

General de Bollardière : The French General who changed his mind

General Jacques de Bollardière is a particular figure. After being one of the greatest French soldiers of the twentieth century, the French colonial wars, especially the Algerian one, made him change. He became then a non-violent leader.

A great soldier

Jacques Pâris de Bollardière was born in 1908 in a Breton, aristocratic and traditionalist family in which every male was a soldier. That's why, in 1930, he was graduated from the French military academy of Saint Cyr and became an officer. At this stage, it is important to underline that Jacques de Bollardière spent one more year at this school because of frequent stays in the school's jail. Indeed, he was a turbulent military student, as his widow, Simone de Bollardière, stated¹. In 1939, Jacques de Bollardière became lieutenant in the Foreign Legion, a French particularity because this army is composed of voluntary foreigners who are managed by French officers. Jacques de Bollardière was then based in Oued Dra, South Morocco.

Technically speaking, the first battle which Jacques de Bollardière participated in was in Narvik in Norway in 1940, against the Nazi army. The first battle is very important in the life of the soldier: it is the baptism by fire. Jacques de Bollardière used this religious expression in his autobiography, as a devoted catholic and his "*fire baptising*" had a real spiritual dimension: he underlined the "*deep communion*" which exists "*between men that the death presence reduces themselves at their men's truth*"². He meant that he became an officer as someone becomes a priest or a pastor. After the victory of the Allied in Narvik, the Legionaries are repatriated in Brest in Brittany at the beginning of June 1940. Then, Jacques de Bollardière witnessed to quick and stunning defeat of the French army, feeling a lot of shame.

He went from Brittany to Great Britain illegally and found his unit near Liverpool. That's the way he met General Charles de Gaulle for the first time speaking of the victory with an "impassioned certainty"³. He became also the friend of many English soldiers and appreciated their organisation and functioning: "*A virile discipline in the service, a frank and*

¹ Interview with Simone de Bollardière, Guidel, January 3, 2008.

² BOLLARDIERE Jacques Pâris de (Général), *Bataille d'Alger, bataille de l'homme*, Desclée De Brouwer Ed., Paris, 1972, 167 p., p. 20.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

polite conversation between gentlemen in clubs, whatever the grade"⁴. Furthermore, he retrospectively underlined their deep respect of the human dignity.

Two months after his arrival in England, Jacques de Bollardière went to Dakar (Senegal) where he "*painfully realized the consolidated gap between the Vichy army and the soldiers of the Free France*"⁵. He participated in the liberation of Eritrea where he met Roger Barberot. The two new friends took part in the liberation of Syria⁶. Then Jacques de Bollardière and his Legionaries participated in the Libya and Egypt campaigns, against the famous German General Rommel. During these long campaigns, in very tough conditions, Jacques de Bollardière fought with traditional military values of honour, sacrifice and respect of the enemy. Jacques de Bollardière notably participated in the battles of Bir Hakeim and El Alamein, in which a mine hurt him in November 1942. Hospitalised in Cairo, he refused to be amputated. After recovering his health, he went to Algiers in September 1943 where he noted the dissensions between the Free France Forces and the General Giraud's army. When he knew that *maquis* had been created in France, he went to London in order to join the resistant. He became then a paratrooper and was trained by the Intelligence Service with the future French Ministry of the Army, Pierre Messmer. During this training, the French soldiers are falsely questioned, but Jacques de Bollardière stated that he hadn't been tortured neither he received "*The proper courses on the manner to torture*"⁷.

Jacques de Bollardière explained that the question of honour is then fundamental for the soldiers. In April 1944, Jacques de Bollardière is parachuted in the Ardennes staying in the clandestineness with his soldiers during six months, helped by the population. Using the religious vocabulary, Jacques de Bollardière insisted on the communion between soldiers and civilians: "*We had faith in them like they had faith in us. We felt that our very existence relied on this mutual faith. It was funded and assured by our humanity stronger than the savagery of the torturers, more profound than indomitable, invincible, and eternal death*"⁸. This passage evoked probably another war: the Algerian one. Indeed, he wrote his book in the early seventies. Moreover, Jacques de Bollardière stated about the Ardennes *maquis* that: "*We are proud to say to everyone that nobody of us, whatever the circumstances, forgot his human dignity*"⁹. He underlined here that the resistance soldiers refused to torture, to execute

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 24.

⁶ BARBEROT Roger (Colonel), *Malaventure en Algérie avec le Général Paris de Bollardière*, Plon Ed., Tribune libre, Paris, 1957, 244 p., p. 2-19.

⁷ BOLLARDIERE Jacques Pâris de (Général), *Bataille d'Alger...*, *op. cit.*, p. 32.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 33.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 34.

summary or to ill-treat prisoners. At last, Jacques de Bollardière evoked that Father Leloir had an important role to keep the resistance troops' moral integrity in refusing the ill-treatments for the prisoners.

After the Ardennes campaign, Jacques de Bollardière was informed that a French unit had been constituted in the Red Devils, the Third Special Air Service, which had no colonel. Volunteer, Jacques de Bollardière was parachuted in Holland in April 1945. In Germany, he saw the exactions of the allied forces against the population.

His many campaigns with the allied forces made Jacques de Bollardière one of the most distinguished soldiers at the end of the war. He became indeed an officer of the Legion of Honour in France, and he was distinguished in Netherlands and in Belgium. He was also appointed to be an honorary member of the Distinguished Service Order in Great Britain. Thus, Jacques de Bollardière was one of the celebrated French soldiers at the end of the World War Two. But he didn't want to remain in the army.

The experience of the colonial war in Indochina

At the end of the war, Jacques de Bollardière is garrisoned in Nantes. He felt bitterness for the military life: *"I realized with trouble that if the war represented for me the passionate defence of freedom, it was also something else: the powerful instinct of an aggressive young male who dreams to test his forces, to test the tipsiness of that supreme feast, that sacred orgy which breaks the monotony of the days, carries you away, touches you and dresses you with the vain prestige of force and glory"*¹⁰. The bitterness of Jacques de Bollardière is due to the information he had about the reprisals against the German population and also to the monotony of the life in garrison. Thus, he decided to leave.

At the same time, he met a woman who became his wife, Simone Erteaud, born in Nantes in a family of doctors. They got married in December 1945, three months after they met. They went to Barèges for their honeymoon, but Jacques de Bollardière was then contacted by his assistant, Captain Botella, who informed him that his past paratrooper regiment had to go in Indochina and was asking for him. When Simone saw the grave face of her husband, she understood his dilemma due to *"the very strong solidarity between brothers in arms"*¹¹.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 42.

¹¹ Interview with Simone de Bollardière, *op. cit.*

Jacques de Bollardière went to Indochina in February 1946. This war shook the certitudes of Jacques de Bollardière who had to “*question, in the most profound of myself, the sense of my live, of my thought of the army, of the man, of the world*”¹². The new meaning of this war participated in this questioning. Indeed, in Indochina, the enemy was invisible because identical with the civilians that contributed to the strong and ambiguous relations of the French soldiers with the population. But Jacques de Bollardière distinctly underlined that the ill-treatments, qualified “*the intelligence method of the idiots*”, were used rarely or secretly¹³. When these ill-treatments were known by him or the officers, they were penalized.

Her wife Simone settled in Indochina in 1948. She lived first in Tonkin where she gave birth to the first two girls of the family. Jacques and Simone de Bollardière came back to France in 1948. But in 1950, he had to go to Indochina again and accepted to be with his soldiers. This time, Simone de Bollardière stayed in France because the war was harder. Jacques de Bollardière commanded the paratroopers units from 1950 to 1953. During this stay, he noted that the relations between the population and the French soldiers were deteriorating. When he came back to France in 1953 he had “*no illusion*”, according to the terms of Roger Barberot, about the future of the French army in Indochina. He even informed the commandment in Paris. The Dien Bien Phu defeat will take place one year later.

In October 1953 Jacques de Bollardière entered the Military High School Centre (CHEM) where he met a lot of civilians. He was notably sensitive to the thought of Jean Guitton about the importance of the spiritual and moral issues in the war. He realized also the importance of the colonial issue and the Third World emergence. At the same time, the Algerian war began. This war will definitively change Jacques de Bollardière’s life.

The turning point of the Algerian war

In 1956, Colonel Barberot told Jacques de Bollardière that Air forces’ units were in constitution, with soldiers of the contingent recalled up in the army. Indeed, in 1955 and 1956, the war being harder and harder, the government decided to recall up soldiers of the contingent. From August to November 1955 and from April to July 1956, the recalled up soldiers showed their disapproval because they had to spend another time in the army even though they had already made their military service, and because they had to quit their

¹² BOLLARDIERE Jacques Pâris de (Général), *Bataille d’Alger...*, *op. cit.*, p. 52.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 57.

civilian lives (their jobs, their families). Furthermore, to recall up soldiers is very rare in France. During autumn 1955, about 50 incidents took place, the *Daily Express* qualifying even one of them “*mutiny*”¹⁴. The movement was getting worse during spring 1956: about 300 incidents took place in the whole country. Colonel Jacques de Bollardière accepted to command the units of recalled up soldiers in the Air forces whereas he could have commanded units of professional soldiers.

Roger Barberot and Jacques de Bollardière noted the gap between the commandment in Algeria and the Ministry of Defence in Paris, one rejecting the responsibility of the decisions on the other, and vice versa¹⁵. Before their departure to Algeria, the recalled up soldiers raised a revolt in the camp of Mourmelon. 3,000 soldiers devastated the camp on July 8, 1956. Colonel Barberot managed to stifle the revolt by giving to the soldiers a governmental authorization to visit their families before going to Algeria.

The soldiers arrived in the Mitidja valley, near Algiers, in the middle of July 1956. Colonel Barberot had to insist on General Lorillot to know what the mission of his unit was. On July 26, Colonel de Bollardière arrived in Algiers. He noted that the lack of possibilities to organize his troupes and the gap existing between the Algerian situation and the unconcern of the French living in Algeria. He concluded that he had to make “*a determining and definitive choice between the truth and the strength of the soul on the one hand, and the false easiness and the loose surrenders on the other hand*”¹⁶. Roger Barberot and Jacques de Bollardière underlined the fear climate in which the soldiers were: for example, the sentinels frequently fired on shadows in the night causing accidents¹⁷. But this fear could have been with thoughtlessness: for example, a soldier walked alone, without arm, in a place known for ambushes¹⁸.

Immediately after his arrival, Jacques de Bollardière is confronted with the issue of ill-treatments and torture in order to get information. Indeed, Colonel Lemaigre, commanding a regiment of his sector, pointed out cases of ‘ratonnades’ which means ‘mouse-hunting’, the term ‘raton’ qualifying Algerians as a kind of rats (raccoons)¹⁹. Jacques de Bollardière referred in his book to his experience of the Resistance in World War Two to explain his refusal of the torture: “*I knew [...] that the violence imposed in its most hideous form to*

¹⁴ “Mutiny in the French army”, *The Daily Express*, September 12, 1955.

¹⁵ BARBEROT Roger (Colonel), *Malaventure en Algérie...*, *op. cit.*, p. 42 and 46.

¹⁶ BOLLARDIERE Jacques Pâris de (Général), *Bataille d’Alger...*, *op. cit.*, p. 73.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 77 and BARBEROT Roger (Colonel), *Malaventure en Algérie...*, *op. cit.*, p. 68.

¹⁸ BOLLARDIERE Jacques Pâris de (Général), *Bataille d’Alger...*, *op. cit.*, p. 78.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 81.

members of a Resistance movement that we want to push into treason, conducts to form troops of Resistance movement more numerous and more determined than ever. In the maquis, I sang with fire the solemn and passionate song of the partisans: 'Friend, if you fall a friend will come from the shadows to replace me. Refusing torture was forcing us to dialog again with the population'²⁰. Furthermore, Roger Barberot and Jacques de Bollardière saw the absurdity of the French military plan which was only securing the area in order that "nothing happens"²¹. Thus, at the end of August 1956, the Colonel Barberot noticed the lack of results despite the number of soldiers involved. He underlined that the French militaries treated all the Algerians as suspects, the Algerians searching thus to keep out of the French soldiers. In a report dated August 27, 1956: "When we arrived in a village and the residents ran away and were killed, it's almost impossible to know if they were running away because they were scared or because they were really rebels"²².

That's why Colonel Barberot proposed to Colonel de Bollardière to have simultaneously a military plan and a pacification mission managed by military units in order to break off with the old system. He proposed then "to create small patrols (of eight men maximum), especially commanded and trained, to operate in a large area by camouflaging in the day and walking in the night. The patrols had to wear special equipment (djellaba, turban, etc.)"²³. As Colonel Barberot stressed it, those units are involuntarily close to the plan established by Mao Zedong for the revolutionary war. Jacques de Bollardière accepted this Colonel Barberot's proposal, and created the "black commandos". Colonel Barberot admitted that the "name was perhaps badly chosen: our objective was not to kill and to destroy"²⁴. Simultaneously, Jacques de Bollardière asked for the beginning of a New Deal program. For this, he formed a team of the most qualified men in the civilian life and asked for the participation of Jean-Jacques Servan-Schreiber, director of the renowned newspaper *L'Express* who has been recalled up as lieutenant. *L'Express* was a newspaper involved against the Algerian war. Jean-Jacques Servan-Schreiber refused to participate in the "head comity" of the regiment²⁵ but accepted to serve as a soldier in the black commandos²⁶, causing the "admiration" of Jacques de Bollardière²⁷.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 84.

²¹ BARBEROT Roger (Colonel), *Malaventure en Algérie...*, *op. cit.*, p. 80.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 85.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 87.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 118.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 92-93.

²⁶ SERVAN-SCHREIBER Jean-Jacques, *Lieutenant en Algérie*, René Julliard Ed., Paris, 1957, 277 p.

²⁷ BOLLARDIERE Jacques Pâris de (Général), *Bataille d'Alger...*, *op. cit.*, p. 87.

The aim of the black commandos was to walk in the sector during ten or fifteen days: because they were only a few, the soldiers had to be very careful; and because they walked for a long time, they had to live *within* the population. The troop of the black commandos gathered about one hundred soldiers at the beginning but quickly it became a success: the volunteers were more and more numerous and at the same time the Algerian population relied more on them. Jacques de Bollardière was proud on the results: “*We were very satisfied to note a clear détente and the renewal of activities interrupted a long time ago. Terrorism became more difficult to accomplish within a population who wanted to live again. A very sensible decrease in attacks was noticeable*”²⁸.

From the beginning, this experience was also supported by powerful people. Indeed, the director of the National Security, Jean Mairey advocated Jacques de Bollardière in an activity report sent to the Prime Minister Guy Mollet, writing that his action was a “*wonderful success*”²⁹. Roger Barberot also underlined that “*General Manceaux-Demiau was supporting completely the experience. The Resident Minister in Algeria, extremely interested, exclaimed: ‘We have to codify this’. Between the two men, the general commanding the troops in Algeria, Lorillot, took an ambiguous attitude*”³⁰. Indeed, even if the black commandos were celebrated, they were still unofficially created. The first unit became official only in February 1957, after many surreal letters exchanges between the commandment in Algiers, the Ministry of Defence and Colonel Barberot³¹. At the end of 1956, the initiatives of Jacques de Bollardière seemed to be successful as he was nominated general.

But the difficulties remained. Firstly, some French militaries and colons in Algeria were still very opposed to dialogue with the Algerian population. For example, Colonel Barberot is qualified as “*Fellagha Colonel*” by a part of the French population in Algeria thinking the repression was less strong³². Moreover, Jean-Jacques Servan-Schreiber was threatened to death and Colonel Barberot had to intervene with the colons’ leaders in order to protect the French journalist. Secondly, the difficulties of General de Bollardière and his soldiers grew with the demobilization of the recalled-up soldiers at the end of 1956, and relief was not planned for the black commandos. At the same time, the unit of Colonel Argoud, one of the future leaders of the military coup in 1961, settled in the same sector. For Colonel

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ MAIREY Jean : « Rapport confidentiel sur la situation en Algérie » (confidential report on the situation in Algeria), January 2, 1957, reproduced in VIDAL-NAQUET Pierre, *La raison d’Etat. Textes publiés par le Comité Maurice Audin*, Minuit Ed., Documents, Paris, 1962, 330 p., p. 103.

³⁰ BARBEROT Roger (Colonel), *Malaventure en Algérie...*, *op. cit.*, p. 127.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 132-134.

³² Fellagha is a pejorative word qualifying the Algerian soldiers.

Barberot, the soldiers of Colonel Argoud were the key of the resourcefulness allowing the action of his brigade to be pursued. But Colonel Argoud was a partisan of “expeditious justice”, what means illegal executions and torture. Later, Colonel Argoud said: “*The information is obtained whatever the price. The suspects are tortured like guilty persons and eliminated if necessary*”³³.

The issues became insuperable at the early 1957: indeed General Massu obtained the full power in the region of Algiers and became thus the chief of Jacques de Bollardière who received “*orders [...] specifying clearly to hold the efficiency as first criterion and that the police operations have priority over pacification*”³⁴. In contradiction with General Massu’s order, Jacques de Bollardière wrote also a directive recommending his soldiers operating “*vigorously and rapidly but above all with discernment*” and opposing clearly to torture: “*The temptation in which the totalitarian countries fell into considers some practises as normal methods to obtain pieces of information must be rejected unequivocally and those practises strictly condemned*”³⁵.

In early March 1957, General de Bollardière was denied by his hierarchy. Indeed, the secretary of State for the Armed forces, Max Lejeune, inspecting the sector commended by General de Bollardière, said his opposition with the General de Bollardière’s method of pacification, particularly free medical assistance. Then General Massu just had to deny the General de Bollardière’s directive. Moreover, General de Bollardière knew that Algerians have disappeared in his sector, kidnapped by the paratroopers. He asked then to be immediately received by General Massu. Two hours of debates opposed the two men. General de Bollardière wrote then a letter asking to be relieved of his command. General de Bollardière was “*tragically disappointed. My heart is wrung by anguish thinking of Algeria, the army and France. A conscious and monstrous choice has been made. I am now horribly sure of it*”³⁶. At the same time, the commandment forced Jacques de Bollardière to disobey. The day after he sent his letter, he had to search in the mosques of his sector. He refused it categorically and thought of writing a directive entitled “*refusal to obey*”³⁷. But he finally

³³ ARGOUD Antoine (Colonel), *La décadence, l'imposture et la tragédie*, Fayard Ed., Paris, 1974, 360 p., p. 142. Also quoted in BRANCHE Raphaëlle, *La torture et l'armée pendant la guerre d'Algérie 1954-1962*, Gallimard Ed., NRF La suite des temps, Paris, 2001, 474 p., p. 50.

³⁴ BOLLARDIERE Jacques Pâris de (Général), *Bataille d'Alger...*, *op. cit.*, p. 92.

³⁵ Directive of General Pâris de Bollardière, February 18, 1957, quoted in BARBEROT Roger (Colonel), *Malaventure en Algérie...*, *op. cit.*, p. 197. Underlined in the text.

³⁶ BOLLARDIERE Jacques Pâris de (Général), *Bataille d'Alger...*, *op. cit.*, p. 94.

³⁷ BARBEROT Roger (Colonel), *Malaventure en Algérie...*, *op. cit.*, p. 204-205.

asked another officer to assume the responsibility of this operation because he had asked yet to be relieved of his command.

Colonel Barberot decided then to alert the Minister of Defence: “*We try to have results by arbitrary and violence even though a simply coherent system would have allowed having them but everybody till now has refused to organize it*”³⁸. He also said: “*If we disagree now strictly with commandment, it’s because what was only fortuitous becomes legal, tolerated and even approved*”³⁹. All the resorts tried, General de Bollardière discretely came back to France on March 14, 1957. Colonel Barberot did it also a little time later, having leave permission.

At the same time, the “Bollardière case” becomes public. Indeed, the Jean-Jacques Servan-Schreiber’s articles on his Algerian experience being prosecuted, he wrote to General de Bollardière to ask him what he thought about his articles. General de Bollardière replied on March twenty seventh that Jean-Jacques Servan-Schreiber served very well during his recalled up in Algeria and that it was logical he was now working as a journalist, “*by underlining for the public opinion the dramatic aspects of the revolutionary war to which we face, and underlining the dreadful danger if we lose, because of the false pretext of the immediate efficiency, our morale values which made by one’s own the greatness of our civilization and army*”⁴⁰. The letter was published in *L’Express* with the authorization of General de Bollardière.

The Minister of Defence immediately summoned General de Bollardière who was penalized for sixty days of obligatory cessation of activity because he published the letter without the allowing of the Ministry of defence. The Ministry of defence threatened even General de Bollardière to be fired from the army. It’s only after two councils of ministers that General de Bollardière was ‘only’ jailed for sixty days in a military camp. The Ministry for Overseas Gaston Defferre was totally opposed to the dismissal of General de Bollardière and was a real support for the creation of the Individual rights and liberties commission. This commission was supposed to enquire about torture and ill-treatments cases but concretely it will only record them⁴¹. At the same time, the debate about the use of torture by the French

³⁸ Letter of Colonel Barberot to Mr. Abel Thomas, Cabinet Director of the minister of national Defence, March 10, 1957, quoted in *ibid.*, p. 202.

³⁹ Letter of Colonel Barberot to the minister of national Defence, March 12, 1957, quoted in *ibid.*, p. 203.

⁴⁰ Letter of General Jacques Pâris de Bollardière to Jean-Jacques Servan-Schreiber, published in *L’Express*, March 27, 1957, reproduced in BOLLARDIERE Jacques Pâris de (Général), *Bataille d’Alger...*, *op. cit.*, p. 94.

⁴¹ About the creation of this commission, cf. BRANCHE Raphaëlle, *La torture et l’armée...*, *op. cit.*, p. 151.

army became very tough in the media. 3,000 Algerians disappeared and many others were killed during this battle in which torture was systematically used.

General de Bollardière was jailed in the garrison of La Courneuve near Paris. Colonel Barberot was demobilized on April 25, 1957. The indiscipline of Jacques de Bollardière was of course much more than the legal terms. It resulted from the refusal of Jacques de Bollardière to torture and to ill-treat Algerians and this refusal was founded on the Christian values of Jacques de Bollardière, as Colonel Barberot underlined it: General de Bollardière “*is in an absolute rigour for all his important or secondary actions, for his choices and preferences. But it is not enough to speak of morale rigour and we have to add the ‘Christian’ epithet*”⁴². The punishment of Jacques de Bollardière is severe in comparison with other ones sanctioned officers. Thus, General Faure was only punished by thirty days of prison for a conspiracy against the Fourth Republic. But the sanctions against officers were less serious than for soldiers and non-commissioned officers condemned to jail.

After his punishment, Jacques de Bollardière felt “*alone and horribly tired*”⁴³. All the military values which funded his life went away, what he compared to the defeat of 1940. But he didn’t want to resign of the army, preferring to transform the institution being in it. He was then transferred as the assistant of the commandment for the French Equatorial Africa (AEF) in Brazzaville, Congo. Afterwards, he held the same job in Germany. For both those occupancies, General de Bollardière had nothing to do. He felt then tired or even depressed. When the military coup occurred in April 1961, General de Bollardière was disgusted and resigned of the army. He was fifty four years old.

The “Non-Violent General”

In December 1961, Jacques de Bollardière found a job as the assistant of the director for a shipbuilder company. Quickly, he realized that another form of violence existed: social violence. He wanted to stop to work but he didn’t want to “*desert cowardly the fight*”⁴⁴. Luckily, in October 1963, Father Feliers and Jo Plunier met Jacques de Bollardière to suggest him to join a permanent education organism, Promotion and Culture Institute. Jacques de Bollardière accepted it. He worked for this organism for seven years, organizing 300 training courses for more than 22,000 persons. At the same time, he gave his first speech on peace and

⁴² BARBEROT Roger (Colonel), *Malaventure en Algérie...*, *op. cit.*, p. 19.

⁴³ BOLLARDIERE Jacques Pâris de (Général), *Bataille d’Alger...*, *op. cit.*, p. 105.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 121.

the encyclical “Pacem in terra”, on December 14, 1963. He was also involved in politics, being candidate for the legislative elections in 1968. He was candidate in Lorient for a centrist list called “Progress and Modern Democracy”. He had about 10% of the vote.

Above all, he discovered non-violence movement. Indeed, a non-violent activist, Jean-Marie Muller, gave a speech in Lorient on October 23, 1970. Simone de Bollardière interested by the thought of Martin Luther King, suggested her husband to listen to Jean-Marie Muller. Jacques de Bollardière was touched deep down in his heart by the conference. Then, he met Jean-Marie Muller who said that the attitude of Jacques de Bollardière during the Algerian war had modified his life. The two men became friends.

One year later, the memory of the Algerian war reappeared with the publication of *La vraie bataille d'Alger (the real battle of Algiers)*, written by General Jacques Massu⁴⁵. This book ensured that torture was necessary, what incited Jacques de Bollardière to answer. Jacques de Bollardière gave a lot of interviews in newspapers before to write his own book in 1972, entitled *Bataille d'Alger, bataille de l'homme (Battle of Algiers, battle of the man)*. A documentary was even realized on Jacques de Bollardière by a French non-violent deserter of the Algerian war, André Gazut. This Swiss documentary had been aired in many francophone countries, but only in 2001 in France when a new debate on torture occurred⁴⁶.

In 1973, two Polynesian members of the Parliament wrote a public letter protesting against the French nuclear tests in Mururoa. The journalist Jean-Jacques Servan-Schreiber contacted Jacques de Bollardière to organize an expedition in the nuclear zone. A meeting took place in Papeete in June 1973. The expedition project aborted, so Jacques de Bollardière, Jean-Marie Muller, a future ecologist leader Brice Lalonde, Father Jean Toulat and Hugh Monroe decided to secretly join the crew of a boat which was already in the Mururoa zone, The Fri. This boat was the one of a New-Zealand movement, Peace Media. The French non-violent activists joined The Fri in a small boat, L'Arwen. On July 15, 1973 the two boats met. In The Fri, there was notably Peter Yeates and Gilbert Nicolas. Jacques de Bollardière said he “*accomplish[es] typically a commando operation, with a huge difference with past: before, I went to kill people; now, I go to prevent them from killing*”⁴⁷. On July 17th, the French army ordered the boat to leave the nuclear zone then stopped the ship. All the pacifists were arrested and imprisoned in the military base in Hao. Immediately, they organized a hunger

⁴⁵ MASSU Jacques (Général), *La vraie bataille d'Alger*, Plon Ed., Paris, 1971, 394 p.

⁴⁶ Broadcasted on the Parliamentary channel in July, 2001, as well as on France 3's regional programmes.

⁴⁷ TOULAT Jean, *Combattants de la non-violence. De Lanza del Vasto au Général de Bollardière*, Le Cerf Ed., 1983, quoted in BOUBAULT Guy, GAUCHARD Benoît and MULLER Jean-Marie, *Jacques de Bollardière. Compagnon de toutes les libérations*, Non-Violence Actualité Ed., Montargis, 2001, 154 p., p. 84.

strike. They were free on July 19th, except Jacques de Bollardière who was imprisoned two more days. Weakened by the expedition and the hunger strike, Jacques de Bollardière had to be medically evacuated to Paris. In jail, Jacques de Bollardière was informed he was compulsorily retired. Then he decided to write to the Ministry of Defence to resign from the grade of officer of the Legion of honour. He published this information at the end of July 1973.

Jacques de Bollardière was then totally engaged for non-violence. He participated in the great meeting for the Larzac peasants in August 1973, speaking in front of more than 50,000 persons. Between those persons, there was José Bové, a young Parisian activist who became a peasant in Le Larzac, and after the famous leader of the trade union La Confédération paysanne (the peasant confederation) and an altermondialist leader. Jacques de Bollardière participated many times in meetings in Le Larzac. In September 1973, Jean Authier created a non-violent movement, called “Non-violent action”. Jacques de Bollardière joined this movement with Jean-Marie Muller. This movement became “Movement for a Non-Violent Action” in November 1974. Jacques de Bollardière was one of the ten members of the Co-ordination committee. He helped then many conscientious objectors prosecuted during the seventies. At the end of the seventies, he had a first cancer but he continued to act. But a second cancer caused his death, on February 22, 1986. He was seventy eight years old.

Jacques de Bollardière was surely one of the greatest French soldiers during World War Two. But the colonial wars made him change. He represents one of the most emblematic cases of refusal in the Algerian war, by protesting against the use of torture and ill-treatments. At last, he is an emblematic French non-violent activist of the twentieth century, being a “non-violent general”. That’s why his name is polemical in France, but some villages and cities – even Paris in 2007 – have streets and squares named ‘Jacques de Bollardière’.

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