

G rard Pichot (1921 - 2010)

Born in the small village of Tourtenay (in the region of Deux-S vres where the school of our former French partners is also located), the young farmer G rard Pichot joined the French resistance movement “*Organisation Civile et Militaire*” at the young age of 22.



Having been brought up as a republican with humanistic values, it was self-evident for him and his whole family to join the resistance against the Nazi occupation. Therefore, G rard, along with his father L once Pichot, his father-in-law, his brother-in-law and a few other resistance fighters formed a group of clandestine resistance fighters that undertook several paramilitary missions against the occupiers.

In June 1943, the group’s mission was to find and save material in two containers on parachutes dropped from British planes. The material was brought to the village and hidden away from the Nazis in secret cellars. But the Nazis, who knew of such clandestine missions, investigated and caught most members of the group on August 9, 1943. G rard Pichot, who was not at his farm that day, was caught 10 days later (August 19, 1943).

After some weeks in prison (in Poitiers), he was deported to the concentration camp Buchenwald in Germany on January 1944.

The concentration camp Buchenwald was close to several military production sites where the Nazis made forced labour workers produce airplanes, rockets and other military weapons mostly in underground production sites, one of these being called “Mittelbau Dora”.

On November 10, 1944, G rard Pichot was transferred from concentration camp Buchenwald to the “Dora” production site where he first had to work in a unit transporting material to the underground site. Later he was shifted to the depot which eased his life a bit.

When in early April 1945, the concentration camp was liberated, G rard Pichot finally was free and after a long dangerous trip, he returned to Paris on May 8, 1945 – the day when Nazi Germany surrendered and the war was over.

G rard Pichot and other surviving resistance fighters founded the “Conservatoire de la R sistance et de la D portation” (an organisation commemorating the Nazi occupation and the French resistance against it) in 1986. G rard Pichot’s tireless efforts after the war were focussed on the young generations: he addressed students to teach them the values that the resistance movement had fought for and called young people to stay alert whenever human rights are endangered and to stand up for the values of humanity.

Story on Gérard Pichot's life

composed by Zaneta (CZ), Timo (GE), Kemal (GR)

A letter to his grand-children

My dear great-grandchildren,

I am writing this letter to tell you some things about my life, so you may not forget and instead do whatever you can to work for freedom and peace in the world.

I was born in Tourtenay, a small village back then, and didn't know anything about the world beyond my home for the first 20 years of my life. Your ancestors were farmers and so I grew up working hard with my hands but happy and proud of cultivating the nature of our home country.

Just having turned 20, all happiness ended abruptly when the German enemy's troops invaded. When I was 22 years old, I decided the only right thing to do was to join the French resistance movement and fight the Nazi occupation.

Both my father and father-in-law, your great-granduncle and I joined with some neighbours to form an underground resistance group and undertook several paramilitary missions against the occupants - highly dangerous activities because we had to be extremely careful not to be caught. As we were not the only ones to fight in the underground and many of our missions meant a lot of trouble and damage, the Nazis were well aware of our activities and did everything they could to catch us.

The mission that failed and gave my life a horrible turn took place in June 1943. Our mission was to save containers on parachutes that were dropped from British planes. It was dangerous to save the containers because they had to be dropped on open fields and getting them meant that we had no protection. But first everything went well. We transported the material to the village and hid it away from the Nazis in secret cellars. Some other smaller activities followed, each of them meant risking our lives because we knew that the occupants were searching the area to find resistance fighters and the material we had collected.

On August 9, 1943 they came to our farm, searched it, found the material and arrested most of the members of our group. That day, I was not at home because I was on a new mission, so I escaped. As good friends informed me and helped me, I could hide. But not for long, because ten days later, they finally found me and imprisoned me in Poitiers where I was kept, constantly beaten and interrogated for weeks.

On an awfully cold day in January 1944, after long weeks of malnutrition, being in a bad state, they decided it was time for me to be deported to the concentration camp of Buchenwald in Germany. Real torture and misery only began there. Without getting much to eat, without suitable clothing or any sort of hygiene, they forced me to work in a material transport unit.

In November that year I was transferred to a special place underground where we were forced to produce rockets and parts of planes for the Nazis to terrorize and kill even more people. The place is known as "Mittelbau Dorä" - one of the most horrible places one can think of. None of us prisoners ever saw much of daylight or got much food to keep us alive for such hard work.

I hardly survived, but for some reason they shifted me again to work in the depot making my life a little easier. Easier only meant that I could see daylight and labour was not as demanding ... the brutality of the Nazis stayed the same.

In April 1945 the concentration camp was liberated by the allied troops, I was finally free. But the war was not yet over. Trying to return home to France was still dangerous even though the allies were moving forward ever deeper into Germany. Nazi Germany finally surrendered on May 8, 1945 - the very day when I came to Paris.

Having survived all the terror that Nazis brought on us French and all the other people in Europe doesn't mean I have ever forgotten anything of what they did. It took 40 years for me and some of my fellow resistance fighters that survived to get over the hatred and tell the young generation about our fate. You, my dears have been born into a world that has changed and experienced that former enemies can and should become friends. But you should know that life was different in the past and you should learn from it for a still better future.

Never forget that living in a peaceful and democratic Europe is not enough. Nobody must forget about the past and the things that millions of people had to suffer. This is the reason why we founded the "Conservatoire de la Résistance et de la Déportation". Our work of commemorating the Nazi occupation and honor the Résistance fight for freedom has always had only one goal: to teach you, the new generations, the values of freedom, peace, equality and brotherhood.

Now that my life is coming to an end, my only wish is that you young people may carry on with staying alert when human rights are threatened and to defend the values of humanity together with your European friends whose ancestors were our enemies.

Your great-grandpa Gérard