Charles de Gaulle
By James Collins

Paris is one of the most beautiful cities in the world. When you visit Paris, you must take your camera. Pictures are all around. The city is a few thousand years old and its age shows in beautiful old buildings, cobblestone streets, little stores, and massive monuments. The camera shutter is always going.

When my business trip to Paris ended, I was relieved and pleased. I had taken pictures on every major street emanating from the Arc de Triomphe. My room was two blocks away on the second floor, in an old-fashioned French hotel with 8-foot French doors opening out onto the street. Now I wanted to get back to America. I wanted to see bustling American streets and traffic. I wanted to see the subways. I wanted to see McDonald's, Burger King, Macy's, and Sears. I had enough of the French culture and I was tired.

I took the metro to Charles de Gaulle airport because I had been on several trips to Paris. I knew that were alternates to the expense of cabs. I was traveling light. I had to check my bags and was now going through security. All I had was my trusty camera and a small carry-on. This was 1984 before the days when they made you take your shoes off to check for bombs. I was in line on an orderly queue up to the security conveyor belt. You had to place your luggage on the conveyor belt, which fed your belongings into the x-ray machine.

Security was a 17-year-old conscript in the French army performing his two years of active service. He was very snappily dressed in a blue uniform with the jaunty French kepi. The one ominous piece of accoutrement was the French Marat submachinegun slung over his shoulder on a short strap. Besides the normal security sign, there was a massive yellow one right at the x-ray machine which was a warning displayed in both French and English. It said attention, the x-ray machine may damage high-speed film and you may lose your pictures. It was a warning clear and terse and I had a camera full of unbelievable pictures of Paris. I was concerned.

I loaded my carry-on onto the conveyor belt and it started on its strip into the x-ray machine. I handed my camera to the French security soldier. He handed it back and said something to me in French. My response was, "Je suis American. Je non parle pas français." to those who do not speak French this was, "I am an American. I do not speak French."

I then handed him the camera a second time and pointed to the sign, which explained that the x-ray could destroy my pictures. He handed it back. Again, I pointed at the sign and for a third, time handed him the camera. This time I was shocked as he swung the submachinegun up to the side of my head and energize the bolt. I could hear the bolt slam and felt the hit against the side of my head. I dropped the camera.

I remembered the Kent massacre when students argued with American National Guard 17 and 18-year-olds who were carrying loaded rifles. I did not want to be on the 7

o'clock news. As I dropped my camera on the conveyor belt and walked through the metal detector, I continued praying thanks to God and my guardian angel. This continued as I picked up my carry-on and my camera and got on my plane. I was very glad to get out of Paris alive. Both the pictures and I survived.

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