

**Sonia Malkine
Narrator**

**Mike Russert & Wayne Clark
New York State Military Museum
Interviewers**

Interviewed on 1/18/2002 at Shady, NY

Q: Today we are interviewing Sonia Malkine. It is January 18th, 2002. We're in Shady, New York. Ms. Malkine, where were you born?

A: I was born in Paris.

Q: In Paris. You grew up in Paris?

A: Until I was three. Then my mother took me down to the south. She remarried a fisherman and we lived in St. Tropez for about 12 years. Then, they divorced and we came back to Paris just a year before the war started.

Q: What was France like just at the beginning of World War II?

A: When the war started you mean?

Q: Just before that. What was life like for you?

A: I was a youngster. I got my first job in 1938. I was 14. It was in the summer and my mother was working as a secretary for the administrator of a big hotel in St. Tropez. So, she got me a summer job there. It turned out to be really an adult job. I was the telephone operator.

I was having a wonderful time except at that time that hotel belonged to a Mr. Kragen (sp?). Mr. Kragen was one of the heirs of Zaharoff. Are you familiar with that name?

Q: No.

A: Zaharoff was a Russian who during the First World War made millions by selling weapons to both sides. He was not particular. He sold his cannons, his munitions to everybody. He made a lot of money. In 1917 he came to France because there was a revolution so his heirs were also very wealthy.

Mr. Kragen bought that hotel. It was a huge hotel for his wife as a birthday present. There was a lot of Russians working there. Colonels of this and Prince of that and Count of something else. It was summer and I was having a good time but what he did he had hired all the help for the hotel in Nice and he told them it was a second rate hotel.

When the people came for the kitchen, for the maids and so forth, they realized that it was not a second rate hotel that it was a palace. The rates were very high. It was very expensive. Marlene Dietrich was there and a lot of people in diamond sales. There was a lot of very wealthy people there.

So, they asked for their salaries to be raised according to the rate of the hotel. Mr. Kragen refused. That was in the middle of the season. It was the middle of August. So, they decided to go on strike. They all went on strike. We were on strike for about three weeks. The people didn't want to leave the hotel. Where would they go in the middle of the season on the Riviera? There was no place to be had.

So, they would go and eat in town. They made their own beds. They carried their own luggage but they didn't want to leave. In fact, at one point they even offered to make up the difference in salary. Of course, he refused. Then, he finally decided to close the hotel. So, we were all out of work. So, my first job was not very lucky.

Q: What did you do after that?

A: After that we went back to Paris. That's fall. I went back to school. I was 15. I went back to high school. I took my exam for high school a couple of days before the Germans came into Paris which was a very bad taste I thought.

Everybody left when the Germans came. Everybody left. The government left for the south. In fact, you know something very interesting. When the government was gone to the south of France, there was nobody to receive the Germans. The town was practically empty except for the Ambassador of the United States – Mr. Bullitt. He loved Paris and didn't want to leave. He's the one who delivered Paris to the Germans.

Q: Oh really?

A: How do you like that? I don't know what gave him the right to do this but I thought it was very interesting.

Q: How did you feel as a young lady with the Germans? What was the feeling in Paris when the Germans came in?

A: When the Germans came in, there was nobody there. The town was practically empty. People started coming back little by little. I came back six months later. I went back to my school to find out if I had my diploma but they said I'm sorry but when everybody left the papers were lost so you'll have to come back and take your exams again. I said thank you very much but there's no question of this, I have to go to work now so I went to work.

When the Germans came into Paris, Hitler came and he loved the city. He told his people to be correct, to pay for everything, to be gentlemen. That lasted for a little while but not very long.

In the first place, they were paying us with German Army money which wasn't worth anything so it was (unclear) the place. Little by little, the French really resented the presence in the city because it was really felt everywhere. Signs everywhere in German. You couldn't do this and couldn't do that and couldn't go there. You couldn't do this, you couldn't do that, verboten, verboten, verboten. You know the hell with this. The French were not used to this kind of thing.

So, the resistance started in Paris in 1940 in a museum, in a basement of a museum. Musee de l'Homme, the Trocadero. I don't know if you know it.

Q: I've heard of it.

A: It was a huge museum. People started making fires, listening to the BBC and propaganda against the Nazis. So, that's where it started. The resistance started in 1940.

Q: How did the Germans react to the early part of the resistance?

A: At the beginning, they didn't take it very seriously until they realized it was growing in every direction. Then little by little they started turning the screw on and on. They started taking hostages. You couldn't have a car. They confiscated all of the cars. They confiscated all the weapons. If you were found with a weapon – any kind of weapon – you were shot. There was no trial or anything. They didn't bother with this kind of thing.

Then they started with the Jews. First they have to wear the yellow star. They couldn't go to the Champs-Elysees. They couldn't go to the Opera. They couldn't go into theaters. They couldn't go into movies. They had to ride the last car in the subway. It was getting....I mean there has been Jews in France since the Middle Ages. (unclear)

Q: Did you have Jewish friends.

A: Oh yes. Sure. My mother has a boyfriend who was Jewish. When I left for the south, I left my apartment to two Jewish women, the mother and aunt of my best friend who was also Jewish. She still is after 60 years.

Life became very difficult and then, of course, the first thing that they did was to take everything they could put their hands on. The start, of course, with the gold, the coal and the iron because they needed that for the war. Then the food. France is a very rich country. Food is plentiful. They took everything that they could and sent everything to Germany.

The rationing became so bad. People were starving. If you had families or friends in the country where you could go and get a pound of butter once and awhile or two pounds of beans, you were lucky but I wasn't and I was starving! I was starving.

We were never rich my family. My mother was always working but I was never hungry. This was something else again.

Q: You were working at that time?

A: I took a job. I went to...I found an ad in a paper and took a job as a typist in an office. In fact, I was the only one there except for the boss. Now, the boss was very interesting – Monsieur Asher. Monsieur Asher was a young punk. I think he was 22 and I was about 17 at that point. He was the only son of a very wealthy bourgeois family. They put him in this office to get him out of trouble.

He was selling, buying and repairing typewriters. That was the “business”. Actually, he was doing “black market” but he was for the collaboration. Every day we had terrible fights because I was absolutely against it. We should collaborate they are the Germans, they are the strongest this and that. I was against it and every day we would have an argument.

One day he came to the office and he wanted me to type leaflets you know these things to stick all over the town against the British, against the Allies. I said, “No. I'm not going to type that. I am not here to do political work after your job for the office. This kind of stuff I don't want to do. He said, “You're going to do it or you're going to lose your job.” I said. “Fine!”

He left slamming the door. He came back that night just before I was leaving. Not only was he drunk but he was also in a Nazi uniform. There was a French Nazi party. I don't remember the name of it. Marcel Bucard was the big boss of that. He was a big Nazi from way back.

He had a blue shirt, a blue tie, black pants and boots and a belt with a holster and pistol. I thought oh my god. I thought about all the arguments that we had. Then I started to realize that I had been followed in my neighborhood – some guy I had been asking about with my concierge. I was seventeen. I never thought it was something political. Then I thought my god that is so (unclear). He is having me followed.

I went to see a friend of mine. She gave me some papers so I could get out of the city. I left. I never went back.

Q: You had to have papers to leave the city?

A: To leave the city, to leave Paris. The county was in two pieces. It was the occupied zone and the non-occupied zone. That was Vichy with Petain and Laval and those bums.

In order to go to the south zone, you had to have papers. You had to go through German police and show “ausweis”. You know, pass.

My friend gave me a pass. She was wonderful. She was working in the German office for the agent, the Todt Agency (Organisation Todt). They were building the Atlantic Wall the bunkers and all those things. So, when people came there for work, she would send the bad guys all the Fascists and the collaborationists, she would send them all to the wrong place. They were going to be bombed by the Allies. The French, she would send them to the Alps or someplace where it was pretty safe. Anyway, she gave me some papers so I could cross someplace safe.

Q: Where were you going by yourself or with your mother?

A: I was going south. My mother came back to Paris so she was in the city but I went to Dordogne which is in the southwest of France. Do you know the country at all? I should show you a map. It's very hilly pretty much like here but very dense forest of chestnut forest. There, there was a “Maquis.”

Q: What were you going down there to do?

A: I was going to a farm. My boyfriend's uncle had a farm down there. He had gone there because he did not want to work for Germany. He was 20 years old. He was going to be sent to Germany to work. He escaped and was working in his uncle's farm.

They had forest and they were cutting wood. They had a saw mill right there at the farm. I was there. I really didn't know what to do. I was brought up in boats. What did I know about farming? I couldn't tell the carrots from the weeds.

Anyway, at the saw mill, there was a Jewish man Illias who was a refugee from Paris. His whole family had moved down south. He was the foreman of the saw mill. He knew that I was lost in this place and he said, “You know if I paid your trip back to Paris would you go back and bring a letter to my family? They don't know where I am. I am sure that they're worried.”

I said, “Well my pass is still good. Sure, I'll go back.” So, he gave me this paper and I went to see his family. I don't think this was his family. It wasn't. It was the Jewish underground. So, they said to me, if we pay your trip back would you go back to Illias and bring some papers from us to Illias.

Yeah. I can do that. There I was. I went back and Illias said, “You are very curious aren't you?” I said, “Yes but I don't want to know. The less I know the better. You know it was your family. They're fine. I don't really want to know.” He said, “I know some people who could use somebody like you. You're French. You're not Jewish. You're papers are in order. You can travel. You don't mind moving around. You could be very useful.” I

said, "Well, to whom? Who is there around here?" He said, "In La Bessede which is a huge forest nearby, there are a lot of Spanish people who came over the mountain in '39 making charcoal. That's their livelihood and they are cutting wood for the saw mill." That was the connection.

"But, their officers are reorganizing these men into a group of guerrilla to work with the French Resistance." The French Resistance was pretty active in that part of the country.

Q: This is your first introduction into the...

A: That was my first introduction. That's how I fell into the underground so to speak. I didn't chose to get up one morning and say I think I am going into the resistance today. It was not that.

I said that I would like to meet these people. My mother had a lot of Spanish friends. She used to work for the Quakers in Paris and she was working for the Spanish refugees bringing food and clothes and medicine to the refugee camps in the south. It was absolutely miserable because there were so many people the French didn't know what to do with them.

She had made a lot of Spanish friends so I was familiar with the Spanish. I loved Flamenco. So, I said, "Ok Spanish it is. Let's meet them first." There was a meeting with Carlos who was one of the leaders of the group in that area. With Carlos there was Mr. Tovar (Colonel Vicente Lopez Tovar). We called him Alberto at the time. Alberto took over at this meeting. I said, "I thought I was going to work for Carlos" but he said that Carlos works for me so you're going to talk to me now. I didn't really like his attitude!

He said to me, "Are you afraid of the Germans?" I said, "What a stupid question of course I am afraid of the Germans. Everybody is. I saw them beating a man in front of me in Paris in a street because he crossed the street in front of a convoy that practically killed the man. Excuse me if I am afraid of them. Everybody is terrified of them. You have to be totally stupid not to be."

He said "Well, if had told me you were not afraid, I wouldn't have trusted you." "So, fine, so now you trust me right?" He said, "Well not quite because I don't know if you can work with fear." I said, "That I can't tell you. I don't know. I'll have to try and see what happens." He said, "Ok. Tomorrow morning at seven, you'll be at the station and there will be a tall blond girl there. She will tell you what to do and where to go."

The next day there was Blondie and she was waiting for me. She was from Lorraine. She had been working with them for a while but she was from another part of the country and it was very difficult for her to do everything. So, they needed somebody else. I started with her. She showed me the ropes.

Q: At this point you're what? Seventeen? Eighteen?

A: Eighteen.

Q: Eighteen? That's a lot of responsibility for an eighteen year old.

A: It was but it was also a big adventure you know. I was free. I was healthy. I had no responsibilities. I loved to travel. It was a big adventure. If I could do something to the Germans I would you know.

Q: What exactly was your job?

A: I was a courier. I transported papers, reports, money. Once in a while weapons but very rarely because that scared me to death. Every time I did something would happen to scare me. Really. The least possible. The papers were bad enough. If I had been caught with them, I would have been shot or worse.

There was a girl who had been working for the Spanish for a while and she was arrested. She was tortured. She was gang raped. They cut her breasts off. What they did to this kid, you wouldn't believe it. She never talked. She was eighteen. They told me later that I took her place which at the time had I known, I would have thought twice about it.

It was a very dangerous thing but I was very shy for one thing, I was very reserved, very shy so I would have never attracted attention. I was not beautiful. I was not anything. I could go through the crowd and nobody would pay attention to me at all.

I was on bicycle most of the time. When it was too far, I would take a bus or the train. Sometimes I would have to take three of them. Even then, sometime, this thing really happened. I was so lucky. I can't tell you how lucky I was those years. I think I had a very busy guardian angel who would fall asleep once and a while and then wake up just in time to get me out of trouble.

Q: You had some close calls?

A: Very close calls. Once I was carrying this little suitcase full of pistols. I had wrapped them up and wrapped them up in newspapers and I had to go by bus quite a big distance. So, I take this bus. I'm waiting in line to get into the bus and behind me I suddenly I see this big shadow on the ground.

It was a German SS. Very tall SS. What he was doing on that bus, I will never know. He sees me carrying this little suitcase which was very heavy. I don't know if you ever carried a suitcase full of pistols but it is very heavy but he was going to be a gentleman. He said "Let me carry this suitcase for you it's too heavy for such a little girl." "Oh no really I'm very strong, I can do it myself. Thank you" "No, no, no" and he took the suitcase away from me gets into the bus and puts it on the rack on top.

He sits right in front of me and says “What’s in the suitcase? It’s so heavy.” I said “its books. I am a student.” It’s the middle of July and I’m on vacation and that’s my book but he heard something metallic in it. He was looking at me and I said, “I had my ice skates also.” Then I thought what a stupid thing to say. What I am I doing in July with ice skates in a part of the country that never sees ice or snow. This guy is going to think I am nuts or worse so I start talking to him very fast that I was a skater here and a skater there.

Oh, he said, “I am a skater too. I’m from Hamburg.” He started telling me about all the champions from Germany. I kept him talking until the next stop and he carried my suitcase down. I said, “Goodbye!” Oh god, I’ve never been so scared. Things like that happened to me three of four times more.

Another time I was with Blondie, she saved the day. That was at the very beginning that I was working with her. We had plastic you know this famous explosive plastic in our saddle bags on both of our bicycles. The saddle bag was full of plastic. It was a beautiful day. We were going down a hill and right at the bottom of the hill there was some Gendarme. French troopers. You never knew with them. Some of them were with the resistance and some were not. You really took a chance with them.

They stopped us. “Girls, what are you carrying in those saddle bags?” My friend, she had a little handbag on her handle bars and she had a piece of bread in it and a knitting or something and she put it right under the Gendarmes nose and said, “What do you think we’re carrying bombs or something?” They just said “Alright girls go ahead.” They probably thought we were doing some black market of something with food because that was the most essential thing for where we were. They let us go.

Q: You had to be pretty quick witted to survive.

A: Oh, yes. Another time, I don’t know how that happened. It was almost at the time of the liberation of Toulouse. That was ’44. I was given some papers to bring to a general. Here I am with my little suitcase that has a false bottom. You put the papers, of course, in the false bottom and put my clothes on top.

Then, Tovar said here’s a pistol. Those papers had to get there even if you to shoot your way through any kind of situation those papers have to get there. I said, “I don’t want a pistol. I really don’t” He said, “No take it you may need it. Take it.”

If you are going to use a pistol where would you put it? In your pocket? In your belt? In your back? I put it in my hand bag. I was not going to use the damn thing. I put it in my hand bag. I remember I had a brand new navy suit. I was so happy about this. It was the first time I bought some new clothes in about three years. I had a handbag which was

the same color. You know, the Parisian girls. Everything had to coordinate. My bag was navy blue also. Then I had my pistol in there.

I get to the station in Toulouse which is a pretty big city. The last big city before the border. We get out of the train and open the door and right outside the gate there were Germans all over the square. All the streets were barred with tanks and with cars. Some French police but mainly the German police and some SS and they were searching everybody and I thought well girl this time you've had it. That damn pistol is going to do you in.

I never panicked. This I can say for myself. I panicked later like three months later I started crying for an hour without any reason. I thought I can't shoot my way through this one. No way. So, I go to the gate. They open my suitcase. They look into there. They didn't see the papers. They close it back. They search me. They couldn't find anything and they let me go. They didn't look in my pocket book. They didn't look and I am petrified just waiting for them to do it. They push me and say come on get out of here.

By that time, my knees are shaking. I can't believe my luck. This is not possible. I go through all that square with all those Germans all over the place. This is the kind of luck I had all through the war.

Q: Did you develop friend in this...

A: The Spanish friends became my friends. They were wonderful people.

Q: Was it hard to trust people?

A: Well, I trusted them with my life. They trusted me which was probably more difficult because they were completely vulnerable if I was arrested and tortured and I talked.

I lived in the woods for two years with 75 Spanish men. I was the only girl and I was the only French and I was the youngest. I was the kid. I was the mascot. I was a soldier like them. I ate like them. I had my own tent. I was treated the same the same as they were. I dressed like them. I had nothing else. They were wonderful. They became my family. There were all kinds of men. There were students, law students from Madrid. There was a lawyer from Barcelona. There was a water carrier from Galicia. He couldn't speak. I don't think he could read or write. There was some communists. There was some socialists. There was some anarchists. There was some union men. There were some republicans who just hated the Fascists. It was a mixture of everything.

There was Churri. Churri became my bodyguard. He decided he was going to be my bodyguard. Churri was a little guy who before the war was in Madrid making churros. Churros are like donuts, in the streets. He had this big basin and he was making the

churros in the street. So they called him Churri because that was his job. He was a very simple guy. He had all kinds of scars on his face from the war.

Then he was shot at one point on the road one day and they brought him back to the camp. We didn't know if he was going to make it. He had five bullets in his body and they couldn't be removed. We had a doctor with us.

I would read the paper for him and roll his cigarettes and I would tell him jokes. After that, nobody could do anything to me or touch me or do anything to me. He was my bodyguard. That was it. That was Churri. I still have a picture of it. I think I have a picture of it.

There was a general. There were soldiers like Tovar and (unclear). They were career officers. Those were the ones who organized the groups. They were so brave. They never complained about anything. They hadn't seen their families for four, five, six, seven years. They didn't know if they were even still alive.

Q: Did you have any contact with your mother at this point?

A: No

Q: Did she have any idea where you were?

A: She didn't. She knew I was in the south somewhere, Dordogne, but that's all she knew. I couldn't communicate with her. In fact, the mail was very slow anyway because it was censored at the border. So, we couldn't say anything. I didn't want her to know where I was just in case she was arrested.

Then she.....oh my mother. The thing that my mother did during the war. The thing about her. There she is. She has two jobs. She has a Jewish companion which was against the law, my grandmother whose house had been bombed to the ground and burned to the ground. My little brother who was ten, eleven, twelve and my little sister who was two.

With this whole household looking for food for everybody, she had to feed everybody. She was making false papers. She had a friend who was a woman who was a teacher. She was teaching arts and drawings and paintings at a big college in Paris. So, that woman helped her copy German stamps and cut them into linoleum to make copies of them.

Then she knew a Spanish printer (unclear) I don't know could get paper so they were making false cards of identities. She made thousands of them. She made baptism certificates. She made (unclear) papers. She would make passes. She would make thousands of papers for people she didn't know.

I said mother one of these days somebody is going to give you up. You could get arrested. The whole family could go to Germany.

She said, “You know, we have to take chances. When those people come to me and they are so desperate what can I say to them? I can’t say no. I can’t say I can’t help you because I don’t know you. I can’t do that.” She went through the war like a miracle.

So, when I ask her after the war was over, “Why do you think it happened that you were never bothered by anybody by the police or the Germans?” She said, “Well I think the reason why is because I never asked for money from anybody.” She never did. She never asked for a dime from anyone which is probably a very romantic idea of my mother because money or no money she could have been arrested.

She was a very brave woman. She was also working with the British looking for apartments in Paris for radio because they had to change all the time. So, that’s what she was doing. She was looking for apartments in Paris. She went through all kinds of very strange things too. So, I guess that adventure can run in the family.

Q: So, you were with this group of seventy some men for two years?

A: Yes. And I’ll tell you one thing. I never felt so safe in my entire life – much safer than New York City! I’ll tell you that.

I knew one thing about the Spanish men. Women were good or they were bad and that was it. There was nothing in between. You didn’t flirt with them. You didn’t fool around. You just kept your place. So, that’s what I did.

Q: Excuse me for a second. We’re going to change tapes.

Q: You were in with this group from 1943....

A: ’43 until ’45. Even after the war was almost over. In the first place there was an expedition in Spain.

Q: What was that all about?

A: In’ 44. That was a kind of Don Quixote kind of thing I thought at the time. But I thought if they were going to go to Spain, I was going to go with them. They fought for my country. I would go to Madrid with them.

They thought that if they had a military expedition in Spain that was covered by the newspapers that would make enough noise so that the Allies would recognize a Spanish government in exile against Franco. Which, of course, didn’t happen. De Gaulle would have loved to beat the heck out of Franco because he hated the guy. He didn’t have anything to fight him with. France was empty. It was bled white.

So, De Gaulle couldn't help. The British wouldn't help. The Americans even less. The Americans said no Franco was neutral during the war. You can imagine how neutral this guy was. There was a lot of food that went from Spain to Germany – a lot of it to the point that the Spanish were very hungry too.

Of course, the submarine, the ships that would come to the Spanish harbors were helped all through the war. There was nothing neutral about him but we couldn't touch Franco. So, we went over the mountain on foot.

Q: Who led this expedition?

A: Tovar.

Q: How many people?

A: About 2000. In different groups. I was with the (Franc Tireurs) people. I was the only girl. No, there was another girl. She was a nurse with another group. We were the only two girls.

We went across the bloody mountains. Oh god was that a high mountain! I was raised on the Riviera and in Paris. What did I know about mountains? It was very high. Anyway, we walked all night. I said why don't we take a pass? They said that's the pass.

So, we went up and then the next day, we went down. I realized that going down was even worse than going up. We went down on the other side on a little village names Bossost. We took over the village and the Fascist there, the police, they all fled. They didn't know what was happening.

We were there for about two and a half weeks and there was fighting. They sent soldiers against us that were youngsters. They were all very young 19 or 20 years old. They said, they told us we were going on maneuvers. They were very shocked when they realized that the bullets were real. They were really taken in by their own people. They could get shot.

So, we gathered them together. We had about 200 of them prisoners. We put them in a barn and talked to them telling them what we were trying to do trying to raise the consciousness of the Spanish people maybe they could rise again but they were not ready to do that. The war was only finished about six years before. It was still fresh yet and they still remember the bombing, the massacres and they were not ready to start that again.

So, we couldn't get the Spanish people with us. They couldn't get the Allies interested in us and then it started to snow. That was the end of October. It was very cold. It started to snow. We had to get back. I'll telling you that was one of the hardest things that I've

see those people do is to go back. They were in Spain. They were home. They wanted to go home to fight for their own country.

Then they had to go back into France again. Some of those men were in their 40's, 50's and they had tears on their faces for the first time I could see something like this with them. It was just heartbreaking. I was mad as hell. I wanted to go to Madrid but we didn't. We went back and that was the end of that.

It was in the papers. I'll show you the papers.

Q: Did the Germans come after you at all?

A: No, the Germans weren't there anymore. That was in '44. In October '44, Paris was liberated. The war was still going on but the Germans were going back to Germany by then.

Q: The 7th Army was coming up.

A: The 7th Army was coming up from Provence, from Marseille up. Normandy was pretty much over by then although it took them quite a while to get away from there. It was really bad.

Q: As the Germans were being pushed back, how were the collaborators being treated?

A: Some were shot. The bad ones. Those who had given up resistance fighters to the Germans. We had no pity for those. Some were arrested. It all depends on what they did. If it was just collaboration because they were just like the Germans, there was not much we could do about them. Or they may go to prison for six months or a year or two depending if they were doing black market with them. It all depended what they did?

Q: What happened to your former boss?

A: Monsieur Asher. I still wonder to this day what happened to him. I don't know. I never knew. I didn't go back to find out. I never knew what happened to him.

Q: What did you think of De Gaulle?

A: De Gaulle was a very brave man. Very straight. Very honest. His integrity was beyond suspicion of any kind. He was a conservative. Right wing. Patriot. Intelligent. A good soldier who knew a lot about strategy who knew that the next war – the modern war – was going to be with tanks and aviation. He wrote a whole treatise on that which Hitler read and used.

The French didn't. The generals who were with the French army Gamelin, completely incompetent. He was still fighting the First World War with trenches and stuff.

Completely ignored the de Gaulle's warning. He was telling them get planes, get tanks! They didn't.

When I talk to Americans they say that the French didn't fight. There is nothing that made me more angry because it wasn't true. It really isn't. When the Germans came over to the west, they started with Norway. That was a shamble on both sides. The British, the French, the Germans. Nobody knew what they were doing up there. Anyway, the Germans finally took over because the British suddenly were busy some other place.

Then they invaded Denmark. Did you know that the Danes didn't fire a single shot when the Germans came in not a single shot? So, that was done very quickly. They had time though to take all their Jews and put them in a boat and send them to Sweden which is a 20 minute boat ride on the other side which was very nice but that was easy for them to do.

Then they went into Holland. Holland was a little harder. People there really fought especially around Rotterdam. There were battles there. Then they went into Belgium. Belgium was saying we are neutral, we are neutral to Hitler who couldn't have cared less if you were neutral. But those idiots wouldn't let the French soldiers and British soldiers into their country.

So, when Hitler came in anyway with his tanks and his...it was like a wall of steel and fire and planes. There was nobody who could resist this kind of thing. It was like a juggernaut. They finally let the French and British in. By then it was too late. That was May 10th that the Germans came into Belgium. By the time the last British left Dunkirk for England that was June 7th, that was almost a month. For a whole month, the French and British fought those bloody Germans. So, don't tell me that they didn't fight.

Q: As the Germans were pushed back, what did your group, your merry little band do?

A: When?

Q: In '45. As the Germans were pushed back, what were you doing at that point?

A: I was still with my Spanish friends. They kept being organized. In the first place they were trying to get papers from the French government and to get some type of normal life, to get jobs. Some had started families so they were trying to get some kind of normal life but at the same time their officers were trying to keep them together just in case they wanted to go back to Spain.

They were training some of the Spanish people to go back to Spain on their own by themselves with a specific – you'd call them terrorists I suppose for doing one thing or another. Two of my friends were caught. Louis – he was from Catalonia. He was a

student and he used to tell me, “When I am the mayor of Barcelona you’ll be my first citizen of honor.” I said, “Louis I’m counting on it.” He was shot in Barcelona.

Then there was Navas, beautiful, handsome, sweet Navas, 25 years old. He went back to Madrid seeing his mother doing some kind of work too. He was arrested and he was garroted. That was the Spanish capital punishment – the garrote – on a public square in Madrid with his mother there. Navas, I couldn’t believe it.

Q: As the war wound down, how did the French treat this group of Spaniard?

A: They treated them well. There was no reason not to. On the contrary, they were very nice to them. They were soldiers who came on their side and helped them. Two thousand of them died in Ravensbruck camp alone. The Germans hated the Spanish because they remembered the resistance in Spain. They threw dogs at them when they caught them.

What they did in ’44 when the Normandy invasion started – I remember that day because I walked 40 miles that day. That’s one day I will not forget. They were blowing up bridges. They were blowing up railroad tracks. They were blowing up trains full of munitions, factories. Anything that could help the Germans, they’d blow it up and they were good at it. They had experience from Spain.

We had one division of Germans, the “Das Reich” division I don’t know if you ever heard of them. They were a SS Panzer Division just for us, just for the Dordogne. They knew it was a nest of guerrilla. What they did those bastards – what they did to us. They were burning farms. They were hanging people, raping, stealing, killing. They killed two men in that little place where I was. There were three tanks on the road. They wouldn’t come in the woods. They would stay on the road but they caught those two guys on the road.

They shot one of them. The other one they made lie on the road then the officer told the tank driver to ride over his legs. Then he came back and rode over the whole body of the guy. By the time they left we couldn’t tell there was somebody there. There was just a mass of red stuff and bones. You just couldn’t tell there had been a person there you know. Those two guys were with the French group.

The French leader was named Rene. His name was Soleil at the time. Soleil is still a friend of mine to this day. It was two of his men. He saw what happened from the top of a hill. He said I’m going to get this guy. I’m going to get this officer. So, they ambushed those three tanks. They threw a grenade in one of them. It fell right into the turret. That stopped the other two. The officer came out and by that time they came out of the woods and arrested him. Then Soleil said to the officer ok now you lie down on the road and he talked to a guy who had a truck. I want you to run over this guy’s legs. Then before the

truck got to the guy he thought what the hell am I doing? I'm doing exactly the same as what this bastard was doing. I'm not any better than this SS. So, he just shot him instead.

Q: Were these SS soldiers French?

A: No. No. They were German. There were very SS who were French and most were Alsatian which started a big thing after the war was over because they said we were mobilized. We were in Alsace. Alsace became German. We became German. They mobilized us. They put us in the SS. So, we did what we had to do. We obeyed orders kind of thing except that wasn't true because the SS were all volunteer. That was another story. There was a lot of stories in this war.

There were several divisions of Germans in the south of France. The order was to stop them as much and as long as possible so they wouldn't get to Normandy. If they had been able to get to Normandy, it would have been very bad for the allies. They might not have been able to stay. So, we did everything we could to slow them down and we paid the price.

We constantly harassed them on the road. We would mine the road. We would blow up one of the tanks then a whole bunch of them had to stop. We did everything we could. We'd blow up a bridge and every time they would stop at the nearest farm and burn it down the crop and everything. They'd hang 15 people on the side of a bridge.

In the little town named Tula, they arrested a hundred hostages and they hung them on the balconies all around the square, the town square – a hundred people hanging there.

They stopped in one little town called Oradour-sur-Glane– a quiet little town in the middle of the countryside. Nobody knows why they stopped there. They took all of the men put them in a barn, shot a machine gun and put the thing on fire. They took the kids out of school and all the women and the sick people and put them in the church and blew up the church. They killed 650 people that day. There was one little kid who managed somehow to go out of a window in the back of the church who managed to escape and a few other people were out of town that day. The whole town was massacred. They never rebuilt the town to this day it is still a museum to the horrors of the Nazis.

You know I almost got there. Talk about lucky. I was on the road that day on my bicycle and it rained. Suddenly there was this storm and I was drenched. I had something like this shoes but I don't know what they were made with lace around my ankle. I don't know what they were made with but they melted. My shoes melted and the only thing that was left was the laces around my ankle. I couldn't pedal without shoes so I thought well I am going to go to Limoges which was one of the big cities down there to see Blondie my friend. Her father who was working in a shoe factory. Maybe he can find me a pair of shoes.

I was with a bunch of youngsters. It was on Sunday. It was a beautiful day. They were on a Sunday outing. I said maybe I better go back to Limoges so I the (unclear) road and they kept going. Then I crossed this little village a few miles down the road and you could hear shooting and there was smoke. What in the hell is going over there. There is nothing there. There is no rail station. There's nothing.

Then they found out that the Germans had been in this little town. The youngsters that were on the road with me that day they found them all shot on the road. If I had stayed with them. If there hadn't been this storm and my shoes melted I would have been shot with them. This is the kind of luck I had all through the war. That's how I survived. Just sheer luck.

They never apologized for it. They never said you know. I think somebody said it was a mistake that it was another Oradour that they were looking for but we had resistance fighters there. They never found out. Nobody was ever punished. Those Germans eventually went to the war to Normandy and so forth and disappeared. There was never anybody punished for it.

Q: As the war starts to end what are you doing at that point?

A: I worked with them. They got a job delivering wood to people in Toulouse. People were too poor to buy it. The government would deliver wood to them for heating and cooking. So, I went with them. I would take care of the paperwork. I stayed with them until October '45. Then the job ended somehow. I forget how. So I went back to Paris. It was the end of the war for me. By that time the war was over and I went to Italy with my mother.

Q: Your mother was happy to see you I'm sure?

A: Oh boy was she happy. She saw me once when I was in Spain. I wrote to her the day before I left for Spain telling her where I was going. My mother got the letter and she thought oh my god what is this girl going to do with all those communists? She didn't like communists at all.

Q: It was ok to be an anarchist.

A: Anarchist was fine but the communists no, no, no. They betrayed the revolution. Anyway, she was a very idealistic person. She was a purist. She was an anarchist until the day she died when she was 85. She never changed her mind. Never compromised. Always straight. My mother, she had guts really.

So, she got my letter telling her I was going to Spain. The next day she took the first train and came to Toulouse and managed somehow to find some Spanish people that she knew to get a message to me.

They got me a 24 hour pass so I could go and say hello to my mother. So, I came to Toulouse. I told her if it hadn't been for us, my brother and I, my mother would have gone to Spain in 1936 when the war started. She was dying to go there. She's always been a revolutionary. She loved the fight. One of those days she was going to die on a barricade even if she has to build one in the backyard. In '68 she was in the barricades in Paris with the students throwing stones at the cops. She had a wonderful time. She was 70 years old by then. She had a wonderful time.

So, I told her I'm going to Spain and one of these days maybe I'll come back. If it hadn't been for us, you would have done that. She understood that so she let me go. By that time, I was 20 years old. I was old enough to know what I was doing. I thought.

Q: Supposedly.

A: She trusted me but never would have said you can't do that. If I was to do something I would have done whether she liked it or not. I was very independent very early. I left my mother when I was just 17. She was still in Toulouse and we had all left Paris and we went south.

I knew she was not going to get along very well with her boyfriend and that's going to be a disaster. So I said no I can't take this. I'm getting out of this. I went back to Paris on my own. I had a boyfriend so I lived with his parents for a while.

It was a miserable life my god Paris during the war. The black years we call them. "Les annee noir". The hunger. The cold. God, it was cold. '42-'43 was one of the coldest winters Paris had ever seen in a century. I would wake up every morning and there was frost inside the apartment on the walls. There was frost on my bed.

We had coal for two months – December and January. That year, the real cold started in February. At that time, there was no coal. There was no heat anywhere. Between the hunger and the cold it was enough to make a rebel out of anybody especially kids my age and there were lots of them.

When I was working in that office every day I would take the metro and stop near the Opera and go to the office. I would pass in front of a big café that was reserved for the German officers. They were having breakfast. They had coffee and they had eggs and they had bread and jam and butter – things that I hadn't seen in two years. I was munching on a piece of celery and by the time I got to the office believe me I was not in the mood for collaboration. I'll tell you that.

Q: Do you still eat celery?

A: Never. I haven't eaten a piece of celery ever since. You can tell my children they can tell you. Just the smell of it can make me sick.

Q: I just had to ask.

A: Never. No I can't. I just can't.

Q: What did you do when the war ended?

A: Well I was very depressed. I was exhausted physically, emotionally, mentally, every way. I went into a depression for several months. Then my mother, bless her, said, "You know you've moped around the house long enough. I got you a job. You're starting on Monday." I said, "What job?" She said, "You are going to be a proof reader." Proof reader? She said, "Yes, your French has always been very good." My best subject in school. You're working as a proofreader.

I said, "Mother I don't know anything about proofreading." She brought some (unclear). She was a proofreader. "I brought some (unclear). I am going to show you exactly what you are going to do. It's going to take you a few hours. It's not going to be very hard. You're not going to work in the daily paper. You are going to start in the print shop and that's it." There is no arguing with mother. No. I never said no to my mother now that I think of it even when I was an adult.

So, I started working as a proofreader. After a year in '46, I met my husband who was working also has a proofreader in my mother's office. So, that was the end of that. That was the end of the war.

My husband had been in the French Resistance in Paris and he had been arrested. He had been tortured and they sent him to camp and he was sentenced to death. He got tuberculosis in prison and he was a mess. When I met him, he was very weak and very feeble and was very difficult for him to walk. He was a fascinating person. He was 25 years and older than me. He knew so much about literature and music and travel and poetry. Just fascinating.

We got together and we had a couple of children. Then we were walking down the street one day in Paris and met a friend of his who said, "Hey George what are you doing here? Why don't you come to America? We have been living there since 1939. We're working. Why don't you come? You can work with us, blah, blah, blah."

George didn't really want to go to America. He was a Parisian you know but I wanted to go. I was so sick of the scene. The same old politicians. The whole thing started all over again. It was so depressing. I said oh please let's get out of here. Let's go to America. What did I know about America? I knew there were gangsters in Chicago, there were cowboys in Texas and that's about it.

Q: That's all you have to know.

A: So, we came to America. America was a big surprise. Of course, it didn't work out with the friends. After a few months we found ourselves without friends, without money, without a job, without an apartment but there was a society to help immigrants after the war – to help people.

They took us over and put us in a hotel on 3rd Street and Broadway somewhere up there. The Hotel Marseille. I haven't forgot. That was 1949. We were there for, I don't know, 10 weeks. Then they finally found an apartment for us in Brooklyn. So, we moved to Brooklyn. Then after a while, they found my husband a job.

George was a wonderful artist. You give this guy a pencil he could draw you anything. Just anything. Cartoons, illustrations, portraits. He was just one of those geniuses with a pencil and would paint.

They found him this job making designs for a linen company, embroidery design. He made the most beautiful embroidery designs you'd ever seen. So, we stayed in America. We had two more children after that then we came to Woodstock and I'm still here.

Q: Very good. Do you still have friends from the resistance?

A: Most of them are gone by now. My Jewish friend Kara, I still see her and her husband. They have been married 60 years.

Q: Wow. Do they live in the states?

A: No. They're in Paris. They travel a lot. They live in France. I just lost one of my oldest friends last week- Simone. She was 96. She used to go to galleries and openings – a real Parisian woman curious about everything, fashion. But, at 96, she finally went.

Q: That's a pretty good life.

A: Yes, she had a good life. But my Spanish friend...oh, yes, I have to tell you how I found them again. That was very interesting. I started singing in '58. I became a folk singer singing French and English. I sang for a French organization called Alliance Francaise. I don't know if you ever heard of it. They usually do a lot of French culture stuff all over the world. There's about 115 in America. So, I sang a lot for them.

One day around Christmas. I was in Harford, Connecticut – a very small group maybe 25 people. After the concert, I was talking with this woman and she came to me and spoke French quite fluently. I said, "Where did you learn your French?" She said, "I lived for three years in a small town in Dordogne."

I said, "Ah where in Dordogne?" She said, "In Belves." I couldn't believe because that's where I lived. I said, "My god, I know everybody there. Do you know Claude?" She said, "Of course I know Claude." Claude was the top French officer of the Resistance group

there. I said, "Do you have any news from them? Because I hadn't seen them in 40 years. She said, "Oh yes, we write to each other once and awhile." I said, "Next time you write to Claude, ask him if he has any news from Soleil the French guy and Tovar the Spanish guy." She said, "Ok."

A year later, I got a letter. She said I've heard from Claude and Soleil and Tovar are going to be in Belves in July where there is going to be a reunion of the old resistance group. I said oh my god. By that time, I just can't believe it. It's been 45 years. My daughter said, 'Call Soleil' I know the town he lives in but don't know the number. She said, "Call the operator."

So, I called the operator and said, "Rene?" "Yes." "This is Sonia." "Oh yes? How are you?" After 45 years. I was the one who was surprised. I was the one who was shocked. I said, "Aren't you surprised" He said, "We talk about you all the time. When we get together we talk about the old times. (unclear) We talk about you."

I said, "How are you guys?" He said, "We are going to get together. Why don't you come over?" So, that year I went back and found my old friends again because I went to sing in a little town for 25 people in Hartford, Connecticut.

Q: That's wonderful.

A: I found my old friends again.

Q: It must have been quite a reunion.

A: It was quite a reunion. The Spanish guys were there. Not all of them but some of them are still there. It was a...

Q: One more tape....Let's see how we can do this. Why don't we bring the camera over here?

A: This is Belves. This is a little town. I had a room there. Sometimes I didn't have time to go to the camp so I would stay overnight in that room until one day the SS came over and I had to get out.

Q: Let's go back. I would like to see the picture of you with your long hair.

A: (Pointing to a picture). That was in Spain. This is a song from a Spanish gypsy who wanted to marry me. He was an old man of 35! I was 17. I said, "(unclear) are you crazy? I'm too young for you." He wanted to take me to Spain. He played the guitar so beautifully. I would have gone to Spain but I didn't want to marry him. Good lord.

Q: You really met some characters.

A: This is from a poet who wrote a poem about me about how cute I was. This is the station of Belves where I started.

Q: You were about how old in that photo?

A: I was about 18.

This was the boss – Tovar. This is one of our Citroen cars. Oh, they were wonderful cars. They still are.

Q: Did you ever have a Duex Chevaux?

A: Oh yes, I had one but it was 1960. That was the first front wheel drive. Those were in the 30's

That was Belves.

Q: You had an apartment there?

A: I had a room. Just a little room.

That was where we were in the hills, in the Maquis. This was another girl – a Spanish girl. This is Blondie, the little girl from Lorraine who helped me. This one is Spanish. She was Spanish too. We were all doing the same kind of thing but in different places.

This is Soleil Rene and this is Tovar. This is the group. They wore a uniform then. That was in '44,'45 because when we were in the woods we didn't have any uniform. We didn't have anything.

This is General Fernandez and Colonel Acebedo. They were at the head of this army – the guerrilla army.

That was at the liberation of Toulouse. We paraded in the streets of Toulouse.

Q: What is this?

A: This is my arm band we wore at the liberation. We had to know who was what. I embroidered this thing as a matter of fact. Guerrilleros Espanoles. FFI. Forces Francaises de l'Interior.

This is Carlos. He was arrested. He spent 20 year in Spain in prison. He came back to France and he was blind. What they did to this man.

This was the expedition in Spain. This guy was a miner from Asturias. He was with the (unclear) Militarios. He would take a stick of dynamite light it and throw it at a tank.

Those guys were tough... they were tough and they were so gentle and sweet. They were tough guys.

Q: You used whatever arms and equipment you could steal from the Germans.

A: That we took what we could take from the Germans. The Allies never gave us anything. Very little. The British finally sent us some things but that was the beginning of '44. We had been there for two years and nobody had helped us.

One thing that makes me really mad when I see those movies or read books about the French Resistance. There is always an agent who came from America or from England who came to parachute into France and told the French how to organize their resistance. That really makes me sick.

Those are my mission orders. I had to have authorization to carry a weapon.

Q: Is that you right here?

A: Yes that was me. What a funny hairdo. That was in '44.

That was in Spain on the other side. It was cold.

He disappeared. He came to Spain with us but we never knew what happened to him. We don't know if he left or he deserted or he was caught or what. We never knew what happened to him...Crespo.

That was when I was interviewed in Spain by a newspaperman. Paul Boudin from *Combat* is the newspaper that he was writing for. He talked about the expedition. Fernandez, was the general Spanish Republican exile made him made him a "Char bonnier" – a charcoal maker. Then the *Combat* made him a general. There are whole articles about him and about Spain. There were several of them. In fact, there is one of them that mentions me somewhere – a little Parisian typist going to Spain with a guerrilla warfare.

Q: A little Parisian typist.

A: You can never tell with a Parisian typist.

That was in Spain. The first day when we arrived in Spain after walking all through this mountain at night we arrived there the next morning. I'm exhausted and I am sitting at the table in that little restaurant. I'm almost falling asleep and Tovar comes up and say "Hey, you have to go back." I said, "What?? You must be kidding." He said, "You're not going to have to go back through the mountain. We have a car. You have to go back to France. We need a lot of things here. We have to tell the general what happened. We have to send him the report."

So, I went back. I arrived in that little town and found the general. He said, "Are you hungry?" I said, "Yes!" He said, "You eat. You sleep for an hour then you go back." So, I went back again but this time I went back and I see a column of trucks with men and weapons. I said, "What's all this?" and he said, "You're taking this all to Spain." I said, "I'm taking all this to Spain?? How am I going to do that??" He said, "You're driving and you're riding in the first truck. Here's pass that we got for you for the border for the French military. You can carry a weapon and you take all of those people to Spain." I felt like John Wayne. Let's take this to Kansas!

Q: They all followed the typist from Paris.

A: I had to take 700 men with weapons and everything to Spain. Oh god. What an adventure. That was fantastic.

That was the winter when we came back. It started to snow. That was cold and miserable. I have a picture of Navas somewhere.

Oh there's Churri. That was Churri. He was my bodyguard. This was a little bunch. There is Churri. The chauffer for the car. He was the maintenance man. He was a mechanic. The other guy. I think he was Tovar's bodyguard. That was a very small little group there wonderful guys.

That was our cook, Antonio. This was Navas. He was garroted in Spain.

There is Julio and Churri.

(unclear) so proud of his car. He was always cleaning and shining. We were living in the woods under a parachute but the car was in good shape, I can tell you that.

Q: He knew his priorities.

A: Antonio, when we finally got some stuff from the village. They would send up cylinders. There was plastic and some Sten guns and some ammunition and there was always some cigarettes and chocolate. They kept the cigarettes. I got the chocolate. Antonio always got the chocolate for me.

Q: Is that you?

A: Yes. No this is me. That was Esperanza. She was a Spanish girl. She was a nurse.

This was a commeration about a battle that we had there in June '44 (at Mussidan). We lost a 100 people there by the Germans. Oh god, it was awful. God, it was awful. There was one man. I remember him. They were fighting and shooting. He had a 17 year old boy and the boy got shot. His father ran to him and took out his gun and started fighting in his place. God, those people were something else.

That was in Spain. That was in '47. They became very nice citizens all well dressed up in suits and ties.

Q: They cleaned up pretty well.

A: He became a photographer. I think he was a photographer before the war and became a photographer again.

Q: That was who?

A: That was Tovar. That was the chief.

This was a concentration camp in France which was started in '39 or '40 for all the people who didn't have any papers. We didn't know who they were.

Q: Those are wonderful photos.

A: Yes. They are good ones. He was a handsome guy. He had green eyes.

This is when I saw them again. That was unbelievable. We meet again 45 years later. That was him again. He was not the handsome young man that I knew. That was the reunion after that in the 80's. There was commemoration things.

This was given to my mother like a commendation or something for soldiers without uniforms of the French Force who participated in the occupied territory on glorious combat for the liberation of the country blah, blah, blah.

Here is Belves now. They had a commemoration with all those old guys.

This is where those two guys had been run over by a tank. There's this monument for them on the road. There were several of those things all over the place. So many of our men were killed. There was one man who was hanged on his farm because he helped me. I had nightmares about that for years. In fact, I wrote a book. I started writing this story then I wrote a whole book about this.

See that woman there she is about four feet. She is not five feet. She just died a couple of years ago. She had ten children. She had two sets of twins I think and for weeks she took care of I think there were 19 men that she was hiding in the barn. She fed them. She took care of them, their laundry and everything on top of the ten kids. It was what the French people did.

Q: Amazing.

A: We put the fire to this place. It was a nice little castle but they started shooting at us. In fact, they wounded one of our men so we burned the place down. That will teach them.

Q: Swine.

A: They really were. They were collaborators, serious collaborators. He would go to Germany and bring German officers to his place. So, we knew he was a real serious collaborator. That was at one of those....I sang for them that day.

Q: That was you and a guitar?

A: Yes. You believe me now don't you?

Q: Yes!

A: Yes. Lots of commemorations. Every year they go back.

Oh, we lived in this beautiful little place. A little Chateau. Chateau Conti. Oh, it was delightful. It was on top of a hill. You could see all of the roads. You could see the Germans coming. In fact, we saw them burning some places down in the west. They came there in June. We thought they were fire from St. Jean's day. Some people still do that in France. They make fire and dance around it. We can't do that. The Germans forbid this a long time ago. It was not the French. It was the Germans who were burning our garage. That was a lovely place. Chateau Conti. I went back there. I had a lot of memories of that place.

Jacques and Illias died. Jacques Rispal died and Claude died. There is Tovar. He was in his 80's by then.

Q: That's a wonderful album.

A: Yes. Lots memories of youth and of adventure. I think that's probably why there's still wars. It's an adventure. Youngsters can't resist it. I think I could have resisted that one but I really didn't have any choice not only because of my upbringing from my mother because I really believed that the Germans were really evil. What they were doing was so bad, so bad. What they did to our country. Where we lived for four years.

The resistance started in France in 1940 I told you at that museum. But then little groups started here and there cooperations of students, a bunch of doctors, some newspaper people, writers like (unclear) and so forth. There was a group of blind people, women and of course there were the communists who had their own thing, the socialists who had their own thing. There were even royalists who were fascists in fashion but they were patriots first. They were against the Germans because they had been the enemy for generations. Not all of them because some of them really went to the Germans.

All those little groups. They were everywhere. Mountain people. Sea people. Fishermen who tried to get people out of the country. There were thousands of those groups and finally De Gaulle.... De Gaulle was surprised that there was a resistance in France. That

was not his idea when he talked in June 1940 in London to the people. “People resist, come to me.” He wanted the young men to come to him and start the army. He had no idea that the people were going to resist in the country. Civilians! Women! The whole thing was absurd to him. It would never occur to him that people could do things like this. He was very surprised at what we did I tell you that. He never thought about organizing the resistance per se when he started but then when he realized there were so many he sent a man named Jean Moulin and Moulin was the organizer. He organized all those groups into the Committee of the French Resistance – a national committee of the French Resistance.

He did a fantastic job putting all of those people together. They didn’t even know they existed because the French are very individualistic. He organized all of these people and made them realize that this was one fight. The better organized we were, the more effective the fight would be. Eventually he was arrested and tortured to death by the famous Barbie. You’ve heard about Barbie. He killed them in prison in Lyon but the work kept going.

One group that was incredible were the people who worked on the railroad. We called them the Cheminots. What the Cheminots did during the war you have no idea the work that they did. In 1944, the day of the landing in France in Normandy, there was not a single train that ran in the whole country. They has stopped the whole shebang. Not a single train in the country ran that day. It took a heck of an organization, I can tell you that.

Q: Sure.

A: I know firsthand because I was on one of those trains. About 6 o’clock in the morning, the train stopped in the middle of the country side. “Everybody go down, the train doesn’t go any further” “What do you mean, I have another 40 miles to go!” “Sorry, but we can’t go any further”

Q: That’s why you walked the 40 miles.

A: That’s why I walked the 40 miles. I did about half of it in bare feet because I had shoes that were made of slats of wood. The soles that are made of wood – articulated. All the pieces were coming off one after the other. The nails were hurting my feet so finally I took off my shoes and walked in bare feet.

The last four miles were in the woods. Have you ever been in a chestnut forest? Have you seen chestnuts with the quills? The forest is like a rug of these things. By that time, it was in the middle of the night. I don’t know how I got there. I had been in the train for three days. I hadn’t eaten. I hadn’t slept. I got there and I don’t even know how I got there.

I arrived at the camp. I woke up. I heard a gun being cocked (unclear). He said, (unclear) I said, 'C'est moi. C'est moi' "What are you doing there. We are leaving this morning. We thought you got arrested." I was three days late which never happened. I think I fainted or fell asleep. I woke up 29 hours later. They had bandaged my feet were a mess. In fact, they were a mess for a long time after that.

The smell of coffee woke me up. I don't know if you know what that meant. We hadn't seen coffee in years and Tovar was there with a cup of coffee in my tent. I was asleep and he was leaving and I said, "Where do you think you're going with my coffee!?" He told me I had been sleeping for 29 hours. It was like a blur. There was nobody on the road. I thought I was going (unclear) find a car or truck or somebody. There was nobody on the road and I thought what is going on here because they didn't tell us why the train has stopped- a bridge had blown up or the tracks had blown up. We can't go further. I said that's what happened but I had been doing it for months.

Then this little old truck – it was working on charcoal. Have you ever seen a truck working on charcoal? It's very funny. They had a chimney on the side and it would work on charcoal. It wouldn't go very fast or very far but it worked. The guys stopped and he said, 'I'm turning a couple of miles up but I can tell the news.' I said, "What news?" "The Allies just landed in Normandy this morning." Oh my god, now I really have to go to the camp. I just came back from Lyon with papers and messages and stuff. I thought maybe I'd find another car but I didn't find a single car. Not a car, not a truck on the road that day. So, I walked all the way on the road to the camp.

Q: Amazing.

A: And I lost my shoes. He said to me, "Why didn't you take a short cut in the woods?" I said, "What short cut?" I didn't know any short cut. I barely know by the road. I've never taken a short cut." "You came right across from the road, you didn't come from the usual way." I was asleep. I swear to god I was asleep.

Q: And you made it.

A: I made it.

Q: Thank you very much.

A: I don't know if I could do that again, you know.

Q: We appreciate this very much.

A: Well, it was fun. Thank you for coming.