

Sfax **January 1943**

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It is not a festive atmosphere: bombardments in waves during the day - Douglas 825 and Bristol Blenheim - bombardments by harassment at night; punctual attacks by Mosquitos in the dazzling light of the parachute flares which, from Sidi Mansour to Thyna, transform the coast into lunar landscape.

This afternoon there, I leave my refuge, on Route Sidi Mansour at km 5, opposite the villa that Antoine Lupi lived in secure there in his small world. In Moulinville, I meet Trione in front of his home; with him are his cousin Martorella and some others, Mathieu? Dubois? In short, buddies of the district. We chat, when a worrying hum makes us pick up our ears; a few seconds pass, and all at once over our heads an irritating whistle of engines and rumble of thunder mixed; we do not even have time to throw ourselves to the ground before the terrifying crash of machine-guns and automatic guns breaks out; within a few meters of the top of the roofs passes, at an extraordinary speed, a three-engined JU 52 pursued by some fighters, the double-tailed Lightning P 38. Around us, a rain of casings which tinkle and rebound like a bushel of mad grasshoppers; the German had already disappeared behind the hill of the battery of Saint Henri whereas the Americans make a final attempt and then disappear towards the West.

We are already in the saddle, we climb the ridge of the Mahdia road, with all speed, cross the manoeuvres field, and reach the shore at the *Poudrière* beach, angled towards the North: the Junker was crashed there, with smoking engines, perforated like a strainer; of the three crew men, two are alive, as for the third, who was at the back of the plane, he was literally torn apart by the projectiles and on just one of his boots one could count the impacts of seventeen bullets.

For the first time, we have in front of us, an image brought closer of what men in war can inflict between them.

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