

10 Sussex Teams dropped in 1944 on Souppes-sur-Loing (Seine et Marne - France)

Foreword

These pages, published with the kind permission of Mr. Bernard Gaillardon, Gilbert Gaillardon's son, relate to the parachute drops of ten Sussex teams in the Souppes-sur-Loing area (Seine et Marne) of France.

They were written from extracts of the testimonies by both Mr. Gilbert Gaillardon (Chief of the Souppes-sur-Loing maquis) and his assistant Mr. Maurice Esnault. Some dates were corrected and information concerning the Sussex teams added (*in blue*). See Website : <http://www.plan-sussex-1944.net/>

These testimonies can be consulted on the Internet at the following Website address:

http://aacvr.free.fr/h_note_bio_gg.htm

The book "**L'histoire merveilleuse du pont de Souppes**" (The marvelous history of the bridge of Souppes), published by AMATTEIS Editions, tells how the resistance movement was organized during the German occupation from 1942 to 1944 in the Southern area of the Seine et Marne, thanks to the testimonies gathered and collected by the Souppes History Society.

Introduction

Since 1942, Gilbert Gaillardon, from Souppes-sur-Loing, had been in contact with the Montargis resistance network. Groups of resistants were formed in Nemours, Beaumont, Voulx, Lorrez-le-Bocage, Egreville, Château-Landon, Avon, Dordives, Bourron-Marlotte, Bagneaux, Villebéon, Vaux, Avon, Villecerf and Moret.

Souppes-sur-Loing became the main centre of the Resistance movement in the south of the Seine-et-Marne.

The resistants received weapons parachuted into the neighborhood, did intelligence work, performed sabotages, sheltered allied downed airmen, received dropped agents, and especially prepared the Liberation.

In August 1944, they held the wood in the neighborhood of Souppes-sur-Loing, and especially protected the bridge there allowing, in the morning of the 21st of August, the rapid liberation of the city and its crossing by several American divisions over the following days.

The first Sussex team dropped on Souppes-sur-Loing

In April 1944, Gilbert Gaillardon was approached by Lieutenant-Colonel Saubestre (aka Marcel), pathfinder in charge of the Sussex Plan who entrusted him to organize and receive intelligence teams being dropped from England. Each team, provided with wireless transmitting set, had to collect intelligence information in various areas of France to be transmitted to the radio station Victor of the American Office of Strategic Services (OSS) and the English Secret Intelligence Service (SIS) these in time would ask to carry out the necessary destruction of important objectives.

Three personal messages determined the parachuting of the first Sussex team on the DZ La Brosse, located in the Cercanceaux wood, near Chaintreaux located at about 5 km East of Souppes-sur-Loing (Seine et Marne):

- "**But to be happy like me**", warning message repeated for several days.
- More imperative message specifying that the landing would take place in the following day: "**Seek another first name**".
- On [Sunday May 7](#), 1944; "**Ring! ring!, joyful bell!**" Indicating it was for this evening.

This was the agreed message. This night, a plane left England and came to perform the first drop.

10 Sussex Teams dropped in 1944 on Souppes-sur-Loing (Seine et Marne - France)



DZ La Brosse



DZ La Brosse

By splendid moonlight, G.Gaillardon, M.Esnault, Marga, Schweiger and Terrien went to the selected DZ of La Brosse. Just after midnight a sudden roaring was heard far off: Was it the awaited plane? Few minutes later... The noise became louder and headed towards the DZ. No doubt! G.Gaillardon and M.Esnault took their positions, and as soon as the plane was above them, they switched on their flashlight torches and made the agreed signals. The plane made a turn and disappeared. Silence fell, all were anxious and wondering what was happening. Was it an English plane or a German one? Terrien was affirmative: "It was English!"

(In fact it was an American B24 Liberator of the USAAF Carpetbaggers - Saint-Clair's crew - mission n°393 - Operation Plymouth 2).

G.Gaillardon, Marga, M.Esnault strolled while discussing the situation when suddenly a noisy roaring was heard. No doubt, it was it... With the risk of becoming breathless, Gaillardon and Esnault ran to their respective places, to mark out the DZ with lights and to flash the agreed signals as soon as the plane flew over the ground at 300 metres; it made a quick turn, went down to 150 metres, slowed down, dropped two parachutes which drifted towards the nearest wood and then two others which fell in the middle of the ground. While M.Esnault rushed towards the wood, where he discovered two containers with material. G.Gaillardon and Marga saw two parachutists to land who quickly ran at the double with parachutes on their shoulders and disappeared in the nearby wood.

They were 2 Sussex agents of the Plutarque team: André Degorse (aka Louis Bessonne) and Henri Schouler (aka Andre Beignet).



André Degorse aka Louis Bessonne

We went to look for them, except the gendarmes who would remain hidden until the parachutists were informed of their presence. Because, in front of the uniforms, they could have had brutal reactions. We advanced in the shade towards the wood and, suddenly, a man appeared holding a revolver in his hand, without his parachute, and ready to defend his life in front of Nazi or traitors. It was not the case and we cordially shook his left hand while his right hand was still holding the revolver.

When asked: "Why did you run after you landed? The answer given was, with the purest Parisian accent: "Because I was staying in full light". Indeed, it was the full light.

10 Sussex Teams dropped in 1944 on Souppes-sur-Loing (Seine et Marne - France)

The search continued and, a few moments later, the second parachutist joined the group. The two heroes coming from the sky did not hide their surprise and their joy to learn that the gendarmes were there, and as they showed up, they cordially congratulated them on their participation. Quickly, the parachutes were folded and the material gathered and stored under the wood.

In view of the huge volume of stores, it was decided to leave them on the spot under Marga's vigilant guard (he was always willing to volunteer).

The parachutists stripped off their jump overalls and put on elegant civilian clothes. They followed close behind the steps of their new friends and walked through the wood towards Souppes. We took by-paths to reach the road to Chaintreaux and, then, Esnault and Schweiger each took a parachutist on their bicycle and, with a sharp pace, we moved towards Fonteneilles-le-Boulay, on the road to Coudray.

A few minutes later, everybody was gathered at Esnault's, and while a substantial snack was prepared, the newcomers were asked an avalanche of questions. We learnt of the formidable Allies' power, how much the British, who cruelly suffered, understood our country and admired Resistance movement, the immense popularity of General Gaulle, and also of life in Algeria since the Liberation of North Africa as these two men, who had escaped from France two years ago, had taken part in the operations in Tunisia.

- Did you believe that the Allies would land soon? That they would succeed?
- We were sure.
- When?
- We did not know but we had all the reasons to believe that within one month something would happen.

(It was the 8th of May 1944)

Dawn was coming up when we decided to take some rest. The parachutists laid down, while Gilbert left with Belugeon in his car, to rejoin Marga and deal with the stores. As usual that morning, Maurice went to work and when he returned at midday, he learnt that, during the morning, Schweiger had come to recommend taking the greatest precautions because the Gestapo were in Souppes. This was just a warning, and after lunching, we went to Gilbert's home where we found Georges Moulin of the Liberation Movement.

After a rather long discussion, it was decided that the two men would definitely stay in Souppes or in the immediate vicinity, that they would have a safe house in Melun where the Sussex observer, Louis ([Andre Degorse](#)), frequently went to collect intelligence information which he would pass to his radio operator, André ([Henri Schouler](#)), who would transmit it to London.

The following day, Louis ([Andre Degorse](#)) and Andre ([Henri Schouler](#)) went to Melun with Georges Moulin to get the necessary false papers, inspector professional card of Ponts et Chaussées (Bridges and Roads Administration), written license allowing to circulate, etc. Later on, he introduced them to Mr. Bouteloup who gave valuable and devoted support to the organization.

Louis ([Andre Degorse](#)), who later had a residence in Melun, frequently went to this city where he collected, thanks to the kindness of the roadmen and agents of Ponts et Chaussées, a lot of very valuable information on German convoy movements of troops, of materials, ammunition warehouses, etc. He was able, thanks to the drivers of the Ponts et Chaussées and their chiefs, to carry out all necessary distribution and transportation from one location to another of the wireless radio set used by André ([Henri Schouler](#)) to send messages to London. As Mr. Bouteloup's passenger, he made his journeys on a motor bike during which he collected intelligence information. However, he did very short stays in Melun, only two or three days at most, and regularly went back to Souppes where he could be seen in the city, accompanied by comrades of the organization, without nobody suspecting that he was fulfilling an important role.

Louis ([Andre Degorse](#)) lived during the first weeks at Mr. Belugeon's house, located at Bois d'Haies then at Mr. Gaillardon father's house at Lorrez, on the other hand Andre ([Henri Schouler](#)) was hosted by Marga.

Thereafter in order to avoid attracting the Germans' attention, André ([Henri Schouler](#)) alternately stayed in Lorrez at Mr. Trembleau's home where he sent many messages to London, under the protection of Mr. Trembleau's son and nephew, then in Ceriseaux at Mr. Monnier's, in Barbizon at Mr. Creuzet's, and in Chenou at Mr. Chaurat's.

10 Sussex Teams dropped in 1944 on Souppes-sur-Loing (Seine et Marne - France)

To prevent the exact pin-pointing by the Germans of the wireless transmitting set by their many goniometric detection cars, it was essential to take great security precautions, for example to send messages from the middle of a wood, from a quarry, etc, and especially to often change, at the same time the wave length used and the transmission location. f

Andre ([Henri Schouler](#)) transmitted from everywhere in the area under the protection and with the help of everybody, in particular from Marga, Roger Collin and especially Jean Tissier who transported the wireless radio set on his bicycle in the Souppes streets and elsewhere at any time of the day and the night.

A complete intelligence network was set-up by George Moulin with Mr. Bravo's help who had contacts in each organization: PTT, Railroads, Ponts et Chaussées, etc

Mr. Moulin, Bravo and Laborie performed the transportation of weapons and wireless transmitting sets. When the transportation involved a far destination, this dangerous work was mainly given to Mr. Ortet who being appointed to support the service of the German Post Office (Feldpost), went through the security check points more easily than his comrades.

The exchanges between Paris and Melun were constant and the reception of each new parachute drop was secretly organized as soon as George Moulin was informed.

Louis ([Andre Degorse](#)) and André ([Henri Schouler](#)), depending on the BCRA, did not have any contact with the Inter-allied services in charge of supplying armament to the FFI.

107 messages were sent by Plutarque team to London, 83 of them intelligence on activity of the Villaroche airfield (Arrival and departure of planes), traffic convoys, locations of anti-aircraft defence, of V1, of gasoline and ammunition warehouses etc.

The encoding and transmission were good and the messages clear. The team was four times congratulated for its work.

The next message from London: "**Gilbert is a great man**" caused Gilbert and Maurice Trembleau father and son, to muster again on July 4th at the DZ of La Croix Blanche near Lorrez-le-Bocage to receive only one parcel for Louis and André, who witnessed the drop which was a success without any hitches.

Dropping of the other Sussex Teams on Souppes-sur-Loing

With this message "**Cinzano is excellent with Gin**", London announced a personnel drop on the night of [July 20, 1944](#). Gilbert immediately made all arrangements so that this important parachute drop occurred as well as possible.

In the afternoon of [July 20](#), a van arrived from Paris, occupied by four men, of which three had already been parachuted from England, and who had come to receive their comrades and to transport their material by car to Paris. Around 11 pm, the Souppes and Dordives teams, including Lea Monnier who did not want to miss any parachute drops, along with the men of the maquis and the four men, were gathered on the DZ. Louis and André rejoined them. The moon was absent giving more of a problem for the plane in identifying the DZ, a special device, parachuted some time before and called "Eureka", was brought into service. It made it possible to get in touch with the planes at some distances and to guide them towards the ground.

Around 1 am, the contact was established, and a few minutes later, a huge RAF "Halifax" flew over the Cercanceaux wood. The beacon lamps always directed by Gilbert were lit. The plane appeared above the ground, performing various turns, then it descended, did a first run along the axis formed by the lamps and, during the second run released twelve parachutes from which hung containers of material for the teams which were going to be parachuted a few moments later.

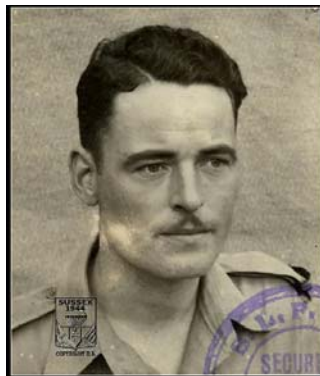
Then the beacons were moved a hundred metres to avoid any unpleasant landing by the parachutists on the containers lying on the ground, during which the plane went away for a few moments. Soon back, it took up an axis formed by the beacons, slowing down its speed to a minimum, the attentive spectators could see four parachutists successively jumping over a two hundred metres length, towards whom the teams ran to receive them on the ground.

10 Sussex Teams dropped in 1944 on Souppes-sur-Loing (Seine et Marne - France)

The plane again increased its height to circle above the ground, and a few minutes later, four other parachutists jumped from the plane, which after a last run at low altitude, headed towards England. Already the containers were being gathered one by one. The parachutists were accompanied by some men of the maquis who carried their parachutes and equipment asking many questions.

They were the 4 Sussex teams "Beauharnais", "Kellerman", "Marmont" and "Sault" dropped by the Halifax of F/Lt Kidd's crew of RAF Sqn 138 during operation Parapluie.

One of them, (*Raymond Porlier aka Carlier from the Beauharnais team*) reached the muster place supported by two of his new 27 friends, he had landed badly and his feet were suffering terribly. After a few minutes spent in exchanging frank handshakes and some words which indicated that this team were in the plane which, a few days earlier, had flown over the DZ with so much insistence, everyone was put to work unpacking the containers. The items were sorted according to the team code such as Latecoere, Breda, Storche, Huricanne etc, and put into charcoal bags, which would form part of the van's load. As the contents of each container filled five coal bags, it would be necessary to make several trips from Souppes to Paris. Berton, in charge of transport organization, decided with Alain the driver, to make three trips: the first part was immediately loaded. Instructions were given so that Jacques of the Carabinerie would come in the early morning, with a car pulled by a horse, to retrieve the remaining bags and to bring them home to where it would be easier to load them into the van, thus avoiding the necessity of the van going inside the wood which could be risky in attracting anybody's attention.



Raymond Porlier aka Carlier
Beauharnais Team

All this work extended late into the night, it became impossible, as the parachutists had envisaged, to go to Dordives before dawn. Their exit, dressed in town suit, from the wood at 7 o'clock in the morning, could look suspect, it was decided that they would remain with the maquis, and during the day some friends from Dordives would come to fetch and direct them using separate roads.

Gilbert gave the order to each non local participant to quickly return home, the dawn was going to come up soon, and while the van drove through the wood towards Dordives followed by Berton on bicycle, Gilbert, Maurice and Louis returned to Souppes where the van was to rejoin them to supplement its charcoal load. Arriving first, they waited a long time, their concerns became even deeper when they were joined by Berton who had been overtaken in the wood by the van and having lost the sight of it, believed that it had arrived a long time ago. This was not the case and they still had to wait for several long minutes before finally seeing it emerge in the street of Paris. The van driver had lost their way in the wood and had fortunately found their way again.

To facilitate completion of the loading, Alain decided to park the car inside Gilbert's court, but while he was busy maneuvering to get there, directed by Louis and Maurice, three large German motor cycles ridden by German policemen dashed from the direction of Montargis, surrounding the van and ordered him to mount the pavement and to stop. Imperturbably, Alain obeyed under his friends' eyes who remained impassive but whose hearts were beating heavily. Without waiting any longer, the German policemen restarted their machines while the first cars of a convoy drove full speed through Souppes. After such shakes and a busy night, they recovered by eating a serious snack and the occupants of the van again took the road to Paris.

10 Sussex Teams dropped in 1944 on Souppes-sur-Loing (Seine et Marne - France)

During the following day, guided by the group from Dordives, the parachutists went to friendly safe houses where they were to remain for the few days necessary to make contact and to familiarize themselves with the French life.

Three found asylum at Mr. Hayé's home, two at Mr. Georges Gaillard's home, two at Mr. Belugeon's home. Doctor Sanseigne was requested and diagnosed that Raymond Porlier had a fracture of two metatarsus requiring absolute rest: he therefore had to champ at the bit while his luckier comrades, after having been magnificently fed during a few days in Dordives, left by various means towards Paris and their sector.

The message ***"Martini will surely attend the festivals this evening"*** announced the parachute drop on DZ La Brosse by a RAF Halifax of the four other Sussex teams in the night of July 30.

They were the teams "Desaix", "Oudinot", "Jourdan" and "Rapp", dropped by the Halifax of F/Lt Palmer's crew of RAF Sqn 138 during operation Martini, which like the preceding ones arrived to Paris without encumbrance.

Dropping of the last Sussex team on Lorrez-le-Bocage near Souppes sur Loing:

The message ***"Maurice and Paul are brave"*** announced the arrival on the night of August 4, 1944 on DZ La Croix Blanche near Lorrez-le-Bocage (Seine et Marne) of the last two Sussex agents to be installed in the area of Montargis, where a safe house was provided.

This was the "Lapin" team composed of Albert Bacquet aka Jean Coulombel and Marceau Darques aka Alain Fouquet who were parachuted by the Sanders' crew of the B 24 Liberator of the USAAF Carpetbaggers (mission n°1430 - operation Benz 1)

Gilbert Gaillardon deserved, for these various operations, the congratulations of Colonel Henderson and Major O' Brien of the OSS who personally came to Souppes to thank him for all the help brought to the Allies by the organization which had been set-up to receive the Sussex teams and their equipment.