

**Stories of Bombardments**  
**(Real Life Stories)**  
(From Diaspora Sfaxienne, 2004, p42)

At the beginning of the bombardments the services of the Office of the Ports had been squeezed into the unused buildings of the school of Picville.

On the ground floor a broad long corridor of a score of meters divided the building in two. At the entry of the corridor a gate opened onto the street and at the bottom, a large carriage door led to the playground. On the left of the gate a vast staircase made it possible to reach the upper floors. During work hours the gate and carriage door remained wide open.

During bombardments the personnel took refuge under the staircase which appeared to us to be the best protected place. But it was often necessary to give way, to sit on one's knees, and to hold oneself in uncomfortable positions.

One day, when the alarm lasted for ever though the humming of the flying fortresses had moved away, tired of squatting, I escaped from the shelter and directed my steps towards the gate while declaring: "The fortresses have passed!" My friend Lauray and a secretary followed me.

The fortress had truly passed; but they had already released their sticks of bomb. And as these fortresses flew very high the bombs had not landed yet.

Hardly had the three curious ones reached the steps of the gate when the bombs landed on the electric factory and the distant cooking gas generators hardly a few hundred meters of the school.

There followed an explosion of a rare violence and an enormous deflagration raised the three imprudent ones like as many wisp of straws, throwing them across the corridor in gliding flight - to the great surprise of the comrades still under the shelter - and landed them in the playground, without much damage fortunately.

Under the laughter and the mockery of their comrades the three imprudent ones joined the shelter quickly and you can well believe that they remained there wisely until the end of alarm!

Lucien BERLOU

## **Sfax and the war: Another Memory**

(From Diaspora Sfaxienne, 2004, p42)

The bombardments becoming increasingly frequent and more and more violent, the Administrative Services had thus been squeezed a little into various of large buildings of the built-up area, in the unused buildings of the school of Picville.

My friend Leroux, director of the port, was charged to ensure from Tunis, the only port in service, the transport of the food intended for the supply of the population of Sfax which counted already nearly one hundred thousand inhabitants and, believe well, it was not a small matter!

For my part I had the role of repairing the damage caused by the bombardments on the works of the port. To avoid any risk I went to the port at the end of the alarm because it was rare that there were two consecutive bombardments.

One day, when I left for my traditional visit after the bombardment, I was asked by the commandant Wintersdorff, captain of the port:

“Where do you go Lucien?”

“As usual I will check the damage caused by the bombardment.”

“I accompany you.”

And we left together.

At the entry of the port it was necessary to present our pass at the German guard who was assisted by an Italian orderly. Hardly had we done that than the alarm siren resounded. Instantly we hastened all four of us towards the nearest shelter, that of the office of the *Capitanerie* (Harbormaster).

At the beginning of the events I had had two shelters built, one intended for the Office of the Ports, the other, that in which we were, at the offices of the *Capitanerie* (Harbormaster). The two shelters were hardly sixty meters apart.

This day the bombardment was of an extreme violence and several bombs fell very close to our shelter. The German guard, sitting on the wood bench, shrank, nervously grasping his machine gun rifle between his legs. The Italian orderly, on his

side, prayed on his knees. I would have agreed for him to also pray for me, but involved in conversation by the commander Wintersdorff, an old sea wolf, I exchanged various remarks with him.

At a given time a deflagration more violent than the others shook our shelter and filled it up with dust; a bomb had to have fallen nearby. The commander Wintersdorff says then:

- Lucien, are you sure of your shelter?

- Think thus: two rows of metal sheeting piles of a strong thickness wedged one on another; three thicknesses of large oak railroad ties (sleepers) and an earth mattress; I think that it can resist without difficulty. The end of alarm resounds. We leave the shelter.

With the commander Wintersdorff we remain speechless: a bomb had struck full center the shelter of the Office of the Ports. In the crater the railroad ties burn and around them the sheeting piles are drawn up vertically to eight or ten meters resembling gigantic arms beseeching the sky.

"We have escaped it well!" was all commander Wintersdorff said. I could only answer, "Eh yes! "

And without exchanging other words returned to our offices at the school of Picville.

Lucien Berlou.