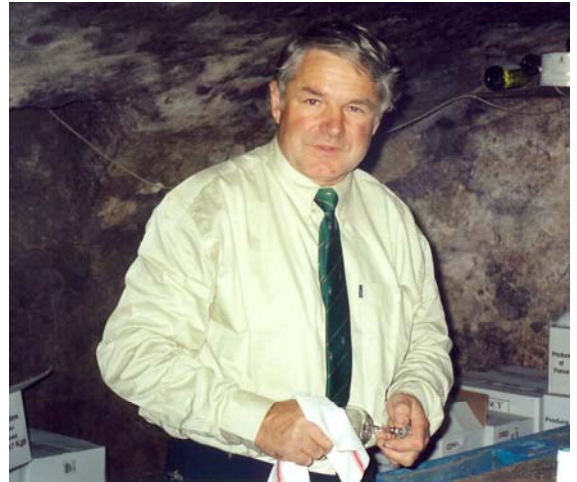


# Everyday is Memorial Day for Pierre Ragon

Pierre Ragon is the proprietor of Domaine Trotereau, a very small estate in Quincy (Kahn-SEE). A minor appellation in Frances' Loire Valley, Quincy is located on the west bank of the Cher River, a tributary of the Loire River. It's a white wine appellation, known for producing rustic Sauvignon Blanc. Because the soil here is more sand than limestone, the wine produced is in general less refined than the Sauvignon Blanc from Quincy's prestigious neighbors to the east in Sancerre and Pouilly-Fumé. But because it is one of the oldest appellations in France, second only to Châteauneuf-du-Pape, the region has a long tradition of wine growing and many of the vineyards have very old vines. Only at great age do the vine's roots penetrate well-below the sand, reaching into the gravel subsoil. Here, old vines with deep root systems will yield wine with good complexity and more finesse than younger vines from the same site, direct contact with the ancient buried gravel being key.



*Pierre Ragon*

I met Pierre Ragon years ago while on a trip visiting French producers represented by importer Peter Weygandt. Before we embarked, Peter asked me whom I would most like to visit in the Loire Valley. He was surprised when I requested Pierre Ragon of Quincy, instead of one of his *hot* producers in Sancerre. I told Peter I wanted to meet Pierre because I thought Domaine Trotereau offered a remarkable and interesting expression of Sauvignon Blanc, which also happened to hit the market at a very reasonable price. In short, I wanted to meet the man who was capable of producing such consistently great Sauvignon Blanc from vineyards thought to be too sandy to grow great wine.

On the way to our appointment, Peter told me that he had met Pierre at a wine exposition in Paris a few



*Pierre's cousin (our translator) in Pierre's meticulously kept vineyard*

years back, but had never personally visited Domaine Trotereau. When we arrived, Pierre was waiting for us in front of the winery, seated in an very old Fiat that had definitely seen better days. He was in a tie and dress slacks, unusual attire for a wine grower getting ready to hit the cellar. I noticed that his clothes didn't seem to fit properly and he seemed uneasy in them. His pants were too long and gathered around his shoes. In an attempt to correct this, they were folded up at the waist several times without the benefit of a belt. His shirt showed deep creases, indicating to all that it had been just removed from its packaging and worn as is. His tie was inverted, with the narrow tail extending well-below the wider main. To compensate for this he simply tucked the longer tail into his shirt. Lastly, his hair was parted severely

to one side, held in place with what was likely the French equivalent of Brill Cream. Just then, Pierre's cousin from Paris arrived, to act as an interpreter for us. It was becoming obvious that Mr. Ragon had gone to great effort for our visit, which was unusual for a humble vigneron.

We headed for the cellar to taste his single cuvee, still in tank. The winery/cellar was tiny and with only *one* wine in *one* tank to try it didn't take us very long. Then it was off to the vineyard. After that, Pierre informed us (through his interpreter) that he had made reservations for a grand lunch at a nearby Michelin three-star restaurant. We were stunned. Although a wonderful gesture, we explained to him that there was no need for him to expend a great sum of money by offering us such an extravagant meal, but he held firm and insisted, adding that we were to order what ever wine we wanted regardless of the cost. To avoid any superfluous details, the meal was perfect, and had to cost this poor man a small fortune. Near the end of the meal one of my cohorts on the trip, a distributor from Michigan, leant over to me and said "we could not sell enough of his wine to pay for this meal," adding, that "Pierre probably doesn't even make enough wine to afford this meal." This comment was caught by the translator and dutifully conveyed to Pierre. His face grew stern, and he said (through the translator) that this had nothing to do with wine sales, rather, it was out of appreciation for us as *Americans*. Needless to say, we were taken a 'back. He went on to elaborate, that he would not have the life he so loves, his little vineyard, his tiny cellar, etc., if it were not for the Americans who fought to free France during WW II.



*Pierre Ragon, Chef d’Cuisine, and Pierre's cousin*

The table grew silent as everyone immediately deduced the motive behind Pierre's dress, his cousin coming from Paris to serve as a translator, and the fine seven course French meal we all just enjoyed. As we were the first Americans to visit Pierre since the war, he wanted to show his respect and to say thank you. We were all humbled by this very modest wine grower. As the conversation meandered through these more serious matters, it was brought-up that both my father and Peter's, had served in WW II, and our colleague from Michigan lost his uncle to the Germans, and was buried in France.

As we left the restaurant, Pierre told us he wanted to show us something next to his vineyard. We agreed and headed back to his Domaine. Although we missed it earlier that day, our heads too full of business I guess, there near the vineyards was an immaculately kept cemetery for American soldiers. We left our cars to pay our respects. As we approached, a manicured field of crosses, with the odd star of David, opened up before us. Pierre informed us that each and every morning before going to tend his vineyard, he stops at this cemetery to offer a prayer of thanks to those young men who gave their life for him.

So as you see, deep in rural France, everyday is in fact Memorial Day. My experience with Pierre Ragon that afternoon is etched in my mind, upwelling forcefully every year around the end of May, mixed with memories of my father and thoughts of other servicemen, past and present, who have and do sacrifice so much for us.