

## **The local Resistance and the maquis of the Vosges:**

### **1) The GMA-Vosges (Mobile Group of Alsace) and the different maquis, like the « Poteau », the « Peut-Haut », Séchenat, Le Thillot, Bussang and the role played by Emile Lutenbacher.**

Stele in memory of the Maquis called Peut-Haut.



To the GMA-Vosges created in 1944, belonged Guy d'Ornant, lieutenant-colonel, alias Marchal and Marcel Kibler.

Marcel Kibler, alias major Marceau, engaged Emile Ehlinger, alias captain Vebaly, responsible for the district of Thann, to establish permanent connection with the Resistance fighters in the Vosges.

Emile Ehlinger chose the Drumont, which constituted in view of the geographical situation an ideal joining place between the Thur Valley and the Vosges.

The 4<sup>th</sup> grouping of the Resistance in the Vosges was managed by the major Gonand, alias Lucien, and the headquarters of the GMA-Vosges moved to Raon-l'Etape.

Its aim was more to deliver information than to help to escape. This group will above all exercise its action in the region of the Donon and in the valleys of the Plaine and Rabodeau.

The GMA-Vosges led the parachuting of small weapons, for example the dropping of May 44 on the ground of the "Cent Sous", near the village of Beulotte-Saint-Laurent, the dropping of July 44 on the ground of the "Atelots", another on the field of "Sources de l'Ognon", on 31<sup>st</sup> August 1944.

The mission of the maquis in relation with the GMA-Vosges was to collect and to diffuse information among themselves, to receive and to share parachuted weapons, to provide for the supply and finally to assure the link between the GMA-Vosges and the various local maquis.

Emile Lutenbacher managed the maquis of Le Thillot-Bussang and was captain of the F.F.I. (French Forces operating within France).

His headquarters were at the farm near the Etang Jean (Pond Jean), the farm and inn of his father Nicolas constituted the strategic centre of information, the crucial meeting place between Resistance fighters.

Indeed, the farm welcomed hundreds of fugitives, draft evaders and Nazi opponents. The Lutenbacher boys guided them from the Drumont towards the other hillside of the Vosges.

However, the coming and going at the Drumont drew the attention of the Gestapo and favoured the denouncement by collaborators.

A concrete and fatal example experienced by the Lutenbacher family: one day, 3 men stood like escaped prisoners and asked hospitality in the farm. The father, Nicolas, in his immense goodness welcomed them. But suddenly, they disappeared. They were men of the Milice!

According to other sources, a false Resistance fighter infiltrated into the network and denounced the family.

The fact remains, that the Gestapo reacted rapidly: assault of the farmhouse on 21<sup>st</sup> September 44, ransacking and burning of the inn, on 22<sup>nd</sup> September, first execution at the Steingraben on 24<sup>th</sup> September 44 – among the Nazi victims, the father Nicolas and his son Paul - second execution at the Steingraben on 4<sup>th</sup> October 1944.

Regarding Emile Lutenbacher, he was arrested on 22<sup>nd</sup> September 44 at the farm, assaulted the day before by the Gestapo after denouncement.

Yet, he was not part of the condemned men, neither of those on 24<sup>th</sup> September, nor of those on 4<sup>th</sup> October 1944.

What happened to him?

On 10<sup>th</sup> December 1944, during the official burial of the shot victims at the Steingraben, nobody knew, what happened to him, neither where he could be.

Only on 26<sup>th</sup> April 1945, his atrocious disabled body was found near the Etang Jean (Pond Jean), at the foot of the Drumont, where he had his headquarters and where so many Alsatian draft evaders had found refuge and help.

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

On 26<sup>th</sup>, 28<sup>th</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup> September as well as on 2<sup>nd</sup> October 1944, the Gestapo and the Waffen-SS arrested nearly 60 persons in Bussang, Saint-Maurice, le Thillot and its surroundings, accused of being part of the Resistance.

When Allied American and French troops approached, the Resistance fighters and maquisards played a key role and they brought a great help, not only in the field of Intelligence, but also by guiding the troops and patrols.

Message of General de Gaulle to the Maquisards, Algiers, August 30<sup>th</sup>, 1943:

*“What you are doing, what you are suffering in the Resistance, that means in the fight, the honour and the greatness of France are depending on – We are getting near the end! Here the reward:*

*Soon, together, we will weep for joy.”*

Source :

Document lent by Jean-Jacques Lutenbacher :

- Bulletin de la Haute Moselle, N° 14, « La Libération septembre/octobre 1944 », édité par le Foyer Socio-Educatif du Collège du Thillot.

Internet websites about the maquis in the Vosges.

## 2)The Corps Franc Pommiès [Irregular Force] and Jean-Paul Sac.



André Pommiès



The CFP, 49<sup>th</sup> Infantry's Regiment, is a Pyrenean Corps Franc (Irregular Force), created on 17<sup>th</sup> November 1942 by André Pommiès, as part of ARO (Army Resistance Organization). André Pommiès was lieutenant-colonel and issued from the prestigious military school of Saint Cyr.

In 1944, the Corps Franc was composed of approximately 90000 men, ready to fight against the Nazis.

On 4<sup>th</sup> September 1944, The CFP went off from the Pyrenean Massifs, crossed the Central Massif and bitterly fought in the region near Autun, from 7<sup>th</sup> to 10<sup>th</sup> September, 1944.

On 22<sup>nd</sup> September 1944, the CFP passed under the command of General de Lattre de Tassigny -First French Army- and he entrusted him with the mission to liberate the Vosges.

He fought in the Vosges and in Alsace from 24<sup>th</sup> September 1944 to 5<sup>th</sup> February 1945. He particularly distinguished himself on 28<sup>th</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup> November 1944, when he broke the enemy positions at a height of 1200m, on the meadows of the Drumont.

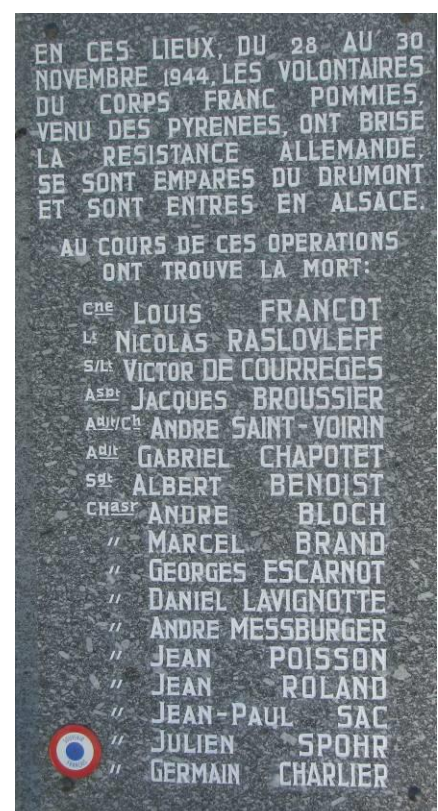
Indeed, the mission in Alsace was to break the bolt of the Thillot and of Bussang, as well as the pass at Oderen and to free the Massif of the Drumont, as well as the Valley of the Thur and later the rest of Alsace after the liberation of Bussang.

On 27<sup>th</sup> November 1944, about at one o'clock in the early morning, the group arrived exhausted to the Drumont, after a long walk with icy cold and with thick snow and after bitter battles, lasting 60 days to free completely the Ramonchamp's region.  
The release of le Thillot and Fresse could be observed on 26<sup>th</sup> November 1944.

In the night of the 27<sup>th</sup> to the 28<sup>th</sup> November, Jean-Paul Sac, a young civilian of le Thillot, offered the FCP his perfect knowledge of the region, to guide the group. But seriously injured by the enemy, J.P Sac succumbed to his wound, while he was going to be 17 years old in December.

On 29<sup>th</sup> November at 5.30 a.m., the First Battalion and the First Company were lining up for battle near the place called Plain du Repos.  
Fights were bitter and deadly. However, the fall at the Drumont allowed to open the road towards the Valley of the Thur.

On 2<sup>nd</sup> December 1944, the First Battalion settled definitely near the Rammersbach. On the same day, Urbès was finally released.





(Memorial of the Corps Franc Pommiers, list of the members killed at the liberation front near the inn at the Drumont).

At Christmas, the FCP entered into the Valley of the Thur and advanced towards Thann.

André Pommiers said about the welcome and hospitality of the inhabitants in the Valley of the Thur:

*“After bitter fights, every home opened us its door, so that my men, who were numb with cold and exhausted, could warm up in the sweet family warmth”.*



Sources :

- Documents lent by Jean-Jacques Lutenbacher about the Corps Franc Pommiers.
- The CFP's Internet website.
- Documents lent by Eric Le Normand, AERIA, Strasbourg.
- Documents lent by Meny, curator of the Museum Serret at Saint-Amarin.



Photos filed by the CFP.

However, for all the battles fight by the CFP for the global Liberation, the price to pay will be heavy: 3000 wounded, 156 prisoners, 575 dead and missed men, including 260 in the Resistance.

### 3)The Network Martial or the refusal to be forcibly incorporated in the Wehrmacht



**Marcel Kibler** (1904-1992), alias major Marceau, was born on 11<sup>th</sup> September 1904 in Saint-Amarin in a family, which was very attached to France.

After a training in decoration in a school at Zurich, he entered the dye workshops Breuil in his home town. There, he created fabrics' impression and became the technical director within the company.

His father, Martin Kibler, was for a long time the Mayor of the municipality of Saint-Amarin. At already 10, he had been strongly impressed, when French troops arrived to his home town and paraded in 1914.

Mobilized in 1939 in the 189<sup>th</sup> Artillery Regiment in Dole, he was demobilized in 1940 and returned to Saint-Amarin.

His wife, Marcelle Chaillet was considered by Germans as a French wife from “the inside”, because she was native of Haute-Saône. For this reason, Marcel Kibler was summoned at the town hall of Saint-Amarin to sign, in front of the “Kreisleiter”, a submission statement to the German Reich, otherwise it meant expulsion out of Alsace, that was forcibly annexed.

As he refused to sign this document, he was immediately deported, as well as all members of his family.

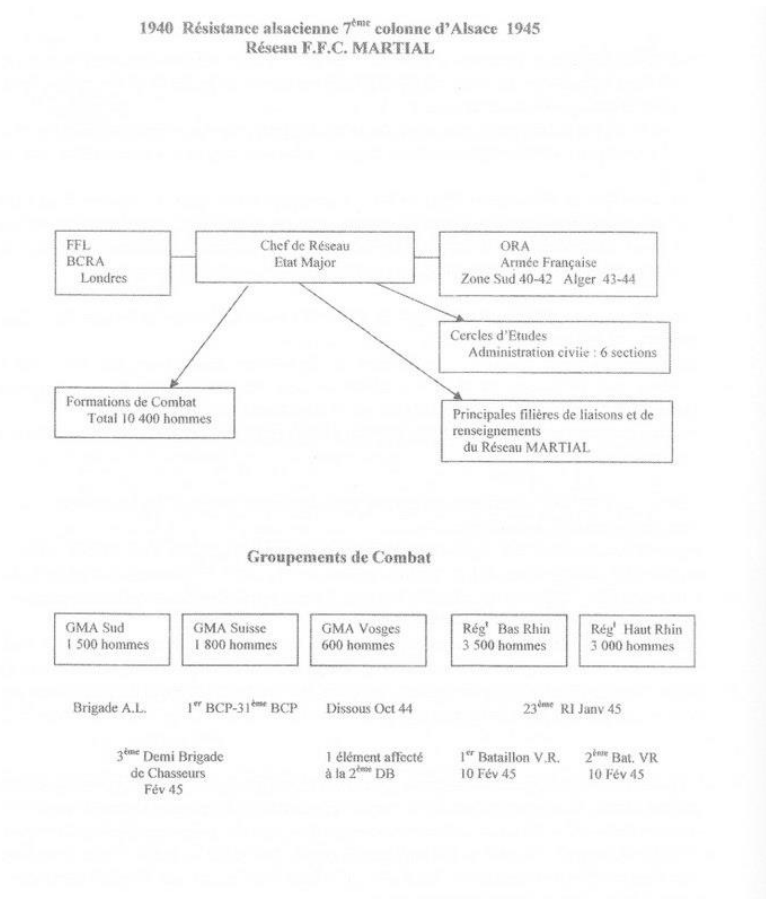
Marcel Kibler, leader of the FFI in Alsace – Museum Serret, Saint-Amarin.



## Marcel Kibler and the creation of the Network Martial:

Set up in 1941 by Paul Dungler (Thann) and Marcel Kibler (Saint-Amarin), the Network Martial, 7<sup>th</sup> Column, allowed the connection between Resistance groups in Alsace and other French regions.

At the end of 1940, Paul Dungler and Marcel Kibler had to leave Alsace and to give command of the 7<sup>th</sup> column to Paul Winter, future major Daniel.



The Network Martial integrated into the ORA – Resistance Organisation inside the French Army.

Organization chart, Museum Serret, Saint-Amarin.

They found themselves in Lyon, with the lieutenant Laurent and created in 1941 the direction committee of the **Alsatian Resistance**, previously Network Martial.

It allowed not only the link between Resistance in Alsace and in other French regions, but also the connection with networks at London.

The “**GMA-Sud**” [South Mobile Group of Alsace] consisting of 1500 men became the **independent Brigade Alsace-Lorraine**, created on 17<sup>th</sup> September 1944 and ordered by **André Malraux**, alias colonel Berger. It was directly issued from the Network Martial.

The “**GMA-Vosges**” created in 1944 was constituted of Guy d’Ornant, alias lieutenant-colonel Marchal, and Marcel Kibler.

The headquarters of the GMA-Vosges settled to Raon-l’Etape; its purpose was more to diffuse information, than to help for escape.

Paul Winter, alias major Daniel, for the Haut-Rhin, and Georges Kieffer, alias major François, for the Bas-Rhin, unquestionably managed the Resistance groups inside Alsace, forcibly annexed to the III. Reich.

**The “GMA- Suisse”** [Switzerland] was managed by major Georges. He helped the general Giraud to fly to Switzerland, after his incredible escape in April 1942 from the prison at Koenigstein, situated at the Elbe’s bank.

#### Aims of the GMA:

At first Intelligence and diffusing of information, organization of escape channels, working out of a future battle against Nazi enemies, parachuting of light weapons thank to the Allies. These purposes were led by a unique leitmotiv: *“Alsace has to participate itself to its liberation!”*

Marcel Kibler, alias major Marceau, also participated in meetings with local F.F.I, created on 1<sup>st</sup> February 1944, after having been reinforced in his military command function for the F.F.I. in Alsace.

Indeed, more than 6500 Alsatians – in addition to the various GMA groups- were enlisted in the F.F.I. and they participated in the Liberation, such as the liberation of Mulhouse, on 20<sup>th</sup> November 1944, this of Strasbourg, on 23<sup>rd</sup> November 1944, and that of Colmar, on 2<sup>nd</sup> February 1945.

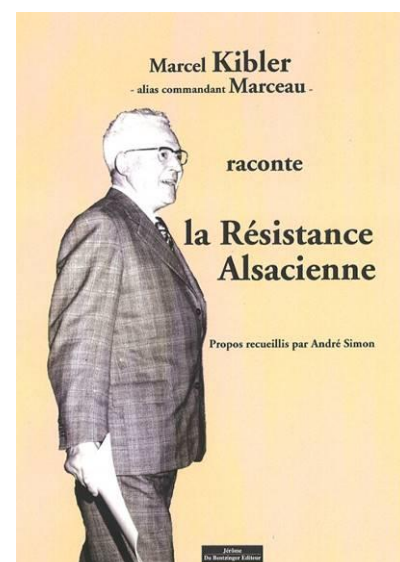
During the attack led by the general Leclerc and the 2<sup>nd</sup> D.B. (Armored Division), Marcel Kibler met the general commander, several times before the final liberation of the Alsatian capital.

A little later, he was next to general Schwartz, to assure the defense of Strasbourg, after the departure of American troops. He also was a good advisor of the general de Lattre de Tassigny.

At first, captain in 1943, then major in 1944, at the head of the Alsatian Resistance, chief of the Alsatian F.F.I., lieutenant-colonel in 1954, Marcel Kibler will forever remain an iconic figure in the regional history.

He earned 18 decorations, including the rosette of the “Légion d’honneur” and the British “King’s Medal for gallantry”, as well as the Medal of Resistance with rosette and several mentions in dispatches.

Jean Eschbach said about the major Marceau:  
*“Marcel Kibler had the soul and the prowess of Empire marshals; he had their boldness and their fairness”.*





Man of exception and gallantry, at the same time admired and criticized for his actions, Marcel Kibler possessed other talents than the military commandment for a great cause; indeed, he occupied his leisure moments in painting – for example Nicolas Lutenbacher's portrait.

He also liked to walk in the mountains, to go hunting and to welcome friends in his property in the Haute-Saône.

As pensioner from 1975, he also devoted his time in the service of many associations in relation with the work of collective Memory.



Marcel Kibler decorated with the Légion d'honneur, on 15<sup>th</sup> February 1945. Museum Serret, Saint-Amarin.

The major Marceau in Strasbourg, at the end of the World War II.

Museum Serret, Saint-Amarin.

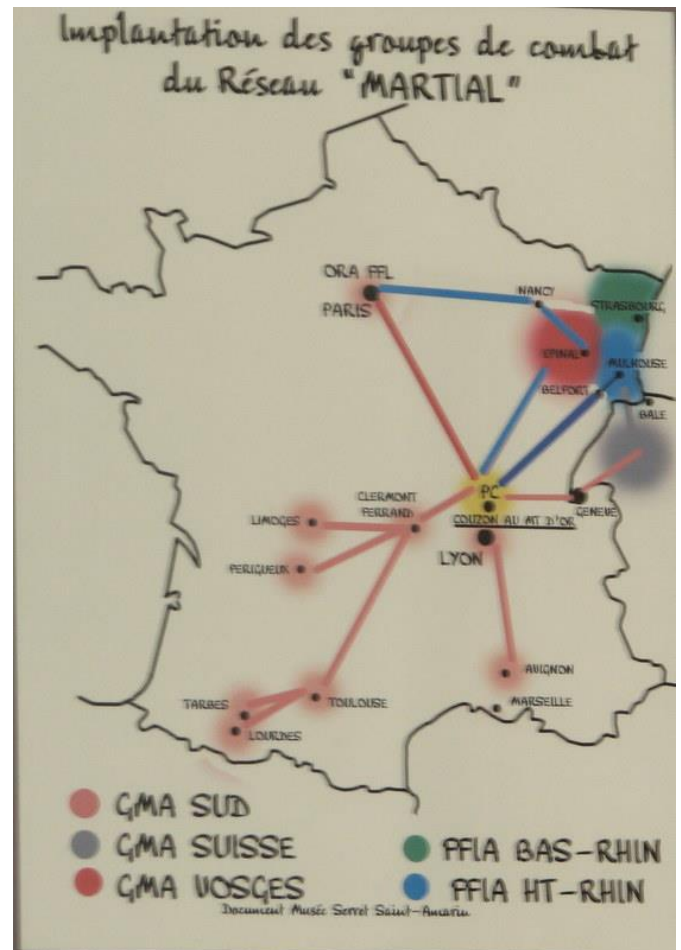


Le commandant Marceau à Strasbourg, à la fin de la guerre.

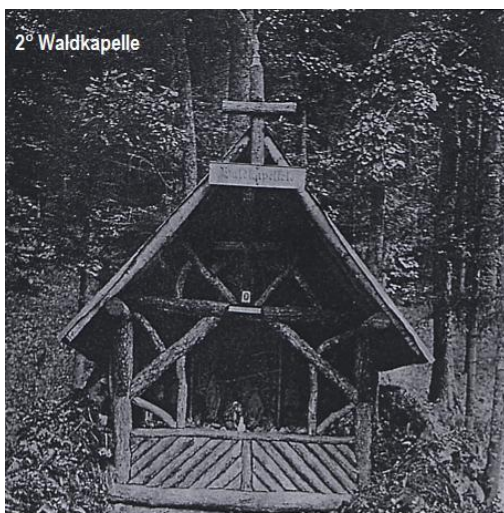
Sources:

Many thanks to Gilbert Meny, curator of the museum Serret at Saint-Amarin, for all precious documents and photos.

- Article of l'Alsace, 3<sup>rd</sup> July 1992 written by Edouard Boeglin: « L'adieu au commandant Marceau ».
- Article of l'Alsace, 3<sup>rd</sup> July 1992 written by Désiré Zurbach: « Le commandant Marceau n'est plus ».
- Article of L'Alsace, 5<sup>th</sup> November 1994 written by Raymond Hober : « Trois jours avec le commandant Marceau ».
- Book written by André Simon : « Marcel Kibler –alias commandant Marceau- raconte la Résistance Alsacienne », édition Jérôme Do Bentzinger, 2008.
- Excerpt of the book entitled « Marcel Kibler, commandant Marceau, patron incontesté de la Résistance alsacienne ».
- « La résistance hors d'Alsace », CANOPE, Mireille Biret, 2010.
- PDF, website about the GMA-Vosges.



#### 4) The maquis of the Waldkapelle – Thann



#### Geographic situation:

The Waldkapelle is located at the “Herrenstubenkopf”, hillsides, in the north-west of Thann (Alsace, Haut-Rhin).

#### Historical and political context:

During the debacle in June 1940, the French soldiers left their weapons in the region; they were found by a group of young people, among them André and Maurice Bucher from Bitschwiller-lès-Thann and Armand Neff from Vieux-Thann.

The weapons were immediately hidden somewhere in the mountain of the Rossberg.

#### Circumstances of the Waldkapelle tragedy:

In 1941, young people of Vieux-Thann, including Jean and Armand Neff, Albert Vonna, Eugène Hauler and Antoine Stantina got together and decided to reorganize old shelters of the W.W.I. as well as natural caves at the end of the Valley called Zuhren, near the Waldkapelle.

In 1944, those young Alsatian civilians refused to be enlisted in the Wehrmacht, as well as to have to work in Germany in the framework of the STO – compulsory work service -

That was the reason, why they went underground and participated to the supplying of local maquisards; they hoped, that the Allies would come soon and release them from the Nazi yoke.

The brothers Gaston and Louis Luttenauer from Cernay met Armand Neff and Gérard Bemmert from Moosch, as well as Emile Grassler from Bitschwiller, Emile Frey, Robert Foehrenbacher and René Onkel from Vieux-Thann, Auguste Rohrbach and André Bilwès from Steinbach, Charles Hugin, Edouard Cattaneo, Jean Hugon, René Dormois and Charles Voisin from Thann, and finally Anatole Jacquot, a maquisard looked for by the Gestapo.

At the middle of September 1944, Jean Hugon wished to put the weapons at the maquis' disposal.

Thus, they were transported and hidden in the cellar of the family Luttenauer.

Jean Hugon had already been arrested by the Gestapo, on 19<sup>th</sup> September 1944, imprisoned into the security camp at Schirmeck-La Broque, but finally released, on 8<sup>th</sup> October 1944.

During the night of the 10<sup>th</sup> to the 11<sup>th</sup> October 44, Armand Neff, Charles Voisin and Gérard Bemmert recovered the weapons and transported them to a place, fit out in the forest near the Waldkapelle.

#### Tragedy of the 18<sup>th</sup> October and execution in Rammersweier, on 6<sup>th</sup> December 1944:

Were they denounced? Did the maquisards be foolhardy? Or did some of them act in collusion with the Gestapo? The opinions are diverging.

It's sure that the Waffen-SS unit called “Charlemagne” and settled in Cernay succeeded in surrounding the place, where the maquis was hidden.

The toll was a disaster: Gaston and Louis Luttenauer were arrested and tortured by the Gestapo installed at Thann's police station.



Inscription written on their tomb.

Both will be executed, on 6<sup>th</sup> December 1944 with 9 other fellow maquisards of Thann in the forest of Rammersweier, near Offenbourg, Germany.

Only Armand Neff and René Onkel could escape.

List of the 11 shot maquisards:

Alfred Bucher - Thann

Edouard Cattaneo – Thann

René Dormois – Thann

Charles Hugin – Thann

Jean Hugon – Thann

Charles Voisin - Thann

Gaston Luttenauer – Cernay

Louis Luttenauer – Cernay

Robert Foehrenbacher – Vieux-Thann

Emile Grassler - Bitschwiller

G rard Bemmert – Moosch



(Photo, website of Thann’s municipality, the way of Memory, at the square called “Petit Bungert”).



Anatole Jacquot was also killed, 31 persons were arrested, among them 9 women and 22 men.



Stele at the place called « Bruderthal », district of Steinbach, where Anatole Jacquot's body had been found.

(Source: photo Internet from René Gerber's book - see bibliography, please).

The 9 women were transferred, on 7<sup>th</sup> December 1944, to the camp at Wolfach (Baden county, Germany), later on 11<sup>th</sup> to Ravensbrück; 5 of them died there.

Out of the 22 arrested men, only 7 will survive from the camps or been released by the French Army from the jail at Mulhouse.

As for instance:

→ Paul Hauser was arrested on 19<sup>th</sup> October 1944 and deported to Ravensbrück, where he died.

→ On 23<sup>rd</sup> October 1944, André Bilwès was arrested and interned at Buchenwald, he will survive.

→ François Neff, Robert Gross and René Schweiss were exterminated at Dachau; Joseph Mann deported to Buchenwald.

About the 9 arrested women:

→ Louise Stantina perished at Sachsenhausen.

→ Antoinette Voisin, Charles' wife, was sentenced to forced labor in Berlin; then she was deported to Sachsenhausen and Ravensbrück. Released by the Red Army, she had been entrusted to the English Army. In Lüneburg, while she was ready to board the plane bringing her back to her native country, she passed away, exhausted.

The bodies of the 11 shot maquisards from the Waldkapelle were exhumed, on 5<sup>th</sup> May and buried with dignity at the Offenburg's cemetery, on 8<sup>th</sup> May 1947.



On 16<sup>th</sup> November 1947, the 11 bodies were brought back to Thann and buried in their own respective village.

Stele at Rammersweier, at the place called « Thalebuckel », where the 11 corpses had been thrown into a bomb crater. (Photos Internet).

Inscription: « *Here on 6<sup>th</sup> December 1944, eleven Resistance fighters from Thann sealed with their blood the fidelity of Alsace to France* ».



Photo taken from Marthe Clauser's book entitled, « 1940-1945, *Le Haut-Rhin en images* » Sodim 1977, p. 72, 73.

The 11 coffins at Rammersweier in 1947.

Judgment of the SS men, guilty of the crime:

Erwin Schöner, born on 7<sup>th</sup> February 1905 in Karlsruhe, succeeded in integrating the "US Counter Intelligence Corps", then he joined Argentina.

Friedrich Ochs, at the Offenburg's trial in November 1964, affirmed, that he hadn't at all participated to the tragedy of the Waldkapelle.

Like many other Nazi criminals, his act remained unpunished!

At the military trial in Metz, in October 1948, Léon Fleckenstein, former lieutenant of the police in Thann and Théo Zimmermann, former lieutenant of the SS, were the only to appear

at court. The first had been acquitted and the second got a jail sentence of 2 years and 4 months.

Consequences of the tragedy at the Waldkapelle and of the W.W.II for local population of Vieux-Thann and surroundings:

The little village of Vieux-Thann was seriously destroyed and had lost many inhabitants:

- 114 French soldiers killed during the liberation of Vieux-Thann.
- Death of 25 civilian people.
- 30 serious injured persons.
- 31 persons arrested by the Gestapo, among them 9 from Vieux-Thann.
- Death of an inhabitant, during his arrest.
- Arrest of 11 maquisards, then execution at Rammersweier, at the forest place called "Thalebuckel".
- Death of 6 deported persons in various Nazi camps.
- 3 missing persons.
- Deportation of 19 other inhabitants.
- Expulsion of 37 families to the "Inside" of France.
- Deportation of 5 families (17 persons) to the "Altreich" (German former Empire) + confiscation of all their property.
- 54 young men, forcibly enlisted in the Wehrmacht, dead either at the battlefield or as war prisoners.

Name of the 9 arrested women: Marie-Louise Relly / Marie Frey / Louise Stantina / Antoinette Voisin / Lina Soriaux / Amandine Simon-Klein / Elisabeth Lemblé / Madeleine Neff / Violette Jacquot.

Name of the 22 arrested men: Charles Voisin / René Onkel / Jean Hugon / Gaston et Louis Luttenauer / Georges Simon-Klein / Antoine Stantina / Edouard Cattaneo / Charles Hugin / René Schweiss / Robert Grosz / François Neff / Jean Neff / Robert Foehrenbacher / Paul Hauser / Joseph Mann / Alfred Bucher / René Dormois / André Bilwès / Emile Grassler / Eugène Berna / Emile Frey.

On 11<sup>th</sup> August 1994, at the occasion of the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Vieux-Thann's liberation, proposal of a common remembrance between Rammersweier and Vieux-Thann, as well as edification of a stele at the place called « Thalebuckel » at Rammersweier.

Idea of Jean-Paul Bruckert, son-in-law of Robert Foehrenbacher, shot at the « Thalebuckel », among others.

Official twinning between Rammersweier and Vieux-Thann since 2003.



Plaque fixed to the Church Saint Dominique at Vieux-Thann, on 28<sup>th</sup> January 2008.



#### Sources :

- Internet website, « Le maquis de la Waldkapelle et la tragédie du 18 octobre 1944 », Steinbach.
- AERIA, Eric Le Normand, article about « Le drame du 18 octobre 1944, le maquis de la Waldkapelle ».
- Article of a German newspaper and Internet website of Hans-Peter Goergens, together with Jean-Paul Bruckert, René Gerber, François Scherr, « Denkmal an der Strasse von Rammersweier nach Durbach », Memorial of Offenburg.
- René Gerber, « Vieux-Thann durant la guerre de 1939-1945 », chapitre « Le maquis de la Waldkapelle », 1994.
- Marthe Clauser, « 1940-1945, Le Haut-Rhin en images », éditions Sodim, Belgique, 1977.
- Article of L'Alsace about the tragedy of the Waldkapelle, 28.09.2014, written by Hervé de Chalandar.
- « L'objectif du maquis de la Waldkapelle » written by Mathieu Dvoratchek, 2011, Société d'Histoire et d'Archéologie de Cernay et Environs (SHACE).



**The GMA-Switzerland and the incredible escape of General Giraud:  
the part played by René Ortlieb (Thann) and by the priest Joseph  
Stamm (Liebsdorf)**

**Pierre Bockel, chaplain of the “Brigade d’Alsace-Lorraine, headed by  
André Malraux, alias colonel Berger.**



Mont Ste-Odile - Winter 1944. The colonel Anatole Jacquot and the colonel Berger, André Malraux, speaking together. (Photos, internet).

The “very Christian” Brigade of the colonel Berger, Pierre Bockel’s very good friend, was created on 17<sup>th</sup> September 1944, and was directly issued from the Network Martial.

This Brigade participated between September 1944 and February 1945 in violent fights in Alsace, like the battle of Dannemarie in September 44, then in the liberation of Strasbourg on 23<sup>rd</sup> November 44, after what in its defence during the counter-offensive of von Rundstedt on 6<sup>th</sup> December 44, in the fight of the Colmar’s pocket and finally in the battle near the mount Saint Odile.



Pierre Bockel, chaplain at the French Army.

About the family Bockel in Thann, we have also to mention the brother, Francis Bockel, notary and resistant, as well as the sister, Christiane Bockel-Kammerer, acting as a nurse during French and Italian campaigns.

**René Ortlieb** was born on 29<sup>th</sup> April 1908 in Thann, as the son of the hotelkeeper, Hôtel du Parc, managed later by René himself.



Reserve non-commissioned officer.

Leader of the non-commissioned officers' association at the Valley of the Thur.

Photo Museum Serret, Saint-Amarin.

Very soon, he entered the organization of the 7<sup>th</sup> Column and the Network Martial.

Meetings were held in one of the hotel rooms in Thann.

He also was owner of a shoot land in rent near Liebsdorf, a village situated in the Sundgau, not far from the Swiss border. This fact will play a key-role in relation with Joseph Stamm, born in Thann, but priest in Liebsdorf.

**Joseph Stamm** was born on 9<sup>th</sup> November 1882 in Thann. After his schooling in his home town, he went to Netherlands to study religion at the Society of African Missions.

After several actions led within the African Missions, Joseph Stamm was appointed priest in Liebsdorf.

### **The GMA-Switzerland and the part played by René Ortlieb and by Joseph Stamm:**

With Joseph Stamm and Paul Weiss, René Ortlieb created a flight channel toward Switzerland and he had a lot of contact with the other Alsatian Resistance fighters.

In connection with the GMA-Switzerland, managed by Paul Winter alias major Daniel, with the organization of Auguste Riegel and Max Schieber, and also with the flight channel managed by the Hôtel de la Bourse in Mulhouse, the resistance group of Thann helped the war prisoners and the Nazi opponents to escape to Switzerland.

The help and the support of the priest, Joseph Stamm, and of his housekeeper, Marie-Thérèse Maurer, were going to be precious and useful.

Furthermore, Henri Kupfer, a forest warden from Waldighoffen, escorted maquisards and runaways to the farm called "les Ebourbettes" managed by Camille Latscha and situated at Oberlarg, only 100m far from the Swiss border.

Camille Latscha assured then the passing through the border.

Joseph Stamm was also in contact with Nicolas Sibeline, train employee in Hausbergen (Bas-Rhin) and with Joseph Weinling, director of the expedition service at the railway station of Strasbourg-Cronenbourg.

They passed precious information for the account of the Network FFC Bruno – French Fighting Forces – on to him.

Therefore, René Ortlieb and Joseph Stamm, members of the Network Martial, will be related with the escape of the general Giraud to Switzerland.

The Network Martial and the GMA-Switzerland were responsible of the successful flight of the general Giraud to Switzerland.

Indeed, at the beginning of April 1942, the Network Martial had been contacted by an envoy of the general Linarès, to organize the transfer of a very high rank personality of the French Army: in reality it was the general Giraud, who had succeeded escaping from the Koenigstein castle, on the Elbe's bank in Germany, where he was detained since 17<sup>th</sup> April 1942.

After his escape, the general took the name of Hans Greiner.

Paul Winter's network had to support him at the railway station in Mulhouse, at the moment he would go off the train from Strasbourg. Thus, he had to ensure his flight to Switzerland, on 22<sup>nd</sup> April 1942.

But on the day and at the hour agreed, there was no general in view!

Panic and anxiety among all the persons responsible for his transfer!

The next morning, the general showed up alone in Mulhouse, at the emergency address given to him!

Reason of his absence at the "D" day: he went off the train in Sélestat and took a room in a hotel to have fun!

This attitude wasn't appreciated at all by Marcel Kibler and even less by Paul Winter and his men. Indeed, each member of the group was overwhelmed with such a casualness, after having risked their life for him!

#### Circumstances of René Ortlieb's and Joseph Stamm's arrest and their tragic destiny:

On 2<sup>nd</sup> May 1943, René Ortlieb had to go to the "Inside" of France; the purpose of his journey was to get in touch with Marshal Pétain personally and to set out the problem of the forcibly enlisted young Alsatian men in the Wehrmacht.

But he couldn't personally discuss with the marshal and he had to content himself to speak only with 2 of his ministers.

Unfortunately, he confided in a friend, the priest Joseph Heidet, about the general Giraud's flight and his transfer to Switzerland.

The priest was too talkative and wasn't conscious, that he had been approached by a traitorous and Nazi collaborator, Charles Reiser, who made himself out, to be a French officer from the 2<sup>nd</sup> Office in Paris, in mission in Alsace.

Furthermore, René Ortlieb went in September 1943 to Lyon, where he met with Marcel Kibler and the leaders of the Network Martial.

When he came back to Thann, the Gestapo arrested him, on 21<sup>st</sup> September 1943, on the same day as both priests, Stamm and Heidet.

They were interned at the prison of Mulhouse, where they had to undergo strong interrogations.

3 days later, they were transferred to the prison of Strasbourg. Thanks to the prisoner Victor Schlegel, René Ortlieb managed to send some words to the lawyer, André Moser, and to inform him about the sequence of the interrogations.

On 3<sup>rd</sup> November 1943, the 3 prisoners were transferred to the security camp at Schirmeck-La Broque; they were accused of high treason and the priest Heidet of failure to report, in spite of Maître Moser's defence.

Both priests, Stamm and Heidet, were deported to the prison of Kehl (Germany), whereas René Ortlieb had to keep at the security camp at Schirmeck, till 8<sup>th</sup> December 1943.

Then, he was transferred to the prison at Kehl and from the 2<sup>nd</sup> December 43, the 3 accused prisoners were deported together to the prison at Wolfach, a little town situated in the Black Forest, near Offenburg, Germany.

On 17<sup>th</sup> April 1945, the Gestapo agent, Gehrum, executed 16 prisoners, among them René Ortlieb and the priest Joseph Stamm.

Height of destiny: not more than 2 days later, a group of the First French Army entered the little town of Wolfach!

The corpses of the 2 victims from Thann were exhumed and brought back to France.

On 3<sup>rd</sup> May 1945, the council of Thann organized an imposing burial ceremony in honour to both victims of Nazi barbary.





Sources :

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