The history of Rigny castle.

“No royal taxes paid by a king’s loyal servant.”

This inscription could be read on the castle gate in 1789. But the coming of the French revolution brought tumult and disorder and put an end to this flattering testimony from the royal generosity of His Majesty King Louis XVI.

At three miles upstream from Gray, the castle of Rigny is situated on the right bank of the Saône River. Rigny dates from the Gallo-Roman era. The name Rigny (Rione, Roigney, Roigne and Rigney) appeared early in the history of Franche-Comté.

Rigny was a dependency of the duchy of Burgundy and was situated at the border of the kingdom. Rigny turned out to be a strategic place and played an important role in the border wars. Rigny was continually attacked, seized, destroyed then rebuilt. Each time Rigny seemed to rise from its ruins it would expose itself to new disasters.

In 891, Rigny, at that time named Rione, was destroyed by the Normans. Then in 947, the Hungarians, from the East, ran through the Rhine River to invade and plunder the Champagne and the Burgundy. In its long history Rigny was repeatedly devastated and plundered.

After several centuries of lull, the villagers of this "poor and destitute country" experienced new disasters.

In 1286, the Count Othon IV of Burgundy’s troops seized the castle. Jean de Rigny, Foulque de Rigny’s father and seneschal of Burgundy, was captured and made prisoner.

In 1290, Jean de Rigny began to rebuild the castle. But shortly after the battle between Philip the Fair and the barons started and Rigny was again devastated.

By the treaty of Vincennes in 1295 Othon IV handed over the county of Burgundy to Philip the Fair. As a consequence the barons of Franche-Comté rebelled against the king of France in 1298.

In 1311, Foulques de Rigny considered that his subjects had suffered enough from long-term hardships: construction works, losses of goods due to theft, invasions or wars. He decided that he would no longer impose the tithe on his subjects.

The villagers of Rigny had always been servile and loyal to the king of France. In return, Charles VII exempted them from paying salt tax and land tax (the taille).
**The Hundred Year’s War.**

Hugues I, Foulques’ grandson, had Rigny confiscated due to his alliance with Jean de Neufchatel. Philippe VI gave Rigny to his wife Jeanne de Bourgogne. In 1359, Jean le Bon returned his castle to him because of his good services. On April the 2nd, 1362, the battle of Brignais, near Lyon, took place between France and England. The French army, under the command of Jacques de Bourbon, constable of France, was defeated. The English seized Rigny and Hugues I was made prisoner. On June the 21st, 1363, Hugues I received a donation from the King of France compensating him for expenses spent for its ransom.

The historical records of the siege of Termonde, in Belgium, report that Hugues I died in November 1379. “Here lies the Knight Hugues of Regni, from Burgundy ...”

Later on France was divided into two parts: the north controlled by the Burgundians and the south by the Armagnacs. The lords of Rigny joined the ranks of king of France. Antoine of Vergy, lord of Rigny and married with Hugues II’s daughter, was wounded while defending John the Fearless on the bridge of Montereau. He was arrested and imprisoned. A few months later he managed to escape.

In the reign of Louis XI, Guillaume of Vergy fought at Charles the Bold’s side. In 1446, Guillaume of Vergy took part in several battles such as the battle of Morat or the battle of Nancy. He was captured while defending the Duke of Burgundy’s daughter against the French army. Thanks to his braveness, Guillaume of Vergy became an adviser to Louis XI. However, when Charles VIII ascended the throne, the Lord of Rigny decided to join the ranks of Maximilian of Austria (1459-1519). He was given the responsibility of being in command of Maximilian’s troops in Burgundy. Meanwhile, Guillaume of Vergy had married with Charles the Bold’s daughter.
In 1483, Jean of Pontailler, Guillemette of Vergy’s son and Guillaume IV’s nephew, acquired Rigny which had remained the property of the Pontaillers for over a century.

On January the 15th, 1608, the Pontaillers sold Rigny to the Duke of Vendôme, Henry IV’s natural son.
In a February 1607 letter, Henry IV only required that Hubert Dumelinet, the crown prosecutor of Langres, hand Rigny on to the King’s subjects.
On September the 7th, 1607, in another letter Henry IV forced the owners of Rigny to make Rigny a safe place.
One would think that the 17th century would have been a period of peace, and that the conflicts would stop. On the contrary, Rigny was going through the worst period of its history.

The beginning of the end…

For decades, a conflict had been brewing between two neighboring towns: Gray and Rigny. The tensions, due to frustration and humiliations, were worsening day by day. Both sides had a shared responsibility for the upcoming conflict.

For instance, the Knight Du Bocage, the owner of Rigny, made prisoner several stone-cutters from Gray who had been invited to work in the castle.
In November 1621, the knight Du Bocage led his peasants to plunder the surroundings of Gray, promising them an easy victory and rich loot. But Du Bocage’s attempt to plunder Gray failed.
A complaint was lodged against him to the chancellor of France who asked the governor of Besançon to prevent Du Bocage from doing any acts of violence.

J.J de Longueval succeeded to the knight Du Bocage in 1627. J.J de Longueval was a nobleman who served the duke of Orléans as a mounted man-at-arms. J.J de Longueval married Marie Morin, the heiress of Rigny.

On June the 27th, 1636, the lieutenant at the court of Rigny, Antoine Martin, reported that J.J de Longueval did not always do his duty properly during the siege and storming of Rigny.
On March the 6th, 1633, the council of the town of Gray lodged a complaint to the parliament of Dôle against the lord of Rigny who had arrested and imprisoned for three days several boatmen transporting salt to Gray.

At that time, Gray was under Spanish domination, and the Spanish looked covetously at the French neighboring village: Rigny, the most beautiful and largest province of Champagne. Given its location on the Saône River, the only navigable river in the region, Rigny could turn out to be dangerous for the Spanish trade.

In 1635, Pétrey of Champvans, who was sent by the court of Spain to prepare the defense of Gray, told that Rigny was “a mote in the eye of Gray”. His phrase summed up the situation very well at that time.

As soon as the occasion presented itself, a serious conflict arose from growing tensions between the two neighboring villages.

In 1636, the king of France ordered the attack of Dole under the command of the prince of Condé. After he visited Rigny the king required that this place is to protect against any threats. Indeed, Rigny, on the border with the Spanish Empire turned out to be a strategic location.

The king assured Longueval that if Rigny would be besieged, he would send troops to defend it. The lord Longueval was reassured and determined to protect Rigny from any invasions.

Longueval promised stop annoying the seigneury of Gray by putting aside his arrogance. But On June the 16th, 1636, Pétrey of Champvans decided to send troops to besiege Rigny.

The siege of Rigny...

At the beginning of the 17th century, the castle of Rigny, at the edge of the Saône River, was surrounded by 150 houses. The castle was considered impregnable with its five towers, its double moats and its crenellated defensive walls. The moats were filled with water from the Saône River.

Pétrey of Champvans’s decision to send troops to besiege Rigny turned out to be risky. The French troops were 12 miles from Rigny, and the cavalry was not sufficiently numerous if the troops took them by surprise.

There were two versions of the story: the one told by the besiegers and the other told by the besieged.

Indeed the prosecutor of Rigny’s version, the army of besiegers consisted of over 2300 men and about 1200 cavalrmen, under the command of the lords of Mandre, Clainchamp, Vallay and several other officers whereas Pétrey of Champvans’s version, his army was much smaller numbering only 900 men with two cannons, under command of the officer Bonours. It would seem that Pétrey of Champvans’s version was closer to reality.
In the name of the king of Spain, the besiegers entered the village and stopped to ask the lord of Longueval to surrender all of the men and the keys of castle.

Longueval refused to give up the castle. The besiegers set fire to the village and opened fire with cannons.
At nightfall, Longueval attempted to go out but covered by only ten arquebusiers he had to withdraw into the castle and continue the defense.
Longueval remembered that the prince of Condé had promised to help him if the castle were attacked. He sent Hugues Desvendot to inform the prince of Condé about the attack.

In spite of the arrest of Hugues Desvendot, the prince of Condé knew about the siege.
He sent 1200 cavalrymen, under the command of la Meilleraye, to put an end to the siege.
The enemy troops saw them as they were wading through the Saône River in Apremont, a nearby village Gray. Only a handful of them were able to reach the opposite bank.
After a skirmish with the Spanish troops the rest of the cavalrymen took cover in a nearby natural shelter. Pétry of Champvans succeeded to dislodge them by shelling with eight cannons.

Pétrey of Champvans wanted to bring two cannons that were in the castle to Gray so that his troops could defend themselves if they needed to beat a retreat.
Pétrey of Champvans decided to send the officer Bresson to warn Longueval that it was his last opportunity to work out the terms of surrender. After the final assault, no concessions would be made to him.

While the officer Bresson was trying to persuade Longueval to surrender, the officer Moiron, knight of Malta, saw Longueval’s wife on the ramparts.
Moiron implored her to think about the consequences that could occur if they did not surrender.
Moiron said “Look at these corpses! You and your children will be massacred because your husband is stubborn. If you wait too long to surrender, several cavalrymen with cannons will arrive within half an hour. And then, it will be the end of you.”
Pétrey added “it’s in God’s hands”. Longueval’s wife was terrified by Pétry’s words. She began to dissolve into tears and took her three children with her to beseech Longueval to surrender in order to save them.

Do not ever underestimate the women’s power. Longueval was moved by his tearful wife and the fate that awaited his family. Longueval was compelled to seek terms of surrender and reluctantly agreed.

Longueval had done his best to defend the castle. 120 enemies were killed during the siege. He had bravely held his position hoping the arrival of the cavalry would assist him. But the cavalry never came.
Longueval never knew that the cavalry was within a few miles of Rigny when it was defeated by the firing of only 20 cannons.
A treaty was concluded between Longueval and Pétrey of Champvans. The terms of the treaty were as follows: Longueval, all his close relatives and all his servants would be taken to the village of Saint-Seine in Burgundy. Longueval could take his belongings with him (furniture, horses, mares, cows, and sheep). The villagers could keep on living in their houses without anyone harming them.

After a six-day siege, Longueval and sixteen of his servants were allowed to march out with their arms and belongings but were stripped of their lands. They had hardly set off when the soldiers plundered and burnt the village. The castle was destroyed from top to bottom despite the signing of the treaty.

According to a historian, much destruction and killing took place within the village. Several women and girls were raped and thrown into the Saône River. The walls of the castle were knocked down and the towers were destroyed.

Mrs. d’Andelot and Father Fagot rushed to the village to try to save some holy relics that were in the chapel of the castle from the destruction.

Meanwhile, Longueval and his servants had arrived at Saint-Seine where a royal notary wrote a report on what had just happened in Rigny. Longueval asked Louis XIII for help. On September the 29th, 1636, Louis XIII gave him the property of Montfalconnet, in Bresse, and the property of Mignot, in Burgundy where Longueval settled.
All the materials used for the construction of Rigny had been transported to Gray in order to build new houses after the siege ended. When peace was restored in the area in 1643, Longueval and the villagers returned and settled back in Rigny. They got their goods back. Longueval had to retrocede the properties of Montfalconnet and Mignot to their former owners.

The eventual cost of building turned out to be much too expensive for Longueval who had lost all his goods. Longueval could not afford the cost of such a reconstruction.

Longueval went to royal court to seek compensation for damage suffered by the loss of his castle.

Longueval sent a request to Louis XIII asking him to help him restore what he had lost since he had been loyal to the Crown and had carried his duty with distinction.

Longueval pointed out the fact that Rigny was an important and strategic place for defense against the Spanish army.

The king’s reply is not known but it is considered doubtful that he did since the castle was rebuilt in a more simplified form.

**The reconstruction work…**

At the present time only the vaults and the thick walls at foundation level of the original castle remain. The castle was in a state of ruin, but the lord of Billy, who married Longueval’s daughter, agreed to pay for its restoration.

In 1665, the inner yard of the former castle a building flanked by two wings was built. The left wing was used as a furniture depository and in the other one a silk farm was established.

The ground floor consisted of two sections: the hall, named the “Salle des Gardes”, and the stables. There were two large carriage entrances: one allowing easy access to supply the castle and the other leading to the guard’s quarters at the first floor.

The servant’s quarters were in another part of the castle. Their rooms were windowless on the inside of the castle. Only the room of the guard, next to the carriage entrance, had a view of both sides of the castle, so it could monitor the main entrance.

Despite a long period of great hardship the lords of Rigny kept their pride and dignity. They fought hard to retain the old seigneurial privileges attached to the fief of Rigny.

One might even say that all the hardships faced by them reinforced their willingness to continue fighting for their sovereignty.

At that time, M. Jean-Claude Jobelot, the king’s lawyer, lived in Besançon. He belonged to one of the most renowned families of the bourgeoisie of Gray.

In September the 13th, 1681, Jobelot related how in March 1653 Claude-Humbert de Mandre, lord of Rigny, baron of the Eagle and the former governor of Besançon’s nephew, listed the land of Montureux which belonged to the fief of Rigny.

One would think to be back to feudal time when the lords could appropriate any fiefs without any legal formalities.
Shortly after, M. de Billy, coming back from Versailles where he lived the high life despite his meager income, forced Jobelot to come in person so that he receives his vassal duties. As the drawbridge had been destroyed the ceremony took place at the main entrance to the castle.

Rigny must have been highly powerful. Indeed, even though Rigny was ruined Rigny gave its lords the power of being exigent. The lords acted in this way not only towards people but towards terrible enemies, such as Gray.

The peace between Gray and Rigny was only apparent.

Everything was a pretext.

M. de Billy brought suit to demand the removal of a post on which there was a notice board mentioning the ban on sailing on the Saône River across his land. At that time the shortest and best way to obtain satisfaction was the Council “d’en-Haut” (High Council).

Immediately after the peace, Longueval returned to Rigny and got back his former powers. On the bank of the Saône River Longueval put a post on which was written that anyone who wanted to sail on the river had to pay tolls.

In the night of September the 25th, 1661, the inhabitants of Gray removed the post and took it to Gray, exhibiting it like a trophy of war. Then they decided to send the board to the Parliament of Dôle in order to ridicule the situation.

M. de Billy sought compensation and complained about “the irreconcilable hatred” between Gray and Rigny. Later, the post was back in the River.

A few years later, M. de Billy died. In 1690, the castle of Rigny was bought by the Gérards, lords of Mont-Saint-Léger. In 1717, the castle came into the possession of J-B Baulard, the king’s lawyer in Gray. The castle remained in his family for several decades.

Although the owners of Rigny did not experience any attacks or conflicts anymore they had some administrative problems. But J-B Baulard had the reputation of being a litigious person. The fight with the administration was his favorite hobby.
Mrs. de Pécauld, widowed very early in her marriage, lived in Rigny for several years. In 1791, Mrs. de Pécauld was threatened by the villagers so that she renounced her privileges and the payment of tithes. Despite the fact that she agreed to their claims the villagers destroyed the walls of the castle and a lot of damage was done inside the property. Mrs. de Pécauld had to run away with her children to Fourgs, a village nearby Pontarlier. In January 1792, she sent her three daughters to Mottier-Travers, a small burg in Switzerland where Jean-Jacques Rousseau wrote Letters Written from the Mountain.

At the beginning of 1793, Mrs. de Pécauld went to Vesoul to bring her case to Royal Court and to lift the writs of sequestration over Rigny and her belongings. The March 1793 the law rendered null and void the verdict handed down by the Royal Court. In April 1793, she was arrested and imprisoned for three weeks. She was condemned and expelled from France. She went to Switzerland where she lived for two years. Antoine Bridant, prosecutor of Gray, was the legal guardian of Pécauld’s children during her absence. In 1794, he met Robespierre who was visiting the region and introduced the children to him.

Robespierre was affectionate towards them and gave them some sweets. He promised them to intercede on their mother’s behalf. However, the inhabitants of Rigny shared her belongings; they sold the castle and a part of the property.

When she came back from Vesoul in 1795, a representative of people, Saladin, applied himself to get the rest of her belongings back to her. Her administrative hassle had not yet ended. She requested to be reinstated in her rights of citizen. Her personal papers were lost by the revolutionary administration, and her belongings were confiscated again. Finally, on June 21st, 1801, a bylaw issued by the prefecture of Vesoul lifted her expulsion order.

The siege of Rigny castle lasted six days whereas the proceedings against Mrs. De Pécauld lasted for ten years. Her daughter, Miss de Pécauld, married the marquis of Montrichard and lord of Visemal and Falletans who owned the castle of Frontenay in the Jura region. The marquis of Montrichard belonged to one of the oldest families of the French nobility. Two of his ancestors were Roland of Montrichard whose portrait is hung over the fireplace in the hall of the castle and Guillaume of Montrichard, knight of renowned fraternal society of Saint-Georges of Burgundy.
In 1841, the marquise of Montrichard planted 5 hectares of mulberry trees. In 1850, she converted a building of the castle into a silk farm. Ten years later, she made her first sale of pure silk for 2700 francs. In 1861, she sent 400 kg of cocoon to a textile mill. The marquise of Montrichard lived in Rigny castle her whole life. She died on 2 October 1865, aged 83. One of her daughters, married M. Dornier, and inherited the castle.

Then the castle came into the possession of her daughter Marie in 1884 who was married to M. Fournier-Sarlovèze. In 1894, they decided to refurbish and occupied the castle until the beginning of the 20th century. In 1890, in a science magazine M. Fournier-Sarlovèze spoke about his brown and lake trout farming. When the alevins reached the swim-up stage they were transferred to the pool of the castle, and finally released into the branch of the Saône River next to the pool.

M. Fournier-Sarlovèze had no offsprings. Gérard of Montrichard inherited the castle by default. He died in 1927 and was buried in the chapel of Rigny.

The castle was passed to his daughter Suzanne who was married to Léon Gabriel Corblet, shipowner in Havre and Mrs. Germaine Alice Corblet’s brother. Mrs. Germaine Corblet was the French President’s wife, René Coty.

When she died, her only son, Jean-Gérard Corblet of Fallerans, inherited the castle.

In 1962, he sold it to the family Maupin. Gradually, the castle was refurbished and turned into a hotel-restaurant.