

Active Resistance in the Thur Valley and the Maquis of the Vosges

B. Tragic fate of two active and heroic resistants' families

- The family Lutenbacher – owner of the mountain farm and inn at the Drumont Massif

The parents: Nicolas and Marceline, born Meny.

The 11 children: Joseph, **Antoine**, Christine, Marthe, **Emile**, **Charles**, **Eugène**, Cécile, **Albert**, Michel and **Paul**.



Photo prêtée par M. Jean-Jacques Lutenbacher, fils d'Eugène Lutenbacher – Fellingring.

Spelling of the family's name, Lutenbacher, with only one « t », in agreement with the family.

The parents **Lutenbacher**:

Nicolas, born on 24th March 1871 in Fellingring, shot on 24th September 1944 at the Steingraben. Owner and cheese-maker at the farm and inn of the Drumont Massif.

Marceline, born Meny, on 2nd June 1873 in Oderen, died on 6th June 1948 in Bussang.

Postcard from the ancient farm and inn at the Drumont.



The farm and inn at the Drumont Massif was a strategic place, where the main actors of the active Resistance in Alsace met. It served as a liaison between different leaders of the Resistance in the Vosges and in Alsace, while in another room German border guards and forest warders came to quench their thirst.

Did they act as if they didn't see anything?

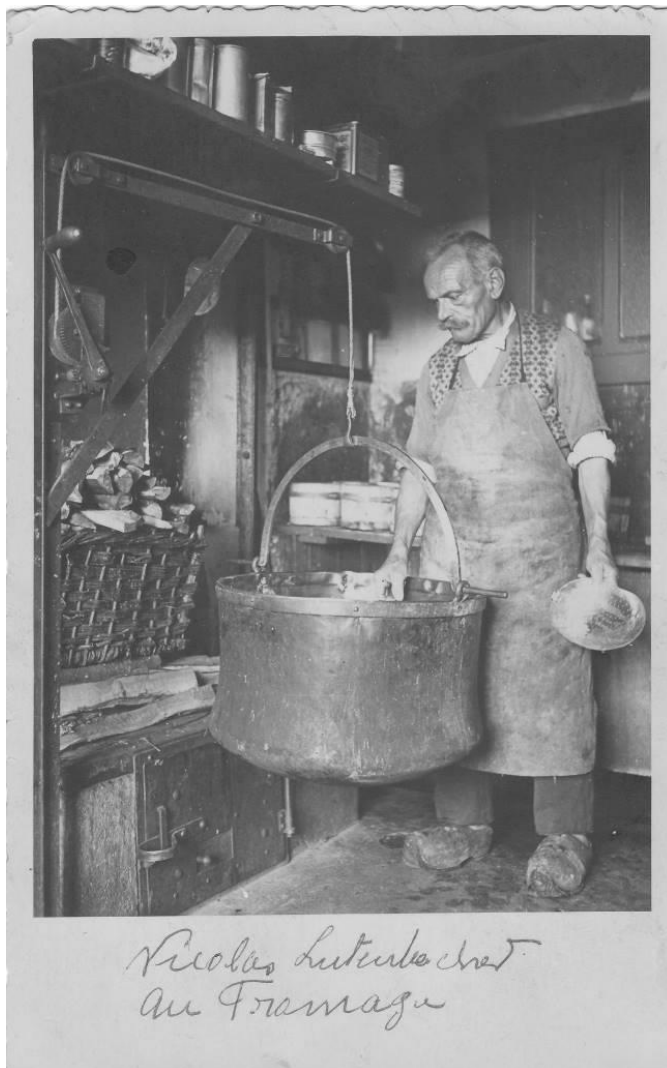
The farm and inn at the Drumont, postcard from 1902 – lent by Jean-Jacques Lutenbacher.



And yet, the farm and inn constituted a crucial place, where more than 1500 fugitives, draft evaders, war prisoners and more generally opponents of the Nazi regime passed through to reach as rapidly as possible the other side of the Vosges.

The Drumont's farm was assaulted by the Gestapo on Thursday, 21st September 1944, wrecked and burnt down the next day, following the denunciation of fake Resistance members infiltrated in the Resistance network.

The execution of Nicolas the father, his youngest son Paul and Georges Sac at the Steingraben took place 3 days after their detention, on Sunday, 24th September 1944.



Nicolas the father making cheese at the farm.

(Photo lent by Jean-Jacques Lutenbacher).

Role played by the members of the family Lutenbacher and the fate of each one:

Nicolas, the father:



His entire life had been devoted to work, to his family, but also to a noble and patriotic ideal.

Famous for his hospitality, his warm welcome and his firm handshake, Nicolas Lutenbacher had been appointed Officer of Agricultural Merit.

Besides, he had been honoured with the Medal of the French Recognition for services rendered to the French troops during the W.W.I in 1918.

He was the one who supervised the multiple activities that took place under his roof. Role, he will pay with his life at the Steingraben, on 24th

September 1944.

Paul:

He was born on 3rd June 1913 in Fellerling and was the youngest boy of the siblings.

He worked as a farmer with his father and also as a postman in Bussang, Paul was an active member of Resistance, as well as a smuggler of refugees and a liaison officer like his other brothers.

Arrested at the farm with his father and Georges Sac, on 21st September, he will be executed aged 31 years old at the Steingraben, at the same time as them, on 24th September 1944.

Emile

(Photo from Marie-France Franchet, Emile's daughter)

Captain of the F.F.I. (French Resistance Forces operating within France during W.W. II) **and leader of the maquis at Le Thillot.**

He was born on 11th November 1904 in Fellerling.

Emile, just as his brothers, helped more than 1500 fugitives to pass the other side of the Vosges, often at the risk of his life. Like all his brothers, he perfectly knew the region.



Furthermore, he regularly met at his father's inn important personalities within the framework of Resistance in Alsace and several local maquis.

He had set up links with the GMA-Vosges (Mobile Group of Alsace) in relation with Marcel Kibler, alias commander Marceau.

He directed with other Resistance fighters the maquis district of Bussang and Le Thillot (Vosges).

The mystery about Emile Lutenbacher's murder:

The Gestapo arrested him on 22nd September 1944 at the inn as he returned from a mission. However, he was neither part of those sentenced to death at the Steingraben on 24th September, nor of those on 4th October 1944.

What happened to him?

On 10th December 1944, during the official funeral of the victims at the Steingraben, nobody knew, what happened to him.

His horribly mutilated dead body was found only on 26th April 1945, not far from Pond Jean, at the foot of the Drumont, where he had his farm and headquarters and where so many refugees had found shelter and help.

The mystery about the exact circumstances of this heinous murder remains intact.

The former Resistance fighters and patriots on both sides of the Vosges erected in his honour a monument at the edge of the Pond Jean, on the road leading to the Drumont near the place where his dead body was found.

During the inauguration ceremony, on 11th May 1947, the War Cross with Silver Star was posthumously handed to Emile Lutenbacher's widow.

11th May 1947-
Many people
attended the
inauguration
ceremony of the
stele erected in
Emile
Lutenbacher's
honour at Pond
Jean.

(Photo lent by
Jean-Jacques
Lutenbacher).



Stele in Emile Lutenbacher's honour,
ceremony of the 11th May 1947, in
presence of his wife, his daughter Marie-
France – the little fair-haired girl – of
Suzanne, Antoine's daughter (beside M^{rs}
Lutenbacher), of Bernard and Albertine,
Albert's children.

(Photo lent by Jean-Jacques Lutenbacher)



New photo of the stele from 2015.

Many thanks to M^{rs} Marie-
France Franchet, Emile
Lutenbacher's daughter,
and to M^r Jean-Jacques
Lutenbacher, Eugène's son,
for all lent documents and
photos about the family.



Antoine :

He was born in 1900 and was the second boy of the siblings.

He acted as a smuggler of refugees on Alsatian side of the Vosges, like his brother Eugène, often at the risk of his own life.

Accused by the Gestapo of intense resistance activities in his village, he had been arrested for a first time on 25th February 1942 with his daughter Suzanne.

Both were interned to the security camp of Schirmeck as “enemies of the German State”, but were released on 25th May 1942.

Antoine was arrested for a second time on 18th November 1944 and transferred to the prison of Colmar and then to Strasbourg, before being deported to the KL-Gaggenau (Germany) along with his 17year old daughter.

They were released by the French Army on 14th April 1945 and then repatriated to France.

Antoine Lutenbacher, who became the Mayor of Husseren-Wesserling after the war for many years was awarded the War Cross with Silver Star on 29th November 1950.

He died on 20th October 1970 in Husseren-Wesserling.

Drawing of Claude Burret, from the book entitled « Le camp d'internement de Schirmeck », testimonies, volume 1, p 26, Collection Essor, 1994.



Antoine Lutenbacher, manager of the grocery “Sadale” in Husseren-Wesserling.

(Photo lent by Jean-Jacques Lutenbacher).

Charles was born on 11th October 1905 in Bussang.

Like his other brothers, he was a people smuggler and a liaison officer; he also played an important role in the local Resistance and in the maquis of the Vosges.

Above, a photo taken during the ceremony at the Steingraben, where he was awarded a medal for his gallantry, next to his brother Eugène.

Charles died on 7th September 2001 in Oderen.

Awarding ceremony at the Steingraben. Eugène (on the right) and his brother Charles.

(Photo lent by Jean-Jacques Lutenbacher).



Eugène Lutenbacher, story of his incredible courage and ruse to thwart his arrest by the Gestapo:

He continued to supply the Resistance network, to give any kind of orders and to act as people smuggler despite the fact that he was watched very closely by the Gestapo. They had already arrested him several times, but released him again and again.

During the night his family was arrested at the farm of the Drumont, on 21st September 1944, 2 members of the Gestapo armed with machine guns broke into Eugène's home in Fellingering and enjoined him to follow them.

He quickly realized that this time the situation was very serious!

He tried to coax both SS and asked his wife Odile to serve them a little schnaps while he put on his shoes, he never would!

Indeed, as soon as he got into his bedroom situated on the first floor, he tied 2 bed sheets together, fixed them to a window ledge and dashed off as quickly as possible.

While crossing the street he even had the courtesy to greet innocently the SS driver who was sitting in the sinister Gestapo van, smoking a cigarette and waiting for the arrival of his 2 colleagues and the prisoner!

Knowing by heart whole paths and trails from Fellingering to the Drumont, he hastened to reach his parents' farmhouse to warn them.

Alas! Arrived on the crest, he noticed, that all lights inside the farm were unusually on.

Determined to save his family from the Nazis' claws, he approached the farm despite the obvious danger and silenced the dogs by the usual whistling. Through a half-open door, he saw the silhouette of an SS armed to the teeth!

Well aware of the desperate situation for his family and for all the people inside the inn, he fled towards the Alsatian hillside. He took refuge at a trustworthy friend's, at the Debenath farm located near Rammersbach.

The Debenath family resupplied him and helped him. They kept him hidden under 5meter of hay right from his family members' arrest to the final liberation, on 2nd December 1944.

Eugène Lutenbacher died on 14th January 1999 in Mulhouse.



Eugène Lutenbacher wearing a soldier uniform.

Résistance medal awarded to Eugène Lutenbacher by General Gruss in 1949.

(Photos lent by Jean-Jacques Lutenbacher, Eugène's son).



At the window:

Eugène Lutenbacher and his wife Odile,
together with other inhabitants of
Fellingering.

In the middle Nicolas' portrait, the
father.

Photo from the 28th August 1948.

(Photo lent by Jean-Jacques
Lutenbacher).



Source :

Many thanks to Jean-Jacques Lutenbacher, Eugène's and Odile's son, for all precious documents and photos about his family and local Resistance.

Albert:

Albert's extraordinary flight and his incredible odyssey:

He was born, on 3rd February 1910 in Bussang. He worked on the family's other farm at the Etang-Jean (pond Jean), while the rest of the family drove the cattle on the meadows to the Drumont and spent the summer at the farm and inn.

The Etang-Jean also served as welcome place and passage for fugitives.

Albert Lutenbacher had been arrested by the Gestapo on 3 occasions already, on 18th September 1941, on 13th January 1942 and on 17th October the same year.

He was then imprisoned in Epinal (Vosges) where he underwent brutal interrogations, the usual food deprivation and torture, before being released.

The Gestapo suspected him of favouring the clandestine passage of young Alsatian fugitives to the other side of the Vosges, as well as to collecting parachuted weapons and handing them out to several maquis of the region.

On the same day as the family Lutenbacher's arrest at the Drumont farm, the countryside warden of Bussang came to see him and announced him, that he had to give 2 bovines to provide the German troops with fresh supplies of meat.

As there were only a pregnant cow and a calf at his farm of the Etang-Jean, Albert decided to go next morning with his assistant to the Drumont farm.

So he arrived on 22nd September 44 at the farm which had been assaulted the day before.

The SS men ordered him to bring the 2 bovines demanded by the Wehrmacht to Bussang.

They took Albert with them on the way to Bussang, one leading a bovine and the other armed to the teeth!

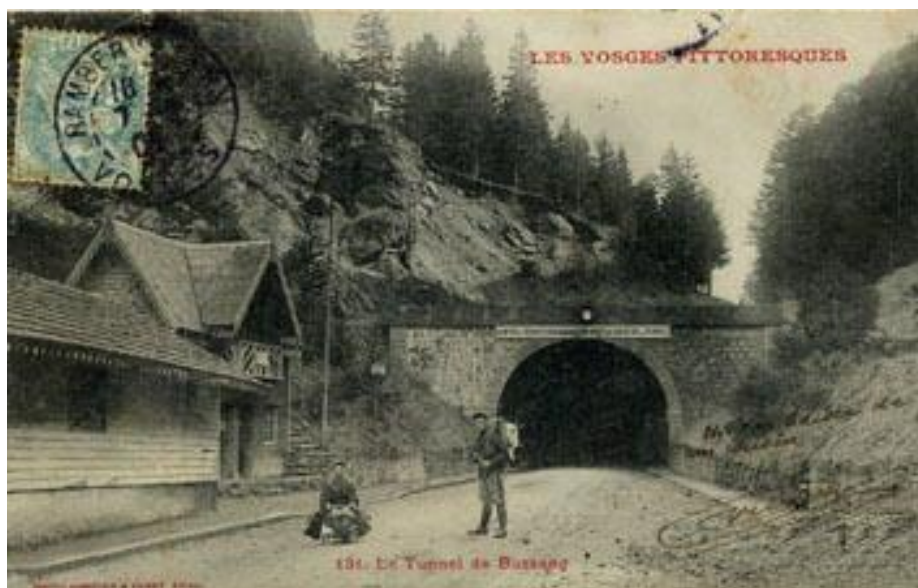
Albert was leading the second bovine but was walking about 20 steps in front of them. In the middle of the forest he suddenly took a short cut with many scrubs and multiple obstacles and promptly disappeared. He went back to his farm!

But during the night between 26th and 27th November 1944, at about 3 o' clock, the Gestapo burst in and arrested him for the second time.

The SS men were very drunk and with their submachine gun under their arms they took Albert with them to an unknown destination.

This night walking finally brought them to the ancient tunnel of the Bussang pass.

At about 5.30 h in the morning a vehement altercation broke out between SS men and a Wehrmacht patrol.



The prisoner took advantage of this unexpected luck to slip away and to disappear as rapidly as possible through the forest.

Thus he managed one last time to escape to certain death by the Nazis and their torturers.

Early in the morning he reached the place called “Germans’ heads” but the Wehrmacht had retreated there.

One more time, Albert Lutenbacher was made prisoner, but this time only a violent shot of the French artillery pounding the German positions saved him.

The surveillance of the prisoner was no longer vital and again, it was for Albert the best opportunity to take to his heels, speeding through the firing guns, narrowly escaping death several times.

After a long and risky escape, he managed to join the French frontlines 2 kilometers away on the heights of Bussang.

It was the best opportunity for him to give to the French command precious information about the Germans’ exact position of the Germans, which lead to effective strikes!

On the next morning, on 28th November 44, Albert Lutenbacher left the place and walked towards the Drumont to guide a group of the Corps Franc Pommiès, at the head of French patrols.

On 1st December 1944, Albert Lutenbacher went back home to the Etang-Jean where he found his mother who had been released from the Schirmeck security camp.

But the joy of that reunion was very short since seven days later the corpses of the shooting at the Steingraben had been exhumed.

The SS had buried them in shallow graves and the Mayor of Bussang, M^r François Pottecher, got the permission to exhume them and to give them a proper burial.

The exhumation of the Nazi victims took place on 8th December 1944 and the official burial on 10th.

Albert died, on 22nd June 1996 in Remiremont.

Conclusion:

In a letter dated 1st May 1947 and sent to General Noettinger, commander of Subdivision of the Haut-Rhin in Colmar, Marcel Kibler described the Lutenbacher family in these words:

“The Lutenbacher family represents in the most complete way the old French family. From the old father to the youngest of the sons, they bore the qualities of their race, patriotic, courageous and with an unanimously recognized integrity. They never spared their efforts or their goods in the service of their country. To this service, some of them gave their life, the

others lost their dearest loved ones, but their example will remain for ever engraved in the hearts of the inhabitants living in the valleys of Alsace and Vosges”.



Photo lent by Jean-Jacques Lutenbacher, from left to right: Albert's wife, Charles's wife, Eugène, Charles, Marthe, Christine, Michel's wife, Albert / Joseph et Michel in a crouching position.

Wonderful panorama at the Drumont that Nicolas, the father, could appreciate each day from his farm.
New photo taken in 2015.



Sources :

Eric Le Normand, AERIA, Strasbourg, « La famille Lutenbacher ».

Jean-Jacques Lutenbacher, family's photos and several documents, among them

- Article from the newspaper L'Alsace, 1964, « Il y a 20 ans, la tragédie du Drumont » written by Pierre Hueber + several other articles about the Lutenbacher family written by the same journalist.
- Article from l'Alsace, 14th May 1947, entitled « Au Drumont, Inauguration d'une stèle commémorative en l'honneur du Capitaine F.F.I. Emile Luttenbacher ».

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