

**PART TWO**

**THE FOREIGN LEGION YEARS**

**1939–1944**

**LEGIO PATRIA NOSTRA**

**1939 -1944**

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## PREFACE

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This is the English translation of my DIARY kept in Hungarian during my five years service from 1939-1944 in the French Foreign Legion. I decided not to make an attempt to correct possible historical mistakes which might have resulted from "The Fog of War" by using the wisdom of hindsight, dealing with the five weeks my unit took part in the fight against Rommel's Afrika Korps in Tunisia.

There are any number of books written by competent historians and war correspondents about the North African Campaign in general and there are also some books written about the Foreign Legion and their role in WWII.

I'm not concerned or worried about being "objective". I'm not a "historian" or "reporter" as I already made it perfectly clear. My only purpose is to tell the story of those five years as I lived them and experienced them and as I put it down in my DIARY as soon as I had the chance. It goes without saying that what I wrote in my DIARY is factual. There is no B.S. and no "fancying up" the happenings. I kept the DIARY strictly for myself. All the names of the people I'm mentioning are their real names in the sense names can be considered REAL in the Foreign Legion where everybody can enlist under any name he wishes. Some of the names are missing which I should have written down but didn't for no special reasons but that I simply overlooked them. For example, strange as it seems I don't remember the name of my Company Commander who took my unit up front in Tunisia. I know he was a new guy and as far as I remember I never laid eyes on him during those few weeks he was in charge of the Cie.

The translation presented some special difficulties because although the original was written in Hungarian, the official language of the Legion is of course French, so the Hungarian was liberally sprinkled with French, often army slang, which in turn was often

"injected" not only with Arabic, but occasionally also with Annamit (Vietnamese) expressions, typical of the Légionnaire lingo which evolved during the years the Legion served in the colonies since 1834. - To render this cocktail accurately in English so as to convey the real flavour of the original was sometimes beyond my modest ability.

Something else must be kept in mind for the un-initiated to understand WHY the Legion seemed to have NO terror for me as it would have been expected from all the books and films written and made about the Legion. First of all the era of Colonization, delicately called in French "Les Operations" were over since years when I joined, so the "baroud" - fighting - was also over of course. More importantly by the time I joined I was a former reserve officer in the Hungarian Army in the infantry. What is not known outside of Europe is the fact that the Hungarian army was run exactly as the Japanese, Hungary being in those days a feudal country, and more importantly an ASIATIC people, descendants of Attila the Hun. There was UNQUESTIONED "iron discipline" and constant brutality. It is NO exaggeration to say that after the Hungarian Army the Foreign Legion was the proverbial piece of cake. As the Legion always had a lot of Hungarians they were familiar with the modus operandi of the Hungarian Army since good many years and anybody who could prove that he served and was honourably discharged was almost automatically "marked" for non-com school and of course if you could prove that you were a non-com then even more so. Add to this the fact that the Legion had never anything like a modern army training before the IIWW, there was precious little an old army man like me could learn in the Legion about tactic or weaponry.

NOTE:

Only the names of "permanent" garrisons are noted in this CHRONOLGY. Names mentioned in the DIARY but not included here are names of places on exercises.

As you can notice there are occasional "holes" in the Chronology of the DIARY. There are various reasons for this, some of them I remember the reason for some not. The whole months of AUGUST 1943 is AWOL for VERY good reason: I spent it <sup>in</sup> AGADIR/Marocco with my hometown (girl)friend using up all the LEAVE time coming to me for my five years service.

As this DIARY is translated from the original Hungarian some FIFTY years after it was written I obviously DONT remember the parts which are missing.

Erwin Fuchs  
Seattle, WA. 1992

C H R O N O L O G Y.

1939	NICE	FEB/11	-	FEB/13/1939
	MARSEILLES (Ft.St.Jean)	FEB/19	-	MARCH/6
	SIDI-bel-ABBES	MARCH/9	-	MARCH/20
	SAIDA (Bootcamp)	MARCH/22	-	JUNE/15
1939	SIDI-bel-ABBES	JUNE/17	-	APR/16/1940
1940	MARNIA	APR/17	-	SEP/26
1940	KREIDER	NOV/28	-	DEC/25/1940
1941	GERYVILLE	JAN/8	-	JAN/14/1941
	AIN-SEFRA	FEB/1	-	AUG/5
	KREIDER	AUG/6	-	AUG/12
	FEZ(En route to CASABL.)	AUG/19		
	CASABLANCA	AUG/20	-	AUG/24
	S.S. CONDE(En rt. to SENEGAL)	AUG/26	-	SEP/1
1941	DAKAR N'BANGO(Nr St.LOUIS)	SEP/4	-	FEB/23/1943
1943	S.S.ATHOS II (DAKAR)	FEB/25	-	MARCH/7
	FEZ (Maroc)	MARCH/9	-	MARCH/24
	EL AROUZA (TUNISIA WWII)	APR/3	-	MAY/8(Wounded)
	<u>ARMISTICE WWII MAY 11/1943</u>			
	FEZ	JUL/11	-	SEP/17
	BOULEMAU	JUL/26	-	JUL/30
	FORET DE MARMORA	SEP/25	-	SEP/26
	AIN DIAB(Nr.Casablanca)	OCT/9	-	OCT/20
	FORET DE MARMORA	OCT/21	-	NOV/19
1943	PORT AU POUL	DEC/23/43	-	JAN/1/44
1944	SIDI-bel-ABBES/CP2	JAN/17	-	FEB/11
	<u>THE CIRCLE IS CLOSED! FIVE YEARS CONTRACT IS OVER!</u>			
1944	COLOMB-BECHAR/JEDID/BIDON II (Internation Camp and Coal mine)	FEB/12	-	MARCH/28

Feb/8/1939/SOPRON/HUNGARY

There is a French saying "PARTIR C'EST UN PEU MOURIR". (To say farewell is a little like dying) Perhaps one of the reasons for this saying is that there is enough crying at farewell for a funeral. We got thru our farewell with grampa with more than our share of tears from both sides on the train station of Sopron, leaving for the French Foreign Legion when it became obvious that Hitler was something much bigger than the usual sporadic jewbashing par for the course in Hungary since centuries. We decided that grampa, whom we adored, and who used to say that we two, my twin brother Tibor and myself are his whole life, is going to be the only member of the family to see us off for our fateful trip to the "legendary" French Foreign Legion subject of countless books and movies of doubtful objectivity.

Now the farewell was mercifully over and we were

on our way to France thru Austria, Germany and Italy.

A friendly guy we met on <sup>the</sup> train gave us the name of a jewish doctor in Genoa, Italy we can look up. In Wienerneustadt, Austria we've to wait for our connecting "D" train. The waiting room is cold and the only thing to buy are German picture postcards, but we also find some good fishconserves and buy two of them for 1DM. A friendly couple comes over to ask the usual questions, who are we and where are we going?- Our mood sofar: hopeful.

From Wienerneustadt we go by a Pullman coach up to the Semmering. There is snow everywhere and beautiful sunshine which puts us in a very hopeful and lighth mood. I shaved in the toilet with Tibor's razor having forgotten my own at home, an unusual happening for me, being generally well organized and having the habit of shlepping more stuff than necessary on trips. -

I'd have lot to write but want to save the space in my leather bound diary whose inner page was illustrated with the hilarious cartoons of my former school buddy and later boss at the silk factory whose name is Istvan|Pham but known only to friends as Pym.

In VELDEN/Austria, big sign on the station: JUDEN UNERWÜNSCHT!  
 ( Jews unwanted!) Drop dead Schweinehund! Weather beautiful, everything is full of snow. We're awaiting further developments impatiently. So far we didn't meet anybody interesting on the train of either sexes. In any case the women are looking frumpy without make up or any kind of grooming we're used to from Hungary. At ARNOLDSTEIN/Austria a custom guy comes in asking if we have foreign currency and if yes how much? We tell him, stamps our passports and politely disappears. Is this the horror story we've been warned about the custom searches where people are strip searched and frisked from head to toes? At TARVISIO/Italy, another custom guy comes in asking whether we have traveller checks? Unfortunately we don't and he leaves even more politely saying good by in German and Italian and this was the end of the terrible custom searches we were warned about. Reminds me of the old Hungarian saw: The soup is never eaten as hot as it is cooked!. -

We meet two Viennese Jews one of them going to Costa-Rica the other to Nice/France. They tell us that at the Italian/French border town of VENTIMIGLIA one can take a taxi and simply cross over to NICE or SAN-REMO. We hope they know what they are talking about. It is not good if everything goes too easily at the beginning as later you have to pay for it. Mood so far: Excellent.-

Looks like our PENGÖ (Hungarian money) is going to stay unspent unless we can exchange it in VENICE. In UDINE I buy two ham sandwiches and two enormous oranges. We stop in VENICE for 1½ hr and look around in front of the station a bit, standing guard over two well filled rucksacks, taking turns. We packed everything we thought might come in handy in the Legion IF we're going to be allowed to keep it. We had an espresso and a hot chocolate and wrote two picture postcards home. We arrive at VERONA at 0230 hrs and buy another espresso and ham on a roll, the guy giving us six Italian liras for 1.5DM which was overly generous but he was not silly enough to accept any Hungarian currency. In Italy the best, and nicest way to count the stations is by the number of espressos one drank.

Had a good sleep. At MILANO two jews are getting on the train, one going to Costa-Rica and one is playing harmonica.

FEB/10/39/VEGHERA(?)/ITALY

We're crossing flat uninteresting country. I've ~~mixed~~<sup>feelings</sup> hope and unease for the future. We meet a very nice middle aged lady and her very charming daughter who turn<sup>s</sup> out to be Austrian aristocrats from Vienna going to visit their relatives in BEAULIEU /France. They give us their address and suggest we contact them in case we need help. Noblesse oblige. At VENTIMIGLIA on ~~the~~<sup>the</sup> Italian/French border we went to French Consulate trying to get a visa to France which is refused (because we're Jews.) However, when we mention that we want to join the Foreign Legion the Consul suggested that we contact the French Police Station at the train station. We started worrying that the difficulties are starting. At last we find the French Police station and we meet two very nice and polite guys who repeatedly warn us : LA LEGION EST DUR MONSIEUR! ( The Legion is hard Sir ). Are we really aware of it what we are doing ? We reassure them that we're well informed about the Legion from a friend in our home town whose sister is married to an Adjutant Chef in Legion, <sup>the</sup> which is of course true. - They look us up in their records in case we are WANTED by the Police anywhere and take our personal data. Later another guy joins us who seems to be less concerned with our wellbeing and starts his Spiel about the advantages of joining the Legion. We cut him short telling him that we already made up our minds about joining the Legion.

We're told that we can spend the night at the police station and next day we can take the train to NICE and they will pay for our tickets. We're told to be at the station at 0730 tomorrow morning. We decide not to spend the night at the police station but go to a little hotel called MILANO. I get a headache which is par for the course if I worry about something.

FEB/11/39/VENTIMIGLIA/Italian/French border

Wake up feeling fine and refreshed in good mood full of hope for the future. We've hot chocolate for b'fast and waiting for the French officials. It is already 0600 hrs but nobody shows up.

We're hanging around and try not to worry as sofar everything went fine without complications. I take the opportunity being a little more at ease for recapitulating the happenings.

Starting from the Italian border everybody was very nice. The before mentioned Austrian Countess and her pretty daughter Marie Elisabeth Löwenthal were very charming to us. The mother told us that she was a friend in her younger days of the wife of our Hungarian Governor Miklós Horthy and that her husband was some kind of Minister in Yugoslavia during the days of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Her charming daughter was very nice and let me make a picture of her with my little BROWNIE, looking very cute in her Russian type fur cap. They were both duly impressed with our courage of going to the Foreign Legion to serve there for the required five years. They gave us their home address in Vienna and made us firmly promise to write them as they are very interested to hear how are we doing in the Legion. They lifted our moral a good deal proving that people with class dont mind if we are jewish Hitler notwithstanding. - We said farewell to each other in San-Remo as if we were old friends.

I can say less about the jewish guy who went to see his relatives in NICE, but carefully neglected to mention their address! Drop dead bastard. - From VENTIMIGLIA a French official joined us, who was very nice and came with us to MENTON where he left and another fellow joined us who was also very decent, bought us an espresso in NICE and took us to the military barracks of the famous CHASSEURS d'ALPINS with their enourmous black beret hanging down to their shoulders! We passed our first but not last physical exam without trouble. The guys in the barracks were of course all young, friendly and easy going boys. We told one of them that we would like to go out and send a telegram home and

sell some of our small but precious gold we were able to smuggle out of Hungary. One of the guys volunteered to show us the way to the post office and a jeweller. From there we came back home for dinner and then we went out for some rubbernecking in NICE where we arrived with incredible dumb luck smack in the middle of the world famous CARNAVAL DE NICE! What can I say about NICE on the world-famous CÔTE d'AZUR of France what haven't been said yet <sup>by</sup> some much better qualified people? It is one of the most scintillatingly beautiful and gorgeous town of the world even under normal circumstances and now with the CARNAVAL it is of course just breathtaking. Add to all this the contrast between the all invading GLOOM and DOOM hanging over the rest of Europe where we came from, everybody waiting for the war to erupt any day or minute and you think you must have entered a completely different world of a studio where a film is being made of the CARNAVAL DE NICE! Nobody is working. Everybody is in the streets day and night having a ball. Fabulous FLOATS with gorgeous girls on them, coming down on Le Promenade Des Anglais one after the other, competing with each other in originality, size, colour, costing small fortunes and thousands of hours of work. I was told that as soon as the last carnival is over they start working on the next one! The mikes blaring the latest hit: J'attendrais, le jour et la nuit j'attendrais toujours ton retour... Everybody is dancing, laughing, throwing tons of confettis of every colour and serpentines miles and miles of it till they come up to your ankles on the ground.

We were with a bunch of Chasseur d'Alpins guzzling cider but I don't remember seeing a single drunk anywhere nor were any fights or any other mayhem, just everybody having a ball and wonderful time. Needless to say that all this is brightening up our mood, making us to forget that there are harder times ahead in the future. We're sending a telegram home to keep the folks from worrying. We went back to the barracks for dinner. Quite a difference from the Hungarian army's piece of lard and one green paprika: bean soup, roast meat with pickles and potatoes, applesauce and wine. This place looks more like a Pension than a military barracks.

After dinner we go out again and the town is perhaps even more dazzlingly beautiful in the evening than during the day. All the waterfountains and waterfalls lit up from underneath with coloured lights, spraying water in the air, palm trees swaying and lit up from underneath, fabulous shops with the most exclusive stuff from all over the world displayed with great French panache, hundreds of ships of all sizes and nationalities laying in the harbour lit up from bow to stern with thousands of coloured lights... just fabulous. Beautiful cars cruising with gorgeous girls wearing "le minimum" throwing confetties and serpentines and having a great time including thousands of soldiers who cant be bothered by saluting anybody but the highest ranking officers with great non-chalence unlike in Hungary where every shitty little Lance Cpl. has to be addressed as SIR and saluted every time you meet him anywhere under any circumstances.

We dont have to worry about curfew as we were told we are free till next week to do as we want. "During the Carnaval everything stops!"

FED/12/39/NICE/FRANCE

Réveille is at 0700 theoretically but a lot of the guys are still in bed at 0900 being sunday. Continental b'fast is served in bed! The highlighth of the day is to shave and Tibor is showing good exmample. We hang around and talk. Lunch turns out to be lousy: two slices of salami, mutton, potatoes, cheese, glass of wine. We go out again for more rubbernecking at the Carnaval. One cant get enough of it. Being sunday it is perhaps even more crowded but there is no shoving, pushing or any kind of rowdiness, everybody is polite and wellbehaved. Tibor steps into the front of a car but all the guy does is laughs, breaks and goes on his way. And to think of it that we have all this fabulous time paid by the French authorities! Tomorrow the days of Aranjuez will be over and we're going to Marseilles. Returning to barracks I decide to go to the restrooms (WC) and this type of WC takes a little getting used to, to put it mildly. It is a square hole with two platforms tiled with a

for your feet, you squat down and you are in business for the main event! The dinner is so-so: Bouillon, mutton which has a smell I'm not used to, potatoes , two cookies and a glass of wine. After dinner we go back for more Carnaval attractions, the last time before we ship out to Marseilles tomorrow with more serious kinds of happenings.

FEB/13/39/NICE/FRANCE

Réveille at 0600hrs, theoretically, unlike in the Hungarian army where the door flies open and the duty non-com SCREAMS :UP! and if you're not out of bed the next second you will find yourself on the FLOOR with your ironbedframe on top of you! Here it is 0630 and everybody is still in bed. At long last a Sgt. enters and makes a friendly individual visit to everybody, giving him a gentle shake saying: Allez hop! The guys dont give a fuck, they sit up and wait till the Sgt leaves and go back to sleep! When its time for b'fast they get up, & get dressed in a hurry. I'm startled to see that one guy comes in with a big can of coffee and everybody is holding out his metal cup, called a quart because it holds a quarter liter of fluid, and gets it filled with coffee. It suddenly dawns on me that something seems to be missing from this scenario: nobody brushed their teeth or washed! When I go to the lavabo (washroom) I notice that there are after all a few courageous mavericks who are "washing" themselves with their pullovers in situ!

At 0800 we report to office. I'm not familiar yet with the ranks in the French army but the young guy seems to be some kind of officer who engages us in a friendly conversation limited by our not very fluent french acquired during four years of high-school. He suggests that we go out and enjoy the Carnaval till 1600 hrs when we'll take the train to Marseilles.

We are both rather flabbergasted about all this freedom of movement when we already signed all the papers officially making us Foreign Legionnaires. Our surprise is even bigger when the officer tells us that we are going to proceed to Marseilles alone.

Where are all the horror stories about people being "Shanghaied" into the Legion ? I assume during the Colonisation it might have been another story.

What gets us somewhat to worry is the news that in Marseilles we'll have to undergo another physical exam, but as so far we had no problems we're optimistic the more so that after all we were good enough for the Hungarian army also and anyway we are in very good health.

One of the officers stops us in the court inquiring when are we leaving and we snapp to attention à la Hungarian which visibly upsets him and hurries to put us in "repos" ("at ease").

I send Tibor out to town to sell our gold watch chain and suggest that he looks up the Jewish Community Center but he declines. He is making inquiries about where to sell the chain and people takes him from person to person until they find a non-com whose relative has a jewellery shop, and the guy offers to take Tibor there. Meanwhile I write a letter to Pym who made the cartoons in my diary when we left for the Legion showing Tibor and myself in all kinds of funny situations all over the world, one of them turning out to be in the Legion!

Lunch was pretty good. The French baguette is as white as the rolls back in Hungary. Tibor sold the first gold chain in the shop of the non-com's relative and the second one in another shop and got the same prizes in both, so he was not screwed in either places. At 1600hrs we report to the office as directed and we get into a conversation with an older guy who speaks German. He takes us to another fellow who asks us to sign a whole bunch of papers which we do without reading them, as by now it would be a little too late to try chicken out anyway.

A fellow takes us to the station and tells us that if we have relatives or friends in Marseilles we should go and see them before we report to the Barracks of the Legion because afterwards we cannot leave anymore. We say a very fond farewell to NICE and the fabulous Carnaval assuming that Marseilles will be a rather drastic contrast to all the fun we had.

I'm writing these lines on the train to Marseilles, going 3rd Class which is like going 1st Class in Hungary! From the station in Marseilles we're going to take a taxi to the barracks of the Legion as we're going to arrive during the night and the last thing we want to do, is get lost in a big new town during the night, shlepping our well stacked rucksaks on our backs, specially as we were told that the barracks are pretty far from the station.

Tibor is asking me whether I would have thought half a year ago that I'm going to sit in the train to Marseilles "en route" to the "legendary" French Foreign Legion?! Nope!

FEB 19/39/MARSEILLES/FRANCE

We arrived in Marseilles during the night and took a taxi to the FORT ST. JEAN, the much "advertised" H.Q. of the Legion in dozens of books and films. It turned out to be an old, spooky, gloomy former forteress as it's name implies, the more so during the night. Somebody took us to a big room of this caravan serai where a whole bunch of people were already sleeping snoring and farting away with great flair. There were some naked bulbs hanging from the ceiling which didnt make the place exactly cosy either. There was a big hunk of laundry soap at the end of each bed as a fitting introduction to the fetishlike cleanliness of the Legion.

Next day we have the honour to wash all the messtins of the room. However afterwards our luck changes rapidly and drastically. Sgt Chef SANFT who is an oldtimer and in charge of this caravanserai and it's inmates, with practiced eyes notices the military bearing of Tibor and myself and motions us to come to see him and we doubletime it over there snapping in attention, TACK, à la Hungarian and give him a snappy salute, also à la Hungarian of course accompanied with a loud SIR, also à la Hungarian

which ellicits a big laugh, saying in German:well obviously you both served in the Hungarian army, righth? JAWOHL! So: first of all this is NOT the Hungarian army as you know. We salute here ONLY the officers NOT like in the Hungarian army. And there is NO such thing here as SIR. Noncoms like me are addressed by their ranks so I'm just plain Sergeant Chef.

Officers are addressed by their ranks, also prefixed with "Mon" like Mon Capitaine for example. Got it ? Jawohl. Now: are you two speaking some French? Yes Sgt Chef. Very good. Would one of you like to be Planton à la Port ? What do we have to do ? We're going to give you some decent uniforms instead of the rags you got when you came and you will stand at the door making sure that only the Staff can leave not the BLEUS ( new recruits ) and you salute the officers who come and go. Yes Sgt Chef but I dont know how to salute the French way. Thats no problem either, just salute the Hungarian way, they will LOVE it he says laughing. ( Hungarian Drill Sgt: Today, I'm cursed by having to try to teach you misbegotten fucken CRIPPLES how to salute in the Hungarian fucken army! Pay attention now you boardcertified fucken ASSHOLES (demonstrating). You did NOT see my arm MOVE, righth? RIGHTH?? YESSIR! You saw my hand only at my pants and at the edge of my HAT! Righth? YESSIR! And I kept my hand at the edge of my hat EXACTLY three fucken seconds and then you saw it again at my pants, righth? YESSIR! Which means in plain words you bunch of poor shitheads that I want to see your arm move like greased LIGHTNING from your pants to the edge of your fucken hat, stay there<sup>N</sup> for EXACTLY three seconds and again become greased LIGHTNING and stop at your pants. If you fuckers did not dislocate your shoulders you did not do righth! Got it ? YESSIR! )

So, says Sgt Chef Sanft, you'll be on duty two hours at the door and off duty two hours, doing whatever you want. Is that alright with you ? Jawohl! Now the other one I want to be Planton de Bureau, which means you come in the morning, sweep up the place, lighth the fire in the stove, go to the canteen and brings up my "casse-croute" and wine (snack) and run errands as required. Is that "einverstanden" (agreed? ) Jawohl Sgt Chef. Now which of you does what is up to you. As you look like two eggs I wouldnt know the difference anyway. Abtrenten! ( Dismissed ). We flipped for it and as usual Tibor lucked out and got the office job.

So we ended up with these two cushy jobs while the others busted their balls shlepping stones building the garden and such stuff.

All this would have been a snapp if I wouldnt have gotten a lousy sore throat standing by the door mostly in the rain being February. To my great surprise one of the Cpl. who made the impression that he is a SOB took Tibor to the kitchen where they cooked up a field bottle full of mulled wine for me! Next day I still had a sore throat but one of the Hungarian Cpl. had to go out to town and I asked him to bring me some lemons and sugar to make hot lemonade with Tibor's kind co-operation in the office which I took with a couple of aspirins which helped. If this kind of luck will last the Legion will be survivable.

Yesterday I wrote to the little Austrian Countess we met on the train hoping against hope that she will answer. We have to stay here till the 22nd because we're both underweight for the Legion. I'm 52kg and Tibor 55kg. Putting a little weight on will not be a big problem as the food is both good and ample, not being comparable to the swill in the Hungarian army. We passed another physical with X-Ray, eye and ear specialists etc but apart from being underweight everything was OK. In Sidi-bel-Abbès the whole drill will be repeated again.

One thing they said about the Legion was true: you can meet here people you gotta see to believe, from both end of the spectrum. Yesterday a young jewish guy arrived speaking eleven languages who worked for a travel agency. One thing you NEVER do here is asking someone WHY did he join the Legion? If he volunteers the info, fine, otherwise mum is the word. My hands are getting grungy as there is not much chance for showers and the water is barely lukewarm. I try at least to shave as often as possible. AS today is sunday the people are sitting on their beds bullshitting. Pure Babel! You can hear French, English, German, Italian, Spanish(refugees from the Civil war), Czech, Polish, Belgian or rather Flemish which is Dutch, Hungarian and some of the oldtimers already served in Tonkin (Vietnam) conversing in Annamit to impress the shit out of the "bleus" ( new recruits ). -  
Sofar our mood is OK, the fact that we are together helps of course.

Sunday's MENU is OK to say the least: Cod in some kind of white sauce with capers, omelet, roast chicken, green peas, chocolate torte, wine. In the Hungarian army MAYBE you get this kind of food in the Officers Mess. After lunch I stand guard for two hours and afterwards sleep. I'm trying to make my hands a little more civilized looking which is a problem as my scissors and file is in the store room yet. Dinner is vegetable soup, sausage with rice and the customary quart of "pinard" ( red wine.) My sore throat is better but still not 100% OK so Tibor cooks some hot lemonade for me in the office which I take with two aspirins.

FEB/20/Marseilles.

I feel better in the morning but I still have a cough. Time for my stint at the door, which would be no problem under normal circumstances but with this goddamn cold it's no fun. Its cool enough to need gloves. I find out that we got three more people for the guard team so I'm <sup>on</sup> duty only for two hours and can goof off for six. Makes it a whole lot easier. I write a letter to Pym. Lunch : some interesting looking cold cuts, cod with gravy, potatoes, Edam cheese, and wine. - My nose is running like crazy.

They get rid of some 20 new recruits including a Mexican dancer who fought in the Spanish civil war and was wounded four times. I dont even want to think of getting "eliminated". What would we DO ? Where to go ? I ask the Hungarian guy to buy us some bananas in town so we can put some weight on.

FEB/21/Marseilles.

Sunday b'fast: cocoa, croissant, afterwards two hours guard duty. Tomorrow there is a transport leaving for Sidi-bel-Abbès but I dont think we're on it. A lot of people have colds. There was a Hungarian airforce Sgt here with a new bunch of recruits. No wonder they are so choosy, new people are arriving all the time. Tibor got a letter from his former girlfriend Olly. I wonder when I am going to get a letter from somebody ? Holiday lunch: bean salad, seafood salad, roast pork with peas & carrots, chocolate pudding,

doughnuts and wine. Digesting same while sitting in the sun. They made rogue gallery pictures of us holding a board in front of us with our name and Numero Matricule 80589 ( Regimental Number) which is more important here than your name. Every time you hear it called out you scream PRESENT! This is truly the sore throat from hell! I can hardly swallow my spit.

One of the new assholes in the guard shakes me awake at 2000hrs to stand guard - instead of him! This dumb scum things that because I'm young I'm dumb enough to fall for this shit. ME ? An old Hungarian machine gunner ?! Bah, humbug. As he doesnt speak any of the "civilized" languages I just turn over and go back to sleep advising him to go and get fucked.( Va t'fair enculer)

#### FEB/22/Marsseilles

Physical exam. Please Allah help me. I get on the scale: 60.5kg fully clothed. I take off my clothes: almost less then the first time! Mood: below freezing! Tibor is already worrying about WHAT to do if we get kicked out? At last it is our turn: the doctor is very nice and understanding and gives us another week for putting on weigth. Lunch: vegetable soup, roast meat, spinach, stewed prunes from which I take three portions as nobody else likes it. Pull guard duty. Dinner: soup, sausage, french fries, wine.

#### FEB/23/Marseilles

B'fast: coffee, sardines, bread. One of the guys who was eliminated stops me to ask whether I would sell him my wool socks. I tell him they are in the store room. People watch each other here like a hawk and notice EVERYTHING. Every day somebody is asking me if I want to sell something? One of the idiots ask me whether I would give him, free, my custom<sup>made</sup> mountain boots ( Goysers ) which costs me a nice hunk of money made by a guy in my hometown, Sopron on the Austrian border, who apprenticed in Austria in a little town called Goysern which is specializing in handmade mountain and ski boots. We were told that we cannot take the boots with us to boot camp but if we can send <sup>it</sup> back home we can get it sent to us when we finished with boot camp and assigned to our own

unit. The question is how much would it cost to send it and a few more items home? The regular custom is that before the new recruits are shipped out to bootcamp they have to sell their civilian clothes to some sons of bitches who come in here and "buy" them for a pittance knowing that the guys have no choice as they are not allowed to go out to town of course.

We got a letter from our grandparents. Grampa writes very sensibly great guy what he is but grandma writes as if we were ten years olds. We never liked the old dame with her wet slobbering kisses. One of our letters were "on hold" by the 2ème Bureau (Intelligence) we've no idea why? My goddamn sore throat is getting better at last. I just heard that one of the guys in our room committed suicide and all his papers and 900FR was stolen from him. Dinner: vegetable soup, sauerkraut with "singe" ( corned beef ), wine. "Singe" means monkey in French and it is army lingo for canned corned beef. A very nice Hungarian Jew from Nyitra arrived. Handsome boy, used to be a lawyer, his name is Miki ( Mike). He worked here in a brandy factory for eighth months but lost his job. Couldnt find anything else so he joined the Legion to get French citizenship.

#### FEB/24/Marseilles

We get a letter from a school friend and colleague at the silk factory that she is engaged. She is a nice and pretty jewish girl. I write her to wish her happiness and luck. After dinner the boys from the Spanish civil war are singing and dancing a little flamenco. Afterwards I pull guard duty and an officer asks me in a nasty tone if I'm cold because my coat collar is turned up. I tell him I've a cold. When returns to leave he asks me from where did I get "kicked out? From Vienna?" No I'm from Hungary. Somuch the worse he says, you should have gone to Palestine instead of joining the Legion". Kiss my ass and get fucked you bastard- (Lèche mon cul <sup>et</sup> va t'faire enculer salaud !) This is the first time that I ran into this problem here. Fortunately this bastard is not part of our unit.

FEB/25/Marseilles

The filthy scavengers are here to "buy" the civilian gear of the transport which is leaving next monday. Sheer robbery. The SOB who is doing the "buying" makes a "take it or leave it" offer knowing fullwell that the seller has no choice. He is offering 10-15 FR for a suit with the shoes and underwear going for free.

Raining since four days. Mood: depressed. Fed up with waiting and hanging around. One of the guys says under 55kg recruits get kicked out in Sidi-bel-Abès. We gotta put on some weigth somehow, someway.

I went to the medical dept to weigh myself: good news, I put on 2 kgs. In the evening more Spanish singing by the guys who foughth on the wrong side.

FEB/26/Marseilles.(Sunday)

I get up early to have a chance to take a shower.-One of the guys on the guard team is an old fart who has to be begged and cajoled all the time to pull his stint. I realize that he is fed up with it but if he thinks I'm going to pull guard duty for him he has another think coming. In this outfit the saw "nice guys finish last" is doubly true.

Miki, the Hungarian guy who used to be a lawyer seems to be a nice kid. I had the impression that he wanted to get his citizenship but he says he wants to make a career of the Legion as we do and would like to stay together with us, which would be nice. His advantage is that he speaks fluently French, ours is that we have a military background.

I'm copying here some of the quotations and slogans on the wall of the dining room:

LEGIO PATRIA NOSTRA. "VOUS AUTRES LEGIONNAIRES, VOUS ETES SOLDAT POUR MOURIR ET JE VOUS ENVOIE OU L'ON MEURT." (You Legionnaires are soldiers to die and I send you where one dies.) Gen. Negrier.  
 "SOLDATS DE LA LEGION: VOTRE DRAPEAU N'A PAS DE PLIS ASSEZ AMPLES POUR CONTENIR TOUTES VOS TITRES DE GLOIRE." Gen, Deligny. (Soldiers of the Legion: Your flag has not enough space for all your Glory.)

VOICI LA LEGION, TROUPE SUR LAQUELLE VOUS POUVEZ CONTER EN TOUTES CIRCONSTANCES. Gen.Dodds ( The Legion is a unit you can count on in every circumstance.)- All these on the wall of the didning room. Sunday dinner: Filet of fish, omelet, roast chicken, french fries, strudel, white and red wine. Everybody is taking it easy, napping, playing dumb army games, reading, writing letters. I fall asleep too till somebody wakes me up who turns out to be one of the Sgts in mufty. He speaks in French mile a minute and all I can understand is that he wants to borrow 50FR from me. I talk it over with Tibor and decide against it. I tell him that my money is in the store room. He says he will wait for me in the court till I get it out and leaves for the room of the noncoms. I follow him and tell him that the store room is closed being sunday and 2100 hrs. Meanwhile the duty Sgt enters and he sends me out of the room, BANGS the door shut and I hear him screaming at the top of his voice. I assume that something is not kosher here. Next day I find out that the Sgt did not have the intention to consider the money a LOAN at all but a handout. The Duty Sgt. sized up the situation when he saw me in the room of the noncoms and chewed the ass out of the Sgt with great flair. There was talk about it to make me testify at the Companie Commander but fortunately it was not necessary. The Sgt is going to jail however because it is strictly forbidden to ask money from the subordinates.

### FEB/27/Marseilles

Tomorrow another physical, hopefully the LAST one! I'm getting a bit tired of this kind of excitement to put it mildly. I change 50FR to buy food to put some weight on. Tibor comes to tell me that we're shipping out wednesday. I hope he is good prophete. I dont know what happens to our personal gear? We can take only the most necessary stuff with us to boot camp. Our money is dwindling rather fast, we've 450FR left.

I didnt hear anything from the little Viennese Countess so far although she wrote some very kind words into my diary before we said farewell to each other. -

Another twenty people are being kicked out, most of them Spanish.

I would be surprised if there would be TWO from the twenty who would have even an idea where they will go and what will they do now? They are all penniless. Those who have a little bundle are considered wealthy. Most of them have nothing but what they have on their back. It is a sad fate indeed to have fought on the losing side and find oneself homeless, without a country, penniless and nowhere to go.

There are here other losers also in great number. A young guy about eighteen with a face I wouldn't like to meet in the dark. He must have been in more than his share of jails and prisons already. He is rolling a cigarette from butts he picked up from the ground and lights up, the cigarette dangling from his lips like in a gangster movie. His pants are too long hanging over his shoes, jacket hangs on him like on a scarecrow, and a beaten up black beret on his head. He is leaning against the wall the cigarette dangling from his thick heavy lips, as I said right out of a French "apache" movie à la Jean Gabin. He takes some change out of his pocket and starts flipping it...no doubt this guy should be in a movie!

#### FEB/28/Marseilles

We're supposed to go on a physical but nobody calls us. What is going on? We want to ship out Wednesday by hook or crook! Enough of this fucken waiting and hanging around. A guy is asking us if we're on the list for the next transport? It doesn't look like it as we didn't pass our physical yet. By the evening no news about shipping out. At last we find out that the list is going to be made up only tomorrow. Mood: depressed.

#### MARCH/1/MARSELLES

We find out that we are not on the list for the next transport. Are we ever going to get out of this fucken dump? We are told that we're supposed to go for physical and if we pass it perhaps we can still leave with the next transport. I go and weigh myself: 53kg. Enough? Not enough? While waiting we are told that the doctor

is not coming in today, so there is no way that we can leave with the next transport goddamn it to hell. We're here more than two weeks already and now it will be at least another fucken week. It is unlikely that I'll be able to put on weight with all these worrying. Somebody comes to tell me that the Captain wants to see me. These people here seem to remember everything about what is in one's papers. He asks me if I'm the designer? ( I was a textile designer in Hungary). He wants me to design a border for some kind of program. I'm not exactly in the mood for mucking about with lousy tools but it is better than standing guard so I do it of course taking my sweet time. Our Hungarian lawyer friend Miki is leaving with today's transport so that's the end of our plans to stay together. There is no problem for Tibor and myself to stay together we were told right from the start. This is routine in the Legion. Relatives can serve together if they want to. We get mail from home in which they say they cant imagine why we shouldnt be accepted but they say not to worry anyway, "que sera, sera". Easier said than done. What are we going to do at home "naked" without jobs etc ? This is the fourth transport I'm letting out the door since I'm here.

Sgt Chef SANFT, our "benefactor", tells Tibor in the office that tomorrow we will be presented with some other BLEUS (new recruits) to the Commandant of Fort St. Jean, Commandant DAIGNY, who is a "vrai chic typ" ( a really nice guy) and perfect gentleman, who has all our papers and documents we brought with us from Hungary so he has a pretty good idea who are we and where we came from etc.

Maybe this is a good time to explain a very important aspect in the life of a Foreign Legionnaire. From the moment somebody becomes a Foreign Legionnaire they open a File on him (what is called in Legion Lingo CAHIER DES CHANSONS ( Book of Songs.)). Everything the Legionnaire did, good and bad, is religiously entered into it and every time the Legionnaire is posted to another unit the CAHIER DES CHANSON goes with him so the new Commanding Officer will have a pretty good idea WHO and WHAT the new guy is

what can be expected of him and from him. Commandant DAIGNY being our first Commanding Officer started our Cahier des Chansons getting his info from Sgt. Chef SANFT and the other noncoms who were in charge of us. Having been guard at the door Cdt. Daigny passed me many times of course so I assume he remembers me somewhat from my Hungarian army salutes if for nothing else. So we tried to make ourselves presentable as far as possible under the circumstances here by getting a shave and trying to clean our "brod-quins" ( army boots ) without polish which is not available.

We decided with Tibor that we're going to do our "entrance" the Hungarian army way. So when it was our turn we marched in side by side, "in steps" of course, stop three steps in front of his desk "in synchro", TACK, salute "in synchro" and looking him in the eye: MON COMMANDANT. Cdt. Daigny watches all this with great amusement and a big grin and says, Sgt. Chef Sanft already told me that you two are former reserve officers from the Hungarian army and it sure shows. He is leafing thru our papers from home and says, I saw all kinds of people coming thru here since the years I'm here but I don't remember anybody coming in with the kind of file you two did. Birth Certificate, Bacc. ( Highschool diploma ) Hungarian Army book showing that you passed your reserve officers exam for infantry, Residence Certificate from your home town in Hungary, Certificate of good Morale and good Conduct from the Police of your home town of all things. Well, he says with a big grin I don't believe you'll have much trouble in the Legion! Good luck! He shakes hands, we give him another snappy salute, make a "regulation" about turn, TACK, and march out in step while we hear Cdt. Daigny still chuckling at our performance and we're happy as Punch.

We get paid: 6FR 50c. It is a whole fucken fortune! We will spend it on food and won't go far either. Tibor is making some tea in the office and tells me that we're going to another room. First I'm not very enthusiastic about it but it turns out to be a change for the better as the room is much nicer with "better sort" of people and the Chef de Chambre ( room chief ) is a young guy with a good sense of humour which makes a big difference.

MARCH/2/MARSEILLES

Physical exam. There is a whole mob of people and a long wait. We're considering the possibilities. The fact is that we're not exactly running as favourites in this race. At long last it is our turn! The doctor is talking a mile a minute from which we understand little but we enthusiastically agree with everything he says, hopefully in the right times, and at long last he says: VOUS ETES APTES TOU LES DEUX. (Fit both of you.) We thank him profusely and fuck off. Outside we let out a big holler and pound each other on the back. Even our appetite is better! We are shipping out either next Sunday or Wednesday at long last. The moral of the story is NOT to worry in advance about things which work out one way or other anyway. That in Sidi-bel-Abbès the whole drill will start from scratch we will think about later. WE will start writing home to let our friends and parents know that so far so good.

To recapitulate the happenings of these weeks here, we really can't complain. Apart from that one bastard who told me I should have gone to Palestine instead of joining the Legion everybody was very decent starting with Sgt Chef Sanft who made our lives easy from day one. These people are expert here in sizing up the new recruits and if they see that you are not a bum they are not going to send you to clean out the shithouses etc. When Sgt. Chef Sanft found out that we're leaving with the next transport he told Tibor in the office that if we're going on like we did here we won't have any problems in the Legion. Nevertheless we assume that bootcamp will not be a lark but we're not worrying about the outcome. It does not look like the Legion will be harder than the Hungarian army was. We want to go to noncom school as soon as possible as we don't have the intention to become "1er Class" (no exact equivalent to this in any other army I know of, something like wannabe Cpl.) after ten years of service.

MARCH/3/Marseilles

I still have this goddamn sore throat, I can hardly swallow. Tibor tells me that he had diarrhea all night and also threw up and feels

fucken awful! As we both ate exactly the same things and I feel OK I guess it must be the reaction to all the excitement to the physical. He makes himself some black coffee with a lot of rum in the office and feels better. Fortunately in the office he has very little to do.

#### MARCH/4/MARSEILLES

We found out that we're shipping out next monday. I'm in the middle of shaving when Tibor comes to tell me that the little Viennese Countess wrote me a letter. She said that my letter caught up with her in Vienna after they got home from vacation from France. Her letter is very nice and friendly. I'm answering of course right away and send her a picture "From the Legion."

There is a big new bunch of refugees from the Spanish Civil war. As there is no more place for them in the barracks they put up big "marabouts" (large round tents) in the court with straw on the floor for sleeping. One of the guys said seeing the new transport: Now I can understand why they lost the war. They are really a sad looking bunch, poor guys, wearing everything imaginable passing for clothes from Knickerbocker pants to riding britches, rubber rain coats, wool capes, you name it. When you've to flee for your life you cannot worry too much about looking stylish. The truth is that they <sup>don't</sup> try very hard to be very likable either. They're very noisy constantly screaming and arguing with each other about everything. I don't understand Spanish but I can pick out the names of towns and other geographical items and I get the impression that they are refighting the highlights of the war with Spanish temperament.

In the evening I go down to the canteen for a coffee. As I'm guard nobody cares a damn what I do and where I go.

#### MARCH/5/MARSEILLES

Tibor tells me we're shipping out on monday afternoon but so far I can't see any preparations for it. They say we can't send our civilians clothes home although I'm sure Sgt. Chef Sanft would let us do it if it would be possible at all. My sore throat is gettin

better but I still have a cough. A Spanish guy is passing by who looks exactly like a jewish cantor(singer of rituals). At lunch there is a guy sitting opposite me I would not like to meet in the dark. It is a rugged looking crowd to say the least. Each one is trying to put on his own plate the bestest and the mostest but in all fairness to them I'm pretty sure since they lost the war they must have had more then their share of meatless and foodless days to, poor guys.

We meet a jewish guy from Switzerland with great class and obvious good manners who joined to get French citizenship. He is obviously well off and he will have to be careful in this crowd otherwise they will pluck him like a chicken. Some of his "friends" already took him for a "loan". Fortunately this is no hardship for him because all he has to do is write home and say how much money he wants and it arrives pronto. It must be nice to be rich.

We climb up to the wall of the forteress and watch "the free world". It is a funny feeling to be locked up even if you volunteered for it. We ship out tomorrow and high time too. I was getting sick and tired of this waiting and hanging around and the noncoms seem to be getting worse and worse.

### MARCH/6/LAST DAY IN MARSEILLES !

The atmosphere is tense waiting for the orders to ship out. We're outfitted with wool uniforms, "brodquins" ( army boots), musettes, (side sacks/bags) and "bidon" ( field bottle) holding two liters. We get our hair cut. In the afternoon we get permission after all to send our civilian clothes home including our handmade mountain boots, windbreakers etc. because Sgt Chef Sanft gives us an escort to the post office great guy what he is. It costs 90FR which is a lot of money for us but it is worth it. They get us formed up in columns, more or less & we get "inspected". The door opens and: EN AVANT- MARCHE! At long last somebody opens the door for ME, not the otherway 'round!

On the ship wall-to-wall bordel and madhouse! No places

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are assigned and everyone is fighting for the better spots. The name of this "luxury cruiser" : SIDI BRACHIM. Tibor and myself manage to find a pretty good spot for ourself. We're on our way to SIDI-bel-ABBES the "legendary" home of the "legendary" French Foreign Legion! Mood:hopeful and optimistic. I wrote home we're shipping out. We go up on deck but dont stay long as it is pretty cool. The ship is rolling a bit but it is no problem. This is our first trip on a big passenger ship, and we wonder about our "sea legs!"

MARCH/7/ SIDI BRACHIM

Had a good sleep, sea/very calm, if it wouldnt be for the vibrations from the engines we wouldnt even know that we're under way. B'fast @ 0600 hrs, we fix up our places and go up on deck. Speed 18knots, sea very calm. There is a former French navy guy with us and Tibor drives the poor guy nuts with questions about ship and sea lore. Guy next to me plays his mandolin which reminds me of one of Zarah Leander's films: ZU NEUEN UFERN. ( Toward new shores ). One year ago I wouldnt have thought I'll be on the SIDI BRACHIM en route to Sidi-bel-Abbès for five years in the Legion.

MARCH/8/ SIDI BRACHIM - ORAN/ALGERIE/AFRIQUE.

Reveille @ 0400hrs and we drop anchor @ 0620 in ORAN/ALGERIE. First impressions are the skyscrapers of Oran, palm trees, and the Arabs in their Djellabias (wool caftans?) From the port we go to Fort St. Thérèse where we stay till 17hrs. Our luck holds out as the wife of the Adjudant happens to be Hungarian and all we've to do is put up two curtains for her. At 17hrs a Cpl Chef takes the mob to the train station and we proceed to Sidi-bel-Abbès, arriving at the Qaurtier Viénot, the H.Q. of the Legion where we are taken to the dining room for "orientation". The walls are covered with battle scenes quotations and slogans of the Legions: LEGIO PATRIA NOSTRA. A Sgt. is making a speach explaining that now we're Foreign Legionnaires and what that news implies. He is also doing his best to scare the shit out of BLEUS<sup>US</sup> ( new recruits), which might or might not succeed according to the individual make up of us wannabe Legionnaires. For Tibor and myself it definetely does not work as we've a pretty good idea what we "bough". Besides the "baroud" (fighting) is over since

years so what the story amounts to is "soldiering" in a new army in a new environment and with soldiering we're not exactly unfamiliar.

Afterwards our personal belongings are closely checked and scrutinized. They take away my waterproof flashlight, don't know why (too big?), my thermos bottle, my canteen and my little BROWNIE camera with the film undevelopped with the picture of the little Viennese Countess on it, damn it. Pisses me off no end, but of course I keep my mouth strictly shut. We're going to sleep not exactly in the best mood, but the fact that we're together makes it a whole lot easier.

MARCH/9/SIDI-bel-ABDES/ALGERIE.

Reveille @ 0600hrs but I get up earlier to avoid being rushed. We fix up the bed and a guy comes in with a big can of coffee and we all hold out our "quart" to be filled. Nobody washes. Ressemblément ("fall in") physical exam and the first "Schwanz-parade" (penis inspection for signs of clap) Everything OK so far. Come back and peel carrots (pluche). Lunch: two kinds of Hors d'oeuvres, meat, veggies, dessert and quart of "pinar" (red wine). Everything good and ample portions. We're definitely NOT being starved here!

The scale at the physical must have been crazy: Tibor 51 kg, I'm 50kg. Never been less before. The infirmier (medic) pulls his finger along my spine and says I've a slight curvature of my spine! This is sure news to me. Nobody ever noticed it before? Afternoon more pluche for more carrots and potatoes. Dinner is good. In the afternoon we went on a "trial marche" for 13 kms carrying ±20kg on our backs. Wool uniform, empty musette bag and the bidon with 2 liter water. Tibor and I say we can do this walking backwards! Slowly we realize that the pace is much faster than in the Hungarian army. It gets only a little unpleasant when we get blisters on the soles of our feet from the new brodquins. I miss my own Goyserers (mountain boots) After 6-7<sup>km</sup> of marching we are getting aware of it that we're carrying a backpack but it is no problem, however the blisters are a nuisance specially when we

stop for a rest and start marching again. The Legion routine is marching 50 minutes and resting ten minutes. The worst part of it is that this sorry bunch of wannabe Legionnaires cant march in step and cant keep up with the front of the column which results of what we called in the Hungarian army of "playing the harmonica" which is self explanatory, as the end of the column is always trying to catch up with the front. We get back to the barracks and climb the steps to our room limping from the goddamn blisters. Eighth of the guys became strugglers but caught up with the column at the rest stop but three of them caught up with us only at the barracks. We realize that we are in for some "interesting" days. C'est La légion! - Tibor has three blisters and I have two. We "operate" on them letting out the water and putting on some of the special tallow we bought with us, made in Sweden and go to sleep.

MARCH 10/ S.b.A.

Reveille, Ressement (Fall-in). The Chèf de Chambre ( Room Chief) is asking if somebody knows how to darn? As this sounds like a cushy corvée (work detail) we both volunteer being both former textile people. He brings some yarns and blankets to mend and darn. I realize right away that the yarn is no damn good because it is not spun tight enough and tell him. He explains that it is not important to do it well just so that it LOOKS like if it would be OK. The old army way! We start working on it with great zeal and the guy says in German: Bitte, bitte nur ganz gemütlich! Gemütlich means "cosily", so what it adds up to is: take it easy please, and we follow his advise. Turns out he is a nice guy but a little self-important. - Lunch.- One of the transport is presented to the Colonel in full uniform with the "legendary" Ceinture Bleu the trademark of the Foreign Legion as seen in all the films.

Tibor and myself have to stay here for awhile with Compagnie d'Essai ( Trial Compagnie) because we're still underweight and the doctor is not sure whether we can hack it. This was not exactly a big surprise after our experience in Marseilles.

There is a whole bunch of us and it is soon obvious that NOT all of us are physically suspect but that this is a dodge to keep people for other reasons too. One of us in the same unit is a Jewish guy from Checkoslovakia who is built like a goddamn Hercules. We get buddies later and it turns out from whispered bits and pieces that he is suspected to have been working for a foreign intelligence. We're going to have to go on more marches and if we're OK we can proceed to boot camp. Some people have to stay 2-3 weeks some 2-3 months. We certainly have the time but the uncertainty is a pain in the ass. We had enough of this shit in Mar-seilles already.

Somehow or other I always seem to end up washing the dishes. This time I manage to break two glasses which cost me 3.60FR. We're moving to the upper <sup>floor</sup>. When I want to make up my new bed I notice that my "sac à viande" ("meat bag"), sort of a sleeping bag made of two sheets sewn together, is missing! I report it to the new Chef de chambre who is a maniac and he starts screaming in German "If you don't find it till tomorrow you go to jail! This is here automatic!" - This is not exactly good news and I'm in a foul mood. I looked already twice in the old room but nothing. Tibor went looking for it too and the Chef de Chambre for whom we darned the blankets helped to look too and they found it on one of the beds. One of the bastards forgot his own and simply "exchanged" it for mine. This is not exactly the Jockey Club lets not forget it. The maniac Chef de Chambre kicked two guys off their beds because they lied down before it was time.

MARCH/ 11/ S.b.A

In the morning we go to shower and from there to the medical dept for inoculation (piccure) from there we go back to barracks and we're supposed to stay in bed for two days on "light diet." They are spoiling us here. When we got inoculated in the Hungarian army we went straight to exercise afterwards. I'm hungry as hell as we didn't get b'fast. At last they bring us mint tea and one of our buddies bring us some chocolate but says not to eat it all

because we're going to have temperature. Easy to say when we're already underweight.

Historic day! We got our Numero Matricule of the Legion: 80589 for me and 80590 for Tibor. From now I'll have to scream PRESENT ! every time I hear my number called out! This number is more important in the Legion than your name what can be anything.

Our friend Schneider brings some cold meat and another guy some cake and we gobble it all up picture or no picture. We can't afford to lose weight.

#### MARCH/12/S.b.A.

We're still supposed to stay in bed but we sneak down to the canteen buy something to eat. They are distributing 20 buttons to each of us to sew on our coats, keeps us from getting bored to death. After tomorrow we go on a 15km march carrying 10kg- after two days on "light diet"? As the old saw goes "the military mind is a contradiction in terms"! We all manage to sneak some food and nobody has any problem. We just missed the Sunday brunch goddamit. The Spanish guys are yackety-yacking all afternoon. Why are all Southern people so noisy? Is there a special reason for this? We had no mail from home since the 28th. "Dinner" is soup with a few pieces of potatoes and veggies and tea. To hell with this "light diet"! Bah humbug!

#### MARCH/13/S.b/A.

Morning corvée in the dining room, sweeping it, washing the floor, laying the tables. Lunch: beets, veggie soup, roast meat, with pickles, stewed carrots, stewed prunes, wine. In the afternoon we walk around the barracks imitating sweeping it. (Corvée quartier). Afterwards I do my laundry (corvée lavage) which is actually not a bad job here where they have good facilities for it. There is a sort of "trough" with the water constantly running thru it, IN on the left side and OUT on the other with two 40cm wide stone slabs on each side so that you can use the trough on

both side. The system works like this: you dunk your laundry in the water of the trough you soap it up with the laundry soap issued and you sortapound it on the slab like you see women doing it <sup>in</sup> all primitive counties, till the soapy water works itself thru the clothes. Then you dunk it back into the water to rinse it CLEAN. It is very important to rinse clean otherwise the clothes get yellow streaks. When the washing is ready you take it on the roof of the building to the "séchoir" ( drier) and hang it up on the wires stretched out in rows. Every séchoir has a "garde séchoir" who makes sure that nobody takes clothes what is not his or exchanges "by mistake" his own lousy clothes with somebody else's better one. Everybody must have his Numéro Matricule stamped in every single item of his gear and the Garde Séchoir writes down every piece you take to be dried - in principle at least. The way the system works is that we all know each other after a while in the same companie and the garde séchoir spotchecks and checks only guys he is not familiar with or looks "louche" ( suspicious ). The fact that there IS a garde séchoir makes pilfering unlikely. Tibor and myself made an agreement that we're going to wash all the clothes for both of us in turn. However this didnt turn out well because my twin brother is a slob who did a lousy job on my clothes. This was no news to me as I heard my parents say when we were small, more than once: Erwin is the neatnick and Tibor is the slob. So I'm <sup>not</sup> inventing this.

We moved to a smaller and friendlier building the only disadvantage is that there is a sign on the door: SECTION D'ESSAI. Dinner: veggie soup, meatstew with peas, figs and pinard. (wine)

On mail call the Sgt is reading MY name! The little Viennese Countess wrote me a very nice letter even enclosing a picture of herself sitting in a boat and looking very cute. How'bout THAT? To dampen my spirit we're both Garde d'escalier( staircase garde) which is a lousy duty. We've to make sure that nobody is leaving the building for the outside shithouse wearing brodequins for two reasons: not to make noise and not go AWOL. As tomorrow is another trial march I put some of the spacial tallow we brought with us

on the sole of my feet to avoid having blisters if I can help it.

We're vaccinated for smallpox but this is no big deal even here, just a scratch.

MARCH/14/S.b. A

I'm Garde de Chambre in the noncom's room which is a pain in the ass meaning a lot of "housework", sweeping and washing the floor etc. After dinner same shit. After finished I go to bed early to be rested for the trial march tomorrow at 0500.

MARCH/15/S.b.A.

Reveille @ 0500, b'fast, Ressement. It's quite cool, good marching weather. Tibor and myself pickup a steady beat, not giving a shit about the others and keep it up till we get back. This 13km was just enough to work up a good appetite, Good lunch: veggie soup, potato salad, corned beef with cabbage, very nice fruit compote, pinard. After lunch I write a letter, sweep up the place and take a leisurely shower as our buddy Wolf, a German jew, is Chef de lavabo. ( Shower room chief). Hanging around.

MARCH/16/S.b.A.

Pluche (veggie peeling) this is part of "daily life in the Legion." They dump a big heap of veggies, potatoes, carrots etc on the ground and we're "invited" to peel the damn thing for the next meal. There is something of<sup>a</sup> honour to be able NOT to do it by hiding in likely places. I just start to peel my first spud when somebody is tapping me on my shoulder and WHO is there?! My old school and hometown buddy Horvath Coca! Coca is his nickname meaning Piggy in Hungarian because he is a big guy and not all muscle either. He is a very talented guy, terrific with his hands, did beautiful silver filigree jewelry etc, also a talented musician who taught himself several instruments including tenor banjo. So, HOW the hell did you get HERE Coca? Very easily. I just asked your parents were did you disappear and after they told me I just went to the same Travel Agency and asked them for the same tickets you bought and here I am!As we came from a small

town of 35,000 people with some 1000 jews we all knew each other.

Well it was nice to have somebody from the old home-town of course specially in the Legion, even if Coca was not all perfection either. As a matter of fact he was pathological liar and teller of tall tales but as the saw goes nobody is perfect.

#### March/17/S.b.A

Another trial march. Reveille @ 0500 hrs. March is a piece of cake. In the afternoon they read the names of those who passed the SECTION d'ESSAI successfully, including we two of course and the Check Hercules whose name is Hans Nettel and we are anxious to get to the next attraction : the bootcamp in Saida! Somehow the Biblical saw pops into my so-called mind; "There is going to be crying and gnashing of teeth!" As the blind man said: we will see!

#### March/19/S.b.A.

In the afternoon we're told at Ressemblément that tomorrow morning we're taking the train to Saida for the bootcamps! Before leaving to my utter surprise and joy they give me back my flashlight and thermos bottle, both of which I already considered lost for a worthy cause, but unfortunately my little BROWNIE camera is not allowed and therefore the picture of the little Viennese Countess will have to 'live' only in my memory. Merde alors.

Mood: terrific!

#### March/20/S.b. A.

Reveille and snowing in big flakes. Ressemblément en tenue de Campagne. Fall in in "full marching order" including the Ceinture Bleu the first time on my belly! Proud as Punch! We're in the bus

like sardines. Snowing all the way. After two hours we arrive to SAIDA which is a small town his only fame being the bootcamp of the Legion since many years.

In the afternoon another pluche... and can I believe it? Another old friend from home ( Szombathely this time not Sopron ) standing beside me, Magyar Laci with whom we spent many happy hours in nightclubs drinking apricot brandy made famous years ago by the Prince of Wales, the one who abdicated for his Fair Lady, and got somewhat inebriated to put it politely, nigh after nigh in one of the famous nighclubs in Budapest on the stuff during his visit.

Being old friends from home I overlook the standard etiquette of the Legion and ask him what was the reason for his exchanging Szombathely for the Legion? Laci has a very funny and expressive face with lips like Emmett Kelly as clown, and he uses it for good effect now, saying: well, I sorta confused the money in the till of my Dad's gas station with my own and Dad took it very hard so I figured it is better if I disappear for a little while. Laci is a really goodhearted and gregarious sort who picked up every check he could reach so of course he was always short of money. He is here in Saida since five months and familiar with the ropes being the sort called in the Legion un type qui se démerde! A guy who knows how to fend for himself.

#### March/22/SAIDA

I go on sick call in the morning because I've some kind of dermatitis on my hands I cant identify. The toubib(arabic for doctor which became part of the Legion lingo) looks between my fingers and says: Ça va (OK) and sends me back to the barracks. In the afternoon the Chef de Chambre tells me to report to the hospital and I damn near shit my pants! Hans Nettel also has to report to the hospital so I'll have at least somebody to talk to. The poor bastard has a monumental boil on his tummy and we're both royally pissed off the more so as I still dont know what my problem is.

March/23/Saida hospital.

In the morning they call me and I get a booklet with my diagnosis: GALE. ( scabies). I'll be goddamned all to hell and back! I'd to come to the fucken Foreign Legion for SCABIES?! There are two nurses and one of them is quite cute and they give me some yellow ointment and a mitten made from some rough fibers and tell me to rub the ointment with the mitten in the skin on my hand. Poor Hans didnt get off so easy. They "treated" his boil the Legion's way: the infirmier ( medic) scorched a piece of cork in a flame untill it glow and jammed it at poor Hans's BOIL cautorizing it! As Hans put it if I would not be Hans Nettel I'd have probably pissed and shit my pants. Being Hans Nettel I just ground my teeth and said: merci beaucoup! I'll have to stay probabaly one week. No big deal as there are not enough people yet in the group to start bootcamp instructions.

March/26/Saida Hospital.

Being sunday I hope Tibor can come visit me. I'm looking out the window and at 1300 hrs I notice the whole bunch of them Tibor, Coca and Laci. Out of 46 Elcus ( recruits) they let leave only five. Coca is very proud to be one of them having no military background like Laci and we too. Tibor tells me that the quality and quantity of the food deteriorated a lot. Laci brought me some cheese and salami, knowing the ropes where to find things. They also tell me that bootcamp instructions started and I want to get out of here as soon as possible.

March/27/Saida Hospital

I ask the doctor to let me leave as I've enough of this hospital. Big snowstorm.

April/3/Saida

Magyar Laci left for Syria. Bootcamp started.

April/4/Saida

I threw up nine times during the nighth.

April/9/Saida

Easter Sunday. Everybody is given permission to go out to town.

We met another Hungarian jewish guy who was working as hairdresser in Paris for years till the war broke out when he had to join the Legion not having his citizenship yet. We go out to town with him but as he is on guard duty we have to return early.

The room is<sup>a</sup> madhouse with the guys coming home drunk having "celebrated" their first leave in town. Some of the drunks are supposed to go on guard duty but this is no big problem because the Legion is long used to these kinds of problems and there are always "stand by"s to take the place of those who are "incapacitated".

April/12/Saida

We got our second vaccination(piccur) yesterday and we had to go to bed again. Our new friend Diamant Laci is visiting us almost all day telling stories about his experiences so far. He <sup>is</sup> shaping up as a really good friend and we hope - again - that we will be able to stay together. Weather is cloudy and I'm bored. We got two letters from home yesterday.

April/23/Saida

We got our third-and last-inoculation today so I've plenty of time for writing and I'm going to try to describe my "room mates". Opposite my bed there is a red haired Belgian, seems like a "better sort" except for his childish trick of shouting my name and then trying to look like if butter wouldnt melt in his dumb mouth. Next to him is a former sailor who occasionally confuses "mine" with "yours". He is leaving everything to the last minute when everybody else is ready. So far he was ready but these kind of smart asses run out of luck here sooner or later and end up in "the box" ( en'boite). Next one is a creep from Switzrland who stole the brush recently of another guy. This is a no-no. If you absolutely need to "acquire" something what is not yours you have to go to another room. He is walking around since weeks with some kind of skin disease on his neck but doesnt go on sick call. Today at the inoculation his luck ran out and was hustled off to the hospital. Next to me is a Ukrainen who is the "confident" of the Chèf de Chambre who is a nice guy but not up to the task of handling this mob.

Few days ago he came home "noir" (literally "black" but meaning drunk) with his nose bleeding. When I asked what happened to him he just laughed and said Oh mon vieux this is nothing I just had a little fight in town. Later I heard that he and his copin (buddy) had dinner in our favourite restaurant BOUBOUL, but did not have the money to pay for it and the patron (owner) did not find this very funny as it happens too often and he can't afford to feed the Legion for free. When I told him that I'll go out to town for dinner and won't be here, he promptly offered to drink my ration of pinard (wine). He is a real nice guy otherwise giving no trouble to anybody. I don't know what he is doing here being a French citizen.

The other row of beds starts with a lazy creep from Italy who is convinced that without him France would surely lose its colonies.

This one too is a serious candidate for "the box". So far it seems that the laziest guys are from Italy living up to the motto of Dolce far niente. And if they're chewed out for some they look terribly hurt and insulted. The next guy looks like if he had to decide to join the Legion in real haste. He looks like a professional fighter. His nose is showing the trademarks. It seems that my impression was correct. When he got into an argument later on with another guy he promptly took up his "stance" ready to go. He is trying to terrorize the room but he was warned to take it easy unless he wants to get into trouble right in bootcamp which is not a very good start in the Legion as it all goes into one's Cahier de Chanson and once you get a reputation of a trouble maker you'll have a tough time live it down. If he settles down he will be probably a good Legionnaire as he is in good shape and smart enough to follow instructions in weaponry etc.

Next to him is a young boy who does not look more than fifteen. His hair is flaming red, has zillions of freckles, ears like an elephant, but with all this he fought in the Spanish Civil war in the International Brigade.

We try to keep our space from the whole crowd because

this is the only way not to get into fights, which usually ends with BOTH parties in "the box". We also have two guys here, both reminding you of monkeys or apes. One of them is a "cute" monkey the other a gorilla. The "cute monkey" is sitting on his bed scratching himself. He has small button eyes with heavy Neanderthal eyebrows to match. He is glancing here and there fast, with a constant grin on his face even when the Sgt is asking him something, not saying anything just keeps grinning. Sooner or later the Sgt. cant help but laughing too which makes the cute monkey very happy like when you give a banana to a little monkey. This cute little monkey is trying very hard to please which is his savior because in the Legion goodwill is appreciated and most everybody is leaving him alone. "Il fait ce qu'il peut, mais ce qu'il peut c'est très <sup>a</sup> peu". This is difficult to translate because it is a play on two words with different meanings spelled differently but sounding the same: He does what little he can, but what he can is little.

The gorilla's head is sort of a dome with floppy ears and sloping front. Over his right eye there is a fairly fresh scar three stitches worth. And he walks like a gorilla too. The next guy is a textbook case of mongoloid cretin with the approximate mental level of a five year old. He is inventing plays for himself for that level of intelligence. Part of our gear are some two dozens of dummy ammos looking like oblongs made of cast iron which are carried in our ammo pouches during marches and exercises to simulate the weight of live ammo. They are displayed with the rest of our gear on the shelves above the beds. Recently before a Revue de Détaille ( Detailed inspection of all our gears) this little moron arranged these dummy ammos, called lingot in the Legion, in every possible way he could think of and every time he came up with a new variation he took a step back to admire the new creation as a painter would do with his work in progress. He was still building his latest creation when the Sgt came in to warn us to get ready for the Revue as the Lieutenant was on his way. The little moron hastily demolishes his latest creation and builds a new one.

The Lt. enters, looks around, says : Bon! and leaves. You should have seen that expression of terrible disappointment on the face of this little moron! The Lt. didnt even glance at his creation?! His whole afternoon was ruined! Even if the Lt. would have chewed him out would have been preferable, after all the Lt. is something of a God to him, but not even GLANCE at his creation ? Humiliation and disaster in one stroke!

We also have a German jew here who worked as tailor till the war broke out when he joined to get his citizenship as he says. what he forgot to say I think was that he worked without papers and the police didnt approve. As far as I'm concerned he could have stayed where he was. He arrived with nothing but what he had on his back and keeps borrowing everything from us from razor blades to needles and yarns - a TAILOR ?! - etc etc which gets a bit tiresome after awhile and he is not very sympathic either to start with. A few days ago he fixed the collar for Tibor and he offered to pay him of course, which he grandiosly refused to accept saying that we did more than enough favours for him. Later he told another German Jew that he did a "big job" for us and we didnt even offer to pay him! What a salaud! ( dirty bastard)

An English bloke, whose name is Williams is in "the box" righth now. He told his story to Diamant Laci which is a classic Legion happening but taken into consideration all the freedom we experienced I'm inclined to take it with a BIG grain of salt.

He and some of his buddies went on a bender and by the time he sobered up he realized that he signed on for the usual five years stipulated by the Management. This might well have been routine during the days of the colonization - delicately called Les Operations - but this is not the case anymore, specially with all the political refugees from the Spanish Civil war and Hitler. In any case he manages to get his share of "cafard" (blues) which he handles the classic way of the Legion: getting drunk. The trouble was that the last time when he got stinko he forgot that he is supposed to be on guard duty. We were just visiting

our friend Diamant Laci when Legionnaire Williams came weaving in by the door "noir comme une bourrique" drunk like a donkey. Sizing up the situation in a second and realizing that he is not only drunk but already late for getting ready for guard duty we all three snapped to it trying to get him dressed like if he would be something of a window dummy. We succeeded well enough for him pass inspection with the rest of the guard at the compagnie without getting noticed, but when the Sgt. of the guard arrived to inspect the whole crew his luck ran out. With years of experience behind him it didnt take him long to size up the sorry status our friend Williams was in. He called the duty Sgt. to take Legionnaire Williams to the Compagnie office. What exactly happened in the office we dont know. What we did know was that Williams TORE out of the office into the court with two of the guard in hot pursuit. They wrestled Williams to the ground, grabbing one of his arms each and dragging him on his ass still another guard came running to grab his legs and thus "transported" him to the POSTE de POLICE. However our friend Williams didnt agree with this decision either. He tore out of there too into the court with the guard again in hot pursuit. They caught up with him again and started

to drag him to the garrison prison on the other side of the court and jammed him thru the door, where our friend Williams' luck really ran out because at the other side of the door Sgt. Matchke was waiting for him with the long piece of chain which was his trademark and favourite piece of gear and without which nobody remembers seeing him and which he uses to "discipline" the prisoners under his definitely NOT tender care. Sgt. Matchke is one of the few characters who fits the image of the sadists all the books wrote about and films "immortalized" about the Legion.

Not to put a too fine point on it Sgt. Matchke is a dirty, filthy, lousy bastard, hated and feared by everybody. He is a red haired enculé (buttfucked) everybody hopes never to meet in his establishment, and even in the court given wide berth. In one word he is a fucken PARIAS, thats what he is.

It was read next day on the Rapport (Daily Orders) that Légionnaire Williams got "only" fifteen days in prison being a BLEU (new recruit) counting as mitigating circumstance.

As one of the participants in this little drama was the PRISON, perhaps it is the right time to say a few well chosen words about the prisons in the Legion. It goes without saying that a lot depends on the general tone of the garrison which is set of course by the garrison commander and more importantly by the guy who is in charge of the prison, called in Legion lingo Maître d'Hôtel. The general idea and principle is nevertheless to make the prison unpleasant enough for the guys NOT to want to undergo this experience because a Légionnaire in prison is useless for the Legion for any and all purposes.

Unlike most of the rest of the stories written about the Legion which are almost all garbage, the prisons are another story. To put it simply they are a Law unto themselves, where the Maître d'Hôtel is given free hands to make his own rules as long as he does not kill anybody, which is definitely a no-no.

So perhaps we should start with the preparation of Légionnaire Williams for his trip to prison and follow him there. The first thing is that from the moment Légionnaire Williams was given fifteen days in prison, Légionnaire Williams became PUNIS DE PRISON WILLIAMS. (Prisoner Williams). He will get his hair shorn the same way when he joined the Legion. The next thing is that the Duty Sgt. of the day comes to visit him in his room and shouts: Punis de Prison Williams EN TENUE DE BAL! (Prisoner Williams put on your ball gown!) While in prison you are not allowed to wear your KEPI because you are NOT a Légionnaire anymore. You wear the BONNET DE POLICE, as you did when you joined up and wore till you finished boot camp and became a Légionnaire! - You are also not allowed to wear your Bande molle-tière (puttees) and the shoelaces are taken out of your brodequins. When your Tenue de Bal is completed two guys from the garde takes you - or rather Punis de Prison Williams - to the Garrison Prison which opens its doors, <sup>guards</sup> staying outside, orders Williams to enter. ("Lascate ogni speranza voi qui entrate")?

Sgt Matchke is standing behind the doors and orders you to exchange your boots for wooden ones similar to the Dutch klompers with the difference that they are worn WITHOUT socks! And now the real FUN begins. Sgt Matchke SCREAMS: Pas de gymnastic... MARCHE! (on the double... MARCHE!) And "from this moment on" as the song says our friend Williams is not going anywhere and not doing anything except ON THE DOUBLE! And just so that there is no misunderstanding Sgt. Matchke gives him a well placed monumental kick in the ass coming from long practice, to start him off right. He directs him to the wall opposite the door where he screams: HALT! FACE AU MUR! (Stop! Face the wall!) If Williams is new to the game and doesn't know what "Face au mur" means, which is that your NOSE is supposed to touch the wall and your toes also, Sgt Matchke very helpfully hits the back of your head busting your nose on the wall.

As I said Williams will doubletime for Ressemblément, double time it for b'fast, double time for washing hands before lunch, double time after lunch for pelote( walking round and round) And to make the whole story more interesting there are no VERBAL commands after the first day. Everything goes by WHISTLE. So just for a sample this is the way it works for meals. WHISTLE: ressemblément. WHISTLE: doubletime for washing hands. WHISTLE: doubletime to face the wall. Sgt Matchke puts your messtin behind your heels so that unless you do your "about turn" exactly according to regs you'll kick it over and you had your lunch. WHISTLE: about turn. WHISTLE: pick up your messtin. WHISTLE: start gobbling your food(you've ten minutes). WHISTLE: put down your messtin. WHISTLE: doubletime to wash your messtin. WHISTLE: put down your messtin. WHISTLE: doubletime it to the wall. WHISTLE: about turn. WHISTLE: pick up your backpack filled with sand. WHISTLE: En avant - MARCHE! Start walking round and round to ensure digestion, for half hour. - Other attractions follow at the discretion of Sgt Matchke. - Food in prison is the same as for regular units with the important difference of: NO pinard(wine), NO desserts and NO smoking. As all the oldtimers at least drink this is one of the worst part of being in prison for them. -

The cells in the prisons are rudimentary to say the least. The "bed" consists of a solid block of cement with ONE blanket and the nights are cool. One of the favourite trick of Sgt. Matchke- and some others - is to throw a bucket full of cold water on you after you fell asleep, if you somehow "misplesed" him during the day or just plain dont like your face. As you remember the wooden clogs are worn WITHOUT socks which must have been invented by some sadist bastard because after the first couple of days your feet are minus a lot of skin, specially your heels and toes. It is standard to go to the hospital after prison to get your feet healed. - As I said prisons are a good place to stay OUT of in the Legion. -

Perhaps to balance the impression of this bastard Matchke I should tell you about the man who was running the bootcamp of Saida.

As it happens so often in life you can meet the worst and the best examples of humanity in the same place back to back, so to say, as it happened in the bootcamp of Saida.

The man who ran the bootcamp of Saida was Adjutant Chef Litkowsky and a majestick looking guy he was too, no other word would do him justice. He had the bearing of an officer of the Tzar of Russia which he was. He was about six feet two, a very handsome guy with a beautiful black beard and more importantly full of the juice of human kindness. We all considered him our "Father figure." The young BLEUS he called "mon petit" the older ones "mon vieux". I dont think I ever heard him to chew anybody out in the four months we spent in Saida. And he didnt miss much either. He must have had at least twenty years of service to became Adjutant Chef and probably more. The Adjutant Chef is God Almighty in the Legion with the highest non commissioned rank and he runs the whole show. The unit is as good- or as bad- as the Adjutant Chef is. Obviously the other noncoms take care of the daily nitty-gritty and the job of turning BLEUS into Légionnaires but it is the Adjutant Chef who sets the tone and who picks his noncoms to get the job done. And although the bootcamp was no piece of cake there was no rough stuff or unnecessary hardships like in the Hungarian army.

By now it goes without saying that it didn't take long for Adjudant Chef Litkowsky to notice our military background and Tibon and myself had again an easy life, as far as an easy life is possible in bootcamp. After the first two months those of us who managed to "look" like a Foreign Legionnaire and could salute decently was given a pass to go out to town. Adjudant Chef Litkowsky called us to say that next day he will test the mob for "military bearing and the ability to salute" so that they can go out to town. I know you two won't have any problems but how about your copin the costaud ?" (your buddy the strong one, meaning Coca!) As I said he didn't miss much. He told us to teach him to salute decently so all three of us can go out to town, ça va mon petit? - Merci beaucoup mon Adjudant Chef. So we took Coca for a little private instruction after Rompez (dismissed) and sure enough all three of us got our passes to go out to town.

APRIL/30/SAIDA-Cameron.

CAMERON! This is the only real HOLIDAY in both sense of the word in the Legion. It is like if all the National Holidays of a country would be rolled into one BIG one and celebrated the same day! All the stops are pulled out, things you can get away with for which you would land in prison at any other time, great food till you bust and last but not the least it is de rigueur to get falling down drunk! So WHAT is all this mayhem all about and for what reason ?

As I'm not writing the history of the Foreign Legion, which was attempted by better qualified people, with questionable results, I'll just restrain myself to the barest facts which are as follows: On the 30th April 1863 in Mexico Captain Danjou of the wooden righthand and 63 Legionnaires held off 2000 Mexican soldiers until there were only three of them left who were allowed to honorably surrender with their arms.

This heroic feat became a legend which is commemorated ever since every 30th April by every unit of the Legion wherever they might be.

So: Reveille was at the very civilized hour of 0730 and not only by the usual solitary Clairon ( bugler) as usual but the whole CLIQUE (fife and bugle corp) which consists in the Legion of a set of drums, bugles, and flutes. B'fast was cocoa, croissant and ham on a roll with a quart of white wine. Afterwards was the big DEFILE (march past) of the Garde d'Honneur(honour garde) with the wooden hand of Captain Danjou reposing on it's crimson velvet pillow, followed by the flags of the Legion followed by the Honour Guard preceded by the Regimental music playing the Boudin and other marches of the Legion. - After the Défilé we had lunch with all the food and wine you could put away followed by more wine from your own resources during the QUARTIER LIBRE for the rest of the day characterized by all the mayhem of drunks and otherwise "disorderly".

Personally OUR Cameron was ruined by the fact that our best friend here Diamant Laci has finished bootcamp and leaves for his own unit a transport compagnie in Ouargla in the Sahara in a few days. What a good friend he is he proved by asking to stay on at boot camp - probably the first time in the history of the Legion - to be able to stay together with us. However Adjudant Chef Litkowsky said that this is strictly against regulations so he cant approve it.

May/1/SAIDA

Somebody's watch was stolen on guard duty and Tibor's FR 50 got "lost". We're in a lousy <sup>mood</sup> because Laci's departure in two days. If there is any place where you can use a reliable friend it is surely the Legion.

MAY/13/SAIDA

Big PRISE D'ARM ( military parade ) for the occasion of installing our new Colonel. It looked very impressive with hundreds of Legionnaires in "full regalia" of White Kepi, red and green epaulettes Ceinture Bleu and all the rest of chiqué( fuss?).

In the evening I go to take a shower and an Italian guy - who else? - is singing next to me Gouneaud's AVE MARIA and a good voice too. Is there another army where somebody is singing AVE MARIA in the shower ?

One of the guys just told me he got a letter from his four year old son. His wife is a member of the Corp de Ballet of the Opera in Italy, dont remember where. He is a very nice guy but likes to drink but even when he is drunk he is a perfect gentleman and just sleeps it off, no fuss no mayhem. I got a letter from the little Viennese Countess. Tibor and Laci keep nagging me to write her in a more "romantic" style but I'm not good at these kinds of phony maneuvers, never was.

MAY/30/SAIDA

Laci left and we're going to miss him badly. He was<sup>a</sup> true friend. The only kind a Legionnaire can find only in another Legionnaire. To have a girlfriend here is absolutely out of the question as no "nice girl" would be seen with a Legionnaire dead. As a matter of fact the sad truth is that we're Persona Non Grata for the whole population of both sexes, if for no other reason, and there are others, that we're here today and gone tomorrow.

At corvée lavage (washing clothes) a jewish guy was told by another Legionnaire : Sale Juif ( dirty jew ). They got into an argument and "faced off" and the dumb jew instead of trying to get in the first lick, wanted to be a gentleman and waited for the other one who promptly bloodied his nose. The dummy adding disgrace to injury went complaining to a Sgt who told him of course: démerdez vous! ( fend for yourself ). In no army of the world does a Sgt wants to be involved in these kinds of personal arguments and problems.

JUNE 1/SAIDA

Reveille @ 0300 hrs. Marche Militaire. Depart @ 0400 hrs. Weather cloudy, good marching weather. Up to the third rest period, we march

fifty minutes and rest ten minutes which works like this: WHISTLE, halt. Sac à terre, fusil d'sus ( backpack on the ground, rifle on top). Repos ( rest for ten minutes ). Whistle: Sac au dos.(pick up rifles from the pack and put the packs on your back. Whistle: En avant marche! (resume marching for fifty minutes.) - After the third rest period we leave the road for the "bled" (Arabic word for desert but also refers to any other terrain &"wide open spaces". It is also often used in the expression : "sal bled", lousy, dirty dump, or place) This is a "sal bled" too, strewn with rocks, stones, clumps of all kinds of shrubs making marching a pain in the ass. The sun comes up, getting hot and we start sweating like a pig using our CHECH to try to keep the sweat out of our eyes. - The CHECH is the light tan cotton scarf we wear around our neck, seen in the movies. It is hands down the most practical and useful gear for the Legionnaire the first item we all try to "find" a second one. It is a very light weight cotton material about 60 cm wide and 3 meters long folded in half and then again in half in width, when worn around the neck and then folded in two lengthwise putting the center of the folded material behind your neck and passing both ends thru the sling in front of you. Clear as mud? Originally it was made for winding it around your face - opened of course - when you get into a CHAMSIN which is a sandstorm, to keep the sand out of your face, nose, eyes ears - as far as possible, which is not very far. CHAMSIN means FIFTY in Arabic because according to desert lore the fucken CHAMSIN can last fifty hours sometimes. Another favored use for the CHECH is to wind it around our belly - folded only in half in width - when we march, to keep our tummy from catching cold during the ten minutes of rest stops. In the African heat sweat evaporates very fast and as you learned in school evaporation is nature's cooling system, which is fine under normal conditions. but when in the Legion your tummy cools down too suddenly during rest stops it catches cold which results in a diarrhea you can shit in a bottle from three meters! Obviously your column is not going to stop to wait for you and the only time you can catch up with them is during their ten minutes rest stop, which you do - when their ten minutes are over

and start marching again! In other words YOUR ten minutes REST stops are used for RUNNING after your column! Between the fluids you lose from the diarrhea AND the running after the column, you start wondering whether it was really such a good idea to join this fucken outfit ? Savvy guys like me learned pretty soon after the first similar "episode" to carry small packets of bismuth subnitrate on marches which is the safest and fastest medication to stop the shits. Opium works too, if you can get it, but then you are likely to have the other extreme of the problem: constipation.

Before I digressed we were walking in that "sale bled" sweating like a pig and wiping the sweat out of our eyes with the above mentioned CHECH. Our friend <sup>Coca</sup> from our hometown is dragging his fat ass by and says: if Fuchs is sweating like a pig we are doing hard work for sure. And sure enough things gets pretty unpleasant, with two guys passing out. Looking around me I realize that the rest of the crew is not enjoying this shit anymore than I do. My brodequin made two blisters on my heel which does not help much either and I wish my custom made mountain boots were here instead being back in Hungary! Fortunately the music is waiting for us at the outskirts of the town and striking up the BOUDIN -the famous march of the Legion-it helps us to look a bit more alive while dragging our sorry asses thru town to our barracks. We're taken to our well-deserved shower but it turns out we did not deserve it after all because there is NO water! Big grumbling and swearing is heard in different languages. We return a second time and this time we did get our well-deserved shower. From there to lunch and SIESTE till 1500 hr and afterwards maintainance work theoretically but mostly just resting our weary limbs.

From tomorrow:

Reveille: @ 0430 hrs

Rompez : @ 0930 hrs (dismissed )

Lunch : @ 1030 hrs

Sieste : 1130-1500 hrs

Rapport : @ 1520 hrs (Daily orders)

Rompez : @ 1715 hrs (dismissed for the day)

JUNE/6/SAIDA

Marche Militaire with a vengeance! The goddamn FUCKEN Abd-El-Krim! The "graduation ceremony" of the bootcamp and the nightmare of every BLEU (recruit) in the bootcamp of Saida. A killer fucken MARCH in the best fucken tradition of the fucken Legion!

Reveille @ 0300 hrs.

Tenue de Campagne (full battle dress) dragging everything we have in gear, full ammo, two bidons (canteens) of water holding two liters each ( 4kg righth there ) the whole shit adding up to 20-25 kg I guess.

Depart: @ 0400 hrs

Up to the first rest period all goes well marching on the road. Afterwards we take to the bled. Tough going but no problems. For awhile we return to the road, Whistle: ten minutes rest. Whistle: Sac au dos, En avant...MARCHE! We take to the bled again from the road. This sal bled is full of rocks, stones, clumps of grass, bushes with thorns and other shit. We start going uphill on a heavily covered terrain with all kinds of vegetations the African bled can "provide" for fun, and my tongue is hanging out (only kidding) but the rest of the crew is not in any better shape either but the saw that misery likes companie is not holding up here, I dont LIKE ANYTHING in this shit! When you are really tired your feet get caught in every little stone and clump of grass because you are too fucken tired to LIFT your feet over them as you do in normal circumstances, without giving it<sup>a</sup> thought. I'm pooped! Period! I'm trying to "psych" myself up but it doesnt work very well. Tibor is dragging by his sorry ass looking ready to drop too. I try to step up on a big rock and my calf muscle locks up in a goddamn spasm and I collaps in one sorry heap and cant get up! One of the guys take my rifle according to old Legionnaire tradition and Coca is taking my backpack as he doesnt have to carry one having been vaccinated three days ago. And therein lies a typical Coca story. As I said previously he is a pathological liar and teller of tall tales and he lives up this time too to his rep. Our folks wrote us later that he wrote a letter to his parents that he SAVED MY LIFE on a march when I collapsed and the Arabs were chasing us in hot pursuit!

First of all, as I said before, all the colonization was over years before we joined. Second, the ONLY Arab anywhere near was a little old geezer we called Fritz who came with us on every march with his two donkeys loaded with soft drinks which he sold us. Fritz learned long ago to speak enough German, the unofficial language of the Legion since time immemorial for doing business with us.

After I folded up, Tibor gave me some coffee and poured a bit of water on my head which felt pretty good. I got my shit together and started walking, but very carefully as my calf was still sore and I didn't want <sup>it</sup> to quit on me a second time. At long last we got to the top of this goddamn mountain and make a rest stop. During the rest stop I get back my rifle from the guy who was nice enough to carry it for me and my backpack from Coca. There is no loss of face in the Legion with these kinds of temporary unpleasantness because it is well understood that one day is my turn to help YOU and another day is your turn to help ME. Sooner or later almost everybody's day comes. Every unit has it's "tire au culs", literally those who pull their ass back and those of course have to do the best they can WITHOUT help because shrinkers, whether during a march or road building or any other corvée are becoming pariahs pretty fast, as nobody is anxious to do the work of two people.

Whistle: Sac au dos, En Avant marche! We resume marching, if dragging our sorry asses the best we can is called marching, but the terrain is still terrible, full of rocks, stones, bushes and all kinds of clumps of vegetation this sal bled can provide for our amusement and delectation. Fortunately we're going downhill now which makes it easier. Tibor is all done in too and I hope he is not going to fold up now when the worst is over. The bastard in front decides to make a "short cut" and we all know that short cuts turn out to be almost always longcuts because usually we get lost. At last we get to the outskirts of the town and the music is waiting for us but we're in a shape where even that doesn't help much. We shuffle thru town the best we can and make it back to the barracks where the traditional end of

every such happening takes place: PRESENTER ARMS! ROMPEZ VOS RANGS! (Present Arms! Dismissed!) and three guys just keel over in a heap. They used up the leftover of their energies and when all was over they had nothing left even for dragging themselves back to their rooms. Happens all the time. Willpower can do miracles - for a while but not forever. The rest of us fill up our canteens with water drag ourselves upstairs, fall down on our beds and drink like a camel! We have lunch, some of us too tired even for that, lie down again and just keep breathing! One of the Sgt. comes thru and says half disgusted half amused: Ils sont tous MORT! (They are all dead!) Well, not quite, but close enough.

#### JUNE/9/SAIDA

It is customary in the Legion that when bootcamp is over all the Platoon Commanders ask for volunteers for the different companies. So, a few days ago Sgt. Baldenberger, our platoon commander asked for volunteers for the machine gun company. Baldeberger is an oldtimer of course, German and probably jewish who took a liking to us two for the usual reasons, we had a military background and knew the weapons etc. Tibor says: bro, they are playing our songs lets go. So we go to see Sgt. Baldenberger tell him we want to volunteer for the machine gun company. His eyes widen and starts to laugh like crazy. I say, what's so funny Sgt? We were both machine gunners in the Hungarian<sup>army</sup>, which was of course true. Oh?! And what kind<sup>of</sup> machine gun did you have? Schwarzlose. And how much did that Schwazlose WEIGH? the tripod 9kg something and the gun 11kg something. Now I understand. And did you two see the French Hotchkiss? No Sgt. Come I show it to you. He takes us to the armory and he points to that monster sitting there made for the trench warfare of the IWW, looking more like a god-damn anti-aircraft gun than an infantry weapon, so heigh on the LOWEST tripod setting that you had to SIT behind it to be able to sigth along the barrel! If you laid down, as you would during a firefigth if you wanted to stay alive, all you could do is look thru between the legs of the TRIPOD! Sgt Baldnberger says with a grin : would you like to lift that monster? Tibor grabs the front

of the barrel and I get hold of the handpiece of the gun and try to lift it. We can but barely. Sgt says, the tripod alone weighs MORE <sup>then</sup> the complete Hungarian gun and the gun weighs half again that much. You with your 55kg want to walk around with this monster on your shoulder ? No Sgt merci beaucoup! Sgt: listen you two, RELAX, if and when something will come in closer to your ability I'll call you. In the Legion only the dumbest and the strongest go to the machine<sup>gun</sup> compagnie. Both of you are disqualified for both reasons.

Sergeant Baldenberger was as good as his word. Today the clerck called us to the office and Baldenberger said, there is a call for volunteers for the course of Observers unit and I want you two to volunteer. It is easy and interesting work and I'm sure you will enjoy it. They will teach you how to use maps and compass and other optical instruments, most of it you probably already learned in the Hungarian army too, so will have no problems. Can you write French because you'll have to take a test before I can approve it. We tell him we had four years of French in school and it will be probably good enough. We take the test and pass without problems. We were told we're supposed to be going to Sidi-bel-Abbès on the 16th for a one year course. We're looking forward to it with mixed feelings. It sounds like an interesting job but if there is a lot of booklearning I'm not quite sure I'm in the mood for hitting the books.

JUNE 15/SAIDA/Last day.

Last day in Saida. Feelings are mixed. It is not as if the bootcamp here was a rest camp or a piece of cake, but we have been well regarded by most everybody from Adjudant Chef Litkowsky to our Platoon Leader Sgt Baldenberger, the latter being something of a surprise as the Sgt is no softie with some 15 yrs of service, and a new unit is always something of a question mark where you gotta prove yourself again from scratch. And Sidi-bel-Abbès is the HQ of the Legion of course which means maximum "chiqué" and everything being done by the book. On the other hand we can let our hair grow again which is better than walking around shorn like a sheep!

JUNE 17/SIDI-bel-ABBES.

Looks like Sgt. Baldenberger did us a good turn and our luck is holding out. From the first day on we realized that this is a very civilized looking outfit. Everybody keeps saying that everything is very "tranquille" ( quiet) here. We go on exercise carrying a small plywood drafting board, pencils and such stuff and we will learn to make sketches as used in the IWW for planning firing zones!

Our "presentation" to the Chief of the Unit is the usual circus because we're twins and they dont know who is who. We find a lot of guys we know from bootcamp and even from Marseilles and we also meet two Hungarian Cpls one of them jewish. And best of all when the Platoon Commander comes to take the Platoon over, standing in "attention" of course, and says "RE-pos" (at ease) with the accent on the FIRST syllable typical of Hungarians, Tibor whispers to me: if this guy is not Hungarian I'm the Pantchen Lama! And it turns out he sure is! He is Sgt. PALOTAY and an "Officer and Gentleman" from the top of his kepi to his toes and according to the grapewine he is a former artillery officer. And as his name ends in "Y" he is also coming from an aristocratic family Hungary being a feudal country in these days yet. That the food is TERRIFIC doesnt hurt either.

JUNE 21/S.b.A.

We surely hit the jackpot this time! The "work" is interesting, the people are all of the "better sort", our unit being sarcastically called "Le Section des Intellectuel" and as I said the food terrific. It is getting hot and it is very pleasant and nice to have nothing more to drag than our little plywood drafting board and pencils instead of all the usual Legionnaire gear and we never march more than 10kms max. I'm writing this during the SIESTE, which is the obligatory rest period in the Legion according to garrison and the time of the year. At the end of the sieste the CLAIRON (bugler) blows the END of the SIESTE: Debout, debout, la sieste est fini, ressemblent pour la théorie! (get up, get up the sieste is over, fall in for the theorethical instructions).

The Garde de Chambre (room garde but also Room Duty for the day who stays home, straighten out the room and sees to it that no un-authorized person enters for nefarious reasons to put it politely) is coming back from the kitchen with a big can of hot mint tea which he pours into everybody's quart hold out while sitting up in bed. We sip our mint tea and then "fall in" for a few hours of theoretical instructions in one of the classrooms about map reading, orientations with compass, how to determine our "point of station" by triangulation using map and compass by different systems and methods etc. -

As I said I was writing this during sieste, the temp outside being 30-35°C. Our old friend Wolff from Saida is here too and I ask him what would he do if we would have to do again the goddamn Abd-el-Krim in this heat? He says I would lie down and cry for Mama! Looks like my beard grows faster than my hair!

#### JUNE/23/S.b.A

Yesterday we went camping for a day! And did we ever have a GREAT time! We got up at 0330 hrs and after marching 15kms with our usual gear we arrived in a beautiful pine forrest just when it started to get warm. We took a little two wheeled cart drawn by a friendly mule loaded to the gunwales with goodies like steak, potatoes etc etc and wine of course in "generous quantities". After arriving we gathered some firewood, peeled the veggies for the meal and the CHEF being Sgt Palotay and his sous-chef Perpète, his batman, started to prepare our meal: biftek au vin (steak in wine) with onions and french fries, bacon, "singe" (canned corned beef) and of course wine. Two hours later Perpète still called for "rabiote" (second helpings) for anybody who could still eat more!

Sgt Palotay is ADORED by everybody in this outfit. Nobody ever heard him say as much as MERDE or a cross word of any kind. A gentleman of first order and caliber. After lunch we sleep till 1500hrs then take a leisurely WALK home! VIVE LA LEGION!

In the evening when we're both in bed already Perpète comes to say that Sgt. Palotay wants to see us. We had no idea why but got dressed in a hurry and gallop downstairs to his room.

Sgt. Palotay shakes hands of course and says he assumes that by now we must have found out that he is Hungarian and that he doesn't want us to believe that he is hiding from us the more so that we're the first Hungarians in his platoon and he hopes we'll have a pleasant time. We assure him that we already do and prepare to make politely our exit, but he says if we are not tired from the camping - surely he gotta be kidding - he would like us to stay for a little talk. He fixes us two aperitifs and we talk for a good hour and half, some of it about our reason for joining some of it his stories about the Legion etc. Before we leave he says that now that we know where his room is if we need something or have a problem just come and see him. We're damn near speechless and overwhelmed by our goodluck to have this kind of Platoon Commander!

JUNE/27/S.b.A.

Garde de Chambre today. Pain in the ass job. I'd rather go out on "exercise" five times, specially here, than be a garde de chambre once. The garde de chambre is responsible not only for "guarding" the room from "un-authorized" visitors "finding" articles for their own missing gear's replacement but to make sure that the room is shipshape in case an officer is coming thru for a looksee. This means of course a lot of "housework" and worse, being responsible for a bunch of assholes not having done what they were supposed to have done for themselves before leaving, knowing that I'll have to do it for them. It also means that I've to get up earlier to fetch the coffee etc for b'fast and holler "Au jus la d'dans" ( the juice is here , meaning coffee not orange juice ) when the Clairon blows Reveille, and pour the coffee in the "quart" of all the clowns holding it at arms length still half asleep. Breakfast in bed in the Foreign Legion ?! Yup.

Apart from this I'm missing out on instructions which I'm able to follow if I'm there but have difficulty to dig it out from the books if I'm not.

A few days ago I heard very good news. As they say in German : Die schönste Freude ist die Schadensfreude,

There is nothing nicer than to gloat over the misfortune of someone who deserves it! That filthy stinking sadist bastard of swine the Maitre d'Hôtel of the prison in Saida, Sgt. Matchke, was busted down to Deuxième Class ( private ) and got ten years prison in the Discipline Compagnie in Colomb-Béchar. He hit a guy in prison with the chain he carried, knocking out the guy who hit his head on the cement bed and died from fractured skull. Matchke is not going to serve of course anywhere like ten years in Béchar. Nobody ever survived there even five as the Discipline Compagnie is a Law unto itself where anything goes. Apart from that with the prapevine of the Legion Matchke will be a marked man from the minute he gets there and will be done in very shortly afterwards specially considering the facts that the crew in Béchar are the "incorrigibles" - or almost so - of the Legion.

Another good news, in another sense, was that we got the news from home that all the stuff we sent home arrived OK.

JULY/5/S.b.A.

The COMPAGNIE D'HONNEUR DE LA LEGION left today for Paris for the DEFILE of the 14th Juillet. They looked fucken terrific! Spit and polished to the sky and some! Our folk wrote us from home that the director of the silk factory where we both worked before leaving for the Legion, promised to send us some money from their Paris office. As the blind man said: we will see.

JULY/17/TESSALA

Since two days we're camping out here with the platoon. The region is gorgeous and we have a great time as usual when Sgt. Palotay runs the show. We're learning to draw Croquis Panoramique which was used in the IWW during trench warfare to mark in the firing zones for the units. Apart from the fact that this was never needed during the colonization as the Arabs never fought that kind of war of course, are we replaying the old Spiel of fighting the next war with the tactic of the LAST war as usual? Ah well it gives us something to do anyway. Our commanding officer, a major, paid us a visit here but there was no "chiqué" thank god. This is a very civilized outfit.

Unfortunately tonight we're breaking camp and go back to Bel-Abbès. Before coming out here I found out that somebody sent us FR 175 which is a lot of money here but WHO? It can be only the director of our old outfit as he promised but why exactly FR 175? Perhaps that's the way the foreign exchange worked out. It was very nice of him anyway.

JULY/22/S.b.A.

We picked up the FR175 but still don't know WHO sent it? Our old buddy Wolff visited us and the poor guy is very depressed. He always hated the military and now he is sitting here with five years to look forward to! He was DWI and killed a woman. He panicked and joined the Legion. Now he is hating himself for it as he says he wouldn't have gotten more than three months max. He is afraid that he will be ruined mentally here before he can get out. "Abruti par la Legion" is a wellknown and time honoured expression in the Legion dictionary. (rendered into an idiot)

There is a very interesting and nice guy here, very bright too, by the name Debésieux (aka DLUBOUSYOU) He served in the French Navy for five years as radio operator. Also worked in the same line in Shanghai for three years. Later he worked as a trader of all kinds of goods from beads to army surplus clothes in Africa. He has great panache and excellent manners. Why the Legion? The classic story: he was caught "in flagrante delicto" balling somebody else's wife, whose husband turned out to be a very rough-tough hombre who told him unless he disappears so that he can't find him anywhere he is dead meat! He hates the Legion of course. "Ces jeune couillons ça me dégoûte!" (these young pricks disgust me!) He is trying to get posted to some small garrison in the South as radio operator. He is feeling a bit better lately as his girlfriend started to write him.

The mood is getting lousy lately as we've nothing to do but get bored to death.

JULY/26th/S.b.A.

Looks like The Management realized our problem and now we've the pleasure to clean hundreds of fucken rifles for the store room! In the evening we're sitting in the court drinking beer with Wolff who is telling girly stories and we've a few laughs.

JULY/27th/S.b.A.

Everything we learned sofar of our spciality we could have learned in 2-3 days. As long as we just stay here there is no problem but if we ever get posted to a "compagnie active" (our own unit) and the Old Man sticks a map in our hands and gives us a compass bearing and says: Show me the way how to get HERE Observateur, we're going to be in deep shit to our neck. Ah well, we'll cross that bridge or whatever when we get there.

We get a very nice letter from the Director of our outfit where we worked but not a word about the FR 175. So WHO sent it?

The dirty bastard of a barber who owes me FR 60 doesnt even want to give me a haircut! He can wait a longtime for his next loan. Did I expect to find only gentlemen in the Legion? Nah.

July/30/S.b.A.

Revue de Détaille. This is the worst kind of pain in the ass and the likeliest to cause grief! We have to arrange EVERY little piece of gear on the bed just so and god help your soul if as much as a fucken needle is missing! Of course half of the time NOBODY is even glancing at the whole shit which makes it perhaps even worse. The Lieutenant walks thru the room but the Qaurtermaster whom the whole show is for is nowhere to be seen. We're promised an "encore" tomorrow. FUCKE'EM!

Sunday the old story: in the morning sleeping and washing clothes, in the afternoon washing clothes and sleeping. In the evening we go out to town and watch the girls. Thats as far as it goes: watching.

AUGUST/1/S.b.A.

Marche à la Boussole and Croquis Panoramique. (Marche following a compass bearing and the above mentioned sketches). I'm bullshitting with Cpl Weiss, a Hungarian Jew, who is "consigned to barracks" with all the other noncoms by the Compagnie Commander. Every time the clairon blows their "song" they have to run down to the guardhouse: Les consignées, les consignées, les consignées en BAS!" To which the universal reaction is: va t'faire chier dans les doigts! ( go and shit in your fingers! )

AUGUST/7/S.b.A.

Yesterday we moved to a bigger room which has advantages and disadvantages. The advantage is that the room being bigger there are twentyfour of us so I'm not on duty so often, the disadvantage is that there are a lot of Spanish guys who scream and argue all the time.

The Management is breaking our balls with a different REVUE every day. Revue de Détaille ( see above ), Revue de Casernement ( billet inspection), Revue d'Armes, (rifle inspection) and all the rest of the shit. Vive La Legion! As Diamant Laci used to say: where are the good old times when all we Legionnaires had to do was kill Arabs ? Now all we do is get our balls busted with revues. In the evening we go out to town with Weiss Laci to drink ice coffee, watch the lucky civilians and the "poules" (chicks). By the time we're ready to go back we're in a foul mood. It makes no sense to go out to town only to get back in a foul mood MERDE! (shit)

AUGUST/12/S/b/A

My buddy Wolff says: Ça me commence a fair chier ici!( I start getting my ass full here!) D'accord! (agreed) Yesterday both in the morning and in the afternoon Revue d'arms and revue de Casernement! This week we didnt have time to be taken for a shower once - in August! - but for revues we have time daily! ( We can go to shower only by units otherwise there is a madhouse there)

I got a letter from the little Viennese Countess. :

I cant figure it out. She is sorry that I didnt get her answer to her previous letter. She is asking me to write more often and to send a picture. She says perhaps she will be able to visit me later. that would be surely a big morale booster to say the least. Mood is lukewarm. The first few months were very pleasant here but lately we're not left in peace from all the fucken revues.

AUGUST/19/S.b.A.

Yesterday we were target shooting with rifles and I won a bottle of wine for shooting "très bien" (very good). Big fucken deal. Today another great attraction: I had to pluck chicken! Fortunately I was called away to the post office because my old pal from the silk factory sent me a registered letter with his picture enclosed. It is nice to know that you're not forgotten by old friends even if yo're in the Legion thousands of miles away according to the old saw: "out of sigth out of mind."

In the next bed to mine there is a German jewish boy, Carl Pollack, crying softly to himself from Heimweh (homesickness) probably. This is not an easy life for us political refugees specially for someone who never been in an army before. In the next bed to his there is a young guy whdwas visited by his wife, also jewish, who is not in a much better mood either. I could do with a little feminine companie myself truth to be told.

AUGUST/23/S.b.A.

Yesterday we went on a manœuvre- so called-at midnight with blank cartridges. We barely started shooting and the Clairon sounded "Cease fire!" Manœuvre over and returned to barracks at forced marche. We already heard rumours about ALARM GENERAL while marching out but we consider it just another "canard" (rumour), however when we get back to barracks it turns out it is true. Everybody is expecting the war to break out anytime. I'm worrying about the folk at home.

AUGUST/28/S.b.A.

Some of the guys are walking around sporting our WWI vintage tin helmets but so far nothing special happened. Two days ago two Spanish and one Italian guys went AWOL but we don't foresee great success for them taking off just from Sidi-bel-Abbes of all places as this place is well used to these kinds of adventures - starting from the good old days and all the "modus operandi" is worked out since years with the police and the Arabs who get a monetary reward for every Legionnaire brought back and sure enough we already heard that these three clowns were "intersected". Seems they just decided they don't like it here that much and getting themselves a compass and a map they decided to just walk home! I don't know if it is still the same system as in the olden days when desertion earned you one year at the Compagnie Discipline in Colomb-Béchar automatically, as desertion is a very big no-no even now in the Legion.

AUGUST/29/S.b.A.

We go downstairs for our daily PLUCHE (peeling veggies) when the order comes: REMONTEZ DANS VOS CHAMBRES! (return to your rooms!) We're sitting on our beds "waiting for the war" as Wolff says. Everybody is assigned to his own Compagnie Active. Tibor and myself are both assigned as OBSERVATEURS to CP1. Our Adjudant Chef is a Belgian and a nice sort of fellow with a good sense of humour. He is a stamp collector and knows of course, being in the office where the mail arrives that I get letters from home and when he sees me he'll stop me: Fuchs when are you going to give <sup>me</sup> some stamps CHOTTT-VRRRRDOMMMME?! Now he is reading the list of assignments and says: Both Fuchs to the same compagnie... like that you can die together! This gets of course a big laugh including his own and ours. What is called Galgenhumor (sick jokes) is an old tradition in the Legion. An old but still favourite one is : Auf wiedersehen im Massengrab! (see you in the massgrave).

At 1500hrs : FALL-IN in full battledress! Everybody is electrified of course but nobody knows anything. One canard follows the other. Some of the guys are running to the window, civilian reservists of the Legion are arriving including a PRIEST! This looks serious! Carl Pollack is getting ready for the war too: polishing his ceinturon (belt).

AUGUST/29/S.b.A.

We go to our companie (CP1/Companie Passage No.1) to be outfitted for the war but there is wall-to-wall madhouse and boxon(whorehouse) we get nothing and we come back emptyhanded. In the afternoon we go back again with the same result. According to the latest but definitely not last canard we're supposed to go to South Tunisie which has a well earned reputation for little water made up for by lots of khamsin (sandstorm. The word is Arabic meaning fifty as this attraction is supposed to last sometimes fifty hours).

AUGUST/31/S.b.A.

In the morning we return to CP1 for our gear, with the same result as before. Considering that CP1 is just accross the street from our barracks it seems that communication is not exactly working at optimum. What else is new? At 0930hrs we get at last a blanket and the half part of a two man's tent. Ready for the war ?! Mood: depressed. Waiting but nothing happens. Latest canard: we're going to the Lybian border, four days by train, and 125kms marching. Carrying our full gear which supposed to weigh in at 30kg ? Everybody is running around like a headless chicken, shouting, and guessing.

Some of the optimists hope that everything will work out peacefully! At dinner we're told that from tomorrow on instructions will proceed normally as before. So what the FUCK is going ON ?! Nevertheless the 7th BTN/RST is supposed to fall-in tomorrow in full battle dress! My impression is that all this shit about full battledress is only to keep the guys busy untill somebody decides at long last WHERE are we going ?

SEPTEMBER/2/S.b.A.

Waiting. Canards of all kinds and variety regarding our possible destination. They took all the Germans out of the compagnie which seems to indicate that we're going to France.

Germany declared war and started to bomb cities in Poland with supposedly 2000 casualties. Not bad for a beginning! In the evening we go out to town and watch the girls from the terrace of a coffeehouse. tomorrow all the mob is supposed to be consigned to barracks.

SEPTEMBER/3/S.b.A.

A supposedly well informed guy said we're going to Constantine. Not a word of it was true. We're sitting at the terrace of a coffeehouse when the radio announces @ 1940hrs that the war is on! This is what is called I guess "A Historic Moment " but all we do is keep drinking whatever we were drinking before the war. When the speech is over there is a polite applause and ça y est.(thats it.) We meet a nice Hungarian Cpl. by the name of Nagy, who says he was Lieutenant in the artillery in Hungary but somehow something here doesnt add up. He said he has years of service in the Legion. If he was an officer in the Hungarian army why is he only a Cpl. in the Legion ? Nix fucken compris. At 2000 hrs we return to barracks but the people keep drinking their aperos with not a care in world, war or no war.

SEPTEMBER/4/S.b.A.

We still dont know anything. We're supposedly part of the 1st Bat. de Marche which would mean that we're going to France. A Hungarian Cpl. I just heard to say that we're going to Tunisie otherwise we would have been issued "tenue de drap"(wool uniforms). One canard after the other in one big unending flow, but something is not what it should be. We're getting our gear drip by drip and at snail pace. We're doing nothing but wait.

SEPTEMBER/6/S.b.A.

15km Marche Militaire to keep the mob occupied I assume. Otherwise nothing new.

SEPTEMBER/7/S.b.A

Attraction of the day: Corvée de Lavage! Big fucken deal.

We move back to the Quartier Viénot where we're assigned to the loft and were we're sleeping on the floor on straw mattresses without any other kind of bedding, no bedsheets, no blankets, nothing and the days are hot and the nights cold. As Napoleon sayeth:

" A la guèrre comme à la guèrre!" One of the Sgt. says in six days we're going to France. Again not a word was true. The fact is that nobody knows anything for sure.

SEPTEMBER/11/S.b.A.

The Companie goes on another Marche Militaire but our Platoon walks only far enough to draw another Croquis Panoramique as in the good old days. In the afternoon we're told we're on duty as Surveillance au Moeurs in the Red Ligth district which is a lot of fun of course specially when we're both on duty in the same time as all the hookers are pointing at us: look, look they are twins! Unfortunately the assigment was changed to Garde au Poudrière which is on the other end of the spectrum being a very lousy assignment because everything has to be done by the book Poudrière being the Armory and ammo store. It is very easy to end up in "the box" for the smallest fuckup. Thanks but no thanks. Fortunately we pulled it off without untoward happenings.

SEPTEMBER/12/S.b.A.

As Wolff very correctly remarked: Ils font chier ici!(they break our balls here). We were given beds at long last and I wake up during the nighth realizing that I'm sharing this bed with others! Millions of bed bugs the size of TANKS! Never saw anything like that. On the other hand the food is just terrific. We never had food in such quality and quantity before. No wonder that the bedbugs are wellfed too. With this kind of food it is not that bad to wait for the war!-The mail is censored now.

SEPTEMBER/15/S.b.A.

In the morning we go out to draw another Croquis and in the afternoon we go to the classroom for theory : we draw the curtains and some of us go to sleep while others are playing navy wargames.

VIVE LA GUERRE!

SEPTEMBER/16/S.b.A.

Perhaps we have it too easy but the boredom is deadly and I've it

up to here with Sidi-bel-Abbes. By African standards it is a fairly big town with good opportunities for spending money but not with our pay of FR 24 for two weeks. If we go out to town a couple of times it is gone. Since eighth months I've not seen feminine compa-  
 nie to put it delicately. In a cathouse they charge FR 10 for fif-  
 teen minutes of "fun". Occasionally I can earn FR 2 for taking the  
 place of somebody else to fetch and serve the meal and I sell my  
 ration of pinard (wine) for an oldtimer instead of exchanging it  
 for dessert, which buys me two coffees on the terrace of Cafe de  
 France, including oggling the girls for free. Seems we're going to  
 stay for at least another two weeks as the Revue de Colonel was  
 postponed till the 28th.

I heard from another jewish guy that tonight is Yom Kippur  
 (Day of Atonement) the Holiest day for us jews. I'm sure our folk  
 is thinking of us spcially our|sweet little grampa we adored and  
 who lived just for us as he used to say. It is better not to dwell  
 on these kinds of subjects too long, under the circumstances.

SEPTEMBER/25/S.b.A.

We spent Yom Kippur as Surveillance au Moeurs in the Redligh Dist-  
 rict of all places. Some of the hookers are young and cute some of  
 them old and ugly weighing in I guess at 120 kgs! The Arabs like  
 their women fat but 120 kgs ? As the saw goes: Chacun à son gout!  
 The record players are going full volume of course playing Arabic  
 music which takes a little getting used to with their shrieking  
 and wailing, . . . . . At midnight we knock off and go back  
 to barracks.

In the morning they find a young jewish guy from Holland  
 dead in the court with a bullet hole in the back of his head. The  
 Police is investigating.

SEPTEMBER/28/S.b.A.

Revue de Colonel en plein Bazar!( with all the gear and pomp)

OCTOBER/13/S.b.A

They are asking for volunteers for France and of course we sign up.  
 In the afternoon we go to the rifle range to practice with FM(lighth  
 machine gun), but there is a|little problem: no ammo! We're told  
 that if we want to we can practice to throw handgranades... using  
 stones instead as we dont have grenades either of course.

I hope I'm wrong but I get a somewhat uneasy feeling about this so-called "war preparation" here. As for practicing with stones, we politely but firmly decline.

OCTOBER/22/S.b.A.

They form up the first RENFORT METROPOLE to France. (expeditionary force) but we're not in it.

OCTOBER/27/S.b.A.

DEFILE for the RENFORT METROPOLE. How many of them will come back? Qui vivra-verra! (the survivors will see) For the time being we're staying here, but permanently broke with just enough money for a couple of coffees in the canteen.

OCTOBER/31/S.b.A.

There is a new Hungarian jewish guy who cant tell me often enough that his Dad is a rabbi in Esztergom! Congratulations landsman!

NOVEMBER/7/S.b.A.

Revue par Le Colonel Corp d'Armee 19th and all the Chiqué of course.

One of my buddies here is a lanky German, Erwin Pfister, a genuine "oldtimer" who served in every colony including Tonkin (Vietnam now). A really sweet, goodnatured guy and a terrific Clairon (bugler). We always know when he is on duty and blowing Appelle du Soir ( evening rollcall) because he blows a beautiful Apelle Fantaisie (fancy stuff) nobody else here can do. He is in the CLIQUE of course, ( fife and bugle corp). He is entertaining us occasionally with stories of The Old Legion, specially from Tonkin which was the dream posting of every Legionnaire as they were allowed to shack up with a native girl in town and come back to barracks in the morning only, as if they would with a civilian job. It was the only garrison in the Legion where they had really decent uniforms, splendid dress whites washed and pressed by their "wives" of course and the only garrison where a Legionnaire could have anything like a decent life the money also higher than in any other posting with the prices very low in town too. One of his buddies in the CLIQUE is another German oldtimer Tambour Künstler Streich (drum artist) with a handlebar moustache. Once Streich and we two went out to town and soon enough three little mouchous (Arab kids) of 3-4 years old started following us and keep repeating

Moussiou, Moussiou! Tilifun, tilifun! I ask Streich what tilifun is and he just chuckles looking embarrassed. Hey whats the big deal? What IS tilifun ? He wants to give us blowjobs Streich says laughing. Moussiou, tilifun, tilifun! Streich barks at them BALEK! (scram) and they leave. I ask Streich whether he is kidding us but he assures us that they are experts! I say, are you talking from personal experience ? Just laughs. I find out later that most of the Arabs are bisexual and the boys are "broken in" at a very early age but the girls have to stay virgins otherwise there is hell to pay!

According to the latest canard there are going to be three RENFORTS (literally reinforcements), leaving from here: one to Syria, one to Tonkin and one to France. Perhaps we can make one of them.

NOVEMBER/10/S.b.A.

Manoeuvre de Bataillon. What is called in the Hungarian army "closing exercise." It includes the usual big boxon (whorehouse). According to the latest canard we're shipping out on the 21st. But WHERE? Nobody knows of course.

NOVEMBER/11/S.b.A.

They are asking for volunteers for PELOTON 1. (literally it means troupe/group but in the Legion it means Course for non-coms. Peloton 1 is for caporals and Peloton 2 is for Sergeants.) It is supposed to last for three months and according to the grapevine is harder than bootcamp. Nevertheless we sign up of course wanting to advance as soon and as fast as possible up the ladder. It is more money and less shit to take.

NOVEMBER/15/S.b.A.

We were not accepted for the Peloton as we dont have the required one year service yet. Inch' Allah.

NOVEMBER/17/S.b.A.

Our 24th birthday! I assume our folks are thinking of us at home wondering where we are and what we are doing? For one thing I'm bored shitless and my mood is accordingly shitty too. I've no hankering to go to Morocco to build roads with pick and shovel, thank you very much. I'd like to go to Syria or France by spring the latest.

There is a guy next to my bed with 23 yrs of service in this Travelling Circus who shouts occasionally with no special nudging necessary : C'est la bestialization à la Legion! (it is animal-like at the Legion). He should know the poor bastard.

NOVEMBER/19/S.b.A.

Erwin Pfister and his buddy Schneider are arriving in the evening "bourré a bloc" (deaddrunk) just in time for evening Rollcall. They manage to stay vertical at the foot of their bed for the duty officer to pass, but fall like a log afterwards on their bed. We get them undressed and into bed, but a little later Pfister gets up, puts on his swimming trunk, hangs his gasmask around his neck, picks up his trenching tool and his coup-coup (machete) and proceeds to the shithouse. Mission accomplished he comes back, lies down, all the while a silly grin on his face but not a word uttered. It says a lot for a guy to be so good natured while falling down drunk, but then I knew since a longtime that he is a sweet guy. Next day being Sunday they decided to keep drinking but first they want to have a shave! Pfister playing the role of the barber is soaping up Schneider and start shaving him with the edge of his trenching tool with great flair. The leftover soapy water he pours over Schneider's head : Un petit friction Monsieur ? he inquires massaging his head. He is parting Schneiders hair with the pointed side of his pick and "combs" his hair with the flat side. Thus well groomed they proceed to the canteen to continue drinking. A few minutes later Schneider comes back with a pocket knife and asks me if I know whose it is ? I dont know and he leaves. Few minutes later he comes back and asks Pubi, another buddy, to whom the knife belongs? Pubi, wanting to avoid an argument says it is Schneiders. Schneider disagrees with this and calls Pubi a liar. This is more than Pubi is willing to swallow and hangs a big shiner on Schneiders face and bloodies his nose. Fifteen minutes later they make up and go <sup>to</sup> the canteen for more drinking. C'est la Legion.

NOVEMBER/23/S.b.A.

Tibor was stopped in the court by our "old" Adjutant the Belgian who asked him whether we are going to Peloton ? After Tibor told

him we were not accepted because we dont have one year service yet he said he is going to fix this. Later our Lt. called us in his office and started to quiz us about subjects we never learned or heard about and of course we didnt know, so he said we dont know enough to go to Peloton! I've the impression that the whole quiz by the Lt. was just some kind of an "excuse" for not sending us to the Peloton. A few days later the Belgian Adjutant tells us somewhat embarrassed that it seems nobody can go to Peloton with less than one year service. The hell with it. I've it up to here with the whole whorehouse. About going somewhere from here: nothing. There is absolutely nothing to do here except getting drunk which is not an option as far as we're concerned. The last thing we want to do is come out of this travelling circus as a vino as so many others did. This Peloton story is also bugging me. Back home we were good enough to go on reserve officers school and to come out in the top ten in a class of 250 in spite of the considerable handicap of being jewish in a rabidly antisemitic country and here in this so-called army we are not good enough to be caporal ? What a joke.

DECEMBER/5/S.b.A.

Yesterday we had a very pleasant attraction. We had to clean out and rebuild a sewer line which was clogged up for years! We had to carry fifty kg cement sacks and 80kg cement pipes. If Tibor wouldnt have been there to calm me down I'd have probably ended up in "the box". I've it up to here with the whole sorry shithouse! About going anywhere nothing is heard.

DECEMBER/13/S.b.A.

Today I've ten months service. We've it all up to here with fucken Bel-Abbes. The food is lousy too in this companie and since a few days we had some of the officers coming to inspect the food but so far nothing happened. It seems the problem is that we're part of Bataillon "rabiote" (surplus) and they dont know what to do with us, so we get the leftovers of everything.

DECEMBER/14/S.b.A.

We go out on "exercise" this morning but the weather is very cold so we come back at 0800hrs. We're supposed to leave this fucken town on the 27th and none too soon either.

DECEMBER/17/S.b.A.

Big excitement! They are calling for volunteers for TONKIN! Needless to say the office is Standing Room Only! Tonkin is a magic word in the Legion, the garrison everybody wants to be posted to. Needless to say we sign up too but the chances to go to Tonkin with ten months service is about zero. Before the war Tonkin was reserved for old-timers with minimum of five years service and very good record. The ship is supposed to leave on the 20th from Oran and that is in three days. Sounds very unlikely to me.

DECEMBER/18/S.b.A.

In the morning "visit aptitude" (medical visit) for Tonkin. It turns out that we can't even go there because those who are qualified to go to France can't go to Tonkin. According to further rumours there will be another Renfort (reinforcement) to Syria and France. In the afternoon a caporal is coming to tell us that the Chef Comtable (Chief Accountant) wants to see us. He wants to know if we would like to go to Tonkin? You bet! So go right down to medical. We go and pass! Soon afterwards they read the list of those who are going but we're not on it! What the fuck is going on here? Inch' Allah. Erwin Pfister is going but he is not very happy about it. He feels he is not coming back this time.

DECEMBER/23/S.b.A.

Renfort Tonkin left today. We said farewell to Pfister who was in a lousy mood. We will miss him as he was a really nice guy always friendly and good natured even when he was drunk. Who knows perhaps we get together again somewhere. "Çe sont que les montagnes qui se rencontre pas." ( Only mountains cannot meet)

DECEMBER/24/S.b.A.

Xmas preparations. I hear the choir practicing STILLE NACHT, HEILIGE NACHT... In Europe we're killing Germans and here they sing STILLE NACHT! All I need now is DEUTSCHLAND ÜBER ALLES and DIE FAHNE HOCH.. (Horst Wessel Lied , the Nazi march) As almost all the noncoms are German there is nothing we can do about it of course. For Xmas we all get some presents, mostly a bottle of wine and a carton of cigarettes which was very nice of them. I traded both of it for food.

JANUARY/1/1940/S.b.A.

HAPPY NEW YEAR ?! All the Germans get drunk celebrating Sylvester and make a big racket of course.

JANUARY/2/S.b.A.

Yesterday afternoon we went to the movies with our Check lawyer friend Miki. We wonder whether we will be "available" to celebrate next New Year ? Qui vivra - verra! (Those alive will see)

JANUARY/5/S.b.A.

Here is the lyric of the latest hit song, a real tearjerker and seems made to measure for our situation here:

J'en ai plus personne  
Personne qui m' aime  
Ma vie monotone  
Et toujours la même

.....

L'espoir s'abandonne  
J'en ai plus personne  
J'en ai plus d'amour...

I'll leave the translation to a better man.

Yesterday they again asked for volunteers for France and we sign up again of course. We're bored to death, it's high time to get out of here and do something USEFUL.

JANUARY/6/S.b.A.

Somebody is hollering at the window: one of our sergeants comes thru the main entrance to the barracks with a CROWN on his head a bunch of the noncoms trailing as his Court! It turns out this is the Holiday of The THREE KINGS! The King has the right to declare QUARTIER LIBRE ( day off for everybody ), an additional quart of pinard and amnesty for all the prisoners. Big hollering and we all get dressed fast as lightning and go out to town.

JANUARY/7/S.b.A.

Miki and we go out to have a coffee on the terrace of Cafe de France and talk over our situation - starting with girls. We come to the agreement that the girl situation is hopeless as no "nice girl" would get caught dead with a Legionnaire. Status quo ante.

We've read in the paper that they're collecting scrap iron in France and that they caught an American ship and embargoed the cargo.

JANUARY/24/S.b.A.

A train was derailed not far from here and guess who was asked for help ? Yup the good ole' Legion that's who according to time honoured traditions going back to "time immemorial". So we had the vicarious pleasure to bust our balls on the Gandi Dancer's Ball.

Yesterday the Sgt asked us wether we want to go to Peloton One. We were not exactly enthusiastic about it being in a foul mood but decided it makes not much sense to cut off our nose to spite our face as we want to start climbing up on the ladder of advancement for the before mentioned reasons: it means better pay and less shit to swallow while being at the bottom of the proverbial totem pole, so we said yes.

JANUARY/30/S.b.A.

Tibor heard there supposed to be a big Renfort to France so the Peloton is unlikely.

FEBRUARY/7/S.b.A.

One of the most interesting guy at our Section Observateurs is a very brighth and well educated Italian fellow. His story is as follows: He was serving as a cadet officer on the pride and joy of the Italian passenger fleet called S.S.REX while studying since three years at the naval academy. He recently married a young beauty exactly half his age, eighteen years, who had the unfortunate habit to fuck around while our friend was at sea, not exactly unheard of in similar situations. The problem was that our friend, who joined under the name of TRENTIS, meaning thirtysix - or trentsix in French- had a very short fuse although normally was a very charming and easy going guy. According to the law of averages once when he came back from a cruise sooner than he was supposed to, he found his lady in bed "in flagrante delicto" as they say in Court and realized that the next time he is likely to kill at least one of them or probably both. He came to the conclusion that the best solution is to join the Legion. Sounds familiar ? Needless to say that with his background of three years of navy academy plus a very good general education he was head and shoulders over the Legion noncoms specially when it came to all optical instruments and technic of orientation and he was not exactly shy or reluctant to let them know. One of those lazy afternoons

when we were supposed to study something in class but most of us slept or played games, our friend Trentis, whose real name was Franco di Barbera, he told me in confidence - decided that our telemeter could use a little maintenance work, getting along in age. So he took it apart. A telemeter is a fairly complicated piece of optic with all kinds of prisms, lenses, mirrors etc which is used to measure distances for ranging in weapons. The table was full of all this stuff laying around when one of the sergeants wandered in and when he saw all this stuff laying around helter-skelter he just went ballistic! He started to scream inquiring whether Trentis lost his mind completely and what the hell he thinks is doing and how the hell is he EVER going to put the instrument together and all the terrible things what will happen to Trentis if there is going to <sup>be</sup> "rabiots" (surpluses) after he put it together and on and on. When he stopped hollering at last, Trentis, without even glancing at him said in his usual icy voice reserved for idiot sergeants like him and others: Sergeant come back in an hour and you will notice that this poor junk of a telemeter will work BETTER than it did since years. Which the sergeant did and which the telemeter did also. Trentis lit up one of his Gauloise, fixed it in his trademark cigarette holder and went back to work. - As far as I know Trentis was the only Legionnaire at least in our group who was EXEMPT of all Defiles (parades) because he was unable to march in STEP! Or at least he succeeded to make everybody believe that he cannot. This was no big deal as long as he was in our platoon because when we went out for our little walks for practicing to make sketches nobody worried about marching in step anyway, but as I heard he got in trouble later on, in less easy going outfits. The story of this really charming and bright guy ended on a very sad note. I don't know all the details but I heard that he was in a compagnie in Colomb-Béchar where he gave some lip to another Italian sergeant who put him in jail and poured a bucket of water on him during the night, which was standard operating procedure. Poor Trentis got pneumonia and died. I've his self portrait in my diary he made me. - Another interesting character in our Platoon was the second in command of Sgt. Palotay, Sgt. Laundry, a tall

lanky guy with some fifteen years of service and a somewhat murky background. He spoke a bunch of languages including Arabic and Mandarin and had his name written on his little drafting board in both lingoos. According to the grapevine his past includes a little opium smuggling in the South China Seas. He is one of those naturals with a so called sixth sense for orientation and also a photographic memory for the scenery. The guy seems to remember every damn tree, rock etc once he passed them. He is also the strong silent type with few words and a wry sense of humour. He is very well liked as he, like Palotay, is a very easy going guy, not much on formalities.

FEBRUARY/13/S.b.A.

Time to celebrate! It is my one year anniversary in the "legendary" French Foreign Legion! Furthermore we were accepted to Peloton One and the fun starts tomorrow.

MARCH/4/S.b.A.

We're on Peloton One since two weeks and the only subject we studied so far is how to peel veggies (pluche) 3-4 times a day. As non-coms don't have to peel veggies I don't even see the logic in THAT! The Bataillon Fantôme left today for France, including our friend Miki. Those who were accepted for Peloton One, like us, were not allowed to go. Mektub. (Fate). According to rumours we're having the final exams for the Peloton at the end of this month. Pluche is not included.

March/30/S.b.A.

This sure is a funny way to make non-coms! All they do is busting our balls with dumb Revues and similar make-do activities but teaching us military skills, specially now that there is a war going on: makash (arabic for "nothing", "there isn't")

The husband of our home town friend Elisabeth (Erzsi) Nagy who gave us the real skinny about this travelling circus aka The Foreign Legion was visiting us today. He is an Adjudant with fifteen years of service, Hungarian of course who married Erzsi by correspondence having put an ad in the local paper in my hometown Sopron. He turned out to be a very nice guy who was taken POW in France later on which was very considerate of him making it possible for me to spend a terrific month of vacation with Erzsi in Agadir later.

More about this later. Why Erzsi married a Foreign Legionnaire who put an ad in the local paper is like this: My hometown, Sopron was a small town with some 35,000 people with about 1000 jews I would guess. Intermarriage between gentiles and jews in that rabidly anti-semitic country since centuries, learned from our Northern neighbor Poland, which in turn learned it from their neighbor Russia of course, was not unheard of but rare. As Erzsi was no headturner although pretty enough, her chances in that small jewish community was limited specially as her sister was a sexy number with strawberry blond hair. What Erzsi lacked in beauty she made up in brains, she was a really very bright gal with university education but as we are talking about the thirties here Woman's Lib was nowhere on the horizon yet and to have a career in a small town for a jewish girl was close to nil. So Erzsi married Adjudant Nagy after three yr correspondence and ended up in Agadir, a beautiful little town in Morocco at the shore of the Mediterranean. (This small digression was a so-called "translator's note" not part of the Diary.)

As for our nomination to Caporal, having graduated from Peloton One, there are several canards: in a few days, in a month, later.

We've a new Hungarian buddy and very high class too: BARON Székely Bandy. He is 21 years old and of course very ...well, highclass. Why this dumb aristocrat joined this outfit can be best explained perhaps by an old Hungarian saying to wit: When a jackass has it too easy he goes dancing on the ice! This specific jackass had everything he could need or want but got bored so he joined the Legion for adventure, complete with generous supplies of silk pajamas and other Legion essentials to the great hilarity of <sup>the</sup> rest of us Hoi Polloi. As he is getting a monthly allowance of FR 2000, compared of our monthly allowance of FR 100 he is not exactly roughing it here either as in all fairness to him and the old saw of Noblesse Oblige he manages to spend it with great flair and panache months after months, eating out in the best restaurants and visiting only the best houses of ill repute. As another Hungarian saying goes: Money talks - dogs bark !

APRIL/16/S.b.A.

In the morning we go out on exercise as usual. All of a sudden the Captain appears and calls all the noncoms together and orders them to take the outfit back to barracks. We're told that the Peloton is finished. In the afternoon "Ressement en plein Bazar" (fall in with full gear) and we're taken to the railway station where we're "entrained" in the kind of cattle cars marked in Hungary: "6 horses or 40 people" Hungary being a horse country from the days of Atilla. Destination: manarf! (Arabic for dont know).

At 0500 we arrive in a little shit town by the name of MARNIA. After a couple of hours of hanging around at the station we're taken to a sort of camp consisting of wooden buildings and we try to make ourselves at home as best as we can remembering the time honoured motto of the Legion originating in the good old times: "Un Légionnaire se démerde!" The expression "se demerder" is untranslatable into English. Merde means of course SHIT. Sofar so good. DE-merder means to UN-shit yourself. In other words get out of this shitty spot or situation. These kinds of scenes we had at the train station where nobody knew what is where, made me recall the Hungarian army in general and the machine gun compagnie in particular where I served. When we arrived to a new location for bivouacing the Compagnie Commander shouted something like the navy's: Now here THIS! In thirty minutes sharp I'm gonna put down a machine gun at one end of this street and let lose! And god help any of my chosen folk who is not in bivouac yet! MOVE IT! - And this was actually not an unreasonable request/warning/ either, as one day before the compagnie was supposed to arrive in the new bivouac the Quartermaster got there with his people, requisitioned the best houses with the best facilities for horses, marked with chalk on every door the number of every platoon etc, and started to pray that he didnt forgot anything! And, best of all, as in all feudal countries, the army was KING, and the people whose houses were requisitioned felt HONOURED.

Needless to say that as for the reason for coming to this sorry dump: "those <sup>who</sup> knew didnt say, those who said didnt know."

APRIL/17/M.

We're occupied by trying to make our camp "livable".

APRIL/18/M.

More of the same: trying to install ourself in this godforsaken dump. Anywhere where is air enough to breath is good enough for the Legion, Another old axiom going back into the myst of antiquity.

APRIL/19/M.

Hanging around, corvée de lavage, Marche Militaire 20kms.

APRIL/20/M.

Having fixed up our camp the best we could, we're moved to a better camp consisting also of wooden barracks. This again is Standard Operating Procedure and old tradition. As soon as we're more or less installed we're moved to another place. The old timer know this of course and never do anything more than what is strictly necessary for "basic comfort" like finding an empty box for our personal gear next to our bed as nightable and if there is no electricity some kind of means for lighth in the evening which can be anything from an "Oil lamp" improvised from an empty box of sardines and a piece of string for wick, or if lucky to find some, candles. " A la Legion on se démerde !"

APRIL/21/M.

Réveille @ 0500hrs. Rassemblement @ 0800. Prise d'Arms.(military parade.) Very sad looking affair. Corvée de lavage. Afternoon Quartier Libre. ( day off) We go out to reconnoitre this dump with Weiss Laci and the Baron who is treating us to a... limonade!

APRIL/30/M.

CAMERON! ( see previous description of first CAMERON in April 1939) Those of us who finished Peloton One are nominated at long last to CAPORAL! In the Legion this is something of a mixed blessing. Yes, the pay is better and you have less shit to eat, the sad fact is that there is VERY little authority , much less respect, accorded to a Caporal's stripe which is proven and demonstrated by the fact that in Legio lingo the Caporal is called CABO, meaning DOG.

Nevertheless, being at the bottom of the totem pole as non-com, you're responsible for all the shitty-nitty-gritty in your platoon and your quarter where they're installed, whether it is a tent or anything else. In plain words it is a SHITTY job but unavoidable to the next grade, Sergeant, which is much better as now YOU

can break the balls of your CABO about all the nitty-gritty of daily life in the Legion and if one of the vinos piss in his bed - not exactly unheard of- and you dont notice because the old bastard camouflaged it by smearing chalk over it, which was noticed by the quartermaster who knew of course all these tricks from long practice, the CABO will go to prison not YOU. As these little accidents are bound to happen during CAMERON, like now, it is a good idea to hold a Revue de Littery (bedding inspec.) after CAMERON, everybody being legally falling down drunk!

MAY/4/M.

Baron Bandi is leaving today for Peloton One. Big farewell. Back in Hungary Bandi wouldnt even have shook my hand being a jew and a nobody.

In the afternoon a group of performers arrived to celebrate Cameron. One of them was a very pretty dancer looking very much like the famous movie star Dolores del Rio. The music was also pretty good.

MAY/19/M.

Surveillance à l'Oued. (wadi) I heard yesterday from Sgt Bibi (Felix Horst) the Chief of my 60mm American trench mortar group that the "Bataillon Fantôme" we were not permitted to join going to France, because we were admitted to Peloton One, was completely wiped out, our poor friend Miki included I assume. Mektub. (fate)

Something here is not kosher. We're just hanging around drinking mint tea under the trees and some of the guys frying fish. Most of the outfit are old timers with 10-15 yrs of sevice or more.

JUNE/9/M.

It looks like there is no way to get away from this dump. The news from France are almost unbelievable and perhaps even to the Germans a surprise, the result of a completely new kind of war they seem to have invented called BLITZKRIEG fought almost completely with ARMOR. As for America, it seems they follow Pres. Wilson's advise from WWI: NEVER AGAIN (get involved in a war o'seas).

JUNE/14/M.

Italy also declared war!

JUNE/14/M.

Sgt. Bibi is transfered "destination inconnue" (destination unknown).

This is very bad news for us two as Bibi became almost a friend to us after he arrived to our unit being called up from the Reserves. I've to insert a sort of "Translator's Note" here otherwise the story of Bibi wont make any sense. I dont remember when and where Bibi joined our unit but I'm pretty sure it was in Sidi-bel- Abbès when all the other reservists arrived which was announced by the guy hollering at the window. (See Diary entry JAN/6/1940/S.b.A.) As I said he was a reservist with 18yrs of previous service covering all the colonies including Tonkin (Vietnam). It was sort of a case of "love at first sight". Bibi was a former officer in the German Navy. He took a big shine to us and started to pester me right away to transfer from the Observers Section where I was at that time, to his group of the newly acquired 60mm American trench mortar. As he frankly put it, Erwin it will be a good deal for both of us. For me it will mean that I wont have to bust my ass trying to teach one of these idiots to handle the mortar as you know all this shit from the Hungarian army, and for you it will be a good deal because being a reservist with 18yrs of service I dont have to prove anything to anybody anymore and this will mean that I dont give a shit about this whole madness and we will take it easy and have an easy life. Bibi's favourite line was: "Die können mich alle am Arsch lecken!" (they can all kiss my arse). When we go out on exercise we will find a nice quiet spot for the mortar "ohne Feindeinsicht" ( without enemy observation, meaning officers of course ) and sit on our ass while the other idiots chase all over the scenery with all the dreck on their back, and when it is all over we pick up the gear load it back on our friendly mule and have a beer in the canteen. Much as I liked the guy and saw his point I was not really anxious to trade in my little drafting board and pencil for shlepping a fucken mortar on my shoulder even if it is a 60mm one. Bibi kept pestering me and what wore me down was his terrific sense of humour and I transferred. How can you not have a good time with a platoon commander who doesnt give a shit about anything and have a great sense of humour to boot ? And needless to say he knew all the tricks in the book of how to keep us out of trouble with the minimum of work in this so called army.

He had just about every decoration except the Légion d'Honneur au Feu, which is the equivalent to the Congressional Medal of Honour with the same inconvenience, that with the exception of officers it is mostly awarded posthumously. He had the Médaille Militaire au Feu, the second highest decoration for bravery, Dragon d'Annam, Tonkin's highest decoration, Médaille Colonial avec Griffe (Colonial Medaille with cluster) Croix de Guerre avec Palms (with a bunch of citations) and of course the usual "bin there" medals. -

Shortly after I transferred to his group the compagnie went out on manoeuvre. Bibi and I looked for a suitably quiet spot for the mortar behind a little hill by the book, chose a suitable target at 600 meters, I put down my jalons (target markers) sighted in the mortar and were sitting on our respective asses bullshitting about the good old days in Tonkin when a Lieutenant walked in on us more by accident than anything else as sure as hell he couldn't SEE us and made some half assed remark inquiring sarcastically whether we are not working too hard? Bibi told him that I'm a reserve officer from the Hungarian army where I learned about handling a 81mm Stokes-Brandt heavy mortar and that our piece is sighted in and ready to fire. The Lt. said Oh? with heavy sarcasm and started to quiz me about mortar lore which I answered of course with "effortless ease". So the Lt. left, murmuring something about like "carry on" while Bibi and myself said something in German concerning what he can do for both us with a certain part of our anatomy and went back to the subject of Tonkin.

Best of all, Bibi was a loyal friend who always stuck up for us if somebody was giving us a hard time. Once in the popote (noncom's mess) another German Sgt. made some antisemitic remark about us, whose name was Bauer. Bibi, who was built like a fireplug and knew jiu-jitsu and could have eaten this shithead for breakfast, janked him up from his chair by his shirt and putting his face in the guy's said: Du heisst Bauer, bist Bauer, und bleibst Bauer! and shoved him back on the chair. (Your name is Peasant, you are a peasant, and you'll stay a peasant.) I heard this story from another Sgt. of course not from Bibi.

As I said Bibi had a weird sense of humour which worked

best when he had one drink more than the basic which of course he did like all the Legionnaires with that many years of service, or less. One day he came looking for me in such a condition and said: Erwin lets go for a little promenade(walk). I said fine with me and he left. He came back with a wheelbarrow and suggested that I get in and he will wheel me around the barracks, which he did at the great hilarity of the bystanders and ourself. -

One day he finagled it that we both get detailed as "Surveillance au Moeurs" in the Red Light District with himself in charge.(See this subject mentioned previously). We had a lot of fun with all the hookers pointing at us exclaiming: look, look they are twins! We religiously visited all the cathouses according to regulations where Bibi got into some spirited roughhousing with a gorgeous Hooker from Martinique, which was famous for it's beautiful girls and which is still a French colony.

This was Bibi whom we lost now because he was transferred somewhere most probably because he was German and our unit was probably destined to go to France sooner or later. -

#### JUNE/16/M.

Cpl. Kupay, a Hungarian, returned from CLT Co. ? Travailleur(Labour Co.) from the South and said Bibi and a lot of others are building roads! I cant figure this fucken story out. By now I'm used to it that everything is being done backassward in this half-assed outfit but to call up all these oldtimers from the reserves suposedly to fight Germany, then change their so-called mind and send them to build roads instead of sending them back home taking into consideration that all these oldtimers have years and years of service and already did their part, or more, for "La Belle France", is either the hight of idiocy or the most disgusting thing I can think of. Surely it is not their fault that France lost the war in record time!

Pétain might have been the Hero of Verdun and "tiger" during the IWW but now he is just an old fart and senile at best or a traitor at worst who handed over his country to the fucken Germans, establishing his Govt at Vichy. It will be fascinating to read ten years from now what REALLY happened behind the scenery ?

JUNE/17/1940/M.

Finita della Comedia! The Drôle de Guerre is finished, La Belle France KAPUT! What will happen now to the Legion in general and us in particular ?

JUNE/20/M.

The whole charka (Arabic for mob) returned from bel-Abbès. According to rumours the whole outfit will be transported to un-occupied France and from there volunteers will be shipped to England. As the choices are few we would like to go to un-occupied France and see what happens there. Righth now we're waiting for the Armistice details.

This afternoon two of the other noncoms present themselves with lopsided grins and announce that they decided to take me out and get me drunk even if they have to hold me down and pour the booze down my throat. Tibor and myself are known to be non-drinkers beside the daily ration of pinard and sometimes we even exchange that for dessert. This fact does not sit very well with most of them, being contrarary to the old time honoured tradition of the Legion. I tell'em that if this is their only ambition I'll co-operate but it will cost them money because I'll drink only the best champagne money can buy. I didnt insist on this because I'm a connaisseur of bubbly but because I've heard that champagne doesnt result in bad hangover.

I know from one previous experience - more about that later- that I dont get obnoxious when I get drunk, nor do I pass out. First I get sleepy and if I keep drinking I get sick like a dog long before I would pass out.

So we go out to this bistro of this little shit town and after putting away some five bottles of bubblies between the three of us, and by that time I at least was feeling no pain as the saw goes, but still able to ambulate without help, we realize that we have to get back to barracks as I'm Chèf de Chambre (room chief) and have to do evening Roll Call for the duty Noncom. We all get home without problems but the warm room isnt doing much good for me and I start feeling woozie. Fortunately the Roll Call is no problem but righth afterwards I just keel over like a log on my mattress on the floor the room doing "looping the loop" and feeling the second incarnation of the bubbly being imminent I stagger to my feet. Fortunately the mattress next to me is occupied by my old buddy Weber, Mohammed's righth hand man who recognized the symptoms from long practice and helps me to the shithouse where I get sick like the dog I talked about, under similar circumstance before. He also escorts me gently back encouraging me and assuring me that if I've to do an encore during the nighth to make sure to wake him up as he doesnt want me to break my ass - or worse - in the dark. Sure enough I take him by his words more than once and good buddy and oldtimer what he is, he was nursing me back to normal abnormalcy.

Next day the duty noncom comes to visit me and asks me if it was true that I was stinko last nighth when I did the evening

Roll Call? I assure him that I indeed was. He looks at me with something like admiration and says laughing, hey you seem to be a talented beginner! I didnt notice a thing! Perhaps there is a REAL Legionnaire hiding in you after all! I assure him that if he is righth I dont have the intention to find out.

As I mentioned earlier this was the second time that I was drunk. (Translator's note: and the last time too.) The first time was when I was still in highschool in Szombathely, Hungary. One of our friends was the son of the rabbi Horowitz Muci, who was something of a hellraiser and a terrific sabre fencer. His parents had of course a big social life as leaders of the Jewish community and it became something of a tradition with Muci's freinds to be invited at the end of the season to liquidate all the leftover booze at the end of the season. Muci gave a nice party with his parents approval to all his friends with all kinds of yummy stuff to eat with the leftover booze. Supposedly everything was kosher but this was our least worry as most of us were not very religious to put it delicately. So we've put away a fair amount of food and booze and one of us said it would be perhaps a good idea to switch to something milder from the potent Hungarian apricot brandy and Hungarian gin, called boróka pálinka, in case you must know, so Muci appeared with a bottle of Triple Sec which is a water clear liqueur similar to Cointreau, both much favoured by female type persons. So we all poured a shot of Triple Sec and did "bottoms up" and we all started to gag and splutter and grabbing for the water carafe caughing and yelling at Muci saying that <sup>this</sup> is NO Triple Sec whatever it is, because it went down like liquid fire! To settle the argument Muci suggested to try a second shot which we did, and that was the last <sup>thing</sup> most of us remembered. Tibor and myself staggered home somehow as it was a bitter winter day and the cold air sobered us up somewhat, but when I got in the warm apartment and went to bed I got sick like a dog and spent most of the nighth in the bathroom. Next day Muci was considerate enough to call all of us up and tell us the story of the Triple Sec. It turned out that her mother made liqueur from essence and 180° alcohol and kept the latter in the Triple Sec bottle. -

(Translator's Note: Horowitz Muci reappeared in my life some 35yrs later, in 1965 to be exact, while he lived in Israel since 1938 and became "instrumental" in my first immigration/emigration - or as we say Aliya/Verida - to Israel and the less is said about THAT the better and that is what I intend to say.)

JUNE/23/M.

We're still waiting for the details and conditions of the Armistice. What will happen afterwards nobody seems to know. Yesterday we were on manoeuvre to pass the time I guess. We had a pleasant time but as usual, militarily it was a fucken debacle. Our company was supposed to defend a sector normally hold by a Bataillon! It boggles the mind.

JUNE/27/M

The Armistice was signed on the 25th. Not much to rejoice about, to put it mildly.

Tibor picked up a filthy parasite in his beard (tinea barba) and I picked it up from him according to time honoured tradition of our childhood, when we used to drive our longsuffering mother nuts always having two kids sick in the same time, and bitching about being boooooored indoors. The expert imbeciles or imbecile experts? at the medical department told us exactly the opposite <sup>what</sup> to do - NOT to wash our faces - to let the bugs BREED undisturbed? - and gave us an ointment of resorcin, also utterly useless and the damn thing drove us nuts it was itching somuch. At last I had the brilliant idea to write home to our favourite uncle Zsiga (Sigmund) who was a very good G.P. in a little town near Budapest. My Dad said once we overheard: Zsiga is the only one in the family who could make a lot of money as a doctor in Budapest but he wants to work in a backwater because "they need me there more"! Anyway Uncle Zsiga answered by return mail and told us what to do -first of all WASH our faces

with soap and water several times a day and then soak it with a solution of permanganate, so we got rid of the goddamn thing at long last. If we will have to write home to Zsiga every time we get sick we're in good shape or as they say in French : nous somme pas fauché! This is one of those funny expressions which means exactly the opposite what it means literally. "Fauché" is slang for being broke and the complete expression is "we're not broke", meaning we ARE!

According to the local papers here, neither England or America broke their back to help France with fighting Germany. (Translators Note: I could say a few wellchosen words about the possibility of HELPING France but I promised in the Foreword not to use the wisdom of hindsight, so I wont).

Yesterday we were on manoeuvre again. We had a chance to take a nice bath in a little river and had a good time. Our Company Commander, Capitaine Brinon an oldtimer of the Old School we call Mohammed because he is a tall handsome guy with a beautiful beard, called his ordonnance (batman) to bring his snack thus: Weber, apport mon cassecroute... surtout liquid quci! (Weber bring my snack ... mostly liquid, hey ). Weber is my buddy and a very nice German guy an oldtimer of course who served evrywhere including Tonkin and I have his picture in my diary looking very sharp in his snow white dress uniform ready for going "home" to his "wife" in town after "working hours" as it was customary in Tonkin. Weber is with Capitaine Brinon since many years and knows what kind of "snack" he wants so he arrived promptly with a full bidon (canteen) of his liquid lunch which was emptied with effortless ease and perhaps a bit too fast because when Mohammed mounted his horse he gently slid off on the other side exclaiming goodnaturedly, Weber, hold this putain de bourrique (whore of a donkey) so he cant move! This got a big laugh of course. Mohammed is very well liked by the outfit, being an old timer who knows the ropes and causes no problems with dumb chiqués. (unnecessary fuss).

SEPTEMBER/26/M.

I didnt write anything in this Diary for three months for the simple reason that there was nothing worth writing about. Boredom and more boredom mixed with the usual dumb "military occupations" inspections to break our collective balls to kill time.

Since the Armistice we're just waiting for "developments". I assume the "Big Heads" have more important things to worry about than this sorry travelling circus in Africa, out of sight out of mind as the saw goes.

From the guys who survived the Drôle de Guerre in France and came back we hear incredible stories about the all encompassing LACK of organization in every sense and in every aspect. One of the sergeants who shipped out from Liverpool with the same kind of 60mm mortar I've told me he was sent upfront without ONE single piece of ammo for it, being told he will get some soon which never arrived.

Some of the fieldhospitals were staffed exclusively with OB's and GYN's while the clinics in the rear had trauma specialists delivering babies! It boggles the mind.

Fifty-sixty ton German tanks were "facing" two machine guns trying to hold them up! Where ammo was needed they got food and where the guys didn't eat since days they got ammo! Spahis (light colonial infantry) was expected to block the advance of companies of armor and on and on. Any wonder that they got their ass reamed out in short order? OK so we lost the fucken war, but what am I doing HERE? Since two years I'm living like an animal ("The feeding and watering of animals were accomplished in good order and in time specified by regulations" as they said in the Hungarian army.)

Ninety percent of the mob is constantly and consistently drunk which is overlooked by The Management aware of the situation.

NOVEMBER/28/KREIDER

I didn't write anything in this Diary for two months for the same reason as specified above. Meanwhile we were transferred to this "sal bled". According to rumours from the Company office we're daily getting from above, Note de Services regarding the liquidation of the unit ASAP. We also heard rumours since a long time that we're going to get the New Soldébut so far they are just rumours.

Tibor is in the "hospital" with jaundice but he is in no danger. As a matter of fact he is better off than the rest of us. He is left in peace and eats a little better too than we do, which is not saying a lot as our food is awful.

DECEMBER/21/K.

According to "well informed sources" all the Jews will be kicked out of the Legion by spring, courtesy of the fucken Vichy Govt, the filthy sons of collaborating bitches! The only possibility will be to go somehow to England. Our unit will be transferred soon to Geryville. -

JANUARY/8/GERYVILLE.

We're here since Xmas. I wont soon forget this little 120km march in full battledress. It is not the 120 kms, which are by Legion standards nothing unheard of, but the scenery and the "road" which made it a killer. It was a four day march at 30kms per day. The "road" is not a road but what is called in French a "piste" - best translated as "trail" just marked with stones in this fucken bled. The whole 120 kms is straight like the proverbial arrow flies. You start out in the dark and when it is getting lighth all you see is this fucken piste disappearing on the horizon! Left and righth nothing but sand, rocks, stones and alfalfa grass. There is NOTHING to take your mind off your blisters, your shoulders which are numb from your goddamn pack, rifle, two bidons of water 2 liter each- meaning four kgs righth there- your sidebag (musette) with your personal gear and other stuff, coming to 25kg alltogether. By the time you arrive to the last fifty minutes of the day and the rest stop for spending the night in your two men tent you drop in your track with barely enough strenght to take off your shit and wait for your evening meal and sleep "the sleep of the damned". This went on for four days and by the time we got to this fucken dump we were barely alive. The place itself wouldnt be all that bad if it wouldnt be so goddamned COLD, -6-8 C° which is 6-8C° below freezing and the food would not be POW quality and quantity as a matter of fact I bet the fucken Germans are feeding their POWs better. The simple fact is that we're literally STARVING! We catch and eat everything we can, dogs, cats, even sparrows. Needless to say we have it up to here with this so called army. It is an absolute DISGRACE to "feed" an army like this in peace time!

JANUARY/14/G.

As I said we are starving. B'fast was black coffeee and watery

SOUP for breakfast in the LEGION ?! Lunch: small piece of bread, watery soup, some veggies without any kind of fat or oil, 5dkg(!) grizzles mascarding as meat. ( 50dkg=1/2 lbs) I was able to snare some St. Johns bread from the storeroom which is normally fed to the mules. This kind of thing is absolutely UNHEARD of in the Legion! - Our new Adjutant is not a bad guy when he is sober but when he is not he gets nasty. I dont mean dangerously nasty just a pain in the ass. Today he wanted to have Revue d'arms (rifle inspection) and insisted that the tiles in the barracks to be WASHED when it is freezing outside and we've of course no heat. When he came in for the inspection his face was red which is a bad sign for him. The guys were already shitting their pants because of the rifle inspection. I went to the canteen bought a can of lighter fluid and a box of matches -in place of toothpicks - raided my first aid kit for cotton wool and started to clean our vintage IWW rifles with Tibor swearing a blue streak in Hungarian of course about how this fucken asshole of an Adjutant is NOT going to screw two old-timers like us. He starts going down the row of beds and find something to bitch about every rifle "distributing" four days of corvées in the kitchen (KP) eight days this and eighth days that etc when he arrives to my bed. I use the old time tested trick and SNAPP to attention TACK! which is almost unheard in the Legion. He gives me a funny look, picks up my rifles and starts turning it this way and that way, snaps up the rearsigth, always a likely spot for the uninitiated to be harboring some grease or dirt in it's nook and crannies but NOT here asshole, I wasnt born yesterday in this fucken game either. He looks at me and ask me, did you serve before in another army ? Oui Mon Adjutant! Where ? Hungarian army Mon Adjutant! Eh b'en MERDE alors! ( SHIT!) throws my rifle on the bed and looks at Tibor at the next bed , toi aussi? (you too?) Oui Mon Adjutant! He walks away and NEVER again did he look at our rifles.

FEBRUARY/1/AIN-SEFRA.

It was two years ago to the day that we left our hometown Sopron. And look where we got! Hanging around in this travelling circus getting bored to death,starving to death because those filthy

bastards at Vichy are considering the Foreign Legion The Forgotten Army.

Ain-Sefra is the kind of "picturesque oasis" you see in the movies with the typical Foreign Legion fort surrounded with sand dunes as far as the eye can see with the exception of palms in the oasis. Compared to Geryville the food is a bit better which is not saying a lot. There are renewed rumours about the New Pay including the arrears. I'll believe it when I see it. The fact is that our pay is a scandal. A new recruit with the Colonials gets more than a Cpl. in the Legion with ten years of service. This is the gratitude of La Belle France for the Legion.

MARCH, 3/A-S.

I hate this Veteran Organization as Tibor calls it, more and more daily. It has as much to do with soldiering as a boyscout outfit or less. One week ago they distributed our Tenue de Guèrre (battle dress) what we never saw while the war was still on. It seems they realized the mistake because two days later not only took that back but our Number One going out uniform was also had to be handed in. Now we look at least like the bunch of clochards (bums) we are. On the other hand we have to attend... are you ready ? SINGING lessons! I swear this is true. Perhaps they think it will take our minds off our growling empty stomachs! It seems somebody completely lost his mind after all. Perhaps we should follow the example of the Coloniale Tiralleurs which revolted and promptly got the New Pay. The trouble is that if the Legion would revolt we would be put in a concentration camp and starved to death.

We heard the Legion in Syria switched over to the English, likewise those who stayed in England and now fighting the Italians.

I dont even have enough money to buy a pair of sox and soon I'll have to wear footrags like we did in the Hungarian army.

MARCH/6/A-S.

I got a letter from Trudy. She mailed it five months ago. I was very pleased and answered righth away. Perhaps we shall meet again some-times somewhere.

I've to insert another "Translators' Note" here otherwise this wont make sense. I've met Trudy in Hungary when she came visiting

her relatives who lived in the same house I and my parents lived. She was a stunning looking girl and although we never even had a date she made a lasting impression on me as it turned out, and feeling lonely in the Legion - as so many others - I asked my parents to find out her address because I wanted to correspond with her. My mother who adored her and kept nagging her to go out with one of us got her address of course and I started to correspond with her. To make a long story short Trudy became my wife after the war when I was discharged from the British Army which we both joined after we finished with the Legion. Trudy was living in England as a political refugee from Vienna. -

Meanwhile "back at the farm" I heard two different canards. According to one, our Bataillon is going to Syria. According to the other there is going to be a "Visit Aptitude" (medical exam) for the "NOUVELLE ARMEE" - whatever that is supposed to be! (New Army). Tibor came home from guard duty with the news that there is going to be Peloton Two for sergeants and he already talked to our Adjutant who in turn talked to our Lt. who agreed that we're both "intelligent, sérieux, discipliné" and we should be admitted. "Sérieux" is a code word in the Legion for not being a "drinker", but there is one big problem: we are jewish and according to the new rules under Vichy, jews are not admitted to Pelotons. Tibor took this very hard but I'd a hunch that this will be the story and although I too was pissed off -after all we had to leave our country for just this kind of "problems" - so I just fell back on Bibi's favourite line : they can all kiss my ass! Next day we went out on exercise and Sgt Bagg came to ask me to draw for him his Croquis Panoramique and being still pissed off about the Peloton story I told him I'm busy although I finished mine long ago and was just sitting on my ass. He gave me a dirty look and walked away. Sgt Bagg was one those classic type every army has it's share: The Screamer who always finds some reason or other to scream at somebody for one reason or other. I long ago sized him up as a case of a " dog whose bark is worse than his bite" as I never saw him doing anything mean or even unfair, so I didnt really expect any serious

repercussion to this refusal of mine to do his Croquis and from where I sat I felt that If I'm not good enough for Peloton Two I cant see WHY <sup>only</sup> should I help a fucken Sgt. to do the work he is suppose to be not able to do but to do it better than I do. This was not quite fair of course, after all I was a "specialist" in this shit, but not sending us to Peloton Two was not fair either. Barka! (Arabic for finished) Tibor who heard about the story of course even before the manoeuvre was over felt differently reminding me of the old Hungarian army saying : it is always the stronger dog who fuck! By some strange coincidence - in which I dont believe- it was Bagg's turn to be duty Sergeant<sup>of</sup> the week and my turn to be duty Cpl with him. As soon as Tibor found this out he told me: bro your goose is cooked! Bagg is going to screw you in short order now for the croquis story. I said, lets wait and see, there is an old French saying : nobody can break FOUR legs of a duck! Actually being duty noncom of the week is usually a good deal because we dont have to go out on exercise just take care of the routine housekeeping stuff. Of course under special circumstances the Sgt can be a pain in the ass, but what else is new? So we start our week and of course I'm extra careful waiting for the proverbial first shoe to drop. Which never did. He does his job I do mine and he is showing no sign whatever that he is mad at me. I thought this sumbitch is trying to lull me into being careless and then clobber me. The first day casse-croute (snack) time comes at 1000 hours and Bagg says Erwin I'm gonna have a ham sandwich and a little white wine -wink- is that OK by you too ? I said the ham sandwich sounds good but I would prefer coffee. Oh yeah I heard you two dont drink, too bad. He scribbles on a piece of paper and sends me to the kitchen to fetch it. To make a long story short with the exception of the time at the Observers Course this was the easiest and pleasantest two weeks in the Legion. I'm saying two weeks because it turned out that the Sgt whose turn it was to relieve Bagg was sick and he volunteered to stay on and asked me if I feel like pulling another week too? I agreed of course. Bagg was an oldtimer with years of service and he had - like most oldtimers - an unexhaustible store of stories of the "good old times". I knew that he had

a good sense of humour too as with all his screaming he also had a loud horselaugh to go with. So we had a good time. A couple of months later we went on a three day manoeuvre including a lot of goddamn marching and Bagg comes to see me. Erwin with my goddamn luck I'll be duty Sgt during this putain de manoeuvre (whore of a manoeuvre) and I heard you two have a good reputation for being good walkers. You think I could Shanghai you as duty Cpl? As you know when we have these long marches there are always stragglers after the first day and it's the duty noncoms responsibility to see to it that these fuckers keep <sup>up</sup> with the columns. What I usually do is start out one hour earlier than the rest of the unit that way I cut these clowns a little slack to be able to arrive in the same time. I'll walk in front and you bring up the rear kicking asses. What do you say? Well, I'm not more immune to flattery than the next guy and also remembering all the laughs we had I agreed. So the second day when we had our stragglers as usual Bagg comes to

to tell me that he wants to start out an hour earlier and I said it's OK by me but he will have to wake me up. He laughs saying dont worry about THAT mon vieux you'll be. so I'm fast asleep when I hear Bagg hollering at the top of his voice ,the lame, the sick, the blind, the halt, the abruti, the freshly buttfucked GETUP!! He sticks his head in my tent: Are you up Erwin ? Actually my translation doesnt do Bagg's original justice because he managed to scream all this in rhyme.As I said the guy had a sense of humour.

MARCH/30/A-A.

According to latest rumours "it is almost sure" that we'll get the new solde amounting to FR 300/month and perhaps even the arrears will be paid, up to January 1st! My impression is that even if this is true we wont enjoy it for long as they're going to kick out all the jews.

APRIL/9/A-S.

We're impatiently awaiting the NEW SOLDE which should arrive on the 16th. However the arrears they will pay only if one can prove having a debt of FR 3000 on the "outside". We solved this big problem by asking Erzsi in Agadir, whose husband was a POW by this time in Germany, to send us this required documentm, which she did.

According to the papers the English occupied Addis-Abeba and the Germans marched into Yugoslavia and Greece. Looks like something serious getting started on the other side.

APRIL/13/A.S.

Yugoslavia bombed the airfield in PÉCS/ Hungary. There is a 17 yr old boy pulling garde duty with me who joined the Legion under the influence of movie about the Legion. One wonders how many guys can be "thankful" for some dumb movie about all the "adventure" which turned out to build roads with pick and shovel and similar fun as this boy does. - The English are pressing on with their offensive. -

APRIL/14/A-S.

It seems we'll get the New Solde but one third of it will have to be deposited in a bank's Savings Account! By what righth and reason? According to the latest "position" they want to pay the end of the five years service, hoping I assume that NOT evrybody will be "present" at the Rollcall anymore. Smart fuckers.

Neither the Chef Comptable nor the Lt. is willing to accept Erzsi's document. When Capitaine De Marion de Glatiny was running this outfit it was not the whorehouse it is now.

A few days ago my Sgt. advised me that he will put me in prison at the first opportunity! Sofar he wasnt able to keep his word. (Another Translator's Note: I dont remember this shithead. What I do remember is that NO fucken noncom of ANY rank came even close to put me in prison EVER. At the two occasions when I was in prison later, both times it was my Companie Commander and it was against rules as we'll see later on.)

I've read in the paper that Rudolf Hess deserted to England. Yesterday they distributed the goddamn COUVRE NUQUE (neck cover) which became part of the Legion mystique made famous by such classic - and others - as BEAU GESTE! We call it "chasse mouche" (fly chaser) and it looked in the movies much better than "in vivo" It makes us look like NUNS! Come to think of it the whole fucken Legion looks a whole lot different than in the movies! For one thing in spite of all the dunes around here nobody saw Marlene Dietrich sofar à la Garden of Allah.

I dont have the vaguest idea HOW we're gonna survive another two

and half years in this sorry whorehouse of an "army" ?

MAY/28/A-S.

There is another Renfort Tonkin but we didnt sign up as we dont have enough service. According to latest canards within two weeks the Bataillon is going to be disbanded with half of it going to Syria the other half to Morocco. Syria would be better because the pay is better and it is closer to the English.

JUNE/27/A-S.

The official antisemitism notwithstanding the majority of the non-coms are very decent to us specially Sgt. Chef Schatz, a former officer of the German Navy, with some fifteen years of service in the Legion. He is acting Adjutant of the compagnie and as such he is in charge of the housekeeping duties and therefore the distribution every morning of the parties for the different corvées. He is usually manages to leave the two of us for last and then says with a wave of his hand : VERKOMMTS! ( get lost ).

It was in the papers ten days ago that the French sued for peace in Syria but the English rejected it. The next day it was in the paper that the English were willing to negotiate but their conditions were "unacceptable" to the French. After another month of fighting the "unacceptable" conditions became ACCEPTABLE after all. The Renfort they sent to Syria three days before the Armistice came back from bel-Abbès. The latest news is that we'll go to DAKAR in Sénégal but this news also disappeared later on. Are we going to die in this sal bled?

AUGUST/1/A-S.

The whole fucken compagnie is in turmoil since yesterday! We were ordered to prepare to move out of here at long last! Our Compagnie Commander (Brinon/Mohammed) was recalled from leave in France. Also all leaves were cancelled, all the unfit and those with short service were transferred to other units. The Cadre will be brought up to wartime strenght and they also distributed our Tenue de Guerre. (Battle dress). Where we're supposed to go nobody knows. What seems to be sure is that we are going to join the Bataillon to be completed in Kreider and from there we'll proceed to bel-Abbès. The canards of the destination are as follows: in order of probability:

89a.)

- 1.) DAKAR/Senegal
- 2.) MOROCCO
- 3.) TONKIN
- 4.) RUSSIA

we're certainly not lacking choices! Personally I "include out" Russia completely for several reasons, to wit: 1.) The unit is much too small and insignificant. 2.) We're not trained for this kind of war to put it mildly. 3.) The logistic is impossible.

AUGUST/3/A-S.

As our unit got it's marching Order we sent all our personal gear to Erzsi in Agadir - including my Peacetime Diary. Our Company will procede to KREIDER where we will join the 1st Bataillon. From there we'll go to bel-Abbès and what happens later we dont know yet. I was able to put together a fairly respectable medical kit being aware of it that our own<sup>is</sup> not better than the rest of this sorry "army". I think I've to insert another "Translators Note" here otherwise this medical kit story wont make sense. . . . The fact<sup>is</sup> that my dream was ever since I was kneehigh to become a surgeon. Due to very strict quota systems on the universities for jews, specially in medical schools, I couldnt go and we didnt have money to go to another country in Europe either. Nevertheless I was reading medical books constantly, specially surgical textbooks and I "practiced medicin without a license" ever since I nominated myself the First Aid Man to the soccer team in elementary school and later in high school ditto, soccer being in Hungary what baseball is here in America. I was also the First Aid Man man during higschool when we went on a trip to another part of the country or nearby Austria. When I came to America in 1950 I got a job in an operating room first as orderly and then worked my way up to surgical technician (scrub) as in those days there were no courses for this and every hospital "grew" it's own technicians. I was the first in our hospital and probably one of the first in the country. It was a new speciality the surgeons devised who got used to male surgical technicians in field hospitals due to a shortage of RN's. The surgeons liked the male technicians who seemed to be more sturdy in those pressure cooker situations of field hospitals and were also less likely to burst in tears when the surgeons chewed them out in army lingo if something didnt go the way they wanted it. By the time we were ready (?) to go upfront I considered myself - righthly or wrongly - to be competent enough to handle emergency First Aid like putting on tourniquets, seal a sucking chest wound etc. The supplies I brougth from my own savings and my freindly mule agreed to carry it in an ammo box together with the 60mm trench mortar.

"Meanwhile back at the farm" there is general excitement at the news of our impending departure and the probability that our number came up this time, resulting in a larger than usual drunks and other disorderliness. What the future might bring nobody knows of course. "Qui vivra-verra!"

AUGUST/4/A-S.

Gearing up with the usual incredible badlam and confusion I should be used<sup>to</sup> by now but aint. We knew since a week that we're shipping out but at 2300 hrs they still distributing equipment. The mob is getting more and more impatient and surly because we get everything drip by drip and it seems to take forever. We've enough stuff by now to need a personal mule to carry it. At 0100 hrs I go to sleep at last.

AUGUST/5/A-S.

We're leaving for the station @ 0300 hrs. I'm dragging my mortar beside my personal gear which should amount to 25-30kg which is a respectable weight for a little guy weighing not much more than 55kg himself and even if it is only a short trip to the station. We entrain in our usual luxury Pullman cattle car of course but as we say in the Legion : C'est mieux <sup>mal</sup> rouler que bien marcher! (It is better to roll badly than march well.). We arrive to KREIDER at 1130 hrs and we're greeted by the Clique (music) and more importantly we get a meal of Boudin( blood sausage) and salad. The Boudin is an old Legion tradition and the March of the Legion is also called Boudin. The mood is much better as everybody is "content" that something seems to be happening at long last!

AUGUST /6/KREIDER.

After Reveille we are ordered to strike our tents because they are not ALIGNED according to the BOOK! After re-aligning them à la WWI we're rewarded with our favourite inspection: Revue de Détaille! (see previous explanation) We've to lay every little piece of gear on the ground just so! Vive la Legion! After the Revue our new Bataillon Cdr. Commandant Borgat, who seems to be a decent sort of the Old School with years of service in the Legion invites our whole compagnie to the foyer for an aperitif. We're favourably impressed.

AS I said the Old Timers are usually OK as it is considered a plum to serve with the Legion and the crème de la crème of St.Cyr gets these plums. (St. Cyr is the French military/Academy). It is usually the new officers sent out by the sons of bitches of Vichy who turn out to be a pain in the ass and ignorant morons to boot who try to make up for ignorance by becoming a thorn in our sides day after day.

Later I "assist" Levine who went to medical school before he joined the Legion, to lance a beaut of a boil on the ass of a young guy who adamantly refused to go to our medical department for which I couldnt blame him remembering their state of the art technic of cauthorizing Nettel's boil on his tummy in Saida in boot camp. Operation this time was a success and the patient didnt even die! As a matter of fact he felt much better and walked better too.

Tomorrow or after tomorrow we're supposed to continue to bel-Abbès and after a few days from there to CONSTANTINE and according to rumours from there to DAKAR in SÉNÉGAL by ship. Sofar it sounds OK. -

AUGUST/7/KREIDER.

In the morning we go to the swimming pool here. At last they got a good idea, cant believe it. After the pool "military" exercise. Afternoon they distribute our Tenue de Sport which is typical of this outfit. When we were posted to a garrison for long stays we never saw a Tenue de Sport. Now that we're leaving they woke up. AS I said all this fancy stuff would be very nice if everybody would have a personal mule to carry all this shit.

AUGUST/8/KREIDER

In the morning "Education Physique" (gymnastic) and swimming pool. Afternoon Travaux Propriété. (personal housekeeping) i.e. SIESTE.

AUGUST/9/Sunday/KREIDER

Quartier Libre.(day off) I could go swimming but my tummy hurts. We're supposed to leave in three days.

AUGUST/10/KREIDER

In the afternoon Capt. Brinon(Mohammed) arrives from France where he was on vacation. One hour exercise. In the afternoon another hour exercise with the mortar. Supposedly we're leaving after tomorrow but sofar I cant see any kind of preparation.

AUGUST/12/KREIDER

Our Bataillon Commander seems to have a sense of humour. We're going on night manoeuvre wearing our pith helmet, recently distributed, the first time, also shorts because he says<sup>he</sup> heard grumbling that we are not allowed to wear the pith helmet! Tonigth being fullmoon it is a good opportunity to try it out! As I said the Old Timers are OK. No news sofar about our next trip. Nobody knows anything.

AUGUSTUS/19/FEZ (Morocco)

We arrived on the 16th again in the usual cattle cars and a lousy crowded trip it was up to PERREGAU where we changed trains and from there on it was better as we got some straws to "relax" on and to sleep on and there was more space too. We stoppèd in bel-Abbès for an hour and half. An old pal from home Fehér Bandi, was waiting for us with cass-croute. And this requires another Translator's Note. As I said we knew from back home and then we met <sup>him</sup> again in the Legion. He is another pathological liar and teller of tall tales and big loudmouth to boot. He joined for the same reason we did to get away from Hitler.- "Fast forward" now to 1970 when I went to Israel to work as so-called foreign expert for ten years. After having installed myself in my apartment subsidized by my outfit I visited some of my neighbors one of them being Hungarians. During the usual "interrogation" I told them I was in the Legion from 1939-1944 and they said there is another Hungarian who is also a former Foreign Legionnaire, you want to meet him? Sure I do. As you guessed it turned out to be Bandi who did not lose any time to start regaling me with all his derring do in Tonkin and Bir-Chakeim where the Legion did another CAMERON holding up Rommel's Afrika Korps for a critical time span and earning the only GLOIRE for the Legion during the IIWW. After a little judicious cross examination during several encounters I realized that not a single word of his stories could have been true because according to the times and places he mentioned he would have to be in TWO places in the SAME time and even Fehér Bandi cannot do that.- "Fast forward" now to 1963 when my brother Tibor was living <sup>with</sup> his Hungarian Wife in England where they fled during the Hungarian Revolution of 1956. My brother and his wife became avid kayakers in Hungary

and they decided in England that they will save enough money to "circumnavigate" the Mediterranean in their beloved KLEPPER AERIUS. The Fateful day - in more ways than one - arrived in the summer of 1963 when they started their trip by kayaking down the Rhône to Marseilles. They had the best gear money can buy from ROLEX Submariner to the best lifejackets on the market all expertly stowed away in the kayak which Tibor considered his "speciality" and even wrote an article about, which was published by YACHTING in England no less. To make a short story short they got in a whirlpool at Marseilles and both drowned, with the lifejackets expertly stowed away! There was a story about them in the papers which was read by Fehér Bandi who was living in France and he went to Marseilles to identify my brother and to arrange with the Foreign Legion for his burial being a member of the Old Legionnaires Association. As my brother had an English passport the English Consul was also contacted by the French Authorities the result of what was that my brother Tibor was buried by the French Foreign Legion AND the English Consul at LA COURONNE near Martiguès. As my brother always had a streak of the adventurer in him I'm absolutely convinced that being buried by the Foreign Legion as Sergeant Tibor Fuchs Mle. 80590, must have pleased him no end. Needless to say Fehér Bandi was also present at the funeral. Bandi regaled me of course with all the "gruesome details" in Israel, how the crabs have eaten the eyes etc of Tibor whose body was found in the netz of a fisherman. Tibor's wife was found floating in the sea and was buried next to Tibor. One thing you must say for the Legion. They do take care of their own - as long as nobody can interfere with their decisions. The problems starts when the love-hate relations of the "higher ups" gets into the way, and I'm NOT talking only about the Vichy era either.

"Meanwhile back in the farm". In a few hours we're leaving for MEKNES (Morocco), from there to CASABLANCA where we're supposed to stay one week. According to the same canard we are still supposed to go to DAKAR in Sénégal. Also according to rumours we are to get completely new gear in DAKAR! Now that we already have enough gear for a mule!

AUGUST/20/CASABLANCA

Yesterday afternoon we got to MEKNES and were greeted by the Clique (music) and a nice casse-croute. The oldtimers say something is not kosher here, they're making too much fuss about us. Always a bad sign in the Legion. In the evening I'd a little "Misunderstanding" with one of the Sgt about the sleeping space and he made some funny remarks. He will have a little surprise if he repeats what he said while drunk. At 0430 we arrive at CASABLANCA. We're taken to a very lousy camping ground which seems to be a garbage dump without water or any other facilities. We can go out to town but I've no clean pants. Tibor leaves with Levine the medical students who lanced the boil on the ass of that young kid with my modest assistance. Supposedly we're leaving after tomorrow. There is no sign of new gear there was talk about. If we have to fight <sup>with</sup> what we have, our WWI vintage 07/15 rifles etc we're going to be in baaaad shape. Tomorrow the flag of the Bataillon will arrive and there will be a big Défilé and other chiqué.(fuss)

AUGUST/21/CASABLANCA

I didn't have to go on the défilé because being a mortar man I don't carry a rifle only handgun. In the afternoon we visited CASA's most notorious, famous - or infamous ? - attraction the biggest Red Light District in Africa, the BOUSBIERE! This is actually a whole TOWN in itself with thousands of hookers of all ages, sizes, and colours.- Most of them young and cute some of them wearing nothing more than a panty of "minimum" size covering just the "essentials". In this kind of competition there is no opportunity for subtlety I guess!

Today afternoon another défilé because the flag of the 4ème Regiment arrived. After that visit Medical perhaps because they figured that we got sick of all the défilés ? Perhaps we're leaving tomorrow. We also visited a private cathouse, one drink FR 10 and the "ladies" Fr 100 and definitely NOT worth judging by their looks. Everything is very expensive.

AUGUST/24/CASA

We paid another visit to the BOUSBIERE. When are we going to see again a town <sup>with</sup> thousands of hookers ?

I left with Fr 1.50 but I got my money's worth. For two and half years I'd no "fun" and who knows when and where is the next opportunity ? We're supposed to ship out tomorrow.

AUGUST/26/ S.S. CONDEE.

We embarked yesterday at 1700hrs on this "luxury" liner like sardines. It is a 10,000 ton cargo ship. We're escorted by two destroyers and two U-boats. The food is not too bad but not enough. The trip is supposed to last 7-8 days.

AUGUST/27/S.S.CONDEE.

"Nuit calm -RAS." ( Nigth calm - nothing to report)The food already became awful and "TheManagement" doesnt give a fuck, as our Chef Comptable is a bastard. Mood: lousy.

AUGUST/28/S.S.CONDEE

"Nuit calm-RAS". In the morning one of the destroyers reports two U-boats "Natonalité inconnue" (Natl.unknown), 3km from the shore. We're getting away from the shore and "Formation de convoy en ligne de front!" (defensive formation) Fortunately nothing untoward happens. If we get torpedoed we'll drown like rats. We're in the Hold like sardines and there is only ONE improvised wood staircase to the deck which is swinging even with TWO PERSONS on it!

AUGUST/30/S.S.CONDEE

"Nuit calm-RAS"

We're supposed to arrive in DAKAR/Sénégal in two days - if all goes well.

AUGUST/31/S.S.CONDEE

We're supposed to arrive in DAKAR tomorrow at last and none too soon. I dont have big expectation or requirements regarding comfort but it is a disgrace to transport troupes in conditions like this during wartime. Not enough food, not enough water, no adequate washing facilities and barely enough space to turn over.

SEPTEMBER/1/CONDEE

That with this kind of organization - using the word carelessly- you can ONLY lose a war is obvious. We docked at DAKAR at 0700 hrs. At 0530 hrs the guys were already running around fully dressed including the holy Ceinture Bleu of course. At Last at 0900 hrs

officially "en tenue en plein bazar" on deck! (on deck in full battle dress) Fifteen minutes later we're told "not <sup>to</sup> get excited" because we'll disembark only in the EVENING! Back to the fucken HOLD with all the shit. We're further advised that lunch will be at 1600hrs ! Big screaming and bitching because this means that we wont eat for 24 hrs! This is supposed to be the famous NOUVELLE ARMEE ? (NEW ARMY) Armée de mes COUILLE (army of my ass) At 1430 hrs we're told to get ready - again - to disembark! Which we actually did midst a three ring circus etc . which was exceptional even for this sorry outfit. We arrive at St. LOUIS, Capital of Sénégal by train at 1600 hrs. Lunch: ONE can of corned beef for THREE after not having eaten for 24 hrs! WELCOME TO SENEGAL! Our camp, DAKAR n' BANGO is 8kms from St LOUIS. The camp looks OK- sofar. As we say in Hungarian .from a distance it looks far enough. The barracks are of bricks at least, not wood, and it is not a tent either. The "rooms" are 3.5mx3.5m, but there is neither electricity nor running water, nor windows only a door for entrance on each side. Obviously they were built for native troops used to live in huts. AS we're "native troops" too it is good enough for us too.

In all fairness there seems to be enough washing facilities, including showers, outside, also native type shithouses. In this kind of killer climate water is a necessity of course not a luxury. The evening meal was pretty decent. However the madhouse and the whorehouse at the assigning of rooms was something to behold and to believe!

SEPTEMBER/4/1941/DAKAR n' BANGO.

Life generally speaking is not too bad - sofar-taking into consideration that we're here only since four days. There are of course good news and bad news. The good news are that unlike in North Africa where the natives - of both sexes-hated our guts with a passion due to the memories of the "colonization" here the natives of both sexes are frindly as the Legion was never here before so we didnt have time to fuck up our reputation - yet. The girls come to the camp every morning to sell all kinds of home made food stuff for fairly reasonable prices: fried chicken, fried fish,

yogurt, milk, butter, peanut oil, coconuts and all kinds of nice tropical fruits we never saw in North Africa, like mangoes, goyab (guava) etc and also KOLA nuts similar to betel nuts but without the red colour of it. It is to be chewed and although it tastes first bitter it supposed to have a stimulating effect like caffeine. It is an "acquired taste" as the saw goes. Our solde is fairly high here about Fr. 32/day.

The bad news is that St. LOUIS - the only town around here - is one hour walking distance from camp and we can get only two passes per compagnie during the week and evening rollcall being at 2100 hrs this means that there is noway <sup>go</sup> to town during the week. (Standing orders of our Colonel Bonti(?). The worst news is the climate. It is a real HELLHOLE! the oldtimers who were in Tonkin (Vietnam) say that compared to here Tonkin was Paradise! It is very hot all year round. In the summer dry hot in the "winter" almost 100% humidity. Our skin is never really dry but clammy all the time. During the day millions of flies, during the night zillions of mosquitos as we're in the delta and swamp of the Sénégal river. After the showers - in the "winter" the ground is steaming and everything rots and gets moldy. The water has a bitter after-taste and of course it has to be boiled. Water purifying tablets are hereabout unheard of.

Our Brigade Commander must have been sent from Vichy because he gave the order that all passes have to be TYPED! No Foreign Legion officer of the old school would have given such an idiotic order even when DRUNK! - Incidentally our official name is: Quatrième Demi Brigade Légion Etrangère. (4ème DBLE).

One débrouillard (resourceful) came up with a new "receipe": yogurt with coconut and sugar! Yum-yum!

SEPTEMBER/11/DAKAR n'BANGO/Sénégal.

According to rumours we're not going to get the "Solde Colonial" because that Vichy swine of a Minister de la Guerre said the Legion is part of Troup Metropole (French Army) therefore not qualified! After 120 years when the Legion was not even allowed to be in France - except during wars, natch - we suddenly became Troupe METROPOLE!

Yesterday one of the guys brought a cute hooker in camp but according to the grape wine she is clapped up, not exactly unheard of here where medical service is archaic.

What I would like to know WHY did we come to Sénégal in the first place? There is sure no war to be fought here as far as I know?

SEPTEMBER/15/D.B.

According to rumours a note arrived to the office to get rid of all the jews! We're awaiting further developments.

The food is awful. The same shit day after day: inedible "meat", dried peas or rice, or small red beans or macaroni. It is funny that in a country where everything sprouts you stick in the ground - according to local jokes including walking sticks - we didn't see fresh vegetables for weeks. The native girls don't sell any either.

As I said before the medical service here is terrible. Lots of VD, both gonorrhoea and syphilis and if you need treatment you got to buy your drugs from your own pocket. As we're in the delta and the swamp of the Sénégal river, malaria is of course endemic and amoebic dysentery practically comes with the territory.

SEPTEMBER/17/D.B.

We try to make coffee but the trouble is that there are only two kinds of shrubs here: those with thorns of all kinds, shapes and length, and they are the kinds which burn and suitable for building fires with, and those which has some kind of white sap similar to latex, without thorns which doesn't burn. Take your choice. - As I said climate-wise this is a real hellhole.

There are new canards that we're supposed to move on to Sudan but this I doubt. I've learned that there are Hungarians in St. Louis and I'll try to make contacts. The "arrears" in solde is nowhere to be seen. The barracks have rooms 3.5x3.5 meter without windows. The water in the lavabos is lukewarm of course and rusty.

The showers work only "sporadically".

SEPTEMBER/22/D.E.

We visited the "Capital" of Sénégal and kept looking for the MAIN Str. but there AINT no such animal. However there are things to buy IF you can afford it but we cant. Everything is very expensive. One aperitif Fr. 10, lunch Fr.30 and our daily Solde is Fr.32.

SEPTEMBER/24/D.E.

We were sent down to St.Louis to fetch 100 Mauser rifles. By the time we got back to camp the 100 became 98 only. Big screaming and hollering and the Sgt. who is the son of the Belgian CONSUL, got fifteen days prison. He was goddamn lucky that this didnt happen during the "good old days" when you got Court Martialed if ONE cartridge was missing! He got the fifteen days for not coming back with the convoy and staying in town without permission. This guy is a charcter. Very brighth and well brought up of course but drinks like a fish. Some time ago he got stoned again and collapsed in the midday sun having gotten a sun stroke. He was in coma for two weeks. You cannot do these kinds of idiocies in this killer climate. As I said before the food is awful. We live mostly from what we buy from the native girls every day.

We have no problems communicating as they speak a very funny kind of pidgin French. We're on very friendly terms and we always pay for whatever we buy from them but one of the clowns every outfit manages to 'acquire' took something and ran away without paying for it, curious to find out what will happen? The gal got up in a flash and waving her gri-gri (talizman) at the guy she started screaming : GRI-GRI POUR MOI GAGNER CREVER POUR TOI! (my talizman will kill you!) This sounded so funny to us it became a household word. Every time one of us got mad at somebody we started to scream: Gri-gri pour moi gagner crever pour toi!

The Sénégalese are probably the most beautiful people in Africa. They are tall, very handsome and the women specially has a posture models would kill for. They get <sup>it</sup> from their childhood on from carrying a whole stack of calabash (dried and hollowed out pumpkins) on their head. It is just deligthful to watch one of those