



Editorial Reviews

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Liberty, equality, and fraternity are all well and good, a champion of French culture once remarked. But, he continued, what made France truly superior to its neighbors was the French passion for wine, which "contributed to the French race by giving it wit, gaiety, and good taste, qualities which set it profoundly apart from people who drink a lot of beer."

The commentator may have had a point; after all, write Don and Petie Kladstrup, it was a well-known fact that Adolf Hitler did not like wine. Still, their leader's teetotalism notwithstanding, the Germans showed no distaste for French wine when they invaded France in 1940. Indeed, among the first acts of the occupying army was to seize great stores of wine, sending tens of thousands of barrels to the Third Reich and ordering the conversion of thousands of hectares of vineyards into war production.

Some French vintners, the Kladstrups write in this enjoyable study, went along with orders. Many others, however, including the heads of distinguished houses like Moët et Chandon, engaged in daring and dangerous acts of resistance wherever they could. Some lied about their yields; others built false walls to hide precious vintages; and still others concocted elaborate ruses, such as sprinkling carpet dust into inferior grades of new wine to give it a musty, distinguished flavor. Not every German was fooled, and some partisans of the grape died for their troubles. But some Germans, at considerable risk to themselves, also looked the other way. The Kladstrups fill their pages with memories of the wine war from both sides of the struggle, stories sometimes somber, sometimes amusing, that commemorate those "whose love of the grape and devotion to a way of life helped them survive and triumph over one of the darkest and most difficult chapters in French history." --Gregory McNamee

In Alsace-Lorraine, an air of fatalism prevailed. "Here we go again," people thought.

The disputed provinces, on France's eastern border with Germany, became French territory in the late seventeenth century. Between 1870 and 1945, however, they changed hands four times, passing from France to Germany, to France, to Germany and back to France.

Among those who witnessed each change were the Hugels of Riquewihr, a family of winegrowers in Alsace since 1639. "We are specialists in war and wine," said Johnny Hugel. "In 1939, we were just sitting down to celebrate our family's three hundredth anniversary in the wine business when something happened: war was declared." The party was canceled.

The Hugel story, in many ways, is the story of Alsace. "My grandfather had to change his nationality four times," Johnny's brother André said. Grandfather Emile was born in 1869. He was born French, but two years later, in 1871, Alsace was taken over by Germany after the Franco-Prussian War, and he became German. The end of World War 1 in 1918 made him French again. In 1940, when Alsace was annexed, he was forced to become German. By 1950, when Emile died at the age of eighty-one, he was once again French.

The constant swing between nationalities resulted in a kind of regional schizophrenia, a feeling of being part French, part German, but most of all Alsatian.

Selling wine under such conditions was often a struggle; it meant suddenly adapting to different economic situations. As Papa Jean Hugel once wrote, "It is very easy on a map to change the line of the frontier overnight ... but very often the new system was in direct contradiction to the previous one. The home market became the export market, out of reach through tariff restrictions and vice versa. Well-established connections were no longer available, and new markets had to be painstakingly won."

In the fall of 1939, it seemed inevitable that the whole agonizing process was about to repeat itself. With the declaration of war, the French government, fearing an attack, ordered that the city of Strasbourg, which sat just across the Rhine River from Germany, be evacuated. A few weeks later, when nothing had happened, many of the city's 200,000 residents began trickling back, figuring it had been a false alarm.

The Hugels thought otherwise. They were convinced it was only a matter of time before the Phony War became a real war. They had seen how appeasement had failed at Munich the year before, how Hitler had played Prime Ministers Daladier and Chamberlain for fools. When Hitler signed a friendship and nonaggression pact with the Soviet Union in August 1939, the Hugels had little doubt war was just around the corner. They were proved right. "At that moment, we felt that the only way Germany could be stopped was if the United States joined the war," Johnny Hugel said. But those hopes were dashed when President Roosevelt, in October, reaffirmed his country's intent to remain neutral.

Throughout Alsace, there was a feeling of impending doom, a sense of foreboding as threatening as the clouds that hung over the region during that cold gray November. The following month, as the holiday season drew near, the festive spirit that usually existed was nowhere to be seen. Most of Alsace's villages, which looked as if they had popped out of a Hansel and Gretel storybook, remained dark. There were no twinkling lights, no music and laughter, none of the things that normally accompany the Christmas season.

On Christmas Eve, the Hugels gathered together in Riquewihr as they always did, but it was a somber affair. In previous years, the house had always been decorated, everyone exchanged gifts and then sat down to a sumptuous dinner that included some wonderful wines. But not this year. No one was in the

mood. Everyone feared that this would be their last Christmas as French citizens, and Grandpa Emile, an old man of eighty, did not want to die a German.

'My mother cried the whole night,' André recalled. With two of her sons nearly old enough to be drafted into the German army and one of her brothers living in Germany, there was no consoling her.

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[NOMADS - PAGES 53-54]

Although there was no mention of Alsace in the armistice agreement, the region was annexed outright on August 7 and everything French was outlawed. Street signs were changed to German, Hugel et Fils became Hügel und Söhne and the wearing of berets was forbidden. "If you even said *bonjour*, you could go to a concentration camp," André's brother Johnny recalled. A cousin of the Hugels did, in fact, get sent to a camp when he refused to sign a statement saying he was of Germanic origin

"You had to obey the rules, there was no alternative," André said. "In order to go on to high school, I had to join the Hitler Youth." Brothers Johnny and Georges faced a grimmer prospect: they had to join the German army.

Georges was the first, because he was the oldest. It was not a happy moment, "but I did what I had to," said Georges. "I was afraid my family might get sent to a camp. I saw some other guys run away and their families were sent to Poland."

Unlike others, the people of Alsace had little confidence in Marshal Pétain. "He was a weak man," Georges said. "Sure, he was the hero of Verdun and all that, but he was weak. The only reason soldiers liked him is that they thought there was less chance of being killed when he was in charge, that was because he never did much. A lot of officers felt he needed a good kick in the pants."

Now that they were part of Germany again, the Hugels had to figure out how to keep their wine business running and, as Papa Hugel said, "adapt to the new economic situation." In one respect, it was not terribly complicated. Germany was the only customer. "All of our wine, like everyone else's, was blocked by the Germans," André said. "We could not sell to our traditional customers like Great Britain; we could only sell to Germany and at prices the Germans set." The Germans, he said, may not have stolen their wine in the usual sense, "but they did steal it legally and massively. They emptied Alsace of its wine."

Madame Lina Hugel, however, had more immediate concerns. Three weeks after the annexation, she was told to report to German headquarters. No one was sure why, although it was no secret that authorities were upset about Monsieur Hugel's refusal to join the Nazi Party. Letters and notices had been sent urging residents of Riquewihr to join, but Monsieur Hugel had steadfastly ignored them. Now there were rumors that their business might be closed and that the family could be deported.

"My mother was frightened," André said. "She did not know what to expect."

When she arrived at headquarters, an officer informed her that her loyalty to Germany was in question. "We are aware that you always speak French to your children," the German said. "Why do you hate Germans?"

Madame Hugel, momentarily taken aback, quickly recovered. "What do you mean?" she asked. "How can you say I hate Germans? My own brother is German, and I also have two sons who are about to fight for your Führer!"

Her response caught the officer by surprise, but he seemed satisfied. A few minutes later, he excused her. As she turned to go, the German stopped her and added a gentle warning. "Madame, we are the Wehrmacht; we are not the bad ones and you shall have no further trouble from us, but once the yellows come, it will be awful."

He was referring to the Gestapo.

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[THE GROWLING STOMACH - PAGES 128-133]

For Georges and Johnny Hugel, joining the Resistance was never an option. With Alsace annexed by Germany, there was no way for the two brothers to escape the fate awaiting all Alsatian boys: induction into the German army. Those who tried to escape were caught and executed. The few who slipped through German hands saw their families arrested and deported to concentration camps.

"Neither of us wanted to be German soldiers, but our family was already in trouble with the Gestapo," Georges said. "We would never have done something that might put them in a worse position."

The Hugel's troubles had begun in 1936, when the Summer Olympics were held in Berlin. Madame Hugel's father, André Zoll, whose company had sent him to work in Germany, marked the occasion by raising the French and German flags outside his home. No friend of the Nazis, he deliberately put the French flag on top. Within an hour, the Gestapo arrived, warning that unless the flags were reversed, they would take him to headquarters. André complied, saying no insult had been intended and that his actions were merely a gesture of welcome for Olympic guests. The Gestapo did not arrest André but noted in their files that this family of Alsatians was "too French" and should be watched carefully.

Three years later, the Hugels came under greater scrutiny. This time, it was during a ceremony in front of the Monument aux Morts in Riquewihr, honoring those killed in World War 1. The date was July 14, 1939, Bastille Day. France and Germany were not yet at war, but Hitler was already flexing his muscles, having overrun Austria and now threatening the rest of Europe. Some in Riquewihr had openly expressed their admiration for the Führer, complaining that the French Third Republic was weak and that France could use a strong leader. Such comments angered Grandfather Hugel, who was mayor of Riquewihr. When it came time to give his speech, he lashed out. Glaring at the crowd in front of the war memorial, he pointed toward the Rhine River and declared, "For those of you who don't like France, the bridge is open!"

No longer were the Hugels merely seen as being "too French"; now they were also considered anti-Nazi. Even the weather seemed to be looking askance at them. That September, when picking began, it was apparent to the Hugels and nearly everyone else that the 1939 vintage would be disastrous. It had rained most of the summer, and the grapes, while abundant, had never ripened. Hauling them in for pressing was not easy because the Hugels had only one horse and no vehicles left. Their other horses and all of their trucks had been requisitioned by the French army, which was mobilizing to face the Germans.

Over the next two months, Jean Hugel watched his wine closely, recording its progress as it underwent fermentation in wooden casks. On December 21, he went into the cellar again to check on his wine. He was horrified. It was worse than he feared. The best cask had only 8.4 percent of alcohol, much less than the minimum standard of 11 percent and far below the desired level of 12.5 or 13. "The wine was awful," Johnny said. "It was thin, diluted, the worst we ever made."

When Alsace was annexed the following year, German authorities made life even more difficult for the Hugels by "blocking" their wine, prohibiting them from selling it even to German wine merchants. With the exception of a tiny amount they were allowed to sell to friends and local restaurants, all of the wine had to be held for the German army and navy or certain leaders of the Third Reich. Nazi officials, however, made no promises about when or even how much they would buy. "If they told us to send a few cases to the Russian front, we had to send it," Johnny said. "But that's how we unloaded that awful 1939

vintage. The Germans were careless when they filled out their orders and did not always specify what vintage they wanted, so we always shipped the '39."

That was the only wine they tried to sell. With other outlets closed and prices fixed so low that it was hard to break even, the Hugels decided to make an effort to hold on to their wine. "We began making up excuses whenever we got an order from the Germans," Johnny said. "We'd say, 'We have no corks,' or 'We've run out of bottles,' or 'We have no transportation.' Most of the time, the excuses worked.

The Germans, however, were not finished with the Hugels. When authorities dispatched Polish prisoners of war to Alsace to alleviate a labor shortage in the vineyards, the Hugels were left out. That left Johnny and his father to do most of the work. "I was spending all my time in the vineyard working behind a horse and plow. On those hot summer days when the horse didn't want to move and the flies were all around, it was a nightmare."

An even worse nightmare occurred when the Germans notified Johnny's father that their 300-year-old family wine firm was about to be closed down. No reason was given but it was no secret either: Jean Hugel had

never joined the Nazi Party. The Nazis had sent letter after letter, but Jean kept putting them off, hoping he could keep the family wine business running without joining the Party. He also wanted to preserve the firm for his sons. Now, however, two of them had been drafted into the German army.

Johnny tried to delay being called up by enrolling in medical school, but he was assigned to a medical unit in northern Italy.

Georges, who had been sent to officer's training school after his induction, was targeted for a more frightening destination, a place no German soldier wanted to go: the Russian front.

More than a million Germans had already perished there and another three million were now bogged down in a costly war of attrition. Some who survived had warned Georges what to expect. "My training was good, so I felt prepared," Georges said. "I was not afraid."

His family, however, was terrified. On the eve of his departure, George's mother sobbed uncontrollably, his father was barely able to speak. Finally, Georges's grandfather rose from his chair. Moving slowly across the room to his desk, he opened the drawer and withdrew the tricolored sash he had worn as mayor of Riquewihr when he had delivered his denunciation of pro-German Alsatians. "I have something I want to give you," he said. Taking a pair of scissors, he cut off a portion of the sash with the blue, white and red colors of the French flag and said, "This is the most important thing I have. Always carry it with you. In case of trouble, tell them you are French, not German." The elder Hugel also gave Georges two gold coins. "That is all I can do for you," he said sadly.

Georges arrived in the Ukraine on July 15, 1943. Unlike the war in the West where conventional military rules applied, this was something completely different. Hitler had called it a "war of annihilation." Conquering Russia, he declared, would be easier than France. But he had underestimated the resolve of the Red Army.

"Hitler was crazy," Georges said. "There were a few fanatics in our group who believed in what he was talking about but most of us thought he was crazy. We weren't fighting for Hitler. We were just hoping to stay alive."

From the day they arrived, Georges and his unit found themselves on the defensive, almost always retreating. Nothing was motorized and everything, including food and ammunition, had to be hauled by horses. Day after day they walked, much of the time in drenching rain which turned the vast plains of the Ukraine into an endless sea of mud. "It was two feet deep, up to our knees," Georges said. "We could barely walk. Our horses and carts were always getting stuck."

And all around them, nearly everywhere, lay the stench of death. Atrocities and scorched-earth tactics carried out by both armies had turned the landscape into a wasteland of decaying corpses. The worst atrocities were committed by the Einsatzgruppe, German commandos who followed in the wake of the German army's advance, methodically rounding up Slavs, Jews, Gypsies and Communists, and killing them. "It was worse than you can imagine," Georges said, "the people, the animals lying there ...

"You had to have something to hang on to or you would go mad." For Georges, it was a motorbike his father bought him as a graduation gift when he finished high school in 1939. "I tried not to think about home, my family, the vineyards; that was much too painful. Instead I concentrated on the motorbike and a trip I made with it in the Alps. I relived every kilometer, pictured everything I saw. The mountains, the forests, that was what I tried to think about."

But nothing could block out the horrors that confronted him as he and his men slogged westward: the burned-out and abandoned villages, the bodies of victims dangling from trees or scaffolds where they had been hung by the SS. Those were the worst moments. If the bodies were not too high, Georges would order his men to cut them down.

"We didn't feel anything," Georges said. "We were numb, incapable of feeling any emotion. We had walked so far, more than a thousand miles, and we were beyond exhaustion."

But conscious enough to hear the haunting cries of Russian partisans armed with loudspeakers calling them murderers and arsonists for burning their villages.

When possible, Georges and his men followed behind tanks, keeping to the paths that the armored vehicles cut through the mud. Georges cautioned his men not to follow too closely because the tanks were often targets of Russian guns. Despite Georges's warning, some soldiers were careless and paid with their lives.

September came and the warmth of summer fled. But not the rain. Never the rain. If anything, it became heavier and the mud deeper. Only one thing kept Georges and his men moving: the knowledge of what would happen if they fell into Russian hands. "Surrender was never an option. We knew what they did to Germans they captured," Georges said.

One afternoon, Georges felt a burning sensation in his boots. He tried to ignore it but when the pain persisted, he was forced to stop. Removing his boots, Georges discovered they were full of blood. His feet had been pierced by pieces of shrapnel and become infected, and blood poisoning, caused by weeks of marching through water and mud, had also set in. Unable to walk, Georges was left by the roadside. His unit moved on.

"That was my most frightening moment. A wounded soldier was of no use to the Russians and I knew if they found me I was dead."

It turned out to be the best piece of luck Georges ever had. A Red Cross truck came by and stopped. The driver was lost and asked if he knew where a certain town was, explaining that he had a load of wounded soldiers he was taking to a field hospital. Georges said he knew where the town was and would show the way if he could hitch a ride. The driver agreed and lifted Georges into the already jammed ambulance.

After a few weeks in a field hospital, Georges was shipped back to Germany, where he spent his last months as a German soldier recuperating. He never returned to Russia.

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[SAVING THE TREASURES - PAGES 190-193]

When the Germans in Alsace realized how fast the Allies were moving, they began raiding the cellars of winegrowers. People including Georges Hugel watched in dismay as soldiers went from one cellar to

another, loading as much wine as they could carry onto trucks and driving it to an airstrip outside Riquewihr. The cargo was then transferred to airplanes, which began revving up their engines. The first plane lurched forward fifty meters, then came to a stop, as if someone had thrown out an anchor. None of the other planes, their engines groaning under the exertion, could take off either.

"Their planes were too light," Georges said, "and they didn't have enough fuel to take off fully loaded, so, fortunately, most of our wine remained in the country."

Alsace was the last part of France to be liberated, and it happened just as the harvest was getting underway.

"It was a huge harvest but also a sad one," said Georges's brother André. Their father was in hiding from the Gestapo after refusing to join the Nazi Party and their brother Johnny was still in the German army. Georges himself was still recuperating from the wounds he suffered in Russia and could only get around on crutches.

Bringing in the grapes was nearly impossible. Many vineyards had been sown with antitank mines in anticipation of an Allied attack. There were also unexploded bombs that had been dropped by the Allies, a few of which went off when vineyard workers stepped on them. As grape picking got under way, Allied planes began attacking departing German convoys. Georges and André were bringing in a load of grapes when a plane, its machine guns firing, passed just yards over their heads. Georges pushed André down and fell beside him. Grapes and chunks of earth flew everywhere as bullets from the plane riddled the vineyard. When the two brothers got up, the first thing they saw was a German truck a short distance away in flames. But as the smoke cleared, they suddenly realized that several of their workers had been killed.

When Georges and André returned home, their mother told them that a German officer had just been there. She said she had been reluctant to let him in, but he had insisted. "I have a message for you," he told her. "Madame, you may tell your husband that it is safe to come home." Fearing a trap, Madame Hugel replied that she did not understand what the officer was taking about and that, in any case, she had no idea where her husband was. The German smiled grimly. "Madame, you understood me perfectly. There is no longer any risk of him being arrested. The air is pure now. Everything here has changed."

As the rumble of Allied artillery became louder, the Hugels and others huddled for protection in their wine cellars. On the night of December 3, mortar and artillery shells began landing in Riquewihr.

Two days later, the streets of Riquewihr were full of Texans, some in tanks, some herding German prisoners and others conducting house-to-house searches.

"We were stunned by how laid-back the Americans were and the absence of noise," André Hugel said. "The sound of their rubber-soled boots was such a change from the hob-nailed boots the Germans wore."

It was 7.30 in the morning when the Americans, part of the 36th Infantry Division, headquartered in San Antonio, arrived. Grandpa Emile Hugel had awakened an hour earlier. When he realized Riquewihr had been liberated, he decided to put on his best suit to greet the Americans. As he was pulling on his pants, however, a nervous young GI looking for Germans burst into the room. At first, the eighty-year-old Hugel, whose eyesight was weak, did not realize who it was, but his grandson André, who accompanied the soldier, quickly explained. The old man was so overjoyed that he rushed across the bedroom and threw his arms around the American. As he did so, his pants dropped to the floor. The soldier was so startled that he leveled his gun at Hugel. The misunderstanding was quickly cleared up and the now impeccably dressed Emile soon joined the jubilant throngs outside.

The celebration was even more special for the Hugel family because Jean Hugel had emerged from hiding. He had been ensconced in a hotel in nearby Colmar, pretending to be one of the staff, when a friendly telephone operator called him and said, "Monsieur Hugel, you can quit hiding now. The Americans are here."

Once he was back, he began doing a little horse trading, bartering wine for fuel, one jerry can of wine for two jerry cans of fuel. The Texans considered it a bargain. So did Jean, who now could drive his car and truck again.

A week after Riquewihr's liberation, the Germans launched a counterattack to retake the town. As they raced through the village, the Texans fired at them from the windows of homes and buildings. Soon the cobblestone streets were filled with dead and wounded. Casualties were carried to the courtyard of the Hugels' winery, which the Americans had converted to a first-aid station and morgue.

Vineyards suffered as well. American tanks ground through fences and vines, some setting off land mines and unexploded shells as they attempted to drive the Germans back. As battles raged, an American plane crashed in the Hugels' vineyard, killing all aboard.

Similar scenes were taking place in towns and villages throughout Alsace. In Ammerschwihr, heavy bombardment by Allied planes sent residents scurrying to their wine cellars for safety. Dozens found shelter in the cellar of the Kuehn wine firm, whose name, ironically, was the Cave de l'Enfer, the Cellar of Hell. They were not alone, because the cave had already been filled with statues of saints from one of Ammerschwihr's churches. The statues had been placed there for safety. (People still refer to it as the time when the saints went to hell.)

The real inferno was upstairs. Fires burned everywhere as American planes, having spotted two German tanks, repeatedly bombed the sixteenth-century town in the belief that the Germans still held it. The Americans did not realize that the tanks had been abandoned and that all of the Germans had left.

As terrified residents tried to put out the fires, the water suddenly stopped as wells ran dry. A bomb had hit the reservoir. In desperation, people began hauling bottles and barrels of wine from their cellars, hooking hoses to the casks and spraying the contents on the fires. Jean Adam was thirteen years old as he helped his mother and father try to save the family winery. "The wine we were using was pretty generic, very low in alcohol because harvests had been so bad, so it didn't cause any explosions," Jean said. "But it might have been different if we had been using Gewürztraminer."

With their wine, the Adams were able to save their stable and animals but very little else. It was the same throughout Ammerschwihr. Eighty-five percent of the town and many of the surrounding vineyards were destroyed.

In Riquewihr, Georges Hugel looked at the destruction with sadness and pain. He had witnessed the brutality of war as a German soldier on the Russian front, and nothing, he felt, could ever be as bad as that. But seeing his own home threatened and his friends and neighbors under attack convinced him there was something more he had to do. "I'm going back to war," he told his family. "I'm joining the French army."

It was the worst news his parents could have imagined: one son still fighting for the Germans, and now one with the Allies.

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After World War 1, the French government had ordered growers to rip out their hybrid vines and replace them with the traditional grape varieties of Alsace. Growers dragged their feet, complaining it was too expensive. The government did not force the issue.

When Alsace was annexed by Germany in 1940, new pressure was exerted, this time by Berlin. Get rid of the hybrids or else, the authorities warned. Still nothing happened.

One day in 1942, Alsatians awoke to the sound of sawing. Looking out their windows, they saw that their vineyards were full of Hitler Youth from Baden, Germany. The Third Reich had sent truckloads of the young people into Alsace armed with detailed maps of the vineyards and secateurs and saws. In one fell swoop, the hybrids, which had comprised 75 percent of the vineyards, were gone from Alsace. In the opinion of most Alsatians, it was the one good thing the Germans did for Alsace. Now there was no choice but to replant.

Work, however, began slowly. Most of the vineyards were littered with unexploded mines and artillery shells. There was also a labor shortage; nearly all of Alsace's young men had been drafted into the German army. Most were sent to the Russian front and a huge percentage had been killed. Those who survived were only now making their way home.

The waiting had been particularly difficult for the Hugels. Their eldest son, Georges, was now fighting in the French army; their second son, Johnny, still was in the German one.

Johnny returned home first, he had been in a German unit fighting near Lake Constance on the Austrian border when he spotted a column of French tanks approaching. Ducking into a nearby farmhouse, Johnny quickly shed his German uniform and traded it to a farmer for some old clothes. "Look after yourself" the farmer called as Johnny rushed out to greet the troops. He was back in Riquewihr a few days later.

One day after that, Georges returned as well. That was when they discovered they had been in the same battle. Georges had been fighting at Lake Constance too.

With the Hugels reunited and Alsace now completely liberated, the real celebrating could finally begin. "We went from cellar to cellar. We were plastered for three days," Johnny said. "Every day someone else, one of our friends, was coming home. Every day someone else came back." ,

But many did not. At least 40,000 young Alsatian men were killed fighting in the German army, most of them in Russia. Before liberation, death notices were required to state that the victim *Gefallen für Führer, Volk und Vaterland* (died for the Führer, people and Fatherland). Now, grieving families could say without fear that their sons had died on the Eastern front.

As Alsatians reclaimed their French identity, it was also safe to speak French. Instead of having to greet friends on the street by saying "Heil Hitler," people now could say "*Bonjour*." Men could also sport berets. Names of streets, businesses, towns and villages were restored as well.

Reichenweier became Riquewihr. Hügel und Söhne was once again Hugel et Fils.