

**Letter by Huguette Verhague to Richard 'Duke' Sutherland describing her  
activities during the Second World War as part of the French Resistance, 1945  
(GB0232/D1249/4/4/2)**

Do not mind the bad writing, I do it so much that I can't hold the pen!

1.5.1945

Dear Duke,

I am going to begin this letter but it may be a long time before you get it finished because there is a real book to be written about our life since 1940! And I am lost with such a great big work to do for the F.F.I. and other jobs that I every night have to write until 12!pm – It is 11.30, I'll try to begin...!

In 1940, we were in Mortemer when the Jerry were coming on! I got my first bombing on the road to Menesqueville, on the terrible day of June 9<sup>th</sup> (19 raids during the day!). Soldiers, refugees were on every roads, and the bombers came above! 19 of them were on the forest, sending their bombs on us. It was most exciting because you could see them coming down. I was not frightened, just my heart beating a bit quicker, but I got no hurt (of course they could not be compared with your bombs, much bigger!). I then saw 2 of the 'planes turning and going straight on to Mortemer, where my mother was! I got up and ran as much as I could but 14 bombes had missed the abbey, for 200 yards. There had been troops there having left the morning before. Nothing was spoiled, only Maggie had been so frightened for me. (May 3<sup>rd</sup>) Since the Thursday we had been all the time in the ditch, behind the house. Next morning, I went on my bicycle to the village. All was empty, owing to the 5<sup>th</sup> column (French Officers) who told everybody to run away! I got breads and a jerry can of petrol for leaving. I walked up the hill, beeing more sheltered from the nasty Messerschmitt. As I got to the top of the hill I saw a small plane coming very low right on me! I threw bic, and breads in a bush and fell myself under trees. Just where I was a minute before on the road they sent 8 bullets of machine gun! (I guessed why afterwards!) I always tried to find out these bullets but never was I able to! I jumped on my bic and went down then I understood why they shot at me: they had sent a spy from the 'plane! This was the time I was most frightened of all the war, I believe, though you are going to see through how many dangerous things we were! I had to pass near the man. He was standing near the river (motor), very blue eyes and holding his right hand in his pocket (very big and strong man). I, of course, stood up brave and had to smile at him, for he said "Good Morning" but for 50 yards I had to walk quietly, instead of running as I badly wanted to! It was most horrible to wait that this man, guessing I found out he was Jerry, would shoot me in the back. But God kept me, for all the war, you will see! We then decided to go and left the same evening, 10pm for Brittany (where Dorothy was supposed to be!). Jerry came here 4 hours later! The car took 12 hours to do the

20kms to Gaillon. The road was full of killed, holes, bombs and people. Just before the bridge at Gaillon (the one of Les Andelys was blown up) we had a terrible bombing (Happily my dog Loulotte was dead in '36. She was so frightened of bombs!) and passed the bridge just one hour before it bursted. We had not slept one minute! (Please, excuse this dirty letter. The paper is bad and I have so much to say!) We had meals outside, of course, and for 3 nights slept anywhere, in straw, with the 2 dogs (and lots of rats!), in the car, 3 or 4 in the same room in Carnac. We were near South Brittany where we stayed 6 days. Jerry came before we could get away! As we speak Germ. (Maggie rather, I a little) we got on better! We went to Cotes du Nord until Aug 4<sup>th</sup> then came back to Normandy. Maggie was staying near Louviers and I did about 9000kms on my bic, bringing food to her from here! It was most horrible in 1941 because we were not "settled in the war" and really were starving; people had not planted potatoes in 1940 so we were eating nettles and grass! On day, here, I had just a spoonful of noodles with carrots, not butter not bread, 6 weeks without meat. Then I took the habit of going very far and begging so much that we were better afterwards. I am a clever girl you know! I must say I got on OK! Then as there was nothing in Louviers, I took Maggie back here in 1942. Easier for food and wood!

At last, after years of slavery, 1944 came! We were only living with B.B.C. and the many tracts (papers) sent by our beloved R.A.F. and which I sent on by post to various people in towns. Anyone who were listening BBC or gathering tracts were treated as enemies of course I should have deserved to be shot so many times! In August '44, we had 25 grammes of butter, nothing else. For food we had 275gr bread each, a day, 90gr of meat a week, 250gr butter a month, 150gr coffee. I used to make our own flour and bread, also coffee with grilled wheat. On June 6<sup>th</sup> you landed. The same day, Lisors, which was full of Germans was bombed for 2 hours by mustangs! It was so exciting from here (top of our gate!) I could watch the whole scene. They were so good, no one French killed but never they missed a Jerry truck! I nearly got mad of joy! Then next day, one Germ. petrol tank was brought in the forest near Lyons (20000000 litres!) Thirty minutes later, the bombers came! And threw their bombs from above here! The house was shaken like a boat!! Unhappily they could not burst the petrol. Then on the morning of 10<sup>th</sup> our first little "blue bird" came here! His 'plane was blown down near Lyons. He was a young F.O. from London, Philip, and was wounded. We took him here, were hiding his clothes and I nursed him but during the night he was very badly ill and next morning I went through the forest trying to get to Lyons where was my friend Diane who is a Doctor. Marshal Rommel was in Lyons! All the roads were kept with SS and wires. I went to the Jerry. They said I was not to pass without a permission from German officer (I really could not ask one!) then I gave them some butter, told them not to shoot me in the back (!), and, like one Indian, I walked like a snake, under the bushes, away from the roads, though I knew it was risky! At least I could join Diane who first told me I was mad, then came afterwards, with the same risks, to visit Philip. (Of course it was forbidden to aid those airmen!!) He, at last, got a little better

but planes were falling all over the district and on June 28<sup>th</sup> we got 4 more blue boys. The youngest was Reg, 19, Don (Canadian) 23, Ron, 24, and Doug, 28. I never was happier for years because since the war, I had asked Gog, every day, to send me English to save! They were sleeping in the loft, having supper with us. Many times I took them out (in civilian) for walks. Of course the Resistance and many other people (safe) gave the food for them and we never were short. Alas, on Aug 7<sup>th</sup> as they badly wanted to go back, the Resistance took them away to try and join up your country. Germans caught them! If only they had been a little more patient! I was not at home when they left. Only Maggie. You can guess (sorry) how anxious I was. It is only in Jan that by their families I heard they were prisoners in Germany. 4 of them. But from Philip, nothing? The R.A.F. will come once more to see me soon to enquire about him. Poor boy! I think I must go to bed. Otherwise you won't be able to read this!

#### 6.5.45

Well. We had met several times one American (airman) officer who was hidden at one F.F.I. Chief near here. (We had been taking care of one of these chieftains hidden by us in the hole, you know, and where we had kept the boys, while Jerry was searching them in the forest.) and just for a fortnight, there had been also a Canadian Airforce officer. On Aug 19<sup>th</sup> at night, I saw 3 men opening the gate. I saw Ted (American) and said "What is the matter?" So he said: "You told me yesterday that if we were in trouble, to come to you, so here we are!" I said "What's the trouble? – Gestapo" he answered. Mr T, where he was had been "given up" by a tortured man, and they all came in to hide in here. The house is very small, as we were not in the Abbey. I put Mr and Mrs T (and their big she-dog! What a job keeping her away from my own "Belle"! ) in my room. I slept in the kitchen. The 4 boys (Ted, Nic and one F.F.I. and one boy of 16 next to my mother. On the 22<sup>nd</sup> The whole F.F.I.s of the village, Lisors, Rosay, Touffreville took "the maquis" for trying to kill Jerry and take guns. At night 2am I saw a torch at the gate. I went out hoping you had come, our dear British! Alas it was only Jerry! I was apologising, because I had locked the gate that was supposed to be left open, always. They said nothing, only they wanted to sleep anywhere, in the loft!! I knew if they had passed the room they would have seen the 4 boys, so I brought them (11!) into my kitchen and they slept on the floor! I had a sergeant under my sofa!! At six, they left. At 8.30 two trucks of S.S. stopped near the farm, Jerry went into the bush and began to chase our poor F.F.I.s! 5 were taken, tortured (feet boiled, broken forearms and so on) and shot in the evening, near here. As soon, Mr, Mrs T and the F.F.I. were lucky to escape. The boys went into the loft, René (little boy) stayed with us (he was very brave). One S.S. came in, was looking everywhere and, at last I showed him the tortoise and made him change his mind, he left! Meanwhile, Mr and Mrs T were nearly killed in a big bombing at Menesqueville but could escape! Then, when we had lunch, we saw one S.S. opening the gate and rushing directly to the hen shed...under the loft, breaking the doors, with his pistols in hand! "This time, said

René, "I think we are finished!" God made him come out without seeing the airmen, who were kneeling and praying. It is the only time I really wanted to kiss a Jerry! We had deserved so many times to be shot that we are still surprised to be alive!! About 4pm I looked outside and saw one of our little, F.F.I. rushing from the bush here, just as the sentry was turning towards us!! He washed and changed his clothes, and quietly, with Belle. I took him to Lisors, passing and talking (!) with the Jerry sentry, and meeting 7 patrols...which never stopped us! God was really with us!! As I came back, at 7pm, I saw, against the farm wall one F.F.I. chief and a little F.F.I. caught by an Airedale like Belle and 30 S.S. beating the chief and keeping them. They knew we had the boys. (They were shot next morning). Then I feared they would come during the night I asked the German to do patrols all night on the road, in front of the gate...so that the "terrorists would not hide in here!" So they did and so the boys were safe! On the Thursday, the S.S. arrested Victoria's brother who knew we had the boys. (He was F.F.I. chief too he disappeared we don't know if killed) so, being afraid he would speak, at night in the mist, the 2 boys left with blankets and food for the hole. As we expected the Gestapo would come at once the forest being full of patrols and they had told me, Jerry, that "I had nothing to fear, because I was correct" (How much!!) I told Nic that if next day, by night, I was not with them, I should be shot, so they would have left! They both kissed us. Nic was weeping, and told me that God would be with us! They left with a rope, behind the wall. Nothing happened!! Next morning, S.S. went to arrest René Loucopoulos, you remember (1 wife 3 children) and shot him. He was F.F.I. chief. Then at night I did at least 5kms to reach the hole hidden from Jerry who was all over the woods. I brought the boys water, food and straw...which was most awful to carry! On the Sat night they came back to the loft always with the rope. On the Sunday, I had a good time helping an Hungarian to desert German army, gave him food, clothes etc. On the Tuesday, the rain began! As the boys were having lunch in my mother's room, 5 Jerry came in the kitchen, sat down, ate, and began to dry themselves. They said they could not eat before "because Tommy!" (We know nothing about the events. No light, no radio since August 18<sup>th</sup>). They stayed 5 hours! I was so afraid they would see the boys just across (especially because Ted was so fond of seeing the retreating Jerry and always wanted to put his head through the leaves!) At last they left. It was delicious to see them rushing back to Ste Catherine, using any vehicles, buses, horses, bicycles (they asked mine, also, well hidden, I told them it was gone to Germany!) Also they never found the wireless, not the pistols, grenades and machine guns hidden here!! As I came back from fetching the bread, at 6.30, I heard the Ecouis bells ringing! We understood. You were there! We thought they were American, no, it was our dear English Army! Next morning Victoria's daughter in law rushed, screaming, "M Huguette, the bells! It was Lisors!" I said nothing to the boys, not thinking to give them wrong hope, and ran to Lisors in pouring rain (my bic was under the wood!) My F.F.I. Jean (saved and hidden in the forest) came to fetch me even before going to check the B.L.A. I heard all the village calling me. "At last, run M Hug, you must be the first there!" I directly went to the little caterpillar truck, and asked an officer, quick, (I think I have been the only one not to kiss that boy because

I was so anxious to bring my two!) I went to ask the officer what I had to do. One forgotten mine had just bursted and the bridge was damaged. One girl lent me her bicycle and I rushed here! The boys got mad! Ted walked screaming and Nic yelled!! I felt shy to walk with them! We had taken so much the habit of hiding them! All the F.F.I who had been with them in the woods, cheered and kissed them and at last! I gave them up to the British! And, Duke, I then got my first best English cigarette. We had missed them so much for years!! (It was a wild woodbine! I keep the box!!) Then, Victoria's nephew asked us three for lunch (poor Maggie was left at home with only the potatoes!) and we had the most excellent lunch. Ted ate at least 2 lb of cucumber, Nic, a dish full of tomatoes, then omelette, duck, beans, rice pudding, wine, brandy (Dear me, never the censor will have patience to read this!) They gave the boys a whole bottle of brandy, flowers, champagne afterwards at Derly's wife. (Jerry left Mortemer at 6.30!) The Hq was at the big farm near the bridge to Ecouis. At 3pm my two boys went in a jeep with the English going back to their base. They kissed me in front of all the village, and all the troops! After they left I was staying with your so kind officers and had tea at last!! And I finally went to fetch Maggie, brought in car. Next morning, some trucks stopped, we gave them coffee, they gave us all they could soap etc. Unhappily mines were near Ste Cath and 2 of our poor little tommies were killed! The little truck is still here. Well, I shall shut up and leave one page for Maggie. In my next letter, if this one reaches you, I'll tell you what I am doing, so busy for F.F.I.s since the liberation. I am really ashamed to write like that so badly. I hope you won't mind? Happy to hear you are all safe. Where is your sister Leila? Did you ever hear from Kamala? With kindest souvenirs and so many thanks to you all, British, for having saved us!

Your faithful friend Huguette.