



Maquisards collect arms dropped by parachute on a safe zone in Haute-Savoie: it was the only area in France to be liberated by the Resistance

Convincing Resistance fighters of the best time to retreat from a battle was perhaps the hardest thing to do, because they were all determined to inflict the optimum damage on the occupying forces.

Otherwise, it was all a bit of an adventure.

But life was never easy; evading the Germans and the *Milice* (Vichy Militia) was especially difficult.

There was never really any let-up, but however many setbacks we had, we just had to get on with the job in hand.

Major Farmer then smiled, as if thanking Providence, before relating the most memorable experience of his war:

When cycling with a Resistance colleague to meet a member of the Pétain government, whom we thought was going to change sides, I was relieved to have passed through Vichy.

Then, when we came to a fork in this road, a German guard stepped out from nowhere and ordered us to stop. He asked us where we were going, so I replied in German.

This man, who was probably in his forties, then asked me where I'd learnt my German.

I still don't know why, but I said that I'd learnt it in a PoW camp.

Then something strange happened, which I'll never forget. He warned us not to continue on that road, but to turn off to the right and take the back roads.

I feel sure he saved our lives and that there were Germans on the road ahead whom we would have run straight into had we continued on our planned route.

As a result of Hubert's coordination of landing grounds for supply drops, from June to August 1944 the Freelance circuit received some 100 tonnes of weapons and ammunition in 282 containers and 218 packages from 16 drops.

As well as providing vital weapons for the well organised Maquis groups of more than 5,000 men in the area, the arms supply proved invaluable on June 18 when the Resistance stronghold at Mont Mouchet was attacked by the Germans and there was fierce fighting in Chaudes-Aigues.

A force of some 10,000 enemy, using armoured cars, tanks, artillery, four Junkers 88 and two Focke Wulf 190 aircraft, launched a first-class attack.

The battle raged from 7.00 until well into nightfall, when our position became untenable and we received the order to withdraw.

After the withdrawal, a French captain asked Hubert and Hélène to deliver a message to some Maquis in a village 12km away.

On our return, we noticed a Henschel 126 spotter plane following us up the road and had to jump out of the car and into a ditch.

Fearing being captured in the Mont Mouchet battle, Roland had destroyed their radio and codes for security reasons and, with the car now also destroyed, Hubert had to walk 260km to find another Resistance network.

He needed another wireless operator to send a message to London, requesting that they supply a new radio and codes. This was just two weeks after the Allies landed on D-Day.

That day and in the weeks that followed it is estimated that the Germans were deprived of 50 divisions that were tied up fighting battles with the Resistance and, as a result of sabotage, trying to cross bridges that no longer existed.

In July and August 1944, Hubert helped the Resistance in the Tronçais Forest in the Allier and fought in the liberation of Montluçon.

He also coordinated the cutting of

telephone lines and the blowing up of bridges and rail lines.

Hubert, Hélène and Roland were part of Churchill's network of agents who were "to co-ordinate all action, by way of subversion and sabotage, against the enemy overseas."

Their efforts, and those of other SOE agents, saw Britain send over 650 tons of explosives; 723,000 hand grenades; and roughly 500,000 small arms, including 198,000 rifles, 20,000 Bren guns and 58,000 pistols, into France to arm the various Resistance groups around the country.

Major Farmer always refused to carry a suicide pill, for use in case of capture, on missions.

Major Farmer, who worked with the Foreign Office after the war, was appointed Chevalier de la Légion d'Honneur in April, 1996. He said: "I have always felt very much at home here in France."



nce. This painting, Loire Rendezvous launched by SWA Fine Art Publishing

called the Freelance Resistance circuit, liaise with the Massif Central Maquis leader, Emile Coulaudon (codename Gaspard), and get weapons and ammunition to Maquis in the Chaudes-Aigues district.

This involved identifying fields that were suitable for parachute drops of weaponry and ammunition from England; training Resistance fighters to use these arms; and giving them much needed cash.

Once I'd found suitable sites for the drops, the radio operator would send the corresponding Michelin map coordinates to London by wireless telegraph. We would then wait to hear a personalised coded message on the BBC evening news.

This would give the go-ahead for the drop and included additional information such as "Daphne is well and so is her daughter Charlotte".

If intercepted, it meant nothing, but it kept us informed of family affairs.

With the constant fear of betrayal, what was life like working with the Resistance?



Resistance fighters and SOE agents faced a constant danger of betrayal and death. However, this photograph – which became known for the smile on the face 'Victim' – was actually a propaganda picture set up by the Germans