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Marianne

Part Two

The French, and the French Canadians too, have a taste for the cross-lingual pun, a set of sounds meaning one thing in French and another in English.

Our word *debilitate* derives from the French verb *débiliter*, pronounced "day-beel-ee-tay." That derives in turn from the French adjective *débile,* pronounced day-beel and meaning feeble. Used as a noun, *un débile,* it means a moron, a simpleton. The French Canadians, having observed that Americans often refer to George W. Bush as W, pronounced *double-you*, call him *débile-you.*

Richard the Lion Heart, the paragon English king of the *Robin Hood* myth and *Ivanhoe*, wasn't English at all. He was French, an Angevin, he was cold and cruel, he was militarily brilliant, and he spent only six months of his life in England. At Acre in 1191, during the Third Crusade, he let his men massacre 2,600 Arab prisoners and eviscerate them, in search of supposedly swallowed gems. So, for George W. Bush, seeking to inspire fervor against the Arabs and Islam, to use the word "crusade" in a speech was catastrophically stupid.

When I was covering political matters in Paris, I overheard a French diplomat say to an American diplomat, "It is not a question of whether we" — meaning the British and the French — "or the Arabs control the eastern Mediterranean. It is whether we control it or the Russians do." When the United States withdrew its financial support for building the Aswan High Dam, Abdul Gamel Nasser retaliated by turning to the Russians and at the same time seizing the Suez Canal, built by the French and until then a private corporation largely European in ownership. It was open to transit by ships of all nations. With the seizure of the canal by Egypt, and the prohibition of Israeli shipping, the Israelis attacked and took the canal, causing an international furor. But they were fighting for their national life. The story is rather complicated, as all history is, but the British and French moved forces into the canal zone, while the Israelis withdrew to a position ten miles from it. Nasser sank ships in the canal to render it impassable. Dwight D. Eisenhower, then president of the United States, and his evil Secretary of State John Foster Dulles, mounted United Nations pressure on Israel, France, and Britain to withdraw from the canal area. This they did, and the Egyptians took control. The canal was cleared by the UN at a cost of ten million pounds. Had the United States stayed out of that dispute, chances are that Israeli hegemony would extend to the canal, or close to it, and we would not now be having the troubles we are enjoying in that region.

After that, the British and the French — although I recall no comment specifically stating this — took an attitude to the Americans that said in essence: "Okay, you've got it. You be the policeman of the Middle East." The U.S. has been stuck with the expense of it ever since. Later, John F. Kennedy had covert contact with the FLN, the Algerian force demanding independence from the French, surreptitiously encouraging them. The French said at the time that the real reason for the U.S. position was the desire of the Americans to control Middle Eastern oil, and I'm not sure they were wrong. Charles de Gaulle took a referendum, the Algerians voted for independence, and the French withdrew. Algeria, it must be understood, was not a colony: it was a part of France itself, as the State of Alaska is part of the U.S. Now there is a hellish mess in Algeria, about which you read little; but again, the Americans were in part responsible. Is it any wonder the French don't trust them?

The campaign against the French began before the build-up to war with Iraq. You will recall that there was a sudden flurry of reporting on the desecration of Jewish buildings and cemeteries in France. I immediately wondered who was actually doing this. France has a substantial Arab population. The country is 81 percent Catholic (most of them irreligious and many anti-Church), 6.9 percent Muslim, 1.7 percent Protestant, and 1.3 percent Jewish. The Muslim population is a little over twice that of Protestants and Jews combined. So when that indictment-by-smear of the French was going on, I asked my friend Paul Benkimoun about it. Paul is a prominent French jazz critic and commentator. He is also a doctor, and his main work is as medical correspondent of *Le Monde*. His name indicates Sephardic origins, and suggests, he told me, that the family was once in the spice trade. Paul said:

"On antisemitism, of course, books can be written, but to make a long story short I would say that on one hand France has a tradition of antisemitism that was very alive from the days of the Dreyfus case on to the Vichy regime. It was mainly a right-wing antisemitism, the Jews being seen as a symbol of foreign capital (and of course a scapegoat to social and political problems in France). This tradition has lost a lot of its momentum. What we are confronted with now is another form of antisemitism, mainly inside sections of the Muslim community. This is directly linked to the situation in Israel and Palestine. Some connections exist but it would be wrong to see the present wave of antisemitism as a simple continuation of the former. Sharon's government wants to present France as being an antisemitic country to put pressure on the Jewish community in France to come to Israel, the same way it uses the economic crisis in Argentina and racist tensions in South Africa, because now that the flux of Jewish immigration from Russia is drying up, these are the three countries (apart from the USA) where a strong Jewish community exists."

Now, after Jacques Chirac declined to send troops to Iraq, and Bush stamped his foot about it, and the news media reported that "freedom fries" had appeared on the Air Force One menu, the onslaught began. *Après Débile You, le déluge.*

On television news shows, we saw images of American restaurateurs pouring French wines down sewers. Calls went out for a boycott of French goods. When Paula Zahn on CNN made mention of France, the eerily narcissistic Jack Cafferty said, "Never been there. Never intend to go."

Can you imagine the outcry had he spoken in such tones about Jews or African Americans?

More recently, another smug man, Lawrence Eagleburger, secretary of state under the first George Bush, said he would not "kiss a certain part of the French anatomy" to solicit help "winning the peace" in Iraq. I couldn't believe that a man of that position could stoop to gutter vulgarity, and on television.

The *Washington Post* each year runs a contest for the best examples of changing one letter in a word and giving it another meaning. Among the honorable mentions this year is: "Frognostication: The science of predicting what day the following month that France will surrender."

Ah. We're back to that. If we're going to call them "frogs," why don't we restore to American usage all the ethnic epithets? That the *Washington Post* actually printed that joke in itself shocks me. More of the irresponsibility of contemporary journalism.

One night I saw a TV commercial that consisted of four panels, the last being a yellow smiling star over the words Carl's Jr. The first said, in white letters on a blue background, "What did the French do in the Franco-Prussian War? They surrendered." The next: "What did the French do in World War II? They surrendered." The third: "What did the French do in Viet Nam? They surrendered."

So did the Americans. They took a drubbing far worse than that suffered by the French, who got out of Viet Nam with a modicum of dignity, and would have left sooner but for pressure from the Eisenhower administration, particularly Richard Nixon, that they stay. There is no more ignominious set of images than the television news footage of terrified Americans scrambling to board helicopters on the roof of the U.S. embassy in Saigon to escape the Viet Namese.

There is a lot of American business for the French to boycott. U.S. exports to France in 2002 amounted to 19,016 millions of dollars, French exports to the U.S. 28,240 millions, for an overall American deficit of 9,223 million. If the French were to start boycotting in return, the U.S. balance of payments would be much worse than it is. And by the way, 650,000 jobs in the U.S. depend on French investment here.

Jay Leno said on the *Tonight Show*: "How many Frenchmen does it take to defend Paris? Nobody knows — it's never been tried." Oh yes it has, and almost always successfully.

One of the most interesting examples is that of Henri of Navarre, heir presumptive to the French throne, who laid siege to the city several times in the summer of 1590, and failed to take it. The issue was religious. He had been raised Protestant by his mother, but by terms of the Treaty of Nemours, only a Catholic could be king of France. By the end of that summer, the city was surrounded. He has always been held in a certain affection in France, because the ordeal of the city caused him pain. Henri allowed farmers and others to slip through his lines to take provisions to the populace. He became a Catholic, the siege was lifted, and he was crowned Henri IV, leaving with us the wry utterance "*Paris vaut bien une messe*." Paris is well worth a Mass.

And then there is the matter of the taxis of the Marne.

In September 1914, soon after the start of World War I, the Germans were trying to take Paris. To stop them, the Sixth Army near Nanteuil badly needed reinforcements. When the military governor of Paris learned there was a shortage of army motor vehicles and drivers, he said, "Why not use taxis?" The taxi drivers of Paris, and their vehicles, were assembled, and a column of about 150 vehicles left the city, each of them carrying five men. Most of them let off their passengers, returned to Paris, and took another carload of

soldiers. The Germans were stopped. Paris was *not* taken.

Not even Joan of Arc could capture Paris. The English were in alliance with the Burgundians, who held the city. Her forces attacked Paris in August, 1429, and were defeated.

France has always been trapped between two Germanic enemies, the Germans to the east and the English to the northwest. During a long history, England was always invading it, as in the example of Henry V. The Germans have always admired its culture, and wanted to possess it, like a man yearning after a woman. (Some of the most sensitive performances of French music I have ever heard have been by German orchestras and soloists, such as the great Walter Gieseking recordings of the Ravel piano music. As a matter of fact, the Germans seem to have a greater taste for French music than the French do.)

The English have their John Bull, a pot-bellied old guy with the Union Jack for a waistcoat. The United States has Uncle Sam, with his stars and stripes, a lanky New England Puritan. France is the only country I know that has a beautiful young woman as its national symbol. They even have a name for her. Her name is Marianne.

During the French Revolution, France was attacked by English and German forces, whose purpose was to destroy the emergent democracy. Their own nobility and aristocracy feared such an example in the very heart of Europe, particularly regicide. Most of the nations of Europe were aligned against France, and the French forces under Napoleon for a time beat them, capturing virtually all of Europe. He was at last defeated and confined to Elba, then returned and took them on again. The combined forces of Britain, Prussia, Austria, and Russia, a total of 794,000 troops, were organized to fight him. Napoleon had a much smaller force. Furthermore, it is possible that had he not been ill at the time of Waterloo, he might have beaten the forces of Blucher and Wellington. History is written by the victors, who paint themselves as the virtuous heroes, and so Napoleon has always been portrayed as a villain. He was in fact a genius, one of the finest minds of his age, and I have always thought that at Waterloo, the wrong side won. And he said that within a hundred years, Europe would do at the conference table what he had tried to accomplish on the battlefield: the making of a single Europe. It took a little longer than that, but eventually the European Union came into being with a single passport and a single currency, the Euro. And the Germans got what they had for so long wanted: they finally got Marianne into bed. I don't think you'll separate them now, the snide condescension toward them of Donald Rumsfeld to the contrary notwithstanding.

American economic pundits mocked the Euro, saying it would not last. It is now stronger than the American dollar. I daresay American money men and their minions feared the emergence of an economic power to frustrate the U.S. in its drive, with the USSR out of the way, for world hegemony.

Charles De Gaulle, austere (even his wife called him *vous*, not *tu*), distant, ugly, ungainly, arrogant, and fiercely proud, was a man with, to my evaluation, one of the most astute political minds of the last century; his father had been a professor of philosophy and literature at a Jesuit college. He was wounded and taken prisoner by the Germans in World War I. In WW II, he was a colonel in charge of a brigade of tanks, and when France fell he went to England and declared himself leader of the Free French, to the discomfiture of Winston Churchill and Franklin D. Roosevelt. He was too strong, and they knew they couldn't control him. On June 18, 1940, he made a famous broadcast urging the French to fight on. He was the very core and heartbeat of the *Résistance*.

In March 1966, he withdrew France from NATO and ordered American forces out of France. And he blocked England from entry into the European Economic Union which would evolve into the EU. He thought the British were lackeys of the United States. He also said that France would build its own atomic bomb. It did. And under De Gaulle, the French aviation industry expanded, building superior civil and military aircraft including the Mystère series of fighters, and, later the Concorde and Airbus. Succeeding American governments hated him.

Since the new campaign against the French began, we have heard repeatedly that they are ungrateful because they didn't obediently follow Débile You's orders. And we hear (endlessly) that the United States twice went to war to save France. This is one of history's egregious lies. The United States *never once* tried to "save" France, although France interceded, on the urging of the Marquis de Lafayette to the French king, to save the Americans during the Revolutionary War. Historians seem to concur that French military assistance was the determining factor in the American victory. When Cornwallis retreated to Yorktown, George Washington combined American forces with French forces under the comte de Rochambeau and joined Lafayette in the siege. They were aided by a French fleet under the comte de Grasse, and Cornwallis surrendered on October 19, 1781, ending the war and assuring the survival of the new country.

Despite the images of the Marquis de Lafayette, neither his

nor Louis XVI's motivations were altogether altruistic. When Lafayette was two, his father's regiment was wiped out by English gunners, and he also lost an uncle to the Seven Years War. His devotion to Washington was real, but not without other impetus. He wrote in 1777 that "firmly persuaded that to harm England is to serve (dare I say revenge) my country, I believe in the idea of putting to work all the resources of every individual who has the honor to be French."

And very near all the resources were indeed put to work. In one year, 1781, the year of the Yorktown victory, the government of Louis XVI spent 227 million livres on the American campaign, with 147 million of that going to the navy, which was charged with carrying French troops to America and supplying them and impeding the English from resupplying their own troops.

In *Citizens: A Chronicle of the French Revolution*, Simon Schama says, "At the root of its problems was the high cost of armaments when coupled with political resistance to new taxes and a growing willingness of governments to accept high interest-bearing obligations from both domestic and, increasingly, foreign creditors." Sound familiar? The fiscal crisis that eventuated, partly the result of the French involvement with Washington, contributed to the instability that ultimately cost Louis his throne and then his head.

Only recently one heard Joe Scarborough on MSNBC say that Franklin Roosevelt declared war on Germany. Not so. Soon after Pearl Harbor, on December 11, 1941, the German chargé d'affaires in Washington handed the state department a *notice of Germany's declaration of war on the United States*. Nobody said, "Aha, we're going to save the French."

It was different in World War I. The British and French mounted an efficient propaganda campaign against the Germans. Canadian newspapers were relentlessly censored and forbidden to give any hint of the real horrors of the war. Each battle was portrayed as a glorious triumph over the Germans. In the United States, British and French propagandists sustained a campaign of publicity about the atrocities of the Germans, including all those in "bleeding Belgium." After the war, the Belgian government investigated these tales; not one of them was substantiated. But the stories were very effective in drumming up American desire to join the conflict. The Lusitania was sunk by a German submarine in May, 1915, with a loss of 1,195 lives, 123 of them American. Congress declared war on Germany on April 6, 1917, and General Black Jack Pershing arrived in France on June 13, 1917, with the American Expeditionary Force. He led a battalion of the First Infantry Division down the Champs Elysées to Lafayette's tomb, where he was reported to say, "Lafayette, we are here." Pershing always insisted it was his aide, Colonel Charles Stanton, who said it.

One reason for the British death toll was its high command, especially Lord Kitchener and Field Marshall Douglas Haig, of the Haig and Haig liquor family, both of whom are most charitably described as idiots. The British forces were run by a rigid military caste system, the common soldier coming from the working class, the officers from the nobility and aristocracy. A common soldier had no hope of rising through the ranks. Although many in the upper level of British government knew that Haig was a dangerous self-deluding fool, he could not be removed from command because of his connections in high places, including the king. British Prime Minister Lloyd George, who despised him, said, "We could certainly beat the Germans if only we could get Haig to join them." At the battle of the Somme River on July 1, 1917, which the British and Canadian troops called The Great Fuck-up, Haig managed to leave 19,000 corpses in the mud, though the toll may have been much higher: German guns had blown more thousands of soldiers into irrecoverable bits. The British and Canadian press proclaimed it a great victory. Haig continued his offensive at the Somme for five months at a cost of 25,000 Canadian casualties, with overall casualties reckoned at 623,907. The Germans suffered comparatively light casualties. At Passchendaele, Haig lost 68,000 men in an advance of only two miles; and in the overall Passchendaele offensive, 300,000 men in three and a half months.

When the Canadian commander, Arthur Currie, was ordered into that offensive, he saw that men could not make their way through the goo that was filled with the decomposing bodies of dead men. He proposed building a plank road, like roads in Northern Ontario. The British laughed. Currie built a sawmill, had his men turn trees into planks, and got his road. The British copied the example. Currie had predicted 16,000 Canadian casualties. The final figure was 15,654.

The Canadians suffered from the interference of Samuel Hughes, described by historian Pierre Berton as resembling a character in a bad novel peopled by unbelievable characters. "Of these," Berton wrote, "the most grotesque was the Honorable Sam Hughes, the megalomaniac minister of militia, the strangest, most maddening politician in all Canadian parliamentary history . . . ." The Canadian governor general, Lord Connaught, called him "a conceited lunatic," and many of the men around him concurred that he was crazy. He was also corrupt. And if Pershing made logistical errors, they were as nothing compared to the debacles authored by Hughes.

Hughes vindictively opposed the rise of Arthur Currie, a former real estate agent from Victoria, British Columbia, with only a high school education. He had joined a militia, and then been promoted up through the ranks. By 1917, he was a major general in command of the First Canadian Division, and was soon promoted to lieutenant general, the highest rank other than field marshal in the British forces of which, of course, the Canadians were a part. Devoid of the rigid prejudices and practices of the traditional British army hierarchy, Currie proved to be an outstanding tactician of unorthodox methods. And like another brilliant tactician, George S. Patton in the next war, he cared deeply about the welfare of his troops, and also like Patton, he had "an almost fanatical hatred of unnecessary casualties." (Patton at this point was a young tank officer, rehearsing in effect for what would be called World War II.) It was the Canadians under Currie who captured Vimy Ridge, the first British victory after two and a half years of fighting.

Obviously the complexities of that battle cannot be chronicled here. But one of the things Currie invented was the creeping barrage. Abandoning the "over the top" attacks of countless Hollywood movies, Currie moved his men in units, not lines. Artillery shells slammed in advancing curtains into the Germans with the Canadian troops following dangerously close behind. The Germans in their dugouts were numbed, and stumbled out with hands up to surrender. Currie destroyed the myth of German invincibility at Vimy. But it was achieved at a cost of 10,000 Canadian casualties. Currie was knighted and given command of the Canadian Corps, a separate unit not incorporated into the British army.

The Canadians were chosen as the shock troops in what were to be known as the Last Hundred Days of the war. The turning point was the battle of Amiens on August 8, 1918. Currie managed to move the entire Corps, four divisions, seventy-five miles from Flanders to Amiens in a single week, and in total secrecy. The Germans were shocked to encounter them. Erich Ludendorff, by then the de facto leader of Germany, heard from his brother-in-law, commander of the German Eighteenth Army, who tried to excuse the defeat saying "we were up against the élite of the French army and the celebrated Canadian Corps." Oh yes, the élite, by German estimate. The cowardly French.

When Ludendorff told the Kaiser of the defeat, the latter said that "the war could no longer be won." Ludendorff agreed, and said the war must be ended.

On September 2, Currie's forces broke through the supposedly impenetrable Hindenburg system of defense, the first Allied soldiers to do so. A German college professor told one of his Canadian captors, "You don't know it, but the war's over. They're scraping the bottom of the barrel. There's nobody left. They're taking everybody. We've lost the war."

Currie's army would pull off one more miracle. They were ordered to cross the Canal du Nord, behind which German forces were massed. It was a long line of slime. Currie declined to make a direct assault. He knew that there was a dry section, 2,600 yards wide, to the south. He moved two divisions, again in secrecy, to that area, crossed over, and attacked the Germans from behind. The battle was fierce, but Currie won it. Then he was ordered by his British superiors to take the fortifications on Mount Houy. He had been ordered to conserve shells in the possibility that the war would continue into 1919. He refused. He poured 2,149 tons of high explosives on the Germans, then assaulted them with a single infantry brigade. The Canadians took the objective at a cost of 80 casualties. The Germans lost 2,600.

Germany, on the verge of collapse, faced fresh troops from the United States. Instead of pushing into Germany and an unconditional surrender, the Allies accepted a negotiated armistice, which began at 11 a.m. on November 11. Currie's artillery commander, Andrew McNaughton — later Canada's minister of defense — was enraged. He said, "Bloody fools! We have them on the run. That means we shall have to do it all over again in another twenty-five years."

There was at least one other officer of the war who knew this: a thirty-two-year-old member of the U.S. tank corps, a distant cousin of Johnny Mercer's named George S. Patton.

After the war, the American image machine called Hollywood began to polish the impression that the U.S. won the war almost alone: *The Big Parade* in 1925, *Wings* in 1927, *The Fighting 69th* in 1940; *Sergeant York* in 1941, the latter two obviously designed to prepare the American public for the pending new war with Germany. *Wings*, a silent film, had some of the best aerial dogfight sequences ever put on film. William Wellman, who directed it, had joined the French Foreign Legion early in the war, and then became a flier with the Lafayette Escadrille, American volunteers in a squadron under French command. He knew therefore what he was doing when he made *Wings*.

Pierre Berton, in his illuminating book *Marching as to War*, writes: "Of the twenty-seven super-aces in the (Royal Flying Corps) — those who had downed more than thirty aircraft — eleven were Canadian. Of the ten leading aces on the Allied side, five were Canadians; all survived the war, including Billy Bishop, who ended up as the greatest living

Canadian ace of all, with seventy-two kills to his credit. The Americans made a hero of Eddie Rickenbaker, whose tally was a mere twenty-one enemy planes destroyed, not enough to make him an ace in British estimation. Donald MacLaren of Ottawa, who survived his first dogfight in February 1918 on the day that Rickenbaker entered the war, knocked down forty-eight aircraft before the conflict ended, more than twice Rickenbaker's tally."

This is the ranking of aces by nationality in World War I: Australia, 1; Austria-Hungary, 49; Belgium, 6; Canada, 190; England, 607; France, 182; Germany, 393; India, 1; Ireland, 36; Italy, 45; New Zealand, 13; Russia, 19; Scotland, 51; South Africa, 45; United States, 120; Wales, 19.

The French, British, and their allies, were in the war for fifty-one months, the U.S. for only seventeen. However, with advancing designs in aircraft, most of the air battles came in the late months of the war.

To my mind, the greatest American contribution to the war came in the person of an officer born in France (at Nice), named William Mitchell, known to history as Billy Mitchell. He commanded a combined French-American armada of almost 1,500 aircraft, the largest concentration of air power up to that time; the number is still impressive. He bombed the Germans with this force at what was called the St. Mihiel salient, enabling the U.S. First Army to wipe them out. Shortly thereafter, now a brigadier general, he sent forces of as many as 200 planes to bomb German targets. Billy Mitchell was a major pioneer of mass bombing.

But the best pilots, as one sees even by the statistics, were the Canadians. Why should this be so? In *Marching as to War*, Pierre Berton writes, "They came from small, isolated towns — free spirits, impatient of military tradition, reckless of rules and discipline, contemptuous of spit and polish. They handled their flimsy aircraft like spirited steeds, not surprisingly, since so many were also superb horsemen." In other words, they were cowboys.

Even sympathetic historians have said that Pershing made mistakes, and some of the other allied commanders thought he came close to losing the war for them. When the war ended on November 11, 1918, the Americans commanded 83 miles of the 392-mile front, the Belgians 25 miles, the British and Commonwealth troops 70 miles, and the cowardly French 214 miles. Britain had lost between 715,000 and one million lives, and little (in terms of population) Australia between 60,000 and 61,270. The United States had lost between 50,548 and 53,407. Canada, with a population of less than 8,000,000, had lost more: between 55,000 and 61,000. Far the greatest toll, however, was suffered by France. With its colonies, France lost 1,243,000 — 11 percent of its population, with as many more crippled. England lost 8 percent of its population, and Canada 9 percent. With a population at that time (July 1918) of 103,208,000, the U.S. lost 0.37 percent. (By comparison, the U.S. had a death toll of 548,000 in the influenza pandemic that began that autumn.) So devastating were the war losses of the French that the government forbade any form of contraception in order to rebuild the population. The law was not rescinded until the 1960s.

The war left France devastated, since it was fought almost entirely on French soil. Its population decimated — literally — and its agriculture in ruins, even its trees reduced to bare standing sticks, it suffered more than any other nation. The depletion of the British population, in both wars, had some peculiar social side effects, including sexual. To any sexually adventurous young man after the second war, England was the obvious playground, the Land of the Round Heeled Ladies. When I was a young overseas correspondent in 1954, I came to know a young woman, probably in her middle thirties, who worked as a secretary at our *Montreal Star* office. We discussed this over lunch one day. She said, and I am quoting her verbatim, or close to it, "Well, you see, with so many of our young men gone, most of us realize that we will probably never marry, and so we find whatever sexual satisfaction we can in passing affairs. You would be surprised, however, at how little emotion we put into them."

At one time, a certain joke circulated. Whether it originated after World War I or World War II, I cannot say, but my guess would be it was the former. It isn't even a very good joke, but it indicates an attitude. And it is a joke I suspect few Americans have ever heard.

An Englishman is on vacation in some tropical country. He wants to go swimming, but he is told by the natives and other tourists that the ocean here is shark-infested. Blithely he walks down to the edge, takes off his clothes, and dives into the surf. He is seen in the water for about an hour, with shark fins cutting the surface around him. By the time he comes ashore and dons his clothes, a crowd has gathered. Everyone wants to know how he survived. He says:

"It's very simple, really. I have an American flag tattooed on my buttock, and under it the words: We Won the War." Pause. "Not even a shark will swallow that."

The reason the U.S., Britain, Canada, and other allies went into France through Normandy in World War II is simple. Unless you want to make an amphibious invasion of Germany from the North Sea or the Baltic, probably an impossible task,

you have to go through France to get to it. You can do it by assault from the English Channel or come up through Italy and Southern France. But why Europe, when the United States was at war in the Pacific against Japan? Harold R. Stark, chief of naval operations, presented Roosevelt with four possible plans. The fourth, which Stark recommended, was to press the war against Germany and then go after the Japanese, since Germany was the more powerful foe and with any further delay, an exhausted England might be forced to capitulate. And, as American military intelligence knew (or could surmise), Hitler had plans to island-hop the North Atlantic with his own and the captured French and English fleets, and take Canada and then the United States itself. And so it was decided, and American troops poured into England.

The Pacific war, brilliantly planned and brilliantly fought at devastating cost, was almost entirely an American operation. I recently lost a friend, Richard Harwood of the *Washington Post*, who fought at Guadalcanal, Iwo Jima, and Saipan, and loathed war. As Canadian and British forces were regrouping to join the Pacific campaign, the Enola Gay brought the war to an end. The European war was very much a common effort, with the French underground — the FFI — playing a major role. When you see the newsreel footage of the landings at Normandy, remember that those shoreside buildings, hotels and homes and more, that have been reduced to rubble by bombardment, are French. When I first went to France, in 1954, and flew in with the RCAF over Normandy, the yellow dimples, like smallpox scars, all over the land near the coast were the effects of Allied bombing. Whenever you see some of those shots of trains being shot to pieces by Allied fighters, remember that the crews of those trains were French. Estimates of the losses to the French military in World War II run as high as 250,000. The FFI lost 20,000. Civilian losses, most of them, one presumes, from Allied bombardment, run as high as 470,000. In Paris, the Résistance had gone down into the sewer system, a vast complex of tunnels that had the advantage of its own separate telephone system. To this day you can see the scars of machine gun fire on the face of the Préfecture de Police, which had been taken over by the FFI. The Paris police had joined them in the resistance. Enemy opposition melted, and 3,500 Germans surrendered to the FFI. The first military unit to enter the city, sent there by General Omar Bradley, was the Second French Armored Division under General Jacques-Philippe Leclerc. Bradley sent them in on Eisenhower's order (Patton wanted to bypass the city) because the German military commander, Dietrich von Choltitz, had sent word that Hitler had given orders to destroy the city, which he would be able to disobey only so long.

Jacques-Philippe Leclerc was actually the Vicomte de Hauteclocque. He was wounded and captured by the Germans in 1939. He escaped and went to England to join the Free French forces of Charles de Gaulle, changing his name to Leclerc to protect his family at home. Promoted to brigadier general, he achieved notable successes in North Africa, and led a spectacular thousand-mile march from Chad to Tripoli to link with the British forces. After the Normandy invasion, he led his Second Armored Division as part of Patton's Third Army. It was to Leclerc that Von Choltitz surrendered the city on August 25, 1944.

It has been said that Paris liberated itself. There may be some hyperbole in that, but it is not untrue.

In 1931, de Gaulle published a book called *Le Fil de l'épée*, translated as *Edge of the Sword*, and in 1934 another called *The Future of War*. In these and in his statements, he argued that future wars would be mobile, using the tank and aircraft. His views got him into trouble with his superiors.

In the United States, Billy Mitchell expressed similar views, arguing that the days of the great dreadnoughts were over. He came into conflict with his superiors. In 1924, he said that the Navy and Defense departments were guilty of "incompetency, criminal negligence, and almost treasonable administration of the National Defense." He was court-martialed for this in 1925 and sentenced to five years of suspension of rank and duty. He resigned in 1926. He did not live to see his views vindicated by the Japanese at Pearl Harbor and the U.S. Navy at Midway.

Lord Kitchener and Douglas Haig were honored and rewarded lavishly in England, when what they deserved was to be stood against a wall and shot. Arthur Currie got no rewards and little honor in Canada, and although he became president of McGill University, he was on the whole treated shabbily and died of a heart attack.

In 1946 General Leclerc was sent to French-occupied Indo China. He sent back a report that the problem was more political than military. This caused controversy in Paris, and he resigned his post. He was killed in a plane crash in 1947.

But *how many Frenchmen does it take to defend Paris? Nobody knows, because it's never been tried.*

It is one thing to have a policy difference with the leader of another country. It is quite another to smear an entire people because of it. It is vicious, and it can only be called racism, from the freedom fries on Air Force One to the insults of Jay

Leno, Lawrence Eagleburger, Donald Rumsfeld and Jack Cafferty, and seemingly every cheap comic on television.

High on a slope overlooking the Seine in Upper Normandy stand the ruins of an incredible edifice. This is the Château Gaillard. It is huge, and, incredibly, it was built in a single year, 1191.

History comes vividly to life at unexpected moments, and for me, one of them occurred when I spotted that fortification from the highway as I was driving back to Paris from England in 1958. I am sure that more than a few GIs saw it with wonder as they moved in from the beaches of Normandy. I asked what it was, and was told that it was the castle of Richard the Lion Heart. He ceased to be myth in that moment. In the mid-fifteenth century Henry VI of England captured the castle, although it took him two years of siege to do it, and ordered it destroyed. — one of the most magnificent edifices on earth. He was not fully successful, and much of it is still there. If you ask Google in the Internet for *Château Gaillard*, you'll find some interesting photos of it. As I stood on its walls, looking down at the Seine, I could imagine the Viking longships sailing up the Seine to pillage the land around Paris, which I suppose then was still known as Lutèce. They never did succeed in taking it, but the French king known as Charles the Simple got sick of the nuisance and signed a treaty with them, assigning them a certain amount of land on the coast, on the condition that they pledge loyalty to him, learn the French language, and protect the country from any further Viking incursions. It was a good deal for everybody. The people of French Canada derive almost entirely from an original population of 10,000 settlers from Normandy, which is the reason my Québec French had a Normandy accent when I first lived in Paris. It occurs to me that the French have been dealing with the Arab world and Islam at least since Richard's time, and may know a little about them.

I get weary too of hearing how unfriendly and inhospitable the French are. But then, when I lived in Paris I did not confine my activities to a few square miles of downtown Paris, where the tourists go. I lived at Porte Dorée, out near the Château de Vincennes, where the Germans used to execute members of the *Résistance*. I knew all the local tradespeople. At Porte Dorée (it means golden door) there is a wonderful museum, and in front of it a fine statute of Leclerc.

In 1984, I was in Dusseldorf, aiding in recording an LP with Sarah Vaughan, the lyrics of which I wrote. The arrangements were by Francy Boland. When the project was over, my wife and I went to Paris. We arrived at the Gare du Nord late in the afternoon, with a lot of baggage. A porter loaded it on a dolly as I explained that I couldn't pay him until I got some of my money changed into francs. Furthermore, a friend was lending us an apartment for our stay in the city, and I had to pick up the key by 5 o'clock. The porter said it was okay. We made my wife comfortable in a cafe in the Gare, the baggage around her, and he walked me outside, where we discovered that there was a huge line of people trying to exchange money. He urged me to take a cab to get the key, and change my money in that neighborhood. He took money from his pocket, quite a bit of it, and gave it to me, saying he would watch over of my wife.

I took the cab, got the key, exchanged money, and returned to the Gare. My wife told me that the porter had bought her coffee, and she described other kindnesses from strangers who spoke no English. I found the porter and the first thing I did was to return the money he had lent me. Then I started peeling off bills — I would have paid him anything — and giving them to him. He held up his palm and said, "*Non non, c'est trop* — no no, that's too much."

A day or so later, my wife wanted to buy some shoes. We entered a store. I told the woman manager what my wife wanted. And then I spoke to my wife in English. The woman, who assumed I was French, said, "Ah! Your wife is American?" She said to one of her girls, "Get Denise from the back room! She loves to practice her English." My wife said she was always treated that way, even when I wasn't with her.

Early one evening, we were sitting outdoors in a street corner restaurant. Two young American couples stopped to consult a map. One of the wives was carrying her shoes in her hand. I interceded. "Can I help you?" I said.

"Oh thank God!" one of them said. "Someone who speaks English."

One of the men asked me if I knew how to get to So-and-So. "No I don't," I said, "but I'll ask." And I stood up and addressed the people of the cafe: "We have some visiting young Americans here, and they're lost. Can anybody tell them how to get to So-and-So?"

Five or six men stood up and gathered around the Americans on the corner. And of course, being French, they immediately got into an argument. They sounded nasty, but it was only heated debate about the directions. *No no, they'll never find it that way. The best way for them is . . .* Finally they reached agreement, and with me as translator, gave the two couples directions, shook hands with them all around and sent them on their way, and we went back to our dinners.

To be continued