up men. Up to 40,000 troops were believed to be retreating towards Nantes, fifty miles upstream, and so Admiral Dunbar-Nasmith had decided to begin the evacuation early on 16 June. By the end of the day 13,000 base troops had been taken onboard ship.

17 June saw the biggest single loss of life during the entire evacuation process when at 3.35pm the liner *Lancastria* was sunk by German bombing. 3,000 of the 5,800 men embarked on her were killed, even though she sank relatively slowly in shallow water. Rescue efforts were hampered by a sheet of burning oil that surrounded the ship and by a German air raid that lasted from 3.45 to 4.30pm.

This disaster was not revealed in Britain for some years. When the news reached Churchill in the Cabinet Room, he forbade its publication on the grounds that "the newspapers have got quite enough disasters for to-day at least". At the time he had intended to lift the ban after few days had passed, but this disaster was followed by the French surrender, the start of the Battle of Britain and the constant fear of invasion. Under the pressure of these momentous events Churchill simply forgot to lift the ban until reminded of it later in the war.

Despite this tragedy, the evacuation went on. Soon after dawn on 18 June a convoy of ten ships carrying 23,000 men left the port, leaving only 4,000 men still to evacuate. False intelligence then led Admiral Dunbar-Nasmith to believe that the Germans were closer than they were, and at 11am on 18 June a convoy of twelve ships took off the last men, leaving behind a great deal of equipment that could have been rescued. The Germans had still not arrived on 19 June, but instead Admiral Dunbar-Nasmith was informed that 8,000 Poles had reached the port. Accordingly he sent in a fleet of seven transports and six destroyers, but they only found 2,000 men. By the end of the day a total of 57,235 troops had been evacuated from St. Nazaire, 54,411 British and 2,764 Polish.

My family were at great risk. My mother had adopted on marriage my father's nationality (soon after the occupation, enemy citizens living in France were rounded up and interned in camps). Ninou was Jewish by birth and so was of course my grandmother, as were Jacques and Monique (my uncle and aunt) who had left for Martinique a few months before and returned to France at the outbreak of the war.

In spite of the occupation we ventured into Paris to see Mamé (my grandmother) in the 16th arrondissement. Ninou's feelings ran high on seeing German soldiers strutting so boldly in the streets of the Capital. She would have fought tooth and nail to rid her beloved Paris - and country - of its intrusive occupants. In the meantime she had to do something to save her children, her mother and herself. She also wanted to re-join her husband who was already in England. Rumours were circulating that small boats (of any sort) were taking people across the Channel. A 'holiday' was quickly organised and a reservation was made in the small town of Kerity - in Brittany - with Mlle Bisouette at her Bed and Breakfast. Ninou, Doreen, Patrick and I arrived sometime in August 1940. Although as children we probably enjoyed our stay in northern Brittany, with its beautiful sandy beaches, our departure for England did not take place. The coastline had already been closed by the Germans and now crossing the Channel was out of the question.

So back we were in Paris in September and now living with Mamé. One event suddenly changed the course of our lives. On the 5th December 1940 when Doreen was alone in my grandmother's flat, there was a loud knock on the door. The french Gendarmerie who were in collaboration with the occupying Germans, had come to arrest her as a foreign national. She was 16 years old at the time. She was asked to take enough clothes for 24 hours. Doreen with many others was first taken to Besançon (to the east of Dijon) where she stayed a couple of months and then on to Vittel (in the Vosges in the east of France), to a large spa hotel which had been turned into an internment camp.

I am including an excerpt from *Red Princess, a Revolutionary Life* written by Sofka Zinovieff, granddaughter of Sofka Skipwith. The latter was also an internee in Besançon and Vittel, and Doreen remembered her well. A strong personality, Sofka Skipwith (who was Russian and married to an Englishman) was instrumental in keeping up morale at the camps by organising plays and many other activities. Very fortunately, Doreen only stayed in the camps for six months. Many people were kept in Vittel for most of the duration of the war.

Like each of the four thousand women in the barracks, Sofka was issued with a pale-blue French Army coat (man-sized), wooden clogs (Parisian shoes fared badly in the snow), food tickets and a tin plate and cutlery. The long, scratchy coats were rarely removed, acting as an extra blanket in bed, and the clogs clacked noisily up and down the draughty stone staircases from morning till night. Rations were based on a weekly loaf – flat, grey, stamped with a long-gone date and often blooming with green mould. Eating it produced violent stomach cramps, but inmates learned to slice it and dry pieces on the dormitory stove to make it more digestible. There was a daily helping of disgusting soup, often made from mangel-wurzel or cattle beet, which was collected from huge, iron cauldrons in the kitchens. One prisoner noted the rats ‘as large as rabbits’ tearing open sacks of dried vegetables, and horse carcasses lying around in the filth. There were no bathrooms – just a large, iced-up trough where inmates could wash in freezing water, overlooked by guards.

My family knew someone who could help and might be able to get her out. Madame Allatini was able to persuade the German authorities to free Doreen. After having been allowed to leave and given a little money, enough to catch a train to Paris, Doreen went directly to my grandmother’s flat which had already been sealed by the Germans. Many apartments which had been vacated by their owners had their front doors sealed with a large brass padlock with a Swastika engraving – a warning that no-one was to enter. Fortunately Doreen managed to get

into the flat in rue Robert Turquan by the tradesmen's entrance. During the short time she stayed there, her friends from the rowing club, the Sepheriades family who lived in Chatou near Paris, helped her financially and she was then able to first go to Moissac (where she met Georges) and then on to Lisbon. From there she caught a plane to London and was to stay in England until the end of the conflict.

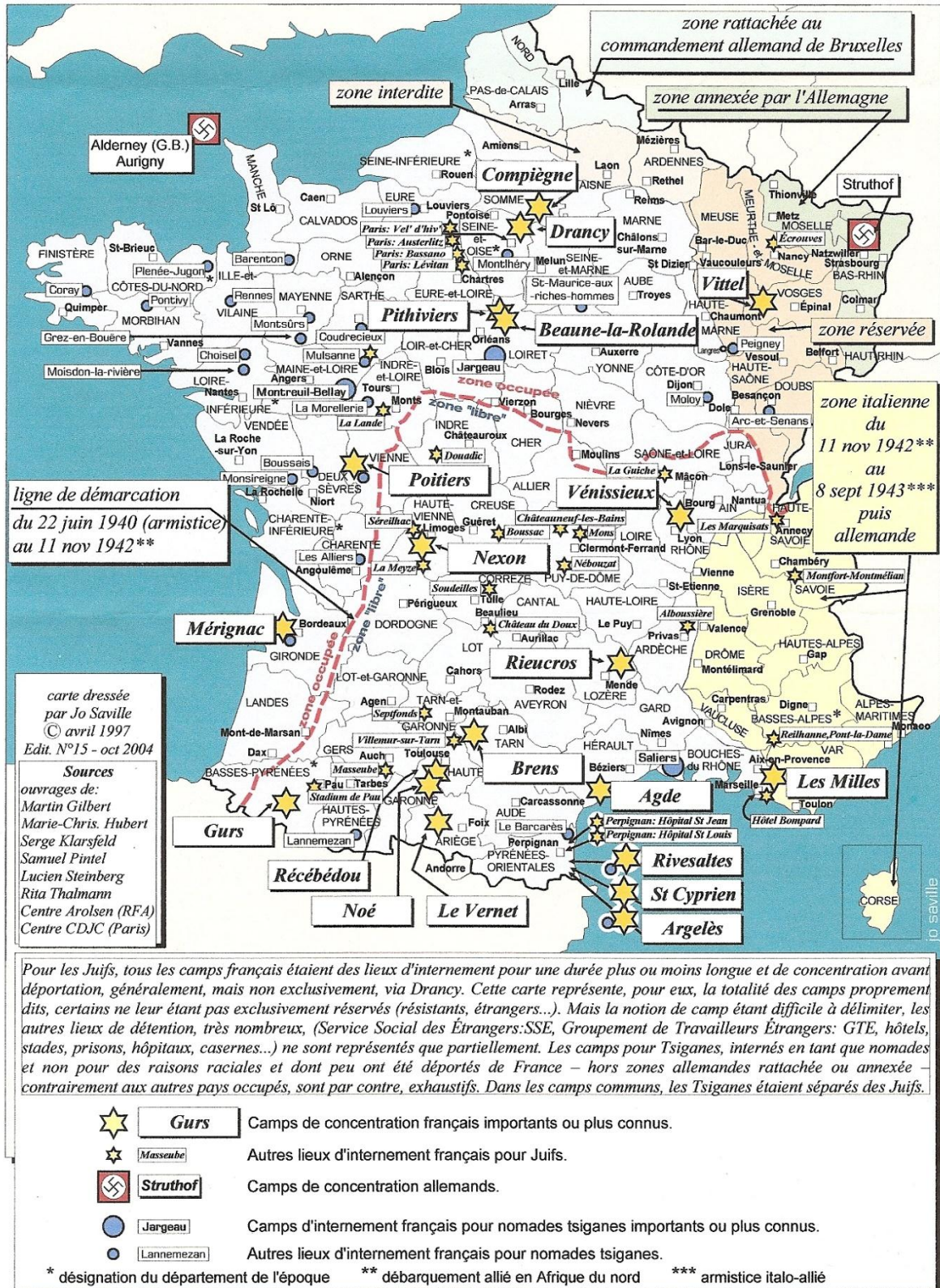
Soon after our return to France, my mother learned that in 1944 Madame Allatini had been arrested and shot by the Gestapo, the German police, for being a member of the Resistance.

The Germans were already occupying the northern regions of France, the areas that were the most economically rich and beneficial to them. They occupied also the whole of the western coast commanding the Atlantic (see page 11). A demarcation line was established: it was a proper frontier dividing France in two zones (the occupied zone and the free zone) which would then have nothing to do with each other. There were checkpoints near large towns; the open country was left free for all.

From the beginning of the occupation, Resistance in France was very strong and lasted throughout the war. It was highly organised by intensely dedicated and passionate people (my uncle Jacques helped to hide and save Jewish children when in Moissac with the Eclaireurs Israélites (EI) of which he was one of the leading members. Georges Lévitte, Doreen's future husband – also a leader – played an important role in the saving of Jewish children).

We had to leave Paris quickly. For us the obvious next move was to cross the demarcation line from occupied to free zone. The exact spot is not known but it was presumably due south of Paris (although my aunt whose memoirs I have just read, seemed to think that we crossed via the Basque Country, which surprises me somewhat...). Members of the Resistance volunteered to pass civilians across the line far away from checkpoints and hopefully unnoticed by German soldiers. This is what

La France des camps durant la Seconde Guerre mondiale



happened on the 8th December 1940. I well remember climbing into a horse-drawn cart in the dark of the moon, being covered with blankets and told not to say a word, cough or sneeze because we were not to be heard or seen. Everything went well and once in the Free Zone we were on our way to Moissac - in the Tarn et Garonne, south west France. There we were to join my family: Monique - whose twin girls (Myriam and Aline) were born a few days before, on the 5th December. By the way, my mother learnt that Mamé, always very pragmatic, had hidden on her body two ingots of gold, as the French say 'au cas où' or 'just in case'! In Moissac we felt relatively safe surrounded by family and the dedicated Scouts Israélites de France. Their leader Gamzon, with his fellow leaders, ran a very tight ship in the home for Jewish children where everyday life was based on Scout idealism. In fact there were already several homes but fortunately all were situated in the Free Zone.

During the war, my aunt and uncle and their twin daughters, always surrounded by faithful and supportive friends, were able to move a few times to avoid suspicion and being caught: to Lautrec near Moissac, Orange in the Rhône Valley (where Jacques worked on the farm as 'valet de ferme') and later, Chamonix. Jacques was throughout heavily involved in the Resistance but when his own sister was deported in 1943 to Auschwitz (and never came back), Monique felt that their time had come to escape to a safer place. Switzerland was a neutral country during the conflict and just across the border. The Swiss were accepting Jews who were placed in special camps. Monique, Aline and Myriam, and Mamé were in the Valais but they were given a hard time and their stay there was not an easy one. They were 'released' in 1945, a sum of money having been required to secure their freedom.

Ninou's father, Jules Lehmann, also escaped. He was taken in by farmers in a remote area near Pelussin, east of St Etienne, in the department of the Loire, and stayed there during the whole of WW2. We went to see him in 1946 and we told him that the war had ended!

We stayed in Moissac for a few weeks, enough time for my mother to gather her thoughts. This would not be the end of our journey as we had to get out of the country at all costs. It was decided that it would be easier for us to be nearer Marseille as Ninou had to put her papers in order. On marrying my father, she had adopted British nationality, had two passports, both expired...and as our journey promised to be long through Spain and Portugal (then the only way out of France) visas were also needed.

Early in 1941, we made our way to the south east Mediterranean coast. Some rooms had been reserved at a fisherman's cottage in Cassis - an ancient fishing port, rebuilt 200 years ago on old ruins dating back to the 16th century (this information would have seemed rather irrelevant to our problem!!). The house we lived in faced the old port - which is today most certainly taken over by luxury yachts. Marseille was only 22 kilometres away and a short journey by train. The American Consulate would provide us with enough funds for the next stage of our escape out of France. Ninou rarely talked about this long and arduous journey and later as adolescents we did not ask many questions as our minds were focusing on more important matters (at least for us!). Of course we now regret not having quizzed her more about that period in our lives.



Cousin Claudine, Patrick and Dinah, watched over by Ninou in Arles

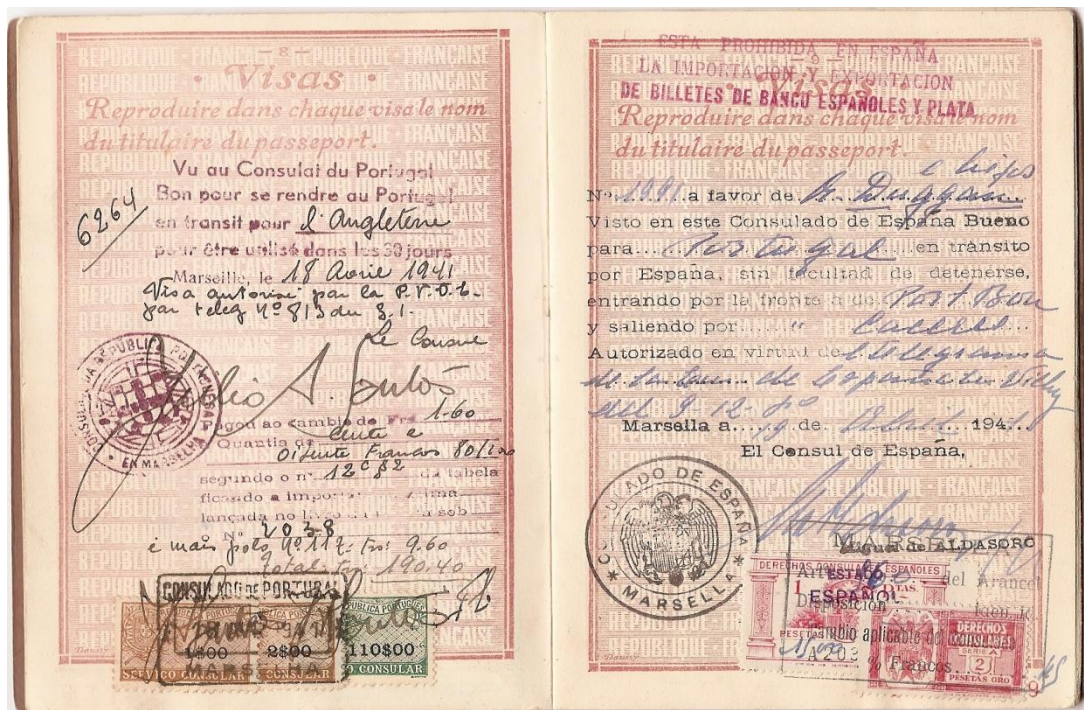
Relatives (Margot, Mamé's sister and her family) had taken refuge in Arles so we were able to visit them in between my mother's frequent visits to Marseille. Our British passport was renewed until August 1941 - by special authority of the American Consul General (in charge of British Interests). Visas were also issued for Spain and Portugal. From a letter written by Ninou to her sister we also learned that she (Ninou) had travelled to Lyon to try and obtain a medical certificate confirming that Doreen was physically fragile and should therefore be let out of the camp (and maybe it worked but we shall never know.) As you might remember Doreen was released six months after her arrest (early December 1940). By the 2nd May 1941 (Doreen's 17th birthday) our papers were ready and having said goodbye to Mamé (it must have been an emotional moment as no-one knew how long the war would last and we might not see each other again) we left France by train, crossing the frontier at Cerbère and entering Spain at Port-Bou. Many civilians escaped from France into Spain walking at night in the Pyrenees mountains, crossing areas of unguarded frontiers. They were risking a great deal. Some were shot but many were lucky and managed to get through.



Mamé

This time however we were doing things in style and travelling by train was rather less dangerous than passing under barbed wire on a cold December night, as we had done to pass the demarcation line! Spain was never involved against Germany nor was she considered as an ally. So that country was thought of as hostile by those engaged in the war against Hitler. In the train travelling towards Madrid, there must have been a great deal of checking of papers in carriages and corridors. Patrick has a vivid memory of that journey: a sad time for him, many tears were shed as it is then that he lost his beloved toy dog which he carried everywhere. A very traumatic event for a child at a particularly traumatic moment...

Having arrived in Madrid it seems, from dates stamped by the Spanish Authorities in Ninou's passport, that several days were spent in the capital, maybe to obtain more funds as we already had a visa to enter. Our entrance on the 9th May 1941 was at Valencia de Alcantara - Spanish side.



Portugal was a neutral country and helped the allies by allowing the Azores (a Portuguese colony) to be a base for aircraft. In the most

westerly of European States one could probably say that Ninou now at last felt safer. We first stayed at *La Pensao Lusitano* in Parede near Lisbon. There were many refugees in the country as it was a point of departure for the Americas or Great Britain. People were waiting and waiting for planes and convoys of ships which would take them to safety - although sailing in the Atlantic was not the safest of ways of escaping!

It was almost summer. The weather was a little unsettled (the Atlantic coast is often colder) but life would not have been too unpleasant.

3

As tu des nouvelles de Do. Son père
ne se doutait pas qu'elle était là. Il
se va entreprendre des démarches d'écha
Si cela est possible. J'en doute un
peu - Personnellement je ne vois
qu'une cause de santé qui puisse
lui être favorable - les femmes filles
que j'ai rencontrées à Marseille sont
également ici. Je les ai aperçues l'autre
fois - J'aimerais avoir de vos nouvelles
à tous - De Tonique et des jumelles
de son mari et de la femme - Vous devez
être moins privés que les autres passagers
quand je pense au mal que l'on
avait de trouver quoique ce soit, cela
m'a en coupe l'appétit - On brève est-ce
seulement parce que j'ai plus faim
en sortant de table - Quand les bons
temps reviendront tu verras qu'on
éprouve une certain plaisir à ce
servir de tout ce dont on manquait
à tel point que ça valait la peine d'en
avoir été privé - A condition bien
entendu, que les privations ne vous
fissent pas sombrer avant

24 Mai 41.

Pensao Lusitano
Rafael Pinheiro 36
Lisbonne.

Chère Maman -
Je suis toujours sans nouvelles
de France, mais j'ai saisi que les lettres
mettent longtemps à parvenir ici et
la poste aérienne ne fonctionne pas
dans cette direction - Nous sommes
toujours à la même pension quoique
je compte aller au bord de la mer
d'ici peu - Il fait plutôt beaux
chaud que dans le midi de la France,
comme d'habitude à ce que j'ai pu voir - Un
petit vent de l'Atlantique souffle
presque continuellement et depuis que
nous sommes ici il n'a fait chaud
vraiment que 2 ou 3 jours - Les
enfants se plaisent ici, ils se
plaisent partout. J'écris - Nous

Letter from Ninou to her mother, May 1941

The waiting was long but there were some compensations: the beautiful beaches of Cascais, 20 kilometres outside Lisbon, where we bathed and there were the bullfights, totally unfamiliar to us. The shouting, the cries of encouragement to the matador, the enthusiasm of the watching crowd are so typically Iberian and unique to this sport. Ninou told me later that I was very taken by it all, sitting on the knees of a Portuguese and clapping my hands with great brio. Bulls are not put to

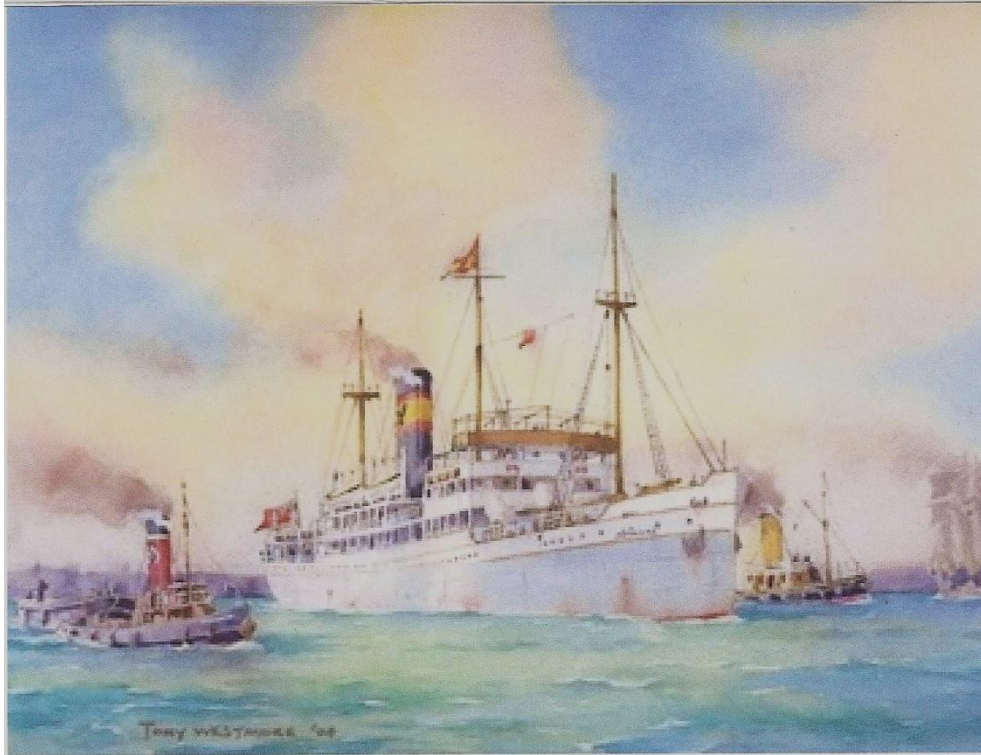
death in Portugal unlike Spain, which makes this pastime slightly more acceptable but still cruel...

The Tropical Gardens are famous in Lisbon and we probably spent some time whiling the hours away admiring the extraordinary trees in the huge greenhouses.

Then, the moment my mother had been waiting for, for so long, came at last. A convoy was due to arrive shortly in Gibraltar. On the 19th June 1941 (my fourth birthday) we boarded in Lisbon, the *Avoceta*, a passenger vessel built in Dundee in 1923 which normally operated the Liverpool, Casablanca, Lisbon, Canary Islands route - with passengers and fruit cargoes. (Just for the record, on the 25th September 1941, three months after we sailed on this ship it was sunk by a U boat, north of the Azores, taking the lives of 123 people. Survivors were rescued by *MS Periwinkle* and taken to Milford Haven). When we travelled to Gibraltar, many other refugees were on the *Avoceta* and the cabins must have been fully occupied, however we arrived safely two days later.

The convoy sailing towards Britain was to leave only on the 4th July - another 12 days to wait - but I do not know what happened to us then. Could we have stayed on 'The Rock' or on board ship? We were in fact expecting the delayed arrival of the *Furious* which was to head the convoy. I presume we did not know at the time that this Royal Navy ship had received some damage in an incident described in the following way: 'During launch operation the second aircraft struck part of the ship's (the *Furious*) structure and crashed overboard. The fuel tank caught fire causing 15 casualties, nine of which were fatal. Launch operation resumed when the fire was extinguished'. This happened on the 30th June, the day before it arrived in Gibraltar! (This information was obtained by Patrick on the Arnold Hague site). 1941 and the subsequent years of the war were busy times for the Navy: warships were crisscrossing the Mediterranean and the Atlantic, always on the move. *Furious* had to be repaired and needed to go back to the UK rather

urgently... We were fortunate to be escorted not only by the *Furious* but also by the light cruiser *Hermione* and several destroyers *Lance*, *Legion*, *Wishart* and *Fury*. Six ships in total!! At the time it was the rule to have such an escort. The Atlantic waters were dangerous places to be sailing in.



The Avoceta and the Scythia

We departed. The *Scythia* was carrying us three along with 2,000 other refugees. It had been a cruise ship and Patrick remembers well the surroundings: the plush carpets, the large tables with immaculately white table cloths and the incessant safety drills we had to go through - almost daily. We were well looked after by the sailors and there too I have a memory of sitting on a sailor's knee. (What would Freud make of that?). On board, we were told of depth charges being launched by our escort ships at German U boats.

We arrived without incident on the 13th July in Glasgow. By a strange coincidence I am typing these words on our computer from our home in Lewes and it is the 13th July but the year is 2011... exactly 70 years later. We had spent nine days on the unsafe waters of the Atlantic, on our 'cruise', taking us to the Promised Land where we incidentally, were to stay another four years till August 1945. No-one knew at the time how long this war would last (the time span of a war is never known). In 1939 people really thought that the conflict would be of a short duration. Little did they know!

So the now happy travellers had arrived on British soil and were to go their different ways. Patrick remembers seeing huge barrage balloons floating over the port of Glasgow which was of course, a very strategic area to bomb. I learnt very recently that Clydebank, a few miles away, had been blitzed by the Germans in March of that same year, 1941. Hundreds of people died, and homes destroyed. Clydebank shipyards were an important target: ships were built and repaired there.

Our destination was London. After quite a few hours in the train rattling southwards, we were reunited with Papa, overjoyed at seeing his family again. He was wearing khaki battle-dress. We had left him over a year before and in that space of time events had taken place and several countries crossed. We stayed a couple of nights in Hounslow with Dug and Mike (my father's sister and brother in law). Without any more ado we whizzed down to Hailsham where my father, who was in charge of the

requisitioning of houses for the Army had found us a small semi-detached bungalow - rather too small for my mother's taste! But as you will see from a reference letter (on page 29), he performed his army duties very well and seemed to be highly esteemed by his superiors.

From the moment we arrived in Hailsham, a small market town (not far from the south coast and east of Brighton) for my brother and me, a new chapter was to begin.



From the 16th July, our lives were to be more settled and the four years spent in this rural community were to be happy ones. My father, who had joined the Royal Engineers, was based in Eastbourne. The regiment had the rather huge Grand Hotel as headquarters, a little different from our modest abode. During the war years Harold became good friends with Maurice Tate, a most revered cricketer – a pre-war celebrity, after whom the gates to the County Cricket Ground are named. Much to my mother's annoyance, Harold and Maurice became drinking

partners – she had to drag them out of the pub on occasion (women were not encouraged in such places at the time!).



Doreen, who had been released in 1941 from the camp, was able to join us in England where she stayed till the end of the conflict. Interestingly, she was introduced to Anna Freud, Sigmund Freud's daughter, who in 1941 established the Hampstead War Nurseries, a refuge for approximately 100 Jewish children made homeless by the bombing (see below). Doreen, who had a natural instinct for children, became a very useful helper and I think enjoyed her few years learning about child development.

The Anna Freud Centre is an organisation with a rich history of caring for young minds. Anna Freud was one of the founders of child psychoanalysis and her work has profoundly influenced thinking on child development. Anna Freud's tradition of innovation is embedded in the ethos of the Centre she founded, and to this day it remains both a leading authority on the emotional well-being of children, and a provider of pioneering treatment for children and young people in distress.

Origins

In 1941, in response to the social upheaval and emotional distress faced by the children of war time Europe, Anna Freud established the Hampstead War Nurseries, a refuge for approximately 100 children made homeless by the bombing. The War Nurseries provided residences for children who were considered "billeting problems" because they could not be evacuated without their mothers or had developed difficulties in foster care situations. Anna Freud worked with these children and applied her knowledge of child development to the children's care. For example, in contrast to the typical residential nursery practice at that time, parents were involved as much as possible. 'Family' groups were organised so that children received consistent care rather than being looked after by whichever member of staff happened to be on duty.

The Nurseries also provided a unique opportunity for observational research into child development and study of the impact of the war on children. This research aimed to foster better understanding of each individual child's needs.

The Hampstead Child Therapy Course began in 1947 and The Hampstead Clinic opened at 12 Maresfield Gardens in 1952 when the Centre was granted charity status and became known as the Hampstead Child Therapy Course and Clinic (the name was changed in honour of Anna Freud after her death in 1982). Anna Freud established the Therapy Course and Clinic with four principles in mind. Firstly, she wanted therapy to be available for children in need, regardless of their family's ability to pay. Secondly, she wanted to create a training course specifically for therapeutic work with children rather than child therapy training being only an addendum to adult therapy training. Thirdly, she wanted to apply psychoanalytic knowledge and skill to fields such as education and social and legal reform. Fourthly, Anna Freud was devoted to enquiry, which was always based on careful and detailed observation: research was an integral part of the Centre's work from the beginning. While the Centre today has expanded its focus and utilises a wider range of clinical approaches, it remains dedicated to the principles of innovative research, effective practice and world class training.

The Pantiles, 23 Mill Road, Hailsham, backed onto fields, in a quiet road leading to the marshes (now of course the surrounding fields are no more there. Large housing estates are covering what was once our playground). Ninou, a Parisian at heart, took an instant dislike to the place and I suspect to the people – she was a foreigner in a small market town, war-time England was suspicious of foreigners. She admitted, however, in letters written to her family that at least we were safe. But she was still intent on saving her country and very soon after our arrival in Hailsham, she went to London to Général de Gaulle's Free French headquarters in Carlton Gardens, to enquire whether she could help in any way. She was told in no uncertain terms that the best thing she could do was to look after her children. So she acquired a piano and wrote amazing poetry, dramatic and declamatory, quite reminiscent of Racine and Corneille whom she had studied in the Lycée Molière in Paris. Till late in life, my mother was able to recite great chunks of poetry learned by heart at school. While in England, there was often great nostalgia for her country and she missed her family.

There were some pleasant moments for her though. She particularly enjoyed dancing with the Canadians who were billeted at Firlie Place, usually the home of the Gage family, not far from Lewes. It is said that the soldiers left this handsome country house in a disastrous state. Sadly this was not uncommon during the war. Ninou loved going to Tunbridge Wells on the double decker bus, or to the Herstmonceux swimming pool, which no longer exists.

Patrick and I, on arriving in Hailsham, very soon decided to become English. We suffered from a lot of jeering on our way to school – as you can expect we were quickly noticed as French speaking children and called 'Froggies', 'Frenchies' etc... (we were foreigners after all). So in no time we had adapted to English life, learned the language very quickly and flatly refused to speak to our mother in French but also correcting her very good English - said with a strong accent - in shops.

Downs.

Le bouclier blafard qui s'erige en falaise,
 Decouvre par endroit les Coteaux mal a l'aise,
 De montrer leur sein vert, ce velours des troupeaux,
 Sans protection des vents, sans protection des eaux.

On les entend gemir sous la lanierie des fouets,
 Ce sont des pleurs d'enfants, des grincements de rouet
 Qui s'en vont crescendo sur le clavier des plaines.
 Le zephyr, dans ses cuivres, souffle a perdre l'haleine.

Les arbres ebouiffes entonnent le Tanhauser,
 Sans se soucier des gens, sans se soucier des guerres.
 Des mouettes qui cherchent abri au fond des marecages,
 Poussent des cris de crecelle en rasant les nuages.
~~Sur la breche des greves s'animent les galets,~~

Sur la breche des greves s'animent les galets,
 Sans treve refaconnes au doigt des flots sales.
 Perles eparpillees au collier de Neptune,
 Leur chanson de cailloux s'egrene sur la dune .

Hailsham

Il faut que je l'avoue aujourd'hui j'ai trop bu.
 Ce n'est pas du vin doux, mon peche, mon abus.
 Ce n'est pas du gin, ni du whisky d'Ecosse,
 J'ai trop bu du village sans sculpture et sans bosse,
 Plat comme une limonde et droit comme un baton,
 Du black out sinistre ou l'on cherche a taton,
 Parmi toutes les portes qui sont toutes pareilles,
 L'emplacement du disque de la vie qui s'enraye.
 J'ai trop bu, j'ai trop bu, j'ai trop bu de la Bible,
 de Shakespeare, d'Haendel. Ils sont tous invincibles.
 De toutes les cheminées qui fument a la meme heure,
 Des fermes au foin range, au betail sans odeur,
 Des soldats d'Amerique, des proscrits d'Italie,
 qui vont au cinema cacher leur nostalgie .

Mais tout a coup pour moi scintillent les cheveux d'or,
 Des enfants des Normands qui s'amuseent dehors.
 Tout s'habille en Dimanche. La poussiere du chemin
 Apporte le chaud parfum du troublant romarin.
 Le soleil reviendra encore une autre fois,
 Et la petite fleur bleue et les touchers de soie s
 Tissees sur les metiers de Lyon au pied du Rhone,
 Les marches en plein air que seul l'oubli detrone,

I never remember being hungry during those four years. Food was rationed during that time, we were well provided with orange juice and cod liver oil which we obtained from the Post Office, to help us grow into healthy children. We had no exotic fruit like oranges or bananas as transport of food from other countries was non-existent. Buying fish and chips in Hailsham High Street was a treat and it was always wrapped in newspaper. Patrick in particular, still has very fond memories of buying Lyons apple pies at the little shop 'down the road'. When he comes to England to see us he relives those moments: although they don't quite taste the same we always try and have a pie ready for him. These details might seem trivial but are important to us both!



Harold Duggan and friend and cricketer, Maurice Tate, in Rye

Although we remember enjoying our pre-school years at Mrs Metsen's, our memory of our primary school education seems to have been totally obliterated: this might have been caused by other traumatic

events having taken place subsequently. I learnt to knit though and some time each day was dedicated to making up woollen squares which would, when finished, be sewn together and turned into blankets for the soldiers. This was our modest war effort... (boys had to knit too).

We had some enjoyable moments: running through the fields and the woods, left to our own devices; in the spring picking bluebells and doing a little door to door selling with half dead flowers in our hands - bluebells never last very long. There was an incident which my brother and I did not witness as we were at school at the time. A bull escaped from the market and ran amok in Mill Road – right up to our front door. When opening the door, Ninou was suddenly faced by this very fierce black animal. She waved a red cloth, which excites bulls rather than calms them!

One of the biggest events was when a very large tent suddenly appeared at the cattle market in Hailsham. We were told that bread was being made for the troops and we asked if we could help, and we did! That was a big moment for us: helping to make bread for the troops, that was something.... Of course many years later we realised that the preparations for D-Day were already taking place. There were some strange-looking boats (which turned out to be amphibious – they were able to travel on land and on sea) incessantly going back and forth on the still waters of the quite small Hailsham pond. These were hardly the harsh conditions of the sea but the Army had to test boats somewhere. The landings by the allies, on the shores of France were then a total secret.

I must stress that life in that area of Britain was far from being peaceful! Throughout our stay in England, flying bombs and planes were constantly whizzing over our heads, launched by the Germans targeting London in particular. V1s (pilotless jet planes) made a frightening metallic engine sound, and hearing that was a very frequent occurrence when on our way to school. We were told to lie down on the ground and stay

quite still until we were certain that we could not hear any more noise. We were constantly preoccupied by noises and even now – my brother and I discovered - we are still today very aware of what goes on in the skies... At home we took refuge in our Morrison Steel Table Shelter which occupied one of our modest rooms and Ninou hid under the piano, when we heard the familiar rumble up above. In the town, the local fire station was partly demolished and it is surprising that so little was hit during those raids!

The 6th June 1944, D-Day. The landings on the Normandy beaches, a long prepared operation. Many casualties, but successful. The Allied troops eventually reached Paris. The French Capital was liberated!! Général de Gaulle and his men marched proudly down the Champs-Élysées on the 14th June.

Back in Hailsham, my mother, on hearing this overwhelmingly joyful news, hung the most enormous French flag you have ever seen, on the facade of our semi-detached bungalow, which consequently hid it totally... (the front of the house I mean). A huge demonstration of relief and patriotism on Ninou's part.

Victoire

Versez, Versez l'alcool aux filles et aux garçons !
 La débauche officielle s'époumonne en chansons .
 Dans le trou de la nuit ou dorment les maisons .
 Des chapeaux en papier, des cocardes, a foison !
 Et descroix de St-George, des dragons, des blasons,
 Ont attendu six ans et la belle saison
 Pour dire: C'est fini. Aux filles et aux garçons .

Les rois, les présidents et les chefs provisoires
 Sentent monter dans l'air des parfums d'encensoir
 Sur leurs balcons drapes qui flottent en perissoir
 Dans l'Océan humain, ~~Célébrons la victoire!~~ *accablé par l'histoire*
Videz ~~Finis~~ les camps d'horreur aux odeurs d'abattoir ..
 Ont attendu six ans les lumières de l'espoir
 Pour dire: C'est fini la tuerie, pour ce soir .

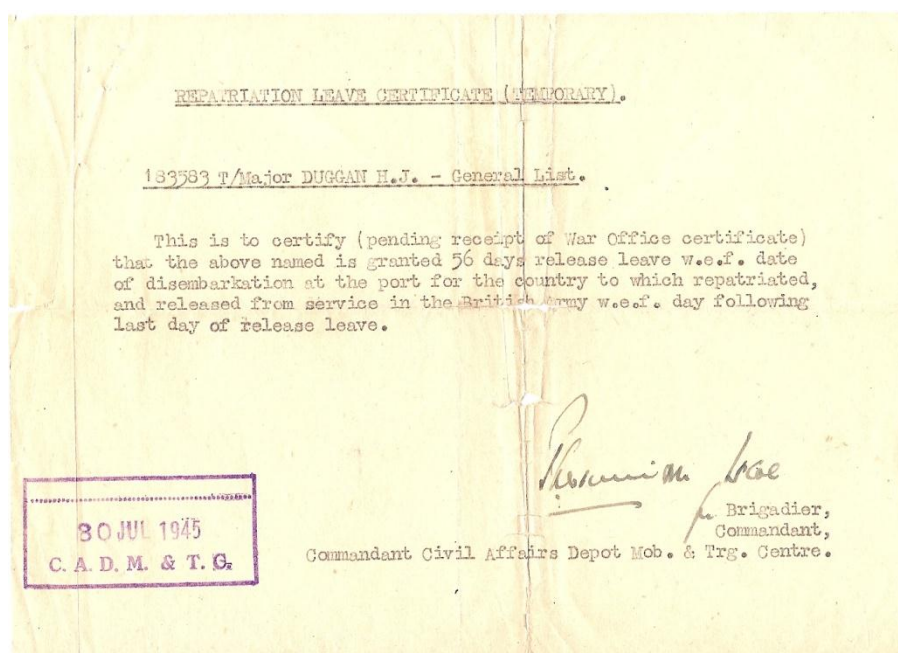
However a whole year went by before the end of WW2 was announced: on 30th April 1945 Hitler committed suicide during the battle of Berlin.

V E Day commemorates 8th May 1945 when the Allies accepted the formal surrender of the occupying forces of Nazi Germany at the end of Adolf Hitler's Third Reich.

V J Day, 15th August 1945, commemorates Victory of the Pacific, the name chosen for the day on which the surrender of Japan occurred - effectively the end of WW2!

Major H J Duggan was demobbed on the 30th July 1945 – 'date of disembarkation at the port for the country to which repatriated, and released from service in the British Army'. In 1944, my father was promoted to Major for his very valuable work in the Royal Engineers.

It was now safe for us to return. On the 30th July, an open van came to collect our belongings; we were only allowed our very favourite toys and had to leave many behind. My father had been given blankets and campbeds by the Army, standard issue to all soldiers at the end of war - they were in fact used by us – later - quite a lot I remember.



Harold's repatriation leave certificate

REFERENCE LETTER

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN.

Major H.J. DUGGAN has served under my command as my personal assistant for the past two years, and is an Officer of outstanding merit and ability.

Whatever his task he has approached it in a quiet, cheerful, but businesslike way. Through merit and hard work I have been able to promote him up to his present rank as Major, and he has always fully justified his promotion by the efficient way in which he has carried out his increased responsibilities. He is most energetic and nothing is too much trouble. Has a knack of getting things done with a minimum of effort.

Absolutely reliable and trustworthy. Can be confidently recommended for any suitable employment in civil life.

J. T. Blewinski

Lieutenant Colonel, R.A.,
C.A. Depot, Mobilization, and Training Centre.

Grand Hotel,
EASTBOURNE.
24 August, 1945.



From :- Brigadier R. BRUCE HAY, D.S.O.

Grand Hotel,
EASTBOURNE,
SUSSEX.

26th July, 1945.

My Dear *Duggan,*

I ~~am~~ sorry not to see you again before you left. I therefore feel that I should like to write and thank you very much for all the loyal and efficient work which you have put into this Centre, not only in helping to get us into EASTBOURNE while you were Assistant Quartering Commandant to this District, but also from the time you joined my Staff up to your departure for foreign climes.

I hope that your "foreign service" in ENGLAND has not been too irksome, anyway I think your wife has enjoyed it.

Should you have found it dull at least you can look back on something "well done", and know that your services have been fully appreciated by all who have worked with you, and not least by me.

In thanking you once more I wish you every possible success on returning to your normal occupation. You have earned it.

Kindest Regards to your Wife.

Yours sincerely

R. Bruce Hay

Major H.J DUGGAN,
53 Mill Road,
HAILSHAM,
SUSSEX.

We dashed down to the coast, Newhaven more precisely (for us a most familiar place now...) and boarded the ferry sailing to Dieppe, rather less sophisticated than the ones crossing the Channel today. For us though it was a time of salvation! A few hours later, having arrived in the French port and disembarked, we boarded the train on the quay alongside the ship. But as the train slid slowly into the town of Dieppe, the scenes which were awaiting us were totally unexpected and still very vivid in my mind. We were suddenly aware of a multitude of children's hands stretching out towards the carriage windows. They belonged to ill-nourished looking children shouting 'chocolat, cigarettes'! This was quite a shock. What had the war done to France? I suspect my parents suddenly realised that the conditions we had been living in during the last four years, had been rather favourable.

A further train journey took us to Paris. Again there were traumatic moments. The capital had taken a terrible toll during the Occupation. Andrew Hussey describes in his book *Paris: The Secret History*: 'Filth, dirt everywhere. The city looked neglected and half wrecked. Buildings were riddled with bullet holes and covered with filth. The streets were dark and dirty.... the air was thick with choking dust'. As we walked in the city, we saw long queues outside shops for food - not really the quiet, rural life we had been living in Hailsham. This was our motherland and we had to readapt fairly quickly. It was not easy as we had nowhere to live. Relatives lent us their flats. The first one was not to be a very pleasant experience but fortunately for us my grandfather's sister, Tante Blanche, very generously gave us her very spacious, very bourgeois flat in the 17th arrondissement on the Avenue Niel where we lived in comfort for a few months. Conditions were poor in Paris. The schools were dirty, poorly maintained and as children we were unhappy. We changed schools several times. I caught scabies (unheard of today), became ill and was sent to Mègeve, in the French Alps, for three months to recuperate.

Ninou decided that it was time for us to leave Paris and live in more salubrious quarters! Shortly after our arrival in France we had a notification from the town of Bougival informing us that our house (rented) had been partly demolished and was unfit to live in. A barge full of ammunition had exploded on the Seine - the house was very close to the river as you might remember, and the town was unable to accommodate us.

After some thought and research it was decided that St Germain-en-Laye would suit us very well. On the western outskirts of Paris it was known to be a healthy place to live in, situated on a plateau overlooking the river Seine, with an ancient chateau dating back to King François 1er and beyond the town, a vast forest. But the town is mostly known for being the birthplace of Louis XIV, and Claude Debussy. Another important factor, there were two good schools (lycées).



Our home in St Germain-en-Laye

My father was 'graciously' given back the post he occupied before the war at Wood-Milne, whose business was the manufacture of rubber soles and heels in Rueil-Malmaison, 20 minutes away from St Germain. We lived in this very pleasant provincial town for 10 happy years, from 1946. My parents were renting a largish house, well situated near the centre of the town and all amenities - although I had a 25 minutes walk every morning to school - but it kept me fit and I often cycled. I have learned since that the Lycée Claude Debussy was, at the time, one of the best schools in the country!! And certainly very academic: not always to my benefit... We had to learn French all over again when we returned to France, our native country (in Paris we had a private tutor). Some of my teachers were extremely fierce and not always very sensitive, in particular those who had been in that establishment for many years (two of my teachers had also taught Doreen there before the war). The traditional learning by heart of classical poetry was always a very trying experience for me: when we were called to the front of the class and asked to recite; at the first hesitation, we were sent back to our seat with a 0!! - no second chance, no 'rattrapage'...



Dinah and Patrick at the back of the house at St Germain

Patrick and I have very fond memories of St Germain. We had many friends some of whom we still see today. There were parties and apart from public exams it was a time of 'insouciance' without responsibilities. My brother rowed at my father's club in Le Port-Marly which was established in the 1950s on the Seine, not far from St Germain at the foot of the plateau.



L'Inondation à Port Marly by Alfred Sisley, 1876

It was the family sport. At that time my father was the trainer, my mother rowed and Doreen was a cox. I was the exception of course as I had an aversion to very muscly women's thighs! Earlier, in 1946, Jean Sepheriades had become the world champion sculler at the Royal Regatta in Henley, and thanks to my father, who trained him and introduced the Fairbairn technique, he became and is still to this day a national rowing hero. The club always had a large following, very appreciated and well attended at the rowing regattas.



Not quite rowing, not quite France, but Doreen, Ninou and Harold on a float in Torcross, Devon, probably during the war

I was for a short period of time taught the piano by Monsieur Alain. He had built an organ in his living room and this fairly large musical instrument seemed to be supporting his nineteenth century house! Unfortunately, the pressure of school work and exams meant that practising the piano was rarely part of my daily schedule. However, M Alain's daughter Marie-Claire became famous worldwide as an organist, and both her brothers, Jehan and Olivier, were brilliant musicians. Jehan, whose work *Litanies* was performed at the Proms this year, for the first time I suspect, died heroically at the age of 29 at the battle of Saumur during WW2.

Very sadly our father died in 1955 of his third heart attack, exactly ten years after his return from the war. A terrible loss. Ninou had to support her family and on the advice of a friend decided to lodge a few 'well-bred' British girls all from renowned Public Schools. This distressed me as my 'space' was taken, my bedroom was now in the attic and my mother's thoughts were elsewhere...

After the Baccalauréat - the Bac in French - a Swedish friend of mine, Marianne Lemchen, who also attended the Lycée Claude Debussy, asked me whether I would like to go with her to Oxford where she wanted to perfect her English - which was, needless to say, already quite perfect! This was an excellent opportunity for me to have a change and we both set off in September 1956 for the 'City of Dreaming Spires'. We had enrolled at the St Giles School of English, school for foreign students, for one academic year. The teaching was, of course, much less formal than at my former 'lycée' and in that respect it was quite a pleasant relief. However, Oxford life presented for me some difficulties. In the 1950s foreignness was very exotic for the young student elite and fending off unwanted advances on the back seat of taxis became extremely tedious! After a shaky start I went back home at Christmas (Ninou was by now living in Suresnes) and told her that I was very reluctant to go back. There was no question of me not continuing the course (at the end of which I was expected to take the Cambridge Proficiency Exam). My mother had paid for the two terms and I know that it had presented for her some financial sacrifice.

The second term could not have been more different! In February 1957 I met Colin Child at Rhodes House where was being held an evening of listening to Scandinavian music – on records - which Marianne and I had decided to attend.

Colin and I were married the following year. Civil wedding in Oxford in April, followed in June by a more formal wedding at the Methodist Church, rue Roquépine in Paris.

Colin has been my companion and soul-mate for 53 years!

It has turned out to be a slow journey down memory lane - almost as slow as the original escape from Occupied France in 1941. But now I have written it, I am pleased I have made the effort as I have lived with this war 'experience' for over 70 years, recounting it many times to

people who cared to listen to me! There was a time however when I felt that Patrick and I had too few details to make it an interesting account. With original documents which we had in our possession: passports, letters written at the time, photographs and of course the invaluable help of the internet - not forgetting our own very personal memories - we now both hope that it has been a worthwhile exercise for our children and grandchildren and maybe even later generations to come (today is the 30th July – the date at which my father was demobbed in 1945 - another coincidence).

It is interesting that Patrick, his wife H  l  ne and their children, Antoine, Caroline and Dominique, now live in Brittany, none of them very far from St Nazaire.

My sister Doreen also stayed in France with her husband Georges L  vitte, and they brought up their children, Jean-David, Agn  s, Marc and Shula, in Paris.

This journey will seem a very tiny part of the history of World War II. We survived, many, many, did not. Six million Jews died during the Holocaust or in ghettos - 22 members of Ninou's family were deported to concentration camps and never came back. Lest we forget!

Dinah Child

September 2011

