

Chapuis.

Ken Follett

From: Daniel Starer [dstarer@bellatlantic.net]
Sent: 18 December 2000 03:30
To: Ken Follett
Subject: URGENT

Dear Ken,

After some difficulty connecting, I have spoken with Mr. Robert Chapuis who is happy to help and remarkably well-qualified to do so. Not only did he work on the PTT long lines in 1944, he had some involvement with the resistance, and Chapuis in his later career wrote a definitive history on telephone switching equipment.

Chapuis would like you to telephone him between 9:00 AM and Noon on Monday, December 18th (French Time). He is also available on the 19th but then goes to Italy. If you are not available on the morning of the 18th please let him know and inform him when you do expect to call.

Robert J. Chapuis
11 rue de Gex
01210 Ferney-Voltaire
France

telephone 33 4 50 40 60 76
fax 33 4 50 42 99 51

He seems to receive faxes successfully, but his machine currently has great trouble sending them.

Having worked for years in Geneva for an international organization, his English is quite good. However, I am told his hearing is failing. I recommend speaking a little slower than usual.

Like everyone my translator and I have contacted in France, he is keen to talk about the Violet Plan and Keller--a topic of great pride among the French telecom community. I faxed him the preliminary scene you wrote and gently advised that your main topic of interest is authenticating your own story and learning details of automatic telephone exchanges (and how to sabotage them).

I promised you will send a signed novel to him at the above address. Perhaps best to send a copy translated into French.

One of his books is called:

Electronics, Computers & Telephone Switching: A Book
of Technological History,
Studies in Telecommunication
Series #12
Hardcover, 596 Pages, Elsevier
Science, June 1990
ISBN: 0444880429
Author: Chapuis, R. J. / Joes,
A. E.

Here is a brief biography:

Robert Chapuis grew up in Vienne, France and attended the Ecole Polytechnique for his post-secondary education. During World War Two he helped train French army men in artillery firing, and was an officer in the Colonial Army. He returned to the

Polytechnique in 1941 and entered the telecommunications field. In 1944 Chapuis worked with the French Long Lines under the Occupation. After the war he worked for the CCIF, the international telephone company, and so moved to Geneva, Switzerland. Chapuis focused on signaling and remained with the group throughout its transformation into the CCITT. He travelled internationally, helping negotiate standards for international telephone service, and writing policy papers for CCITT decisions. Chapuis helped design international switching systems during the 1960s. He retired in 1984 and helped create a 500,000 line switching system in Saudi Arabia, as well as writing and publishing papers.

Below is part of an interview with Mr. Chapuis:

NEBEKER: Was it in 1942 that you chose telecommunications?

CHAPUIS: Yes.

NEBEKER: You immediately went into the service of PTT?

CHAPUIS: After two months of vacation at home. Then I went to the Ecole, which was in Paris. This was Occupied Paris and far from my family area, and I was literally starving. Of course we were French civil servants, but we were paid at a very low level, just subsistence. So I had two years in the ENST. At that time, since many military were off duty, instead of there being twelve or fifteen of us for the PTT in the ENST, we were about 150 alumni, with many officers from the French air force, army, or navy who went into electronics and later, some of them, into very good careers.

On the first of July 1944, I began my active service in the French "Long Lines." It was for me a very exciting period, but very hectic! The French long-distance cables had to be restored by the French Long-Lines teams when they were not directly in the battlefields, according to an agreement between German and French offices. There was sabotage of the cables by the French Resistance. Cables were also destroyed by bombing of Allied planes of roads and railway tracks. Plenty of work to be done.

Thus I traveled with the cable repair teams. We used the trucks of the French Long Lines. It was good because we were allowed fuel to go to various places outside Paris, country places where we could also find some food. Sometimes, when we had finished restoring the cable, small armed groups of the Resistance would arrive, and we would tell them "OK, let us restore it. When we finish, one day later, you can come back and cut the cables again."

NEBEKER: You were traveling throughout Occupied France?

CHAPUIS: This was in '44, and since 1942 all of France was occupied.

NEBEKER: You were mainly in the Paris area?

CHAPUIS: I went north, near Flanders, also south near the Loire, and so on. At the end of July, after my first term with the cable teams, I went to Lyons to be at its main repeater station. That was a very bad journey from Paris to Lyons: it took two and a half days by train.

NEBEKER: Why so long?

CHAPUIS: Bombing. The train stopped whenever the planes came. Then we scattered into the countryside, then we returned to the train. Then I remember in Dijon we were parked quite a long time. I saw

a train of people going to deportation. What could we do?

In Lyons I had also some narrow escapes. I went for liaison to Vichy, which was then one of the headquarters of French Telecom, and said, "What shall we do when the Allied troops come?" I received a very diplomatic note - this was at the time of Vichy government - telling me, "You restore the cables so we can get the connections from Lyons to Paris."

I've skipped many details. I came back, hitchhiking or walking, from Vichy to Lyons. Then I went to a subsidiary repeater station. Then a German team of Alpine Jaegers came through the repeater station and asked, "What are you doing here?" That morning the Resistance had come and, after firing, left some cartridges on the ground. Well, by chance I could speak a little German and got out of a very unpleasant situation.

Then in September I came back to Paris, where I spent three years at the headquarters of French Long Lines.

NEBEKER: That was in September '44.

CHAPUIS: Yes. I was in the office supply. I was a big boss. I could have made a fortune - but I didn't - because I received gas from the American Army and converted it into tickets for sending to the repeater stations. Then after one year I went to the transmission department, where we had to restore the repeater stations' equipment. Fifty percent of the repeater stations had been destroyed, totally or partially, especially by Germans when they had to leave France.

END OF EMAIL