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# COLONIAL PRISONERS OF WAR AND VICHY FRANCE, 1940-1942: EXPERIENCES AND POLITICS



A DISSERTATION FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

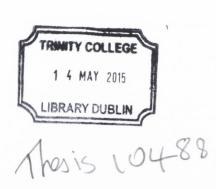
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# Summary

This thesis traces the experience and politics surrounding the prisoners of war from the French colonies captured by the Germans in 1940. These colonial prisoners of war (CPOWs) come from across the French Empire to fight in France during the Second World War. Unlike their French counterparts who, upon capture, were brought to Germany, the CPOWs were interned in camps throughout Occupied France, called *Frontstalags*. This decision to keep the CPOWs in France defined not only their experience of captivity, but also how the French and German authorities reacted to them.

Numbering less than ten per cent of the total French prisoners, the CPOWs nevertheless came to represent something greater than colonial subjects interned in the motherland. Vichy's legitimacy depended on the Empire. Caught within its own rhetoric of a unified Empire and its commitment to collaboration, Vichy inadvertently gave the CPOWs unexpected importance. That importance derived from the fact that the CPOWs had experienced the French defeat and would eventually return to the colonies, their home. Vichy believed that influencing the CPOWs, by improving the conditions of their captivity, would ultimately ensure the return of loyal colonial subjects.

Two main research methods were used in this thesis, each of which offers a unique approach to generating information regarding the research questions. The first method, research in military and civil archives in France, Germany, and Senegal, forms the backbone of the qualitative data. A quantitative approach complements the qualitative work. This aspect of the project included the calculation of CPOW statistics. Using the 'capture cards' from the International Committee for the Red Cross (ICRC) the dataset contains records for 1,600 CPOWs. Despite the flawed source, it allows new conclusions to be drawn on the CPOW population.

This thesis is divided into nine chapters. The first chapter traces the roots of the CPOWs' experience to the use of colonial soldiers in previous conflicts. The second chapter discusses how in the chaos of May-June 1940 the colonial soldiers came to be CPOWs. Even at capture, differences in treatment between the French and colonial prisoners appeared. Chapters three through five examine the CPOWs' experiences in the *Frontstalags* through the physical conditions in the camps, their work and their health. These three chapters allow comparisons to be drawn with the

experience of white French prisoners in Germany. Overall, this thesis argues that Vichy managed to protect the CPOWs from a far more difficult captivity if they had been interned in Germany.

Chapter six examines the twin themes of politics and experience through the philanthropic mobilisation for CPOWs. Vichy saw material and moral or 'top-down' aid to colonial prisoners as a way to offset the effects of the defeat while underlining the obligations of loyalty and obedience it implied for its recipients. However, this chapter argues, that by pushing the French to help the CPOWs, personal connections between French and CPOW formed, which often helped the CPOWs to escape. This 'bottom-up' assistance was the most memorable, and, for Vichy, the most problematic, as these connections remained outside Vichy's realm of control.

Chapter seven, argues that the CPOWs as a subject can be used to examine and challenge Robert Paxton's argument that Vichy did not act as a shield and could not protect the French 'from worse' under German occupation. The CPOWs are an excellent test subject as they represented a stake in one of the key issues: the Empire. When the Empire is lost to Vichy, the southern zone is occupied and the CPOWs lose their political clout. Chapter eight argues that, due to their political significance detailed in the previous chapter, the CPOWs became a battleground for influence between Vichy and the Germans. For Vichy, close control of CPOWs, who might prove a disturbing element for future French colonial rule, because they had lived the defeat and collaboration, now became vital. The final chapter discusses the CPOWs' long road home, beginning for some in 1940 and ending in 1945 for others. Disappointment, frustration and conflicting expectations led to clashes between colonial authorities and CPOWs. This thesis argues that most dissatisfaction, understandably, came from CPOWs repatriated in 1945 after five years of captivity and internment, the last two without news from home.

This thesis aims to settle the debate over the degree of material hardship and political protections or vulnerability experienced by the CPOWs, by looking in detail at what that experience consisted of in the period when Vichy enjoyed real (if limited) power, 1940-1942, and by assessing the degree of interest displayed by Vichy in these particular colonial subjects.

# Acknowledgements

This thesis would not have been possible without the generous assistance and contribution of many friends and scholars. In particular, I would like to thank my supervisor, Professor John Horne, for his support and patience during this long road to completion. Without his advice and encouragement this thesis would never have got off the ground.

I would like to thank the Irish Research Council for funding my thesis. The Grace Lawless Lee Fund was incredibly generous in funding research trips to both France and Senegal. Trinity College Dublin provided additional funding for travel through the Trinity Association and Trust postgraduate travel award.

Having spent time in many different archives abroad I am indebt to their helpful and knowledgeable archivists. I would also like to thank at the Service Historique de la Défense: Capitaine Valerie Caniart; Capitaine Stephan Longuet, Thibault Mazire and conservatrice Elisabeth Olive. In Caen, Alain Alexandra and his entire staff at the BAVCC were accommodating and helpful, despite my early arrivals and late departures. I would also like to thank Dr Anne-Marie Pathé and Dr Fabien Théofilakis at IHTP; Babacar Ndiaye, Director of the Archives Nationales du Sénégal; Etienne d'Alençon, Service départemental des archives des Pyrénées-Atlantiques; Geneviève Doucet, archives départementales de la Côte-d'Or, Olivier de Solan, archives départementales de la Somme; Bruno Corre, Directeur du Service départemental d'archives du Finistère; Raymond Riff and Hélène Say, Directeur des archives départementales Meurthe-et-Moselle; Véronique David, archives départementales de la Nièvre.

This project has benefited from the contribution and assistance of many professors and professionals. I would like to thank professors Raffael Scheck and Martin Thomas for their assistance in orientating this project; Professor Ruth Ginio for her valuable contacts and advice for researching in Dakar; Professor Ibrahima Thioub at Cheikh Anta Diop University; Colonel Thioune and Colonel Manga of the Musée de la Direction des Archives et du Patrimoine Historique des Forces Armées du Sénégal, who, as well as welcoming me and guiding my research, organised a trip

to the cemetery at Thiaroye; Ms. Debra Birch in the School of Histories and Humanities; and especially Dr. Joseph Clarke, Dr. Liam Chambers, Dr. Martine Cuypers, Dr. Helen Dodge, Dr. Anne Dolan, Dr. Heather Jones, Professor Alan Kramer, Professor Marc Michel, Dr David Murphy, Dr. Tomas O'Conner, Professor Jane Ohlmeyer, and Professor Olivier Wieviorka.

I will be forever grateful to Dr. Léan Ní Chléirigh, Dr. Nathalie Genet-Rouffiac, conservateur en chef de la patrimoine, and Mr. Kieran Fagan for their pertinent and helpful feedback on chapters. Mr. Falk Werner was generous with his time and knowledge by helping me navigate the military archives in Freiberg and guiding my German translations.

My friends at Trinity College Dublin and abroad have encouraged and supported me, providing a welcome break from studies as well practical advice. I would especially like to thank Sean Brady, Stephen Carroll, Alex Dowdall, Tomás Irish, Géraud Letang, Séan O'Reilly and Maeve Ryan. I am grateful for the support of my entire family who fed me and kept me going, especially during that particularly difficult first year in Dublin. David Frank provided the medical background to many of my questions. Special thanks go to my father for constantly asking 'so what?'; Jeff for his technical support, often in the middle of the night; Mai for her constant encouragement; and my mother for the many, many trips to Trinity while I was abroad.

Finally, I would like to thank Cyril, without whom there would be no thesis, and little Alexandre, who changed everything.

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# List of abbreviations

AD Archives Départementales (Departmental Archives)

**AEF** Afrique Equitoriale Française

Agence Française d'Information de Presse AFIP

Archives Nationales de France (French National Archives) AN ANOM Archives Nationales d'Outre-Mer (Overseas archives)

ANS Archives Nationales du Sénégal (Senegalese National Archives)

**AOF** Afrique Occidentale Française (French West Africa)

Bundesarchiv-Militärachiv, Freiburg (German Military Archives) BA-MA **BAVCC** Bureau des Archives des Victimes des Conflicts Contemporains

(Archives for victims of contemporary conflicts)

Bibliothèque de Documentation Internationale Contemporaine, **BDIC** 

Nanterre

CAA Commission d'Armistice Allemande (German Armistice Commission)

Comité Central d'Assistance aux prisonniers de guerre (Central CCAPG ·

committee for assisting POWs)

Commission de contrôle postal des prisonniers de guerre (postal **CCPPG** 

censure for POWs)

Commission Italienne d'armistice (Italian Armistice committee) CIA

**CPOWs** Colonial prisoners of war

Croix-Rouge Français (French Red Cross) **CRF** 

Délégation Française auprès de la CAA (French delegation to the **DFCAA** 

German Armistice Commission)

DIA Division d'infanterie africaine

**DSA** Direction des Services de l'Armistice (Direction of Armistice services) DSPG

Direction du Service des Prisonniers de Guerre (Direction of POW

services)

**FSH** French Historical Studies **FWA** French West Africa (AOF)

International Committee of the Red Cross **ICRC** 

**NCO** Non-Commissioned Officer

No date n.d.

Office Algérien d'action économique et touristique (Economic and **OFALAC** 

tourist office for the general government of Algeria)

**OKW** Oberkommando der Wehrmacht (Supreme Command of the Armed

Forces)

**POW** Prisoner of War

**PTT** Postes, Télégraphes et Téléphones Régiment d'antillerie nord africaine **RANA** Régiment d'Infanterie Colonial RIC

Régiment d'Infanterie Coloniale Mixte Sénégalais **RICMS** 

Régiment de tirailleurs sénégalais RTS

**SDPG** Service diplomatique des prisonniers de guerre (Diplomatic service for

POWs)

Service Historique de la Défense (French military archives) SHD Wirtschaft Oberleitung (General Direction for Agriculture) WOL

Young Men's Christian Association **YMCA** 

# Introduction

Among the almost two million French soldiers who became prisoners of war when France was defeated in June 1940, were a sizable number of men from the colonies. While European prisoners were eventually taken to Germany, colonial prisoners of war (CPOWs) remained in camps called Frontstalags throughout Occupied France. Believing that total German victory was now inevitable, the newly appointed Prime Minister, Philippe Pétain, requested an Armistice. The new regime established at Vichy designed its political programme to rebuild France along traditional lines. Pétain believed that collaboration would ensure the prisoners' return and give France a better place in the new German-dominated Europe than Britain who had kept fighting. To convince the French people of the same, Vichy exploited two issues: prisoners of war and the French Empire. If the prisoners' return was a goal widely supported by French opinion, the role of the Empire as a source of French strength and status in the world seemed a potential asset for Vichy in dealing with the Germans since it remained beyond the latter's control. CPOWs were at the juncture of these two entities. As highly visible components of the French Empire and as colonial subjects who had witnessed France's defeat and who would eventually return home to the colonies, CPOWs were left in a unique and delicate position. The paternalistic traditions of the French for their 'natives' influenced Vichy's negotiations on their behalf. Although Germany was in the dominant position, the overarching French goal in this regard was to encourage the idea that France remained an important imperial power able to protect its colonial subjects. Vichy's actions for CPOWs were directly related to this preoccupation. This thesis turns on two central questions: within the large spectrum of prisoners of war, how did CPOWs fare? Did Vichy collaboration have a positive, neutral or negative effect on the CPOWs' experience?

### Historiography

Early scholarship on Vichy emphasised the distinctive and regrettable breach of traditional French ideals and Republicanism that it represented. Using mainly French sources, it concentrated on conspiracy, collaborators, and resistance fighters while avoiding the darker aspects of the Occupation. Soon after the war, André

Siegfried established the theory of a good Vichy following Pétain and a bad Vichy under Pierre Laval's influence. This theory sought to reconcile Pétain, the immensely popular war hero of Verdun, with the dark history of Vichy. Taking up an argument used by Pétain at his trial, the historian Robert Aron established the 'shield metaphor', and it dominated historical thought until Robert Paxton, an American historian, published a new interpretation in 1972. Using unpublished records from the High Court trials Aron explained that Pétain's decisions, albeit difficult ones to make, acted as a shield protecting France from greater atrocities at the hands of the Germans. Until the 1960s French scholarship continued to focus on the French resistance. In a revolutionary move, using German archives, Henri Michel ventured the thesis that the French sought collaboration with the Germans in order to avoid some of the constraints from the Armistice agreement; this was the argument upon which Paxton would build.

Paxton's monograph Vichy France, Old Guard and New Order 1940-1944 tore open the historical debate in 1972 by placing the emphasis on Vichy's role during the Second World War. Building on Michel's initial thesis Paxton used American and German sources as well as the traditional French ones to explain not 'why France fell, but about what France decided to do next.'3 Paxton deliberately uses the verb 'to decide' as the crux of his argument concerns active French choices. Pétain and other Vichy leaders were convinced that Modernity had forced France to lose its way. France became the only European nation that attempted dramatic social change based on its desire to return to traditional French values whilst under German Occupation. Paxton explained in the introduction to the 2001 edition of his book that the 'shield metaphor' had not accurately described Vichy's hopes for better conditions 'as a voluntary, though neutral, participant in Hitler's Europe.'4 Using the Empire as a bargaining chip Vichy actively sought German collaboration in exchange for relaxing the terms of the Armistice. Eventually though, it was German lack of interest in French collaboration, rather than Vichy restraint, which limited the extent of French collaboration.

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. xv.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Jean-Pierre Azéma, 'Vichy et la mémoire savante: 45 ans d'historiographie', in Jean-Pierre Azéma and François Bédarida (eds), *Le Régime de Vichy et les Français* (Paris: Fayard, 1992), p. 26 ; André Sigfriend, *Du IIIe au Ve Republique* (Paris: Editions Grasset, 1956).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Robert Aron, *Histoire de Vichy*, 1940-1944 (Paris: Arthème Fayard, 1954).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> Robert O. Paxton, *Vichy France, Old Guard and New Order 1940 – 1944* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1972, 2001), p. 1.

The significance and lasting effect of the Vichy period was not limited to the post-war era. Explorations into the memory of Vichy have taken various forms including the documentary film 'Le Chagrin et la Pitié' (1969) by Marcel Ophüls and Henry Rousso's Vichy Syndrome (1987). Rousso's monograph changed the historiography by emphasizing how Vichy had affected French collective memory. He identified the turning point in Vichy memory and discussion as the early 1970s. After the débâcle of the Algerian War and the movements of May 1968, France entered a period of obsession and crisis surrounding Vichy, the Occupation and the Resistance. Beginning his research in the late 1970s Rousso admitted that only a naïve researcher, as he saw himself then, would have been surprised at the visceral reactions to research into Vichy's legacy.<sup>5</sup> France in the 1970s had difficulty facing controversial views on Vichy. The banning from French television for twelve years of Ophüls' film, made in 1969, confirmed this difficulty. 'Le Chagrin et la Pitié' attempted to cast doubt on several core beliefs about the French resistance. Ophüls listened and recorded while survivors, collaborators, resistance fighters, Jews, politicians and Germans explained the 'truth' about the Occupation. Then in his infinitely calm voice he questioned and challenged these assumptions. Ophüls also worked to dispel the surviving myths about Vichy, like its protection of the Jews, by questioning oft-cited statistics on Jewish survival in France. Through awkward pauses and strained reactions Ophüls attempted to undermine the long established Vichy narrative. Forty years later his film has not lost its impact.

Likewise, despite the subsequent popularity of Paxton's book, his argument was not accepted immediately. Published in 1988, Paul-Marie de la Gorce's book, L'Empire écartelé continued to advance the idea that Pétain reacted to the complicated situation imposed by German Occupation and attempted to make the best of it for France. De la Gorce suggested that Hitler initiated negotiations for the use of French bases in Morocco after the British sank the French fleet at Mers-el-Kébir in 1940 and that Vichy initially refused. He argued that Vichy decided not to simply refuse German advances but to use them as a basis for renegotiating the conditions of the Armistice. Sixteen years post-Paxton a minority view that Vichy merely followed the German lead in collaboration persisted. De la Gorce did recognize that it was

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> Henry Rousso, *The Vichy Syndrome: History and Memory in France since 1944*, trans, Arthur Goldhammer (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1987, Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1991), p. 1.

Hitler who preferred the advantages of a neutral French Empire and who then refused to negotiate with a willing Vichy.

Julian Jackson's monograph marked the distance Vichy historiography has travelled since Paxton's Vichy France. Paxton's argument on Vichy collaboration has been the dominant analysis since the 1980s. In his 2001 publication Jackson argued for a more nuanced view of Vichy, since Paxton's extensive use of German archives, the very thing which made his argument 'famous', may have 'slightly skewed' his analysis. <sup>7</sup> Jackson explained how feelings of instability and vulnerability affected the French population in the 1930s. He emphasized the importance of imperial rhetoric as early as the 1938 Munich conference, rhetoric that justified abandoning commitments in Eastern Europe so France could concentrate more fully on its overseas possessions. This allowed the French government to reinforce links to the Empire from a position of force: as victors of the First World War, and not the last resort of a nation feeling its impotence in Europe. Already the Empire had an emotional connotation. The political discourse post-Munich resonated in the language used later by Vichy. The Alliance Démocratique explained that 'we are accused of being resigned to the abdication of France. No, as a western, maritime, African, and colonial nation, the development of our magnificent Empire is of much greater importance to our destiny than the unappealing role of gendarme or banker of Europe which in the flush of victory we felt ourselves called on to play.'8 This suggested repli impérial reinforced the continuity between Third Republic disillusionment and Vichy's reaction; both used the Empire to conceal obvious discrepancies between political rhetoric and France's global status.

Generally, previous scholarship on the Second World War has treated the French Empire as an issue apart rather than relating it to the domestic history of Vichy France. This thesis, however, analyses how Vichy dealt with its colonial subjects in mainland France within the context of Vichy's need to use the Empire as a bargaining tool with Germany, while trying, as a defeated power, to preserve French authority in the colonies. Through the colonial prisoners of war this thesis looks at Vichy's need for, and exploitation of, both the symbolism of the French Empire and the Empire itself. To do so this thesis relies on a number of excellent imperial histories.

° Ibid., p. 94.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> Julian Jackson, *France: the Dark Years* 1940-1944 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

Ruth Ginio's work *Vichy's Rule in French West Africa* studies the implementation of the National Revolution in the colonies. She argued that this colonial context allowed Vichy to impose a much stricter interpretation of French law than possible under the Third Republic. Notably, she argued, that the end of the Third Republic eliminated the need to maintain Republican myths on race and assimilation. Ginio's exploration of Vichy propaganda in the colonies provides a backbone for understanding Vichy's propaganda towards CPOWs. Both Tony Chafer's *The End of Empire in French West Africa* and Martin Thomas' *The French Empire at War 1940-1945* also provide excellent context for this project. 10

As for the CPOWs, they have attracted a certain amount of attention. In 1981 Yves Durand published a definitive work on French prisoners of war and their place in collaboration. Durand explained accurately that the German authorities bought into this vision of collaboration where POWs became the 'stakes'. North American historians Nancy Lawler and Myron Echenberg published two of the first major works on colonial soldiers. Using oral histories and archival sources, Lawler's 1992 monograph, *Soldiers of Misfortune* argued that when African prisoners survived capture, their experience in captivity was significantly worse than that of European prisoners. Published a year earlier, Echenberg's monograph, *Colonial Conscripts: The Tirailleurs Sénégalais in French West Africa 1857-1960* details the history of the West African soldiers but only dedicates one chapter on captivity in World War Two. In it Echenberg explored the consequences of the French authorities' disregard for the fundamental change among CPOWs who, united through captivity, felt that they had fought better than the French in 1940 and thus deserved better after the war. Belkacem Recham provided a brief glimpse of the basic conditions in the

<sup>9</sup> Ruth Ginio, French Colonialism Unmasked: the Vichy years in French West Africa (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2006).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>10</sup> Tony Chafer, End of Empire in French West Africa: France's Successful Decolonisation? (Oxford: Berg, 2002), Martin Thomas, The French Empire at War 1940-1945 (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>11</sup> Yves Durand, La Captivité: histoire des prisonniers de guerre français 1939-1945 (Paris: F.n.c.p.g.c.a.t.m., 1981), p. 29.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>12</sup> Nancy Lawler, Soldiers of Misfortune: Ivorien Tirailleurs of World Ward II (Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1992), p. 96-97.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>13</sup> Myron Echenberg, *Colonial Conscripts: the Tirailleur Sénégalais in French West Africa, 1857-1960* (London: James Currey, 1991).

Frontstalags in his work on Algerians in the French Army. It was largely descriptive but did argue that many Algerian prisoners felt abandoned by the French.<sup>14</sup>

Martin Thomas reopened the debate on French colonial prisoners with his 2002 article in *French Historical Studies*. Thomas argued that through the 'systematic categorisation of racial difference' the needs of 1.5 million French prisoners took precedence over those of tens of thousand colonial captives. He analysed the importance of CPOWs within the Franco-German political negotiations as well as highlighting the conditions within the camps. Thomas was rightly critical of the beginning and final stages of captivity where conditions were terrible. He viewed the CPOWs' experiences as generally negative. However, new research and material has allowed for a more ample view of their experience. As we shall see, the period from early 1941 to November 1942 was relatively stable for CPOWs.

French sociologist Armelle Mabon was also deeply critical of France's treatment of colonial prisoners in an impassioned treatment of the subject. <sup>16</sup> Despite the goodwill shown by the French population to the CPOWs, Mabon remained shocked by the decision to replace German guards by French officers, arguing that it forced colonial prisoners into Vichy's collaboration policies and was a precursor to a systematic refusal to acknowledge the CPOWs' rights. <sup>17</sup> Mabon made excellent use of private letters and correspondence between colonial prisoners of war and French social workers, but focused on French primary and secondary sources exclusively. In a series of articles and films culminating in the 2010 publication of *Prisonniers de guerre "Indigènes": visages oubliés de la France occupée*, Mabon has criticized the French government for obscuring the truth and ignoring the CPOWs' memory. Her focus on powerful events, like massacres in 1940 or Thiaroye in 1944, underlined her argument that Vichy and subsequent governments neglected the CPOWs. While Mabon raises interesting questions about the post-war memory of captivity, her overall interpretation is driven by what amounts to a political agenda.

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>14</sup> Belkacem Recham, Les Musulmans Algériens dans l'armée française (1919-1945) (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1996), p. 227.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>15</sup> Martin Thomas, 'The Vichy Government and French Colonial POWs, 1940-1944' in *FHS*, xxv, no. 4 (Fall 2002), p. 658.

Armelle Mabon and Martine Cuttier, 'La Singulière captivité des prisonniers de guerre africains (1939-1945)', in Sylvie Caucanas, Rémy Cazals, and Pascal Payen (eds) *Les Prisonniers de guerre dans l'histoire: Contacts entre peuples et cultures* (Carcassonne: Les Audois and Toulouse: Editions Privat, 2003), p. 142.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>17</sup> Ibid., p. 147; see also Armelle Mabon, *Prisonniers de guerre "Indigènes" visages oubliés de la France occupée* (Paris: Découverte, 2010).

Raffael Scheck presents the most nuanced study of colonial soldiers. He suggests that conditions for colonial prisoners improved after August 1940 and that internment in France meant better living conditions and access to supplies than for prisoners in Germany. Scheck's publication, *Hitler's African Victims* studies the massacre of colonial soldiers by the German army in 1940. His forthcoming monograph explores the relationship between German guards and colonial prisoners. He argues that smaller work groups created the opportunity for human relationships between captor and prisoner. Scheck maintains that collaboration, rather than rendering CPOWs more vulnerable than they might otherwise have been, compensated for the lack of international protection for French prisoners.

This thesis aims to settle the debate over the degree of material hardship and political protection or vulnerability experienced by the CPOWs by looking in detail at what that experience consisted of in the period when Vichy enjoyed real (if limited) power, 1940-1942, and by assessing the degree of interest displayed by Vichy in these particular colonial subjects.

# Methodology and Sources

The name 'colonial prisoners of war' is a misnomer, but a useful one. The French Empire was an agglomeration of colonies of different status, departments, and territories under mandate. Nationals of the older colonies such as Martinique and French Guyana and residents of the four communes of Dakar were considered French citizens. Algeria was administratively part of France and was divided into three departments. European settlers, the *pieds-noirs* fought in colonial regiments on the basis of universal military service, like their fellow citizens in metropolitan France. However, for the purpose of this thesis, 'colonial prisoners of war' refers only to prisoners of colour. German separation of prisoners along racial lines, regardless of origin or citizenship, determined the prisoners' experiences and thus justifies this designation. It is worth noting that even contemporary sources had difficulty with terminology. Without much consistency CPOWs were referred to as *indigènes* 

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>18</sup> Raffael Scheck, 'French Colonial Soldiers in German Prisoner of War Camps', in *French History*, xxiv, no. 3 (2010), p. 423.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>19</sup> Raffael Scheck, *Hitler's African Victims: The German Army Massacres of Black French soldiers in 1940* (Cambridge: University Press Cambridge, 2006).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>20</sup> Raffael Scheck, *French Colonial Soldiers in German Captivity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, Forthcoming).

('natives', usually for everyone not from North Africa) or *indigènes-coloniaux* (colonial 'natives') or *nord-Africains* (North Africans).

Two main research methods were used in this thesis, each of which offers a unique approach to generating information regarding the research questions. The first method involved research in a variety of military and civil archives in France, Germany, and Senegal. An in-depth analysis of primary source material from a wide variety of archives forms the backbone of the qualitative data. The variety of different sources, from political and diplomatic correspondence, official memoranda, to private letters, allowed this project to consider both the political stakes as well as the individual experiences of the CPOWs during their captivity.

A quantitative approach complements the qualitative work. This aspect of the project included the calculation of CPOW statistics using a variety of sources. Previous scholarship has been unable to establish definitive numbers of colonial prisoners and the question remains difficult. Many different offices and ministries maintained numerical lists of prisoners for individual camps or work groups. In order to establish the most reliable estimate, these lists must be compared. Using the International Committee for the Red Cross (ICRC) 'capture cards' sent to families when the prisoner arrived safely in a camp, German camp records, prefects' reports sent to Vichy, and reports from delegations visiting the camps, calculations were made on the number of prisoners captured. These statistics were generally broken down by nationality or colony of origin. The Red Cross 'capture cards' are housed at one of the French Military Archives' sites, the Bureau des Archives des Victimes des Conflits Contemporains (BAVCC) in Caen. These cards have yet to be exploited by historians. The source is organized by colony and then alphabetically by last name. Having recorded every 160th prisoner, the dataset contains 1,600 CPOWs. Unfortunately, this suggests there were over 250,000 CPOWs whereas contemporary estimates place approximately 85,000 CPOWs in the Frontstalags in 1941. The source is flawed, as multiple cards exist for each prisoner, but the duplicates are not necessarily filed together. Prisoners filled out a new card every time they changed camps or when ICRC representatives inspected a camp. Names were phonetically transcribed resulting in variations depending on the scribe. Sometimes last names and first names were inverted. However, assuming the flaws are consistent across the source, it can still be used to detail the proportion of prisoners from each country, to

establish their average age, and to map movement throughout the *Frontstalags*. See the appendix for more details.

While the question of colonial prisoners has become more prominent in the historical debate through the work of Raffael Scheck and Martin Thomas, their archival trace remains sporadic. Data on French prisoners is abundant, but that on CPOWs much less so, with smaller archives often not knowing what material actually exists. The main French repositories are the Archives Nationales (AN) in Paris and the Service Historique de la Défense (SHD). The National Archives contain the political records for the Second World War. These include the records for the services charged with protecting prisoners of war. Originally POWs were supervised by subdirection of the Armistice commission, and later transferred to Georges Scapini. The archives also contain records of the Franco-German negotiations and complaints about Geneva Convention violations. Material includes official records from the prisoner of war services, records from aid groups and the French Red Cross (CRF), as well as official camp inspection reports from the ICRC and the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA). The military archives contain the records for the 1940 campaign, the defeat and subsequent Armistice. They have records from official camp visits and reports of capture and escape from CPOWs themselves. There are also records on assistance sent to CPOWs from aid groups focusing on prisoners from specific colonies. Fears of German propaganda led Vichy and the colonial authorities to submit monthly reports on propaganda. The propaganda targeting North African prisoners is mostly housed in Vincennes. This is complemented with sources from the Archives Nationales d'Outre-Mer (ANOM). These records in Aix, mainly from North Africa, describe the welcoming home of CPOWs before November 1942, efforts made by the government on their behalf, and the morale of the local populations.

A recurring problem in the sources is the lack of the CPOWs' voices. With a few notable exceptions like Léopold Senghor, Ahmed Rafa and Michel Gnimagnon, colonial prisoners were illiterate and did not leave written records of their captivity. Letters sent by prisoners to their families were rare. The few postal control records found in Senegal state that CPOWs' letters contained nothing of interest besides personal greetings to their families. Most accounts of the CPOW experience in capture and captivity came from French officers or doctors or through social workers and the ICRC representatives on official visits. In 1940 Vichy created the *Commission sur les replis suspects* to investigate and eventually bring to justice French officers

who had retreated or surrendered against their orders. Testimonies from escaped prisoners were sent to this commission whose work was continued by the Provisional Government until after the liberation. Vichy used this structure to question escaped CPOWs about German propaganda they might have encountered. These documents are located in the military archives and constitute the largest records of CPOWs' captivity experience, containing first person narratives from the surrender, capture, through to camp life and escape. Most of these files acknowledge the significant assistance from the local population. Comparisons can be made with the abundance of material from French prisoners, especially surrounding the early days of capture. The drawback to this source is that most of these interviewed prisoners had escaped or been released before 1942. No first person narratives exist for the entire war, and these reports were destined for a French audience. The primary sources do not reveal if the CPOWs questioned Vichy's legitimacy or collaboration. On the other hand, the administrative documents are rich for the period. Due to the paucity of the CPOWs' voices, these documents are used both to determine the Vichy's reaction to the CPOWs, and also to glean whatever is possible on the CPOWs' experience.

The Archives Nationales du Sénégal (ANS) hold the material for the former colony of Senegal with its capital in Saint-Louis, and former French West Africa (AOF) with its capital in Dakar. Material includes lists of prisoners from the former West African colonies, including those who had not received any letters from their families, those to be released due to illness, and those to be put on a congé de captivité, or captivity leave, under the conditions of the Montoire agreement. This is significant as Mabon argued that no CPOWs had access to these temporary releases.<sup>21</sup> However, these lists only cover seven months of the war. Some are organized by colony, others by regiment or by Frontstalag. There are no definitive lists; rather updates were sent from the Red Cross, or the service in charge of prisoners of war. Propaganda played an important role in the colonies. Governors were constantly asked to evaluate the morale of the European and native populations; sometimes this included former prisoners. Officially, the native populations tended to be loyal to France unless there was a specific incident. Fear of German and Anglo-Gaullist propaganda was as rampant in the colonies as in France. Officials were constantly worried their propaganda was not as effective as the enemies'.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>21</sup> Mabon, "Indigènes", p. 40.

As we shall see, the CPOWs were housed in camps across Occupied France. While some use has previously been made of departmental archives to study these, the current thesis is the first to do so systematically. A vast discrepancy of material was revealed across the archives of the Ardennes, Charente, Eure-et-Loir, Gironde, Haute Saône, La Nièvre, Somme, Landes, Loiret, Mayenne, Maine-et-Loire, Marne, Meurthe-et-Moselle, Loire Atlantique, Pyrénées-Atlantiques, Vienne, Vosges and Yonne, all departments where Frontstalags were located. It was interesting to note which towns kept records on their local prisoner of war camps and which did not. Some departments, like the Vosges, had no traces of CPOWs in the archives. Records exist of the French prisoners who passed through the camp of Epinal, but very little on the CPOWs. Other archives revealed detailed records of the CPOWs' work and captivity in the region. These sources shed light on the relationship between the CPOWs and the local governments and populations. In many departments school children were encouraged to collect clothes and scraps of fabric to send to the suffering populations in North Africa but no mention is made of the North African prisoners living in their own towns. The prefects' monthly reports also shed light on the local concerns and preoccupations during the war but never mention the CPOWs or Frontstalags. The question of escaping prisoners of war is particularly relevant for the departmental archives. Generally prisoners felt it was their duty to try and escape. The archives in Nancy show the large numbers of people arrested for helping prisoners to escape. Some prefects and mayors actively helped escaping colonial prisoners whereas others turned them over to the German authorities. One German camp guard turned a blind eye to escaping prisoners but then promptly found himself on the Eastern Front. One department has the diary for a leader of the French resistance. He was also the locksmith for the prisoner of war camp in the town.

The *Bundesarchiv-Militärachiv* (BA-MA) in Freiburg-im-Breisgau provided reports from the *Oberkommando der Wehrmacht* (OKW) or Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces pertaining to how prisoners in Germany should be treated. These reports include comparative information on German POW camps, rules governing POW labour and supplies. The archive also holds material on the colonial labour battalions used increasingly after November 1942. However, there is very little material on how the CPOWs were organized or why they were interned in France.

Bringing this source material to bear on the questions formulated at the outset, allows answers to be progressively derived from the analysis provided in each

chapter. The experience of the colonial prisoners of war will be explored through their physical conditions, work, leisure activities, and health to answer the question: what was that experience like compared to French POWs in Germany, and non-Geneva POWs? What might conditions have been like if the CPOWs were interned in Germany? The sources are limited, and not all aspects of prisoner life can be compared. While questions of sexuality and personal relationships are intrinsically important, answers simply do not appear for the CPOWs in the source material. As noted, the CPOWs' own accounts of their captivity were always given to French officers. The CPOWs were acutely aware of the boundaries imposed by colonialism and paternalism. All references to relationships with the French were, therefore, suitably deferential. The role, limited or otherwise, that CPOWs played in Franco-German negotiations will be explored. The French officially and unofficially expressed support and solidarity for the CPOWs. This reveals something about their experience but also addresses the issue of how the regime, notables and ordinary folk saw the CPOWs. Was it paternalism? Solidarity? Or a mixture? Finally, this thesis looks at what was at stake politically between Vichy and the Germans in the question of the CPOWs.

The CPOWs reveal much about Vichy's imperial policies and the centrality of the French Empire to Vichy's political legitimacy. Can the CPOWs as a group be used to test Paxton's theories of collaboration? Did Vichy manage to protect this group from 'worse' and if so, why? For in addition to its concern to establish the nature of the CPOWs' treatment and experience, this thesis also explores how that treatment and experience became an important political issue in Vichy's relationship with Germany, and thus in 'collaboration'. The first chapter, 'Genesis' argues that reactions towards colonial soldiers in 1940 were influenced by their use in previous European conflicts dating from the Franco-Prussian war. The next three chapters explore the CPOWs captivity experience through their daily life, work, and health and sickness during the first half of the war. Chapter six brings the two themes of the thesis together through the CPOWs' interactions with the French. It discusses the political significance of Vichy's philanthropic mobilisation for the CPOWs, as well as the CPOWs' interactions with individual French men and women, and the repercussions the latter had on the former's captivity and post-captivity experience. Chapter seven discusses the full political implications of the CPOWs and the Empire in Vichy's policy of collaboration. It also looks at the repercussions of the events in

November 1942 on the CPOWs and Vichy. Chapter eight discusses why both Germany and Vichy targeted the CPOWs with propaganda. Determined not to allow the defeat or dissidence to weaken the CPOWs' loyalty to France, Vichy actively combated German propaganda in the *Frontstalags*, the southern zone, and in the colonies. The final chapter of the thesis deals with the time period of the future and the CPOWs' return home.

The fate of the CPOWs was first and foremost a matter of their own experience. But the very status of being a prisoner was a political question between Vichy France and the Germans. As such much of the evidence is used twice: to establish the experiences of these men and use that experience to draw conclusions on the political issues. For many of these men, their experiences continued until they were repatriated in 1944-1945. Using these dual strands of experience and politics, the CPOWs reveal much about the nature of the Vichy regime and collaboration. The period of greatest latitude, where the struggle over the CPOWs was the most intense, was when Vichy had the greatest autonomy and the Empire, their home, was nominally under Vichy control. That changed in November 1942 when Germany retreated at El Alamein and Stalingrad and shifted to a total-war economy. All of this means the CPOWs' experience and Vichy's control changed substantially at this moment, and explains the predominant concern of this thesis with the period 1940 to 1942.

# Chapter one

# Genesis: French colonial soldiers before June 1940

Suspending the Third Republic's constitution and voting full powers to Pétain after the defeat in June 1940 were radical departures from French Republican traditions. However, this departure belies certain similarities between the two regimes. Central among those similarities – or continuities – was the importance attached to the Empire, including the use of colonial soldiers as an integral part of the French armed forces. When France went to war in 1939, it mobilised the Empire and drew on the colonies for a portion of its armed forces, as it had done during the First World War and even in the Franco-Prussian War in 1870. When France was humiliatingly defeated little more than nine months later, the Empire remained an asset in the eyes of the Vichy regime, while the colonial soldiers who had been taken prisoner by the Germans, became a liability of a different order to that of the far more numerous French prisoners of war. For the Germans (as they had since 1870) considered it illegal and immoral to use colonial troops in European theatres of war whereas the Vichy regime felt bound to protect its own colonial soldiers in their captivity both for their own sake and as a guarantee of the regime's ability to still lay claim to its imperial role. Thus the wartime issue of the colonial prisoners of war was born.

# Colonial soldiers during the Second World War

The aftermath of the 1938 Munich conference demonstrated that appeasement had failed when Hitler's territorial demands proved insatiable. On 3 September 1939 France and Britain declared war on Germany. French colonial subjects, volunteers and conscripts, were called to arms once again. The colonial administrations reported that spontaneous declarations of loyalty flowed from the colonies. Reservists with strong influence in colonial society as well as *marabouts*, religious leaders, and chiefs, who all maintained their position due to the French, united to encourage the

population to enlist. In Senegal the heads of the influential religious brotherhoods spoke in support of France. Abdoul Assiz Sy, son of El Hadj Malick declared that, 'France has always helped and protected Islam, consequently Muslims need to show their gratitude in defending her.' Aguibou Barry, chief of Dabola, Guinea, announced that he and the other village chiefs, 'agreed on this point: even if our skin is black, the fact remains that we are French, French in our souls and like our brothers in the métropole, in addition to our young children, we will make our few assets available to the defence of the "Motherland".'3 Older leaders like Seydou Norou Tall in Senegal and the Moro Naba in Côte d'Ivoire publicly declared their intentions to enlist prompting their followers to volunteer instead.<sup>4</sup> Nancy Lawler reports there was little resistance from reservists because they feared repercussions against their family.<sup>5</sup> The Governor of Guinea recognized that mobilisation brought complications. While the elites were proclaiming, outwardly at least, their adhesion to France, 'the mass of natives, who externalise their feelings less or whose expressions are sometimes less visible, have accepted with dignity the difficulties brought to daily life by the mobilisation of the youth, and have bravely set to the extra work to compensate for the departure of those called up.'6 Few Indochinese volunteered for service, but conscription was generally accepted without resistance.<sup>7</sup>

Accurate numbers of potential colonial soldiers proved difficult to predict. In 1934 a French military commission determined that in the event of a European war 121,000 skilled and 158,000 unskilled sub-Saharan African troops could be sent to France at a rate of 45,000 per month.<sup>8</sup> This was much higher than was realistically possible. In total the Empire provided 197,300 troops from sub-Saharan Africa, 300,000 from North Africa and 116,000 from Indochina.<sup>9</sup> However, French reports from 1 March 1940 state that the total number of colonial soldiers available to France

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> ANS, 2D5, Governor of French Guinea to Léon Cayla, 16 September 1939.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> ANS, 2D5, Letter for Directeur du Service des informations from Direction des Affaires politiques et administrative, 22 September 1939.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> Lawler, Soldiers of Misfortune, p. 31.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid

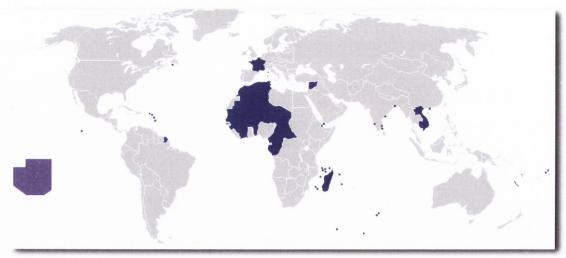
<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> Liêm-Khê Luguern, 'Ni civil ni militaire: le travailleur indochinois inconnu de la Seconde Guerre mondial' *Le Mouvement Social*, no. 219-220, (2007/2-3), p. 185.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup> Martin Thomas, 'At the Heart of Things? French Imperial Defense Planning in the Late 1930s' in *French Historical Studies*, xxi, no. 2. (Spring, 1998), p. 334.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup> Thomas, French Empire at War, p. 12.

was 535,000 from North Africa and 155,000 from the other colonies.<sup>10</sup> Even after the war had begun France over-estimated its available soldiers.

Colonial soldiers came to France from all over the Empire: Algeria, Tunisia, Morocco, West Africa, French Equatorial Africa, Madagascar, Reunion, Indochina, the Antilles, and a few from the pacific islands and French territories in India. They were stationed throughout France in 1939-1940 with North African regiments in Lyons, Avignon, Bourg, Metz and Verdun. Generally, as in the First World War, colonial soldiers either served in mostly native regiments with their own countrymen and European officers, or in mixed infantry regiments with both European soldiers and officers. These *Régiments d'Infanterie Coloniale Mixte* (RICM), created in August 1914 in Morocco, were considered particularly successful and were stationed in Aix-en-Provence. During the winter, the Senegalese *tirailleurs* were stationed in the warmer climates from Mont-de-Marsan to Toulon. Five *Régiments d'Artillerie Coloniale* (RAC) with mounted divisions and Malagasy gunners were distributed in places like Agen, Bordeaux, Joigny and Lorient. Finally there were two half-brigades of colonial machine gunners; the Malagasy in Pamiers and the Indochinese in Carcassonne.



Map 1.1: The French Empire 1919-1939 (source: wikimediacommons.com uploaded by user Rosss).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>10</sup> SHD, 27N22, Note sur les effectifs indigènes en France et dans le basin méditerranéen on 1 March 1940.

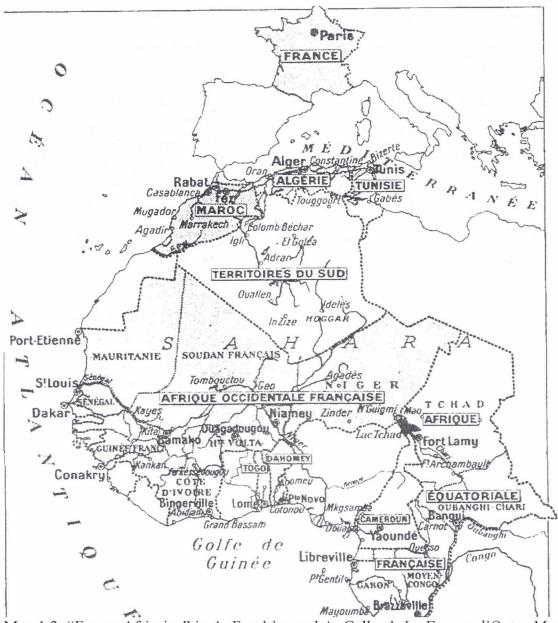
<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>11</sup> Anthony Clayton, France, Soldiers & Africa (London: Brassy's, 1988), p. 121.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>12</sup> Ibid., p. 122.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>13</sup> Maurice Rives and Robert Dietrich, *Héros meconnus*, 1914-1918, 1939-1945 (Paris: Memorial des combattants d'Afrique Noire, 1990), p. 121.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>14</sup> Ibid., p. 121.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>15</sup> Ibid., p. 121.



Map 1.2: "France Africaine" in A. Fauchère and A. Galland, *La France d'Outre-Mer Illustrée* (Paris: Ed. Blondel La Rougery, 1931), p. 2.

Colonial soldiers had widely different socio-economic backgrounds. French citizenship or not was the greatest divider. Citizenship was granted to some 'evolved natives', for example *originaires* of the four communes of Dakar, or those from the older colonies in the West Indies. The 15 October 1915 law protected voting rights for *originaires* of the four communes of Dakar, and confirmed their citizenship rights and the corresponding obligation for military service. <sup>16</sup> By 1939, any colonial subject with

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>16</sup> Michael Crowder (ed.), Colonial West Africa, collected essays (London: Cass, 1978), p. 107.

French nationality had the same obligations towards military service as the French.<sup>17</sup> As during the First World War, colonial elites faced resistance and refusal when requesting equal rights in return for military service.

Sometimes these distinctions caused problems. The *originaires* reservists in Thiès, Senegal in 1939 complained about the lack of housing, the manner in which they were received upon arrival, and how the terrible food forced them to bring their wives to cook. They believed that the lack of housing was due to France's refusal to embark the black soldiers for France, which proved France's contempt for their potential in battle and felt that, on the contrary, they had the right to defend France like white soldiers. Others who heard this rumour suggested they should be allowed to return home if they were not going to France. *Agent auxiliaire de la sûreté* Abdou N'Diaye criticised these complaints as revealing, 'the Senegalese pride and compulsion to always claim their rights, regardless of the circumstances.' French citizens from Dakar, Rufisque, and those called up at Thiès also complained about the difficulties and length of time required to have their citizenship recognized. The nuances and distinctions within the colonial populations were usually respected by the French military.

For the colonial soldiers stationed in France, the phoney war seemed long and uneventful as French and German armies remained behind their lines. To fight boredom, the Senegalese soldiers of the fifty-third *Régiment d'Infanterie Coloniale* (RIC) gave a concert of traditional music and dance for the French soldiers.<sup>22</sup> Lack of news from home was a common complaint, and dangerous for morale. Official efforts to support and monitor the colonial troops began as soon as they arrived in France, and focused on correspondence. Letters to soldiers were exempt from postal tax. Léon Cayla, Governor General of AOF, encouraged chiefs and local government officials to facilitate communication by providing paper, pens, and eventually official writers.<sup>23</sup> Local leaders distributed writing supplies and encouraged the literate to help

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<sup>17</sup> Manuel troupes 2, p. 48.

Informations, 16 September 1939.

ANS, 2D5, Abdou N'Diaye to Chef de la Brigade des Recherches à Saint-Louis, 15 September 1939.
 ANS, 2D5, Directeur des affaires politiques et administratives to Directeur des Services des Informations, 16 September 1939.

ANS, 2D5, Abdou N'Diaye to Chef de la Brigade des Recherches à Saint-Louis, 15 September 1939.
 ANS, 2D5, Directeur des affaires politiques et administratives to Directeur des Services des

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>22</sup> SHD, 34N1081, Commandant GIBOU, postal control for 53rd RIC, 3 May 1940.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>23</sup> ANS, 2D5, Cayla to the Governors of Senegal, Mauritanie, and Govenor administrator of Dakar, 2 May 1940.

their comrades with their letters. The governor of the Sudan printed pre-addressed postcards for the soldiers.<sup>24</sup> Through censorship, this correspondence provided the military and colonial administrations with valuable insights into the morale of the colonial soldiers and home populations.

Some hostilities occurred during the phoney war and both sides took prisoners. Propaganda efforts started immediately. Both France and Germany went to great lengths to prove how well captured enemy prisoners were treated. This reversed the tendency from the First World War, where, as Heather Jones explained, POWs were constantly associated with violence and atrocities. Michael Wilson, a reporter for the International News Service, interviewed a German officer who was recaptured after attempting an escape. When asked by how he was treated, he replied, 'Marvellously... when I found I was back at the same camp I expected retaliatory treatment.' Instead the French guards chose a milder punishment than that legally allowed:

Under the Geneva Accord, belligerents were permitted to inflict thirty days solitary confinement, hold up parcels and remove books and newspapers from recaptured prisoners for a similar period. "Actually we have only given them fifteen days solitary confinement to their rooms and held up their parcels," he said, "But we are letting them read books, although we do not give them newspapers."<sup>27</sup>

The *Deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung* published a reminder on 12 March that, unlike during the Great War, 'the belligerent countries have, through a mutual agreement, forbidden reprisals to be taken against any prisoners under their control.'<sup>28</sup> Posters with the text of the Geneva Convention of 1929 were printed in German and posted in prisoner of war camps in France.<sup>29</sup> Radio Stuttgart, which was the regime's international radio transmitter, allowed captured prisoners to give messages to their families over the air. The commentator claimed that, 'the thousands of French prisoners in Germany are allowed as much contact with their families as possible. In

<sup>24</sup> ANS, 2D5, Desanti to Cayla, 31 May 1940.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>25</sup> Heather Jones, *Violence Against Prisoners of War in the First World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), p. 123.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>26</sup> SHD, 27N36, Michael Wilson, 'Camp for German Military Prisoners', 4 March 1940.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>28</sup> SHD, 27N68, Ministre de l'information, summary of intelligence on German propaganda in the press between 1 March to 1 April 1940, 15 May 1940.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>29</sup> SHD, 7N2480, Perisse, note for the Direction des Services du Personnel et du Materiel de l'Administration centrale, 25 March 1940.

this way, the German people are pleased to ease the plight of the victims of a senseless war.'30 This established a line of propaganda that would also be used with colonial prisoners of war: asserting that Germany opposed the war, especially against innocent colonial subjects. Propaganda of this kind worried French military officials. Soldiers were warned that, 'if they were to fall into the enemy's hands, they must refuse to make any kind of declaration destined for the radio. By refusing to provide propaganda for the enemy, they continue to helpfully serve their country.<sup>31</sup> By the end of March 1940 'the use of French prisoners by the German radio in Stuttgart had almost completely stopped since certain "errors" had been unmasked. 32

Suddenly, in May 1940, after eight months of stagnation, the phoney war became real. Over the following six weeks the German army advanced with the unprecedented rapidity of Blitzkrieg warfare. In May 1940 combat was ferocious and marked by the use of aerial bombardment. Colonial soldiers shared the brunt of combat. They faced tank attacks in the Aisne, Argonne and along the Somme.<sup>33</sup> Colonial gunners, notably from Madagascar, had been stationed in the Maginot line. The fifth and sixth Colonial Divisions, with many African tirailleurs, confronted German tanks on the Somme.<sup>34</sup>

Decades of recruiting the so-called 'warrior races' had permeated French military culture. A French soldier exclaimed enthusiastically: 'Talk about the job the Senegalese are doing! Without them the Krauts would already be in Paris, they have only one word engraved on their minds: "Win". '35 A soldier in the 220th régiment d'artillerie nord africain (RANA) wrote that 'in a few days we will return to "kick their a\*\*" and we'll show them what a mix of black and white really is, because our Senegalese are ready for ferocious fighting and aren't afraid, as for us, we have friends to avenge.<sup>36</sup> This soldier believed that the French fought for country and for vengeance for their fallen comrades, whereas the Africans were naturally bellicose. Another French soldier believed that 'none of the [Senegalese] fear death, and when they have the chance to have a go at the Germans, I can assure you that [the latter]

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>30</sup> SHD, 27N68, Chef d'Etat Major to General Gamelin, 2 January 1940.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>31</sup> SHD, 27N68, General d'armée Georges, note for the army, 19 February 1940.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>32</sup> SHD, 27N68, Commission Général de l'Information, summary of intelligence on German propaganda in the press 16 January to 29 February, 31 March 1940. <sup>33</sup> Echenberg, *Colonial Conscripts*, p. 92.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>34</sup> Ibid., p. 92.

<sup>35</sup> SHD, 27N70, Colonel Gauche, daily summary of military postal censorship, 7 June 1940. <sup>36</sup> SHD, 27N70, daily summary of military postal censorship from 30 May 1940, 31 May 1940.

will remain in the same place minus their heads.'<sup>37</sup> The French believed that their soldiers were ferocious fighters. When faced with the reality, that their soldiers were normal men who could be brave or cowards, the criticisms were harsh.

The colonial soldiers found this style of warfare, with aerial bombings, terrifying. A Senegalese soldier wrote home explaining that: 'Here we don't fight with the gun, but only with airplanes, lots of noise, lots of fear.' A sergeant with the sixth RIC confirmed that 'the bombings, the airplanes, the machine guns terrify them; they go crazy under shelling and bombing.' Yet, colonial soldiers were not the only ones affected by the bombing raids. Marc Bloch's memories are worth quoting in length:

A blitz is probably not, in itself, actually more dangerous than many other threats to which the soldier is exposed. [...] But it possesses, this bombing descended from heaven, a capacity for terror, which really only belongs to itself. Projectiles fall from very high and appear, incorrectly, to fall straight down. Their combined weight and altitude allows them a tremendous momentum that is visible, to which the strongest obstacles appear unable to resist. There is something inhuman in this kind of attack coupled with such force. As before a cataclysm of nature, the soldier bows his head under this unleashing, inclined to feel absolutely helpless [...] The sounds are heinous, savage, unnerving to the extreme: as much the whistling, deliberately intensifying, that I was just talking about, as the detonation where the whole body is shaken in its marrow. <sup>40</sup>

The colonial soldiers' normal reaction to this brutal and oppressive form of warfare encouraged diverging views on their worth as soldiers. Many French soldiers seemed surprised that the *tirailleurs* might show fear.

The colonial soldiers' experience was unduly impacted by other's views and assumptions. It was generally believed that the colonial soldiers could not fully comprehend the reasons for war. The military censor declared that the colonial soldiers' letters show they 'do not seem to have understood, overall, the gravity of the

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>37</sup> SHD, 27N70, Colonel Gauche, daily summary of military postal censorship, 7 June 1940.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>38</sup> SHD, 27N70, daily summary of military postal censorship from 29 May 1940, 30 May 1940.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>40</sup> Marc Bloch, *L'Etrange défaite: témoignage écrit en 1940* (Paris: Société des éditions Franc-Tireur, 1946; Electronic edition: www.ebooksgratuit.com, 2009), pp 65-66.

situation, some, better informed, accept it with their usual fatalism.'<sup>41</sup> However, a *tirailleur* wrote home explaining that they had gone to fight to help the Belgians.<sup>42</sup> These two letters reveal a discrepancy between what French soldiers thought of their colonial counterparts' motivation, and how the colonial soldiers saw themselves. Colonial soldiers, like their French counterparts, were given only the explanations about the war that their officers deemed necessary.

Paternalism towards the 'natives' permeated French military culture. Soldiers wrote home with reports of the colonial soldiers' childlike behaviour. Even common soldiers looked to protect 'their' colonial soldiers. A soldier from the 14<sup>th</sup> RTS wrote that 'our *tirailleurs* are still so careless, and we have to constantly remind them to be careful: to understand the enemy's proximity, they want to see them with their own eyes. How naïve.' When three enemy planes bombed the 7<sup>th</sup> company of the 53 RICMS, a junior officer saw that 'the *tirailleurs* were so excited that I let them believe they were French or English planes.' How could the colonial soldiers be expected to fully understand the gravity of the situation when the rapidity of the French defeat surprised everyone?

Both the French and the Germans held simultaneously contradictory views of the colonial soldiers. This gravely affected the battle experience of the latter. On the one hand, the colonial soldiers were considered weaker soldiers, more prone to indiscipline under heavy fire. Without much experience under fire, colonial troops tended to panic. Captain Pilet explained:

They have had no time to harden. Additionally, they were engaged at Airaines and Quesnoy in conditions that hurt their morale. Dispersed into rooms in houses, unable to see the Europeans. Under these conditions it was all one or the other. While on five different occasions I had to use my pistol to send the deserters back to their place, a few individuals held themselves magnificently [...] I've heard from the Germans themselves that they had great difficulty

<sup>42</sup> SHD, 27N70, daily summary of military postal censorship from 16-19 May 1940, 20 May 1940.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>41</sup> Ibid

SHD, 27N70, daily summary of military postal censorship from 26 May 1940, 27 May 1940.
 SHD, 34N1081, Sous-Lieutenant Gilbert, combat report for the 7<sup>th</sup> company of the 53 RICMS, 5-7
 June 1940; see also SHD, 27N70, Colonel Gauche, daily summary of military postal censorship, 7 June 1940.

defeating the resistance from the last few Senegalese, hidden in the basements or in corners of demolished houses, they had to kill them one by one. 45

Those soldiers who held on despite being separated from their officers often fought to the end. After three days of battle in mid-May, an officer of the Moroccan *spahis* wrote: 'this regiment is admirable, French as well as the natives. The Germans are bold (we are too), they have a tough army. Our soldiers are perfect.'<sup>46</sup> This kind of resistance surprised the Germans and in some cases they reacted badly.

Stereotypes were more than simple racism. They influenced both sides, and sometimes dangerously. The colonial soldiers had been taught that the Germans were racist, and would not take coloured prisoners. This was to encourage colonial soldiers to keep fighting. However, the German soldiers' view of the colonial soldiers' faithlessness was attributed to their legal use of the coupe-coupe or machete. Fear of the coupe-coupe led German soldiers to force captured tirailleurs to keep their hands on their heads.<sup>47</sup> German soldiers killed a group of tirailleurs after finding three Germans with wounds from a coupe-coupe. 48 In turn, the Germans were told never to trust the 'savage' soldiers who mutilated German corpses. Colonel Nehring warned that, 'it is proven that French colonial soldiers mutilated German soldiers in a beastly manner. Any goodwill towards these native soldiers would be an error. It is rigorously forbidden to send them to the rear unguarded.'49 This created a vicious circle where colonial soldiers, afraid of being killed, resisted to the end. Consequently, the German soldiers felt that resistance proved the stereotypes of savage African fighters and justified treating them with violence. French doctor Jean Guérin's description also highlighted German distrust of colonial soldiers. Guérin approached the German who captured him and his colonial soldiers, 'who interrupted my explanations with a brutal, "Sind Schwarzen der? (Are there any blacks?)" He became furious after my affirmative answer and threatened to shoot us all if, in the village, a single shot was fired on his men. He entered the church manifesting his contempt and disgust for the

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>45</sup> SHD, 24N1081, Captain Pilet, extracts from report of 21 RIC, 2e Bataillon du 53 RICMS, 11 September 1940.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>46</sup> SHD, 27N70, summary of the first reports from the censor of the troops' reaction to the announcement of a large enemy offensive, 16 May 1940; see also SHD, 34N1081, Sous-Lieutenant Gilbert, combat report for the 7<sup>th</sup> company of the 53 RICMS, 5-7 June 1940.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>47</sup> SHD, 34N1081, Sous-lieutenant Maurice Chatelard, summary of command report for 4<sup>th</sup> section of the 9<sup>th</sup> company of 53 RIC, 25 November 1940.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>48</sup> SHD, 34N1081, Sous-Lieutenant Gilbert, combat report for the 7<sup>th</sup> company of the 53 RICMS, 5-7 June 1940.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>49</sup> Eric Deroo and Antoine Champeaux, *La Force noire, gloire et infortunes d'une légende coloniale* (Paris: Editions Tallandier, 2006), p. 174.

natives.' <sup>50</sup> German distrust of colonial soldiers was so strong they feared a trap even after capture.

Consequently, the repercussions of the French defeat were worse for colonial soldiers than French ones. Ingrained racism, ferocious close combat, and rumours of illegal warfare made surrender and capture the most dangerous time for colonial soldiers. While all French soldiers might be exposed to enemy maltreatment, African soldiers were at particular risk.<sup>51</sup> Raffael Scheck estimates about 3,000 Senegalese *tirailleurs* were massacred in May and June 1940.<sup>52</sup> A French officer, Colonel Bouriand, reported that these massacres occurred all along the Front and were often witnessed by French mayors or *tirailleurs* who managed to escape.<sup>53</sup>

Moving from the place of capture to a temporary camp was particularly dangerous for CPOWs. Germans surrounded Aboulaye Maiga and his group with machine guns and fired on them. He was the only survivor. This was not an isolated incident. Dibour Cissé was taken prisoner and brought to Lyons. He reported that the Germans rounded up 100 men and fired on them with machine guns, twenty-five cm cannons and a tank. He survived by falling at the same time as those who were shot and pretending to be dead for three hours. He Germans forced a group of 200 tirailleurs into a field and began shooting. The Germans forced a group of 200 tirailleurs. This information was later passed along to the families.

The French officers and civilians who tried to protect the CPOWs were regarded with suspicion. The off-cited Jean Moulin, prefect of the Eure-et-Loir, attempted suicide rather than sign a German document blaming the Senegalese troops for atrocities. This incident revealed the German conviction that the colonial troops were illegitimate combatants prone to atrocities. These atrocities, in turn, justified the massacre of colonial troops. However, by seeking to 'legitimise' their actions by forcing Moulin into a false declaration, they inadvertently showed that they

<sup>50</sup> SHD, 34N1081, Jean Guérin, liberation report, 22 December 1941.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., p. 58.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>51</sup> For a detailed study on the massacre of Senegalese *tirailleurs* in 1940 see Scheck, *Hitler's African Victims*.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>53</sup> SHD, 34N1098, Colonel Bouriand, report on 19 June 1940's combat, 28 June 1940.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>54</sup> ANS, 2D23/28, Levavasseur to the Governor of the Soudan, 7 May 1941.

<sup>55</sup> ANS, 2D23/28, Edouard, interview of Dibor Cissé, 17 April 1941.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>57</sup> SHD, 14P16, Zouave Manuel Aldeguer, captivity report, 4 November 1940.

maintained some respect for international law. Total disregard would allow them to shoot colonial soldiers without reason.

Most soldiers would have been aware of the 1929 Geneva Convention protecting prisoners of war. Hence they needed to believe the colonial soldiers mutilated their enemies and fought 'dirty'. Sergeant Langenfeld was forced to watch the executions: 'The Germans explained to us they shoot twenty Senegalese for every German who had been beheaded. They shot a large number. The North Africans and the French prisoners dug a big hole to bury them.' Perhaps these killings were revenge for an enthusiastic defence as Hassen-Ladjimi and Faguet believed, or the result of racial conditioning. Scheck warns that it would be premature to conclude that Germans killed black prisoners due to 'hallucinatory racism' since not all German units killed their black prisoners and most coloured prisoners were not killed.<sup>59</sup>

Confusion and fear characterised the colonial soldiers' experiences in May and June 1940. As seen, the extremity of the aerial bombings polarised the colonial soldiers' reactions. Those who overcame their fears fought bravely. While only a minority of colonial soldiers were massacred, their deaths affected the experience of CPOWs who had fought a legitimate war according to the rules of war. Reports of these massacres travelled quickly among the prisoners. Survivors were left trying to rationalise the massacres and navigate the beginning of a captivity that felt dangerous and volatile. It is unsurprising that they viewed this early period of captivity through a lens of exhaustion and fear. The violence continued through the first week of captivity.

Gestures that were seen as lack of discipline were severely punished: three captured Senegalese *tirailleurs* were shot after being taken prisoner for refusing to be disarmed. Hassen-Ladjimi recalled that on the march from the point of capture to a temporary camp prisoners who 'deviated to the left or the right were shot; during the journey, anyone who fell from exhaustion was finished off, I saw, myself, two men with bullets in the head. This instability continued when CPOWs were evacuated from France. A secret informant revealed that on a muddy field in the rain in Austria 'many of our countrymen were shot with machine guns. Pierre Diagne and Lamine Sarr, well known Dakarois, died in these conditions. They lined all the *tirailleurs* 

<sup>60</sup> SHD, 14P46, 28<sup>e</sup> RICMS, information briefing, 10 July 1940.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>58</sup> SHD, 2P88, Sergeant Langenfeld, report 10<sup>th</sup> R.T.M., [n.d.].

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>59</sup> Scheck, *Hitler's African Victims*, p. 118.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>61</sup> SHD, 14P16, Sergent d'activité Hassen-Ladjimi, escape report, 30 September 1940.

single file by ten and shot the tenth person who was then buried by the other nine.'62 For the CPOWs, those killed were not anonymous soldiers, but their friends or well-known members of their communities.

The motivations for these killings were not apparent at the time but two main reasons circulated: racism and revenge for an enthusiastic defence of France. A political report described the situation as 'very peculiar. The Germans, surprised and overexcited by the unexpected resistance, acted cruelly and harshly after the combat, but one should not conclude that they have adopted this behaviour generally towards our blacks whom they have captured.' Corporal-Chief Leonanci was told that 'the Moroccans were killed, because they said we resisted too much.' A former commander of the twenty-fifth *Régiment de Tirailleurs Sénégalais* (RTS) Faguet, was evacuated before the incident but he thought that the nature of this fighting, where severely outnumbered colonial troops fought all day, provoked the massacre, which killed forty-five of the seventy *tirailleurs* and wounded almost all the others. The fighting happened on 20 June between France's request for an Armistice and its signature. S.P. Mackenzie explained that the difficulty in shifting from fighting an enemy soldier to protecting him explained the danger for surrendering soldiers.

Racism and a belief that the colonial troops engaged in illegal warfare played a role in the massacres. German racial discourse going back to 1870 represented colonial soldiers as savages. In *Mein Kampf* Hitler wrote, in direct opposition to French pride in the contribution of the colonial troops, that '[the army] was the school that still taught the individual German to seek the salvation of their nation, not in the mendacious phrases of international fraternity between negroes, Germans, Chinese, French, British, etc., but rather in the strength and unity of his own nationality.' A Senegalese prisoner explained that his German guards near Berlin thought the black

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<sup>64</sup> SHD 14P17, Caporal-chef Leonanci, escape report, [no date].

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>62</sup> ANS, 2D23/28, intelligence forwarded to the Direction des affaires politiques et administratives and surêté générale, 22 August 1941.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>63</sup> ANS, 2D23/28, Chief of the 12<sup>th</sup> Section of the Affaires Politiques et Administration to Boisson, 18 March 1941.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>65</sup> ANS, 2D23/28, Chief of the 12<sup>th</sup> Section of the Affaires Politiques et Administration to Boisson, 18 March 1941.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>66</sup> S.P. Mackenzie, *The Colditz Myth British and Commonwealth Prisoners of War in Nazi Germany* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 36.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>67</sup> Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf complete and unabridged* (New York: Reynal and Hitchcock, 1941), pp 384-385. (Https://ia700308.us.archive.org/4/items/meinkampf035176mbp/meinkampf035176mbp.pdf) (Last consulted 17 February 2014).

prisoners were cannibals.<sup>68</sup> However, racism was not enough to justify the massacre of prisoners, even remotely.

The German attitude did not reflect a new Nazi racism, but rather the old hostility to colonial troops being used in a European theatre that was evident from 1870 and 1914-18. The Germans assumed that the colonial soldiers fought in a barbarous and illegal manner. More fundamentally still, they considered the fact of their deployment in Europe unacceptable. A German officer kicked a Moroccan lying on the ground while yelling: 'the great French nation declared war on Germany, but Morocco did not declare war on Germany! Dog!'69 Some German soldiers doubtlessly felt that the assumed status of indigenous soldiers as 'savages' who violated international law through illegal warfare and desecration of corpses justified massacres. France was blamed for using colonial troops and de-humanising everyone's war experience. This argument was not limited to colonial soldiers. Any evidence, real or imaginary, that soldiers had fought 'dirty' inspired vengeance and often death. Murdered British soldiers had been accused of using dum-dum bullets.<sup>70</sup> The French were accused of the same despite the German Army Command's denial of these rumours.<sup>71</sup> Given the theoretical explanations by Mackenzie and Scheck, combined with German racial theory as evidenced by their reaction to Soviet prisoners, it is unsurprising that some colonial soldiers suffered a similar fate. However, the contrast with the future conflict in the east is striking. Germany's war against Soviet Russia was a war of extermination; Russian prisoners were fed the bare minimum.<sup>72</sup> Between 3.3 and 3.5 million or sixty per cent of Soviet prisoners died in German captivity; whereas only five per cent of CPOWs died during captivity.<sup>73</sup> Perhaps a question for further study is not, why were some colonial soldiers massacred, but rather why were most of them spared?

The French reaction to the massacres revealed that France was prepared to defend its use of colonial soldiers as legitimate. Jean Moulin, a man of exceptional moral character, nevertheless set the stage for the French refusal to accept German

<sup>68</sup> ANS, 2D23/28, information from an occasional native informant, 17 September 1941.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>69</sup> AN, 72/AJ/291, Joseph Julien Dache, witness statement [n.d.]; see also Paul Mansire, report on captivity, June 1940 to January 1941.

<sup>70</sup> Mackenzie, Colditz Myth, p. 37.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>71</sup> Scheck, Hitler's African Victims, p. 22.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>72</sup> Christian Streit, 'Prisonniers de guerre allies aux mains des Allemands' in Jean-Claude Catherine (ed.) *La Captivité des prisonniers de guerre: histoire, art et mémoire 1939-1945* (Rennes: Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2008), pp 31-32.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>73</sup> See chapter five, p. 156.

racist violence. The sheer number of reports, both civilian and military, of the violence showed that the French did not consider this acceptable behaviour, even in wartime. We can see the roots of Vichy's reactions to both the Germans and the CPOWs in the French attempts to explain the massacres. They do not label all Germans as racist murderers, but nor do they allow that these massacres were in any way justifiable. German reactions to the colonial soldiers, later their prisoners, were also shaped by their experiences of fighting the French since 1870. The genesis of what was to be the CPOWs' experience in 1940 had a long pre-history going back to 1870.

## Colonial soldiers and the Third Republic, 1870-1920

Both the Third Republic and Vichy constructed an image of the Empire and then attempted to convince the French of its merits. Supporters argued that the colonies gave France greatness as well as labour and material goods. Critics of the Third Republic's imperialist policy believed that overseas territories could never replace the lost French provinces, and that wasting money to pursue these follies would leave France vulnerable to further German aggression. Ruth Ginio describes the action of the Third Republic in French West Africa when it contradicted Republican ideals as a 'Vichy before Vichy'. The colonial soldiers had a major, if only symbolic, role in defining French imperial identity.

The Senegalese had served as soldiers from the earliest French and British incursions into Senegal. In 1857 Governor Faideherbe established the first permanent black African troops, called *tirailleurs sénégalais*. They became a symbol of French imperial power, loyalty and obedience. These *tirailleurs* were initially used for maintaining stability in West Africa. The first use of colonial soldiers in Europe was during the Franco-Prussian war. Bismarck and Moltke the Elder, the German commander in chief, protested at the use of the North African soldiers. Eventually colonial soldiers were sent abroad and used to pacify other colonies. Between 1908 and 1913 Senegalese *tirailleurs* represented between nine and fifteen per cent of the French army of conquest in Morocco. Their numbers increased dramatically in the early years of the twentieth century. It was Charles Mangin's *La Force Noire* (1910)

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>74</sup> Ginio, French Colonialism Unmasked, p. 16.

that changed the debate on colonial recruitment. He wanted to raise a West African army to serve as a counterweight to France's low birth-rate in case of another European war. While the *tirailleurs* were perhaps the best known of the colonial soldiers with their striking red *chechia*, France recruited from all over the Empire. The First World War brought half a million colonial troops and a quarter of a million civilian workers from the Empire to metropolitan France.

Racial stereotypes firmly in place, the French sought to recruit the ethnic groups considered warrior material. General Langlois believed the Africans would make good soldiers because:

The [black] race presents in its entirety qualities that render it particularly apt to soldiering. It derives its warlike qualities from its *heredity* [sic] because, as far back as we can go in history, the state of war is normal in Africa, [and] from his society that teaches him discipline; the harsh conditions of his existence which give him endurance, from his insouciance which makes him tough in drawn-out struggles which characterise modern battles, to his hotheaded and bloodthirsty nature which make him terrible in the shock.<sup>76</sup>

Unsuitable ethnic groups, like the nomadic Moors, Peuhls or Touaregs, were often those who effectively resisted the colonial administration.<sup>77</sup> While in Indochina French authorities were keen to recruite the 'warlike' men from Tonkin, overall political, cultural and administrative divisions determinded military recruitment more than racial hierarchies.<sup>78</sup> Some of the greatest opposition to the use of West African soldiers came from French officers with extensive experience in North Africa, who insisted the North Africans would make better soldiers.<sup>79</sup> They believed that,

for the Arabs, soldiering is the most noble career. For a North African, the French army represents an ideal: to serve is not shameful: the act of serving under arms is noble: it represents the force that protects, that attracts, the force of the Muslim God. To participate in that force is a supreme honour.<sup>80</sup>

Mangin believed, on the contrary, that 'the Arab is the least governable of all the

80 C. R. Huré, L'Armee d'Afrique 1830-1962, (Paris: Charles-Lavauzelle 1977), p. 2.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>76</sup> BDIC, S Pièce 8551, General Langlois, Manuel élémentaire à l'usage des officiers et sous-officiers appelés à commander des indigènes coloniaux (Indochinois-Sénégalais-Malgaches) dans la métropole, Fascicule n. 2 Sénégalais [Henceforth Manuel officiers 2] (Paris: Ministre de la guerre, 1923), p. 11.

<sup>77</sup> Marc Michel, Les Africains et la grande guerre, l'appel à l'Afrique 1914-1918 (Paris: Karthala, 2003), p. 16.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>78</sup> Richard S. Fogarty, *Race & War in France: Colonial Subjects in the French army, 1914-1918* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008), p. 44.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>79</sup> Echenberg, *Colonial Conscripts*, p. 35.

peoples.'<sup>81</sup> Stereotypes applied across the Empire. The French believed that while the Indochinese made terrible soldiers, they were excellent labourers. These stereotypes persisted and affected how Vichy judged the CPOWs' loyalty and capacity to survive the rigours of captivity. They also revealed two tendencies in French military thought: that 'natives' enjoyed fighting and French officers had favourite ethnic groups. Since the colonial troops were natural warriors, then military service was not a duty to be performed in exchange for civic rights. Once the contradiction in Republican theory was dealt with, the different status between the white and colonial troops could be exploited.

The French army had three distinct branches each contributing differently to the mystique of the imperial armies: the *Armée Métropolitaine* or the Metropolitan army, the *Armée d'Afrique*, and the *Troupes Coloniales (La Coloniale)*. The Metropolitan army was formed to defend France and was composed of Frenchmen from mainland France. The *Armée d'Afrique* was effectively a North African Army recruited from the 19<sup>th</sup> military region in Algeria, and later the protectorates of Tunisia and Morocco. The *Armée d'Afrique* and native regiments. The cavalry, *chasseurs d'Afrique*, the *Légion Etrangère* (Foreign Legion) and the infantry *zouaves* made up the European contingents. The *zouaves* included French settlers in Algeria, or *pied-noirs*, as well as the occasional French-born soldiers. Natives' were mixed with a small number of convicts in the *Infanterie Légère d'Afrique*. There were North African cavalry units called *spahis* and the *Compagnies Sahariennes* on camelback. Most North Africans served as *tirailleurs* in the light infantry units. The *Armée d'Afrique* had mixed European and native units. After the Great War, these included some tank and infantry units.

The Coloniale was composed of units raised in both metropolitan France and the Empire for the purposes of extending and protecting the colonies. It consisted of both European and indigenous soldiers. The *Coloniale Blanche* regiments were composed almost entirely of volunteers from the *métropole* and conscripts from the older colonies in the Caribbean, who had full citizen status.<sup>87</sup> So there were black men

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<sup>81</sup> Michel, Appel à l'Afrique, p. 16.

<sup>82</sup> Clayton, France, Soldiers and Africa, p. 6.

<sup>83</sup> Lee Sharp, *The French Army 1939-1940 vol 1* (Milton Keynes: Military Press, 2002), p. 116.

<sup>84</sup> Clayton, France, Soldiers and Africa, pp 6-7.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., p. 7.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>86</sup> Ibid., p. 7.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>87</sup> Ibid., p. 7.

in the *Coloniale Blanche*. By contrast the various regiments of *tirailleurs* were composed of men from colonies not accorded citizenship rights and were generally conscripts. Overall, the French army showed the complexity of French imperial and racial ideas. The racial hierarchy was primarily, but not exclusively, dependent on colour. Once a person had French citizenship he had, in theory, the same rights and responsibilities as every French citizen.

Recruitment leading up to the First World War revealed the limitations of military policy based on conjecture and stereotype. Mangin had wanted a professional volunteer army. Despite his conviction that Africans, being innate warriors, would be grateful for the chance to fight for France, volunteers were not forthcoming.<sup>88</sup> The law of 7 February 1912 allowed for the partial conscription of males between the ages of twenty to twenty-eight in West Africa. The images of the loyal native ready to serve France hid the reality of enforced mobilisation. 89 In West Africa, recruitment began in earnest from September 1914, and each annual class was smaller than desired. 90 At the beginning of September the first black African troops arrived in Sète, while others went to Marseilles and then on to the front. The decree of 1908 allowed conscription in Vietnam but by 1912 there were only 1,350 conscripts. 91 Eventually approximately 30,000 Indochinese fought in France and North Africa during the First World War. 92 North African soldiers, mostly volunteers, were sent to the front as early as August 1914.93 In the fall of 1915 general conscription was brought into Algeria, and a year later in Tunisia. In Madagascar, claims that all soldiers were volunteers were false as the local administration gave monetary gifts local recruiters for each volunteer creating a system of corruption and coercion. 94 Differing conscription laws throughout the Empire led to unequal recruitment. Forty-five per cent of colonial soldiers were from North Africa and thirty per cent from sub-Saharan Africa.<sup>95</sup>

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89 Michel, Appel à l'Afrique, pp 81-82.

<sup>88</sup> Echenberg, Colonial Conscripts, p. 31.

<sup>90</sup> Echenberg, Colonial Conscripts, p. 33; Crowder, Colonial West Africa, p. 110.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>91</sup> Jacques Thobie, Gilbert Meynier, Catherine Coquery-Vidrovitch, Charles-Robert Ageron eds., *Histoire de la France coloniale*, 1914-1990 (Paris: Armand Colin, 1990), p. 76.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>92</sup> Eric Thomas Jennings, 'Remembering "Other" Losses: The Temple du Souvenir Indochinois of Nogent-sur-Marne', in *History & Memory*, xv, no 1, (Spring/Summer 2003), p. 10.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>93</sup> Eric Deroo and Antoine Champeaux, 'Panorama des troupes coloniales française dans les deux guerres mondiales' in *Revue Historique des Armées* n 271 (second trimester, 2013), p 73. <sup>94</sup> Fogarty, *Race & War*, p. 42-43.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>95</sup> Guy Pedroncini (ed.), *Histoire Militaire de la France, Vol 3 De 1871 à 1940* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1992), p. 298; *Histoire de la France coloniale*, p. 78. Historians cite slightly different numbers. Guy Pedroncini cites in his 'Allocution introductive', in Claude Carlier and Guy Pedroncini (eds), *Les Troupes coloniales dans la Grande Guerre* (Paris: Editions Economica, 1997), p.

Mobilising the Empire for the First World War allowed France to showcase imperial loyalty and solidarity. Reports from the colonies evoked feelings of solidarity: 'From the first day of the threat and on the first line of defence, the French colonies rose with a common outburst to the Motherland, and without hesitation offered their most precious possessions: the blood of her children and the wealth of their labour.'96 As France prepared for war, the Empire was a valuable symbol of what France was compared to Germany. France, home to 100 million, symbolised civilisation and racial enlightenment. The 'spontaneous' support showed by the colonies proved that French Republicanism would triumph over German barbarism. This effusion masked the reality of the colonial soldiers' departures: the women cried and sang funeral songs.97 As the First World War progressed and news of its devastation reached the colonies, recruitment stagnated. There had been real expressions of solidarity in 1914, but they transformed into rebellion by 1915 due to the increased economic pressures and the return of the soldiers' bodies. 98 In Algeria a revolt broke out in 1916. The famine of 1917-1918 forced many Algerian men to join up and the class of 1917 was filled completely. 99 Riots also broke out in early 1917 in Upper-Senegal Niger region, Dahomey, Ivory Coast, and Guinea. 100 Eventually, the Governor General of AOF, Joost Van Vollenhoven, stopped recruitment.

Using colonial soldiers to defend the *métropole* remained contentious, despite their previous contributions. Critics remained unconvinced that African soldiers could sufficiently reinforce the French forces. Some colonial administrators feared arming the 'natives'. Vigorous opposition came from civilian colonial authorities who recognized that the increased recruitment would further strain the labour shortages. Recruitment in the colonies pitted the *métropole*'s needs against those of the colonial economy. Administrators and businessmen did not want to lose their urban labour

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<sup>16</sup> that there were 150,000 troops from Algeria, 135,000 from sub-Saharan Africa, 43,000 from Indochina, 39,000 from Tunisia, 34,000 from Morocco, 31,000 from Madagascar, 31,000 from the French West Indies and Reunion, and 3,000 French Somaliland and the Pacific. Michael Crowder states 180,000 black African troops fought in Europe during the First World War; Nancy Lawler argues 161,250 Senegalese *tirailleurs* were in World War One. According to French military training manuals published in 1923, Algeria provided 170,000 Muslim troops, Madagascar sent 40,000, and Indochina sent 535,000 soldiers and 240,000 civilian workers. Marc Michel cites a similar statistic for Madagascar. Paul-Marie de la Gorce cites 900,000 men were recruited from the colonies for combat or labour.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>96</sup> BDIC, O Pièce 14168, note, Comité d'aide et d'assistance coloniale, 1914-1915.

<sup>97</sup> Michel, Appel à l'Afrique, p. 35.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>98</sup> Ibid., p. 32.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>99</sup> Histoire de la France coloniale, p. 77.

<sup>100</sup> Crowder, Colonial West Africa, p. 111.

<sup>101</sup> Michel, Appel à l'Afrique, p. 29.

force especially after the previous conscription of their European workers, resulting in an uneven conscription of farmers. 102 France simultaneously needed men and food from the colonies. Military requirements prevailed. 103 In a bold move, Black deputy Blaise Diagne was named Commissioner for the Republic for the Recruitment of Troops in French West Africa on 11 January 1918. This gave him the same rank as Governor General Van Vollenhoven, who resigned supposedly in protest at the recruitment.<sup>104</sup> Diagne raised 20,000 more volunteers than requested. Marc Michel credits Diagne's presence for the success of the 1918 recruitment after the violent rejection of the previous year. 105

Evaluation of the performance of colonial troops in the First World War varied, and was heavily permeated with stereotypes. They were nevertheless praised for their fighting qualities. General Huré wrote in glowing terms about a regiment of tirailleurs:

How could one forget that the 2<sup>e</sup> Régiment de marche de tirailleurs in August 1918 penetrated 22 km into the German lines near Roye and took more than 1,000 prisoners walking on Hirson in October? We read in one of its six citations, "Assault regiment which has maintained the harsh and vibrant traditions of the bladed weapon and the French bayonet during this war."106

Praise of coloured troops was not universal. Critics said they were more susceptible to disease and cold, had bad aim, were undisciplined under fire and did not manoeuvre well. 107 The cost of training and maintenance was also high. The fear of disease led to the policy of hivernage where colonial troops, unused to the cold, were moved from the front to warmer regions in the Midi during the winter months. In 1914 the Senegalese troops arriving from Morocco fought well at Dixmude, in Belgium, but were immediately removed from the front for winter. They remained in the Midi, training until May 1916 'under the orders of colonial chiefs [white leaders of the colonial troops] used to leading this somewhat special company' when they returned to the Front. 108 Malagasy troops remained on the front throughout the winters

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>102</sup> Ibid., p. 111.

Echenberg, Colonial Conscripts, p. 31.

<sup>104</sup> Crowder, Colonial West Africa, p.113.

<sup>105</sup> Michel, Appel à l'Afrique, p. 49.

<sup>106</sup> Huré, L'Armee d'Afrique, p. 296.

<sup>107</sup> Joe Lunn, "Les Races guerrières": Racial Preconception in the French Military about West African Solders during the First World War' in Journal of Contemporary History, xxxiv, no. 4 (October 1999), p. 525. <sup>108</sup> Histoire et épopée des troupes coloniales (Paris: Les Presses Modernes, 1956), p. 327.

of 1917-1918, and 1918-1919.<sup>109</sup> Opponents claimed that despite bravery and endurance in battle the *tirailleurs* lost focus and panicked without their European officers.<sup>110</sup> In order to prevent disorder Senegalese troops were sent into attack surrounded by European formations.<sup>111</sup> As we have seen, similar criticism resurfaced in 1940.

The presence of colonial soldiers in Europe sparked the popular imagination both negatively and positively. The Germans were explicitly opposed to it. Already, Bismarck and von Moltke the elder had condemned the French use of North African soldiers in 1870. The German's own experience of colonial warfare, especially with the Herero in South-West Africa in 1904-1907, reinforced this hostility, which was reapplied to Europe in 1914. In particular, they accused colonial soldiers of 'enemy barbarism' that was then applied to European warfare. They insisted that the colonial troops mutilated the bodies of wounded and dead German soldiers. Wartime propaganda detailed these alleged atrocities in great detail. The French later capitalised on German prejudice and stereotypes of the colonial troops' savagery by using them as shock troops. Most colonial troops were used in this manner since their supposedly warlike characteristics, and their simplistic minds allegedly made them better suited for simple, frontward attacks without complicated strategy. The popular imagination and the popular imagination and the popular imagination and proposed to it. Already, Bismarck and von Moltke the popular imagination as a popular imagination and proposed to it. Already, Bismarck and von Moltke the popular imagination as a popular imagination and proposed to it. Already, Bismarck and von Moltke the popular imagination as a popular imagination and proposed to it. Already, Bismarck and von Moltke the popular imagination as a popular imagination and proposed to it. Already, Bismarck and von Moltke the popular imagination and proposed to it. Already, Bismarck and von Moltke the popular imagination and proposed to it. Already, Bismarck and von Moltke the popular imagination and von Moltke the popular imaginatio

The French glorified the African troops who managed to hold back the German onslaught through their ruthless barbarism. Echenberg argues that some French elements emphasised the image of Africans decapitating their victims. This, in turn, allowed the Germans to complain about French ruthlessness in employing cannibals against their enemies. The 1917 publication of the German author Leo Frobenius, entitled *Le Cirque ethnique de nos ennemis*, criticised French 'domestication' of Africans and Asians while arguing racial segregation protected cultural differences. When captured, CPOWs were interned with other French

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110 Lunn, 'Races guerrières', p. 529.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>109</sup> BDIC, S 11562, *Manuel l'usage des troupes employées outre-mer, deuxième partie* [Henceforth *Manuel troupes 2*] (Paris: Ministre de la Guerre, 1923), p. 342.

Echenberg, Colonial Conscripts, pp 530-1.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>112</sup> Jones, Violence against Prisoners, p. 74.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>113</sup> Ibid., p. 74.

<sup>114</sup> Fogarty, Race & War, p. 85.

Echenberg, Colonial Conscripts, p. 33.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>116</sup> Odon Abbal, *Soldats oubliés: Les prisonniers de guerre français* (Bez-et-Esparon: E&C Editions, 2001), p. 57.

prisoners in Germany, although their experience there awaits detailed study. 117 Gilbert Meynier noted that German efforts to turn Algerian prisoners against France were badly organised and had the opposite effect. 118

The French not only understood the extent of German racism, they capitalised on it so as to humiliate the German prisoners and to emphasize Africa as the adopted child of France. 119 Collective humiliation was commonly used as leverage over the enemy. 120 This set off a spiral of retaliation against the prisoners. Upon learning that France had sent German prisoners to Morocco and Dahomey, Germany moved French prisoners to extremely harsh camps in Latvia. 121 In France, photographs and drawings circulated showing the German soldiers in positions inferior to their colonial guards. 122 Germany retaliated by sending 30,000 French prisoners to Russia in May and June 1916 with reduced food packages, brutal work, and insufficient accommodation. Other French prisoners were sent to the French front to dig German trenches in violation of international law. 123 Neutral negotiations were required to resolve the issue. Germany encouraged French prisoners to write home about these terrible conditions, hoping that their families would complain which in turn would force France to improve conditions for the Germans interned in the colonies. 124

After the war, the Germans felt particularly humiliated by the use of colonial troops in the Rhineland in 1919. The German reaction to these soldiers was visceral, vitriolic and totally ungrounded in reality. The number of colonial troops varied from 200,000 during the winter of 1919 to 45,000 in 1921. The international press took up the 'Black shame' and bemoaned the fate of innocent German girls raped by the hundreds. Pamphlets were published in the United States, Sweden, and Great Britain.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>117</sup> Michel, Lawler, Echenberg, and Jones provide no information on CPOWs in the First World War. Gilbert Meynier devotes a few pages in his massive tome on Algeria during the First World War to prisoners: Gilbert Meynier, L'Algérie Révélée: La guerre de 1914-1918 et le premier quart du XXe siècle (Paris and Geneva: Librairie Droz, 1981), pp 434-435.

<sup>118</sup> Meynier, L'Algérie révélée, p. 435.

Abbal, Soldats oubliés, p 57.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>120</sup> Jones, Violence against Prisoners, p. 136.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>121</sup> Ibid., p. 134.

<sup>122</sup> Hans-Jürgen Lüsebrink, 'Les Troupes coloniales dans la guerre: présences, imaginaires et représentations' in Nicolas Bancel, Pascal Blanchard, and Laurent Gervereau (eds), Images et colonies: iconographie de propagande coloniale sur l'Afrique française de 1880 à 1960 (Nanterre: BDIC, 1993), p. 74.

123 Abbal, Soldats oubliés, pp 57-58.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>124</sup> Jones, Violence Against Prisoners, p. 136.

<sup>125</sup> Keith L. Nelson, 'The "Black Horror on the Rhine": Race as a Factor in Post World War I Diplomacy' in Journal of Modern History, xlii, no. 4, (December, 1970), p. 611; Manuel officiers 2, p. 342.

Behind the German complaints lay a deep-seated fear of 'African' sexuality. 126 Keith Nelson argued that French administrators understood and exploited German discomfort regarding colonial soldiers. 127 Many French believed, as the Germans did, that the colonial soldiers' were 'over-sexed'. Brothels, some segregated by race, were installed in the Saar. 128 In May 1919 an anonymous group of French soldiers wrote to General Brissaud-Desmaillet to complain that the tirailleurs were taking too long, leaving little time for other soldiers. The administration responded that they were working with the local authorities to 'significantly increase the number of filles de joie, but in the meantime the tirailleurs must expedite their antics: they will be given instructions on this subject.' This example shows the contradictions inherent in French views towards their colonial soldiers. While integrated into the army, and even its brothels, colonial soldiers remained 'others', dependent on the French for instructions on even the most basic subjects. Additionally, supplying prostitutes kept the colonial soldiers away from 'good women' be they French or German. Eventually the French quietly removed the colonial soldiers from Germany. That French soldiers had non-segregated brothels while the American army remained segregated until well after the Second World War reveals as much about French and American racial thought as the 'black shame' did of the Germans.

The greatest consequence of the First World War was its impact on international law, especially regarding POWs. The 1907 Hague Convention and the 1906 Geneva Convention for the wounded and sick had established basic rules for warfare but did not forbid reprisals. Both sides constantly pushed the limits of acceptable treatment, especially concerning prisoner labour. The first ICRC delegation visited POW camps in 1915 amidst mutual French and German suspicion. Heather Jones has determined that what tempered abuses towards prisoners was not international law but rather each side's fear of reprisals by the other against its own prisoners.<sup>130</sup>

The repercussions of the dramatic change in attitude towards prisoner labour

<sup>126</sup> Julia Roos, 'Women's Rights, Nationalist Anxiety, and the "Moral" Agenda in the Early Weimar Republic: Revisiting the "Black Horror" Campaign against France's African Occupation Troops' in *Central European History*, xlii (2009), p. 477.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>127</sup> Nelson, 'Black Horror', p. 613.

Roos, 'Women's Rights', p. 495.
 General Brissaud-Desmaillet, 'Ordres generals d'opérations, 3e partie, 127<sup>th</sup> Division', 3 May 1919.
 I would like to thank the anonymous archivist at SHD who gave me this document.

lasted long after the Great War and can be seen in the attitude towards international law and the expansion of prisoner labour. Under the Hague Law of Land Warfare of 1907, which was in force and recognised by all parties, it was perfectly legal to require regular prisoners to work as long as that work was not directly connected to the war effort. The Geneva Convention for the protection of prisoners of 1929 codified the previous practices and agreements. The nature of the First World War brought multiple breaches of international law. The demands of the total war economy expanded and ultimately changed the definition of acceptable work for POWs. The integration of forced prisoner labour into the captors' armies in 1916-1917 was in complete violation of the POWs' pre-war legal status. <sup>131</sup> Reciprocity combined with this desperate need for labour changed the definition of permissible prisoner labour.

## The inter-war period

The Third Republic used the euphoria of victory and the colonies' contribution to the Great War to strengthen military and popular ties to the Empire. Both required changing the average French person's reaction to the colonies and its subjects. Postwar officer training manuals drew lessons from the Great War. They tried, through detailed ethnographic research, to move beyond the previous stereotypes of colonial soldiers. The manuals warned that the Malagasy and Indochinese *tirailleurs* had been incorrectly limited to manual labour or kept far from the front line. To obtain the best from these soldiers, officers were instructed to provide regular breaks and assume they would never be able to march in formation correctly. After the Malagasy's success in battle 'the long retained doubt on their bravery has fallen. We can say today that not only the Malagasy become good soldiers but they are brave under fire. Vietnamese troops at the front, 'confirmed the opinion we had of them: well supervised, under leaders they know and who know them well, the *tirailleurs* give a good show in combat. Jiah Unsurprisingly and not linked to race, the quality of training

<sup>131</sup> Ibid., p. 127. For a full discussion on the expansion of POW labour and its ramification on international law see Jones above.

134 Manuel troupes 2, p. 46; see also Histoire et épopée, pp 327-328.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>132</sup> BDIC, S Pièce 8551, Manuel Élémentaire à l'usage des officiers et sous-officiers appelés à commander des indigènes coloniaux (Indochinois-Sénégalais-Malgaches) dans la métropole [Henceforth Manuel officiers 1] (Paris: Ministre de la guerre, 1923), p. 9.

<sup>133</sup> BDIC, S Pièce 8551, Manuel élémentaire à l'usage des officiers et sous-officiers appelés à commander des indigènes coloniaux (Indochinois-Sénégalais-Malgaches) dans la métropole, Fascicule N. 3 Malgaches [Henceforth Manuel officier 3] (Paris: Ministre de la guerre, 1923) p. 14.

influenced the soldiers' performance especially under heavy artillery fire. As seen, this concern resurfaced during the battles of 1940. Ultimately these manuals replaced one set of out-dated stereotypes with another.

The role of a French officer reflected French imperial values. French racism was paternalistic in nature. Colonial soldiers were considered only as good as their French officers, and the ideal relationship between them was a paternal one. Richard Fogarty clarifies the contradiction of French republican values, colonial troops and ideas of France during the Great War. He argues that this contradiction arose from a republican ideal of a nation of select individuals, organised not along racial lines but on their acceptance of the nation's culture. Furthermore, he argues, that paternalism fit nicely into republican colonisation by presenting France as a benevolent parent able to raise its children to civilisation through education. However, this was not so simple in practice because it contradicted the hierarchical stereotypes on which colonial rule was founded.

Ultimately, colonial soldiers were viewed as several different homogeneous groups with specific characteristics and flaws. Thesee views were influenced by the First World War and aimed to fix the problems the colonial soldiers had during that war. The Hovas, from Madagascar, were seen as docile and disciplined with above average intelligence, for 'natives'. They showed courage along the Front in the First World War but were heavily influenced by their European officers, who should be chosen carefully. Post-war training manuals give a good insight into the French army's views on the value of colonial soldiers in the interwar period:

Generally, the native has a lot of self-esteem; he is even proud, conceited and braggart. As such it is essential to avoid using hurtful words in front of his friends; bullying is not acceptable and it is worth remembering that violence is totally prohibited.<sup>139</sup>

France, and particularly the French Army, took their civilising mission, to help the 'natives' rise towards French civilisation, seriously.

French officers were taught to love their soldiers, but not necessarily to respect them: 'those who are destined to instruct, educate and lead the black Africans must

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>135</sup> BDIC, S 11562, *Manuel l'usage des troupes employées outre-mer* [Henceforth *Manuel troupes 1*] (Paris: Ministre de la Guerre, 1923), p. 36; Fogarty, *Race & War*, p. 98, 100.

<sup>136</sup> Fogarty, Race & War, p. 2.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>137</sup> Ibid., p. 101.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>138</sup> Manuel officiers 2, p. 339.

<sup>139</sup> Manuel officiers 1, p.9.

love them for all their qualities and despite their defects, that they be instilled with the idea that the white man's role, especially that of a French man, is a paternal role vis-à-vis the black man.' Three hundred pages later the training manual returns to the same theme: 'The Senegalese' love for their leaders during their service is legendary, as is, furthermore, their affection for those who know how to conquer their simple hearts, for those who love them really.' It seems odd to talk of love in a military context. This demonstrates how colonial soldiers were seen and treated as children who needed the benevolent discipline of a 'father-figure' to cultivate their potential. The racist undertones are clear, but they differed drastically from those of the German army or even the segregated American one. The French army believed that with the right support and encouragement colonial subjects could become valuable soldiers.

Most colonial soldiers were only taught the French needed for the army. The use of Pidgin French or *petit-nègre* for the West African soldiers reflected the common impression that the Africans were unable to learn proper French. Soldiers from Madagascar were considered more intelligent and better able to speak and understand French than other colonial subjects. The Indochinese, despite their own allegedly primitive language, were seen as slightly more intelligent than other colonial subjects so should be forced to speak French. Some Senegalese *tirailleurs* were encouraged to learn French: 'We can ask those of them who are bound to the service for several years to learn to read and write French. Through their desire to get closer to us in this way we can expect very good results.' In theory, after the First World War the use of *petit-nègre* was to be phased out. The officer training manuals from 1923 explain that

native units are increasingly mixed with the French troops and the language differences should not be a barrier to the physical or moral solidarity among the diverse elements of the army. Teaching French, therefore, provides some of this desirable result. But it is not enough to teach, as in the past, the basics of our language: natives recruited in the colonies will now occupy the same jobs as Europeans. They will provide liaison officers in the Metropolitan army

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>140</sup> A. Charles Roux, *L'Appel de l'Afrique noire à la France* (Lyons: Éditions France-Colonies-Travail, 1939), p. 71.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>141</sup> Manuel officiers 2, p. 16.

Manuel officiers 3, p. 11.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>143</sup> Manuel officiers 1, p. 9.

<sup>144</sup> Manuel officiers 2, p. 25.

While most officers were European, opportunities for advancement for colonial soldiers did exist. Some indigenous North Africans became lieutenants, second lieutenants and more exceptionally captains. 146 Within the Troupes Coloniales, however, only Senegalese and Malagasy units had colonial noncommissioned officers (NCOs). 147 New officers were warned when choosing NCOs, that 'it is important not to choose them from among former slaves or else their position will be universally challenged.'148 Colonial officers could be recruited in one of two ways: those who had followed the same professional training as French officers and had the rank of officer, and those who were recruited and trained to be native NCOs. 149 Officers were warned to choose young 'natives' from influential families and integrate them into a 'French setting so they can familiarise themselves with our mentality.'150 The inclusion of small groups of elite 'natives' helped reconcile the racial contradictions that Fogarty highlighted. Without forcing major changes, the army could point to a few success stories as examples of Republican victories. Meanwhile, the majority of colonial soldiers were paid less, had lower pensions and longer contracts. This system had the implicit consent of important native families who had access to better opportunities for their children.

Publications on the Empire were careful to explain to the French that not all 'natives' were savages, but rather just on a slower path of development. Central Africa was seen as particularly slow, whereas the Vietnamese had created their own, modern civilisation. The military believed that educating the 'natives' demonstrated French concern for their well-being by improving them, which was, of course, in exchange for certain obligations. This vision of colonial soldiers influenced their interactions with the French populations. Here again they were infantilised: 'The villagers themselves adapt quickly to these large black warriors, for the most part naïve and good lads who we see very quickly play with an awkward

<sup>145</sup> Manuel troupes 2, p. 226.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>146</sup> Ibid., p. 36.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>147</sup> Ibid., p. 36.

Manuel officiers 3, p. 20.

Manuel troupes 1, p. 36.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid., p. 36.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 8.

<sup>152</sup> Manuel officiers 2, p. 16.

sweetness with the small children.' The French officer should serve as a guide for the colonial soldiers on their path to civilisation while recognizing that the vast majority of them would remain child-like. Officers were responsible for their soldiers, and the French military was responsible for them all.

The Great War also changed popular attitudes towards the Empire and colonial soldiers, both now being seen as a positive asset. It marked a turning point in imperial relations.<sup>154</sup> The shock of the First World War, combined with the fear of vulnerability against a populous Germany, created a sense that France's survival depended on having, and being, an Empire.<sup>155</sup> Not everyone was convinced by these developments. Some politicians opposed capitalist imperialism; others thought it too expensive; still others simply did not understand the point. Between the wars, the Socialists accepted a left-leaning civilizing mission while the Communist Party declared itself implacably opposed. Dissenting opinion believed that the only real power and security was in Europe and that colonial expansion only benefited Germany.<sup>156</sup> Despite links forged by the First World War, many Frenchmen lacked a personal connection to the Empire.

To promote identification with the Empire, on 6 May 1931 the Third Republic launched the ambitious Colonial exhibition in the Bois de Vincennes. Thirty-four million visitors came. An outpouring of pro-colonial literature accompanied the exhibition, including a publication on colonial regiments in the First World War. Native veterans were paid to attend in ceremonial roles. The exhibition had reconstructions of the temple at Angkor-Wat, Tunisian marketplaces, Mosques from the Sudan, and colonial villages, complete with indigenous peoples. It showcased the great technological advances supposedly brought to these 'virgin' territories. Marshal Lyautey, known as the 'maker of Morocco', chaired the 1931 exhibition. He declared that:

It will be the most vivid lesson. It will show a picturesque and striking summary of our overseas Empire's prodigious activity. Its unique

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>153</sup> Martial Doze, Le Général Mazillier (1862-1937): Les Troupes coloniales sous la IIIe république: reconstruction de l'empire – victoire de 1918 (Paris: L. Fournier et Cie, 1939), p. 141.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>154</sup> Martin Evans, 'Culture and Empire: an Overview' in Martin Evans ed., *Culture and Empire: The French Experience 1830-1940* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2004), p. 2.

<sup>155</sup> de la Gorce, L'Empire écartelé, p. 10.

<sup>156</sup> Evans, Culture and Empire, p. 10.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>157</sup> Raoul Girardet, *L'Idée coloniale en France 1871-1962* (Paris: Hachette, 1972), p. 117.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>158</sup> Jean Charbonneau, *Les Contingents coloniaux: du soleil au gloire* (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1931).

development, its wealth, and the perspectives it opens for our activities and our hopes - such lessons for those who come to see, to think and to ponder. <sup>159</sup> Its goal was to reinforce the idea, born of the First World War, that France was strong because of the Empire. French politician, Jean Odin, who later voted against giving Pétain full-powers, claimed in 1931 that the First World War 'achieved, through the ordeal of blood, pain and tears, despite the variety of races, to a dizzying extent, the

1931 exhibition was one in which the 'Greater France' of 100 million was seen as the

unalterable fusion of the greater French Fatherland.'160 The period surrounding the

counterweight to any revival of German strength.

The colonial exhibition hoped to reinforce the bond between the French and their Empire from a position of strength. In 1931, France had not yet felt the full effects of the Great Depression. This was because the franc had been devalued in June 1928, undervaluing its currency and giving France a temporary advantage in international trade. Additionally, France had ceased lending abroad in 1929 and had repatriated large amounts of its funds. France was confident in its world status, large Empire and stable economy. However, this temporary reprieve would end in 1931 with the end of the export-led boom and later when sterling was devaluated. The Third Republic increased the size of the French Empire to over 4,767,000 square miles. Most resistance movements had been quashed by 1929 and there was no question of asking the colonial subjects for the right to rule them. Minister of Colonies, and later the centre-right French Premier, Paul Reynaud explained that France's imperial experience gave France a leadership role in a world where Europe was merely a province. The strength of the strength

Just as the French officers were taught their responsibilities towards their soldiers, the French nation was shown that an Empire came with responsibilities and obligations. Blaise Diagne, himself a symbol of French colonial success as the first black deputy and leader of the successful recruiting mission in West Africa, reminded the French of their civilising mission. <sup>163</sup> He praised the French Government's

<sup>159</sup> Hubert Lyautey in L'Effort colonial, p. 693.

<sup>162</sup> Paul Reynaud, 'L'empire français', in L'Effort colonial, p. 687.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>160</sup> Jean Odin, 'La Plus grande France' in *L'Effort colonial dans le monde*, (Sud-Ouest Economique, 31 August 1931), p. 745.

Derek Aldcroft, From Versailles to Wall Street, 1919-1929 (London: Allen Lane, 1977), pp 178-181.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>163</sup> Richard Krooth, *Arms and Empire: Imperial Patterns before World War II* (Santa Barbara, California: Harvest Publishers, 1980), p. 95.

attention to their colonial obligations:

Give our subjects and protégés the knowledge that the ends towards which we strive are the same for them as for us, that this structure we want to develop will be theirs as much as ours, this is, in part, what our dream of a being colonising people represents.<sup>164</sup>

France saw its imperial duty as diametrically opposed to German views on race. The French viewpoint placed all men on the same path to civilisation. Races moved at different paces on their journey. French civilisation was the epitome of civilisation and as such the goal of all men. The colonial exhibition, by mixing a fantastical vision with a utilitarian one, was to give France a new definition of what it was to be French. Nazi Germany, in contrast, believed in a racial hierarchy that could only be protected through pure bloodlines. In *Mein Kampf*, Hitler argued 'not only that [France] complements her army to an ever-increasing degree from her enormous Empire's reservoir of coloured humanity, but racially as well, she is making such great process in negrification that we can actually speak of an African state arising on European soil.'166

The Colonial Exhibition gave ordinary French citizens a taste of the Empire to increase their faith in French greatness. The exhibition presented colonial expansion as an organized and inherent part of Frenchness. However, the pride and fervour of the exhibition hid many doubts and disagreements. French victory in the Great War had given way to general unease. The Third Republic needed to actively cultivate popular opinion and strengthen the image of French influence across the globe. Reynaud explained both the creation-myth of French imperialism and rebuked its detractors:

France is the crossroads between the Mediterranean world and the Nordic world because the French are not a race but a nation. Therefore, they do not speak on behalf of a race, proud and cruel criterion, unbridgeable gap, but in the name of a humane and gentle civilization whose character is to be

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>164</sup> Blaise Diagne, in L'Effort colonial, p. 743.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>165</sup> Herman Lebovics, *True France: the Wars over Cultural Identity, 1900-1945* (Ithaca NY and London: Cornell University Press, 1992), pp 55, 70.

<sup>166</sup> Hitler, Mein Kampf, , p. 589.

Charles-Robert Agéron, 'L'Exposition coloniale de 1931 mythe républicain ou mythe impériale?' in Pierre Nora ed., *Les Lieux de memoire* (Paris : Gallimard, 1997), p. 505.

<sup>168</sup> Evans, 'Culture and Empire', p.3.
169 De la Gorce, *L'Empire écartelé*, p. 9.

universal. Many thought that extending French power throughout the world would dilute it, weaken it, making it less able to ward off the ever-threatening danger. But experience has spoken. The Republic, after giving France far-off territories, returned its lost provinces. During those tragic days, the colonies came to the Motherland's sides, and the unity of our Empire was forged in suffering and blood.<sup>170</sup>

The Third Republic attempted to reinforce French prominence in Europe and in the world by its imperial policies. However, the political and economic crisis of the 1930s had a devastating effect on French self-confidence. The prices of tropical foodstuffs dropped between sixty and seventy per cent during the crisis. By reducing the cost of importing colonial goods France hoped to assist the affected colonies, but this required French interest in colonial products. As time passed France began to feel the depression. Political instability at home felled many governments until the Popular Front in 1936 brought about new optimism to the left. However, that too faded as the economic recovery stalled.

Germany, of course, had been deprived of its colonies in 1919. But under the Nazis, some interest groups expressed renewed interest in an empire outside Europe. This became even more apparent once Germany was at war with the two major empires, Britain and France, in 1939. A colonial exhibition was held in Dresden from June to September 1940 highlighting the natural resources that colonies could potentially provide. Publications examined the economic, political and social questions surrounding a German return to their former colonies. The *Deutsche Bergwerkszeitung* criticized the French and British colonial administrations 'as plutocratic exploitations of the 'natives' while the *Deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung* ran a 'tendentious survey of French Morocco and Spanish Morocco aimed at exacerbating French and Spanish rivalry in the country.

Later Germany would reassure Vichy that they had no plans for French imperial territory while promising Spain and Italy parts of the French Empire.

<sup>170</sup> Reynaud, 'L'Empire français', p. 687.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>171</sup> Krooth, Arms and Empire, p. 95.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>172</sup> See <a href="http://dresden-postkolonial.de/kolonialausstellungen">http://dresden-postkolonial.de/kolonialausstellungen</a>. This exhibition was incorrectly identified as being in Berlin in February 1940 in SHD, 27N68, Commission Général de l'Information, summary of intelligence on German propaganda from the press 16 January to 29 February, 31 March 1940.

<sup>173</sup> Thid

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>174</sup> SHD, 27N68, summary of intelligence on German propaganda from 1 December 1939 to 15 January 1940, 15 February 1940.

However, German prisoners held in France in 1940 explained, amongst complaints of undercooked steak and too much wine, Germany's motivation for war: 'England and France have all the colonies. They have taken our "vital space". We are fighting for our Lebensraum. 175 Lebensraum, or the sacred space Germany needed to fulfil its destiny, was generally argued to be in the East. However, the prisoners were echoing Hitler's 1939 speech when Hitler stated that, 'I want peace with everybody, but I demand the allocation of a colonial empire in proportion to and worthy of the Reich's strength. First of all, I demand the restitution of all the German colonies that were stolen from us. This demand is not to be considered an ultimatum but corresponds both with reason and common law.'176 The German government protested at the French and British violations of the mandate system by stationing troops in Syria, and recruiting colonial soldiers in Cameroon. 177 This helped legitimise Nazi claims that Germany was anti-imperialist and pro-Islam. At the same time Germany demonstrated a continued dislike of racial minorities by complaining on German radio that 'forty-two German prisoners coming from Morocco reported how badly they were treated. A black soldier hit one of them in the legs with a rod. They are currently behaving in Morocco as they did before 1914.'178

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After six weeks of fighting, to everyone's surprise, the war was over. What was still thought of as the strongest European army had been thoroughly defeated. The war ended before it really began. The Germans had reached the coast, and the French government fled Paris. The British and French retreat at Dunkirk was a spectacular military effort. Over 300,000 men were evacuated. But the French felt abandoned. Eight million French and Belgian civilians clogged the roads fleeing before the advancing German armies. It would take decades before France recovered fully from the emotional and physical shock of such a complete and rapid defeat. This shock prompted Philippe Pétain, hero of Verdun, to request the terms of an Armistice. Under the Armistice agreement, two million French soldiers, among them some 85,000 colonial soldiers became prisoners of war. They became, along with the

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>175</sup> SHD, 27N36, Michael Wilson, 'Camp for German Military Prisoners', 4 March 1940.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>176</sup> SHD, 27N68, Adolf Hitler, speech, 6 October 1939.

<sup>1//</sup> Ibid.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>178</sup> SHD, 31N123, summary of German radio broadcasts, 18 July 1940.

French Empire, major concerns of the new regime established under Pétain at Vichy on 10 July.

Any remaining confidence dissolved with the defeat, forcing Vichy to search for other means to preserve French 'greatness' (grandeur). With significant and symbolic territorial losses in France, only the Empire remained. The theme of the Empire returned – or rather continued – with the Vichy regime as one element of 'collaboration' with the occupying Germans.' Despite repudiating the ideals and politics of the Third Republic, Vichy echoed much of its imperial rhetoric. This was as much by necessity as conviction. Pétain reminded France that the Armistice saved the Empire, allowing France an honourable defeat. Indeed, an intact Empire allowed Vichy to imagine that it had a real measure of power in the face of Germany and a post-war role as the lynchpin between Europe and Africa. In its rhetoric, at least, Vichy attempted to establish connections with the Empire from a supposed position of strength and not as the last resort of a nation defeated and impotent in Europe.

## Chapter two

# Becoming a CPOW: the chaos of early captivity

Despite the Armistice, becoming a prisoner had not been a simple business, and least of all for colonial soldiers. After capture a soldier could have one of three experiences. First, he might be shot or killed during surrender or shortly after. Second, he could become a prisoner of war, go to a temporary location in France and later be sent by foot and train to camps in Germany. Or lastly, he could be sent to a camp in Occupied France instead of Germany. Most white French prisoners fell into the second category and most colonial prisoners the third. This initial period of captivity was particularly difficult and chaotic. The Germans did not have the infrastructure to cope with such high numbers of prisoners. The French roads and railways had been damaged by the fighting and were engorged with displaced civilians. Food, water and basic sanitation were in short supply. Tens of thousands of prisoners were left in fields surrounded by barbed wire. Most French believed that Germany would defeat Great Britain in a matter of months ending the war and redistributing power in Europe. As a result many French prisoners believed they would be released shortly, so did not bother to escape. Out of the chaos of the summer of 1940 came two distinct and complementary approaches to bring order to the chaos: building the diplomatic structures to deal with the prisoners and building the physical structures to house them. It took from the summer of 1940 to the spring of 1941 for these structures to work properly. Collaboration dominated the French diplomatic approach.

This chapter explores the dual strands of the thesis, the actual experience of the CPOWs and Franco-German negotiations over their fate during this critical phase as the political discussions attempted to improve the CPOWs' experiences. During the summer of 1940, both France and Germany worked to stabilise the situation for the prisoners. Vichy attempted to negotiate with the Germans who in turn were sorting prisoners and determining how to respond to Vichy. Even the prisoners tried to improve their disorganised, over-crowded temporary housing. The first step was to implement the Armistice agreement.

#### The Franco-German Armistice

On 16 June 1940, French premier Paul Reynaud resigned, ceding his place to Philippe Pétain. Pétain explained that 'the question posed at this moment is not whether the French government should or should not ask for an Armistice, but whether the French government asks for an Armistice or accepts leaving metropolitan France... in my view, an Armistice is the necessary condition for the survival of our eternal France.' Signing the Armistice was not a neutral action. Opponents reminded France that the French navy was undefeated and the Empire unoccupied. However, an unsigned report on the situation of the French army at the time of the Armistice claimed that French shipping could only move 15,000 to 20,000 men and North Africa lacked the industry to equip them.<sup>2</sup> In February 1939, fifty-three per cent of Frenchmen felt that losing part of the Empire would be as painful as losing metropolitan territory.<sup>3</sup> However, when that question became a real possibility, Pétain's 'eternal France' was only the *métropole*. In June 1940, the discrepancy between the Empire as symbol of imperial grandeur and its practical value was revealed. It became essential to simultaneously convince the French that the Empire was worth saving, through the Armistice, but not useful enough to support a government in exile as Reynaud had half-heartedly suggested.

The question of the Empire was confused even for the French government. On 21 June members of the French government including Camile Chautemps, Jean Zay, and Pierre Mendès France sailed on the *Massilia* believing they were moving the government to North Africa. When they arrived in Casablanca three days later they were accused of desertion and arrested by the Vichy government. For many Frenchmen moving the government to North Africa would mean guerrilla warfare and reprisals on those left behind.<sup>4</sup> The continual political and economic crises of the 1930s had weakened faith in the Republic. Pre-war France was divided and hesitant about a war that risked another generation of French lives. At the time the defeat felt almost unsurprising. Looking for someone to blame, Vichy targeted the Popular

<sup>1</sup> Jean-Pierre Azéma, *From Munich to the Liberation 1938-1944* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1979), Translated by Janet Lloyd, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), p. 42.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> SHD, 27N11, report on situation of the French armies at the time of the Armistice request, [n.d.]. <sup>3</sup> Charles-Robert Algeron, 'Vichy, les Français et l'empire' in Azéma and Bédarida (eds) *Vichy et les Français*, p.122.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> SHD, 2P82, note from LaCarniere, President of the comité départemental d'accueil et d'entr'aide de la L. F. C. de l'Isère; see also Paxton, *Vichy France*, p. 15.

Front, Republicans, Communists, Freemasons and Jews. When Pétain gave the French nation the 'gift of himself', he was an immensely popular, albeit aged, hero of the Great War. He presented the Armistice as the brave choice that would save the unity of the French Empire. Ironically, the beginning of the Vichy regime marked both the failure and the triumph of the Third Republic's attempt to cultivate an imperial identity. Its failure was clear when only a small minority of politicians and de Gaulle in London believed that the war could continue from the Empire and that the Empire could save the *métropole*. However, under the Vichy regime, the government followed the Third Republic's policy of creating popular attachment to the colonies. Despite blocking the real test of the Empire's full potential, continuing the war from North Africa, Vichy needed both the French and the Germans to believe in the strength of the Empire.

Containing political and military clauses, the Armistice imposed significant burdens on the French. The demarcation line divided France into Occupied and Unoccupied Zones. Germany annexed Alsace-Lorraine and administered the Northern departments directly from Brussels. A forbidden zone surrounded the Atlantic coasts. The Armistice army was limited to 100,000 men and Germany imposed huge occupation costs on France. To ensure the Armistice army was essentially composed of white French soldiers, Vichy repatriated those colonial soldiers who had not been captured to the colonies to be demobilised. Article twenty, which stated French prisoners would remain in captivity until the conclusion of peace, was devastating for the French and their economy. Hitler had recognized that the Armistice needed to allow the French some room for hope. Marshal Keitel praised France as a brave adversary. Under the terms of the Armistice the French fleet remained French and undefeated, and as mentioned, Germany made no claims to the Empire.

When on 10 July 1940, Pétain was voted head of the French state with full powers, he explained succinctly: 'too few babies, too few weapons, too few allies, those were the reasons for our defeat.' Prisoners and the Empire became key issues for the new regime. Vichy explained that, 'prisoners and youth, whether we like it or

<sup>5</sup> Azéma, From Munich to the Liberation, p. 46.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> AN, AJ/41/1835, state of negotiations, sub-committee for POWs, 8 October1940.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> SHD, 2P82, Jean Labusquière, 'Verité sur les combatants' in *La Famille du prisonnier de guerre* [n.d.].

Archives de Paris, D38Z/1, Philippe Pétain, 23 June 1940, Manifestations et allocutions du maréchal Pétain (Paris: Editions Libraire Joseph Gilbert, 1940).

not, are the keystones to a restored France.' Vichy hoped that the threat or promise of allowing use of the Empire's strategic bases, or alternatively keeping the Empire neutral, would entice the Germans into negotiations. Pétain viewed 'collaboration' as the leverage required to influence the wartime situation, prior to total German victory, to France's advantage. Vichy was a post-war regime that was desperately waiting for a peace that would take five years to arrive.

The first symbols of collaboration came from Hitler and Pétain's meeting at Montoire 24 October 1940. Montoire was a town in the Loir-et-Cher department about 200 kilometres to the south-west of Paris, conveniently located near the Paris-Hendaye train line. Hitler was returning from an unsatisfactory encounter with Franco. Pétain hoped the meeting would solidify France's position. Both the defence of Dakar against the first military venture of the Free French and this meeting reassured Hitler that Pétain was not in contact with de Gaulle. 10 Hitler decided it was best to have France defend her own colonies. Vichy hoped that after proving how useful a sovereign France could be, the occupation costs would be reduced and the French prisoners returned. Germany preferred to remain vague on its contributions to collaboration. The fatal flaw of the Vichy governments, from Pétain in 1940 to Pierre Laval in 1942, was the miscalculation that collaboration necessarily meant their internal sovereignty would diminish over time. Collaboration built the scaffolding on which the CPOWs were placed. Without the importance of the Empire to collaboration, then the CPOWs' political significance in discussions would not exist. That, in turn, would have fundamentally changed their experiences.

Despite Vichy's enthusiasm for the Empire, the nation was more easily convinced of the importance of its prisoners in German captivity. Germany used the 1.5 million French prisoners as hostages to exact the maximum French concessions. The return of French prisoners was paramount for symbolic and practical purposes. If collaboration could ensure their rapid return, Vichy could be sure of popular support for their politics and the National Revolution. The missing men had a disastrous effect on the French economy. Without them France would struggle to pay the massive occupation costs. Vichy courted both the prisoners and their families. <sup>11</sup> Most French

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup> SHD, 2P82, report regarding the prisoners' return, 15 September 1941.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>10</sup> Paxton, Vichy France, p. 69.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>11</sup> Jackson, *The Dark Years*, p. 509.

families were suffering the loss of their fathers and brothers. This put Vichy under pressure to get results. An internal memo warned that:

If, through mistakes by the responsible organisation or inadequate funding, the government must count on the hostility of 1,500,000 prisoners, a grave internal danger weighs on its destiny, the solidarity through suffering being the only [solidarity] that can bring forth this formidable power in the service of order or disorder.<sup>12</sup>

Prisoners were a potent symbol because unlike the dead they could be brought home. They epitomized the healing power of quiet suffering so praised by Vichy.

The French press played an important role shaping public opinion on the issues of both prisoners and the Empire. Naturally, it was strictly controlled. Articles on politics or Franco-German relations required prior German approval. The rightwing newspaper, *Je suis partout*, claimed that hundreds of thousands of prisoners were released due to the Montoire meeting and 'all those who are against this political belief are the enemies of the prisoners, our enemies.' It was vital that the prisoners and their families should understand their centrality to Vichy's 'collaboration'. To counteract the prisoners' general ignorance of Vichy's efforts the government launched a poster campaign in the POW camps to educate prisoners about their rights and responsibilities. Prisoners also received brochures:

Remember all that the Marshal has done to improve your lot... and understand! Think of material aid you received in the camps, limited as it was. You owe it to the Marshal. Think of the emotional support, of the letters you waited for, the news from home. You owe it to the Marshal. Think and understand that this joy that you have been given in rejoining your family, you owe that to the Marshal and his government.<sup>16</sup>

These publications reinforced the idea that collaboration directly benefited France. Prisoners of war were omnipresent in the press, films, posters and political discourse.<sup>17</sup> Town halls displayed reports of Vichy's efforts including the amount of

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>12</sup> SHD, 2P82, report regarding the prisoners' return, 15 September 1941.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>13</sup> AN, F/9/2007, Scapini to the Ministers and Secretaries of State, 12 November 1941.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>14</sup> Je suis partout, 25 October 1941.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>15</sup> AN, AJ/41/1834, Chauvin, note for the CAA, 8 September 1940.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>16</sup> SHD 2P82, brochure, 'Un an de travail', 17 June 1941.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>17</sup> SHD, 2P79, note for the Cabinet of the Secretary of State for War, 4 October [no year]; AN, F/41/273, 'Faces of Prisoners' from Stalag VIIIC in Silesia.

tobacco, blankets, clothing and food sent to prisoners.<sup>18</sup> Pétain reminded the nation in October 1940 that, 'the fate of our prisoners is my first thought. I think of them, because they suffer, because they fought to the very limit of their strength and by clinging to the soil of France they have fallen into the hands of the enemy.'<sup>19</sup>

The French Empire proved a more difficult symbol to exploit. In December 1941, the government explained how collaboration connected the fate of the Empire with the prisoners:

- 1. The policy of collaboration with Germany that the French Government has decided to follow, must, in order to be successful, have the country's support. For this support to be obtained, the French people must be able to think that this German victory will not be definitive. The return of prisoners is an essential element to this confidence in the future and, in consequence, the restoration of moral balance of the country.
- 2. The Government has pledged to defend its Empire. This defence cannot be held securely if more than one million young men are trapped in Germany.<sup>20</sup>

The Empire was the last remaining icon of French grandeur and Vichy needed its young men to defend it against foreign and domestic aggressors. More importantly, the Armistice grounded Vichy's political legitimacy in French imperial history by saving the French Empire from Germany. Using language reminiscent of the Third Republic publications, Vichy's publications recalled that: 'France, invaded and conquered in the most distressing and painful circumstances ever known in its history, turns to itself with dignity. In this tragic situation, she turns her eyes towards her Empire to try to find, not just a consolation and comfort, but a reason for national pride and hope.' With the Empire intact, the Armistice gave Vichy a hope on which to construct its new identity.

By shifting focus to 'greater France' Vichy sought to distract the French from the problems at home. However, for many French men and women the Empire remained a distant matter of negligible importance. Vichy sought to correct this by emphasizing the loyalty, vastness and potential resources of the Empire.<sup>22</sup> Large projects of infrastructure such as the trans-Saharan railroad or the development of the

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>18</sup> SHD, 2P79, *Paris-Midi*, 12 June 1941.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>19</sup> Pétain's message to prisoners, 9 October 1940 quoted in Durand, *La Captivité*, p. 311.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>20</sup> AN, AJ/41/2053, note regarding POWs, 22 December 1941.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>21</sup> AN, F/41/273, brochure, 'L'Empire notre meilleur chance, retour sur le passé' [no date]. <sup>22</sup> Ibid.

Niger delta were advertised to inspire popular imagination and 'reanimate the mystique of the Empire builders.' As noted Vichy saw France's role after the war was as the lynchpin between German dominated Europe and the African colonies. This meant that Vichy's sovereignty depended on German interest the French controlling their Empire and the prisoners' labour. Vichy had limited room for diplomatic manoeuvres, but that certainly did not imply that the Germans dictated every French decision.

The Empire remained an abstract symbol until the British attacked it. Now, the real advantages, for Germany, of a neutral French Empire became clear. On 3 July 1940 the British Navy bombarded the French fleet anchored off the coast of Algeria killing 1,300 men.<sup>24</sup> In September Free French ships shelled Dakar but were defeated by Governor-General of French West Africa Pierre Boisson's forces who remained loyal to Pétain's Vichy regime. While the promise of resources and new infrastructure remained too abstract to enthuse the average Frenchmen, these attacks were generally condemned. The Vichy Air Force bombed Gibraltar and after two days the allies retreated. British attacks on the Empire supplied a rallying call for Vichy. The French press declared that 'it is through the defence of the Empire that the mass of Frenchmen will become fully conscious of the solidarity that binds them to the [African] continent.'25 Under these circumstances collaboration with Germany seemed a plausible alternative to British domination. As François Darlan, Admiral of the French Navy, warned: 'in spite of [Britain] treating us like a continental Ireland or even as a colony, I intend to act so that France will retake its place of power in Europe and in the world.'26 These events changed Vichy's way of viewing their colonial subjects and thus the CPOWs. The colonies were suddenly presented with two 'Frances' claiming to be the legitimate government. For the first time, France felt obligated to bargain for its subjects' loyalty.<sup>27</sup> Protecting the Empire, and thus the CPOWs, became one of Vichy's top priorities.

Vichy's own paternalism towards its colonial subjects and the significance it attached to the Empire combined to give the CPOWs a visibility and political importance beyond their numbers. In Vichy's eyes, the CPOWs would eventually

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>23</sup> AN, F1a/3653, *La France socialiste*, 28 August 1942; see also AN, F1a/3653, *Inter-France*, 'les Délais d'achèvement' [n.d.].

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>24</sup> Jackson, *Dark Years*, p. 129.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>25</sup> AN, F1a/3653, L'Oeuvre, 12 August 1942.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>26</sup> SHD, 2P82, Darlan, report on Franco-British relations, 31 May 1941.

return to their homes in the Empire, in the full knowledge that Vichy had protected them. They would, in return, be shining examples of imperial loyalty and obedience. In the meantime, they were observable symbols interned across Occupied France of imperial devotion, having given their liberty for the motherland, and of the prisoners' suffering so often evoked by Pétain. However, they were also a liability. Vichy's paternalism made it fear that the CPOWs, who were seen as big children, would be easily swayed by German propaganda. While French prisoners were incorporated as active participants in the National Revolution, the CPOWs were not invited into political discussions. Within Vichy's rhetoric of imperial unity lay the fear of the potential conflicts resulting from repatriating unhappy ex-servicemen, who had witnessed the defeat of France, to the colonies. This spurred Vichy's efforts on their behalf. The duration of the war, however, became a major complicating factor.

## Building the administrative structure

With the primacy of prisoners in general firmly established, Vichy launched negotiations for their early return, and for an improved administrative and logistical system for dealing with them in the interim.<sup>28</sup> The structure changed several times at the beginning of the war. Initially, negotiations passed through the Armistice commission at Wiesbaden which had French and German subcommittees for prisoners of war. Article twenty-two of the Armistice Convention created the Délégation Française auprès de la Commission Allemande d'Armistice (DFCAA) on 22 June 1940. General Huntziger was the DFCAA's initial president but was replaced by General Doyen in September 1940. The DFCAA's principal goal was to obtain the release or the temporary leave of certain categories of prisoners. It worked closely with the POW section of the Délégation des services de l'Armistice (DSA), created on 26 June 1940.<sup>29</sup> The Direction du Service des Prisonniers de Guerre (DSPG) was established 28 July 1940 under General Besson. Located in Vichy until 30 October 1940, the DSPG then moved to Lyons. It organized and responded to all practical questions regarding prisoners of war including sending 'group shipments to prisoners and their families, as well as material and spiritual aid to both.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>30</sup> Durand, La Captivité, p. 312.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>28</sup> AN, AJ/41/1835, state of negotiations, sub-committee for POWs, 8 October1940.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>29</sup> AN, 72 AJ/291, Jeanmot, Les Prisonniers de guerre.

Structurally and politically negotiations changed dramatically with the appointment of Georges Scapini. A First World War veteran, he was a close friend of German Ambassador Otto Abetz from their inter-war participation in the *Comité France-Allemagne*. On 30 July 1940 Scapini met with the German authorities to discuss the mass release of French POWs, which was refused. In September 1940, Scapini was named Ambassador of France<sup>31</sup> and his *Service diplomatique des prisonniers de guerre* (SDPG) was given control over all prisoner of war issues for the French side. Interestingly, Pétain had already sent Scapini to Berlin on several occasions in September and October as his personal emissary with unknown instructions. While there Scapini met with top German officials and argued that France could play an important role in Hitler's Europe as a colonial power.<sup>32</sup> Scapini believed that the French colonies were key to her future as an important player in Europe. As such, the fates of prisoners and colonies were linked in the person of Scapini.

Under Scapini, the international regulations were sidestepped. In November 1940 Scapini met with General Reinecke in Berlin to launch the first major negotiations surrounding prisoners of war. It is important to note the complex interactions between Besson's DSPG in Lyons and Scapini's SDPG in Paris. Scapini was the only person allowed to negotiate directly with the Germans, but Besson's service continued to function throughout the war. The protocol of 16 November 1940 enacted the German suggestion that France, through Georges Scapini, officially substitute itself as protecting power under the Geneva Convention. The significance of this change should not be underestimated. As Neville Wylie argues, codifying the rights of the protecting powers, and indeed of the ICRC, in the 1929 Geneva Convention had been a huge step forward in the protection of prisoners. The French prisoners were no longer protected by a powerful neutral nation, the United States, but by a defeated Vichy which held no German prisoners. Scapini tended to the prisoners'

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>31</sup> Ambassador was an administrative rank giving Scapini the legitimacy needed to negotiate with the Germans and to represent French interests.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>32</sup> Paxton, Vichy France, p. 72.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>33</sup> AN, AJ/41/1834, Humbert, note for DSA POW section, 13 November 1940.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>34</sup> Neville Wylie, 'The 1929 Prisoner of War Convention and the Building of the Inter-war Prisoner of War Regime' in Sibylle Scheipers (ed) *Prisoners in War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 101.

material, psychological and political needs while aiming to infuse them with the spirit of the National Revolution.<sup>35</sup>

After capture, prisoners in Germany were under the High Command of the German Army or *Oberkommando des Heeres* (OKH).<sup>36</sup> However, *Stalags* and *Oflags* were under the authority of the Reserve Army Command.<sup>37</sup> The chain of command was Hitler, Chief OKW, '*Allgemeines Wehrmachtamt*' (AWA), *Abteilung für Kriegsgefangenenwesen* (Abt.Kgf.Wesen)' reporting to the AWA, OKH, *Wehrkreiskommando*, *Kommandeur der Kriegsgefangenen im Wehrkreis* and then commandants of POW camps.<sup>38</sup> In France, the *Feldkommandantur* or local military command, instructed the camp commanders in his area. He also instructed the French prefects on questions regarding colonial and French prisoners. While politically less important, camp commanders and guards had the real influence over the CPOWs' experience.

Scapini took a two-pronged approach to negotiations: request the release of specific categories while emphasising the need to send all prisoners home. He explained to Abetz: 'I also presented, in the absence of a general solution, requests concerning the settlement of a number of specific points. With the approach of winter, I felt obliged to stress the serious impact of the prolongation of captivity, in this time of neither peace nor war, on the morale and physical state of the prisoners.'<sup>39</sup> Vichy wanted Germany to recognize that France was in a peculiar position, having stopped fighting. However, Germany simply reiterated that it was at war. The Scapini agreement released the prisoners held in Switzerland, arranged for Christmas packages, opened an annexe of Scapini's services in Berlin, assigned prisoners' jobs according to their skills, and arranged faster repatriation for the wounded. 40 The first wave of releases included prisoners who posed a financial burden to Germany, such as older soldiers. Veterans of the First World War were released with soldiers who had economic responsibilities in their own homes such as fathers or older brothers of four or more children. Their release also relieved Vichy from the responsibility of supporting their families while the income earners were in captivity. Additional liberations were eventually allowed for the non-essential medical personnel; prisoners

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>35</sup> Durand, La Captivité, p. 317.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>36</sup> Ibid., p. 29.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>37</sup> Ibid., p. 30.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>38</sup> Ibid., p. 29..

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>39</sup> AN, F/9/2007, Scapini to Abetz, 10 December 1941.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>40</sup> AN, AJ/41/2053, Poussart, meeting with Scapini's services, 6 June [no year].

whose illness or wounds disallow them from work for at least a year; and civilians who could prove they were not in the military. In November 1940, 600 civilian North African and Indochinese workers were transferred via camp Saint-Médard to the Unoccupied Zone. As of 5 July 1940, names of specialists were to be submitted for approval, as Germany was no longer prepared to allow mass releases. Despite Scapini's continued efforts and Vichy's public and repeated calls for the release of all French prisoners, Scapini admitted to Abetz that the French economy could not absorb their return en masse before a peace settlement was made.

These limited successes gave Vichy unfounded confidence in collaboration. Unsurprisingly, Vichy and Germany had different goals for the prisoners. For Vichy the prisoners' return would restart the French economy while providing a concrete expression of German confidence in collaboration. However, Germany consistently acted in its own self-interest. The French Delegation at Wiesbaden knew as early as December 1940 that there was 'no illusion to be had on the possible mass liberation of prisoners. An article in the *Kölnische Zeitung* shows that prisoners are systematically and methodically used *en masse* by the Germans as labourers.' As the German war effort intensified, the need for a solid workforce increased. The use of prisoner labour was essential to the German economy and determined German attitudes towards them. Even as early as November 1940 not every member of the DFCAA was convinced that collaboration gave France what it wanted and needed. One report on the DFCAA's activities concluded that:

The forfeit made of 1,500,000 prisoners is too important for the winner to let escape. Thus, the winner will, in fact, cede nothing and play by his own rules, even against international law and the agreements. We have observed infringements to the Geneva Convention and to the agreements on release and captivity leave. [...] One might ask oneself, in this conditions, how the recent Scapini accords, which, *a priori*, give France very little, will be applied.<sup>47</sup>

Despite the doubts and contradictions within Vichy's own reasoning, it was committed to collaboration and determined to move forward with it. As Julian

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>41</sup> AN, AJ/41/1835, State of negotiations, sub-committee for POWs, 8 October 1940.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>42</sup> AD Gironde, 45W15, Oelsner-Wolner to the prefect of Gironde, 30 November 1940.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>43</sup> AN, AJ/41/1835, summary of DFCAA meeting, 5 July 1940.

<sup>44</sup> Paxton, Vichy France, pp 77-78.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>45</sup> AN, AJ/41/1835, subcommittee for POWs, 1 December 1940.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>46</sup> Durand, La Captivité, p. 111.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>47</sup> AN, AJ/41/1835, Report of the DFCAA's activities between 17 -23 November, 25 November 1940.

Jackson argues, the release of prisoners of war cost the Germans nothing and encouraged Vichy's desire to believe collaboration brought concrete results.<sup>48</sup>

However, German policy towards CPOWs was different. Precisely because it believed France was wrong to use colonial soldiers in Europe, it intended to make the resulting captives a charge for France. By physically separating the colonial from French POWs Germany effectively split CPOWs from negotiations on French prisoners. Vichy simultaneously considered CPOWs to be part of, and separate from, the prisoner of war question. They were not, however, hostages in Germany. They were located in Occupied France and provided Vichy with a topic on which negotiations might prove fruitful. The CPOWs were not a priority for Germany, as demonstrated by their refusal to bring them to Germany. However, that decision set in motion a series of events, which would, ironically, make the CPOWs important for Germany. Being on French soil increased the CPOWs' visibility and significance for Vichy which hoped to promote its imperial agenda through them. Once Germany understood that, it used the CPOWs as leverage to exact additional financial concessions from Vichy. As already noted, a variety of factors make it difficult to establish exact statistics for prisoners of war in general and CPOWs in particular. A safe figure seems to be somewhere in excess of 80,000 CPOWs in the spring of 1941.<sup>49</sup>

CPOWs, like colonial soldiers, were considered an integral part of the French army but one that required special provisions. Vichy wanted CPOWs to be accorded the same release arrangements as white French prisoners, while seeking extra exceptions for CPOWs due to their sensitivity to climate and risks to their heath. Many CPOWs would have qualified for release under Scapini's agreement but few had the documents to prove their eligibility. Even after questionnaires were distributed, it was 'quite difficult to determine, even approximately, the number of native prisoners with four or more children... in some work groups sixty per cent of the natives declared themselves fathers of large families, in others twenty per cent.'50 Some CPOWs were polygamists, but only their first wives were legally recognized. Lack of accurate numbers of CPOWs and especially numbers of fathers, hindered the

<sup>48</sup> Jackson, *Dark Years*, p. 233.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>49</sup> See Appendix A for a full discussion of statistics on CPOWs, p. 280.

process.<sup>51</sup> A report by the Algerian Economic and Tourism office (OFALAC) estimated about a quarter of CPOWs had more than four children.<sup>52</sup> Another estimate suggested that about 1,000 CPOWs had at least four children.<sup>53</sup>

Two different approaches were used to maximize the numbers of CPOWs benefiting from these releases. First, the colonies sought more accurate lists and supporting documents and second, individual CPOWs appealed their cases. In January 1941 Pierre Boisson sent a memo to the governors of each West African colony instructing the local administration to coordinate with the local military authorities. They worked from both the lists of prisoners available or from locals who have received word from their prisoner to determine who could benefit from these measures. The colonial registry of births and marriages was also adapted to the local legal status for 'natives' to facilitate obtaining official records.<sup>54</sup> Moussa Baccouche wrote to the President of the Red Cross in Algiers asking for help in obtaining his release. Baccouche had four children under eighteen and two young brothers, who were all dependent on his father.<sup>55</sup> After his father's death they no longer had any means of support. Having gone through official channels a frustrated Baccouche sent a scathing letter to the President of the French Red Cross in Algiers:

Two requests, dated April 5 and 18, addressed to M. Scapini with all the necessary documents justifying my status as a father and only supporter of a large family, for my captivity leave under the 16 November 1940 protocol, have been in vain. In order to complete my duty for France, Mr. President, must my family suffer in misery, and my children be left, without support, to disease and perhaps death? Is that the reward that we, the colonial soldiers, deserve?<sup>56</sup>

On 20 October 1941, the letter was forwarded to Bonnard, a SDPG inspector with experience in colonial medicine. We do not know if Baccouche was released or not.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>54</sup> ANS, 2D24 (28), Memo from Boisson to Governors of Senegal, Mauritania, Circumscriptions of Dakar and its dependences, Soudan, Guinea, Ivory Coast, Dahomey, Niger and the Commissioner of Togo, 27 January 1941.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>55</sup> AN, F/9/2351, Moussa Baccouche to the President of the Red Cross Alger, 8 September 1941.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>56</sup> Ibid.

Another prisoner, Mamadou Kane, asked his cousin to write to their friend Jean David at Vichy requesting assistance in gathering the necessary documents for his release as father of as a large family. Kane explained that:

I am a civil servant for the government of the Mauritania and St. Louis in Senegal and that colony pays my wife the family allowances provided for five children. The Minister for Colonies, with a simple cable to Dakar, can confirm what I have told you. The War Ministry, (section for colonial troops) should have the record of my five children in my officer's file. <sup>57</sup>

The message was received. Admiral Platon, the Colonial Minister, sent an official request for his documents directly to Boisson.<sup>58</sup> However, these cases remained the minority. In the meantime, Vichy continued to present various arguments for mass release of French and CPOWs. The fact that Baccouche was able to send letters criticising Vichy's work on his behalf proved that the CPOWs had moved out of the chaotic limbo and into a period where they could expect more than the bare minimum of food and shelter.

## The chaos of early captivity: building the camp structure

The other half of becoming a CPOW was the experience of the men involved as colonial prisoners of war. While France and Germany were establishing the political structures, the CPOWs were living the chaotic and disorganised captivity on the ground. Once captured, colonial and French POWs were held together in makeshift camps before being transferred to permanent ones. Tens of thousands of prisoners were concentrated along the front awaiting transport and lacking in basic supplies. The German army was faced with an overwhelming number of prisoners. All soldiers had to walk long distances under difficult conditions. Caporal-Chef Leonanci described a typical experience for colonial soldiers in June and July 1940: 'We walked the St. Michel road. They left us, like beasts, for eight days, without water, without food. Always walking, they directed us towards Verdun to the Niel barracks where there were 18,000 of us; the food was only a quart of cooked barley

<sup>58</sup> ANOM, 1AFFPOL/639, Platon to Boisson, 19 January 1941.

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>57</sup> ANOM, 1AFFPOL/639, Mamadou Kane to his cousin, 8 December 1940.

per day (dysentery wreaked havoc).<sup>59</sup> CPOWs were searched and anything that could be construed as a weapon was confiscated.<sup>60</sup> At Meaux, the 15,000 prisoners slept in buildings, courtyards, or on the bare earth without shelter.<sup>61</sup> Hassim-Ladjimi's camp was prepared for 1,000 prisoners but it held 13,000.<sup>62</sup>

Hunger, exhaustion and strict discipline characterized the first weeks of captivity. Early camps were often fields surrounded by barbed wire containing a mix of nationalities. Robert Chedorge reported insufficient food, inexistent hygiene and iron-like discipline. 63 Another CPOW added to Chedorge's description: 'In all the camps the Germans gave them harsh work to do.'64 Food was an immediate, and lasting, concern. Lieutenant de Peralo remembered that 'the food is defective; soup that smells like dishwater that sometimes has a vegetable floating in it. The main course is either barley, or sprouts with a chemical origin. The bread is German soldiers' biscuits or German black bread, always mouldy and distributed in inadequate quantities.'65 France was in chaos with almost two million prisoners parked in fields along the front and with eight million civilian refugees, who had fled from the German advance, flooding the roads. The Germans struggled to set up the infrastructure to care for the prisoners. Nowhere in France was equipped for this number of captives. They needed food, water, sanitation facilities and shelter. Additionally, June was particularly wet and cold. During the first week after capture, prisoners had to fend for themselves. As a result they suffered physically and mentally through incomprehension and shock of such a rapid and thorough defeat.

It is difficult to speak of unified German action towards POWs during this initial period. However, almost immediately differences in treatment emerged between colonial and French prisoners. Officers were lodged inside, often with beds, while CPOWs were left in fields or overcrowded shelters.<sup>66</sup> Rarely were soldiers

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>59</sup> SHD, 14P17, Leonanci, escape report, [n.d.]; for similar accounts see SHD, 14P31, Captain Debayeux to the Chef d'Escadron Commanding the IV /64<sup>e</sup> R.A.A., 10 October 1940; SHD, 14P17, Ahmed Ben Mohamed, escape report, 11 September 1940; SHD, 14P16, Hassen-Ladjimi, escape report, 30 September 1940, Pasquier, escape report, 30 August 1940, and Manuel Aldeguer, captivity report, 4 November 1940.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>60</sup>SHD, 14P17, Robert Paris and François Sanchez, escape report, [n.d.].

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>61</sup> SHD, 14P17, Paris and Sanchez, escape report, [n.d.]; Robert Chedorge, escape report, 2 November 1940.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>62</sup> SHD, 14P16, Hassen-Ladjimi, escape report, 30 September 1940.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>63</sup> SHD, 14P17, Chedorge, escape report, 2 November 1940.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>64</sup> SHD, 14P17, report on soldiers who escaped from POW camps, 7 November 1940.

<sup>65</sup> SHD, 14P46, de Peralo, escape from Epinal, 27 September 1940.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>66</sup> SHD, 14P46, Lieutenant de Peralo, escape from Epinal, 27 September 1940.

treated in a more relaxed manner than the French officers.<sup>67</sup> A military doctor remembered later, that during the summer of 1940, the colonial troops were imprisoned in a separate room and not fed. The doctor and other officers shared their bread ration with them.<sup>68</sup> Many prisoners believed they would be released immediately so did not attempt to escape. Morale was good at the beginning but it fell each day as the promised releases seemed less and less likely. Conditions during the summer of 1940 were bad for all prisoners of war. In light of the massacres of colonial prisoners and the emerging differences in treatment, this period was worse for CPOWs than French prisoners.

All prisoners pushed for improvements within the temporary camps. With camp populations exceeding their limits, changes were required. A few NCOs in Meaux asked the Kommandantur to organise cleaning duties. The camp was then divided into five sectors, each run by an NCO. Sergeant Paris organized his cleaning crew with Caporal Sanchez and six Moroccans. They all received extra rations. <sup>69</sup> In another camp, the engineering officers organised the construction of shelters with boards and corrugated iron. They built a road on logs to allow the camp commander to drive in for assemblies. The camp was surrounded by barbed wire and the prisoners also built wooden observatories. 70 It was unsurprising that the prisoners themselves pushed for change since they were the ones suffering. This example also illustrated a German tendency to allow the prisoners, and as a consequence, Vichy, to take charge of German responsibilities. At this stage, it was out of necessity, but later became part of German policy to take as much as possible from the defeated nations.

The occupation of France presented Germany with options for interning CPOWs that had not existed in previous conflicts. Originally, the Germans had planned to intern all prisoners in Germany during the war. By October 1939 thirtyone POW camps had been completed. 71 Occupied France allowed Germany to enact a racial separation of its prisoners. Separating the CPOWs from the European French prisoners was unique. In Germany, prisoners from the British Empire and Commonwealth were housed in the same compounds as British prisoners. 72 The

<sup>67</sup> SHD, 14P17, Lieutenant Bon, excerpt from report, [n.d.].

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>68</sup> SHD, 34N1081, T. E. Bonne to Général Directeur des Troupes Coloniales, 23 September 1944.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>69</sup> SHD, 14P17, Paris and Sanchez, escape report, [n.d.].

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>71</sup> Vasilis Vourkoutiotis, Prisoners of War and the German High Command: the British and American Experience (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), p. 31. <sup>72</sup> Mackenzie, *Colditz Myth*, p. 266.

Germans kept the CPOWs in France to protect their own country from colonial diseases, maintain supposed racial purity and from a desire to make the French pay for their own colonial soldiers.<sup>73</sup> Overwhelmed by the number of prisoners, separation was not uniformly enforced. Ben Mohamed El Habib was wounded during capture and subsequently 'housed in an immense tent with 300 people (French, natives and Senegalese). '74 A prisoner's race determined his captivity experience, and ultimately his chance of survival. However, racial distinctions depended on more than one's origins. The German Army determined race by the prisoner's uniform, a practice that was confirmed by the OKW's June 1941 orders. 75 A 1942 publication by Dr Alphonse Waltzog, Conseiller de justice militaire de l'Armée de l'air, elaborated: 'The criterion was the uniform. A Polish man who fought in the French army, is, when captured by the Germans, a French prisoner of war and not a Polish one. This is important in determining the protecting power's actions.'<sup>76</sup> Being considered a French prisoner was the most important protection the CPOWs had. Other prisoners of 'inferior' races and armies, such as the Polish or Russian prisoners, did not have the same fate.

By late autumn 1940, Germany began permanently segregating French prisoners by transferring the white prisoners to Germany and keeping prisoners of colour in France. This separated the officers from their CPOWs. To Vichy would have preferred keeping the CPOWs' officers with them as a protection against German influence. The German camp regime had *Oflags* for officers and *Stalags* for the men in Germany and *Frontstalags* in Occupied France. Germany did not have the infrastructure for an immediate and total segregation of the prisoners. Among the 130,000 men who remained in France were CPOWs, white metropolitan soldiers who fought in overseas regiments, and some French soldiers without ties to the colonies. The white prisoners remained in *Frontstalags* until released in 1940 or 1941. In the confusion of their massive victory, German forces brought approximately 38,000 colonial prisoners, possibly forty per cent of the total, to Germany.

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>73</sup> Lawler, *Soldiers of Misfortune*, pp 104.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>74</sup> SHD, 14P17, Mohamed Ben Mohamed Ben El Habib, escape report, 29 August 1941.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>75</sup> Vourkoutiotis, *Prisoners of War*, p. 38.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>76</sup> Alphonse Waltzog, *Les Principaux accords du droite de la guerre sur terre* (Berlin: Librarie Franz Valhan, 1942).

<sup>77</sup> SHD, 14P46, Captain Larroque, escape report, 12 July 1940; see also SHD, 14P17, Adjutant Fillet, report on capture by the Germans, detention and escape, [n.d.].

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>78</sup> AN, 72 AJ/291, Lieutenant Jeanmot, Les Prisonniers de guerre dans la deuxieme guerre mondiale plan d'études (Vincennes: SHD, 20 January 1956).

The physical sorting of prisoners was a fundamental part, for the Germans, of organising the chaos of early captivity. For Vichy, stability came with the political structures capable of negotiating with the Germans. For CPOWs, stability came with internment in an established camp, regular food deliveries, and a predictable daily schedule. For lucky CPOWs, this was already the case in August 1940, when they were sent to help bring in the harvest on French farms. The unlucky CPOWs remained in flux, travelling to Germany and then back to Occupied France, until early 1941.

The journey to Germany was long and gruelling, characterised by forced marches and limited or no food. <sup>79</sup> CPOWs remembered the harsh conditions of their short captivity in Germany. Lieutenant-Colonel Nardin confirmed that,

the natives are unanimous in their complaints: 1. of the bad quality and lack of food, coffee from grilled barley without sugar, one loaf of rye bread for five, thin soup with beets and potatoes, never meat. 2. of the housing: barracks with sheet metal and wooden planks. 3. The bedding: sawdust without blankets.<sup>80</sup>

Reducing food intake meant prisoners lacked the strength to escape and reserved limited rations for working prisoners. At Neubrandenburg camp the food was only improved after an epidemic of diarrhoea caused fifty deaths.<sup>81</sup> Other *Stalags* had similar conditions. These descriptions were typical of the beginning of captivity in Germany.<sup>82</sup> Caporal Belkacem described similar conditions in camp in Austria while emphasizing that the camp was surrounded by machine guns and barbed wire effectively preventing any escapes.<sup>83</sup>

From the beginning, French officials were concerned over the influence the German guards might have on the CPOWs. Early reports confirmed violent tendencies towards the CPOWs. Abdoulaye Maiga witnessed German soldiers hitting black or biracial officers and described all younger guards as 'wicked'.<sup>84</sup> Generally, older guards and First World War veterans were more humane.<sup>85</sup> During the transfer to Germany, the guards were often armed German civilians, between forty and fifty

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>79</sup> SHD, 14P16, 'Proposition de citation à l'ordre du Régiment, Bancilon Albin, du 27<sup>e</sup> Régiment de Tirailleurs Algériens', 1 August 1940; SHD, 14P31, Debayeux to the Chef d'Escadron Commanding the IV /64<sup>e</sup> R.A.A., 10 October 1940.

<sup>80</sup> SHD, 14P31, Lieutenant Colonel Nardin, special native office report, 2 November 1940.

<sup>81</sup> SHD, 14P16, Pasquier, escape report, 30 August 1940.

 <sup>82</sup> SHD, 14P31, Debayeux to the Chef d'Escadron Commanding the IV /64° R.A.A., 10 October 1940.
 83 SHD, 14P16, A. Belkacem, escape report, 28 October 1940.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>84</sup> ANS, 2D23, Lavavasseur to the Governor of the Soudan, 7 May 1941.

<sup>85</sup> SHD, 14P17, Mohamed Ben Mohamed Ben El Habib, escape report, 29 August 1941.

years old.<sup>86</sup> However, once in a permanent camp the guards were from the German Army. There were cases of cruelty from older guards like in Stalag VIIA:

The guards had big dogs on a leash and they took pleasure in releasing them on the prisoners: their dogs inflicted cruel bites, some of which were fatal. The guards shot prisoners who attempted to escape. There were four guard posts with eight men aged from thirty to forty years. They were armed with rifles.<sup>87</sup>

While clearly some guards were consistently violent, Pasquier reported that individually the guards, 'were fairly easy-going, [but] in front of their NCOs they became horrid.'88 This tendency became increasingly common in the *Frontstalags*.

Over time, German attitudes towards CPOWs fell into two broad categories: racism tending towards mistreatment or a curious camaraderie. Both of these categories were far removed from the massacres in May-June 1940. The stark change in context for the German soldiers moving from the heat of battle against 'savage' foes to the euphoria of victory, explained this shift in attitude. For some German soldiers the CPOWs were different and intriguing. For others, kindness was a key component to anti-French propaganda. Jean Cavaillès reported on 12 June 1940 that he had a 'quarrel with the Germans about the blacks. They deck them out in straw hats – top hats, etc., and photograph them. Since I reproached a Senegalese man for allowing this, the German soldiers surrounded me [and] punched [me] in the nose, "Schwein"."

The German military administration in France grew increasingly worried that their soldiers were becoming too friendly with the CPOWs and in August 1940 issued a memo stating that behaviour similar to that described by Cavaillès was unbecoming of the German army. Cavaillès remembered that they were photographed in procession with the black soldiers directly behind the officers and in front of the French troops. Despite Cavaillès' worries, it would be an exaggeration to claim that overall the CPOWs were treated better than the French prisoners. It is more likely that these photographs, like the German newsreels exaggerating the numbers of CPOWs

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>86</sup> SHD, 14P31, Debayeux to the Chef d'Escadron Commanding the IV /64<sup>e</sup> R.A.A., 10 October 1940.

<sup>88</sup> SHD, 14P16, Pasquier, escape report, 30 August 1940.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>89</sup> AN, 72AJ/1965, Jean Cavaillès, 'La Guerre' in Gabrielle Ferrières, *Jean Cavaillés, philosophe et combattent*, (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1950).

<sup>90</sup> Scheck, French Colonial Prisoners, p. 125.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

captured,<sup>92</sup> were used to demonstrate German racial superiority. Just as the French had used colonial soldiers to reinforce German discomfort during and after the First World War, so the Germans appear to be doing the same here to the French.

A calculated middle approach to the CPOWs began to appear, reflecting Germany's ongoing efforts to destabilise French and British territories by encouraging independence movements. Makan Traore and Mamadou Kone were 'treated better and better by their guards. These guards were discretely attempting to gain their friendship by taking good care of them and promising them an early release, etc.'93 A North African prisoner reported being told 'eat and drink and if you want to go back to your country then go, but do not stay in the Frenchmen's country where you will be killed with them.'94 This was clearly rhetorical as CPOWs were not allowed to leave the *Frontstalags* at-will.

Once the camp system was better organized the German authorities started moving CPOWs to France and French POWs to Germany. This happened as early as August 1940 when Senegalese, Malagasy, Indochinese, and North African prisoners were sent from Neubrandenburg to Orléans or Pithiviers. By March 1941, 38,145 CPOWs had been repatriated from German camps to the *Frontstalags*. An October 1941 OKW brief stated there must be no more Algerians or Tunisians found in German POW camps. These movements confirmed that CPOWs were to be treated based on their skin colour and not citizenship or military rank. The Algerian captain Rafa was initially interned like white French officers in *Oflag* IID. However, in November 1940 he was moved to a *Frontstalag* with the CPOWs. CPOWs like Aomar Ben Mohamed used their repatriation to the *Frontstalag* at Fourchambault (Nièvre) to escape. Among white prisoners only Bretons and Alsatians were allowed to remain in France.

To accommodate the CPOWs the German authorities built, renovated and installed prisoner of war camps in the Occupied Zone. Even moving out of fields, the CPOWs were not guaranteed a finished camp. In the Somme, the mostly North

<sup>92</sup> Thomas, 'French Colonial POWs', p. 663.

<sup>93</sup> ANS, 2D23, telegramme from Cercle Segou to Governor of the Soudan, 19 January 1941.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>94</sup> SHD, 3H253, General François to Commander in Chief of the T.O.A.F.N., 10 July 1940.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>95</sup> SHD, 14P16, Pasquier, escape report, 30 August 1940; SHD, 14P31, Debayeux to the Chef d'Escadron Commanding the IV /64<sup>e</sup> R.A.A, 10 October 1940.

<sup>96</sup> SHD, 2P65, Scapini to Koeltz, 20 March 1941.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>97</sup> BA-MA, RW6/270, OKW, special report on POWs, no. 5, 10 October 1941.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>98</sup> SHD, 1K908, Capitain Rafa, report on his activities during his captivity, 10 July 1948.

<sup>99</sup> SHD, 14P17, Sergent Aomar Ben Mohamed Ben Aissa, escape report, [n.d.].

African prisoners were housed in youth hostels, barracks, a partly destroyed building and two castles. 100 At Camp Longvic prisoners were housed in the former Dijon Airbase. Since the base had been bombarded in May and June 1940, many water pipes were broken. 101 Over time, the Germans attempted to transform or build camps according to their standards. German manuals from 1939 had provided basic instructions for POW camps: the two barbed wire fences surrounding camps of fewer than 10,000 men were to be constructed first, followed by the guards' barracks and lastly the prisoners' barracks. 102 Most German prisoner of war camps had a comparable layout. They were surrounded by barbed wire with a German guard post at the entrance, a *Vorlager* or fore-camp containing administrative buildings, showers, disinfection area, infirmary, a camp prison. Further along, behind more barbed wire, was the, *Hauptlager* or main part of the camp. 103 Where available, the Germans used camps that the French had built. Laharie was originally intended for German prisoners. 104 Airvault had not been finished so the Germans built the barracks, water pipes, and some roads. 105

Creating the necessary infrastructure for new camps required French and German cooperation. In Bayonne a camp for 5,000 prisoners was built on polo fields. The engineers required:

that a significant amount of drinkable water be brought to the location and some kind of sanitation device be installed. We have recently been invited by various German authorities, notably by the colonel who runs the prisoner of war service in the area, to study and execute, in the shortest time possible, the aforementioned water and sewer works, without which the camp would be uninhabitable. <sup>106</sup>

Working with a civil engineer, the municipal and occupation authorities concluded that 325,000 francs would be needed to complete the project properly. <sup>107</sup> Elsewhere, in Angoulême, construction for housing civilian Indochinese workers had been halted

AD Somme, 48W70, Lallemant, report on the POW camps in the region of Montdidier, 6 Mai 1941.
 SHD, 34N5, le Féloch, captivity report, 26 February 1942.

<sup>102</sup> Vourkoutiotis, Prisoners of War, p. 50.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>103</sup> Yves Durand, La Vie quotidienne des prisonniers de guerre dans les Stalags, les Oflags et les Kommandos 1939-1945 (Hachette: Mesnil-sur-l'Estrée, 1987), pp 51-52.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>104</sup> AN, F/9/2351, Marti and de Morsier, ICRC, visit to Frontstalag 195 Onesse-Laharie, 13 June 1941.

<sup>105</sup> AN, F/9/2351, Paul B. Anderson and August Senaud, report on Airvault, 23 January 1941.

AD Pyrénées-Atlantiques, Bayonne E Dépôt Bayonne 1W14, report from the city engineer,
 'Alimentation Hydraulique et Assainissement d'un camp de prisonniers sur les terrains du Polo', 18
 October 1940.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>107</sup> Ibid.

by the fighting in May 1940. After the defeat, the *Feldkommandantur* wanted to complete the construction and use the space to house 10,000 CPOWs. To do so, the camp commander requested the construction workers work a forty-eight hour week as opposed to the forty-hour week introduced by the Popular Front in 1936. The prefect consulted with the *Inspecteur du Travail*. He decided since work had been interrupted for months that the extra hours could be worked without over-time pay. Despite the over-time, in November the German commander was frustrated by the lack of progress. He complained to the prefect that:

I have tried in the last few weeks to create a spacious, clean and hygienic camp for the prisoners already there and the thousands who will be arriving in the next few days. The construction of barracks, W.C.s, showers and roads, as well as the organisation of open spaces, which requires moving large quantities of earth, transporting sand, gravel and stones, would already be well advanced, if the contractors had the necessary number of trucks at their disposal. [...] All my efforts and all my labours are for the benefit of the French prisoners entrusted to me, and I request your kind assistance in completing my duties that benefit only your brave native soldiers from the colonial territories.<sup>111</sup>

The prefect asked the director of the *Ponts et chaussés* to find trucks to complete the work since the Germans were financing it.<sup>112</sup> The camp commander's attitude revealed two things: that the Germans generally understood the importance of good conditions for prisoners, and Vichy would become more and more implicated in financing them.

French payment for the maintenance of its own prisoners in German captivity contravened the Geneva Convention. However, payment for the occupation was regulated by the Hague Law of Land Warfare (1907) as well as article three of the Armistice Agreement<sup>113</sup> which required France pay for the occupation. Sometimes these texts contradicted each other allowing costs which should have been related to the prisoners, thus German expenses, to be budgeted as occupation costs, and paid for

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>108</sup> AD Charente, 1W37, De la Laurencie to prefect of Charente, 30 September 1940.

AD Charente, 1W37, prefect of Charente to Le Calloc'h Inspecteur du Travail, 10 October 1940.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>110</sup> AD Charente, 1W37, Le Calloc'h to prefect of Charente, 12 October 1940.

AD Charente, 1W37, Kommandant Frontstalag 184 to prefect of Charente, 15 November 1940.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>112</sup> AD Charente, 1W37, prefect of Charente to Ingénieur en chef des ponts et chaussées, 18 November 1940.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>113</sup> See appendix C.

by the French. Article three of the armistice agreement also gave the French government the right to choose their seat of power, whether that be in unoccupied zone or in Paris, located in the occupied zone. The government was installed at Vichy, a spa town which had the advantage of a great number of hotels and a limited number of left-wing politicians. However, the regime's authority stretched over both the occupied and unoccupied zones. Vichy's commitment to collaboration further complicated the debate as Vichy hesitated to refuse German requests. The German authorities recognized the multiple advantages, for them, of keeping the Frontstalags in the occupied territory. Most importantly, keeping them in the occupied zone placed a level of administrative and practical distance between Vichy and its prisoners: crossing the demarcation line was difficult, even for Vichy politicians and official post. As seen, both Vichy and the Germans quickly recognized the potential gains that control over the CPOWs represented. By maintaining their authority over the CPOWs, Germany was then able to obtain concessions from the French in exchange for greater access to the CPOWs. Had the Germans simply allowed the CPOWs to be moved to North Africa or the unoccupied zone, as Vichy requested, 114 then they would have lost an important tool in negotiations. Additionally, since the CPOWs were only important to the Germans due to Vichy's interest in them, they became an arena where Germany could grant Vichy concessions, thus allowing Vichy to continue to believe that collaboration was effective and sincere.

In a pattern that continued throughout the war and despite early agreements confirming German responsibility for the construction of POW camps, French towns and prefectures often advanced the necessary funds or supplies. In September 1940 the Mayor of Voves paid for the installation, repairs and supplies for the CPOW camp. He had been assured that the German unit in charge of the camp would pay for food from 16 August but none of the other expenses had been paid. The nebulous distinction between occupation costs and maintenance costs led to disagreements. The prefecture of the Gironde supplied 10,000 blankets, 600 heating stoves with proper chimneys, 600 coal buckets, and straw for 10,000 prisoners in *Frontstalag* 221. A month later, the *Frontstalag* commander was unable to find wool blankets for the CPOWs. He asked mayors of towns that had previously received help for French

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<sup>114</sup> See chapter seven, pp 188-191.

AD Eure et Loir, 1W101, mayor of Voves to prefect of Eure et Loir, September 1940.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>116</sup> AD Gironde, 45W15, Gossman to the prefecture of Gironde, service de liquidation des réquisitions, 14 November 1940.

refugees to supply the blankets. 117 In constructing the Frontstalag in Angoulême, the German authorities seized two fields. The prefect argued that the German authorities should compensate the farmers. However, Colonel von Ploetz refused because 'the requisition of land to expand the prisoner of war camp is not an expropriation, but a requisition for the duration of the war. Since this is a requisition that falls under the law for war benefits, the German occupying authorities cannot compensate the owners.,118

The signatories of the Armistice did not anticipate this situation as they assumed the war would end shortly. The prefect and von Ploetz exchanged letters until March 1941 alternatively citing the Hague agreement, the Geneva Convention and the Franco-German Armistice justifying payment by the other side. Eventually a German directive was issued 13 March 1941:

According to this letter, the costs of quartering the prisoners of war are borne by the French state. The military governor in France shall take steps to ensure that the prefects are asked to pay the fee for the French state. If temporarily the prefects refuse this payment, the Stalag will advance it. In any case, contractors must get their funds as quickly as possible to ensure a good continuation of the work to be done. 119

The prefects received further information in October 1941:

From 1 May 1941, the French government must pay for the normal upkeep of buildings used to house prisoners of war. Germany must pay directly for any new construction, renovations and expansions. A new order will be forthcoming for the case of new construction and expansions requested by the French administration. 120

Where a structure or building that existed prior to the CPOWs' arrival was renovated the French authorities were responsible for its cost. Collaboration between Vichy and the German authorities blurred the lines between occupier and occupied. The question of payment was further complicated when CPOWs started working for French farms or German companies. CPOWs did benefit from French implication in the costs and installations of Frontstalags. Some prefects were naturally involved and

<sup>120</sup> AD Somme, 26W401, J. Brunet, note for the prefects, 4 October 1941.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>117</sup> AD Gironde, 45W82, Commander Frontstalag 221 to the prefecture of Gironde, service de liquidation des réquisitions, 3 December 1940.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>118</sup> AD Charente, 1W37, von Ploetz to prefect of the Charente, 18 December 1940.

<sup>119</sup> AD Charente, 1W37, Letter from L'Intendant près du Chef de district de l'Administration Militaire de Bordeaux, 19 March 1941.

concerned with the CPOWs' well-being, like the prefect of the Nièvre, while others were more inclined to watch their financial contributions carefully. Vichy had political concerns to ensure CPOWs were well housed, well fed, and well clothed, and that France got the credit for these efforts. Unfortunately for Vichy, this was not always the case.

The decision to keep CPOWs in France and not Germany defined the CPOWs' experience of captivity above all other factors. Instead of being interned in a racially segregated enemy country, CPOWs were surrounded by a French population. Generally, the French recognised colonial soldiers and praised their contributions in defending France. Many of the CPOWs spoke some French, another advantage over internment in Germany. While an unintentional consequence, leaving the CPOWs in France forced them into the public eye. That fact, combined with Vichy's proimperial rhetoric, ensured that Vichy could not neglect the CPOWs in favour of the French prisoners. It is ironic that German racism, which kept the CPOWs out of Germany, was exactly what made them an important question at stake in relations between France and Germany. By early 1941 the prisoner of war system in France was fully established. Twenty-two Frontstalags had been built across Occupied France from the Ardennes, to Brittany, to the Landes near Bordeaux. The construction and habitation of the Frontstalags initiated the second phase of captivity, which lasted until the German occupation of the southern zone in November 1942. As diplomatic relations between Vichy and Germany stabilized so did physical conditions for CPOWs.

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The intensity of the battles, and totality of the defeat in May and June 1940 created an instability that proved dangerous for colonial soldiers. The majority of them survived capture and reached temporary camps which were installed where tens of thousands of prisoners had been left in the open countryside. These camps lacked basic sanitation and food. Conditions were difficult for all prisoners. But already differences had begun to emerge in the prisoners' treatment. Having decided to segregate prisoners by race, the Germans spent late 1940 and early 1941 implementing this policy. It took until March 1941 to return all CPOWs to France. Only by late 1940 or early 1941 did most prisoners have permanent shelters, regular

access to post and the Red Cross. Some aspects of captivity were organized faster than others. CPOWs were used during the 1940 harvest to bring in food because labour was needed immediately. Other aspects such as recreation or food from the colonies took longer to put in place. This stability ended with the allied landings in North Africa in November 1942, when Germany invaded the rest of France, destroying any remaining illusions of Vichy's autonomy. Thus, the CPOWs became an important component of Vichy's political arguments with Germany, perhaps despite Vichy's original intentions.

# Chapter three

# Daily life in the *Frontstalags*, early 1941 to November 1942

By 1941 most of the CPOWs had settled into a routine. A network of Frontstalags across Occupied France housed approximately 80,000 CPOWs. The CPOWs' daily life centred around life in the camp and their work. While in the Frontstalags, CPOWs slept in large, overcrowded rooms. During most of the winter of 1940-1941 they suffered from a colder climate than at home and damp, draughty camps. Most CPOWs were able to shower once a week, but conditions did vary. Meals were eaten together, and larger camps had multiple cooks able to prepare meals from home. Their rations were supplemented enormously by Vichy and the French Red Cross. The filtering process, which turned the Frontstalags into a world dominated by colonial soldiers, forced the CPOWs to interact with people from the rest of the Empire. Generally they were housed with those from their home colony. Sometimes race was used to promote one group above the other. The Geneva Convention provided the guidelines to camp life, but the reality was quite different. Vichy had greater influence over the CPOWs' food, which it could deliver directly to the camp, than over sanitary installations, whose construction required German permission.

Physical conditions such as food, shelter and clothing, were essential components of the CPOWs' experience. The CPOWs' life revolved around work and the camp with limited time for distractions. If the physical conditions were satisfactory, captivity could be endured. CPOWs needed protection against the winter climate, acceptable clothing for the work they were required to do, and enough food to survive captivity. A good camp had well-built barracks with heating and a well-stocked kitchen that offered a variety of food. Even so captivity was long and difficult for CPOWs. The boredom, separation from families, and uncertainty of its length, all wore them down. The physical conditions could either facilitate their captivity or make it much worse. The CPOWs' daily life experiences revealed the dynamic between Vichy and Germany that would continue until November 1942 and which shaped all aspects of their captivity. The *Frontstalags* were both the CPOWs' homes

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> See chapter four.

and an enclave of total German control on French soil. Vichy believed that influencing the physical conditions within the *Frontstalags* would also allow Vichy to regain some control over its occupied metropolitan territory, or at least, be better informed of the CPOWs' experiences.

The structure of the camp system in France consisted of a major camp or *Frontstalag* on which smaller surrounding camps depended. For example, *Frontstalag* 122 was divided into three camps run by Colonel von Thadden: Bayonne A at Beyris, Bayonne A1 at Hendaye and Bayonne B at Basta les Forges. *Frontstalags* were designated by an Arabic numeral, unlike *Stalags*, which were identified by a Roman numeral followed by a letter, e.g. Stalag IIIA. The CPOWs alternated between the *Frontstalags* and smaller *Arbeitskommandos* or work groups scattered throughout the surrounding areas. Over fifty camps existed on 24 September 1940. By the next summer twenty main *Frontstalags* remained: 121 Epinal, 124 Joigny, 132 Laval, 133 Rennes, 135 Quimper, 141 Vesoul, 151 Montargis, 153 Chartres, 161 Nancy, 181 Saumur, 184 Angoulême, 190 Charleville, 192 La Fère, 194 Châlons-sur-Marne, 195 Onesse-et-Laharie, 204 Amiens, 221 Saint-Médard, 222 Bayonne, 230 Poitiers, and 232 Savenay. Over time camps were closed because the numbers of CPOWs decreased or because conditions were unsatisfactory.

CPOWs moved from *Frontstalag* to *Frontstalag* or between different work camps. This made their experience unstable. The German authorities determined all transfers. Epinal was one of the most important *Frontstalags*. It was both a transit camp for French prisoners being moved to and from Germany, as well as a permanent camp for CPOWs. German records show on 1 March 1941 that the camp held 986 French prisoners and 7,451 CPOWs from Martinique, Algeria, Tunisia, Morocco, Senegal, Madagascar and Indochina.<sup>5</sup> Three weeks later 3,200 additional prisoners were moved onto surrounding Arbeitskommandos.<sup>6</sup> Chartres was a middle sized *Frontstalag* with 2,271 French prisoners and 2,786 CPOWs.<sup>7</sup> Morancez, a sub-camp of the *Frontstalag* at Chartres, held 1,112 prisoners from Morocco, Tunisia and

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> AN, F/9/2963, DSPG, reports on POW camps, [this report is without date but was attached to report on Angoulême, 30 December 1940].

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> Durand, Captivité, p. 59.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> Martin Thomas, 'Les Prisonniers coloniaux' in *La France pendant la seconde guerre mondiale, atlas historique*, Jean-Luc Leleu, Françoise Passera and Jean Quellien (eds) (Paris: Fayard and Ministère de la Défense, 2010), p. 114.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> AN, F/9/2959, Frontstalags in France, 1 March 1941.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> SHD, 2P78, analysis of inspectors' reports from POW camps in Occupied France, 15 April 1941.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> AN, F/9/2959, Frontstalags in France, 1 March 1941.

Algeria.<sup>8</sup> Joigny was another important *Frontstalag* located in the Yonne in north-central France. Between October 1940 and March 1941 the population ranged from 4,400 to 2,000.<sup>9</sup> Two weeks later it jumped to 1,112 French prisoners, 2,503 CPOWs and four foreigners, with 1,620 prisoners who worked outside the camp on Arbeitskommandos.<sup>10</sup>



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Map 3.1: *Frontstalags* housing CPOWs in Occupied France with Demarcation line, 1 March 1941, (source: AN, F9, 2959).

<sup>8</sup> SHD, 2P78, René Scapini, visit to Frontstalag 153, 28 March 1941.

<sup>9</sup> SHD, 2P78, CRF, material aid to Joigny, 11 April 1941.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>10</sup> SHD, 2P78, Bonnaud, Visit to Frontstalag 124 Joigny, 19 March 1941.



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Map 3.2: *Frontstalags* housing CPOWs in Occupied France with Demarcation line, 1 January 1943, (source: SHD, 2P78).

At first, the *Frontstalags* were closed to Vichy officials.<sup>11</sup> Eventually, Germany exchanged access to the camps for assistance with the CPOWs' upkeep. Vichy wanted concrete information on the CPOWs' physical and intellectual needs and a way to keep informed on these areas of German influence. Unfortunately for Vichy at first Germany only allowed international aid organisations to visit the *Frontstalags*. Both the ICRC and the YMCA had international reputations and experience inspecting POW camps during the Great War and in 1939-1940. The YMCA inspections tended to be more optimistic than those of the Red Cross. The

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>11</sup> See chapter seven, p. 192.

YMCA saw themselves as a 'link between the prisoners and the outside world.' Despite being a Christian organisation, they served all prisoners regardless of religions and nationality. Alton Davis of the YMCA went on a three-week tour of the *Frontstalags* and declared that: 'the hygiene conditions are unfavourable compared to those in Germany.' Davis' assessment of hygiene may be accurate during the chaos of early captivity. As we have seen, in October 1940, many camps were unfinished and lacking in basic supplies. The YMCA took a typically American Protestant approach to constant self-improvement and provided materials designed to improve the prisoners' morale through useful leisure activities. This resonated well with the National Revolution, but sometimes frustrated the CPOWs who preferred to play cards rather than organise orchestras or reading groups.

The ICRC sent inspectors and material goods to the prisoners. The French Red Cross had less overall access and concentrated on collective deliveries and bringing individual parcels. Through these deliveries, their drivers, often women, were able to assess the prisoners' conditions and morale. In the spring of 1941, Vichy was allowed to send official SDPG inspectors to the *Frontstalags*. Sometimes Scapini himself visited the CPOWs. They tried to assess the prisoners' conditions, improve morale and subtly counteract German propaganda through speeches on imperial unity accompanied by the distribution of colonial food. Mayors or prefects occasionally saw CPOWs while distributing packages for special occasions.<sup>15</sup>

The inspection reports provide valuable information on living conditions - an aspect of the CPOWs' captivity with few first-person accounts. The obvious flaw is that these sources were not from the CPOWs themselves. However, the reports not only reveal how the international inspectors saw the CPOWs' captivity, but what information was available to Vichy and how it reacted to that information. Inspections were carefully orchestrated, camp commanders were given advance notice and the delegations were supervised. In Germany, the physical conditions and rations were improved before the inspections, which prompted prisoners to exaggerate complaints. <sup>16</sup> Camps in Germany were encouraged to improve their floral displays to

13 Ibid

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>12</sup> AN, F/41/266, 'Service de l'aide aux prisonniers de guerre, une oeuvre humanitaire', *La Gazette de Lausanne*, 21 January 1941.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>14</sup> AN, F/9/2828, Alton Davis to the French Consulate General in Geneva, 21 October 1940.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>15</sup> AN, F/9/2351, Jean Schmidt, monthly report, 1 February 1942.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>16</sup> Mackenzie, *Colditz Myth*, p. 280.

make them more pleasing to prisoners and visitors alike. 17 There is no evidence to suggest the situation was any different in France. Wylie reminds us that these reports provide a positive, pro-German, approximation of the captivity experience in the camps with little access to workgroups.<sup>18</sup>

Vichy was inundated with information, not all reliable, on the CPOWs' conditions. With this multitude of inspections and observers, different opinions of the CPOWs conditions emerged, which made it difficult for Vichy to respond to the prisoners' needs. Changing populations, new leadership, or the extent of renovations all explain slight differences in camp conditions. However, when none of these were present, what explained contradictory assessments only a few months apart? Inspectors had different priorities and noted varying aspects of camp life, making it difficult to create a complete picture. Germany had much to gain from good international inspections and bad French ones. If Vichy officials or the French Red Cross thought the prisoners were suffering that might prompt more donations, and thus fewer expenses for Germany. While clearly not the only motivation to increase rations for the CPOWs, French officials often responded to requests for more or better food.

The CPOWs' captivity experience was full of contradictions. When one aspect was easier, another made life more difficult. No CPOW, or prisoner of war in general, had an easy captivity, despite Pétain's portrayal of them suffering in quiet contemplation. The reality for the CPOWs was austere. Camps varied drastically in cleanliness, situation and German organisation. At Epinal, prisoners worked on agricultural projects such as vegetable gardens and tending horses, rabbits, goats and sheep. There was a cinema seating 500 as well as a thirty-five person orchestra. The camp commander organized German classes and hoped to start football and sporting competitions within the camp. 19 Nonetheless, Epinal also had the reputation for being a harsh camp where African prisoners were not allowed medical treatment.<sup>20</sup> The German officer in charge of Solferino in the southwest, by contrast, attempted to improve conditions, with the camp receiving fresh vegetables and slightly better

<sup>17</sup> BA-MA, RW6/270, OKW special report, no. 2, 7 July 1941.

<sup>20</sup> Lawler, Soldiers of Misfortune, p. 112.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>18</sup> Neville Wylie, Barbed Wire Diplomacy, Britain, Germany and the Politics of Prisoners of War 1939-1945 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 171.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>19</sup> AN, F/9/2351, Paul Anderson and Auguste Senaud, Report of YMCA visits to POW camps in Occupied France, 6 April 1941.

rations, but the CPOWs were critically short of clothes and woollens. Some of the Martiniquais and Malagasy prisoners only had canvas jackets and were dying of cold. The commander's efforts could not compensate for the lack of appropriate clothing. Chartres was more difficult to evaluate. The inspector wrote, 'morale is acceptable' but then continued, 'morale is very low. The Germans mean well. Mr Scapini's words seem to have had a good effect on the natives. POWs there 'praise the German authorities for their efforts to make captivity less difficult to handle. Yet escapes doubled from March to June. Arené Scapini noted in his summary that remarkable improvements had been made since his last inspection. This commentary was not included in Le Gousest's summary of the reports. Despite the flaws in the inspection reports, they were Vichy's only real glimpse at the CPOWs' experience.

The inspector's bias determined how they rated a camp. The example of Joigny, visited twice in March and April 1941, showed the discretion inspectors had in their reports. In March, Dr Bonnaud visited the camp. Bonnaud had worked in the colonial hospital at Fréjus before the war, which had a quarantine unit for *tirailleurs* infected with tuberculosis. His overall opinion was 'fairly good. The men are having difficulties getting used to the discipline. The food is generally insufficient. Not enough tobacco. Vorking for the ministry of the Secretary of State for War, Lieutenant-Colonel Dupuy was charged with analysing and synthesising the multitude of inspection reports. He often added his own opinion. For Joigny, he believed that morale was low due to 'bad food, lack of news: for the past fortnight no letters or packages have arrived; to the total absence of basic comforts, little assistance from the Red Cross, the health situation of many prisoners [...] bad impression overall. Bonnaud had not included the fact that the CPOWs were not receiving their Red Cross parcels and the canteen had been closed as punishment for an unknown crime. Prisoners depended on their parcels to ensure they had enough to eat. Without the

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<sup>22</sup> René Scapini, visit to *Frontstalag* 153, 28 March 1941 (SHD, 2P78).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>21</sup> SHD, 2P65, Mrs Henri Dehau, observations from various POW camps, [n.d. but attached to a protocol dated 4 November 1941].

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>23</sup> SHD, 2P78, Le Gouest, summary of inspection reports from POW camps, [n.d. but camp visited 12 June 1941].

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>24</sup> SHD, 2P78, René Scapini, visit to *Frontstalag* 153, 28 March 1941; René Scapini, inspection report of *Frontstalag* 153, 12 June 1941.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>25</sup> SHD, 2P78, René Scapini, inspection report of *Frontstalag* 153, 12 June 1941.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>26</sup> Thomas, 'Prisonniers de guerre colonial français', p. 327.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>27</sup> SHD, 2P78, Dr. Bonnaud, Visit to Frontstalag 124 Joigny, 19 March 1941.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>28</sup> SHD, 2P78, analysis of the French Inspection's reports on POW camps visits, 11 April 1941.

canteen they did not have the option of buying extra food. Perhaps this was more challenging to the CPOWs than the strict discipline Bonnaud evoked.

Vichy worked within the constraints of their limited information and access to improve conditions. Joigny's bad reputation prompted Huntziger to question the French Red Cross on their assistance. Here the information became confusing and sometimes contradictory. The Red Cross had been making deliveries to Joigny once a fortnight since October 1940.<sup>29</sup> On 27 March 1941, the German camp commander suddenly, and without explanation, stopped the deliveries.<sup>30</sup> Over five months, the Red Cross had delivered 650 individual packages, as well as beef, hard biscuits, and clothing.<sup>31</sup> During Bonnaud's visit, a full week before the deliveries ceased, the CPOWs complained they had not received their packages. Vichy never learnt what happened to the parcels or why the camp commander stopped the Red Cross deliveries.

The April report by the YMCA demonstrated the limitations of camp inspections. The YMCA had been told that the prisoners had only arrived recently, which was misleading at best since there had been a substantial CPOW population there for at least five months.<sup>32</sup> Without access to a camp's history, inspectors only saw a slice of the CPOWs' conditions. In the two weeks between visits the population had declined by two-thirds and the camp was renovated:

the quarters are distributed partly in the barracks, partly in sheds. We saw bunks, which were transported from Cravant. New latrines were built: the drainage will go directly into the city's sewers. The showers are in working order. The premises seem, for the most part, attractive.<sup>33</sup>

The YMCA noted that food provided by the Red Cross was abundant, implying that deliveries had begun again.<sup>34</sup> Overall the YMCA's impression were 'favourable [...] because they have tried to do their best.'<sup>35</sup> Joigny was fairly representative of both a *Frontstalag* and also the contradictory and inconsistent information available to Vichy. This example accurately shows the numerous actors, both French and

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>29</sup> SHD, 2P78, Verdier to Huntziger, 26 April 1941.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>33</sup> AN, F/9/2351, YMCA, report on visits to POW camps, 11 April 1941.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

international, with differing motivations, working to improve the conditions in the *Frontstalags*.

Vichy's ability to influence conditions was limited to the food and clothing they could supply. The organisation and structure of the camps remained firmly in German hands. Vichy officials with colonial experience advised on how to avoid conflicts between the prisoners, such as separating CPOWs by race. However, the German authorities had their own agenda and rarely took the advice. Vichy's ability to communicate with its colonial prisoners was limited. Germany exploited Vichy's desire to keep channels to the CPOWs open by gradually transferring financial responsibility, but not control, to Vichy. This worked in the CPOWs' favour as it was politically unwise for Vichy to let them suffer. For Germany, the CPOWs remained enemy prisoners, but ones with increasing political capital, as a way to push financial responsibility onto the French. After the difficult start, a system of captivity was slowly implemented where housing, food and clothing were improved and, more importantly, CPOWs could notify Vichy or international inspectors of deficiencies. With the exception of the work regime, physical conditions were the major factor influencing the CPOWs. As for discipline, most colonial soldiers would have been used to a highly regimented life in the French army anyway, and one not dissimilar to the POW regime.

## Housing, food and clothing

There was no way for the CPOWs to forget they were prisoners. Barbed wire was omnipresent. In Bordeaux camps were surrounded by a complex system of barbed wire with German sentinel posts throughout.<sup>36</sup> Dijon had a similar setup with guards posted about four feet from the barbed wire.<sup>37</sup> Longvic was organized into sectors or blocs and surrounded by walls, with machine guns posted at each corner and the front gate.<sup>38</sup> The German authorities paid for the purchase of the barbed wire for large camps and *Frontstalags*.<sup>39</sup> Nonetheless, despite uniform instructions, the level of comfort depended on the camps' location.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>36</sup> SHD, 2P70, Senghor, captivity report, 7 July 1942.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>37</sup> SHD, 14P17, Mohamed Ben Ali, capture and escape report, 7 November 1940.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>38</sup> SHD, 34N5, T.C. le Féloch, captivity report, 26 February 1942.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>39</sup> AD Vienne, 1566W2, Haeusler to prefect of Vienne, 13 May 1941.

As anticipated during the debates on hivernage, 40 the CPOWs suffered during their first winter in captivity. The CPOWs were generally cold and damp in their Frontstalags. During the early years of captivity there were a range of situations. At one camp, the food was deemed 'inadequate and made by German cooks [... Despite the judgement that the CPOWs health was satisfactory] the head doctors count forty patients in the infirmary and during the last month fifteen patients were evacuated to the hospital. Most of the patients have pneumonia. 41 Léopold Senghor, a teacher before the war and later first president of Senegal, was one of the only CPOWs to leave a written account. Senghor explained that when he arrived at Poitiers in October 1940 the barracks had not yet been built. Prisoners were lodged in unheated hangers with corrugated metal roofs. 42 By December most Senegalese prisoners were in barracks but some North African prisoners were still in the hangars in subzero temperatures. Prisoners received as much coal as they needed, but the barracks were not insulated and were surrounded by mud so the indoor temperature remained below zero. Prisoners had no access to showers or sinks. Senghor said that, 'in general we are fairly well dressed. Note, however, the persistent shortage of gloves and socks. Many tirailleurs get sick (frozen and frostbitten feet)'. 43 This was a typical complaint.44

Shortages forced camp commanders and local authorities to find creative methods of heating. In the Loiret:

The question of heating the camps [is] especially important due to the presence of many African prisoners, who are very sensitive to cold. The shortage of cast iron stoves has resulted in the construction of many brick stoves of a type specifically designed by the earthenware factory Gien. [Additionally] groups of prisoners have been created, working under the supervision of the Department of Forestry in the woods chopping trees and cutting wood, to complement the coal provided by the occupying authorities.

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<sup>40</sup> See chapter seven, p. 188.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>41</sup> AN, F/9/2963, Bigard, DSPG mission to Troyes, 9-10 January 1941.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>42</sup> SHD, 2P70, Senghor, captivity report, 7 July 1942.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>44</sup> For further examples see: AN, F/9/2351, Anderson and Senaud, report on camp visits in Occupied France, Airvault, 23 January 1941; AN, F/9/2963, Bigard, DSPG mission to Savenay [n.d.]; AN, F/9/2963, Bigard, DSPG mission to Troyes, 6 January 1941; SHD, 2P78, Bonnaud, visit to *Frontstalag* 124 Joigny, 19 March 1941; SHD, 2P78, Georges Scapini and Jean Desbons, summary of visit to *Frontstalag* 195, 10 April 1941.

Thus heating the camps has been assured everywhere in sufficient conditions.<sup>45</sup>

Other camps, like Rennes, followed suit: the 1,400 *tirailleurs* had a 'good state of health so far, despite the cold. The premises are well-heated (one kilogram of coal per man per day). '<sup>46</sup> Montargis and Orléans had well-heated barracks. <sup>47</sup> At Chartres, 2,786 CPOWs slept in brick hangars with adequate heating and blankets. <sup>48</sup> CPOWs at Saumur were initially housed in wooden barracks but by January 1941 they were moved to well-heated stone buildings with two or three blankets and sheets per prisoner. <sup>49</sup> Michel Gnimagnon remarked that 'significant improvements have been made since November [1940] in sleeping arrangements, lighting, heating, communal and personal hygiene (rooms equipped with beds and lit by electricity, installation of stoves, periodic distributions of coal). <sup>50</sup> At Chalôns-sur-Marne in January 1940 'the prisoners seem relatively happy: they are well quartered, heated and fed. The natives receive an extra coal ration and are favoured in the distribution of warm clothes. This does not, however, make up for the harsh climate. <sup>51</sup>

Conditions for CPOWs were overcrowded, especially before they moved to work camps. The Geneva Convention established general guidelines for prisoners' lodgings: 'the premises must be entirely free from damp, and adequately heated and lighted. [...] As regards dormitories, their total area, minimum cubic air space, fittings and bedding material, the conditions shall be the same as for the depot troops of the detaining Power.'<sup>52</sup> The guidelines were rarely respected entirely. Bunked beds were the norm, often with two or three levels.<sup>53</sup> In Epinal, the rooms housed twice as many men as technically allowed.<sup>54</sup> Usually the mattresses were made of straw, and

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>45</sup> AD Loiret, 11R14, prefect of Loiret, note regarding POWs in the department, 6 February 1941.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>46</sup> AN, F/9/2963, camp inspection report for Rennes, 23 January 1941.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>47</sup> AN, F/9/2351, Anderson and Senaud, report on camp visits in Occupied France, Orléans, 21 January 1941.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>48</sup> AN, F/9/2351, Anderson and Senaud, report of YMCA visits to POW camps in Occupied France, 4 February 1941.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>49</sup> AN, F/9/2351, Anderson and Senaud, report on camp visits in Occupied France, Montargis, 20 January 1941

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>50</sup> SHD 14P46, Michel Gnimagnon, captivity report, 7 February 1941. See appendix D for Gnimagnon's full report.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>51</sup> AN, F/9/2963, DSPG, report on the camp of Chalôns sur Marne, 6 January 1941.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>52</sup> Section II, article 10, Convention relative to the Treatment of Prisoners of War, Geneva, 27 July 1929

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>53</sup> AN, F/9/2351, Anderson and Senaud, Report on camp visits in Occupied France, Montargis, 20 January 1941.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>54</sup> SHD, 14P46, Lieutenant de Peralo, escape report, 27 September 1940.

CPOWs, if lucky, had two or three blankets.<sup>55</sup> Barracks might house 100 CPOWs.<sup>56</sup> NCOs generally had better sleeping arrangements. At Joigny, they had small rooms with individual beds.<sup>57</sup> They were also given bed-linen.<sup>58</sup> There were, of course, examples of CPOWs who had worse housing arrangements. At Pithiviers Mohamed Ben Brahim and Mohamed Ben Ali remembered that, 'prisoners slept in factories on straw with half a blanket (quilts) for two prisoners.'59

While the white prisoners remained in the Frontstalags there were differences between the sleeping arrangements for CPOWs and French prisoners. However, it was not systematically better for one group or the other. At Joigny, only the CPOWs had mattresses while the French slept on straw, a fact that the French did not appreciate. 60 Prisoner Jean Detroyat remarked that at Epinal it was the opposite: 'the French prisoners lodged in the camp (200) have beds, some natives have berths in carpet, most do not have a bed only a straw mattress and two blankets.'61 Epinal's camp commander blamed the CPOWs for the lack of berths, claiming they had burnt them for warmth. The prisoners' representative denied it.<sup>62</sup> It was not unusual to find contradictions between the prisoners and the camp staff's assessments. In this respect, the CPOWs were at a disadvantage, as some Europeans believed that certain races were inherently dishonest.

Ensuring the proper sanitation for large numbers of men living together in crowded conditions was a major undertaking. As seen with other conditions, the Geneva Convention was only a guide and camps varied widely in their level of hygiene. Free access to showers made the difference between a mediocre camp and a good one. Every ten days at Montargis CPOWs had their one required shower during which time their clothes were disinfected.<sup>63</sup> They also had free access to individual showers. Epinal had facilities for 500 prisoners to shower daily but disinfection was

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>55</sup> SHD, 2P88, Faure, report on information provided by escaped prisoner Marcel Guillet, 20 January

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>57</sup> AN, F/9/2351, ICRC, report on Joigny, 18 June 1941.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>58</sup> Vourkoutiotis, *Prisoners of War*, p. 54.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>59</sup> SHD, 14P31, Debayeux to Chef d'Escadron, 10 October 1940.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>60</sup> SHD, 2P78, analysis of inspectors' reports from POW camps in Occupied France, 15 April 1941.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>61</sup> SHD, 2P78, Jean Detroyat, report of visit to Frontstalag 121 Epinal, 27 March 1941.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>63</sup> AN, F/9/2351, Anderson and Senaud, report on camp visits in Occupied France, Montargis, 20 January 1941.

only available at the hospital.<sup>64</sup> Marcel Guillet, on the other hand, remembered being allowed to shower once a week.<sup>65</sup> An unhealthy environment put both the prisoners and their guards at risk. Vichy and the camp commanders generally cooperated, where needed, to improve the sanitation for the CPOWs. Upon arrival in Poitiers, Lieutenant Bayle declared that, 'this pigsty is not appropriate for the French army' and installed running water, covered pathways with stones, and a sports field.<sup>66</sup> German officers told Scapini, on his visit to Laharie, that the poor hygiene could be fixed if they could obtain plumbing fixtures.<sup>67</sup> Scapini sent a request to the Red Cross and within two months the CPOWs had individual showers and a 1,800-litre water tank.68

In rare cases the infrastructure could not overcome a camp's natural disadvantages. At Airvault the Germans built 'an admirable system of sanitation and hygienic installations,' which would have been more effective if the camp had not been surrounded by mud.<sup>69</sup> Airvault continued to have problems with diseases and was eventually closed.

As the CPOWs often worked in their local communities, the French could easily assess the conditions of their clothes and shoes. The harsh conditions took their toll on the CPOWs' clothes and footwear. That visibility increased pressure on Vichy to replace them and revealed the subjective nature of assisting CPOWs. André Paul Sadon, prefect of the Nièvre, a traditionally left-wing rural department, wrote multiple letters lamenting that 'some are barefoot and clothed in rags.'70 Requests for assistance in May 1941 showed that only one third of the CPOWs at Epinal were appropriately clothed and shod. 71 Similarly, at Chartres, the shoes were so worn that they no longer had laces.<sup>72</sup> The camp authorities often collected leather shoes and

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>64</sup> AN, F/9/2351, Anderson and Senaud, report of YMCA visits to POW camps in Occupied France, 6 April 1941.

SHD, 2P88, Faure, report on information provided by escaped prisoner Marcel Guillet, 20 January 1941. See also AN, F/9/2351, Anderson and Senaud, report on camp visits in Occupied France, Ambroise, 22 January 1941 and Saumur, 24 January 1941.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>66</sup> SHD, 2P70, Senghor, captivity report, 7 July 1942.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>68</sup> AN, F/9/2351, Marti and de Morsier, ICRC visit to *Frontstalag* 195 Onesse-Laharie, 13 June 1941.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>69</sup> AN, F/9/2351, Paul B. Anderson and August Senaud, report on camp visits in Occupied France, Airvault, 23 January 1941.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>70</sup> SHD, 2P78, André Paul Sadon to Secretary of State for Home Affairs, 10 Octobre 1941.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>71</sup> SHD, 2P78, analysis of inspectors' reports from POW camps in Occupied France, [n.d. but camp visited 22 May 1941].

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>72</sup> SHD, 2P78, Le Gouest, summary of inspection reports from POW camps, [n.d. but camp visited 12 June 1941].

kept them for the winter, forcing prisoners to wear wooden shoes.<sup>73</sup> Without shoes, the CPOWs' activities and ability to earn a salary were limited. The YMCA reported at Joigny, that 'the majority of the Annamites are not able to work due to their physical conditions and their shoes.'74 It is unclear if the Indochinese prisoners would have received shoes had they been fit to work, or if shoes were only given to the CPOWs thought to be better workers. Prisoners at Montargis asked the YMCA for better shoes to replace their wooden sandals but the inspectors hesitated due to rumours that the North Africans had sold their clothes to their friends.<sup>75</sup>

#### Food

Food shortages posed a real problem to the CPOWs' health. Durand wrote accurately: 'Every prisoner, no matter who he is, is a hungry man.' International regulations tried to ensure prisoners received minimum rations from the detaining power. These rations were often unappetizing and prepared badly.<sup>77</sup> CPOWs survived on bread or potatoes as a staple with smaller quantities of proteins. The French press almost certainly exaggerated claims that prisoners at Epinal received seventy grams of meat per day. 78 René Scapini's report that prisoners at Chartres had meat once or twice a week in the soup was more accurate.<sup>79</sup> Senghor remembered receiving 'a small, scientifically calculated ration of fat or jam.'80 CPOWs in Brittany suffered from scabies and other diseases since their food was unhygienic. 81 Serious undernourishment at Saint-Médard led to '400 to 500 seriously ill, many deaths per day. Tuberculosis, pneumonia, consumption.'82 Scheck argues that camps in the southwest were overpopulated after many CPOWs were moved south, and as a result they had the least rations. 83 Most of the camps, regardless of location, required additional food

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>73</sup> Scheck, French Colonial Soldiers, p. 240.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>74</sup> AN, F/9/2351, YMCA, report on visits to POW camps, 11 April 1941.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>75</sup> AN, F/9/2351, Anderson and Senaud, report on camp visits in Occupied France, Montargis, 20

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>76</sup> Durand, Captivité, p. 123.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>77</sup> SHD, 2P78, René Scapini, visit to *Frontstalag* 153, 28 March 1941.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>78</sup> AN, F/9/2351, Anderson and Senaud, report of YMCA visits to POW camps in Occupied France, 6 April 1941.

79 Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> SHD, 2P70, Senghor, captivity report, 7 July 1942.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>81</sup> AD Loire Atlantique, 1690W127, Taittinger to prefect of Loire Inférieure, 22 July 1940.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>82</sup> AN, F/9/2963, Bigard, DSPG mission to St Medard, 6-10 January 1941.

<sup>83</sup> Scheck, French Colonial Soldiers, p. 232.

for the CPOWs. The CPOWs turned towards the French population for help, and they usually found it.

While certain aspects of captivity remained removed from civilian concerns, food was universally understood. The French wanted to be reassured that their prisoners, including the CPOWs, were not starving. This concern for the prisoners' food fundamentally improved the CPOWs' experience of captivity by supplementing the rations provided by the Germans. Civilian populations often sent CPOWs extra bread or vegetables depending on what could be spared. French civilians continued to help CPOWs throughout the occupation, often filling roles that Vichy could not. CPOWs in the Somme were only fed one meal a day forcing them to beg for bread when outside the camps.<sup>84</sup> This was a common occurrence. When camp inspectors heard these stories, they universally recommended that Vichy increase the CPOWs' rations of bread, meat and dried vegetables.<sup>85</sup> Once the Red Cross deliveries were organised, the CPOWs did not hesitate to ask for improvements. CPOWs requested food from the colonies.<sup>86</sup> When possible these requests were honoured. Twice a month the French Red Cross brought fresh bread, tea, mint, couscous, dates, chickpeas and jam for 3,800 prisoners at Joigny.<sup>87</sup> The colonies supplied Vichy with foodstuffs despite the British blockade. After 1941, Germany was supplied first.<sup>88</sup>

Sometimes the lack of food was entirely due to German neglect. The camp commanders in Vesoul sent the Red Cross donations directly to Germany, and as a result the 15,000 prisoners 'live[d] on public charity.' Some guards thought a strict regime benefited colonial prisoners. At Labenne, the German commandant declared that work was good for the CPOWs which prompted them to yell to the Red Cross delegate 'come, come, see kitchen. Nothing to eat. Come see soup. Soup of water' and 'give food'. These men, starving, refused the games and soap brought by the Red Cross explaining 'empty stomach, won't play' and complained that soap was not

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>84</sup> AD Somme, 48W70, Lallemant, report on the situation of POW camps, 6 Mai 1941; see also AN, F/9/2351, ICRC, visit to St. Martin d'Orney, 13 June 1941.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>85</sup> AD Ardennes, 1W146, L. Bonnaud-Delamare to prefect of the Ardennes, 21 January 1942.

SHD, 2P78, Jean Detroyat, report of visit to *Frontstalag* 121 Epinal, 27 March 1941; see also AN,
 F/9/2351, CRF, automobile section of Bordeaux, report on camp visits in the Landes, 15 October 1941.
 SHD, 2P78, Verdier to Huntziger, 26 April 1941.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>88</sup> Ageron, 'Vichy, les Français et l'Empire', p.131.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>89</sup> AD Haute Saône, 63J33, CCAPG to prefect of Haute Saône, 7 December 1940.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>90</sup> AN, F/9/2351, CRF Automobile section of Bordeaux, report on camp visits in the Landes, 15 October 1941.

edible. 91 More often it was disorganisation, not neglect that affected their food. The prefect of the Loiret noted in February 1941 that, 'the problem of their diet is acute with the state of total disorganisation in which the roads, railways and telephone services are found. The German commander, totally overwhelmed by the number of prisoners, has not taken the necessary steps to deal with the situation.<sup>92</sup> At Mont de Marsan the prisoners told the Red Cross representative, 'you know, Madame, it's too hard for us to die of hunger in France.'93

Most camp commanders preferred to send requests to Vichy for more food. Consequently, their CPOWs were better fed, worked better, and were in better sprits without costing the camp. At Ecly (Ardennes), the camp commander told the prefect that he urgently needed vouchers for bread, meat and fats to feed his CPOWs.<sup>94</sup> Clearly the CPOWs were unable to survive on the rations supplied by the German army. Early in the political negotiations, Vichy attempted to exchange extra food for the access to the CPOWs. 95 Vichy eventually accepted responsibility for the CPOWs' food. German promises rarely materialized and Vichy, the Red Cross, and local populations provided extra rations to prisoners. The CPOWs benefited from this aspect of collaboration as their rations improved. Working with the German commanders, the Vichy regime and its dependant charities attempted to provide adequate rations. This was as much about humanitarian aid as political aims. Vichy needed to retain the image of a strong colonial power that would not abandon its subjects.

The freedom to choose and cook their food improved morale greatly. CPOWs were able to buy special products and raise money for the Frontstalag through the canteen. At Joigny prisoners had the opportunity to purchase sweets, cakes, chocolates, bread, beer and occasionally wine bought by the group leader 96 in town and sold at cost. 97 In Vesoul, the Indochinese prisoners were allowed to purchase one

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>92</sup> AD Loiret, 11R14, prefect of the Loiret, note regarding POWs in the Loiret, 6 February 1941.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>93</sup> AN, F/9/2351, CRF Automobile section of Bordeaux, report on camp visits in the Landes, 15 October 1941; see also SHD, 2P65, Mrs Henri Dehau, observations from various POW camps, [n.d. but attached to a protocol dated 4 November 1941].

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>94</sup> AD Ardennes, 1W146, L. Bonnaud-Delamare to prefect of the Ardennes, 21 January 1942. 95 See chapter seven, p. 193.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>96</sup> See discussion on the *hommes de confiance*, p. 92.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>97</sup> AN, F/9/2351, ICRC, report on Joigny, 18 June 1941; for additional examples see AN, F/9/2351, Anderson and Senaud, report of YMCA visits to POW camps in Occupied France, 6 April 1941.

litre of wine per week.<sup>98</sup> Profits were only made on the sale of beer, which was then used to purchase tobacco and bread for the prisoners.<sup>99</sup> The locals supplied butter and cheese for the canteen.<sup>100</sup> This access to alcohol appears surprising as France, during both wars, went to great lengths to ensure Muslim culinary rules were respected. This included the prohibition of alcohol. However, photos and anecdotal evidence revealed that colonial soldiers drank more alcohol than the French military would have liked. At Onesse-Laharie the group leader could not leave the camp, so only non-food items such as beer and lemonade were found in the canteen.<sup>101</sup> By October 1942 at Onesse-Laharie seven cooks under a colonial chef prepared the camp's food. Prisoners could use individual stoves for cooking private food.<sup>102</sup> Products bought in the canteens combined with individual packages allowed the CPOWs some independence regarding their nutrition.

The CPOWs' daily life presented certain difficulties that should not be minimized: hunger, cold and harsh living conditions. However, from early 1941 the CPOWs had a means of communication with the French: first, through international organisations and later through French ones. Being able to complain and having those complaints heard were two fundamental signs of a stable experience of captivity. Vichy used the CPOWs' complaints and needs as a way to access the closed German space in the *Frontstalags*. Eager to prove their commitment to collaboration, Vichy helped improve the camps and the CPOWs' experiences within them, to the CPOWs' benefit.

#### Internal camp hierarchies: formal and informal

As the Germans continued to filter out the white prisoners, the *Frontstalags* became an increasingly colonial world. However, this world did not reflect Vichy's rhetoric of a united and loyal Empire. As a diverse group of individuals under considerable stress from difficult conditions, the CPOWs did not always get along. For a start, CPOWs in the *Frontstalags* were separated from their officers and the official hierarchy. New formal and informal hierarchies emerged in this relative

AN, F/9/2351, Schirmer and de Morsier, ICRC visit to *Frontstalag* 141 Vesoul, 12 November 1942.
 AN, F/9/2351, ICRC, report on Joigny, 18 June 1941.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>100</sup> AD Haute Saône, 63J33, local delegate to the President of the CCAPG, 23 March 1941.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>101</sup> AN, F/9/2351, Marti and de Morsier, ICRC visit to *Frontstalag* 195 Onesse-Laharie, 13 June 1941. <sup>102</sup> AN, F/9/2351, Schimmer and de Morsier, ICRC visit to *Frontstalag* 195, 28 October 1942.

vacuum. French paternalism expected the white soldiers, while they remained in the Frontstalags, to take on a leadership role for the CPOWs. Both Vichy and the YMCA encouraged this collaboration. The YMCA believed this would help the CPOWs feel 'at home', 103 while Vichy was concerned with maintaining the status quo. White prisoners were encouraged to educate their colonial fellows. The white camp inspectors saw these efforts as universally positive. At Orléans 'the North Africans' morale seems to have been significantly improved by the organisation of a series of sporting events directed by the prisoners themselves, supervised by some French prisoners accustomed to the African troops.'104 Unfortunately, we do not have the CPOWs' opinion on the subject. At Montargis, the ICRC used similar language to praise the efforts of Second Lieutenant Dessertin whose Senegalese troops were very disciplined. They felt that 'a French officer used to leading the North Africans, with the help of some French colleagues, could rapidly improve the situation for prisoners hailing from that region.'105 Being accustomed to the 'ways' of the colonial soldiers was an important skill for French officers and NCOs. Since most French with 'colonial experience' went through the same training, this effectively ensured that colonial soldiers were isolated from anyone with a different background or experience. Thus it reinforced the conservatism of the French army. Vichy feared German influence over the CPOWs would increase without the white French as most of the latter were released from the Frontstalags throughout 1941.

Internal hierarchies, as protected by the Geneva Convention, were established within the prisoner of war camps. <sup>106</sup> On top was the German camp leadership. Most *Frontstalags* followed the same model as Bulgose where 'the German commander is a second lieutenant of the reserve. He is assisted by six or seven NCOs. The guards in charge of camp surveillance and work groups are from a special company, independent from the *Frontstalag*. <sup>107</sup> Below them and within the camp, each group of prisoners had a leader who was responsible for executing the Germans' orders. <sup>108</sup> Camps in Germany had a similar organisation.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>103</sup> AN, F/9/2351, Anderson and Senaud, report of YMCA visits to POW camps in Occupied France, 4 February 1941.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>104</sup> AN, F/9/2351, Anderson and Senaud, report on camp visits in Occupied France, Orléans, 21 January 1941.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>105</sup> AN, F/9/2351, Anderson and Senaud, report on camp visits in Occupied France, Montargis, 20 January 1941.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>106</sup> See appendix B, p. 280.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>107</sup> SHD, 34N1081, Jean Guérin, report of captivity and release, 22 December 1941.

<sup>108</sup> Mabon, 'Indigènes', p 56.

The homme de confiance or man of confidence was one prisoner who could directly influence the CPOWs' daily experience. He served as the liaison between the prisoners, the German commanders, and the aid organisations to assess the prisoners' needs. Article forty-three of the Geneva Convention allowed prisoners to choose their own homme de confiance. 109 In France, unlike in Germany, the camp commanders often chose the CPOWs' homme de confiance. This allowed opportunistic CPOWs to obtain favoured roles from the Germans, often at their comrades' expense. When supported by the camp authorities the homme de confiance could actively improve conditions for his fellow prisoners by sending requests for godmothers or donations to charities. 110 For example, in Vesoul, Sergeant Major Tran Van Tiep, verified the daily deliveries from the Red Cross and held the only key to the depot. 111 However, in Chalons-en-Champagne, the homme de confiance had difficulties ensuring the collective deliveries for the CPOWs because his rights were not always respected and CPOWs were scattered in work groups. 112 Mabon argues that since the German guards often selected the homme de confiance their efficacy remained doubtful. 113 El Mouldi Benahssen wrote to the President of the French Red Cross demanding the right to choose their own homme de confiance. 114 Generally, this was ineffective, as the Germans maintained total control over the internal camp organisation. In several camps in the southwest, French chefs de camp or camp chiefs replaced the function of the homme de confiance. 115 They liaised between the prisoners and the German camp administration. Often they were supposed to have responsibilities such as distributing packages and goods supplied by the charities.

Despite the constraints, many CPOWs navigated their leadership roles well and were able to improve conditions for their fellow CPOWs. Leadership roles placed the prisoner in a potentially awkward position above their fellow prisoners and below the German guards. In one camp near Rennes, the ICRC inspectors felt that the homme de confiance and the native NCOs did an excellent job maintaining

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>109</sup> Section 5, article 43, The Convention Relative to the Treatment of Prisoners of War, Geneva, 27 July 1929.

AD Marne, Reims, 6W R819, Bouret to Popelain, April 1942.

AN, F/9/2351, Schirmer and de Morsier, ICRC visit to Frontstalag 141 Vesoul, 12 November 1942.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>112</sup> AD Marne, Châlons-en-Champagne, 5Z783, Bigard, DSPG, sub-section in Paris, [n.d.].

<sup>113</sup> Mabon, 'Indigènes', p 56.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>115</sup> SHD, 2P65, Mrs Henri Dehau, observations from various POW camps, [n.d. but attached to a protocol dated 4 November 1941].

discipline. 116 At Bulgose in the Landes, 'prisoners are grouped by barracks, under the direction of a native NCO promoted to chief of the barrack. The entire ethnic group is placed under the authority of a native NCO (one Moroccan warrant officer, one Senegalese staff sergeant, one Malagasy staff sergeant), [and] the oldest is the homme de confiance for the camp. The native NCOs generally carry out their, often delicate, tasks well.'117 Among the nine camps in Rethel seven of the hommes de confiance were CPOWs and two were French doctors. The local representative of the DSPG remarked that, 'these hommes de confiances appear to take great care of their camp and to maintain good relations with the German military staff.' One homme de confiance, Corporal Hamada, used his position to circumvent the camp authorities and discuss his concerns about a Tunisian soldier, Ayade van Amor, with the mayor of Mailly. According to Hamda, Ayade had declared himself an NCO, encouraged indiscipline among the CPOWs, insulted France and refused to obey a French homme de confiance. 119 In turn the mayor initiated a further investigation. Due to lack of petrol the departmental delegate was unable to visit the camp but suggested that the Red Cross drivers who made deliveries to the camp continue the investigation. The outcome is unknown.

A figure that solicited universal hatred was he who betrayed his comrades in exchange for favours from the Germans. Repatriated Algerian prisoners 'complain[ed] equally about certain NCOs or men who work as informants to the Germans and reveal the escapes.' This reaction was common among all prisoners. Vichy preferred when white men held these roles over the CPOWs, as it avoided 'awkward' racial tensions. The Germans preferred to give them to North Africans, which exacerbated tensions between sub-Saharan and North Africans. One case illustrates the abuses of the system. At Solferino, the NCOs accused the Algerian *chef de camp*, Akob Bouabdallah of:

searching the barracks without the Germans' authorisation, trading bread for twenty-four packets of cigarettes or 150 francs, pillaging personal parcels and

<sup>116</sup> AN, F/9/2351, Schirmer and de Morsier, ICRC Camp visit Rennes, 5 November 1942.

<sup>117</sup> SHD, 34N1081, Guerin, report of captivity and release, 22 December 1941.

AD Ardennes, 1W146 L. Bonnaud-Delamare to delegate for the POW Services, 21 January 1942; see also AD Loiret, 11R14, prefect of Loiret, note from POW Services, 22 July 1941

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>119</sup> AD Marne, Reims, 6W R819, letter from the department delegate to the Director [no indication of what], 17 June 1942.

ANOM, Alg GGA 1CM-73, Préfecture d'Oran, Centre d'Information de d'Etudes, 6 February 1942.
 MacKenzie, Colditz Myth, p. 128.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>122</sup> Scheck, *French Colonial Soldiers*, p. 262.

removing the hashish (Kif) from the Tunisian packages, selling civilians the shoes and clothes provided by the Red Cross (shoes: 150 francs), renting card games [...] eliminating gambling, confiscating the money and giving it to the Germans without providing a receipt. However, the ban [on gambling] does not affect his barracks, and on the contrary, [he] encourages the German soldiers to play with the Algerians, which can have (and already has had) regrettable effects, create disagreement and fuel racial hatred.<sup>123</sup>

The CPOWs knew their rights, and to whom address their complaints.

There were a few times when French officials made a point of responding to the CPOWs' concerns. *Sergeant-Chef* Bonko Hambrié wrote to Pétain complaining that backstabbing among the prisoners had forced out a good NCO, leaving the CPOWs without any support. The head of the *Bureau de l'inspection des camps* met with Hambrié during his next visit to Rennes. On another occasion, responding to the CPOWs' accusations that the *homme de confiance* Geromini at camp Hanneman was selling Red Cross supplies to the prisoners and Germans, the DSPG intervened and the Germans transferred him to Stalag VIIIA in Görlitz. As we shall see in chapter six, stealing Red Cross supplies or parcels was punished severely.

The Germans used select CPOWs as an additional layer of management and as an internal camp police force. In the Landes, a dozen CPOWs chopping wood were:

under the guard's supervision and under the "policemen's" authority. These "policemen" are generally native NCOs, but often just simple soldiers who through despicable manoeuvring have gained the Germans' confidence. They then are subject to their comrades' clear hostility, which led some to resign their position. 126

This was quite common throughout the *Frontstalags*. <sup>127</sup> At Longvic, the NCOs served as the police force, and apparently fights were common among the North Africans. <sup>128</sup> A French doctor and prisoner, Pierre Jean Prost, gave a long description from his time in the *Frontstalags* of the Algerians and Tunisians who accepted these positions:

<sup>128</sup> SHD, 34N5, Le Féloch, captivity report, 26 February 1942.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>123</sup> AN, F/9/2351, El Mouldi Benahssen to President of the CRF, forwarded to Scapini, 17 May 1942.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>124</sup> AN, F/9/2351, Bonko Hambrié to Pétain, [n.d. but response dated 11 August 1941].

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>125</sup> AN, F/9/2351, Bonnard to Sous-Direction des Prisonniers de Guerre, 20 June 1941.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>126</sup> SHD, 34N1081, Guerin, liberation report, 22 December 1941.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>127</sup> AN, F/9/2351, ICRC, visit to Mont de Marsan, 13 June 1941; for other examples see SHD, 2P70, Senghor, captivity report, 7 July 1942; SHD 14P46, Gnimagnon, captivity report, 7 February 1941; SHD, 14P17, report on escapes from POW camps, Subdivision of Taza, 4 November 1940.

One should perhaps not generalize, but what made them unsympathetic is that they were very opportunistic, they sought to please our guards and eagerly accepted the job of camp police. (They were given helmets; they wore an armband with a 'P'; and were armed with a gasmask hose which served as a baton. They earned one mark per day). The Germans had suggested that Captain Cherchell of the colonial artillery (Martiniquais) entrust the coloured officers (there were seven) with running the camp police. Of course the officers refused this kind of collaboration, the Senegalese *tirailleurs* and Moroccans did as well, but the Algerians [and] Tunisians, perhaps through the intermediary of two warrant officers, agreed to guard the buildings where French prisoners, sometimes officers, were locked awaiting departure for Germany.<sup>129</sup>

By using North African prisoners to guard French officers, the German guards reenacted their biggest complaint about the French occupation of the Rhineland: placing Europeans in a position of inferiority vis-à-vis colonial subjects. Mabon argues that Vichy opposed using colonial soldiers as police because they preferred maintaining an apartheid regime in the army. This not only ignores the mixed colonial regiments and the use of native NCOs, but also sheds no light on the nuances of Vichy imperialist policy. Under apartheid blacks were expected to live separately and unequally, with their own languages and institutions. On the contrary, France believed that it was helping its subjects along the path to civilisation, or 'Frenchness'. Adopting French language and culture, through the example and advice of their superiors, were essential signs of assimilation.

Vichy's opposition to the use of colonial soldiers as police was much more straightforward. They did not want the CPOWs to be unduly influenced by the Germans, or to get accustomed to positions of power, especially over the French. Vichy preferred that the CPOWs continue to think of Germany as the enemy. Captivity, at least at this stage, facilitated this. The abstract notions of collaboration remained subservient to the reality of captivity. During this period, it was still the Germans who forced the CPOWs to work, restricted their movements and shot those who attempted to escape. While collaboration permeated every aspect of the political

130 Mabon, 'Indigènes', p 56.

<sup>129</sup> SHD, 14P46, Prost, report on captivity and escape, [n.d.].

discussions around CPOWs, Vichy tried to keep it away from the CPOWs themselves.

Vichy propaganda spoke of the unity and support of the French Empire, glossing over the dissidence in the colonies. The reality of a fragmented French Empire was closer to the actual relations between CPOWs. The French Empire was not made of a unified group of loyal French subjects. Some ethnic groups had their own caste system. Racism was prevalent especially between North and West African populations. Without the imposed military order, informal relationships allowed some CPOWs to renegotiate the constraints of captivity and create new alliances to their own benefit. Interactions varied amongst the CPOWs and between the CPOWs and the French. The CPOWs were sometimes subject to racism or were considered in generalisations due to their race. For example, the Indochinese prisoners were often treated as a group, to be liked or hated, and not as individuals. The French prisoners at Ambroise inexplicably hated them. 131 While in Stalag VIIA, 'the Indochinese tirailleurs' behaviour was noticed in the camp, as much by their good discipline and conduct, as the commitment they showed towards their officers; their departure was universally regretted.' When CPOWs were praised or noticed, it was usually for their excellent discipline. Loyalty and obedience were considered the highest qualities for a colonial soldier.

It is unsurprising that many CPOWs felt isolated. They were without news from their families, sometimes for years, and were depersonalised or treated like 'others' by their fellow prisoners. The 450 Indochinese in Orleans 'maintained excellent relationships with the French in the camp, but they still felt very isolated due to the fact they have not yet been able to correspond with their families' 133

The German authorities repeatedly ignored the rights of French citizens of colour. As seen in chapter one, German and French racial theories were contradictory. The German authorities made decisions based on broad categories of race, not citizenship. Some Martiniquais prisoners were, unsurprisingly, 'offended at being considered natives, and [at the fact] that the Germans only see men of colour and not the nationality and the position of French citizenship.' In the spring of 1941, when

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>131</sup> AN, 72/AJ/291, Roger Dabin to Secretary General of the committee for captivity stories, 14 August 1958

<sup>132</sup> SHD, 2P88, Jean Brelivet, captivity report, 22 July 1941.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>133</sup> AD Loiret, 11R14, Jean Morane to President CCAPG, 17 February 1941.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>134</sup> SHD, 14P46, Prost, report on captivity and escape, [n.d.].

all remaining 'French prisoners' were released from the *Frontstalags*, the *Comité* d'aide et d'assistance aux militaires martiniquais wrote to General Andlauer:

The German authorities have accepted, in numerous cases, to release or place on captivity leave French prisoners held in camps in France, but lacking the sufficient documents, the natives from our old colonies living in the *métropole* before the general mobilisation in 1939, and legally considered metropolitan, have not yet been able to take advantage of this measure. <sup>135</sup>

The letter concluded with a list of prisoners fitting this criterion and a request for their release.

The French citizens of colour could pose a significant risk to Vichy's desire for loyalty and stability, especially since Vichy had no power to release them: that lay with the German authorities. They were educated, literate, and accustomed to fighting for their rights. Luckily for Vichy they were also a small minority, with rather more CPOWs from Martinique than from the four communes of Dakar. Vichy was therefore more concerned about the negative effect these citizens might have on the other CPOWs with the 'promiscuity of races and contamination of the blacks by the protesting bad minds of some North Africans and Martiniquais. Ather than admit their impotence to a group with potential influence over the mass of CPOWs, Vichy preferred to ask the Germans to keep the races separate.

Worry about German propaganda certainly preoccupied the Vichy authorities, but their desire for the separation of races went further. Behind the racist discourse of the French colonisers was detailed knowledge of the Empire's populations. Despite publicly praising a vast Empire brought together through love of the motherland, actual unity was difficult to obtain and even feared by Vichy. As seen, the CPOWs had different cultures, languages and religious traditions. Rural farmers from Upper Volta had as little in common with urban workers from Algiers as with their German captors. Some colonial societies, such as the Peuhls in Guinea, were divided along social lines. The French colonial administrators and military officers had experience with the different and distinct cultures within the colonial populations. This knowledge was combined with generalisations and stereotypes to create French

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>135</sup> AN, F/9/2351, G. Chenard to Andlauer, 10 December 1941.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>136</sup> AN, F/9/2351, remarks on three camps: Onesse-Laharie, St-Medard, Bayonne-Anglet and their Arbietskommandos, [n.d.].

SHD, 2P63, Dupuy, analysis of all reports on the *Frontstalags* from 1 October to 1 April 1942.

policy. Vichy felt that keeping races separate would effectively limit potentially dangerous trans-national feelings, like *Négritude* championed by Aimé Césaire and Senghor in the 1930s, among the CPOWs.

Germany, by contrast, had the organisational power over the CPOWs but none of the colonialists' inside knowledge of the different peoples and cultures. In some camps, like Chartres, prisoners were separated by origin. <sup>139</sup> Lo Samba, a Senegalese soldier, remembered:

The prisoner camps, either in Germany or in France, are divided into four sections: European prisoners, Arab prisoner, Yellow prisoners, Black prisoners. The Martiniquais are in the same section as the Africans. The prisoners do not communicate with different sections. 140

In Voves (Eure-et-Loir) it was much the same with the 'favoured' races receiving better housing: 'Boys' school: French officer prisoners; Gendarmerie: Alsatian and Lorrain prisoners; Large camp and Moreau factory: military and civilian prisoners; Slaughterhouse: Senegalese, Black troops.' The Senegalese prisoners were housed in the least comfortable section. Bigard explained to the head of the OKW how the French managed their vast Empire:

Natives from Morocco, Algeria, Madagascar and Senegal are found in some camps in the east. These men, who are different races, live together with difficulty. In the French army, great care is taken, in the interest of discipline, to separate, in different garrisons or at least different barracks, natives from different races.<sup>142</sup>

After this the Germans decided to group the prisoners by religion. Religious segregation would not resolve the issues Bigard raised because many North and West Africans shared Islam as a religious faith.

By assigning characteristics to 'Algerians' or 'Indochinese' the CPOWs were expected to conform to these images. Naturally, the CPOWs were individuals who had their own personal reactions to captivity and their fellow CPOWs. These generalisations were applied across most colonial subjects. In the *Service des affaires indigènes nord-africains* in Marseilles, the Moroccan interpreter, Mohamed Ben Hadj

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>139</sup> SHD, 2P78, René Scapini, visit to *Frontstalag* 153, 28 March 1941.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>140</sup> ANS, 2D23, Jean Carcy, report on the interrogation of a released prisoner, 17 June 1941.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>141</sup> AD Eure et Loir, 1W101, mayor of Voves to prefect of Eure et Loir, September 1940.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>142</sup> AN, F/2959, Bigard to Chief of OKW in France, 5 January 1941.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>143</sup> AN, F/2959, major commander in chief of the German army in France to Bigard, 27 January 1941.

was accused interacting badly with Algerians seeking assistance.<sup>144</sup> By November of 1941, most CPOWs were housed according to their origins.<sup>145</sup> Usually this meant there were small groups from different colonies in each *Frontstalag*, each with separate living quarters. However, by November 1942, all the Indochinese prisoners were brought to Vesoul:

because their weak constitutions did not permit them to be used in difficult work, especially in the forest economy, and additionally, they wanted to separate them from the other prisoners of colour. They share the camp with North Africans and Senegalese. They are separated into different buildings according to race.<sup>146</sup>

Forestry work, as will be seen in the next chapter, was particularly difficult. Nonetheless, the French considered the Indochinese excellent workers who managed the cold better than the African soldiers. Vesoul, in eastern France, was one of the harsher climates. This suggests that the Germans, like France, adapted their views on race to individual situations.

Were the racial conflicts innate as the French authorities often argued, or were they exacerbated by captivity? There was certainly evidence that members of the *Comité central d'assistance aux prisonniers de guerre* (CCAPG) preferred to blame problems on inherent racial conflicts. When Mme Lyautey, widow of the military coloniser and symbolic of the Empire, complained that at Lerouville 'natives from Morocco, Algeria, Madagascar and Senegal from lack of sufficient food and warm clothes, are reduced to great suffering. They fight amongst themselves which incites their guards to punish them.' In another case, it was gambling that caused troubles between the Senegalese and Indochinese prisoners. Her explanation was dismissed: 'It is hardly due to lack of food, but only to the fact that Moroccans and Senegalese cannot stand each other and fight.' Perhaps the CCAPG felt Lyautey was criticising their efforts for the CPOWs and preferred to deflect her criticism with tired racial tropes.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>144</sup> AN, F/1a/4526, Inspector General des Services Administratifs, note for Conseiller d'Etat Section général pour l'administration Sous-direction des affaires indigènes. 20 May 1942.

général pour l'administration Sous-direction des affaires indigènes, 20 May 1942.

145 SHD, 2P67, CCAPG Section d'outre-mer, minutes from 24 November 1941 meeting, 28 November 1941.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>146</sup> AN, F/9/2351, Schirmer and de Morsier, ICRC Visit to Vesoul, 12 November 1942.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>147</sup> AN, F/9/2959, Mme Lyautey to CCAPG, 25 October 1940.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>148</sup> SHD, 2P88, Jean Brelivet, captivity report, 22 July 1941.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>149</sup> AN, F/9/2959, translation and commentary of Mme Lyautey's letter to CCAPG, 1 November 1940.

One of the only CPOWs to comment on racial questions was Michel Gnimagnon who dismissed the idea that the CPOWs inherently fought with prisoners of other races and echoed Lyautey's belief. He remembered that:

The prisoners maintained excellent relations among themselves, without regard for colour, race or rank. They saw themselves as brothers-in-arms, united by the same misfortune. One could see at the beginning, and it was painful, some hostility between race and colour due certainly to the shortages and the misery in which were brutally found ourselves. But immediately the brotherly instinct quashed the instinct for egoism and petty mindedness and [now] all fraternize in the common fate. <sup>150</sup>

The crux of Vichy's fears can be seen in Gnimagnon's phrase 'united by the same misfortune'. France wanted the colonial soldiers to be united and loyal to France, but not necessarily united with each other. Racial differences might have been the catalyst, but the prisoners' discord was affected by the constraints of captivity. Prisoners were in confined spaces, far from home in harsh conditions. A.J. Barker argued that 'captivity breeds increased irritability in all men; some suffer a little more, others a little less. This is the so-called "barbed-wire disease," which is not particular to any nationality.' Ultimately, the CPOWs were just men adapting as best they could to captivity.

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In order to establish a comparison of prisoner well-being, we need briefly to consider conditions for western POWs in camps in Germany. Captivity in the summer of 1940 could be characterised, in Germany as in France, by shortages and chaos. Only one report, on Stalag VIIA, described a well-organised camp whose prisoners were in good health and spirits. Its French prisoners requested news of their families, especially those who had been evacuated as well as biscuits, chocolate and soap. The prisoners felt that they were fed enough for the manual labour they

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>150</sup> SHD 14P46, Gnimagnon, captivity report, 7 February 1941.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>151</sup> A.J. Barker, Behind Barbed Wire, (London: B.T. Batsford, 1974), p. 78.

performed, and those on farms were well-fed and housed.<sup>153</sup> This glowing report might have been true for Stalag VIIA, but that case was in the minority.

Despite the inequalities in negotiations, French prisoners, including the CPOWs, were accorded basic human rights as defined by the Geneva Convention. That said, Germany did not hesitate to give Vichy financial responsibility for those rights. As seen, CPOWs benefited greatly from this shift in financial responsibility. Germany had the material resources to uphold the Geneva Convention, yet treated its prisoners the worst of all the western belligerents.<sup>154</sup>

Strict rationing, an extremely large prisoner population, and later the total war economy meant that prisoners in Germany depended on their Red Cross parcels to survive. Germany felt that prisoners should not be treated better than German soldiers or civilians. French prisoners in Germany received minimal rations from the Germans. 155 The British prisoners only received two-thirds of the necessary calories. 156 In Germany, food became an obsession bringing out the worst in the prisoners. 157 One French prisoner wrote that captivity was not a spiritual endeavour, one should not talk of the camp's soul, but of the camp's stomach. 158 A British doctor, A.L. Cochrane, recorded that he received 1,000 calories per day in 1941, which later increased to between 1,600 and 1,800 in 1942-44. 159 The rations did improve after the early days but they were never sufficient. 160 As seen, the CPOWs also faced food shortages but not to the same extreme as those in Germany. Vichy provided a significant amount of food and parcels to prisoners in Germany. In Germany there were fewer controls in place to ensure the prisoners received them. In contrast, the French population regularly informed Vichy on their observations of the CPOWs' status.

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<sup>153</sup> Ibid.

<sup>154</sup> S. P. MacKenzie, 'The Treatment of Prisoners of War in World War II' in *The Journal of Modern History*, lxvi, no. 3 (September, 1994), pp 489-490.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>155</sup> AN, F/9/2828, Colonel Azais, intelligence on Oflag XVIIA, 19 November 1940; see also Helga Bories-Sawala, 'Les Prisonniers français dans l'industrie de guerre allemande' in Catherine ed. *Captivité des prisonniers de guerre*, p. 100.

<sup>156</sup> Wylie, Barbed Wire Diplomacy, p. 93.

<sup>157</sup> Durand, Vie quotidienne, pp 124-125.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>158</sup> Ibid., p. 124.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>159</sup> A.L. Cochrane, 'Tuberculosis Among Prisoners Of War In Germany' in *The British Medical Journal*, ii, no. 4427 (10 November 1945), p. 656.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>160</sup> Durand, Vie quotidienne, p. 125.

Over the longer term, the conditions deteriorated and became especially difficult after 1942-43. 161 Most historians, MacKenzie in particular, emphasise that Red Cross deliveries made the difference between life and death in German POW camps. Prisoners in Germany relied on the Red Cross for everything. Whereas the CPOWs not only benefited from Vichy's Red Cross donations, but had access to the assistance from the local populations. Those in Germany had few clothes appropriate for winter and often wore wooden clogs instead of boots. 162 Eventually governments started supplying uniforms to their own prisoners to ensure they were properly clothed. 163 Germany actively hid the reality of the situation from the ICRC to imply conditions were much better. 164 Camps in Germany had many more international observers from the ICRC and neutral protecting powers than those in France, hence the need to keep up appearances. In contrast, camp commanders in France could appeal directly to the Vichy authorities for more food and supplies for the CPOWs.

Overall, the administrative system in Germany, like that in the *Frontstalags*, was stable from 1941, and the ICRC had access to the prisoners. German guidelines for POW camps were the same for France and Germany. They stipulated that prisoners' housing could have twenty people per room, with either bunk beds or clean straw for the floor. According to Raphaël Michel, the barracks were the centre of camp life and based on one central model: a one storey wooden or cement structure about fifty metres by ten metres with a corrugated iron roof. Generally difficult to heat in winter and too hot in summer, they housed about 200 men on bunk beds. Mattresses, where available, were made of straw and full of bugs and vermin. However was to receive two blankets, a towel, cutlery and a bowl. Michel's overall description holds true for the Frontstalags, especially on the difficulties in heating them. However, there were no recorded complaints about high temperatures in the summer. While in the *Frontstalags*, as in Germany, much of the CPOWs' lives, outside of work, were contained within the barracks. Some camps had dedicated rooms for games or prayer. The major difference was the amount of time CPOWs

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<sup>167</sup> Ibid., p. 50.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>161</sup> Wylie, Barbed Wire Diplomacy, p. 171.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>162</sup> MacKenzie, Colditz Myth, p. 155.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>163</sup> Ibid., p. 162.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>164</sup> Mackenzie, 'Treatment', p. 490.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>165</sup> Vourkoutiotis, *Prisoners of War*, p. 50.

 <sup>166</sup> Raphaël Michel, 'Les Prisonniers de guerre de la Somme de la seconde guerre mondiale',
 (Université de Picardie Jules Verne faculté d'Histoire et Géographie, Mémoire de maîtrise sous la direction de Prof Cointet, Amiens, Sept 1999), pp 31-34.

actually spent in the *Frontstalags* outside of the winter months. As will be discussed, CPOWs spent most of their time in smaller work camps, in closer contact with the French population.

Camp conditions in Germany could be much worse than those in France. Camps were overcrowded with insufficient protection from the elements and few sanitary installations. 168 Even officers found housing conditions in the Oflags difficult. 169 Dortmund was an enormous camp in Germany where prisoners were stacked inside a velodrome, sleeping on the floor without toilets or latrines. 170 It was only fully evacuated in October 1941. These kinds of conditions were only found in France during the summer of 1940. CPOWs had, at worst, straw to sleep on and basic toilet facilities. The sheer numbers of prisoners in Germany led to many make-shift camps. Those for French prisoners in Poland were even worse. In Stalag XXB prisoners were housed in silos, which in other camps were used to hold potatoes.<sup>171</sup> The silos were low, dark and prisoners could barely sit. Despite these conditions, Durand argued that prisoners preferred the silos to the regular cold and draughty barracks.<sup>172</sup> The toilets in Stalag VIIID were right next to the overcrowded rooms. The entire building smelt like the toilets. 173 Only one Frontstalag, Airvault, reported similar sanitary deficiencies, but, as seen, it was closed and the CPOWs distributed among the other camps. Stalag XIIB held 1,450 beds on two levels in November 1940. By March 1942 it had worsened to three-tiered bunk beds and new arrivals slept on the floor.<sup>174</sup> Not the ideal twenty prisoners per room the guidelines envisaged.

Conditions inside the camps were the cornerstone for the prisoners of war experiences of captivity. Most importantly, Durand reminds us of the vast variety of conditions in the German POW camps. <sup>175</sup> While some camps were particularly good, most were fairly mediocre. <sup>176</sup> Conditions in France were less extreme than those in Germany. The lack of basic structures, clean beds and good hygiene had a negative effect on the CPOWs' morale. Both the German and local French authorities attempted to improve camp conditions where possible. Conditions for the CPOWs

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>168</sup> MacKenzie, Colditz Myth, p. 96.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>169</sup> SHD, 2P77, André Joppe, notes on Oflag X, 15 March 1941.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>170</sup> Durand, Vie quotidienne, p. 55.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>171</sup> Ibid., p. 56.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>172</sup> Ibid., p. 56.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>173</sup> Ibid., 69.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>174</sup> Ibid., p. 55.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>175</sup> Durand, Vie quotidienne, pp 56-57.

<sup>176</sup> MacKenzie, Colditz Myth, p. 98.

improved during the first two years of captivity. However, they declined again during the last years of captivity.

It must be accepted that western and colonial prisoners suffered from many of the same shortages: lack of food, appropriate clothing, and uncomfortable lodgings. As the war continued conditions worsened in France as they did in Germany. However, there were two major differences that played in the CPOWs' favour: the prisoners were visible to the local population, and the total prisoner population was much smaller. Combined, this gave the CPOWs greater material and even psychological support than the western prisoners experienced in Germany. In France, instead of hiding bad conditions from Vichy, Germany seemed to do the opposite. As responsibility for financial support for the CPOWs became increasingly blurred, Vichy paid for improvements in the camps, as well as supplying food and clothing. Vichy also sent collective deliveries and parcels to French prisoners in Germany. However, these prisoners could only be helped through official channels. Additionally, the distance meant that supplies might be delayed or waylaid. CPOWs in France benefited from individual contributions, outside the official channels, from local farmers who brought extra milk to the camps, or who sourced vegetables for them. Also, the weather was generally milder in France than in Germany or further east.

Captivity was always a brutal experience. Within the constraints imposed by occupation, the Vichy government, aided by local and international initiatives, attempted to improve conditions for the CPOWs. These efforts were hindered by lack of funds, and constraints on Vichy's power in negotiations. Vichy later turned to charities and aid organisations to fill the gaps. Despite the hardships there was a continuity and predictability in their captivity. The chaos of summer 1940 was over and CPOWs settled into a routine. The most revealing comment about the CPOW experience came from Gnimagnon: 'One can say that until recently, a prisoner's life in Epinal was not much different to that led in French garrisons during peacetime.' The *status quo* was exactly what Vichy wanted: if nothing changed than no CPOWs would get unsavoury ideas. Some CPOWs took advantage of these new and informal relationships in the *Frontstalags* to renegotiate their usual positions of power. Overall, the basic camp experience of the CPOWs in France was better than that of their

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>177</sup> SHD, 14P46, Gnimagnon, captivity and escape report, 7 February 1941.

French and allied counterparts in Germany down to the end of 1942. However, the work regime and the health of the CPOWs were two additional and crucial aspects of their life that require separate investigation.

## Chapter four

## Colonial prisoners of war and work, August 1940 – November 1942

Diverging needs for prisoner labour set French and German priorities at odds with each other. France wanted the CPOWs returned to offset labour shortages in the colonies and return of the French prisoners to restart the French economy. Germany had quickly incorporated the French into its agriculture and industry. Instead, it presented CPOWs as a solution for labour shortages in the Occupied Zone. They helped bring in the harvest in the summer of 1940 and became consistently more integrated into the French economy as the war progressed. These competing goals had a direct impact on the CPOWs' experiences, as the two powers defined, and redefined, the kind of work CPOWs could do. Collaboration brought the international texts like the Hague Agreement and Geneva Convention into question. As France attempted to shape a new role for itself, many terms of these conventions were circumvented, especially those defining prisoner labour. Nevertheless, these international doctrines remained the standard against which all changes were negotiated. Work was a significant portion of the CPOWs' lives in captivity. Everything regarding CPOW labour became a political tug-of-war between the German need to transfer expense and what Vichy hoped to gain from collaboration. This changed the CPOWs' experience of captivity. Instead of remaining with thousands of other CPOWs in the Frontstalags, the CPOWs were placed in small groups and sent to work on local farms and industries. This made them more visible and fostered relationships with French civilians. For the French, the CPOWs were seen less as representatives of a political agenda, and more as individuals who needed help. That said, the work was often difficult and the CPOWs ill-equipped for its demands.

### What was CPOW work?

By 1939, both France and Germany assumed prisoners would be incorporated into their captor's economy. Allowing prisoners to work benefited the occupying power, and ensured prisoners were not idle. The French defeat, as seen, challenged

the Geneva Convention's definition of 'war work' as one power had a war economy, and the other a post-war or at any rate a neutral one. CPOWs, far from the front, remained relatively protected in the 'war work' they did. Prior to the Armistice, Germany had shown a contradictory attitude towards POW labour. Technically OKW instructions held employers responsible for the illegal use of prisoner labour to build weapons factories. In May 1940 a meeting with OKW and the Todt organisation decided that 1,000 prisoners could be used temporarily to build explosive factories. The Todt organisation was a German civil and military engineering founded under the Third Reich by Fritz Todt and later implicated in much of the forced labour projects in the occupied territories. Germany had always intended to use prisoner labour at-will.

The question of CPOW labour revealed both the limits and the benefits of the CPOWs for Vichy's policy of collaboration. Vichy attempted to hide its impotence within its national duty and humanitarian concerns for its prisoners. Vichy knew it could not refuse German demands for prisoner labour and believed, correctly, that the CPOWs would benefit from working closely with the French, another unintentional consequence of being left in France. Some CPOWs, along with some French prisoners, were put to work almost immediately. Two weeks after the Armistice, the occupying forces instructed prefects in the Occupied Zone to communicate their department's labour requirements because 'this allocation of French prisoners [wa]s a gracious measure by the Führer of Germany who wants to see them employed for France to facilitate economic recovery and ensure the harvest is brought in.' This was not an unselfish act. France would became a major supplier of foodstuffs for Germany. Rebuilding the French economy benefited Germany if it was to limit the use of its own resources in occupying France. Even if all 80,000 CPOWs, a significant number, were able to work outside the camp, it was still a limited resource. French agriculture was an immediate and lasting priority since thirty six per cent of French prisoners in Germany were farmers.<sup>3</sup> The labour shortages in a still peasantbased agriculture were particularly severe in 1940-1944. Hence CPOW labour was as important for the French as it was for the German authorities. The Germans saw the

<sup>3</sup> Paxton, Vichy France, p. 209.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> J. Billig, 'Le Rôle des prisonniers de guerre dans l'économie du Reich' in *Revue d'Histoire de la Deuxième Guerre Mondiale*, xxxvii, (January 1960), p. 61.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> AD Yonne, 1W643, Gutschmidt to Joseph Bourgeois, 7 July 1940.

CPOWs as an inexpensive labour force to exploit.<sup>4</sup> The CPOWs who went to work immediately escaped some of the chaos their compatriots faced in the large temporary camps. Instead they were engaged in difficult labour in France, leaving the more 'valuable' workers, the white French, for German industries.

Having chosen the path of collaboration, Vichy felt obliged to acquiesce in German demands, believing this would benefit France in the long-term. Scapini warned the prefect of the Gironde in July of the importance of rebuilding the French economy:

by providing jobs for workers and employees, and producing the necessary wealth to the people, it is essential to the life of the nation. In addition, if it is not done promptly, the occupying authorities' stranglehold on the French economy will accentuate, and will risk damaging the industrial interests as well as those of the country.<sup>5</sup>

In October 1940 General La Laurencie explained to the prefects that using prisoner labour was twice as expensive because the French had to subsidise their food costs, pay their family allowances while also paying unemployment benefits for civilian workers who would have done this work. While La Laurencie honestly informed the prefects that Vichy could not refuse the German request, he hid Vichy's impotence behind their duty and the national interest. Scapini used similar language in his memoirs: 'A million and a half prisoners is no longer a legal question; it is a human question of life or death.'

The Vichy authorities, especially Scapini, saw revisions to the Geneva Convention as logical modifications of international law designed to reflect the reality of the situation. It seemed natural that France would contribute to this revision as a prelude to its future role in German Europe. However, unlike during the previous international conferences, now France was an unequal partner. Despite the drastic change of position regarding international law by becoming its own protecting power, the act of negotiating the new interpretations helped Vichy legitimize its regime as the legal independent French government and not a puppet regime. Neville Wylie argues that since most states view themselves as law-abiding, even with good economic

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> Scheck, 'French Colonial Soldiers', p. 425.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> AD Gironde, 45W1, Scapini to prefect of the Gironde, 24 July 1940.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> AD Saumur, 25W 49, La Laurencie to the prefects, 3 October 1940.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> Georges Scapini, *Mission sans gloire* (Morgan: Paris, 1960), p. 51.

reasons to do so it was difficult to completely disregard the Geneva Convention.<sup>8</sup> Despite Vichy's weak position, it challenged the German legal interpretations of the Hague and Geneva Conventions and the Armistice Agreement on prisoner labour. CPOWs became the test subjects for these new interpretations since Vichy had little oversight of French prisoners' work in Germany.

Most CPOWs began by working for French farms, forests or on road works. As seen, CPOWs were both part of the French prisoner question and separate from it. Vichy did not feel it necessary to explain shifting interpretations of the Geneva Convention to the CPOWs. Many would have been used to similar work in the colonies. Many Ivorians had even enlisted to escape the forced labour in forests in Côte d'Ivoire only to be sent to work in French forests. Eventually, some even worked in munitions factories, transporting explosives and building military defences along the coast, or directly for the German *Wirtschaftoberleitung* (WOL) or the 'Ostland' corporation.

In a dramatic change from the First World War where, as seen, governments accused the enemy of violating the Hague Convention of 1907, Vichy and Germany did the opposite. Both governments preferred to reassure their populations that the Geneva Convention was being respected. French newspaper, *La Dépêche* reprinted a German article detailing the calm and orderly manner in which prisoners in Germany were assigned jobs according to their professional experience. <sup>11</sup> The article insisted twice that the Geneva Convention was being respected and that no prisoners worked in the war industry.

Trying to preserve the distinction between war-related and non-war related work for CPOWs and French prisoners, in October 1940, Director of the DSPG, Besson asked the American ambassador, as the United States was still the protecting power for French prisoners, to investigate claims that prisoners in Stalag VIIA worked in an ammunitions factory. The first question was to settle on a definition of 'war work'. Article 31 of the Geneva Convention was clear that prisoners could not work directly for the war-effort. Over the first eight months of the occupation, the

<sup>8</sup> Wylie, *Barbed Wire Diplomacy*, p. 34.

Lawler, Soldiers of Misfortune, p. 112.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>10</sup> Scheck, French Colonial Soldiers, p. 427.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>11</sup> La Dépêche, 13 December 1940.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>12</sup> AN, F/9/2828, Besson to US Ambassador to France, 1 October 1940.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>13</sup> Section III, Article 31, Geneva Convention relative to the treatment of Prisoners of war, 27 July 1929.

French and German delegations debated the technical and legal definitions of roads and runways. The Germans believed that there was no practical difference between the two since tanks drove on roads and airplanes used runways. Since prisoners could repair roads, they should also be allowed to repair runways. The French retorted that during the First World War prisoners were not allowed to build roads destined for military use. In March 1941, Vichy officials quietly agreed to let the matter drop. Scapini informed the Germans that Vichy would not protest over the use of prisoners in war work, although he gave no commitment to total abandonment of article 31. He felt that the article 31 restrictions were purely academic and sentimental. Understanding that their position was lost, Scapini tried to present this as a French decision, which might be rewarded later. The CPOWs were politically and physically on the periphery of the negotiations on war work, which ultimately played in their favour. Only after November 1942 were companies of CPOWs converted to workers.

#### Men at Work: CPOW labour

Most CPOWs were assigned to work on French farms, as did most prisoners in Germany. In the summer of 1940 sixty-five per cent of all the Reich's prisoners, in France and Germany, worked in agriculture, by 1941 it was fifty-two per cent, though this eventually decreased to 31.5 per cent by February 1944.<sup>19</sup> The transformation of French prisoners into civilian workers,<sup>20</sup> as well as the lower amount of agricultural work done in the winter contributed to the decrease. They were generally unskilled and unused to French agriculture. The prefect of the Nièvre, André Paul Sadon, reflected a commonly held opinion that the CPOWs were best suited to the unskilled spring work, but that the harvest required skilled workers.<sup>21</sup> Two months later Sadon acknowledged that the North African prisoners 'were actually highly sought after by

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>14</sup> AN, AJ/41/1834, Boehme, CAA to DFCAA, 31 August 1940.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>15</sup> AN, F/9/2002, Doyen to Von Stulpnagel, 14 January 1941; see also AN, F/9/2002, Humbert, note for the CAA, 3 December 1940.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>16</sup> SHD, 2P63, meeting between Dupuy and Scapini, 14 March 1941.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>17</sup> Scapini, Mission sans gloire, p. 155.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>18</sup> See chapter seven, p. 205.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>19</sup> Billig, 'Le Rôle des prisonniers de guerre', p. 56.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>20</sup> Ibid., p. 56.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>21</sup> AD Nièvre, 137W 126, André Paul Sadon, monthly report, May 1941.

farmers who now recognize the great help provided by this casual labour.'<sup>22</sup> At least at the beginning, work offered a welcome change from the strict regime in the *Frontstalags*. Charles Metton collected four Algerian prisoners from their camp each morning and brought them, without guards, to his farm where they helped drain the fields.<sup>23</sup> This allowed the CPOWs to interact with the French without German oversight, and to escape, at least for a little while, the discipline of the *Frontstalags*. Nevertheless, while some CPOWs preferred working outside, farm work was demanding and exhausting especially for those unused to physical work.<sup>24</sup>

The natural lull in the winter for agricultural work coincided with increased German organisation over the CPOW labour. In November 1940, the French press described work in the Frontstalags; 'the camp's main occupation is to prepare for a comfortable winter. The men are also working to restore the neighbouring roads and paths, and are engaged in some forestry work.'25 At first, the camp commanders requested suggestions for work that the CPOWs could do.26 The chief engineer in Eure-et-Loir suggested they do work similar to that done by 'the unemployed in winter: cutting the undergrowth, levelling the shoulder, clearing ditches along the roads and paths.'27 Lieutenant Blaubach wanted the CPOWs at Charleville to work inside the Frontstalag. The prefect concluded that the difficulties in transporting the primary material ruled out any economic interest in having the CPOWs work from within the camp, but felt that the CPOWs would be useful in logging or local factories.<sup>28</sup> During the first two years of captivity CPOWs generally did unskilled labour like repairing roads, clearing out ditches, cutting down isolated trees, breaking stones, excavating cesspools, cleaning bridges and quarries, digging fields and repairing waterways.<sup>29</sup> Others even built a sports field for the German soldiers.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> AD Yonne, 1W643, mayor of Nitry to prefect of the Yonne, 23 May 1941.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>22</sup> AD Nièvre, 137W 126, Sadon to Scapini, 18 July 1941.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>23</sup> Jean-Jacques François, *La Guerre de 1939-1940 en Eure-et-Loir: le courrier des lecteurs* (Luisant: La Parcheminière, 1999), pp 304-305.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>24</sup> Durand, Captivité, p. 117.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>25</sup> AN, 72/AJ/1840, AFIP, visit to a POW camp near Paris, 19 November 1940.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>26</sup> AD Eure et Loir, 1W2, Ducrot to prefect of Eure et Loir, 24 August 1940; Directeur des Services Agricoles to prefect of Eure et Loir, 27 August 1940.

Agricoles to prefect of Eure et Loir, 27 August 1940.

27 AD Eure et Loir, 1W2, Ingénieur en Chef des ponts et Chaussées to prefect of Eure et Loir, 22 August 1940.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>28</sup> AD Ardennes, 1W146, prefect of the Ardennes to Lieutenant Blaubach, 10 October 1942.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>29</sup> AD Vienne, 1566W2, use of prisoners in the following camps: Latille, Vouzailles, Vouille, Neuville, Mirebeau, Scorbe-Clairevaux, [n.d.]; see also AD Marne, Châlons en Champagne, 7W S5989, Engineer in chief to local engineers, 13 November 1941.

Two competing needs rapidly appeared: agriculture and forestry. The *Frontstalag* commander at Charleville assigned all his CPOWs to local farms to alleviate food shortages across France.<sup>31</sup> At Joigny, the CPOWs were divided between forests and farms but all were required to spend a few hours daily collecting potato beetles, a local pest.<sup>32</sup> CPOWs assigned to one kind of work could not be used for the other. The agricultural needs have already been mentioned, but French fuel requirements were just as important. After the defeat, fuel shortages forced Vichy to exploit the forests for wood. However, lack of trained lumberjacks hindered their progress.<sup>33</sup> Instead groups like the CPOWs and the *Chantiers de la Jeunesse* were used to chop wood. Thus the CPOWs engaged in two essential sectors of the French economy. However, two factors frustrated the French employers: the Germans controlled the CPOWs' work and the CPOWs were unskilled, and unproductive workers.<sup>34</sup>

Moving CPOWs directly into the local economy and working for private firms which paid the camp left them vulnerable. Sometimes employers used the camp commanders' control to get around French labour law. For example, upon request from their employers, the *Feldkommandantur* increased the working day to ten hours for CPOWs at Mézilles (Yonne).<sup>35</sup> The inspector for the French forestry department complained to the prefect about the increased hours and 'onerous conditions of the black prisoners employed in the forests of your jurisdiction.'<sup>36</sup> Eventually, the camp commander agreed that the CPOWs' working day would be limited to eight hours.

Eventually, camp commanders and local businesses signed legal contracts for the CPOWs' labour. Businesses sent requests directly to the camp commander who reassigned the CPOWs accordingly.<sup>37</sup> In Bordeaux the *Eaux et Forêts* or French forestry department signed a contract with the German Reich for the employment of prisoners for 'logging, shaping, debarking, and stacking wood, [and] fighting forest

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>31</sup> 'Notes documentaries et Etudes' in *Ordre nouveau et collaboration* (Ministère Français de l'Information, 25 June 1945, n 83), p. 6.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>32</sup> AD Yonne, 1W655, prefect of Yonne, memo to mayors of Yonne, 23 June 1941.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>33</sup> Chris Pearson, "The Age of Wood': Fuel and Fighting in French Forests, 1940-1944," in *Environmental History*, xi (October 2006), pp 777-778.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>34</sup> AD Yonne, 1W655, Ulrich to prefect of Yonne, 2 April 1942; see also AD Yonne, 1W644, Wildermuth to prefect of the Yonne, 4 August 1941; SHD, 14P16, Hassen-Ladjimi, escape report, 28 September 1940.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>35</sup> AD Yonne, 1W655, Wildermuth to French forestry department inspector, 7 June 1941.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>36</sup> AD Yonne, 1W655, prefect of the Yonne to French forestry department inspector, 30 May 1941.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>37</sup> AD Yonne, 1W655, prefect of the Yonne to mayor of St-Martin-des-Champs, 3 June [probably 1941].

fires.'38 Similar contracts were signed between *Frontstalags* and employers stating the number of prisoners, type of work, means of payment and the local town's responsibilities. These contracts benefited the Germans, who could break them at any time, and not the CPOWs.<sup>39</sup> Private companies soon contacted the camp commanders for access to this inexpensive labour. In the Yonne, a Parisian company requested forestry rights and the use of fifty CPOWs. The company stated that 'being former coloniaux we are particularly apt to lead this labour force, which, with your permission, we would like to choose directly from the camp.'40 The French response was positive since the company already owned barracks ready to hold CPOWs. However, it is unclear if the employers were allowed to select specific CPOWs from the camp. Usually, CPOWs were assigned to work groups by the camp commanders.

The CPOWs had no control over the type of work they did. Once their labour was regulated, they lost some of the freedoms of the summer of 1940. German guards always accompanied them. 41 Jean Pierre Prost, whose position as a camp doctor provided a detailed report on the CPOWs' captivity, reported that since there had been too many escapes among the Moroccans and Algerians, only the Senegalese were allowed out on work groups. 42 Technically the guards were present to relieve the French of the responsibility for the CPOWs in case of escape. 43 In reality this gave the CPOWs two masters: the guards for captivity and the French for productivity. As more CPOWs were sent to work in small communes, the German authorities published posters with instructions. Prisoners and communities were reminded that the Germans trusted both in order to help the French economy. This brought ordinary French men under the influence of the local Frontstalag. Mayors and employers were held personally responsible for the prisoners quartered locally. Most importantly, 'escape was equivalent to desertion and would be punished as such.'44 In this form, collaboration effectively made French civil servants agents of the detaining power.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>38</sup> AD Yonne, 1W652, contract between the German Reich represented by the chief of the military administration in Bordeaux and the chief of French forestry department at Bordeaux, [n.d.].

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>39</sup> AD Marne, Châlons en Champagne, 7W S5989, Blank Contract, Frontstalag 194.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>40</sup> AD Yonne, 1W643, R.P. Picourt to prefect of Yonne, 17 May 1941.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>41</sup> AD Yonne, 1W655, Mathès to prefect of the Yonne, 14 March 1941.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>42</sup> SHD, 14P46, Prost, captivity report, [n.d.].

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>43</sup> AD Yonne, 1W655, French forestry department inspector to prefect of the Yonne, 24 May 1941. <sup>44</sup> AD Haute Saône, 27W63, Lieutenant-Colonel Laub, Poster Consignes pour les prisonniers aidant aux travaux des champs, [n.d.].

The CPOWs did not have a regular work schedule. Sometimes the guards took the CPOWs back to camp after only five or six hours of work. The teams were changed constantly meaning CPOWs were forced to adjust to different jobs with different colleagues. The difficulty of the physical labour was added to the distance CPOWs were forced to walk to work. At Dixmont, CPOWs walked sixteen kilometres daily. Similarly, at Mont-de-Marsan, after travel time, CPOWs only worked four-hour days.

The occupying authorities moved and reassigned CPOWs at will, sometimes without informing the prefects or their employers. In May 1941, the CPOWs were removed from Sambourg without an explanation.'<sup>49</sup> More commonly, companies or communes were forced to accept CPOWs as employees.<sup>50</sup> Twenty-five CPOWs were sent to work at the Billault company. Billault could neither afford the extra prisoners nor had enough work for them.<sup>51</sup> Luckily, a Parisian company took advantage of the available labour and requested permission to exploit the Bois de Madeleine in Brienon (Yonne). The *Feldkommandantur* gave the *Socitété d'exploitations des bois* thirty-five CPOWs and permission to build the camp.<sup>52</sup> Despite the coordination and responsibility taken by Vichy and the local authorities, the German government maintained ultimate control over the CPOWs and their labour. As the occupation continued, the Germans became less flexible in changing the CPOWs' assignments.

#### Food

For all the assistance provided by CPOWs, communities often hesitated to employ them due to the accompanying restrictions. French towns were given more and more financial responsibility towards the upkeep of these prisoners. The first major change pertained to CPOWs' rations. As seen in the previous chapter, in the *Frontstalags* the German authorities provided food, which was supplemented through the French Red Cross. Given Germany's belief that France should pay, literally, for

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>45</sup> AD Yonne, 1W655, French forestry department inspector to prefect of the Yonne, 24 May 1941.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>46</sup> AD Mayenne, 227W6, mayor of Ballots to the prefect of the Mayenne, 18 September 1941.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>47</sup> AD Yonne, 1W655, Michel Verneaux, Minister of Agriculture report, 15 May 1941.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>48</sup> AN, F/9/2351, Schimmer and de Morsier, ICRC visit to Frontstalag 195, 28 October 1942.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>49</sup> AD Yonne, 1W655, prefect of the Yonne to Directeur des Services Agricoles, 27 May 1941.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>50</sup> AD Gironde, 45W15, Dr. Heerdt to prefect of the Gironde, 22 April 1941.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>51</sup> AD Yonne, 1W655, prefect of Yonne to Feldkommandanteur 509, 4 June 1941. <sup>52</sup> AD Yonne, 1W655, Feldkommandanteur 509 to prefect of Yonne, 10 June 1941.

using colonial soldiers, this was the next logical step. From February 1941, employers, be they farmers or businesses, were required to provide ten francs per day for each CPOW employed for food for each working day.<sup>53</sup> Vichy subsidised the cost when the employers could not. As with other changes, the Frontstalag commanders informed the prefects of the new rules. The prefects were then expected to force compliance from mayors and local employers.

Feeding CPOWs was more than a simple monetary transaction. It meant ensuring the prisoners' most basic right. By refusing to continue to feed the CPOWs the German Authorities showed a clear understanding of Vichy's commitment to collaboration and its own general disregard for its Geneva Convention responsibilities. Without any concessions from Germany, Vichy had additional financial charges. Vichy could not let the CPOWs go hungry on French soil while simultaneously struggling to maintain sovereignty in the colonies. Here practical business sense and humanitarian concerns collided and revealed the multitude of French attitudes towards the CPOWs.

French budgets were stretched thinly. Small farmers could not always manage the additional costs. These changes became a bureaucratic nightmare. Confusion reigned over their implementation. Technically, the French were only responsible for the food while the CPOWs were working. In practice, this was rapidly revealed not to be the case. CPOWs arrived in Bléneau (Yonne) ten days before starting work and only worked seventeen days in April 1941. The mayor wondered why employers had to pay ten francs per day even when the CPOWs stayed in their camps. <sup>54</sup> The prefect of the Yonne clarified the instructions for his department. When prisoners remained in their camp, food was to be provided by the canton and taken from the budget 'assistance for prisoners of war'. Vichy reimbursed employers up to fifteen francs on presentation of receipts. <sup>55</sup> The guards' food was to be provided while prisoners worked outside the commandos. Expenses related to preparing the cantons for the CPOWs' arrival belonged to the canton and were taken from the budget for the cost of the occupation. <sup>56</sup> La Laurencie asked mayors to appeal to their constituents' feelings of solidarity in employing CPOWs. However, if their labour did not compensate for

<sup>53</sup> AD Somme, 49W27, prefect of the Somme to the mayors of the department, 20 February 1941.

AD Yonne, 1W655, mayor of Bléneau to prefect of the Yonne, 31 May 1941.
 AD Mayenne, 227W6, mayor of Changé to the prefect of Mayenne, 30 July 1941.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>56</sup> AD Yonne, 1W655, prefect of Yonne to mayor of Chatel Gérard, 17 April 1941.

the expense of employing them, communes could pay employers ten francs per day for the prisoners' food while ensuring the system was not abused.<sup>57</sup>

Frontstalag commanders held prefects responsible for ensuring payments from their the local administrations, private companies or government-run employers. This was not a simple task. The prefects had two difficulties in obtaining payments. Some employers ignored their contracts and delayed payment for the CPOWs' food, like the logging companies in the Yonne. Other resistance came from the towns, having been forced to find work for the CPOWs, who could not afford the CPOWs' food. Most French, like the mayor of Bais, were not unwilling to feed the CPOWs, but had no room in their budgets.

Passing the responsibility for feeding CPOWs to the French benefited the CPOWs in the end. When the prefect could not ensure payment, the camp commanders did not hesitate to summon reluctant mayors to meetings to reiterate their financial responsibility.<sup>62</sup> The prefect of the Yonne was warned that:

The mayors of Dixmont, Arces, St-Fargeau, Chatel-Gérard, Courgenay, Bois de la Madeleine and Coutarnoux, seem to believe that these prisoners do not have the right to the same rations as civilians. This point of view is wrong. The *Frontstalag's* commander believes that these prisoners must receive the rations allowed for workers. Please instruct the mayors to take the immediate steps to increase the rations.<sup>63</sup>

Production increased when workers were well-fed. Some companies used extra rations to encourage prisoners to work harder. Worm and Company employed 500 North African prisoners near Nantes. The director felt that:

these rations are much lower than what they should be for forced labour, extracting peat is exhausting work; as a result we have noted reduced production; we decided [...] to distribute an additional meal to all those who

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>57</sup> AD Gironde, 45W15, prefect of Gironde to mayors of Gironde and Dordogne in Occupied Zone, 16 December 1940; for another example, AD Marne, Reims, 6W R819, prefect of the Marne to Popelin, 19 January 1942.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>58</sup> AD Marne, Reims, 6W R819, Kratzenberg to prefect of the Marne, 14 January 1942.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>59</sup> AD Yonne, 1W655, prefect of Yonne to French forestry department Inspector, 23 June 1941.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>60</sup> AD Mayenne, 227W6, mayor of Changé to the prefect of Mayenne, 4 July 1941.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>61</sup> AD Mayenne, 227W6, mayor of Bais to Special Commissioner at the prefecture, 1 April 1941.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>62</sup> AD Yonne, 1W655, Dr. Richelmann to prefect of the Yonne, 17 June 1941.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>63</sup> AD Yonne, 1W643, Dr. Richelmann to prefect of the Yonne, 5 April 1941; see other examples, AD Yonne, 1W655, prefect of the Yonne to mayor of Saint-Fargeau, 25 October 1941; AD Yonne, 1W655, sous-prefect Avallon to prefect of the Yonne, 15 March 1941; AD Mayenne, 227W6, order from the director of the prisoners stationed in Couptrain, 20 May 1941.

have worked conscientiously: if we insist on distributing this extra ration ourselves and not adding it to their normal food, it is because we want it to be a reward for good workers.<sup>64</sup>

Presumably prisoners who did not work enough were not given the extra rations. A similar carrot and stick tactic was used in Germany to encourage the productivity of French prisoners.<sup>65</sup>

Working outside the Frontstalag brought several advantages for the CPOWs in addition to contacts with the local French. Their German guards were often more relaxed on work groups than in a large *Frontstalag*. Vichy feared this relaxed attitude and close contact with German guards would influence the CPOWs and make them forget their loyalty to France. But the French also took advantage of this leniency to gain access to the CPOWs. In the Ardennes locals slipped prisoners packages and letters despite the risk that, if caught, the local post offices would be closed as punishment. Each of the CPOWs.

For individual French men and women sharing a meal or providing food to the CPOWs was an act of solidarity in a country under foreign occupation. It drew the CPOWs and the French together and created shared experiences. Feeding the less fortunate is a nearly universal act of charity and thus fit nicely into Pétain's paternalistic and Christian discourse. While some administrators protested at the financial burden, the principle that the CPOWs be well-fed while working in France was generally accepted. Despite the difficulties, many communities managed to do it well. In Saint-Jean sur Erve, prisoners were fed soup, meat, potatoes or beans, jam or cheese, bread and coffee, red wine or cider. Saint-Jean's mayor described how the locals 'welcome[d] the soldiers to their tables and len[t] them cutlery. When our native soldiers work directly for an individual, they feed them completely, and often the German guard too. This vocabulary reflected a personal attachment to the CPOWs and could be found throughout Occupied France. In the Ille-et-Vilaine, Madame Le Gourain fed the CPOWs, organised classes, prepared baptisms, provided

AD Loire Atlantique, 1690W127, Worms and Co. to the Directeur du Ravitaillement général, [n.d.].
 Durand, Captivité, p. 114.

<sup>66</sup> Scheck, French Colonial Soldiers, p. 430.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>67</sup> AN, F/9/2351, Brault, notes on a mission to the Eastern Region, Overseas section, 27 October - 9 November 1941.

AD Ardennes, 1W145, prefect of the Ardennes to the sous-prefects and mayors, 21 January 1941.
 AD Mayenne, 227W6, mayor of Saint Jean sur Erve to the prefect of Mayenne, 26 March 1941.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>70</sup> AD Mayenne, 227W6, mayor of Saint Jean sur Erve to the prefect of Mayenne, 26 March 1941.

light medical care and organised parties for the holidays.<sup>71</sup> The population of Villers-la-Montagne (Meurthe-et-Moselle) reacted badly when their mayor Mr Guillaume, 'refused to feed the sixty-five Senegalese prisoners sent to work on his commune's farms. The population was scandalized, and German army and later the French Red Cross eventually fed the prisoners.'<sup>72</sup>

The complicated dynamic created by Vichy collaboration meant that the Germans were pressuring the French to ensure the CPOWs were fed. This effort cost the Germans nothing, and saved them the cost of feeding their prisoners. Vichy, as always, summoned its citizens to their duty and solidarity with the CPOWs. The unlikely support of the German camp commanders improved conditions for the CPOWs. After Vichy's continued rhetoric of imperial unity and the prisoners' sacrifice, it would have been difficult to ignore the CPOWs needs.

#### Salary

Work was one of the CPOWs' only opportunities to earn a salary. Their right to do so was guaranteed by article 28 of the Geneva Convention. Here again, the Convention assumed the employers and the detaining power would be the same nationality. Instead, the Germans followed their *modus operandi* and shifted financial responsibility to the French. This caused outrage and incomprehension among the employers and local administrators who, having been told that supporting the CPOWs was their duty, felt they were not worth a salary as well. The exact salary could vary by a franc or two depending on the camp. Most CPOWs received ten francs per work day, keeping eight and giving two to the camps' communal fund. CPOWs used their earnings to buy chocolate or tobacco in the canteen or even send it home to their families in the colonies.

At first, only prisoners working outside the camps were paid. CPOWs worked in teams so everyone had the opportunity to earn.<sup>76</sup> By mid-1941, the Germans required that the French remunerate all CPOWs, even those on fatigue duty or

<sup>71</sup> Mabon, 'Indigènes', p. 87.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>72</sup> SHD, 7NN2022, Huntziger to Amiral de la Flotte, 23 May 1941.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>73</sup> Section III, Article 28, Geneva Convention relative to the treatment of Prisoners of war, 27 July 1929.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>74</sup> Durand, *Captivité*, p. 60.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>75</sup> SHD, 2P78, Georges Scapini and Jean Desbons, summary of visit to Frontstalag 195, 10 April 1941.

cooking in the *Frontstalags*.<sup>77</sup> The camp commander explained that without the cooks, who had the right to a salary too, the mayor would have to hire a woman to feed the CPOWs which would be much more expensive.<sup>78</sup> The camp treasurer sent the prefects lists containing the prisoners' names, dates of employment and total payment due. The prefect then paid the camp directly and turned to the employers for reimbursement.<sup>79</sup>

By forcing prefects to obtain payment from companies, Germany reinforced Vichy responsibility for their colonial prisoners. This was a significant reversal from the summer of 1940 when the DSPG had complained to the CAA that salaries had not been paid at Longvic, Beaune and the camps in the Loiret. Employers sought to circumvent these rules and often did not pay the CPOWs fully. As with the food, prefectures were forced to reclaim back pay and employment certificates for unpaid CPOWs. If private businesses refused to pay the CPOWs' salaries, the prefectures were effectively responsible for it. For smaller communes this represented a further strain on already limited budgets. CPOWs suffered directly when the French refused, or were unable. For example, in the Yonne the local dairy that supplied the CPOWs stopped making deliveries until it was paid. Example 1.

Employers in the Haute-Marne believed their only requirement was to feed the CPOWs. 83 This confusion might be the result of instructions sent to engineers, which read: 'The labour from prisoners of war working in agriculture is completely free.'84 Additionally, many employers assumed that colonial labour would be cheaper than French prisoners since the CPOWs were generally assumed to be less productive. The mayor of Nitry, when faced with this new payment, forgot all feelings of imperial solidarity:

Had the municipal council thought we would be asked to pay twenty francs per day per man for the prisoners, it would have simply left them in their

<sup>80</sup> AN, F/9/2002, Chauvin, note for the CAA, 25 August 1940.

83 Mabon, 'Indigènes', p. 65.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>77</sup> AD Yonne, 1W655, prefect of the Yonne to mayor of Dixmont, 13 June [presumably 1941]; AD Yonne, 1W655, prefect of the Yonne to mayor of Arges, 2 June 1941.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>78</sup> AD Yonne, 1W655, Stabazahlmeiter und Dienstatellenleiter FS 124 to prefect of the Yonne, 29 May 1941.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>79</sup> Mabon, 'Indigènes', p. 64.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>81</sup> AD Yonne, 1W655, Stabazahlmeiter und Dienstatellenleiter FS 124 to prefect of the Yonne, 4 June 1941; see also AD Yonne, 1W655, mayor of Vézelay to prefect of the Yonne, 11 June 1941; AD Yonne, 1W655, prefect of the Yonne to mayor of Coutarnoux, 3 June 1941.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>82</sup> AD Yonne, 1W655, Stabazahlmeiter und Dienstatellenleiter FS 124 to prefect of the Yonne, 30 May 1941.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>84</sup> AD Vienne, 1566W2, Engineer in Chief Poitiers to engineers in the sous-divisions, 23 April 1941.

quarters. In the beginning there was no mention of salaries for the colonial prisoners: it was only by your memos of 17 and 22 April that we learnt that the payment of colonial prisoners was the same as for French prisoners.<sup>85</sup>

These increased financial burdens drew out the paternalistic, and sometimes racist views of some French officials. The prefect of the Yonne worried about the 'potential inconveniences' in allowing CPOWs access to cash. He proposed placing their salary directly into savings accounts, which presumably the CPOWs would not be allowed to touch. The German authorities at Frontstalag 124 rejected this idea. Elimiting the CPOWs' access to funds was a manner to further limit their movements. The mayor of Selle-Craonnaise explained that while they would be able to take fifteen French prisoners, even Bretons, quite easily, 'placing Arabs [...] would be absolutely impossible and the team [would be] unused [...] no farmer would want to employ Arabs, Indochinese or others...' As we have seen, in reality many farmers had no difficulties employing CPOWs. These racist reactions reflected the frustrations many small towns felt upon learning that they would not receive white prisoners, but CPOWs. See

Disappointment with the CPOWs was often expressed by discussing their arrogance. Under normal rules of war, prisoners worked for the enemy and could justify low productivity. The double effect of ensuring a slower work rhythm and the catharsis of thwarting the enemy's plans helped prisoners with the frustration of captivity. However, CPOWs were technically working for their country and any similar efforts were criticized. Instead Vichy hoped that good CPOWs whould be grateful for the efforts made on their behalf. Since the French were paying for their labour and upkeep they expected good work. Vichy felt its efforts towards the CPOWs compensated their sacrifice during the war and now during captivity. As a result CPOWs should not complain. The Indochinese prisoners held in the Yonne were accused of having:

a bad attitude and flagrant indiscipline, consequently, the cultivation is done under bad conditions and with practically no results. The Brigadier of *Eaux et Forêts* charged with supervising this work has seen his authority sapped by the insidious action of the *Annamite* corporal and is not adequately supported by

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>85</sup> AD Yonne, 1W643, mayor of Nitry to prefect of the Yonne, 23 May 1941.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>86</sup> AD Yonne, 1W652, Letter Sous-prefect Sens to Prefect, [n.d.].

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>87</sup> AD Mayenne, 227W6, mayor of Selle-Craonnaise to Bussière, 22 March 1941.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>88</sup> AD Mayenne, 227W22, J. F. Bussiere to Kraaz, 26 March 1941.

the German guards, to the extent that these acts, which challenge the discipline, happen daily.<sup>89</sup>

This kind of disobedience, especially if tacitly supported by the German guards, worried the Vichy regime. Without any explanations from the CPOWs themselves it is hard to determine if these acts were the beginning of organised resistance or the expressions of frustrated and tired prisoners. The CPOWs' actions and the French reaction foreshadowed the conflicts during repatriation at the end of the war. The mayor of Pont-sur-Yonne requested the CPOWs be removed from his commune. He claimed that:

These men are good for nothing, the farmers have tried everything except violence. There is nothing to get from them: gluttonous and lazy, unsuited for all work. It is an inconvenience and sets a bad example if they decide not to work. Their attitude prevents others from working. This morning, Mr Van Damme could not convince his prisoner to go to work. He refused and hid in an attic.<sup>90</sup>

At the beginning of 1941, the occupying authorities decided to further regulate CPOW labour by insisting prisoners be grouped together. No longer could CPOWs be sent individually to work sites. Scapini reported that in a few work groups the Germans had tried to replace the German guard with a French homme of confiance but there were too many escapes. This approach would be used again in 1943. Apparently, the German authorities feared that CPOWs would both escape and incite disorder, so it was only reluctantly they were allowed to work on civil projects, and why they were no longer to be sent individually to farms. The prefects were encouraged to find large farms where supervised groups of CPOWs could work effectively. However, family farms were much more common in western and southwestern France, especially in smaller communities like Beaulieu-sur-Oudon. Initially the town was sent ten prisoners, five Africans who worked individually on local farms and five Vietnamese (*Annamite*) employed repairing local roads and pathways. However, the commune was instructed to use the ten prisoners on the same team. But, as the mayor explained, this was impossible as no farmer could use such a large team

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>89</sup> AD Yonne, 1W644, prefect of the Yonne to the Feldkommandantur 745, 27 June 1942.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>90</sup> AD Yonne, 1W655, mayor Pont sur Yonne to mayor de Gisy les Nobles, 16 June 1942.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>91</sup> AD Somme, 49W27, prefect of the Somme to the mayors of the department, 20 February 1941.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>92</sup> AN, 72/AJ/1840, Georges Scapini, speech on POWs, 15 October 1941.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>93</sup> AD Loiret, 11R14, prefect of the Loiret, note on POWs in Loiret, 21 February 1941.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>94</sup> AD Mayenne, 227W6, Commune of Beaulieu-sur-Oudon to the prefect of Mayenne, 11 June 1941.

on the small farms that predominate in the region. The mayor himself had to try and use them on the one collective worksite in the area. He was essentially creating and paying for work just to keep the CPOWs occupied. The German authorities made little attempt to ensure the towns could absorb CPOW labour effectively. For example, Sambourg had a population of ninety-seven and received thirty CPOWs. One proposed solution allowed neighbouring communes to join together, if they housed the prisoners together, so that they could work individually on local farms and return to their quarters each evening. Public works had to be found, and financed, for the CPOWs when the farms could no longer absorb their labour.

Eventually private companies resisted the restrictions enforced by camp commanders by not rehiring the CPOWs. Timber merchants at Chatel-Gérard (Yonne) released the fifty CPOWs when their work was finished. They estimated that the cost of CPOW labour was sixty francs per cubic meter of stacked wood whereas civilian workers cost only twenty francs. 98 The forestry administration feared the same would happen in other camps. 99 J. Billig explained that prisoners' wages were calculated on the expected productivity. Since prisoners were expected to perform less than civilian workers, the average salary for prisoners was about sixty per cent of a normal one, and less for Russian prisoners. 100 Interestingly, Billig says that tests of productivity for prisoners in coalmines confirmed that prisoners produced between fifty and sixty per cent of what civilian miners did. With thirty-five per cent of professional French lumberjacks in German POW camps they needed the labour. 101 The timber merchants complained that the conditions of employment were constantly changing which reduced productivity. They had been promised both French and CPOWs for an eight-hour work day. The actual conditions were quite different. They only received CPOWs who were considered only half as effective as French prisoners.

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<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>96</sup> AD Yonne, 1W655, Maurice Vincent to prefect of Yonne, 15 March 1941; see also AD Mayenne, 227W22, mayors of Ambrières, Chantigné, Signé et Saint Loup du Gass to the commandant in charge of POW services, [n.d.].

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>97</sup> AD Loiret, 11R14, prefect of the Loiret to the mayors of the department, 5 May 1941.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>98</sup> AD Yonne, 1W655, Inspector for the French forestry department to prefect of the Yonne, 17 June 1941.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>100</sup> Billig, 'Rôle des prisonniers de guerre', p. 58.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>101</sup> Pearson, 'The Age of Wood', p.781.

Due to the difference in price the forestry industry was reluctant to use CPOWs unless their demands to bring down the cost of CPOW labour were met. They suggested that the employer would pay ten francs for salary and ten francs for food per workday; that the government pay any additional costs for food and installing camps; and most importantly that the guards would ensure prisoners worked for eight hours at a normal speed, and any output over the average would be paid at the normal local rate. Five employers stopped using CPOW labour. There is no indication that anything was done to meet their demands. Of all the complaints, lack of productivity was the worst. To reduce complaints Vichy subsidised the farmers whose CPOW labour did not outweigh cost of the CPOWs' food and salary paid. 103

Eventually local authorities also complained about the ever-changing rules. The mayor of Chatelain insisted his commune could not employ, feed and pay seventeen prisoners, especially as no farmer had requested a prisoner, and their work 'was not worth a salary higher than their food. The mayor of Cossé also felt his commune was unable to absorb twelve prisoners and their two German guards. The prefect of the Nièvre wrote to Scapini saying that while many farmers appreciated the CPOWs' work, difficulties obtaining supplies made them hesitate to employ more. In November he repeated the arguments: due to the costs, the communes and individuals show little enthusiasm in employing this labour. The coloured prisoners, despite their eagerness, are often unskilled and their productivity is generally low. The prefect of the Yonne wrote to the commander of the Frontstalag requesting the removal of the CPOWs from the area, as they did not have enough work for them. He requested the CPOWs be assigned to the French forestry department.

Bringing CPOWs onto French farms and into French businesses created a three-way interaction between CPOWs, French people and the German authorities. In the summer of 1940 most French towns were eager for CPOW labour unskilled as it was. As noted, many thought the CPOWs would only be there for the summer and no

103 Mabon, 'Indigènes', p. 65.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>102</sup> AD Yonne, 1W655, French forestry department inspector to prefect of the Yonne, 24 May 1941.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>104</sup> AD Mayenne, 227W6, mayor of Chatelain to the prefect of Mayenne, [n.d.].

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>105</sup> AD Mayenne, 227W6, mayor of Cosmes to the prefect of Mayenne, 21 March 1941.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>106</sup> AD Nièvre, 137W 127, Sadon to Scapini, 9 August 1941.

AD Nièvre, 137W 128, Sadon, monthly report, 4 November 1941.

AD Yonne, 1W644, prefect of the Yonne to Commandant of Frontstalag 124, 29 September 1941.

continued obligations were implied. As the occupation continued, resistance against this labour force increased. It would be unhelpful to attribute this to simple racism, despite a few local figures who would have preferred French prisoners. The growing dissatisfaction with CPOW labour was inherently linked to the demands made by the German authorities, which not only increased costs but also placed individuals at risk if their prisoner escaped.

The above evidence shows two different levels of French and CPOW interaction. First was on a local and individual level between small farmers and their prisoners, where relations were generally good. Second, when salaries entered the equation, it was on an economic level between businesses, or town governments, and large groups of prisoners that they hired or had forced upon them. In the first instance, peasant farmers and poor households viewed feeding CPOWs as a humanitarian gesture. At this level, they extended the solidarity with French POWs to CPOWs, who had also fought for France. The CPOWs could thus be included in the solidarity of defeat and occupation. In the latter case, injecting salaried work - especially when paid labour was not necessarily the norm, altered the equation. Feeding the CPOWs was generally acceptable but salary often appeared to be an unjustified extra. Many family farms were not used to hiring labour or to a large income in cash. It was the absence of the men that made them abnormally reliant on hired labour. Productivity and a return on the investment became the dominant consideration. For logging companies, the question was simple economics: how much did it cost to use CPOW labour and what did they make out of it. Yet the motive of solidarity never entirely disappeared, despite the lengthening war. The French towns and villages were in a more difficult position. On the one hand, they had budgets that needed to be respected and less and less money. On the other, they were not unsympathetic to the plight of the CPOWs.

#### **Work Camps**

Eventually, the Germans agreed that the CPOWs were travelling too far. Instead of sending individual CPOWs to farms, in 1942, unlike 1941, the local authorities were enjoined to provide directly for contingents that would go straight to

smaller work groups.<sup>110</sup> Most French work groups had between twenty and 200 CPOWs.<sup>111</sup> One of the largest camps in the Marne had 600 CPOWs.<sup>112</sup>

Unsurprisingly, after some debate, the cost for these smaller work camps was imposed on the French. This entailed cleaning and repairing the site, adding security to the doors and windows, installing electricity and heating in the rooms, supplying beds and linens, as well as sanitation supplies. In the spring of 1942 the Yonne had twenty-five camps for its agricultural services and planned to build seventeen more. One exception was when the *Administration Française des Forêts* requested that a camp be built in the Gironde to remove burnt pine trees between le Temple and Le Las. The German authorities paid two thirds of the costs. Technically, the employers were to pay for the CPOWs' lodgings. However, as seen, many towns became the *de facto* employers. As a result, the Secretary of State for War's exceptional budget was used to subsidise costs that outweighed the CPOWs' economic contribution.

Despite the increased pressure and expense, some communities went beyond their responsibilities for the CPOWs. Whereas, CPOWs normally returned to their Frontstalag during the winter, the mayor of Dollot (Yonne) asked if the CPOWs could remain with their employers as their regular camp was uncomfortable. Farmers in Nitry, Montrel and Vernenton were instructed to house their CPOWs throughout the winter of 1941-1942 even without a salary while the Frontstalag decided how to proceed. Proceed.

Eventually communes and towns were forced to accept prisoner labour. In April 1942 three mayors in the Yonne attempted, unsuccessfully, to refuse the CPOWs. The prefect told the sous-prefect of Avallon to ensure the mayors placed

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>110</sup> AD Yonne, 1W655, Directeur des Services Agricoles to prefect of the Yonne, 27 February 1942.

AD Ardennes, 1W146, L. Bonnaud-Delamare to prefect of the Ardennes, 21 January 1942; see also AD Vienne, 1J746, Letter to General Massiet, *Amitiés Africaines*, 29 May 1941.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>112</sup> AD Marne, Reims, 6W R819, Chief of the distribution centre for prisoners in Chaumont to Popelin, 5 May 1942.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>113</sup> AD Ardennes, 1W145, Jean Brunet to the prefects, 12 May 1941; see also AD Yonne, 1W655, prefect of the Yonne to mayor of Gisy-les-Nobles, 28 February 1942; AD Yonne, 1W655, sous-prefect Avallon to prefect of the Yonne, 15 March 1941.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>114</sup> AD Mayenne, 227W6, mayor of Ballots to the prefect of Mayenne, 2 April 1942.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>115</sup> AD Yonne, 1W655, Direction des Services Agricoles, List of POW camps, 14 April 1942.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>116</sup> AD Gironde, 45W15, Chef de l'Administation militare régionale to prefect of Gironde, 26 August 1941.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>117</sup> AD Somme, 26W401, Secretary of State for Finance to prefect of the Somme, 5 August 1942.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>118</sup> AD Yonne, 1W652, prefect of the Yonne to Feldkommandantur 509, 3 December 1941.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>119</sup> AD Yonne, 1W652, Feldkommandantur to Directeur des Services Agricoles, 6 October 1941.

CPOWs, as in previous years, with interested farmers. Some accepted prisoners for the harvest, assuming they would leave afterward. The Mayor of Saint-Agnan explained that, by patriotism as much as by humanitarianism, my farmers bravely accepted this burden but could we not now pass these prisoners along to other nearby communes where agriculture is more important and farmers more numerous? These requests were refused. The prefect of the Yonne was forced to write to the mayors of Joux la Ville, Sacy, Brimault, Thury, Sainpuits, Sainte-Colombe sur Loing and Cruzy-le-Chatel, explaining that they could not refuse their designated CPOWs and that they must make use of them as best suited their town and the greater good.

### Work and French prisoners in Germany

How did the work performed and the labour regime of the CPOWs compare with the allied POWs in Germany? The allied POWs in Germany were primarily a labour source. Work groups varied in size from one prisoner to 1,000. Their conditions could be just as diverse. Prisoners working on German farms and vineyards, like around Stalag XIID near Neumagen, ate with their employers, as in France. However, many others worked in more difficult jobs, for example, in mines, cement or armament factories, often under bad conditions. Unlike the CPOWs, prisoners working at Magdebourg, Germany, worked ten-hour days, commuted two hours by train to work, were badly treated by the German guards and had no leisure activities. It in contrast to the CPOWs who felt integrated into French life, Durand notes that French prisoners working on commandos often spent all their time walking to work, or at work, leaving them feeling marginalised.

As mentioned, the full German war economy put pressure on the prisoners. In April 1941, the German Minister for Labour issued a detailed report criticizing the

<sup>120</sup> AD Yonne, 1W655, prefect of the Yonne to sous-prefect of Avallon, 21 April 1942.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>121</sup> AD Yonne, 1W652, mayor of Saint-Agnan to the sous-prefect of Yonne, 20 May 1941.

<sup>122</sup> AD Yonne, 1W652, prefect of Yonne to the mayors of Joux la Ville, Sacy and Brimault, 2 May 1941; see other examples AD Mayenne, 227W6, mayor of Fourgerolles-du-Plessis to Jacques-Félix Bussière, 18 March 1941; AD Mayenne, 227W6, mayor of Fromentières to Bussière, 24 March 1941;

AD Mayenne, 227W6, mayor of Gesvres to Bussière, 18 March 1941.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>123</sup> Scheck, French Colonial Soldiers, p. 427.

<sup>124</sup> Durand, Vie quotidienne, p. 71.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid., p. 70; AD Vienne, 1566W2, Engineer in Chief, report on work done by POWs, 28 April 1941.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>126</sup> Durand, p. 69, 73; Mackenzie, 'Treatment', p. 500.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>127</sup> Durand, p. 68.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>128</sup> Ibid., p. 68.

use of POW labour for non-essential projects such as building private gardens, while acknowledging that low productivity meant prisoner labour slowed the urgent nature of the war economy. He argued that POWs were only to be used for essential 'war work' or agriculture and mining.<sup>129</sup> By December 1942 French prisoners in Germany were moved out of the agricultural sector and into industrial ones.<sup>130</sup> Many German employers, like the French, complained about the low productivity levels of their prisoners. By April 1942, Fritz Sauckel, in charge of German labour needs, wanted prisoners treated and fed to maximum their efficiency while reducing the associated costs.<sup>131</sup> Conditions only worsened over time. By 1943, over one million non-Soviet prisoners were working for the war effort.<sup>132</sup>

Despite the strenuous nature of POW work, most prisoners sought to work outside the camps. As in France, working outside camps allowed prisoners the opportunity to obtain extra food, especially for those prisoners working on farms. British prisoners in Germany were also able to purchase or receive food from the local population. Australian prisoners in Germany reported better conditions when working outside the camps since they could obtain extra rations or more easily escape. 134

Germany offered French prisoners the option of signing a civilian contract and leaving captivity in exchange for the right to return home on leave. This was originally Scapini's idea. He proposed that in exchange, France would return any prisoners who broke their contracts. Offering the return of escaped prisoners revealed Vichy's willingness to move into the darker side of collaboration as early as March 1941. The CPOWs, due to their internment in France, were temporarily protected from these measures. While Polish prisoners were converted *en masse*, white French workers were offered this opportunity. Once prisoners were converted to civilians they lost their Geneva Convention protections. Worse, as Mackenzie points out, they moved from a somewhat protected Wehrmacht custody to that of the

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>129</sup>BA-MA, RW6/270, Dr Syrup, transcript from the Minister of Labour, 26 April 1941.

<sup>130</sup> Durand, Captivité, p. 114.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>131</sup> Mackenzie, 'Treatment', p. 499.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>132</sup> Ibid., p. 500.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>133</sup> Wylie, Barbed Wire Diplomacy, p. 95.

Peter Monteath, 'Australian POWs in German Captivity in the Second World War', *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, lv, no. 3 (2008), p. 425.

<sup>135</sup> SHD, 2P63, meeting between Dupuy and Scapini, 14 March 1941.

Gestapo.<sup>136</sup> This system was so advantageous for the Germans that they recalled 300,000 Dutch prisoners on captivity leave.<sup>137</sup> They simultaneously increased pressure on the French *relève*.<sup>138</sup> Even when CPOWs were placed under French supervision, working directly for the Germans, they were not under direct Gestapo control. No CPOWs were forced into the *Service du Travail Obligatoire* like their metropolitan counterparts were.<sup>139</sup>

Work was strenuous for prisoners in Germany as in France. Conditions depended on the type of work required. However, as seen with the camp conditions, the simple fact of being in France was a considerable advantage. Work was a welcome change from the boredom associated with captivity and it allowed prisoners to earn wages. CPOWs had another advantage over French POWs as they were paid in French francs. In Germany, prisoners were paid in Lagergeld or camp money that could not be spent outside the Stalags. The CPOWs were also protected from becoming civilian workers in Germany. While both French and German employers sought to obtain the maximum efficiency from their prisoners, the CPOWs were removed, at least in the early years, from the full pressure of the German war economy. The general assumption that colonial prisoners were less effective than the French also provided a level of protection unknown in Germany. While Soviet and other 'racially inferior' prisoners of Nazi Germany were worked to death, CPOWs were not. The Soviet and colonial prisoners were similar in that Germany considered them both to be illegal combatants. However, the result could not have been more different. Additionally, the French prisoners in Germany did not benefit, as CPOWs did, from the local prefect's interest and protection. Work placed the CPOWs in direct contact with the French civilian population. They spoke the same language and fought on the same side during the war. These contacts, as detailed in chapter nine, were essential for all prisoners hoping to escape captivity. This reveals the last advantage for captivity in France. Escaping CPOWs had shorter distances to walk to reach the Unoccupied Zone.

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>136</sup> Mackenzie, 'Treatment', p. 501.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>138</sup> In 1942, the *réleve* recruited French skilled and unskilled labour for Germany by promising the return of a French prisoner for every three workers sent to Germany. It created widespread discontent and pushed many Frenchmen towards resistance.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>139</sup> Martin Thomas, 'French Colonial Prisoners of War', p. 667.

Who benefited from CPOW labour? The German argument that CPOWs were working for France's benefit was disingenuous. Both France and Germany depended heavily on the revival of the French economy. Germany purchased heavily from French agriculture. The exchange rate set by the occupying authorities gave the Germans huge purchasing power and depleted the French treasury. By 1944 German grain purchases had increased from six to eight million quintals, and meat purchases had doubled to 270,000 tons. 140 The occupation costs were crippling France. Conditions worsened as the occupation continued. While generally local farmers and small businesses were initially pleased with the CPOW labour, they became increasingly disillusioned with the situation. Responding to a sense of solidarity farmers and local employers were willing to feed, and sometimes even house, CPOWs, although some would have preferred to support white prisoners instead. The increasing rules and expenses changed the equation from solidarity to a business decision. The CPOWs cost more than they could deliver. Once the full cost of CPOW labour, food, housing, and salary, was revealed, employers were stuck with their prisoners. Technically the French farmers benefited from this labour. However, the obligation to pay for unnecessary labour meant the German authorities benefited more than the French. Their prisoners were supervised and kept busy with minimum German intervention and infrastructure. Through this system, the Germans could address Vichy's concerns on how the missing prisoners affected the labour pool. Instead of returning French prisoners, Germany provided the CPOWs. It allowed Germany to keep the 'better' workers in its own economy while simultaneously showing their generosity towards France. Providing workers for the French economy was the German contribution to collaboration. As always, this collaboration benefited Germany more than Vichy. The CPOWs were the unexpected beneficiaries of this policy. Difficult labour conditions were normal for prisoners. At least in France some of their employers saw them as more than just workers and felt some responsibility for their conditions.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>140</sup> Paxton, Vichy France, p. 144.

# Chapter five

## 'Colonial maladies': health and sickness among CPOWs

Given the presence of 80,000 CPOWs from warm or tropical climes on French soil, ill-health was a particular source of vulnerability to the men and of concern to Vichy. Perhaps more than anything it tested Vichy's paternalism and level of control over the lives of its colonial soldiers in enemy captivity. The harsh climate, insufficient food, and imperfect sanitary conditions left the CPOWs susceptible to disease. For at least three reasons the German authorities feared CPOWs' illness: expense, contagion and racist assumptions. The German guards' often limited experience with colonial troops combined with racist ideas on 'primitive diseases' facilitated the release of sick CPOWs. French doctors encouraged exaggeration or subterfuge to obtain medical releases for CPOWs. Inaccurate and contradictory statistics fuelled fears that tuberculosis had devastated the CPOW population and prompted Vichy's renewed efforts to have the CPOWs released. Two major factors influenced the CPOWs' health: treatment in the *Frontstalags* and vulnerability to disease exacerbated by captivity. Vichy could not control the former and could only react to the latter.

#### Death and physical violence to CPOWs

Violence against prisoners was not a new phenomenon. As seen, during the Great War huge propaganda campaigns showed the barbarity of the opponents' treatment of prisoners. German soldiers in France during the Second World War attempted to prove their civility through good behaviour. This did not reduce the lasting effect of violence towards CPOWs on the CPOWs themselves, on popular memory and on historians. Violence and even murder occurred in the *Frontstalags*. Some of these attacks were racially motivated; others appear to be in response to some perceived wrongdoing by the victim, like trying to escape or fraternising with French women. The guards' attitudes towards the prisoners depended on factors such as the age of the guard, the nationality of the prisoner, and whether the CPOW was, in the eyes of the guard, overstepping his position as a 'native'. Tayeb was killed

Another prisoner was shot for ignoring orders and giving water to passing French prisoners. Some guards, like Speith, were noted as particularly dangerous and not always mentally stable. These incidents of violence appeared to have been the exception. There is nothing in the sources to indicate a climate of insecurity in the *Frontstalags*. The intertwining of the occupation forces and the French population meant that widespread violence in the *Frontstalags* could not go unnoticed. Doctors and other prisoners, like the *homme de confiance* in Tayeb's murder, who witnessed these incidents felt confident enough to refuse to corroborate purposefully inaccurate reports. This suggests prisoners maintained some level of agency within the camps.

Nevertheless, the German camp guards were popularly remembered as violent racists. The *Frontstalag* administration, like any organisation, had good and bad members. Leaders, German or French, good or bad, were decisive in influencing the CPOWs' experience. Some, like the commanders at Bordeaux and Epinal, were conscious of their responsibility in running a *Frontstalag*, and worked to improve the conditions, which directly impacted on prisoner health. Anderson and Senaud of the YMCA reported that Epinal:

is the first camp where we have seen practical work on such a large scale. [E] verything has been provided to occupy the prisoners and improve their lot. If the results are not yet apparent, they will not take long to appear. The camp commander, who took these initiatives, deserves the highest praise. We encourage others to imitate his work.<sup>2</sup>

Camp commanders had the most influence on the overall running of the camps, but guards could negatively or positively shape prisoners' daily lives. The German occupying forces were under strict instruction to behave well in France. Mackenzie explained that the German guards only treated those prisoners deemed worthy of respect well.<sup>3</sup> Michel Gnimagnon reported that 'over time the German discipline lessened. The camp commander, who had been a prisoner of the French during the other war and who had been treated with humanity, gives us leeway.' With German

<sup>1</sup> See chapter six, p. 175.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> AN, F/9/2351, Paul Anderson and Auguste Senaud, report of YMCA visits to POW camps in Occupied France, 6 April 1941.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> Mackenzie, Colditz Myth, p. 109.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> SHD, 14P46, Michel Gnimagnon, captivity report, 7 February 1941.

difficulties on the Eastern front, the younger guards were replaced with older or injured ones who were generally less prone to fanaticism.<sup>5</sup>

Complaints about conditions affecting the prisoner health ran the gamut from administrative difficulties to cruelty. At Bulgose an internal dispute between the commander and the interpreter meant that the Red Cross requests that CPOWs not carry heavy loads on their shoulders was never conveyed to the camp commander. Mrs. Henri Duhau, an inspector for camps in the southwest, complained that at Lue and Ychoux, French prisoners were unable to serve as intermediaries between the Germans and the CPOWs. Toure Vamoutari maintained that 'he could not complain too much about the Germans, who, according to him, were extremely severe, intolerant of any infringement of the rules, but who did show a certain fairness. Michel Gnimagnon was interned in several camps:

In Rambervillers, we experienced misery unlike anything before. The discipline was austere: roll calls followed roll calls that lasted all day, searches followed searches; threats followed threats. [At Epinal] life was better than in all the other camps in which we stayed. Without being well, which is incompatible with a prisoner's life, we had the minimum necessary to survive. The discipline, without being relaxed, was without austerity.<sup>9</sup>

CPOWs commonly complained about the strict German discipline and excessive punishments. There were, moreover, acts of great violence committed against CPOWs.

Acts of arbitrary cruelty towards the CPOWs shocked them and white prisoners alike, and were often reported to the Vichy authorities after release. Sergeant-Major Fillet remembered the guards at Troyes treated the French decently, but mistreated the CPOWs, especially the black prisoners. Oumar Diallo echoed Fillet's observations but felt the Moroccans suffered the most. CPOWs were more likely to be shot than French prisoners. Often, CPOWs were killed for an alleged

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> Durand, Vie quotidienne, p. 230.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> AN, F/9/2351, CRF, report on camp visits in the Landes, 15 October 1941.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> SHD, 2P65, Mrs Henri Dehau, observations from various POW camps, [n.d. but attached to a protocol dated 4 November 1941].

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup> ANS, 2D23/28, telegram, P. Chasseriaud and H. Dechamps to Boisson, 24 May 1941; for another example see ANS, 2D23/28, Beraud to the Governor of Senegal, 28 May 1941.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup> SHD, 14P46, Gnimagnon, captivity report, 7 February 1941.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>10</sup> SHD, 14P17, Adjutant Fillet, report on his capture by the Germans, detention and escape, [n.d.].

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>11</sup> ANS, 2D23/28, Creuse to the Governor of Senegal, 13 September 1941.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>12</sup> AN, 72/AJ/291, Paul Mansire, captivity report, June 1940 to January 1941.

crime, for example, giving water to French prisoners against orders, <sup>13</sup> or for having an 'incorrect' attitude. <sup>14</sup> A released Senegalese prisoner reported that in Germany, 'the slightest hesitation in completing a task was punished by death (the prisoner actually said "slaughtered like a chicken"). <sup>15</sup> The most common excuse for violence was that the CPOW was attempting to escape. In one case, at least, the violence was due to one man: officer Speith. He was 'a real brute, and not always sane. He would not hesitate to kick or use his cane to hit French or native prisoners for futile reasons. In January, this officer shot a North African prisoner with a revolver during roll call. <sup>16</sup>

Arbitrary death by shooting or physical mistreatment by guards were the most immediate perils to health. Escapes were most often used to cover up a violent overreaction. The French prisoner Marcel Guillot reported that 'my friends and I were never treated badly. However, I saw a guard kill, without pity, a prisoner attempting to escape.' Even if a CPOW were escaping the Geneva Convention only allowed disciplinary action if recaptured. Gnimagnon recalled that recaptured prisoners were imprisoned while waiting judgement, only those caught in the act of escaping were killed. Despite the sixty escapes over eighteen months, there were no reprisals on the CPOWs remaining in the work group at Saucats. The ICRC reported that the prisoners were treated well and there had only been one death.

Vichy was aware of acts of violence committed against its CPOWs. This suggests the violence was limited enough to continue to shock its witnesses. Three murders occupied at Frontstalag 194 and its work groups. Kadour Ben Mohammed was shot in the chest, while sitting on his bed explaining that he was too sick to work. He died immediately after an operation. The second prisoner, Abdelam-Ben-Safhili was killed reportedly because he was fighting with another prisoner and the German guard fired to separate them. He died at the hospital. The prefect of the

<sup>13</sup> AN, F/1a/3780, information from a recently escaped Muslim soldier from Douar Key, August 1943.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>14</sup> SHD, 3H257, General Vergez to Général d'Armée, Ministry secretary of State for war, 7 October 1940.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>15</sup> ANS, 2D23/28, information from an occasional native informant, 17 September 1941.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>16</sup> SHD, 34N1081, Sergeant Jacques Boyer, addendum to escape report, 15 April 1941.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>17</sup> SHD, 2P88, Faure, report based on information from the escaped prisoner Marcel Guillet, 20 January 1941.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>18</sup> Articles 50 and 51, Convention relative to the Treatment of Prisoners of War, Geneva, 27 July 1929; see appendix B, p. 288.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>19</sup> SHD, 14P46, Gnimagnon, captivity report, 7 February 1941.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>20</sup> AN, F/9/2351, Schirmer and Morsier, ICRC, visit to work camp Saucats at *Frontstalag* 221, 26 October 1942.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>21</sup> SHD, 2P72, medical report, [n.d.].

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>22</sup> SHD, 2P72, medical report, 19 September 1942.

department of Meurthe-et-Moselle protested immediately and informed Scapini when a third, unknown Senegalese, prisoner was shot on a work group.<sup>23</sup> He held funerals for all three men.<sup>24</sup> The CPOWs and French reactions to the violence show that it was not the norm. Had it been, guards would not have felt obligated to explain to give explanations, even ones easily contradicted by the physical evidence, to justify the violence. Those who liked violence, like Speith, remained the minority. However, guards in the *Frontstalags* did sometimes react with more violence than a situation warranted, like when CPOWs did not immediately comply with an order or refused to work without appropriate clothes.<sup>25</sup>

French doctors were often called to attend the wounded. Ben Kadour only died after an operation and the medical officers reported the Speith's violence. In the Chaumont *Frontstalag*, when a CPOW died the doctor placed an announcement in the local paper, and about thirty people attended the funerals.<sup>26</sup> The relationship between the local communities and the camps was intertwined. Funerals were not authorized in all camps. In Epinal only religious funerals held in the local church were permitted for civilians and prisoners.<sup>27</sup> The only doctor at Bulgose was forbidden from viewing the body of a CPOW who was shot either during an escape, as the Germans claimed, or after having surrendered, as several CPOW witnessed.<sup>28</sup> This suggests that, generally, the French were aware of the murders, and that the Germans did not feel the need to hide them. Besson reported to Scapini that Nia Kouei had been killed for refusing to obey an order:

Most of these cases where the prisoner was killed should have required a Court Marshal and not summary execution and nothing can justify a guard firing on unarmed men. I would be obliged if you could intervene with the German Authorities to ensure measures at taken to ensure this kind of event does not happen again, and, if you agree, that the prisoners' families receive some kind of financial compensation.<sup>29</sup>

It seems unlikely that the German government would pay the family of a colonial soldier for a death they would claim was provoked. Cynically viewed,

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>23</sup> SHD, 2P72, De Brinon to the chef du gouvernement, DSA, 25 October 1942.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>24</sup> AN, F/1a/3650, prefect of the Meuse to Scapini, 10 April 1942.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>25</sup> AN, F/9/2351, prefect of the Meuse to Scapini, 6 May 1942.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>26</sup> AN, F/9/2351, Mission Brault in the Eastern Region, 27 October to 9 November 1941.

Ibid.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>28</sup> SHD, 34N1081, Jean Guérin, liberation report, 22 December 1941.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>29</sup> SHD, 2P72, Besson to Scapini, 12 May 1942.

protesting cost Vichy nothing and contributed to the illusion of protecting their colonial subjects. Besson's request was in a letter to Scapini and could reflect a real desire to stop the violence or to place the responsibility on Scapini's services and not his own. The DSPG requested that the SDPG investigate the murder of two Moroccan CPOWs at Nancy or at least complain to the German authorities. However, no official record was found of the success of these complaints. While the majority of CPOWs were not abused or killed by their German guards the image and reminders of unprovoked brutality lingered. Overall, diseases were much more devastating for the overall CPOW population.

### Health in the Frontstalags

The CPOWs' health was the greatest concern for both the CPOWs and Vichy, though for different reasons. Close quarters, less than ideal sanitary conditions and the harsh climate put the CPOWs at risk of contagious diseases. Vichy feared these might spread to the local population and hoped illness would provide an opportunity to obtain the release of CPOWs hitherto refused. Vichy repeatedly insisted to the Germans that releasing all CPOWs was the only way to protect their health. The Germans consistently refused a mass release of CPOWs. Nevertheless, the fear of contagious diseases, like tuberculosis, allowed sick CPOWs to be set free on humanitarian grounds. This decision remained in German hands.

Tropical diseases could be particularly frightening, especially for officials with limited experience of them. Colonial illnesses included sleeping sickness, yellow fever, malaria, typhoid, cholera, bubonic plague and leprosy. Yellow fever, for example, had 'terrifying symptoms that cause panic: jaundice, high fever, internal haemorrhage and vomiting of black blood.' Outbreaks in the colonies affected both Europeans and colonial 'natives', but the stereotypes of 'native hygiene' informed public opinion. The French in Senegal believed the 'natives' were 'natural targets' for disease and thus posed a risk for the European settlers, unless, of course, they adopted French civilisation and ideas of progress. Martin Thomas argues that these views remained common during the interwar period. The high rates of illness found among

30 SHD, 2P72, Dupuis, note for the DSPG, 4 November 1942.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>31</sup> Kalala Ngalamulume, 'Keeping the City Totally Clean: Yellow Fever and the Politics of Prevention in Colonial Saint- Louis-du-Sénégal', in *The Journal of African History*, xlv, no. 2 (2004), p. 186. <sup>32</sup> Ibid., p. 191.

North Africans was often explained by their 'moral degeneracy, criminality and cultural primitivism' and not their over-crowded and unsanitary living conditions.<sup>33</sup> The main French specialist centres for tropical illnesses were in Fréjus, and in Marseilles, where the Ecole du Pharo was an important research centre for tropical diseases.<sup>34</sup>

Historians, like Nancy Lawler, have long cited German fear of colonial diseases as a contributing factor to the CPOWs' internment in France instead of Germany. Already in the late nineteenth century some German doctors believed that tropical diseases could have a lasting, degenerative effect on the German race. Other German doctors believed that combating these diseases was the key to successful German colonisation. German scientists found a cure for sleeping sickness in 1922, but having lost their colonies could not take advantage of the medical advances. German interest in tropical diseases continued. In November 1940 construction began for a hospital at Saint-Médard for CPOWs. This hospital contained a special section for training German doctors in tropical diseases. This section was closed to French inspectors and used for medical experiments on CPOWs. These experiments ranged from simple studies on tropical diseases to more sinister medical experiments designed to prove racial differences, including injecting CPOWs with antibodies from other races to observe the effects.

The CPOWs brought their susceptibility to disease from all over the world, different climates and backgrounds. Seven cases of leprosy, and three or four cases of trachoma, an easily treated disease that often led to blindness when ignored, were recorded at Epinal. <sup>41</sup> CPOWs also suffered from syphilis, <sup>42</sup> chills and dysentery, <sup>43</sup> fevers, <sup>44</sup> bronchopneumonia, and bronchitis. <sup>45</sup> The hospital at Bayonne-Angelet

<sup>33</sup> Thomas, 'French Colonial Prisoners of War', p. 682.

35 Lawler, Soldiers of Misfortune, pp 104.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>34</sup> Hélène Berlan and Etienne Thévenin, *Médecins et société en France: du XVIe siècle à nos jours* (Toulouse: Editions Privat, 2005), p. 143.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>36</sup> Sílvio Marcus de Souza Correa, 'O "combate" às doenças tropicais na imprensa colonial alemã in *Hist. cienc. saude-Manguinhos*, translated by Derrick Guy Phillips, xx, no.1, (March 2013) p. 69.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid. p. 86

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>38</sup> AD Gironde, 45W82, Chef de l'administration militaire régionale Bordeaux to prefect of Gironde, 22 November 1940.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>39</sup> Scheck, *French Colonial Soldiers*, p. 249.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>40</sup> Ibid., pp 249-251.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>41</sup> AN, F/9/2351, Marti and De Morsier, ICRC visit to Epinal, [n.d.].

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>42</sup> AN, F/9/2351, Bonnaud, Camp visit, 21 April 1941.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>43</sup> AN, F/9/2963, report on Ambroise POW camp, 23 January 1941.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>44</sup> AN, F/9/2963, DSPG, report on Chalons sur Marne POW camp, 6 January 1941. <sup>45</sup> AN, F/9/2963, DSPG, report on Angoulême POW camp, 13-15 January 1941.

requested more quinine, suggesting that some CPOWs had Malaria.<sup>46</sup> Malaria was, and remains, one of the deadliest diseases in the tropics, killing both Europeans and 'natives'. Malaria death rates were high throughout the nineteenth century until quinine was regularly used as a prophylactic. Quinine use in France was not universal until after the Second World War but had been a controversial cure in Algeria since the 1830s.<sup>47</sup>

Tuberculosis was the most prevalent malady among the CPOWs and a contemporary scourge. Prior to the Great War, tuberculosis was seen as a private and embarrassing illness, which was too costly to prevent. Once French soldiers were sent home from the war with tuberculosis three major changes came about: exsoldiers gained the right to proper treatment, the sick had access to sanatoriums, and the government financed an anti-tuberculosis campaign. The number of cases of pulmonary infections and tuberculosis in French West Africa increased in both 1919 and 1945, probably corresponding with the soldiers' return. Since diseases spread in over-crowded areas with limited sanitation, the *Frontstalags* were ideal breeding grounds.

Despite medical progress, stereotypes of colonial soldiers and tropical disease even influenced the medical opinions. The CPOWs were blamed for their illnesses. Doctor Lacaze argued in his doctoral dissertation that 'not only will [the native] not defend himself, but often, unconsciously, he courts trouble; he has no idea what precautions to take for the cold.'52 These racist ideas were often combined with sincere fears that the CPOWs refused to take care of themselves when sick. Competing theories sought to explain why one group of CPOWs was more susceptible to disease than another. West African prisoners were believed to be more susceptible to tuberculosis than North Africans. This was proved untrue by a week of x-rays at Montargis. The North African prisoners had the highest infection rates with

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>46</sup> AN, F/9/2351, DSPG, report on the Bayonne-Anglet POW camp, 23 January 1941.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>47</sup> William B. Cohen, 'Malaria and French Imperialism' in *The Journal of African History*, xxiv, no. 1 (1983), pp 23, 26.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>48</sup> AN, F/9/2351, René Scapini, visit to Hospital at Orléans, 8 January 1943.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>49</sup> Pierre Guillaume, *Du Désespoire au salut: les tuberculeux aux 19e et 20e siècles* (Paris: Aubier, 1986), p. 180.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>50</sup> Ibid., p. 180.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>51</sup> Echenberg, Colonial Conscripts, p.152.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>52</sup> Marcel-Eugène Lacaze, *La Guerre européenne et le Tirailleur Sénégalais*, Doctoral thesis in medicine defended 7 May 1920 at the Faculté de Médecine de Bordeaux cited in Michel, *l'Appel à l'Afrique*, p. 199.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>53</sup> Thomas, 'Prisonniers de guerre coloniaux français', p. 328.

11.4 per cent while 8.6 per cent of both white and black prisoners were infected.<sup>54</sup> However, prisoners from sub-Saharan Africa were said to be more likely to have a quickly developing active infection.

As early as December 1940, Besson and Scapini informed the French and German authorities about the CPOWs' vulnerability to tuberculosis, arguing that many CPOWs died soon after the disease was detected.<sup>55</sup> ICRC reports confirmed the acute nature of the tuberculosis, which evolved quickly and was often fatal to CPOWs. <sup>56</sup> As Prime Minister, Darlan wanted all Malagasy prisoners repatriated as he believed seventy per cent of them were infected by tuberculosis.<sup>57</sup> The SDPG refused to convey this request to the Germans since releasing only the Malagasy might create tensions among the other races in the camps.<sup>58</sup> By 1943, French sources also claimed eighty to ninety per cent of CPOWs in transit camps suffered from tuberculosis, which was nearly always fatal.<sup>59</sup>

Restricting the spread of tropical diseases was a priority for Vichy. 60 In the Frontstalags, doctors, dentists and other health specialists were recruited from among the prisoners to serve the CPOWs. The Germans released some nurses from the POW camps upon request from their hospitals. 61 The rest were kept in the camps to care for prisoners. Generally French army doctors ministered to the CPOWs with colonial assistants. 62 The Germans also strictly regulated the doctors' access to the CPOWs. Dr Guérin was

limited to examining and treating prisoners during the daily health visit and the sick in the infirmary. I was never authorised to verify if the rules for proper hygiene in the housing or food preparation were respected. I was only allowed in the infirmary and always escorted by a German guard who ensured

<sup>56</sup> AN, F/9/2351, Schirmer and Morsier, visit to *Frontstalag* 153, 22 October 1942.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>54</sup> SHD, 2P74, CRF, report on the systematic x-raying of prisoners in Montargis camp, 15-22 April

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>55</sup> SHD, 2P66, Besson, DSPG summary of activities between 2-15 December 1940, 23 December 1940; Scapini to Tiepelmann, note concerning the coloured troops, 16 December 1940.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>57</sup> SHD, 2P64, Le Gouest, summary of POWs, 5 September 1941.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>58</sup> SHD, 2P64, Vaillaud, Rivet, Bonnot, Bonelli, Roussanne, Le Gouest, Dupuy, Buzenac, summary for prisoners, 17 October 1941.

59 BA-MA, RW34/77, coloured colonial units in France, 1 October 1943.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>60</sup> Martin Thomas, 'French Colonial Prisoners of War', p. 683.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>61</sup> SHD, 31N123, CCPPG, intelligence on Stalag VII/A, 20 July 1940.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>62</sup> SHD, 34N1081, Guérin, liberation report, 22 December 1941.

that I brought nothing for the prisoners and that we only discussed their health.63

When qualified prisoners were unavailable civilian doctors were recruited among the local population and were often unpaid.<sup>64</sup> The German authorities also used French civilian doctors when camp hospitals required additional support to combat excessive mortality. 65 By 1941 the white prisoners who remained in Frontstalags were part of the health services.

Conditions and personnel varied from camp to camp. Frontstalags often contained a basic infirmary. Larger camps were more likely to have medical facilities. There are no overall figures for the ratio of medical staff to CPOWs. Instead we have examples from a few camps. At Airvault, 140 French medical staff cared for 5,500-6,000 CPOWs. At Montargis, three doctors, a dentist and thirty-four medical professionals treated prisoners and installed showers and baths. They had an isolation ward or lazaret under the supervision of a French medical officer specialised in colonial diseases with 150 beds. 66 Approximately 5,000 CPOWs were interned throughout the Landes, near Bordeaux, but only Onesse-Laharie had two French military doctors for 2,000 CPOWs. The surrounding camps had no medical staff and no plans for improvement.<sup>67</sup> Nancy had nineteen doctors in total for the 5,000 prisoners, including ten doctors designated for the work groups.<sup>68</sup> The medical staff had limited access to CPOWs and supplies.

The CPOWs suffered from lack of medical supplies. Some camps, like Bayonne, had none. 69 Those living near major hospitals, like Dijon, were more likely to be in better health. 70 Chartres actually installed their camp hospital in a wing of the local hospital. A German chief medical officer ran it and had everything required for medicine and surgery.<sup>71</sup> Otherwise, seriously ill CPOWs were sent to the closest hospital.<sup>72</sup>

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>64</sup> AN, F/9/2351, DSPG, report on the Bayonne-Anglet POW camp, 23 January 1941; see also AN, F/9/2351, Marti and De Morsier, ICRC visit to Epinal, [n.d.].

<sup>65</sup> Lawler, Soldiers of Misfortune, p. 111.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>66</sup> AN, F/9/2351, ICRC, visit to Montargis, 18 June 1941; Madame Duhau, 'Quelques suggestions au sujet des camps de prisonniers indigènes présentées', 26 May 1941.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>68</sup> AN, F/9/2351, Marti and Morsier, ICRC, Visit to Frontstalag 161 Nancy, 25 June 1941.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>69</sup> AN, F/9/2351, DSPG, report on the Bayonne-Anglet POW camp, 23 January 1941.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>70</sup> AN, F/9/2963, Bigard, report of Camp Dijon-Longvie, 6 January 1941.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>71</sup> AN, F/9/2351, Anderson and Senaud YMCA, visit to *Frontstalags*, 4 February 1941.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>72</sup> SHD, 34N1081, Guérin, liberation report, 22 December 1941.

While French doctors, both military and civilian, treated the CPOWs, Vichy itself had limited access to the sick CPOW and their doctors. As seen, inspectors, when allowed to talk to CPOWs, reported confusing or contradictory information.<sup>73</sup> Camp inspections always contained a note on the CPOWs' basic health. For example, in Airvault, in December 1940, the infirmary was full and there were frequent deaths, yet inspectors were not allowed access to the camp nor allowed to speak with the camp doctor. 74 The next report, a month later, stated that Airvault had 'no epidemics, frequent cases of tuberculosis', and that the health of the Indochinese prisoners was 'deplorable, tuberculosis, dysentery etc.'<sup>75</sup> Doctors at both la Roche sur Yon and Le Mans noticed illness in prisoners transferred from Airvault. 76 Such conditions forced the German authorities to close Airvault in early 1941. 77 Armelle Mabon argues that throughout the Frontstalags vermin were omnipresent, sanitary conditions were mediocre, and the Scapini mission had great difficulty speaking with camp doctors. 78 Sanitary conditions deteriorated as the war progressed. The period immediately after the Armistice, and again in 1944 with the Germans' retreat, prisoners' health was at its worst.<sup>79</sup>

Vichy had to make do with incomplete information in its negotiations with Germany. Ultimately, Vichy did not need totally accurate statistics on illness. Its arguments remained consistent: CPOWs were susceptible to disease, especially in cold climates, and should be released on humanitarian grounds. Lack of new information forced the French to depend on old arguments, like the one for *hivernage*, stating that CPOWs were susceptible to lung diseases due to the harsh climate. <sup>80</sup> The original German response had been to move many CPOWs south of Orléans. <sup>81</sup> Vichy was able to reuse this line of reasoning because despite the move:

the number of sick and dying increases in worrying proportions. The natives, overall, are having difficulties adapting to the conditions that they are forced to endure. They frequently get tuberculosis and even though our climate is

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<sup>73</sup> See chapter three, p. 81.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>74</sup> AN, F/9/2963, report on Airvault POW camp, 30 December 1940.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>75</sup> AN, F/9/2963, report on Airvault POW camp, 23 January 1941.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>76</sup> AN, F/9/2963, Bigard, reports on La Roche sur Yon and Le Mans, 6 January 1941.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>77</sup> Scheck, French Colonial Soldiers, p. 245.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>78</sup> Mabon, 'Indigènes', p. 58.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>79</sup> Durand, Vie quotidienne, p. 169.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>80</sup> Echenberg, Colonial Conscripts, p. 97.

<sup>81</sup> Chapter seven, p. 188.

milder than that in Germany it is not sufficient to stop this illness that develops very quickly.<sup>82</sup>

Multiple sources recorded the high numbers of CPOWs with lung disease which increased the efficacy of the argument. The YMCA noticed many CPOWs with tuberculosis at Joigny due to the 'under-nourishment, heavy workload and cold'.<sup>83</sup> The SDPG observed the same in Angoulême where 'the natives suffer from the climatic ravages. Tuberculosis is almost always fatal (four recent deaths).<sup>84</sup>

German ignorance and fear of colonial illnesses actually helped sick CPOWs. Despite the German authorities constant refusal to release CPOWs as a group, they were surprisingly lax in releasing the sick CPOWs. Writing 'contagious' on the door sufficed to dissuade even the least trusting German doctors from examining the latter. French doctors used the leprosy diagnosis to avoid further scrutiny. Many CPOWs, with the help of French doctors, faked madness, coughing fits, and fasted be released on the grounds of ill-health. Three of the CPOWs from the sample data were released for mental health issues: a nervous breakdown, melancholy and general fatigue. Scheck notes that German indulgence in these releases was difficult to explain, as they were aware that the French authorities exaggerated the extent of illnesses.

The degree of German fear in the face of 'exotic maladies' is shown by the measures taken to control the risk of tuberculosis. Both French and German authorities sought a solution to the tuberculosis problem in the camps. Huntziger informed Scapini that:

Examination done upon arrival in the hospital show that these sick are infected, in about half the cases, with severe lesions that have already spread which are beyond the therapeutic options. Only the systematic examination of all prisoners would allow reveal the prisoners infected by tuberculosis while the lesions are limited and consequently curable.<sup>90</sup>

<sup>82</sup> SHD 2P66, Besson to Scapini, 5 December 1940.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>83</sup> AN, F/9/2351, YMCA report on visits to POW camps, 11 April 1941.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>84</sup> AN, F/9/2963, SDPG, report on Angoulême POW camp, 3 February 1941.

<sup>85</sup> SHD, 34N1081, Guérin, liberation report, 22 December 1941.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>86</sup> Lawler, Soldiers of Misfortune, p. 113.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>87</sup> Echenberg, Colonial Conscripts, p. 97.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>88</sup> Database from ICRC capture cards at the BAVCC, Caen.

<sup>89</sup> Scheck, French Colonial Soldiers, p. 246.

<sup>90</sup> SHD, 2P74, Huntziger to Scapini, 24 March 1941.

The camp commander at Luçon had also requested x-rays for the prisoners as there had been many deaths from tuberculosis but no examinations had been completed.<sup>91</sup>

The French achieved a major diplomatic success when Scapini was able to secure mobile pulmonary x-rays throughout the Occupied Zone, under the auspices of the ICRC and local volunteers. He recalled that:

In Germany we failed to obtain the systematic x-rays. However, in France by focusing on the special vulnerability of indigenous troops, screening [wa]s done on a large enough scale. Seventy-seven thousand men were examined in 440 camps and work groups and more than 12,000 releases granted to natives and North Africans.<sup>92</sup>

Two Red Cross reports (see table 5.2 below) come close to confirming Scapini's claims. The earliest reports of systematic testing in the *Frontstalags* date from April 1941. Between April 1941 and February 1942 over 62,000 CPOWs were tested for tuberculosis, with approximately 11,000 confirmed or suspected cases. An additional undated Red Cross report noted that 25,000 additional prisoners were tested with approximately 3,400 confirmed or suspected cases. Logically camps would be tested more than once which explains the greater number of tests than prisoners. It is significant that practically all CPOWs were given x-ray examinations for tuberculosis. However, this one victory did not signify a change in German attitudes towards tuberculosis specifically, or CPOWs generally. Dr. Bonnaud suggested using the new method developed by Scapini's friend, Dr. Vernes to test the CPOWs. <sup>93</sup> Vernes found that blood tests were successful in early detection of both tuberculosis and syphilis. <sup>94</sup> The German authorities

deemed it unnecessary to use new means of investigation that they themselves do not use in their army. It was indicated that this method would be of great benefit, especially for the natives who often suffer from tuberculosis in an early form, and whose symptoms are not pulmonary. The German authorities have stuck by their decision. <sup>95</sup>

They did not believe CPOWs deserved better medical care than German soldiers. 96

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>91</sup> AN, F/9/2351, Martin and de Morsier, ICRC, visit to Luçon, 29 May 1941.

<sup>92</sup> Scapini, Mission, p. 73.

<sup>93</sup> AN, F/9/2351, Bonnaud, Report of visits, 21 April 1941.

<sup>94</sup> Scheck, French Colonial Soldiers, p. 244.

<sup>95</sup> AN, F/9/2351, Bonnaurd to Vernes, 27 May 1941.

Nevertheless, the mobile screenings provided a quick and relatively accurate examination of large numbers of CPOWs. French and German doctors as well as camp commanders facilitated the efforts. Baroness Mallet visited Montargis, Bourges, Chartres, Châteaudun, Nonant-le-Pin and Le Mans for the early screening. All 1,100 prisoners were examined in a day, at a rate of 100 prisoners per hour. The German authorities facilitated the visits as much as possible and a German interpreter supervised the x-rays. Prisoners were either deemed 'unfit for duty' (Dienst unfähige) or 'not unfit for duty' (noch nicht Dienst unfähige). Suspicious results were marked with a red cross and given to the German medical officer Stabsarzt Honiger after each session. A mixed medical commission saw prisoners who were determined 'unfit' for duty and sent any questionable cases to be x-rayed at the civilian hospital in Montargis. 97 At Morancez, the French doctor selected the prisoners to be released and informed the German doctor of his choice. Releases were quite liberal. 98 All prisoners with a confirmed case of tuberculosis were released. 99 This suggests that the German authorities trusted the French Red Cross' systematic x-rays and used them as a basis for releasing CPOWs.

How widespread was tuberculosis among the CPOWs? The plethora of studies, by the Red Cross and Vichy authorities combined with pre-existing notions of colonial health, led to contradictory evaluations. At the *Frontstalag* Laval it was reported that between fifteen and eighteen per cent of the CPOWs had tuberculosis. In December 1940 the DSPG claimed ten per cent of prisoners had latent tuberculosis. Marc Daniels' warned in 1949 that: 'When one presents statistics of tuberculosis in Europe it is with a feeling that they are better than no information at all, but not much better.' Maintaining the racial terms used by the French Red Cross, below are two tables with the results from the pulmonary x-rays in early 1942.

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>97</sup> SHD, 2P74, CRF, report on systematic x-rays at Montargis POW camp, [n.d.].

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>98</sup> AN, F/9/2351, Schirmer and Morsier, Visit to Frontstalag 153, 22 October 1942.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>99</sup> AN, F/9/2351, CRF, results of systematic x-rays done in the *Frontstalags* between 1 January and 10 February 1942.

Marc Daniels, "Tuberculosis in Europe during and after the Second World War" *British Medical Journal*, ii, no. 4636 (12 November 1949), p. 1065

Journal, ii, no. 4636 (12 November 1949), p. 1065.

101 SHD, 2P78, Dantan-Merlin, summary of inspection reports for Frontstalag 132, 19 June [no year].

102 SHD, 2P66, DSPG, activities between 2-15 December 1940, 26 December 1940.

Daniels, "Tuberculosis in Europe", p. 1065.

Table 5.1: Results of systematic x-rays in the *Frontstalags*, 1 January - 10 February 1942 (source: AN, F/9/2351).

'Race'	Number of x-rays	Total cases of	Percentage of TB		
		suspected and			
		confirmed TB			
White	32	17	53.1		
Algerian	3,497	882	25.2		
Moroccan	2,164	472	21.8		
Tunisian	1,117	263	23.5		
Syrians	1				
'Yellow'	102	23	22.5		
Malagasy	885	219	24.7		
Blacks	2,761	608	22		
Antilles	116	40	24		
Guyannais	2	1	50		
Reunionnais	2	2	100		
French India	1	1	100		
Total	10,730	2,528	23.5		

Table 5.2: Comparison of contemporary statistics on CPOW tuberculosis infection rates.

Examining board	Number of	Total cases of	Percentage of
and date	CPOWs	suspected and	tuberculosis
	tested	confirmed TB	
July 1940 –			14% (estimated) <sup>104</sup>
October 1941			
DSPG, June 1941			70% (estimated) <sup>105</sup>
April – December	51,732	8,685 CPOWs	16.7% (tested) <sup>106</sup>
1941, FRC			
January-February	10,690	2,511 CPOWs	23.5% (tested) <sup>107</sup>
1942, CRF			
Gaston Joseph,		More than half of the	(estimated) <sup>108</sup>
June 1940-August		7,500 CPOWs released	
1942		for illness had TB	
CRF, no date	25,466	3,463 CPOWs	13.6% <sup>109</sup>

Doctor Louis Bazy, writing on the health concerns for repatriated prisoners, also believed that only the Red Cross statistics were credible since they depended on methodical testing. He felt the results were quite pessimistic and that they confirmed that the rates of infections came from the CPOWs and not the local population. Some camps reported that thirty per cent of their CPOWs were infected with tuberculosis, compared to a peacetime rate of one per cent among French civilians. 110 Bazy's conclusion of thirty per cent appears high. The Red Cross published select camp infection rates from their largest examination of over 50,000 prisoners: Montargis and

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>104</sup> AN, F/9/2351, mortality rates for natives in POW camps of Occupied France [n.d.].

<sup>105</sup> SHD, 2P64, Secretary of State for war, summary of the 20 June meeting on POWs, 22 June 1941.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>106</sup> AN, F/9/2351, CRF, statistics of tuberculosis tested in the camps between 17 April and 31 December 1941.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>107</sup> AN, F/9/2351, CRF, results of systematic x-rays done in the *Frontstalags* between 1 January and 10

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>108</sup> ANOM, FM 1 AFFPOL/833, Gaston Joseph to Secretary of State for Foreign Affaires, 14 November 1942.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>109</sup> SHD, 2P67, Doctor Louis Bazy, 'L'aspect medico-social du retour du prisonnier' [n.d.]. <sup>110</sup> Ibid.

Le Mans had the lowest infection rates of 9.4 and 9.1 per cent respectively. 111 Chartres, Bourges and Châteaudun were in the middle with 13.1, 14 and 15.4 per cent respectively. 112 The most severe rate of infection was in Nonant-le-Pin with 23.5 per cent. 113 One third of the CPOWs from West Africa released before 1 October 1942 were seriously ill with tuberculosis or dysentery. 114

Much information on the health of CPOWs can be found from the Red Cross 'capture cards' housed at BAVCC in Caen. From the database of about 1,600 CPOWs, approximately eighteen per cent were released from captivity for illness. 115 These 1,600 cases were selected by recording every 160th prisoner alphabetically and represent a cross-section of the CPOWs. 116 There is no way to know if these CPOWs had real or faked illnesses. The confirmed cases from systematic x-rays provide a real proof of illness, as it would have been difficult, although not impossible, to fake an x-ray result. The 'suspected cases' leave room for interpretation. This number falls between the Red Cross report of twenty-three per cent and Mabon's statistic of fourteen per cent CPOWs who were released through February 1943. 117 The lengthening toll of captivity would have only augmented the number of CPOWs with tuberculosis.

#### Health in the Southern Zone

The severity of the illness decided the next course of action. The most obvious and severely ill prisoners were released during the early months. Once sick CPOWs were released from the *Frontstalags* they were repatriated, usually by rail, to the southern zone where they came under Vichy's care. Transportation to the southern zone was difficult. On average, due to petrol shortages, it took three weeks to

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>111</sup> SHD, 2P74, CRF, statistics of tuberculosis cases found at Montargis, 15-22 April 1941; Le Mans, 29-30 May 1941.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>112</sup> SHD, 2P74, CRF, statistics of tuberculosis cases found at Chartres, 19-23 May 1941; Bourges, 24 April- 2 May 1941; Chateaudun, 23-27 May 1941.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>113</sup> SHD, 2P74, CRF, statistics of tuberculosis cases found at Nonant-le-Pin, 23 May 1941.

<sup>114</sup> Thomas, 'Prisonniers de guerre coloniaux français', p. 329.

<sup>115</sup> Calculations based on the ICRC capture cards at the BAVCC, Caen.

<sup>116</sup> See appendix A for a detailed discussion of how the database was constructed.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>117</sup> Mabon, 'Indigènes', p. 106; AN, F/9/2351, letters Fribourg-Blanc to Bonnaud, 13 May 1942 and 24 October 1942.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>118</sup> SHD, 3P84, Crozat to Secrétaire d'Etat à la Guerre, Direction des Troupes Coloniales, 8 February 1943.

evacuate sick prisoners from Orleans to the southern zone. Red Cross drivers tried to collect the most urgent cases once a week. Mallet reported to Scapini in summer 1941 that:

We obtained liberation papers in forty-eight hours and if it were easier to organise the evacuations by freight car or hospital trains, thousands of men could be saved quickly. We evacuate the severe cases by the French Red Cross hospital cars but the lack of petrol prevents us from overusing this method of transportation. Forty-four released men were evacuated by freight car from Chartres, Châteaudun and Nonant-le-pin to Paris and were hospitalised in French Red Cross centres and military hospitals before travelling by hospital train to the Free Zone. 120

Mabon attributes the high mortality in 1941 to the long delays, adding that once evacuations were better organised, the number of preventable deaths decreased. <sup>121</sup> By October 1942, sick prisoners from Morancez were evacuated, in less than a week, to Paris or Orleans from where they travelled to the unoccupied Zone. <sup>122</sup> Oumar Diallo was released after a medical visit and sent via Paris to Fréjus on a hospital train. <sup>123</sup> The YMCA inspectors reported that bedridden prisoners from Lucon went to the civilian hospital in Nantes where they were demobilized and sent to the south of France. Myron Echenberg believes that Vichy deliberately left 5,000 African soldiers without resources in Paris. <sup>124</sup> Given Vichy's desire to keep CPOWs separate from anyone who might influence them unduly, like communists or unhappy exservicemen, it seems unlikely that it would purposely allow such a large number of CPOWs to remain unsupervised in the Occupied Zone. However, some CPOWs did find work and remained in Paris after escaping and chose not to report to the French authorities. Others remained because they were unable or unwilling to risk recapture in attempting to cross the demarcation line.

Once CPOWs were released to the French authorities they were sent to hospitals Sainte-Marguerite, Michel Level, and Montolivet in Marseilles before being repatriated. The number of North Africans in Marseilles fell to 117 between 1941 and

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>119</sup> AN, F/9/2351, ICRC visit to Montargis, 18 June 1941.

<sup>120</sup> SHD, 2P74, Mallet to Scapini, 3 June 1941.

<sup>121</sup> Mabon, 'Indigènes', p 59.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>122</sup> AN, F/9/2351, Schirmer and Morsier, visit to *Frontstalag* 153, 22 October 1942.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>123</sup> ANS, 2D23/28, Creuse to the Governor of Senegal, 13 September 1941.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>124</sup> Echenberg, Colonial Conscripts, p. 97.

1942.<sup>125</sup> The others were sent to Fréjus, Bordeaux, Marseilles or Brive. Fréjus generally housed between 400 and 500 patients, with a maximum of 800 when large numbers arrived from the Occupied Zone together.<sup>126</sup> Most of the CPOWs who passed through Fréjus were Senegalese.

Repatriation south was not enough to stop the spread of tuberculosis. The number of recorded cases increased in the southern zone hospitals: rising at Fréjus from 1.7 per cent in 1940, 1.4 per cent in 1941 to 2.2 per cent in 1942. 127 Nor did repatriation to the southern zone bring the freedom that release from captivity implied. Since CPOWs were not demobilized in France, they remained soldiers subject to a military regime, in a country facing increasing hardships. Commander Wender noted in 1941 that the North African prisoners undergoing treatment in Marseilles were in low spirits, naturally, due to German propaganda, but also to irregular payments, delays before repatriation to North Africa, and a hospital staff without sufficient numbers and unused to the North African mentality. 128 CPOWs who were French citizens received better treatment in the southern zone hospitals, which caused conflicts in the tuberculosis ward in Marseilles. 129 The morale of the repatriated CPOWs concerned Darlan who called for an investigation, and potential sanctions, into the situation of the repatriated CPOWs currently in military hospitals:

The Minister is particularly interested in the fate of our repatriated native prisoners. He cannot accept that, through misunderstandings or personal failings, all the moral and material aid that they deserve might not be given to our natives, with all the heart and spirit of national solidarity that the French from the *métropole* feel for the French of the Empire who are particularly deserving. <sup>130</sup>

At the military hospital in Brive seventy-five CPOWs lodged a complaint against the doctor Jokoum who bullied them for being 'constant moaners'. An inspector found the prisoners' complaints to be justified and that Jokoum felt the formalities to obtain

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>125</sup> ANOM, ALg GGA 1CM/73, Wender, note repatriated North Africans undergoing treatment in Marseilles, 27 April 1942.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>127</sup> SHD, 3P84, Crozat to Secrétaire d'Etat à la Guerre, Direction des Troupes Coloniales, 8 February 1943.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>128</sup> ANOM, ALg GGA 1CM/73, Wender, note repatriated North Africans undergoing treatment in Marseilles', 27 April 1942.

<sup>129</sup> Thomas, 'French Colonial prisoners of war', p. 684.

<sup>130</sup> SHD, 2P85, Paquin to Général Chef de l'état-major de l'armée, 1 November 1941.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>131</sup> SHD, 2P85, Paul Lecourt, report for Commandant Le Gouest, 14 May 1943.

soup and cigarettes too long. The inspector distributed cigarettes directly to the Senegalese since Jokoum gave them out parsimoniously. He concluded that 'the Senegalese are soldiers in every sense of the word: they are disciplined and only a few complain.' It is important that the inspector underlined their discipline. CPOWs' indiscipline was seen as the result of German propaganda and not as a form of legitimate complaint. To avoid these conflicts, especially while under Vichy control, Vichy sought to send CPOWs home quickly. Hospital or regular ships brought sick CPOWs home to the colonies until October 1942.

Illnesses remained a major lever for the French argument in favour of releasing CPOWs. In November 1942, Gaston Joseph, the *Directeur des Affaires politiques* at the Secretary of State for Colonies pushed the Secretary of State for Foreign affaires to attempt to obtain the remaining CPOWs' release. He argued that: 'The toll of two years of captivity has left them with little physical resistance, at risk to contract a dangerous, or even mortal infection. It would be humane, while there is still time, to proceed with their release.' His request, arriving days after the German invasion of the southern zone, was likely designed to test the diplomatic waters. Vichy had been making the same suggestion for almost two and a half years. Vichy after November 1942, however, had even less diplomatic weight than before.

The request was denied and the healthy CPOWs, like their French counterparts, remained in captivity until liberated by the Allies. In 1943 the *Centres de regroupements et de réadaptations* were used to house sick or otherwise incapacitated colonial soldiers, members of the French army, colonial workers and discharged prisoners. The Indochinese and Malagasy CPOWs, less numerous, were kept in the hospital. CPOWs needing long-term care were sent to Toulon. When CPOWs were sick, but not sick enough to be released, the occupying authorities placed them in temporary hospitals to convalesce. Once improved, the CPOWs were assigned to large work groups. These work groups were eventually given to the Germans to use. CPOWs who were released too late to be repatriated found their situation rather unchanged. Instead of being demobilised and released, they were healed and placed in 'centres' rather than *Frontstalags*, and then sent back to work.

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>132</sup> SHD, 2P85, report for Commandant Fauée, Commissariat Général aux Prisonniers de guerre rapatriés, 1 April 1943.

rapatriés, 1 April 1943.

133 ANOM, FM 1 AFFPOL/833, Gaston Joseph to Secretary of State for Foreign Affaires, 14 November 1942.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>134</sup> AN, F/9/2351, Martin and de Morsier, visit to Lucon, 29 May 1941.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>135</sup> BA-MA, RW34/77, coloured colonial units in France, 1 October 1943.

Vichy was unable to protect the CPOWs in the southern zone, especially as the war continued and conditions deteriorated. France was still subject to the whims of the Armistice Commissions. One of the peculiarities of the Armistice was that Germany required France to sign an Armistice with Italy, who had declared war on France only a few days before the Armistice in 1940. The Italians were given a zone of influence in southeast France, including Grenoble and Nice. After November 1942, the Italians moved into Toulon and up to the Rhone. The *Commission Italianne d'Armistice* (CIA) could not act without German support. Nervous about the presence of colonial soldiers so close to the Italian border, the CIA declared that all colonial troops be relocated west of the Rhone by 15 March 1941. Initially, an exception was made for the *Hôpital Colonial de Fréjus*, which allowed Vichy to supervise a large number of colonial soldiers with varying health problems. Medical officer Crozat wrote the below table detailing the number of patients in Fréjus by year:

Year	Europeans	Civilians	Senegalese	Malagasy	Indo-	North	Antilles	Total
					Chinese	Africans		
1940	1475	54	765	1254	887	33	553	5,023
1941	861	60	2,690	1,369	854	25	106	3,975
1942	529	288	647	709	854	61	62	3,144

Table 5.3: Coudraux, Number of patients at Fréjus hospital by year and by race, 5 February 1943 (source: SHD, 3P84).

By early 1943, Vichy lost its greatest advantage in caring for CPOWs when the colonial hospital was closed. Closing Fréjus dispersed doctors with colonial training throughout the southern zone, making it difficult to ensure proper health care. Crozat asked the German authorities in Avignon for clarification on the permanence of isolated detachments of colonial soldiers in order to organize care through local doctors, and for the possibility of using German doctors for emergencies. No response was recorded. But sick CPOWs now mixed with other sick colonial workers and soldiers who had not been repatriated. Once these sick soldiers were healed, their labour was allocated to the German authorities.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>136</sup> SHD, 3P82, Note, 1<sup>st</sup> Group de Divisions militaires, 1 Bureau et S.A., 20 February 1941.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>137</sup> SHD, 3P84, telegramme, Troupes Colonials Guerre Royat, to Organe Liquidateur, 23 February 1943; SHD, 3P84, Valette, note for the Section Militaire de Liaison, 4 March 1943.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>138</sup> SHD, 3P84, telegramme, détachement militaire de Liaison Avignon to Section Militaire Liaison Vichy, 9 March 1943.

### Health conditions in Germany

Since health was the major concern of both Vichy and the Germans concerning the CPOWs, it is especially important to see whether in this regard French and allied POWs in Germany were better off. Camp conditions in Germany varied greatly and the prisoners' experience was dependent on the attitude of the camp staff, which changed over time. 139 About one third of British prisoners killed in Germany between January 1941 and July 1943 died attempting to escape. 140 Perhaps because more British tried to escape, German guards were more likely to shoot at British prisoners than the French.<sup>141</sup> French prisoners in Germany remembered being slapped, hit or abused. One prisoner explained that: 'when a prisoner disobeyed the occupying authorities, they locked him in a cell for three or four days without food or blankets or else they tied him up so his feet barely touch the ground. They left him in this position for one to nine hours.'142 Such violence was illegal and was not the only complaint of its kind. Durand explained that these acts of violence were due to the behaviour of certain individuals and were not symptomatic of French captivity in Germany. 143 The French were treated better than the Polish, but less well than the British. 144 However, when punished, the French prisoners were dealt with severely. 145

The Germans maintained almost total control over decisions pertaining to the prisoners' health. In September 1940 while the United States remained France's neutral protecting power, the Germans suspended the mixed medical commissions. 146 On September 10 the DFCAA informed the CAA that Vichy wanted these Geneva Convention rights protected. Besson asked the American ambassador for help since he feared giving the German authorities sole control over the release of sick and wounded prisoners since France would have no recourse against potentially arbitrary German decisions. 147 After becoming its own protecting power in November 1940, France could no longer depend on America's support. In December 1940, the

<sup>139</sup> Mackenzie, Colditz Myth, p. 93.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>140</sup> Wylie, Barbed Wire Diplomacy, p. 178.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>141</sup> Ibid., p. 178.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>142</sup> AN, F/1a/3780, information from a recently escaped Muslim soldier from Douar Key, August 1943.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>143</sup> Durand, Vie quotidienne, pp 228-229.

<sup>144</sup> Mackenzie, 'Treatment', p. 499.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>145</sup> Ibid., p. 499.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>146</sup> Article 69, Convention relative to the Treatment of Prisoners of War, Geneva, 27 July 1929.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>147</sup> AN, F/9/2828, Besson to American Ambassador to France, 24 September 1940.

Germans announced that the mixed medical commissions would be re-established as soon as the German medical commissions had finished examining the POWs to be repatriated. In January 1942 the mixed medical commission returned from Germany without examining any French prisoners. France had much more access and indirect influence over the CPOWs' healthcare.

Medical supplies, like food and clothing, were severely lacking in Germany. The British doctor A. L. Cochrane explained that such conditions were a breeding ground for tuberculosis. After 1942, out of fear that prisoners might infect the civilian workers, the Germans started x-raying prisoners. 150 Cochrane discovered that the French, like the Indians and Serbs, often described tuberculosis symptoms to get released but the German medical officers required confirmation with positive sputum it was difficult to fake. However, samples rarely arrived at the testing facilities so genuinely sick prisoners often remained in captivity.<sup>151</sup> A German doctor's agreement was required to excuse French prisoners from work or to be repatriated. 152 The Red Cross was able to send some supplies, but generally camps needed x-ray machines and medicine. 153 There were a few special hospitals in Germany for tuberculosis cases. Königswartha, despite its limited facilities, was used for French prisoners. Cochrane explained that repatriation was nonexistent and 'inevitably the hospital developed into a pleasant place to die, rather than a serious hospital, although much good work was done there.'154 Elsterhorst became a hospital for tuberculosis patients in 1943. 155 In order to maintain work efficiency, the Germans restricted the numbers of sick prisoners permitted each day.<sup>156</sup> Despite the conditions, doctors in Germany worked hard to ensure the mortality rate remained below five per cent.<sup>157</sup> They succeeded for the French prisoners. Durand argued that French and German doctors cared for the French prisoners appropriately and most prisoners did not live in fear of sickness or death. 158

Despite all the advantages of captivity in France compared with that in Germany, a higher percentage of CPOWs died during captivity. Approximately two per cent of all French prisoners died in German captivity, <sup>159</sup> compared with five per

<sup>148</sup> AN, F/9/2828, Darlan to Secretary of State for War, DSPG, 10 January 1942.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>149</sup> Ibid.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>150</sup> Cochrane, 'Tuberculosis', p. 656.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>151</sup> Ibid., pp 656-657.

<sup>152</sup> Durand, Vie quotidienne, pp 169-170.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>153</sup> Mackenzie, *Colditz Myth*, p. 172.

<sup>154</sup> Cochrane, 'Tuberculosis', p. 657.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>155</sup> Ibid., p. 657.

<sup>156</sup> Mackenzie, Colditz Myth, p. 172.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>157</sup> Ibid., p. 172.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>158</sup> Durand, Vie quotidienne, p. 135.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>159</sup> François Cochet, Les Exclus de la victoire, histoire des prisonniers de guerre, déportés et STO 1945-1985 (Paris: S.P.M., 1992), p. 18; Durand, Captivité, p. 214.

cent of the CPOWs, almost all of whom died of illness. <sup>160</sup> The difference with the previous scholarship is striking. Bob Moore estimates that approximately half of the CPOWs survived captivity. <sup>161</sup> This is much closer to the rate of mortality for soviet prisoners of war of sixty per cent. It seems more likely that this is a deformation of the percentage of CPOWs who remained in captivity at the end of the war. Contemporary observers repeatedly claimed that the CPOWs were at a greater risk than their French counterparts for illness and death. Certainly that proved to be the case, but why?

For the first half of the war tuberculosis and lung diseases do not appear to be to blame. The *Ministère des Anciens Combattants* established that of the total 1,850,000 prisoners between 1940 and 1945, 183,330 were sick at some point and 37,054 died. Of those who died 6,178 were from tuberculosis, 1,451 from other pulmonary diseases, and 1,186 from contagious diseases. This meant between nineteen and twenty-five per cent of French deaths were due to lung diseases, compared with approximately eighteen per cent of the CPOWs. Considering the continued references to the CPOWs' vulnerability to tuberculosis it is surprising that a larger percentage of French prisoners died of lung disease. There are two potential explanations. First, the German authorities' fear of CPOW illness was greater than their fear of French or Allied prisoners' illness. So CPOWs were granted greater leniency in the identification of tuberculosis, and thus a greater chance of release. This release did not necessarily translate into survival.

The reason why fewer CPOWs survived captivity than French prisoners may lie in the latter part of the war. Conditions in both France and Germany deteriorated severely as the war continued with increased labour demands and food shortages. CPOWs who were removed from France in 1944 with the German retreat would have faced gruelling conditions. Two different, but problematic sources confirm the above statistic of eighteen per cent. The first, the French Red Cross, is the number of CPOWs x-rayed during the first half of the war. While it can be assumed to be generally reliable, it does not cover the entire war unlike the French statistic. The second source is from the BAVCC capture cards and covers the entire war but with

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>160</sup> Scheck, 'French Colonial Soldiers', p. 436.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>161</sup> Moore, 'Treatment of Prisoners in the Western European Theatre', p. 160.

<sup>162</sup> Durand, Captivité, p. 215.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>163</sup> See table 5.2, p. 145; Calculations from BAVCC 'capture cards'.

large unknowns in the data. 164 Further study on the rate of tuberculosis infection and other illnesses among CPOWs, especially per year of captivity, is required.

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As seen, CPOWs were clearly vulnerable to disease during their captivity. While fewer colonial prisoners than white prisoners caught tuberculosis, the white prisoners were more likely to survive captivity. This suggests that the CPOWs' health was weaker in general and that the white prisoners were more likely to recover even after contracting a disease. This may be due to the CPOWs' extended stay in camps, and return to harsh labour, even after their release from captivity. Additionally, CPOWs were more likely than their French counterparts to be victims of violent overreactions from their guards including brutality and murder. Since these prisoners reported specific events, and not a general atmosphere of violence, one can conclude that they remained rare enough to shock and be remembered in detail. This conforms to Bob Moore's assessment that in Western Europe the Geneva Convention was generally upheld and violations, violence and prisoner deaths remained exceptional and were investigated as such. 165 However, once one accounts for the possibility of random violence in the Frontstalags, the overall standard of treatment for prisoners in France was higher than that in Germany. German officers were lucky to have a posting in France, rather than in Germany or worse, the Eastern Front. As a result, their prisoners were also somewhat sheltered from the realities of the war. German fear of contagious diseases combined with an unwillingness to financially support unfit prisoners meant the Germans granted concessions, like systematic x-rays, for France that were not accorded in Germany. Improved rations, due to Vichy and the Red Cross positively impacted the CPOWs' overall health. Vichy's paternalism showed great interest, and probably sincere concern, for the CPOWs' health. But outside of obtaining the release of sick CPOWs, that did not translate into lower mortality rates, especially as conditions in the southern zone remained problematic. Unlike French prisoners who were demobilised and sent home to recuperate, there was little change for the CPOWs, especially after November 1942. Vichy did not have the authority to choose how to care for its sick CPOWs. Instead, sick CPOWs were

<sup>164</sup> See appendix A for an exploration of the benefits and flaws of this source, p. 266.

Moore, 'Treatment of Prisoners in the Western European Theatre', p. 116.

moved across the southern zone from Marseilles to Pau. Once better, the CPOWs were sent back to work.

# Chapter six

# Helping 'our' prisoners: aid and escape

Vichy saw material and moral aid to colonial prisoners as a way to offset the effects of the defeat and reinforce the status quo. Through governmental and private organisations based in France and the colonies, Vichy sent CPOWs individual packages, colonial delicacies, extra clothing, games, books and musical instruments. In helping the CPOWs through captivity, Vichy sought to prove the CPOWs' dependence on France, and thus confirm the legitimacy of French colonial rule at a time when this was under considerable threat. By pushing the French towards their imperial duty, to help the CPOWs, Vichy inadvertently created a different kind of assistance, outside the typical philanthropic efforts. Aid organized by Vichy was regulated to ensure it delivered the correct message: Pétain, Mme Weygand, and the colonial governors rewarded discipline and obedience. It came with a healthy dose of imperial rhetoric stressing duty and loyalty. By contrast, direct aid from the French citizens was as varied as the people providing it. Instead of aid coming from the top down, it came from French men and women whose help often ran contrary to Vichy's goals. Help from individuals often placed the French at great risk, creating bonds and friendship not approved by Vichy.

### Politics of Aid: top-down assistance

In Vichy's eyes, French prisoners were the architects of the New France, whereas the CPOWs were to be the manual labourers fortifying French legitimacy in the Empire. Vichy hoped that 'upon their return to their home countries, our natives, conserving the memory of the help and assistance they received during their time spent on French soil, will be the best representatives to their friends and families of upholding the unity of our great colonial Empire.' At its most basic level, helping

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> SHD, 2P67, CCAPG, founding and goals, 16 December 1941.

prisoners, colonial or French, served the same purpose: reminding them that they had not been forgotten.<sup>2</sup>

Charitable organisations were proud of their contributions and protective of their legitimacy. After the Armistice, dozens of charities sprang up to help the CPOWs. Some, like the Algerian Comité de Secours aux Mobilisés et à leurs familles was created during mobilisation in 1939, but focused on prisoners after the Armistice.<sup>3</sup> Others, like the Comité d'aide et d'assistance coloniale, had existed during the First World War. Despite the important number of individual charities the Vichy government became the biggest contributor to the CPOWs' welfare. The Betreuung, or German prisoner of war office, only wanted to recognise the DSPG as responsible for the POWs, as established by article seventy-eight of the Geneva Convention. The German camp administration refused entry to French Red Cross drivers until the Red Cross was unified under the law of 7 August 1940.5 This law fused three charities: the Société de secours aux blesses militaires, the Association des Dames française and the Union des femmes de France into the French Red Cross.<sup>6</sup> This allowed Vichy to place the Red Cross under its jurisdiction and co-opt its organisational network. Changes to the Red Cross continued throughout the occupation. The French Red Cross President protested that the continued changes challenged its unique role guaranteed by international conventions.<sup>8</sup> Despite decreasing autonomy, the French Red Cross played an essential role in bringing aid to CPOWs.

The DSPG tasked Bigard with improving conditions for French prisoners as thoroughly and rapidly as possible. His responsibilities included 'providing collective provisions for native, colonial and North African prisoners of war in the *Frontstalags* [and] providing individual provisions for these same prisoners through

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> SHD, 2P67, Section Bibliothèque et Jeux , Report of activity during its first year, October 1940 to October 1941.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> SHD, 1P89, Governor General of Algeria to Darlan, 4 June 1941.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> BDIC, O Pièce 14168, report Comité d'Aide et d'Assistance Coloniale 1914-1915, p. 10.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> SHD, 9R37, Le Service des prisonniers de guerre en zone occupée (Paris: DSPG, 1942).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> SHD, 2P66, Besson, note pour la Direction Général de l'Administration de la Guerre et du Contrôle, 12 November 1941.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> SHD, 2P67, note on the role of the CRF in assisting POWs, 6 November 1941; see also SHD, 2P66, Besson, note for Direction Général de l'Administration de la Guerre et du Contrôle, 12 November 1941; SHD, 9R36, Jugnet, note regarding the POW service, 6 May 1941.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup> SHD, 2P67, President of the CRF to the Darlan, 17 April 1942.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup> SHD, 9R37, Le Service des prisonniers de guerre en zone occupée (Paris: DSPG, 1942).

packages.<sup>10</sup> The French administration under the DSPG's control bought food and other supplies in France and stored them in depots.<sup>11</sup> The DSPG tended to prisoners while they remained interned in camps in France or Germany.<sup>12</sup> Vichy sent packages to only those French prisoners whose families could afford to do so, but declared that all CPOWs were 'needy'.<sup>13</sup> All charities and organisations helping CPOWs were placed under the umbrella of the DSPG. This caused tensions with the French Red Cross, which saw its traditional role as independent from the French government.

The DSPG founded the *Comité central d'assistance aux prisonniers de guerre* (CCAPG), under De Bellaigue. <sup>14</sup> It supervised all aid in the Occupied Zone and in turn created the *Section d'outre-mer*, under General Andlauer, specifically for CPOWs. <sup>15</sup> Vichy decided that all aid for CPOWs and prisoners in France must come from the Occupied Zone <sup>16</sup> or the French colonies. Each department had a delegate under the prefect's authority to liaise with the CCAPG, the local charities and the local German authorities. <sup>17</sup> These delegates were accredited to the *Frontstalag* commanders by the DSPG. <sup>18</sup> The CCAPG had 600 local committees, one in practically each commune. <sup>19</sup> A fleet of Red Cross Trucks worked out of a distribution centre in Paris and three sub-centres in Bordeaux, Angers and Chaumont. <sup>20</sup> The decentralisation facilitated and integrated efforts from smaller charities under its control. It enabled the French Red Cross and *Amitiés Africaines* to bring packages from the colonies and Free Zone to the CPOWs. <sup>21</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> SHD, 9R36, Huntziger, note for the organizations taking care of POWs, 30 May 1941.

<sup>14</sup> AN, AJ/41/1839, note for the CAA, 4 August [no year].

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>10</sup> SHD, 2P67, Dupuy to Madame Weygand, [n.d.].

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>11</sup> AN, 72/AJ/291, Lieutenant Jeanmot, Les prisonniers de guerre dans la deuxieme guerre mondiale plan d'études, (Vincennes: Service Historique de la Défense, 20 January 1956).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>13</sup> SHD, 2P68, DSPG, instructions for organizations in North Africa for Secours Collectif of CPOWs including their identification and informing the families, [n.d. but probably 1942].

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>15</sup> SHD, 2P67, CCAPG, founding and goals, 16 December 1941; see also AN, F/1a/3650, CCAPG, report, 1 January 1942.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>16</sup> SHD, 2P66, Besson to the General Delegate of the CRF, 2 December 1940.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>17</sup> SHD, 2P67, Léon Noel, Mandate for the CCAPG, 22 July 1940.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>18</sup> SHD, 9R37, Le Service des prisonniers de guerre en zone occupée (Paris: DSPG, 1942).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>19</sup> AD Marne, Reims, 6W R819, CCAPG, Marne delegation, 5 June 1942.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>21</sup> Ibid.



Image 6.1: 'Le gouvernement de Vichy. La Croix Rouge', (source: SHD, R5133(6)).



Image 6.2: 'La propagande du gouvernement de Vichy et La Croix Rouge. Les Œuvres sociales', (source: SHD, R5133(5)).

Due to the 'diversity of origins and race' the CCAPG established a long list of different 'Godmother' charities: Comité Algérien d'assistance aux prisonniers de

guerre, Amitiés Africaines for all North African prisoners; the Comité de l'Afrique du nord, Comité d'assistance aux troupes noires, Comité d'assistance aux prisonniers de l'AOF, l'Union nationale des anciens coloniaux et Français d'outre-mer, and Centre d'entr'aide pour les soldats et travailleurs d'outre-mer dans la métropole for Indochinese and Malagasy prisoners; the Comité d'aide et assistance aux militaires martiniquais and the Comité d'aide et assistance aux guadeloupéens, Guyanais et Océaniens for those from the Caribbean and Pacific. 22 As the list of organisations shows, overlap occurred, especially for the North African prisoners. While other colonies mostly helped CPOWs, North Africa also supported the pied-noirs or white French soldiers whose families lived in North Africa but, who as seen, were interned in Germany.

North African POWs were politically and numerically significant to both Vichy and Germany due to the strategic potential of the Maghreb in the war effort. North Africans represented about seventy per cent of the CPOWs. The potential use of French bases in North Africa tempted Germany until to the Allied invasion of French north-west Africa in late 1942. As for Vichy, North Africa continued to hold a special place in its heart since Algeria was not considered a colony, but was made up of three French departments, and had been French longer than the Savoy. A large settler population helped motivate charities and the government to assist both CPOWs and *pied-noir* prisoners. France was wary of Spanish and Italian claims to parts of Morocco and Tunisia respectively. Instability in the region would give Germany the excuse it sought to increase controls and the number of inspectors on the ground. Vichy, naturally, wanted to avoid any potential uprisings. Both powers therefore saw the CPOWs as an element for either stability or chaos upon their return.

These charities reinforced Vichy's goal of a paternalistic supervision of the CPOWs. *Amitiés Africaines* rapidly became one of the most important aid organisations. Belkacem Recham argues that it was established as part of a concentrated effort to prepare the North Africans intellectually for war by actively cultivating a military spirit among soldiers and tightening links with veterans.<sup>23</sup> This trend of linking material aid with intellectual influence expanded under Vichy. With a seat in Lyons, *Amitiés Africaines* helped prisoners' families claim their benefits and payments, while advising the government on preventative measures designed to

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>22</sup> SHD, 2P67, CCAPG, founding and goals, 16 December 1941.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>23</sup> Recham, Musulmans Algériens, p. 89.

protect the CPOWs from the physical and mental consequences of a long captivity and propaganda.<sup>24</sup> By 1942, the Ministry of the Interior's *Comité Algérien d'Assistance aux prisonniers de guerre* was allowed to visit camps in Angers, Nantes, Le Mans, Savenay and Saumur.<sup>25</sup>

The French Red Cross coordinated its activities with the depot in Lyons. One of its annexes, at Perigueux, supplied about thirty camps in southwest France from the Vendée to the Pyrenees. Initially the centre only had six or seven drivers and six trucks. Each week they undertook over two-dozen trips varying between 300 and 600 kilometres.<sup>26</sup>

The various charities helped CPOWs correspond with their families since 'this question was felt to be pivotal in the eyes of our protégés for whom the lack of news from their families can have a devastating effect on their physical and mental health.'27 When correspondence and letters did not reach prisoners' families, the CCAPG got creative. CPOWs could write no more than fifteen words on a card that was sent to Vichy. These messages were read on a radio show 'the Voices of France' and broadcast to the Empire via short-wave radio.<sup>28</sup> Responses were sent back via Vichy. Amitiés Africaines also sent postcards to CPOWs asking for their exact name and address so they might be properly identified.<sup>29</sup> Since many CPOWs were illiterate Scapini asked Abetz to 'establish a secretariat, manned by an officer and native NCOs in the camps with North African prisoners to undertake the correspondence for illiterate prisoners.'30 However, there is no trace of an official secretariat being established. Illiterate CPOWs depended on their literate comrades to write letters and help with administrative procedures. The Algerian prisoners' morale improved greatly once they started receiving regular parcels and news from their families.<sup>31</sup> As Indochina was under Japanese occupation, these CPOWs were particularly isolated from their families. Tran-Huu-Phong wrote an open letter to the Indochinese prisoners introducing a new section of the Amicale des annamites de Paris which visited sick

<sup>24</sup> SHD, 2P67, Huré, report on Amitiés Africaines, 19 November 1941.

<sup>26</sup> AN, 72/AJ/1840, *Le Figaro*, 23 July [no year].

<sup>28</sup> AN, F/9/2351, Andlauer, memo to the sous-délégués d'outre-mer, 7 April 1942.

<sup>30</sup> AN, F/9/2959, Scapini to Abetz, 10 March 1941.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>25</sup> AN, F/1a/3650, L. Audisio, Ministry of the Interieur, Affaires Algeriennes, 9 February 1942.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>27</sup> SHD, 2P66, Besson, note for Direction Général de l'Administration de la Guerre et du Contrôle, 12 November 1941.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>29</sup> AN, F/9/2959, Besson, note for the Sous-Direction du Service des prisonniers de guerre, 28 January

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>31</sup> AN, F/1a/3650, L. Audisio, Ministry of the Interieur, Affaires Algeriennes, 9 February 1942.

prisoners in the hospital, organised pen pals and provided a hostel in Paris for former CPOWs.<sup>32</sup> The *Amicale* wanted its prisoners to receive letters despite the difficulties in delivery from Indochina.

Charities advertised their good works and sought endorsement from important figures to order to increase their visibility and potential donations as well as to remind CPOWs of efforts on their behalf. Generally, funds were allocated according to the number of prisoners the charities served. Smaller charities often fought for a greater proportion of government subsidies and assistance.<sup>33</sup> Donations or sponsorship from important political figures were highly sought after and publicised. The press covered the Resident General of Tunisia, Esteva's donation of 50,000 francs to help with packages for Muslim prisoners.<sup>34</sup> It also praised the 100,000 francs donation from Pierre Pucheu, a pro-fascist propagandist and Minister of the Interior in 1941, as 'a high accolade to the magnificent work undertaken in a spirit of fraternal understanding, by the *Comité algérien d'assistance aux prisonniers musulmans* under the auspices of the General Government of Algeria.<sup>35</sup>

There were strong political considerations at play with the types of aid provided. Material aid, like increased food rations or donations of warmer clothes, improved the CPOWs' physical conditions. Moral aid was a more targeted attack on German propaganda. Aid was never simply about sending rice or books but rather was aimed at strengthening ties to France and improving the CPOWs' morale. For example, supplying rations from the colonies gave CPOWs the comfort of their favourite foods and proved that the links between the *métropole* and the colonies remained intact despite threats from de Gaulle and the British. Each group of prisoners was given items of cultural significance, like Kola nuts for the Senegalese, <sup>36</sup> or culinary traditions, like couscous for the North Africans, <sup>37</sup> and rice for the Indochinese and Malagasy. <sup>38</sup> When possible, these rations became monthly

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>32</sup> AD Marne, Reims, 6W R819, Tran-Huu-Phung to Annamite prisoners of war, 1 April 1942.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>33</sup> For proposed distribution of funding see AN, F/9/2964, Cullen to the Contrôleur de l'Armée, 12 June 1942 and AN, F/9/2964, Cosbard to the Secretary of State for the Colonies, 22 June 1942.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>34</sup> AN, 72/AJ/1840, *AFIP*, 'La Sollicitude de la Tunisie à l'égard des prisonniers musulmans', 28 November [no year].

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>35</sup> AN, 72/AJ/1840, *AFIP*, 'Un Don de M. Pucheau aux prisonniers de guerre musulmans', 19 October [no year].

<sup>[</sup>no year]. <sup>36</sup> SHD, 2P66, Besson, summary of the DSPG's activities from 20 December to 12 January 1941, 20 January 1941.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>37</sup> SHD, 2P66, DPSG, summary of activities from 2-15 December 1940, 26 December 1940. <sup>38</sup> SHD, 2P66, DSPG, summary of activities from 27 January to 15 February, 7 March 1941.

deliveries.<sup>39</sup> Between April and December 1941 460 tonnes of rations including sugar, rice, chocolate, chickpeas, dates, figs and cigarettes were sent to the *Frontstalags*.<sup>40</sup> Between the Armistice and 31 December 1941, the *Frontstalags* received a quarter of all donated food, despite having less than ten per cent of the French prisoner population.<sup>41</sup>

Sometimes the CPOWs themselves were used to generate interest in their own plight and raise funds on their own behalf. For this, they were encouraged to make and sell stereotypical colonial crafts. The German officials at Montargis were quite enthusiastic about the YMCA's suggestion to reproduce African statues. <sup>42</sup> The OKW suggested that artisan work would be good for the CPOWs. They believed that the CPOWs 'cannot devote their time only to reading and harmful idleness is likely to lead to unfortunate attitudes. The OKW goes further by allowing objects made in the camps to be sold outside via the *Kommandantur*. <sup>43</sup> In January 1942, General Andlauer wanted CPOWs

to make small objects in raffia, leather, wood, clay, etc... or drawings that could be exhibited and sold by OFALAC. The public's interest in this charity auction will draw attention to our native prisoners, to the sacrifices they have made and demonstrate their attachment to our country, and the bonds that unite our overseas territories to France. 44

These activities were 'safe' as they kept CPOWs in traditional roles. They also reinforced preconceived notions that all colonial subjects could whittle wooden sculptures and would enjoy doing so. By purchasing these 'traditional' crafts, the French were reassured that they had done their duty to help those who had sacrificed their freedom for France. The sale of colonial items was quite successful with three neighbourhoods raising approximately three million francs for the CPOWS. With the Empire remaining an important symbol of French independence despite German occupation, CPOWs, willingly or not, became part of that.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>39</sup> SHD, 2P66, Besson, summary of the DSPG's activities from 1-16 March 1941, 1 April 1941; summary of the DSPG's activities from 17 March – 6 April 1941, 26 April 1941.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>40</sup> AN, F/1a/3650, CCAPG, report, 1 January 1942.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>41</sup> SHD, 9R37, Le Service des prisonniers de guerre en zone occupée (Paris: DSPG, 1942).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>42</sup> AN, F/9/2351, Anderson and Senaud, YMCA report on camp visits in Occupied France, 20 January

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>43</sup> SHD, 2P77, Röhrig, note on making art and other objects in POW camps, 31 December 1941.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>44</sup> AN, F/9/2352, Andlauer, memo to CCAPG overseas section, 12 November 1942.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>45</sup> AN, F/1a/3653, note, Ministre of the Interior, Algerian Affaires, 10 March 1942.

Pétain believed that captivity could be used for self-improvement. The National Revolution's encouragement of appropriate leisure activities designed to improve the moral character of the nation spilled over to the CPOWs, who were encouraged to become the best version of native subjects possible. They received books, games, musical instruments, phonographs and Arabic music and could attend French classes or traditional craft workshops organised in the camps. He between October 1940 and 1941 the *Bibliothèque et Jeux*, a subsection of CCAPG, sent 18,000 games and traditional musical instruments from the colonies and books designed for 'natives and illiterates'. The YMCA also sent 135,000 books in nine languages. Prisoners were grateful for the deliveries and often sent thank you notes to the charities. Echoing the discourse of the period, Bonko Hambrié wrote thanking Pétain 'both in the name of all the Senegalese prisoners and in my own name, for the favours that France has generously given to its African children prisoners in captivity with their brothers from the *métropole*. These aid organisations attempted to improve the prisoners' daily lives and their moral standing.

The CPOWs provided a personification of France's imperial goals. As seen, even during the zenith of French imperialism during the Third Republic, much of the population remained unconvinced of the Empire's necessity, and the same continued during the Occupation. Paul Marion, Secretary of State for Information, declared in 1942 that 'we have only imperial territories, we do not yet have an imperial soul [but] we will also be Europe's imperial educators, since we know how to keep and defend our Empire. We will become pioneers who will lay down powerful bridges, our bridges, between this continent and Africa.' Without the Empire, France had little of value to offer the new Europe. The colonies' had brought 'immense resources and the reasons for hope in the New France.' The fate of CPOWs was caught up in these goals. Vichy publicly celebrated the colonies and encouraged the French to learn more about their Empire. Events like the *Quinzaine Impériale* and the *Semaine de la France d'Outre-mer*, according to the daily paper *Le Matin*, encouraged 'the

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>46</sup> AN, F/1a/3650, CCAPG, report, 1 January 1942; SHD, 2P67; CCAPG, founding and goals, 16 December 1941.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>47</sup> SHD, 2P67, Section Bibliothèque et Jeux, report of activity during its first year, October 1940 to October 1941.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>48</sup> AN, F/41/266, 'Service de l'aide aux prisonniers de guerre', *La Gazette de Lausanne*, 21 January 1941.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>49</sup> AN, F/9/2351, Bonko Hambrié to Pétain, [n.d. but response dated 11 August 1941].

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>50</sup> AN, F/41/305, Paul Marion, speech in Toulouse, 24 January 1942.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>51</sup> AN, F/41/273, report for the inspector of finance, 4 March 1942.

mainland and overseas French to demonstrate their feeling of community, which is also echoed in the many Oflags and Stalags that organized small exhibits, conferences and lectures during the Imperial Fortnight. 52 On these occasions the CPOWs received larger parcels than usual.<sup>53</sup> Only the Senegalese, Malagasy and Indochinese prisoners received these packages, however, because Morocco, Tunisia and Algeria were not technically colonies.<sup>54</sup>

Overall, these celebrations were designed to help the French citizens regain faith in their country, not help the CPOWs. The French press constantly reminded

the public that this or other colony sent an important sum to Secours National. Thus as the colonies think about the *métropole*, how could [the *métropole*] not think of the suffering of their own, held in Stalags. It is therefore likely she is not waiting for the gifts of the French Overseas week to ease the plight of her prisoners.55

However, public reception often remained lukewarm. In the Eure-et-Loir the celebration was unsuccessful due to the 'population's total lack of interest in the colonial question. The propaganda posters did not achieve the desired effect.'56 The risks the French took to help the CPOWs suggest that helping individuals from the colonies, itself a form of resistance, was more appealing than supporting Vichy's imperial goals.

### Organisational problems

The fluid nature of the work camps made it hard to ensure an even distribution of parcels to CPOWs scattered in fields and forests.<sup>57</sup> Technically the Geneva Convention stated that conditions, especially for parcels and post, should be the same for all prisoners.<sup>58</sup> The French authorities requested that the Red Cross drivers be authorised to distribute donations directly to the CPOWs on work groups.<sup>59</sup> The German refusal meant that all donations had to be left at the Frontstalag and

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>52</sup> AN, F/9/2929, 'Carnet du Prisonnier', *Le Matin*, 12 June 1942.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>53</sup> AN, F/9/2964, Prevaudeau to the Contrôleur de l'Armée, 1 April 1942; 'Pour nos prisonniers indigènes', Le Matin, 3 June 1942.

AN, F/9/2964, Bigard to the Secretary of State for the Colonies, 11 April 1942.
 AN, F/41/273, report from the Finance Inspector in Vichy, 4 March 1942.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>56</sup> AD Eure et Loir, 1W9, P. Le Beaube, monthly information report, 2 August 1942.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>57</sup> SHD, 2P69, CCAPG, Overseas Section, 24 November 1941 minutes, 28 November 1941. <sup>58</sup> Article 33, Convention relative to the treatment of prisoners of war, Geneva, 27 July 1929.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>59</sup> AN, F/9/2351, Verbal note to the Militärbefehlshaber in France, 12 August 1941.

distributed by the men of confidence.<sup>60</sup> The German camp commanders' discretion directly influenced the ease and access that charities had to CPOWs. By circumventing the official channels, the local delegate in Epinal managed to send news to families in North and West Africa.<sup>61</sup>

The arrival and quantity of packages caused many complaints. While each colony sent packages to 'their' prisoners, CPOWs of all origins were housed together. The overseas section coordinated the numerous smaller charities under its purview, but did not always communicate with the DSPG. As a result they sometimes overlapped. Dr. Bonnaud took up the cause and informed the Algerian government that he felt the Algerian and Tunisian prisoners received fewer packages than the Moroccans. S. Kieuty, representing OFALAC confirmed that packages from Rabat were 'more numerous and larger than those made by local Algerian and Tunisian organisations.'62 The discrepancies between the charities in the scale of their activities exacerbated tensions between races, especially when prisoners from Senegal, Indochina, Martinique and Madagascar did not receive the same monthly packages as the North African prisoners. 63 Bonnaud then wrote to the Minister of Colonies arguing that CPOWs in the same camp should receive their packages on the same day so they do not feel abandoned. 64 The potential for unequal distribution was not limited to parcels. The Comité d'assistance aux troupes noires wrote to the hommes de confiance saying they 'had a small stock of jumpers and woollen socks to distribute among the neediest black prisoners (usual term Senegalese) from AOF (Senegal, French Soudan - today Mali-, Mauritania, Niger, Guinea, Ivory Coast, Dahomey).'65 Winter clothes were highly coveted in the Frontstalags due to the climate.

North Africa, due to its proximity and large settler population had the best organisation for its prisoners. Using the *Amitiés Africaines* infrastructure to deliver individual packages, the women's section suggested that all packages from North Africa be sent directly to Mme Noguès as Morocco was already doing. Individualised packages would be sent to that person while the others would be shared among the

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>60</sup> AN, F/9/2351, response to 12 August note to the Militärbefehlshaber in France, 20 August 1941.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>61</sup> AN, F/41/85, report, use of subsidies given to the organizing committee for the 'Semaine de la France d'outre-mer 1941', [n.d.].

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>62</sup> AN, F/9/2351, S. Kieuty to Dr. Bonnaud, 10 January 1942.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>63</sup> AN, F/9/2351, Bonnaud to Salle, Minister of Colonies, 16 July 1941.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>65</sup> AN, F/9/2351, General Benoit to the hommes de confiance, 26 September 1942.

remaining Algerian, Tunisian and Moroccan prisoners.<sup>66</sup> In addition they suggested renewing fundraising campaigns in Algeria and Tunisia to increase the number of anonymous packages for Muslim CPOWs.<sup>67</sup> The idea was to ship packages via the Red Cross to Marseilles and on to distribution centres in the Occupied Zone.<sup>68</sup> Then the director of the distribution centres would ensure all packages were delivered to all CPOWs at the same time. The DSPG wanted each colony to organise its efforts to avoid jealousies.<sup>69</sup> In early 1942 they were instructed to study how grouping packages in distribution centres might streamline deliveries.<sup>70</sup> This proved difficult since there was no single organising committee in the Free Zone. The CCAPG's mandate was only for the Occupied Zone.<sup>71</sup>

Despite the promised changes, items went missing and the CPOWs wondered why. Corruption and theft existed at all levels of charitable donations. Some German camp commanders confiscated deliveries directly.<sup>72</sup> Leopold Senghor reported that 'the Red Cross sends us everything we need, but we are always first given old things. Where does the rest go?'<sup>73</sup> In Saint-Médard unclaimed packages were supposed to go to the most needy prisoners, instead they were sent to 'the German camp officer [who] empties the parcels, takes what interests him, cigarettes, chocolates, etc. and sends the rest to the kitchen.'<sup>74</sup> Senegalese prisoners who were transferred out of Joigny in December 1941 were forced to leave their Christmas packages and Red Cross supplies behind.<sup>75</sup> The Mayor of Theil-sur-Vanne complained to the French Red Cross and requested they send a truck to recover the prisoners' belongings.<sup>76</sup>

An anonymous letter sent to the French Red Cross claimed that conditions in the *Frontstalags* worsened after the liberation of the white French prisoners. The author preferred to remain anonymous since he feared 'starvation, prison, and

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>66</sup> SHD, 1P33, François to Weygand, 6 October 1941.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>68</sup> SHD, 2P68, DSPG, instructions for organizations in North Africa for Secours Collectif of CPOWs including their identification and informing the families, [n.d. but probably 1942].

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>70</sup> SHD, 9R37, Service des prisonniers de guerre, end of the year report for 1941, 27 January 1942.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>71</sup> SHD, 9R37, Le Service des prisonniers de guerre en zone occupée (Paris: DSPG, 1942).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>72</sup> AN, F/41/85, report, use of subsidies given to the organizing committee for the 'Semaine de la France d'outre-mer 1941', [n.d.].

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>73</sup> SHD, 2P70, Senghor, captivity report, 7 July 1942.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>74</sup> Ibid.; see also AN, F/9/2351, Paul Gibson to Noirot, 29 October 1941.

AN, F/9/2351, Mayor of Theil sur Vanne to President of the CRF, 21 December 1941.
 Ibid.

exercise during an entire day.'77 The letter claimed that the CPOW in charge of distributing the packages gave items to his friends and sold others to civilians or other prisoners. It alleged that he was in league with the translators, all Jewish, so the prisoners could not inform the guards. 78 The last comment is perhaps the most revealing as it demonstrates an almost perfect reading of the political climate. The writer does not blame the Germans but, understanding the tolerance of anti-Semitism, blames Jews. He did not address how or why these 'Jews' were given the coveted positions as interpreters. Despite the significant indigenous Jewish population of North Africa there is no evidence that Jewish CPOWs were deported from the Frontstalags to the concentration camps.<sup>79</sup>

Disorganisation and corruption were facilitated by the chaos of the first months of the occupation, and the multitude of charities. An anonymous letter accused the DSPG of artificially inflating prices, providing prisoners with rotten produce, general disorganisation and theft. 80 In May 1942 military auditor Honnorat concluded that even if some of the critiques were accurate, there was no reason to reorganise the entire DSPG.<sup>81</sup> Honnorat audited most of the charities to determine how their donations were spent. Most kept good records. 82 However, similar accusations were made against Amitiés Africaines<sup>83</sup> and the CCAPG.<sup>84</sup> Amitiés Africaines was under scrutiny after a public auction to raise money for CPOWs. Instead of donating food directly to the CPOWs, they auctioned it off. The organisation's own general secretary, Messel, blew the whistle on the auction, fearing that news of it would damage Vichy's reputation. He claimed that the head of the women's section, Madame Meifriedy, exaggerated the amount raised, allowed the

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>77</sup> AN, F/9/2351, Anonymous to the President of the Red Cross, 1 December 1941, forwarded to Scapini 16 December 1941.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>79</sup> Until 1944, the Germans did not generally remove Jewish prisoners from Western armies, including soldiers in the British Armies with Palestinian nationality. See Bob Moore, 'The Treatment of Prisoners in the Western European Theatre of War, 1939-1945' in Scheipers (ed) Prisoners in War, p.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>80</sup> SHD, 9P38, Honnorat to the Director du Contrôle et du Contentieux 22 May 1942.

<sup>82</sup> See SHD, 9R36 for the full details of audits: H. Lemery to Honnorat, 26 July 1943; F. Vezia to Honnorat, 26 July 1943; Bouge to Honnorat, 26 July 1943; Huré to Honnorat, 28 July 1943; Benoit to Honnorat, 28 July 1943; Henri Peltier to Honnorat, 5 August 1943; Honnorat to F. Vezia, 8 September 1943; and also AN, F/1a/4526, note for the Conseilleur d'Etat, Secretaire general par l'administration, sous-direction des Affaires Algériennes, 20 May 1942.

<sup>83</sup> SHD, 9R8, report on Amitiés Africaines particularly the Lyons branch, 17 November 1942.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>84</sup> SHD, 9R36, report on the CCAPG's agreement for blankets, 21 July 1941.

wealthy to circumvent rationing restrictions, and did not help the CPOWs. <sup>85</sup> The audit concluded that food, not money, was the top priority for CPOWs, and thus the rations should have been given directly to them. <sup>86</sup> Messel's second accusation claimed that *Amitiés Africaines* changed their focus from helping North African prisoners to primarily French prisoners. Until June 1942 sixty-seven per cent of the packages were sent to North African prisoners. <sup>87</sup> After June 1942 packages were only sent to French prisoners, since the North Africans received anonymous parcels from the DSPG in Paris. <sup>88</sup> Despite the disorganisation and corruption within the aid organisations, they did substantially improve conditions in the *Frontstalags* as well as the CPOWs' rations.

French law punished stealing from prisoners with forced labour. <sup>89</sup> However, it had no jurisdiction in the *Frontstalags*. Instead, the French attempted to streamline deliveries and avoid potential corruption. Bigard sent a request to Scapini, asking whether portions of the deliveries could be given directly to the departmental delegates to be distributed directly to the prisoners according to their needs. <sup>90</sup> Scapini's delegation in Germany made the same request. An OKW report from September 1941 ensured that regulations would be followed and the men of confidence would play a larger role in receiving and distributing donations. <sup>91</sup> Response cards were included inside the packages to fight against theft. <sup>92</sup> When those measures were insufficient, Vichy audited the charities involved in scandals. The occupation afforded many opportunities for the unscrupulous under Vichy. The amount of money and donations destined for the CPOWs were certainly tempting. However, most of the problems were due to disorganisation and overzealousness, and not to criminal masterminds.

Despite Vichy's substantial efforts for the CPOWs, they remained first and foremost colonial subjects. Vichy feared the dangerous precedent if the CPOWs thought that France owed them something even as small as rations. In Beaulieu-sur-Oudon (Mayenne), five CPOWs on a work group held a morning-long hunger strike

<sup>85</sup> SHD, 9R8, report on Amitiés Africaines particularly the Lyons branch, 17 November 1942.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>89</sup> AN, 72/AJ/1840, Law number 782, 12 August 1942.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>90</sup> AN, F/9/2351, Frebault to Bigard, 6 December 1941, forwarded to Scapini 19 December 1941.

<sup>91</sup> BA-MA, RW6/270, OKW, special report no. 4, 1 September 1941.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>92</sup> AN, F/9/2964, Bigard to Secretary of State for Colonies, 11 April 1942.

to complain about their food. Their demands exceeded the 'the possibility of supplies, and indeed ration cards. That evening, the five Africans (excluding the *Annamites*) were very arrogant, to the point where the German guard looked embarrassed. '93 It was assumed that any disobedience was the result of German propaganda. Improving conditions in the *Frontstalags* was one way to fight German assertions that France had abandoned the CPOWs. Vichy felt its donations were a simple and effective counterweight to German propaganda and feared that any complaint about the French contributions, not about the German captors, was a slippery slope to outright rebellion. Vichy's fear was greater than the actual risk represented by CPOW complaints. The prisoners above were dismissed as arrogant, because Vichy did not want this behaviour to spread. Vichy would prefer CPOWs to follow the hierarchy and complain to their *homme de confiance* or to the local delegates. When complaints were made, French officials usually followed up, at least nominally.

The Germans provided a useful third party for Vichy in relation to their CPOWs. Germany could be blamed for the harsh experience of captivity. Vichy, on the other hand, actively helped improve those conditions. Despite providing extras, Vichy did not want CPOWs to feel entitled to these deliveries or start making demands on the state. Regular distribution of chocolate, couscous, rice, sugar, kola nuts, dates and other food by the French Red Cross and the DSPG in the Ardennes created an unfortunate situation for Vichy. CPOWs had got the idea 'that this was a normal ration owed to them and that they could claim it as such. The German guards helped reinforce this view by pointing out the merits of their claims, and often joining the prisoners in complaining [...] if there were delays or reductions in the quantities distributed.' The potential for subversion of Vichy's authority was real.

### Gender and paternalism

As seen, the type of aid was tied to its perceived benefit. The individual package was archetypal of the POW experience. Whereas, French and European prisoners depended on family parcels, this was harder for the CPOWs owing to distance and cost, hence the government individualized parcels for CPOWs. By taking

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>93</sup> AD Mayenne, 227W6, Commune of Beaulieu-sur-Oudon to Perfect of Mayenne, 11 June 1941.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>94</sup> AD Ardennes, 1W146, L. Bonnaud to Contrôleur de l'armée sous-directeur de Service des prisonniers de guerre, 19 August 1942.

over the family's role, Vichy, through Pétain, was further able to present itself as the father of the nation and the French Empire. His photo was often included in the CPOWs' packages<sup>95</sup> with a note explaining which colonial authority had sent it. The traditional French view that its colonial subjects were inherently childlike and in need of guidance resonated with Vichy paternalism. The question of paternalism was intimately linked with that of gender and colonial politics. As discussed at length, the colonial subjects were seen as children or men with an infantile understanding of French civilisation. For the CCAPG, 'the individual package, which brings the native the proof of solicitude, not only of the nation but of a particular element in this community: the colonial organisation, the Governor or Resident General, substitutes itself for the prisoner's far-off family.'<sup>96</sup> Aid needed to appear individualised to be effective, even if this increased cost and time.<sup>97</sup> For the CPOWs, the subordinate colonial authorities actually replaced the CPOWs' family, whereas helping French families with their packages was seen as a way to reinforce the familial bond, not replace it.

Since Pétain was a father-figure, who, then, was the mother of the French Empire? A few formidable women, like Mme Weygand and Mme Noguès, coordinated relief efforts for North African POWs. 98 The women Red Cross drivers also provided the personal touch, even when bringing group deliveries to the *Frontstalags*. They often had more access than other Vichy officials as camp commanders made exceptions and let them visit the work groups. 99 Sometimes France itself was personified as the mother or *mère-patrie*. One CPOW wrote to Pétain: 'Without France's benevolent attention, we do not know what severe treatments would be inflicted on us natives. But now our good mother, watching over her children, knew how to soften yesterday's enemies and manage to pamper us through the mesh of the barbed wire. 100

CPOWs had more contact with French women during their captivity than under the strict segregation of the colonial states. Women personified the differences between top-down and bottom-up assistance to the CPOWs. Seeing French women,

<sup>96</sup> AN, F/9/2959, CCAPG, minutes, 13 January 1942.

98 SHD, 1P33, CRF of Algiers, meeting, 28 June 1941.

<sup>95</sup> AD Marne, Reims, 6W R819, Bouret to Popelain, [n.d.].

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>97</sup> SHD, 9R38, Honnorat, report of the inquiry into the supplying of clothing and rations to prisoners by individual package, 22 May 1942.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>99</sup> AN, F/9/2351, Bonnaud to Commandant Jalluzot, 15 December 1941.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>100</sup> AN, F/9/2351, Bonko Hambrié to Pétain, [n.d. but response dated 11 August 1941].

from Mme. Weygand, in all her glory, to the local girls playing godmothers, in these maternal roles placed them on a pedestal, thus, in Vichy's hope, removing them as potential objects of the CPOWs' sexual desire. Sexual policies for colonial soldiers were problematic, and never more so than under Vichy's reactionary gendered politics. As seen, during the First World War, France supplied the same brothels for colonial and French troops. This ensured the men's needs were met while keeping them away from proper French women. The Vichy regime's return to traditional French values brought a reactionary approach to women and sex. The camp guards did not condone all interactions between CPOWs and locals. As described in chapter five, a twenty-three year old prisoner, Tayeb, met a suspicious death after he 'was caught talking a young Frenchwoman delivering milk – with whom he was suspected of having relations.'101 That Germany did not want colonial prisoners interacting with German women was abundantly clear after the occupation of the Rhineland. Was this a reaction of white European solidarity with the French milkmaid, jealousy that a CPOW was able to seduce a French woman, or simply an act of violence against a colonial prisoner? It might also have been an act of terror designed to deter other CPOWs from sexual or friendly relations with the French population. The fact that Vichy requested an inquiry does not imply they encouraged relations between the CPOWs and French women. Both sides preferred less controversial interactions between the French population and colonial prisoners of war.

Godmothers were Vichy approved maternal role-models for the CPOWs. Many school children and women adopted CPOWs, and as the 'godmother' sent packages and letters. At Epinal:

Girls accept to be godmothers. To allow them to meet their godsons, we sent the [godsons] for medical visits in Haxo on prearranged days and along the road to the hospital they had all the time they needed to meet a Samba Diouf or a Santa Troaré transformed into Jean Jacques or Jean Louis (those were the fashionable first names) and were very impressed with their recent promotion to an apostle and proud to have a godmother who sends them, from time to time, a parcel or a letter.<sup>102</sup>

Senghor observed that many prisoners 'had a godmother who spoils them as much as possible. The Frenchwomen, through their selfless generosity and courage were the

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>101</sup> Besson to Scapini, 18 September 1942 (AN, F/9/2351).

best propagandists for France.' Senghor's own godmother was Georges Pompidou's sister-in-law Jacqueline Cahour. He bonds created between the CPOWs and their godmothers were often tight. However, Vichy discouraged relationships between CPOWs and their godmothers since they placed French women in a subservient position to a colonial subject. The postal control regularly censored letters from prisoners in 'the habit of sending photos to Madagascar with them wrapped around European women, supposedly their wives, who were 'easier' than the Frenchwomen of the colony. Mhile worrying about the potentially negative effects, Vichy understood these godmothers were effective in improving the CPOWs' morale. So they assisted the godmothers in their efforts. The CCAPG allocated the godmothers the *carte de colis* which provided the same assistance with parcels as the French had for their family members in Germany.

## Blurring the lines: escapes and bottom-up assistance

Reinforcing the links between France and the colonies went in both directions. As French citizens responded to the call to help the CPOWs, the lines between top-down aid from Vichy and direct aid between French men and women and individual CPOWs began to blur. As seen, local populations often supplied food and clothes to CPOWs especially in the early moments of captivity. Roger Dabin recalled that before the Red Cross the local population supplied all the prisoners' food at Ambroise. Sergeant Chef Haim remembered that 'the civilian population and the Mayor of Commercy did everything they could to make our life more enjoyable and augment our daily ration which was less than slim. The people of Epinal, in eastern Lorraine, were very patriotic and 'to recognize the courage and good behaviour of the natives during the war send them many packages discretely and via

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>103</sup> SHD, 2P70, Senghor, captivity report, 7 July 1942.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>104</sup> Scheck, French Colonial Soldiers, p. 7.

<sup>105</sup> Mabon, 'Indigènes', pp 94-95.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>106</sup> ANOM, FM 1 AFFPOL/929/Bis, Service des Contôles Techniques des Colonies, Secretary of State for Colonies, 5 November 1941.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>107</sup> AN, F/9/2351, Andlauer to the sous-délégués d'outre-mer aux associations marraines, 27 April 1942.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>108</sup> AN, 72/AJ/291, Roger Dabin to the Secretaire general de la Communication d'histoire de la captivité, 14 August 1958.

<sup>109</sup> SHD, 14P17, Chef Haim, Report, 23 October 1940.

the Red Cross.' Others smuggled in packages or letters. Populations continued to provide all manner of help, even after the establishment of regular Red Cross deliveries. Gnimagnon recalled that:

to the charitable organisations, you must add the private initiatives by the civilian population to improve the prisoners' conditions (especially adoption of godsons, distributions of warm soup to workers in some areas, all kinds of services given kindly and unselfishly: buying potatoes, bread, tobacco, etc.). The population of Epinal and suburb (Golbey-Thaon) is, in many regards, the nicest region in the east where I sojourned, and the one which provided the most services to prisoners in the east. <sup>111</sup>

Vichy preferred philanthropic gestures to pass through the appropriate channels and follow the established propaganda. The danger, for Vichy, was that this bottom-up assistance was unregulated and sometimes moved into illegal activities.

Smuggling the CPOWs food was tolerated, but helping them escape was murkier. Here, the French men and women were not concerned with Vichy's goals of imperial solidarity. Instead, they were helping individuals escape from the enemy. CPOW escape reports universally praised this solidarity from below. Resistance networks had established routes to move CPOWs from the camps to the Free Zone. Before escaping, prisoners like Gregoire Pische studied the possibilities and learnt about potential civilian aid. Informal assistance through food and information was found throughout the Occupied Zone. Gnimagnon first learnt of the escape networks in Chaumont (Haute-Marne) but felt the one at Epinal, where they organized massive daytime escapes notably from the workgroups installing the barbed wire, was the best organised. Information warned that while many civilians were willing to help, some would inform the Germans about the CPOWs' intentions. Without the support of local populations, CPOWs found it difficult to navigate an unfamiliar countryside. Senghor reported that few prisoners escaped in the Gironde as the camps were surrounded by complex systems of barbed wire and the civilians were indifferent to

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>110</sup> SHD, 14P46, Prost, escape report [n.d.].

SHD, 14P46, Gnimagon, captivity report, 7 February 1941.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>112</sup> AD Loiret, 11R14, Secretary of State for National Education and Youth to the prefects, rectors and academy inspectors, 2 April 1941.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>113</sup> SHD, 14P46, Jean Pierre Prost, escape report.

<sup>114</sup> SHD, 14P16, Gregoire Pische, captivity report, 16 August 1941.

<sup>115</sup> SHD, 14P46, Gnimagnon, captivity report, 7 February 1941.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid.

the CPOWs.<sup>117</sup> At Epinal, prisoners destroyed barbed wire and used the sewers or underground tunnels that opened outside the camps.<sup>118</sup> Other prisoners engaged in the lucrative business of selling civilian clothes. Not all groups made it out in their entirety. The German guard killed a North African prisoner who got caught in the barbed wire outside Epinal. Abdoulaye Maiga left with a group of ten prisoners. A German guard noticed the prisoners had crossed the barbed wire surrounding the farm and fired on them. They dispersed into the nearby woods, where only four met up in the night. Over four days of travel they were cared for by French peasants who brought them to the first French post on the demarcation line, once in the Free Zone they went on to Rivesaltes and Provence.<sup>119</sup>

Escapes happened generally along racial lines. Colonial soldiers were separated by race and usually kept apart during captivity. Prisoners would escape with those they trusted, who, more often than not, were their countrymen. The first prisoners to escape from Epinal were the white French and North Africans. Since the sub-Saharan Africans were not escaping, the guards considered them more dependable. This was a reputation they soon exploited with a succession of successful escapes. Lucien Aïtounaboua's departure on 23 November launched other CPOWs into the escape network. As Gnimagnon stated, 'in most cases, we could not escape during the day like the Europeans; despite the best disguises our colour betrayed us.' Creativity helped overcome the CPOWs' inability to blend in with the civilian population. They sought advantages where they could. Albin Bancilon was hidden in plain sight on a French farm whose owners pretended he was their servant. Mohamed Ben Ali took a risky but simple approach: dressed in civilian clothes and carrying a bucket, he pretended to be a North African civilian worker.

Civilian assistance came in two forms: engaged individuals who helped as they could, and those belonging to a more formal network like at Vesoul. The networks at Vesoul and Epinal were particularly effective and served both CPOWs and French prisoners. One leader of the resistance was also the locksmith for the

<sup>117</sup> SHD, 2P70, Senghor, captivity report, 7 July 1942.

121 Ibid.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>118</sup> SHD, 14P46, Gnimagnon, captivity report, 7 February 1941.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>119</sup> ANS, 2D23/28, Levavasseur to Governor of Soudan, 7 May 1941.

<sup>120</sup> SHD, 14P46, Gnimagnon, captivity report, 7 February 1941.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>122</sup> SHD, 14P16, Nussard, recommend Albin Bancilon for commendation, 1 August 1940.

<sup>123</sup> SHD, 14P17, Mohamed Ben Ali, escape report, translated by Ould Yahoui, 7 November 1940.

Frontstalag. 124 Once out of the camp, CPOWs were given false papers, food, lodged in town, and transported away by drivers from the Citroën factory. 125 In the early days at Vesoul, there was a certain complicity between the resistance and the German authorities. The camp commander Lieutenant Boehm was replaced because there were too many escapes since he felt the prisoners were only doing their duty in escaping. 126

Directions and civilian clothes were essential in order to escape. Not knowing the geography of France put CPOWs at a disadvantage. Mohamed Ben Mohamed El Habib walked all night following directions provided by several Frenchmen. In one village a farmer, a mutilé de guerre from the Great War and former prisoner, provided food, civilian clothes and advised walking during the day to avoid German patrols. 127 Men, women and children all helped CPOWs escape. Aomar Ben Mohamed Ben Aissa explained that, 'all the peasants I met along the way helped as much as they could: feeding me, sheltering me, clothing me (nearly new civilian clothes) and even giving me money. 128 It took Mohamed Ben Brahim and Mohamed Ben Ali nine days, swimming across the Loire and the Cher, to reach the French post in Lury (Cher) on 13 September 1940. 129 During their trip 'the French population helped considerably especially with food and directions.'130 Another civilian gave Mohamed Ben Mohamed a map and papers marking his route to the demarcation line. 131 Salah Allag told a civilian about his escape and received civilian clothes, food and directions to the demarcation line. Another civilian showed him where to swim across the Doub to the southern zone. 132 Georges Brabant ferried three North African CPOWs who could not swim across the Doub on his small boat. 133

Crossing the demarcation line was the most dangerous part of their journey. Initially understood as an administrative marker, the demarcation line rapidly became a closed frontier. Civilians and even Vichy officials required passes to cross from one

<sup>126</sup> AD Haute-Saône, 9J10, Journal de marche du 'Mouvement Lorraine' de la Haute-Saône, 2 November 1940.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>124</sup> AD Haute-Saône, 9J10, Journal de marche du 'Mouvement Lorraine' de la Haute-Saône, 28 September 1940.

AD Haute-Saône, 9J10, Pierre Choffel, isolated resistance: escapes from Stalag 141, 22 June 1956.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>127</sup> SHD, 14P17, Sergent Mohamed Ben Mohamed Ben El Habib, escape report, 29 August 1941. <sup>128</sup> SHD, 14P17, Aomar Ben Mohamed Ben Aissa, information provided after his escape, [n.d.].

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>129</sup> SHD, 14P31, Debayeux to Chef d'Escadron commanding the IV/64<sup>th</sup> RAA, 10 October 1940.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>131</sup> SHD, 14P17, Mohamed Ben Mohamed, escape report as told to Lieutenant Charpentier, 29 August

<sup>132</sup> SHD, 14P16, Salah Allag, escape report, [n.d.].

<sup>133</sup> SHD, 14P17, Mohamed Ben Ali, escape report, translated by Ould Yahoui, 7 November 1940.

zone to the other. For those without passes, underground organisations facilitated the crossing. Two brothers in a village near Dôle collected the signatures of 400 prisoners they helped sneak across the line. Hassen-Ladjimi explained how one crossing worked:

They each take their turn with those who passed through, feeding them, hiding them, giving them supplies for the next day and often money. At the demarcation line another organisation exists. I crossed at a farm that had expressly installed a millstone along the border. While two women were lookouts, a child brought the prisoner thirty meters along the road where the track was made in such a way that it was always camouflaged and all the difficult parts are fitted with a ladder or holes in the fences. A dozen prisoners took this route every day. The day before, two Senegalese, armed and in uniform, crossed. 135

Another people-smuggler led Gregoire Pische through a sewer under the canal at Farnier. Once through, other civilians gave him a bicycle to quickly distance him from the frequent German patrols. Toure Vamoutari from the Ivory Coast escaped from St-Michel in Charente, 'by scaling the barbed wire that surrounded the camp and thanks to the help of the villagers in Lac de Dignac, located in the Charente, he was able to cross into the Unoccupied Zone. As already noted, prisoners who crossed the demarcation line before November 1942 were considered free and could not be sent back to their *Frontstalag*.

Helping prisoners escape was against the law punishable by arrest or even deportation. Prefects were expected to locate escaped prisoners and report back to tribunes in the *Frontstalag*. In Germany rewards of twenty *Reichmarks* were offered to civilians who helped the police or camp authorities capture escaped prisoners. In October 1940 the *Petit Vésulien* published a warning that if the 'selfish' escapes did not stop all prisoners would be removed from work groups and

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>134</sup> SHD, 14P46, De Peralo, captivity and escape report, [n.d.].

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>135</sup> SHD, 14P16, Hassen-Ladjimi, escape report, 28 September 1940.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>136</sup> SHD, 14P16, Pische, captivity report, 16 August 1941.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>137</sup> ANS, 2D23, Governor of Ivory Coast to Boisson, 24 May 1941.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>138</sup> AD Haute-Saône, 9J10, Journal de marche du 'Mouvement Lorraine' de la Haute-Saône, 28 September 1940.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>139</sup> AD Gironde, 45W82, Tribunal de la Feldkommandantur 529 to prefect of Gironde, 14 December 1940.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>140</sup> BA-MA, RW6/270, Gez Breyer Oberstlt, OKW, Az 2f 24 Kriegsgef. I, 16 June 1941.

brought back inside the Frontstalag. 141 The mayor of Joux-la-ville in the Yonne was required to file an official police report when three Tunisian prisoners escaped. They waited until they were paid for the month's work, and left without mentioning anything to the mayor about their intentions. The mayor swore he knew neither why they escaped nor the direction they took. 142 Luckily for the mayor and the prisoners' employer they escaped on Sunday when they were under the German guards' supervision. After the French general Giraud escaped from captivity in Germany, Scapini publicly asked prisoners to abstain from escaping. 143 However, there was a complicated relationship between the legal aspect and the potential propaganda benefits. French officials in the colonies acknowledged that 'our best propagandists on this subject are the escaped *tirailleurs* who all emphasize the kindness shown them by the metropolitan French, and blame [Germany] for the beatings and brutality they suffered during captivity.' Additionally, escaped prisoners provided much of Vichy's information on captivity in both France and Germany. As with the potential for 'awkward' relationships formed with the godmothers, Vichy accepted that the benefits outweighed the disadvantages. Vichy preferred to publicly denounce the escapes while benefiting from them.

Between 1940 and 1945, 6.7 per cent of the CPOWs escaped from captivity. 145 This was slightly higher than the figure for total French prisoners, fewer than five per cent of whom escaped. 146 Three reasons could explain the difference. As seen, CPOWs benefited enormously from the local population's help. Second, CPOWs had a shorter distance to travel than French prisoners in Germany. To illustrate the difficulties faced by French prisoners in Germany, Durand cites the example of three French prisoners who escaped from camps in Germany, and who remained free for three months, but who never managed to leave Germany. 147 From their work, CPOWs also had access to French francs. Perhaps a final consideration, the German authorities allowed an unknown number of CPOWs to escape so as to help their

<sup>147</sup> Ibid., p. 108.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>141</sup> Le Petit Vésulien, 22 October 1940.
<sup>142</sup> AD Yonne, 1W652, Procès-Verbal, 6 October 1941.

<sup>143</sup> Helga Bories-Sawala, 'Les Prisonniers Français dans l'industrie de guerre allemande' in Catherine ed. in Captivité des prisonniers de guerre, p. 97.

<sup>144</sup> SHD, 3H159, political and economic information bulletin, 9-15 March 1941.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>145</sup> Calculations based on the ICRC 'capture cards' at the BAVCC, Caen.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>146</sup> Durand, Vie quotiedienne, p. 107.

propaganda efforts in North Africa (the numbers of North Africans who escaped was higher than that for other colonies).

According to OKW data, approximately 2,481 North African prisoners had escaped from the *Frontstalags* by 31 March 1942.<sup>148</sup> The following table gives the percentage of CPOWs who escaped by colony of origin:

Colony	Percentage who escaped
Algeria	9.1% (9.5 if two recaptured are included)
Tunisia	7.5%
Morocco	6%
Senegal	5.7%
Madagascar	3.7%
Guinea	3.7%
Côte d'Ivoire	2.9%
Indochina	4.2%
AEF	50% (one of the two prisoners from AEF
	escaped)

Table 6.1: percentage of CPOWs who escaped, calculations based on the ICRC 'capture cards' (source: BAVCC, Caen).

Once across the demarcation line CPOWs had to decide whether or not to report to the French authorities. Shelters for North African prisoners provided beds and enough money to continue to Fréjus or Marseilles. Some escapers were repatriated to their home country before late 1942, whereas others were placed in French run camps in the southeast: Rivesaltes for North Africans and Fréjus for the others.

### After November 1942

After the allied landings in North Africa relations with the colonies were cut off completely, as North Africa went over to the allied side. Germany riposted by invading the southern zone leaving the Vichy regime only nominally in control. Vichy had lost the Empire and its Free Zone. Vichy collaboration continued until the end of the war, but public opinion had begun to shift. More French hoped for allied victory.

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>148</sup> SHD, 2P63, Dupuy, analysis of full report of the *Frontstalags*, 1 October – 1 April 1942.

Deliveries from the colonies, which had been slowed by the British blockade, were now stopped completely. As seen, North Africa had supplied many of the CPOWs' packages and food for the group deliveries.

All the French, not just the Vichy government, had to redouble their efforts to compensate for the loss of the Empire. After November 1942, Vichy took over the North African charities. From December 1942, German authorities refused the *Amitiés Africaines* access to the camp, only allowing the French Red Cross to make deliveries. Bigard's DSPG organised new packages for the CPOWs. The press continued to generate interest around the CPOWs:

The dramatic events that cost us the loss of our colonial lands drew attention to the plight of our prisoners of war from the Empire ... Bigard [reassures] - all precautions have been taken to ensure that our native colonial prisoners receive Christmas packages and the regular monthly package. For the natives, the organisation was easier. "The godmothers associations", mostly based in Paris and Bordeaux, had already taken on making their dependents' packages, and these, addressed to consolidation centres, are automatically distributed to every camp the same day. These shipments have not slowed down, but unfortunately the occupation of the colonies by the Anglo-Americans is an extremely hard blow to obtaining colonial products, which are so enjoyed by our native soldiers. <sup>151</sup>

A school in the Marne adopted three CPOWs, two of whom had fought in the canton in June 1940. Each month students sent a package and regular letters. The Comité Algérien d'assistance aux prisonniers de guerre also volunteered to act on behalf of the prisoners' families in Algeria. To do so it requested that 'the direction des prisonniers de guerre double its monthly rations so it might send two monthly packages instead of one to all the Muslim prisoners. It would also try to take care of the European prisoners from Algeria interned in Germany. The official newspaper explained that North African prisoners had been invited to send via the men of confidence their address labels to the sous-direction Service des prisonniers de guerre

<sup>149</sup> Mabon, 'Indigènes', p. 75.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>150</sup> AN, F/9/2964, Bigard to the Secrétaire general de la delegation du Gouvernement français dans les territories occupés, 23 November 1942.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>151</sup> SHD, 2P54, Le Petit Parisien, 16 December 1942 ().

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>152</sup> AD Marne, Reims, 6W R810, Adoption of Prisoners by Ecole Mixte à deux classes de Souain, 1 February 1943.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>153</sup> AN, F/1a/3653, Audisio to Ingrand, 11 November 1942.

in Paris 'which, after verification, will pass them to the *Comité central d'assistance* aux prisonniers de guerre algériens. This organisation, created by the Secretary of State for the Interior, ensures the production of packages with food made available by the DSPG and their shipment to the consignee.' The ICRC was called upon to help CPOWs with administrative formalities as Vichy could no longer communicate with the colonies. For example when Caporal Ernest Basse wanted his military allocation sent to his mother in Dakar, French Red Cross asked the ICRC for their assistance. 155

Duty required that the Vichy government take care of their loyal native soldiers. Martin Thomas argues that the limited number of CPOWs meant they were neglected in favour of French prisoners. <sup>156</sup> Certainly, colonial prisoners of war were in the minority. But their potential to make trouble, as colonial subjects who had witnessed the defeat of France, outweighed their numeric importance. Before repatriation, CPOWs were monitored in French camps for exposure to propaganda and its residual effects. Like the idea of imperial unity, Vichy's philanthropic mobilisation on behalf of CPOWs had cracks in its image. CPOWs did benefit from Vichy's assistance. Their material comfort was greatly improved by the additional rations provided by the Red Cross and other organisations. Packages provided the prisoners with regular mail even when correspondence with their families was slow or non-existent. While for Vichy, helping CPOWs was as much a political as a philanthropic cause, individuals generally helped CPOWs out of kindness and solidarity.

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Did Vichy consider the aid given to colonial prisoners of war a success and was it equal to the aid received by Allied prisoners in Germany? Between the Armistice and 31 December 1941, of the total aid from the DSPG the *Frontstalags* received twenty-six per cent of the food donations, fourteen per cent of tobacco and twenty per cent of the articles of clothing. This amount of aid was disproportionate to the number of prisoners in France compared with that of Germany. During the summer of 1940, of course, most of the French prisoners were still in France and

<sup>154</sup> AN, AJ/41/1795, Official Communiqué number 119, DSPG, 7 August 1943.

<sup>157</sup> SHD, 9R37, Le Service des prisonniers de guerre en zone occupée, (DSPG: Paris, 1942).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>155</sup> ANOM, 1AFFPOL/639, Verdier to Secretary of State for Colonies, 16 December 1942.

<sup>156</sup> Thomas, 'French Colonial POWs', p. 660.

required assistance. Allied prisoners in Germany received both official aid from their governments, but also from parcels from their families, which CPOWS did not. CPOWs did benefit from Vichy's philanthropic mobilisation in their favour, but, as we shall see, that did not ensure their continued obedience. The Germans also profited from Vichy's material assistance for CPOWs. By donating extra rations Vichy allowed the Germans to provide only the minimum while reaping the benefits from better-fed prisoners in better spirits. Vichy's goal was to ensure colonial prisoners would remain obedient to France. As the occupation and captivity continued, CPOWs became increasing disillusioned with their situation. All the packages and good-will could not compensate for the release of all white prisoners from the Frontstalags. The traditional paternalism was off-set by individual interactions with the French population who often helped CPOWs escape. Worse, for Vichy, the bottom-up aid had led many CPOWs to believe that formal hierarchies between coloniser and colonised were crumbling, or at least blurring. As CPOWs lingered in France their frustration with the lack of change grew accordingly. Vichy dismissed the CPOWs' disappointment at finding the colonial status quo reinforced once under Vichy's sole control as the result of German propaganda. The question of escape changed dramatically after the loss of the southern zone and the Empire. CPOWs knew they could not return home. Unless they could find work in Paris or wanted to join the resistance, as a small minority did, conditions in the former Free Zone were much like captivity.

## Chapter seven

# Hostages to misfortune: The colonial prisoners of war as a political issue

Interning prisoners in their own, non-annexed country was unusual and somewhat outside the realm of international law. As seen, it defined the CPOWs' captivity experience as well as the political negotiations concerning them. Having established in depth the CPOW experience of captivity, this chapter and the next will examine the other strand of the thesis, the political negotiations. Vichy attempted to capitalise on this unusualness to soften the conditions of the Armistice agreement and remove the CPOWs from German influence. With Vichy as its own protecting power, there was no neutral participant to ensure negotiations remained fair. Vichy thought this flexibility would allow it to prove France's commitment to collaboration, which would in turn improve conditions for the colonial and French prisoners. The Germans preferred to use this negotiable space to escape some of the financial burdens and responsibilities imposed by the Geneva Convention.

Central to Vichy's legitimacy was the promise that collaboration would ensure the protection of the Empire, as well as the return of 1.5 million French prisoners. CPOWs were caught up, as pawns, in this longer diplomatic game. Vichy enthusiastically attempted to regain control over the CPOWs through their release or relocation to the southern zone or even North Africa. Germany understood Vichy's interest in the CPOWs and conceded only enough to let Vichy believe in their good faith. As seen through the issue of CPOWs' work, Vichy accepted considerable financial responsibility in exchange for little real control. The uneasy balance achieved during the first two years was shattered during the winter of 1942-1943 with the allied landings in North Africa, German invasion of the southern zone and battles of Stalingrad and El Alamein. For the French, Vichy's remaining political legitimacy all but evaporated. But the most significant external event on the CPOWs was Vichy's loss of the Empire. With the loss of their home, the CPOWs no longer carried any political significance for France, and Germany incorporated them into their overall labour strategy. To free up the German soldiers the CPOWs' guards were replaced by French ones. Ironically, this gave Vichy

the direct control over the CPOWs they had sought just when it no longer mattered, since the Empire was gone.

### **CPOWs** in negotiations

French motivation for obtaining the release of CPOWs differed from that regarding white prisoners. Vichy hoped to encourage loyalty among their colonial subjects while simultaneously removing them from the influence of German propaganda. With the CPOWs in Occupied France, Scapini had to develop a particular set of arguments in trying to persuade the Germans to release them. Scapini argued that CPOWs could be used in the defence of the colonies and that captivity in cold regions was detrimental to their health, or that the French unemployed could replace CPOWs. The Germans replied that there was no unemployment. Repatriation of the CPOWs, Scapini argued, would thus alleviate material needs, personal suffering and labour shortages in France and the Empire. There was more at stake in negotiations for the release of CPOWs then their physical comfort. Despite representing less than ten per cent of all prisoners, CPOWs were not neglected in the negotiations.

A detailed report released in January 1941 showed the SDPG had raised thirty-five points with the CAA on the Geneva Convention and other political matters. The report outlined the actions taken and results obtained for all prisoners. From these thirty-five points eleven per cent related directly to CPOWs and twenty-eight per cent concerned both French and colonial prisoners of war.<sup>3</sup> By April 1942, the French negotiators were still unsure whether future releases would include CPOWs, but Scapini's service continued submitting requests for their release.<sup>4</sup> When it became clear that the German government was unwilling to release CPOWs, the Vichy government launched efforts to gain more control, direct or indirect, over the CPOWs.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> SHD, 2P64, Secretary of State for War, summary of meeting regarding POWs, 31 July 1941.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Ibid; AN, AJ/41/2053, note 1388, 22 December 1941.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> AN, F/9/2007, Doyen to Scapini, 21 January 1941; Annex IV questions du cadre de la Convention de Genève traitées par le SDPG, [n.d.]; Annex V questions hors du cadre de la Convention de Genève traitées par le SDPG, [n.d.].

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> SHD, 2P64, summary, 17 April 1942.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> SHD, 2P64, summary of meeting regarding POWs, 17 October 1941.

As seen in terms of CPOW experience, the French delegation pushed for the CPOWs to be moved to warmer regions following the *hivernage* tradition. Initially the location of CPOW camps was subject to negotiations between the CAA and the DFCAA in coordination with the DSPG. As the first winter of the captivity approached, the fate of the CPOWs remained undecided. On 8 September 1940 the DFCAA reminded the CAA about

the particularly distressing situation in which, from the first cold weather, the native colonial prisoners of war and especially the Senegalese, who fear the rigours of winter even more than the Indochinese and Malagasy, will find themselves. It is feared that the physical suffering of the prisoners, in addition to the mental distress caused by the complete rupture of any contact with their families, will cause many of them potentially fatal afflictions.<sup>6</sup>

The French proposed two solutions: moving the CPOWs to the unoccupied Zone, under French and then German authority, or moving them to southern Italy.<sup>7</sup> The German authorities had no intention of giving Vichy direct control over CPOWs. Instead they moved fewer than half of them (some 22,000) to camps south of Orléans, leaving approximately 60,000 in north-eastern France or even Germany.<sup>8</sup> Besson concurred that the CPOWs needed to return home to counteract the dangerous decline in their health. He asked that Scapini

and the German authorities study the possibility of a massive and quick repatriation of all the French soldiers presenting symptoms of tuberculosis [and] all the North African and colonial natives. The highly humanitarian nature of these measures will not escape your notice, nor will the profound impact they are sure to have on the French and native populations.<sup>9</sup>

As seen, the German government did allow the repatriation to the Unoccupied Zone of any injured or sick CPOWs where the French government was responsible for guarding them.<sup>10</sup> Sick or injured prisoners could not work and thus were a burden on German resources. Scapini argued 'this [French] climate is hardly more healthy for them due to its

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> AN, AJ/41/1834, Chauvin, note for the CAA, 9 September 1940.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> AN, AJ/41/1835, summary of meeting between Chauvin and Von Rosenberg, 14 September 1940.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup> SHD, 2P66, Besson to Scapini, 5 December 1940.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>10</sup> AN, AJ/41/1835, DFCAA summary activity from 14 to 17 September 1940, 18 September 1940.

humidity, not only does the threat continue, but our fears are coming true.' He explained to the German authorities that *hivernage* would have moved colonial troops to Fréjus or better still North Africa during the winter months had the war continued.

In the midst of negotiations, Scapini's SDPG was given the sole mandate for French prisoners. As a result, urgent requests, like moving the Senegalese out of Camp Verney, were not submitted to the Germans until Scapini could do it.<sup>12</sup> By sticking strictly to the new procedure the German authorities postponed decisions instead of refusing outright. The debate over *hivernage* was emblematic of Vichy-German relations. The German authorities made vague promises that Vichy interpreted as a sign that collaboration was working. Ultimately Vichy had no control over where CPOWs were interned. In November 1941 the German authorities explained:

In anticipation of the winter period, the North African and colonial natives, currently split between the *Arbeitskommandos* of Occupied France, will be grouped in *Frontstalags*, [and] measures will be taken to mitigate the rigours of the cold. But because of the obligations placed by the Geneva Convention on the Detaining Power and the need to maintain full compliance with the provisions of this Convention the reorganization sought can only be made in agreement with the German authorities.<sup>13</sup>

In this instance, the Germans used its responsibilities as the detaining power to reduce French authority in the Occupied Zone.

The source of CPOW vulnerability to the rigours of the climate in northern France, which featured so largely in their experience, was not surprisingly a key issue in Franco-German negotiations. CPOWs, doctors and the YMCA consistently noted the CPOWs' difficulty with the rigours of the French climate. The Germans were well aware of this yet remained unwilling to lose a valuable source of labour to a nominally neutral Vichy. One French doctor in captivity, Jean Prost, explained how the initial hopes of autumn 1940 were dashed:

For a long time the German authorities let us hope that all people of colour would be sent to the southwest due to the harsh climate in Epinal. It was not until

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>11</sup> SHD, 2P66, Scapini to Tiepelmann, note concerning coloured troops, 16 December 1940.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>12</sup> AN, AJ/41/1834, Humbert, note for the DSA, 13 December 1940.

December that it became clear that we would remain. According to the German physician, responsibility lay with French authorities who refused to organize camps in the southwest and with *médecin-colonel* Wattau (?) [sic] the French medical inspector in the camps, who, following an inspection, (?) [sic] declared that that the natives were fine in Epinal and that they were also present there in peacetime. (Courcy and Reffy were barracks for Algerian *tirailleurs*). I tried to argue that the Senegalese were not comparable to the Algerians and we were risking disaster come February.<sup>14</sup>

As Vichy could not obtain the CPOWs release to the unoccupied Zone, southwest France was considered the best alternative for housing them. Many camps were located in the Landes. Prisoners there were lucky to have an active branch of the Red Cross. However, food was scarce, forcing prisoners to live without potatoes, as were basic clothing and facilities to wash the clothes they did have. Despite the slightly warmer climate prisoners in the southwest Occupied France were exposed to harsh conditions. Léopold Senghor acknowledged that while Bordeaux was warmer than Poitiers, 'winter continues to be rigorous and firewood is distributed sparsely. Only the "barracks" of those working in the forest are heated correctly. We freeze at the hospital.

Underlying the French desire to have CPOWs move south was the fear that German methods would weaken the CPOWs' loyalty. The German doctor's above claim that France refused to organize camps in the southwest elucidates the complications. Vichy would have gladly moved CPOWs into the Unoccupied Zone and taken full responsibility for them. The Germans claimed they were bound by the Geneva Convention to ensure good conditions for the CPOWs while simultaneously blaming the French for the harsh conditions. This was simple but effective anti-French propaganda.

### The politics of control and inspection

French prisoners, like other 'western' POWs continued to benefit from a list of protections (see appendix B) and, crucially, this included colonial captives. The

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>14</sup> SHD, 14P46, Prost, report on captivity and escape, [n.d.].

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>15</sup> SHD, 2P78, Georges Scapini and Jean Desbons, summary of visit to *Frontstalag* 195, 10 April 1941.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>16</sup> SHD, 2P70, Léopold Senghor, captivity report, 7 July 1942.

protection of the latter was therefore in sharp contrast to the experience of Soviet POWs and Slav civilians. Colonial and French prisoners were afforded basic protections under the Geneva Convention such as housing and food. The Geneva Convention was designed to give a legal status to the protecting powers, to ensure that humanitarian and not military or political aims determined implementation of the convention.<sup>17</sup> German officers warned their soldiers that to abuse the convention would 'reflect poorly on the honour of the German soldier'. 18 Both Vichy and the Germans sought to circumvent the Geneva Convention when convenient. Vichy genuinely believed that the Geneva Convention could be improved upon. Huntziger stated in June 1940 that the 'Geneva Convention did not fit perfectly, it did not provide for such a large number of prisoners of war in such a short time, everyone [wa]s surprised by the amplitude of the problem.'19 Yves Durand reminds us that while neither power abandoned the Geneva Convention, the ambiguity created when Vichy replaced the United States as its own protecting power resulted in an unequal negotiation with a powerful country that could use the others' prisoners as hostages.<sup>20</sup> This in effect set the terms of the Armistice Commission as far as POWs were concerned (see appendix C).

By reinterpreting the Geneva Convention Vichy hoped to gain greater access to its prisoners, while Germany wanted to reduce costs and maximise its control. In a misguided attempt to show commitment to collaboration and perhaps gain more influence over CPOWs, the French accepted much of the financial responsibility for their own prisoners. French commitment to collaboration coloured negotiations. Vichy undermined the French relationship with the Geneva Convention by becoming its own external protecting power. Germany felt that releasing more French prisoners than strictly required by the convention proved their commitment to the text. Alphonse Waltzog's 1942 publication asserted that: 'Now as in the past all the requirements for the protecting power are met in respect of French prisoners of war exactly as in the case of prisoners,

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>17</sup> Wylie, Barbed Wire Diplomacy, p. 7.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>18</sup> Vourjoutiotis, *Prisoners of War*, p. 28.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>19</sup> AN, AJ/41/1834, Huntziger, note for the Minister of Defence, Nationale Direction des Services de l'Armée, 22 July 1940.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>20</sup> Durand, Captivité, p. 315.

whose country is actually represented by a protecting power.'<sup>21</sup> This did not include protections willingly waived by Vichy hoping for more concessions in return.

Vichy needed to convince both its own population and the Germans that France was a serious interlocutor. In the summer of 1940 it actively worked to be seen as the legitimate French government in both metropolitan France and the colonies.<sup>22</sup> The delicate balance pushed Vichy to offer greater concessions to the German government hoping for reassurances for the French and colonial populations that France remained in control. Since the CPOWs were present on French soil they became the most visible objects of Vichy policy towards prisoners of war. First Vichy needed access to the CPOWs.

The German authorities kept the *Frontstalags'* locations secret until October 1940.<sup>23</sup> Even after October, the Vichy authorities did not know where all the CPOWs were. Upon capture all prisoners had the right to inform their families and government of their whereabouts. The chaotic summer of 1940 delayed this process. In November 1940, Bigard asked for a list of CPOWs by camp.<sup>24</sup> The OKW reminded Vichy that the *Centre national d'information sur les prisonniers de guerre* had no legal right to contact CPOWs or even camps directly for information on missing soldiers. All requests had to go through Scapini who could only communicate with *Vertrauensleuten* (select individuals with certain responsibilities) but not directly with POWs and only via the *Auswaertiges Amt.*<sup>25</sup>

Legally, independent and neutral commissions, often headed by the ICRC and attended by the protecting power, were granted access to camps to ensure international law was respected. Confusion surrounded this issue as well. In July 1940, the OKW allowed German officers to escort Red Cross representatives to camps in Germany and Occupied France. Inspectors were accompanied at all time and could only distribute goods. <sup>26</sup> By August, only the American embassy, still acting as the protecting power to

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>21</sup> Waltzog, Les Principaux accords du Droit.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>22</sup> Paxton, Vichy France, p. 69.

AN, F/9/2829, PTT, note for the Regional, Departmental and Ambulant line directors, 8 October 1940.
 AN, F/9/2959, Bigard to Diemer, 9 November 1940.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>25</sup> BA-MA, RW6/270, OKW collective releases, no, 2, 7 July 1941.

French POWs, had access to camps in Germany and Occupied France.<sup>27</sup> In the months after the defeat, French civilians were tempted to find their relatives by visiting the Frontstalags. As a result the French press repeatedly published German instructions not to go to the camps.<sup>28</sup> The warnings were ignored. Vichy's suggestion to provide extra food in exchange for access was denied as the French Red Cross was already supplying the camps. The French Red Cross depended on subsidies from the Vichy government but on this occasion its activities blocked Vichy from the prisoners. On 14 September 1940 the French and German committees for Prisoners of war met and 'it was envisaged that prefects could possibly be allowed, in accordance with local Kommandanturs, to visit the prisoner of war camps located in occupied territory [...] so that the two authorities may establish rules for the practical implementation of the agreements.'29 Authorisation never came and French prefects were not allowed into the Frontstalags.

By becoming its own protecting power, Vichy hoped to gain access to its prisoners as the United States had.<sup>30</sup> Even critics of the replacement acknowledged that greater access 'could have beneficial consequences for the fate of our prisoners.'31 As usual, Vichy did not obtain everything it wanted. From December 1940, a month after Scapini became the spokesman for Vichy as the protecting power, the German Minister for War withdrew permission for the YMCA to visit French prisoners in Germany. D. A. Davis, the YMCA director in charge of POW activities, wrote to Madame Huntziger to explain:

The reason given for this prohibition is that the Scapini Commission is responsible for all French prisoners of war and the French know better than anyone how to help their countrymen and arrange a programme of activities that best suits them. My conversations with members of the Scapini commission indicate that this was not at all the Ambassador's or the members of this committee's idea to replace private organizations and especially the Secretaries for prisoner of war aid, organized by the Young Men's Christian Association, who

<sup>27</sup> AN, F/9/2001, Mieliecki, CAA to DFCAA, 1 August 1940.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>28</sup> AD Eure et Loir, 1W101, French POW camps in Eure et Loir, 20 August 1940; AD Vesoul, 1PJ32, Le Petit Vésulien, 9 September 1940.

AN, F/9/2002, Chauvin, note for the sous-commission des prisonners de guerre, 17 September 1940.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>30</sup> SHD, 1P33, CRF, Paris automobile section, 21 September 1941.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>31</sup> AN, AJ/41/1834, Humbert, Note for DSA POW section, 13 November 1940.

have rendered a valuable service to prisoners by helping them to develop programmes in the camps.<sup>32</sup>

This showed German willingness to use Vichy's concessions against it. Interestingly this restriction was not enforced in the Occupied Zone as YMCA delegates visited *Frontstalags* in February 1941, a fortnight before Davis wrote his letter. However, access to both the German and French Red Cross was refused at Saumur as punishment for numerous escapes.<sup>33</sup>

Despite lacking official authorisation to visit CPOWs, prefects and local authorities sought ways to ensure their well-being, but were often frustrated in this regard. In December 1941 departmental delegates Mr. Chauvy and Commander de Perthuis were refused entry: 'only the local delegate for Fourchambault manages to contact the prisoners through backchannels.' The prefect in the Vienne was worried about the state of the CPOWs in his department, as the food he supplied was not being distributed to them. After repeated broken promises, the prefect wrote to the CCAPG requesting that a delegation from the American or Swiss Red Cross be sent. Eventually the *Frontstalags* reopened to French and international inspectors. Reports from camp inspectors, charities, the Red Cross, politicians and less often the CPOWs themselves were Vichy's only insight into conditions in the *Frontstalags*. Access was never unfettered or total.

### The political stakes of the CPOW question

The CPOWs were a numerical minority. So why did Vichy invest time and resources on their behalf? To understand Vichy's motivation, one has to examine the imperial context. The CPOWs had some political weight while Vichy held the French Empire. Technically the Armistice protected the latter from German and Italian encroachment, but that did not prevent Germany from manipulating the situation to its advantage. The Germans repeatedly warned Vichy that it remained sceptical that Vichy

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>32</sup> SHD, 2P66, D.A. Davis to Madame Huntziger, 21 February 1941.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>33</sup> AN, F/9/2963, Ms. Riobe to S. Presslin-Beausseaux, 7 October 1940.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>34</sup> AN, F/9/2351, Frebault to Bigard, copied to Scapini, 6 December 1941.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>35</sup> AD Vienne, 1J746, letter to President of the CCAPG, 2 December 1940.

could control the leaders in North Africa.<sup>36</sup> Germany saw the potential for gaining greater influence in the region as well as greater concessions from Vichy. Using the hint of conflict as an excuse, Germany pushed for inspections in Morocco. If Vichy could not control the colonial populations, then Germany had its excuse to take control. It is doubtful that Germany wanted to directly administer Morocco or even North Africa, especially once it invaded Russia. However, both Italy and Spain had designs on French North African territories.

The mere suggestion that France was losing control in North Africa put Vichy on the defensive and ready to prove its commitment to collaboration. Paul-André Doyen, member of the DFCAA, wrote to Carl-Heinrich von Stülpnagel, head of the CAA, confirming:

If the Reich's decision to send a commission to Morocco could be taken to mean that in Germany there exists a suspicion regarding French actions in this country, it is necessary to dispel this suspicion and therefore no objection has been brought against this decision. However, I continue to believe that from this measure, undesirable difficulties may arise. In order to reduce [the difficulties] it is necessary to humour the sensitivity of the local populations and prevent tendentious interpretations from beginning and growing, especially in certain foreign milieus.<sup>37</sup>

Considering that Morocco was one of the most recent additions to the French Empire, the risks of allowing greater German influence seem disproportionate to the advantages. British propaganda suggested that the Germans had come to Morocco to stir up the natives, arm them and provoke trouble against France. Wichy reasserted that 'the French government has pledged to defend the integrity of our African possessions and maintain internal order. It does not accept, under the pretext of inspections, that the German Commission of Casablanca brings to Morocco an activity hostile to France. Vichy recognized its impotence and felt it better to comply with German demands while supplying justifications to the population at home and abroad: 'It can be assumed that

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>36</sup> AN, AJ/41/1788, note for the DSA, 14 March 1941.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>37</sup> AN, AJ/41/1788, Doyen to Von Stulpnagel, 24 January 1941.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>38</sup> AN, AJ/41/1788, Doyen to Vogl, 22 March 1941.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>39</sup> Ibid.

Germany has tried to undertake what might be called "the blackmail of inspection" and let us hope it will mitigate its decisions if we allow German inspections in French North Africa." German propaganda consistently revealed attempts to encourage uprisings and instability in North Africa. The threat of German intervention was real and had repercussions for Vichy. Fear of further colonial instability weighed heavily on Vichy's decisions. The Armistice agreement did not force Vichy to accept inspections. However, Vichy feared that 'they will perhaps use our refusal as the pretext to refuse our request to withdraw materials intended for French West Africa from depots under Italian control."

While the Armistice placed no trade restrictions on Vichy, the CAA oversaw French maritime traffic and required 'very heavy concessions in exchange for the authorisation of certain movements.'<sup>42</sup> Vichy was already providing Germany with lists of merchandise, manifests, and ships' movements from North Africa to the other colonies and the United States.<sup>43</sup> The CAA consistently proved that Vichy's concerns were not their priority. The OKW remained courteous and attentive to the DFCAA, but claiming ignorance of decisions taken in Wiesbaden, simply did not implement them.<sup>44</sup> For example, in November 1940 it had still not acted on an August decision on conditional liberations.<sup>45</sup> The illusion of fair negotiations was just that. The German interlocutors pretended to make generous concessions on small details but never compromised on principles even when contrary to international law.<sup>46</sup> Arguing that France was practically fighting against Germany's enemy, Vichy officials, including Huntziger and Foreign Minister Paul Baudouin, had tried to entice Germany to end the limbo created by the lack of peace terms through a summit meeting.<sup>47</sup> Despite Vichy's efforts, Germany never considered the regime as a partner.

Instability in the colonies did provide Vichy with additional grounds for seeking the return of the French prisoners. De Gaulle and the Free French represented a constant threat for Vichy, especially after French Equatorial Africa's defection and amid attacks

<sup>40</sup> AN, AJ/41/1788, note for the DSA, 14 March 1941.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>41</sup> AN, AJ/41/1788, Parisot to Secretary of State for War, 6 November 1941.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>42</sup> AN, AJ/41/2081, DFCAA to the French Admiralty, 24 July 1942.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>43</sup> AN, AJ/41/2081, Darlan to President of the CAA for economy, 20 March 1942.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>44</sup> AN, AJ/41/1835, subcommittee for POWs, state of negotiations, 8 October 1940.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>45</sup> Ibid., 3-9 November 1940.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>46</sup> Ibid., 19-25 January 1941.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>47</sup> Paxton, Vichy France, p. 61.

on Dakar. Removing CPOWs from German influence had always been Vichy's priority. Now with their home under menace from the Allies, Vichy again argued for the release of trained and educated CPOWs who could lead untrained native troops in defence of the colonies. Technically this violated the terms of the Geneva Convention. In July 1941, interim President of the DFCAA Michelier wrote to the new head of the CAA, Vogl:

Our colonial Empire is almost everywhere likely to supply men for our operations. But these men are worth little without a strong, specialized and quality European supervision. In addition, the slowness of their training does not make them usable for a year and the substantial reinforcements needed could be achieved by the release of our educated native reserves that are currently in prisoner of war camps.<sup>49</sup>

The lack of competent NCOs in the colonies was blamed for many of the uprisings and scuffles with returning soldiers. Having more trained and disciplined troops in the colonies would amount to a double advantage for Vichy: it removed the CPOWs from German influence and increased stability in the colonies. Vichy also assumed the CPOWs' loyalty to France would remain intact if France obtained their release quickly.

Pétain not only feared Anglo-French incursions but also native insurrection in the colonies. He gave Weygand detailed instructions for his colonial tour in October 1940:

In North Africa, [a future British] victory was desired mostly by the Jews who fear seeing the end of their advantages. As for the natives, they remain indifferent, only the Arabs fear the danger that threatens them and were apparently prepared to support an uprising. [...] In conclusion, now more than ever, France must be vigilant, stand ready to repel any aggression and control any hint of dissidence. We must regain control of French West Africa by bringing the civilian and military authorities to a sense of unequivocal loyalty to the Marshal's government, his politics, and the New Order that he instituted, by reminding them of the fundamental notion of obedience to the powers of the state, [and] emphasize this action by improving the economic activity of the various

<sup>49</sup> AN, AJ/41/2081, Michelier to Vogl, 22 July 1941.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>48</sup> Article 74, Convention relative to the Treatment of Prisoners of War, Geneva, 27 July 1929.

territories in order to mitigate the effects of the blockade and thus improve the lives of settlers and indigenous populations.<sup>50</sup>

By the time Weygand visited the colonies, the Free French and British had attacked Dakar and sunk the French fleet in Algeria. Chad, the French Congo, Ubangi-Shari, Cameroon, Gabon, as well as French territories in India and the Pacific had declared loyalty to Charles de Gaulle.

The need to keep up appearances, especially in relation to the colonies, dominated Vichy's decision-making. General de Verdilhac was repatriated from Germany for mental illness and subsequently assigned to an important military post in Syria. Scapini feared that the Germans would 'suppose, that either he was a malingerer or on the contrary, the French Government had no intention of resisting in Syria.<sup>51</sup> Scapini suggested that good politics meant explaining their decision to the OKW to dispel any misunderstandings. Scapini's attitude reflected Vichy's usual fear that Germany might lose interest in collaboration. After the loss of Syria to the Anglo-French forces in July 1941, Darlan attempted further discussions with the German government, whose focus had shifted from the Mediterranean and to the eastern front. Darlan, notoriously anti-British, tried to push Vichy into military collaboration with Germany. He proposed eliminating the Armistice agreement and normalizing diplomatic relations between the two countries, asking Germany to recognize France's pre-war colonial borders in case imperial defence led to war with the allies. However, Darlan received little from the Germans.<sup>52</sup> Paul-Marie de la Gorce cites Darlan's efforts as proof that after the debacle of Mers-el-Kébir in 1940 Hitler initiated negotiations for the use of French bases in Morocco and Vichy's first reaction was always to refuse.<sup>53</sup> De la Gorce argued that Vichy manipulated German interest in North Africa to renegotiate the conditions of the Armistice. However, the evidence supports Paxton's interpretation that Vichy consistently bent to the German will even this was when contrary to its own interests.

As time went on, the French started to express doubts about their government. In April 1942 the sous-prefect of Libourne Giberton, while reporting on public opinion

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>50</sup> SHD, 1P89, Pétain, mission instructions for General Weygand, 5 October 1940.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>51</sup> SHD, 2P82, Scapini to Darlan, 17 December 1941.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>52</sup> Paxton, Vichy France, p. 122.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>53</sup> De la Gorce, L'Empire écartelé, p. 114.

noted that 'we hope for the prisoners' return; that is the question that preoccupies every Frenchman, and, if results could be obtained, the government would strengthen its position in public opinion. We also believe the government's efforts will contribute to loosen the grip of the occupation and improve supplies for the country.'54 The next month he reported that the average Frenchman was worried about the future of the nation having counted on the prisoners' return and a relaxation of the demarcation line and feared that the new Laval government was not as capable as previous governments.<sup>55</sup>

Although aware of this Vichy tried to hide its weakness vis-à-vis the Germans from the population. Faced with German refusal to increase the French prisoners' allocation of letters Scapini attempted to convince the French that 'ultimately increasing the letters would not benefit the prisoners' as it slowed down delivery. <sup>56</sup> CPOWs suffered particularly with delays of one month for North Africa, five months for West Africa and seven months for Madagascar, Réunion, the French West Indies and Indochina.<sup>57</sup> Alternative methods of shipping letters and packages from the colonies were explored. Using Air France to transport the letters was considered but only if the Secretary of State for War accepted to pay the costs of about 200,000 francs per year.<sup>58</sup> Eventually Vichy took control of the post sent to Frontstalags.<sup>59</sup>

As seen, Vichy presented the release of prisoners as the result of successful French negotiators and the generosity of the German government in exchange for French collaboration. Yet discussions on basic rights stagnated when Vichy consistently bent to German pressure. Publicly, difficulties in negotiations were not blamed on the German authorities. On the contrary, individual responsibility was emphasized. Je suis partout published Scapini's message to the effect that 'the problem of releasing prisoners is primarily a political problem. It depends on continuing negotiations between the French Government and the Government of the Reich. It depends especially on the attitude of France - and not only government but also the attitude of the population [...] The main

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>54</sup> AD Gironde, 61W5, A. Giberton, sous-prefect of Libourne, monthly report for 25 March – 25 April, 25 April 1942.

AN, AJ/41/1835, Giberton, monthly report, 29 May 1942.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>56</sup> Scapini, *Mission*, p. 38.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>57</sup> SHD, 2P78, DSPG, Official communication 58, 9 July 1941.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>58</sup> SHD, 2P62, Secretary of State for Communication to Secretary of State for war, 9 August 1942.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>59</sup> AN, F/9/2829, PTT, note for the Regional, Departmental and Ambulant line directors, 8 October 1940.

obstacle to the release of prisoners is Gaullism.'<sup>60</sup> With prisoners from almost every French family, the message was clear: supporting the resistance keeps your prisoner in Germany. Failings were not those of the Vichy government nor an inflexible German regime, but rather due to shadowy enemies bent on destroying the new era of collaboration. Fear of propaganda and untoward influences were a continued theme throughout the war.

As far as CPOWs specifically were concerned, Vichy showed a pattern of concession and compromise regarding the Empire which affected CPOWs' status in negotiations. Behind requests for the release of the colonial prisoners was the careful consideration of the internal political consequences or useful propaganda opportunities. Vichy policy from the beginning favoured the return of French prisoners while removing CPOWs as a target for German propaganda. Chapter eight will demonstrate that the Germans sought to encourage nationalist ideas among North Africans at a time when France's sovereignty and imperial unity were questionable. Despite German claims in June 1940 that France would be treated as a courageous enemy, the political negotiations showed far less respect for Vichy's positions. While Vichy strove for concessions, the rewards, especially when concerning the Empire, often caused conflict. The German authorities used the internal political situation in France and the Empire to reward French good behaviour with releases. Events in North Africa and its potential and strategic importance influenced German policy towards North African prisoners that in turn put Vichy in a weak position vis-à-vis its black CPOWs. Germany recognized that after General Weygand was removed from power in 1941 the political situation in North Africa stabilised. As a reward, Germany released 10,000 CPOWs along with some French prisoners from the navy. 61 Vichy requested 6,200 North Africans and 3,800 West Africans be released. Instead, the German authorities exclusively released North African prisoners to work in mining and agriculture at home in North Africa.<sup>62</sup> By 1941, black CPOWs had seen all the white prisoners leave the *Frontstalags* and were excluded from the largest single release of CPOWs. After the North Africans left captivity the Secretary

<sup>60</sup> Je suis partout, 25 October 1941.

<sup>61</sup> AN, AJ/41/2081, Vogl to Beynet, 24 November 1941.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>62</sup> ANOM, FM/1AFFPOL/833, Secretary of State for the colonies to the Secretary of State for foreign affairs, 14 November 1942.

of State for colonies noticed that 'a painful uneasiness [was] born among prisoners of colour. This feeling has not been eased by measures taken on behalf of veterans or parents of four minor children as these special provisions have hardly affected them.'63

Some members of the DSA felt this release proved that the economic arguments had worked. They wanted to request that an additional 6,000 CPOWs be released. Other members feared that might confuse the issue while the 10,000 North Africans were being released. The request was subsequently removed from the next official correspondence with the Germans, further demonstrating the delegation's sense of their susceptibility to German whims. Here was no other mention of the 6,000 prisoners who presumably were not released. By February 1942, the repatriation of the 10,000 North African prisoners was completed. Germany indicated it would be the last mass release for colonial prisoners. Materially, the liberation of 10,000 CPOWs left more resources for the remaining CPOWs, but it had a negative effect on their morale, especially since the Germans subsequently refused to entertain Vichy's hopes of the release of CPOWs on a greater scale.

#### After November 1942

The Allied landings in French North Africa on 8 November 1942 transformed the situation in France and the colonies. On 11 November the German authorities invaded the Unoccupied Zone, destroying any remaining illusions of Vichy sovereignty. By 23 November, even Boisson had rallied the AOF to Darlan and support for the allies. The Armistice Army was dissolved on 27 November. As Paxton argues, Vichy lost its bargaining chips: the French fleet was scuttled and the Allies controlled the Empire. Vichy had lost everything that the Armistice had purported to protect. The Allied landings changed the public opinion in France. In Libourne, they were greeted with restrained excitement, and generally people hoped for an American victory, even those

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>63</sup> Ibid.

AN, AJ/41/2053, Note for DSA, release of prisoners for the North African economy, 2 December 1941.
 SHD, 2P64, summary of POW meetings, 9 February 1942.

<sup>66</sup> Paxton, Vichy France, p. 281.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>67</sup> H. R. Kedward, *Occupied France, Collaboration and Resistance, 1940-1944* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1985).

who a few months ago were committed to collaboration. Despite the general shift in opinion, Pétain chose to remain at Vichy, after which the regime's relations with Germany moved to a new footing. The loss of the Empire was the most damaging. That changed the political landscape entirely. Externally, with the battles of El Alamein and Stalingrad, the balance of the war had turned against the Axis forcing Germany to mount a total mobilisation of the economy.

This double change of context dramatically affected the CPOWs as a political issue. The absolute primacy of labour for the German war effort meant any further negotiations would turn on increasing productivity for the German war effort. This led to the conscription of French workers to be sent to Germany and a desire to release *Frontstalag* guards for fighting. Vichy saw a political opportunity to reinforce loyalty among the remaining 38,000 CPOWs, who Vichy feared were becoming increasingly disenchanted, by requesting their release. <sup>69</sup> Vichy feared German influence on CPOWs released to North Africa. The loss of the colonies increased Vichy's fears that disillusioned CPOWs had the potential to encourage uprisings. Initially, Vichy hoped releasing the remaining CPOWs would be

a guarantee of influence [...] among the indigenous peoples who have so many times reaffirmed their loyalty through their words and their acts. At the moment when Madagascar has just withstood an unequal struggle or when [French West Africa] could be the object of the next aggression, the liberation of the colonial prisoners is a particularly appropriate measure for strengthening the loyalty of the indigenous peoples.<sup>70</sup>

While Vichy continued to act as though it had political and internal sovereignty, that was simply no longer the case, especially in regard to the CPOWs. Vichy would not have been able to effectively resist outright German demands to convert them into civilian labourers. However, and this remains a key point in the historiography of Vichy, the regime never attempted to resist or refuse German demands. Instead, Pierre Laval's government moved into full-blooded collaborationism.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>68</sup> AD Gironde, 61W5, Giberton, monthly report, November 1942.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>69</sup> AN, AJ/41/2053, SDPG, information Bulletin, 6 March 1943.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>70</sup> ANOM, FM/1AFFPOL/833, Secretary of State for the colonies to the Secretary of State for foreign affairs, 14 November 1942.

However, Germany's interest now shifted from the Empire to labour. German defeats and remobilisation for total war – not the Empire – set the new political terms during the winter of 1942-43. Already, in early 1942, Germany sought to improve its productivity; this became vital after the defeat at Stalingrad. In February 1942, Albert Speer was given control of the German war economy as Minister of Armaments and War Production. He took over the Todt Organisation, after Fritz Todt's death, which during the war concentrated on building military defence structures. Speer centralised and organised the economy, bringing it up to the standards required for total war. Production increased despite the Allied bombings. Simultaneously, the German people required motivation to continue a war that was rapidly turning against them. For that, Paul Joseph Goebbels, Reich Minister of Propaganda, gave his famous 'total war' speech in February 1943. The Germans were promised that total war equalled the fastest war, and sacrifices at home would benefit the soldiers at the Front. In reality, conditions deteriorated, especially rations which decreased dramatically in 1943.<sup>71</sup>

Pressure also increased on the occupied territories, and France was not spared. Under Pierre Laval, Vichy moved into its period of greatest collaboration with the Germans. Already in June 1942, Germany demanded 250,000 workers including 150,000 skilled workers. In exchange for every three workers sent to Germany one French prisoner was released. This *relève* was the most notorious attempt to use POWs as a bargaining tool with the French public. Only 60,000 French workers went to Germany by the end of the summer, many young French men preferring to join the Resistance instead. As the German war effort increased, the need for French labour did as well. In February 1943, Laval introduced the *Service du Travail Obligatoire* (STO), which forcibly required young men to leave for work in Germany. Over 600,000 men left for Germany between June 1942 and August 1943. By September Laval and Speer signed an agreement directly integrating a number of French industries into the German economy. The Todt Organisation also increased its dependence on POW and forced labourers recruited from occupied countries. Some CPOWs were used in France to build the Atlantic Wall. By the end of 1944, 1.4 million labourers worked on the Todt projects in

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>71</sup> Durand, Vie quotidienne, p. 125.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>72</sup> Jackson, *Dark Years*, p. 220.

deplorable conditions. The CPOWs were now a political issue in this new context of direct economic collaboration. Already a minority among French prisoners, the CPOWs' importance was further diluted by the need for a massive increase in labourers. They were increasingly viewed as ready-organised work groups.

Germany increasingly depended on CPOW labour as it faced difficulties recruiting the French to work in Germany.<sup>73</sup> As a result, the Germans informed the *Direction des Troupes Coloniales*:

There is no question of releasing the colonial native prisoners. The only improvement in the fate of these native prisoners is the substitution, as an experiment, of the German or French custodial staff; that the French custodial staff would be made responsible vis-à-vis the German authorities for the discipline and the proper use of work groups. [...] Housing, food, clothing, medical care and payment of natives in work groups continue to be provided by the German authorities of the *Frontstalags* to which they belong. Outside of working hours, the prisoners can walk out of the cantonment and go to the villages where they can purchase supplementary food.<sup>74</sup>

This unorthodox idea, that the French guard their own CPOWs, was in fact Pierre Laval's idea. While Prime Minister, in January 1942, without consulting Scapini or the Secretary of State for Defence, he suggested that French officers supervise some CPOWs. Scapini felt there were too many inconveniences in simply switching German guards for French ones. Instead he suggested asking the Germans to place the CPOWs on captivity leave (congé de captivité), transforming them in situ into workers, and grouping them into colonial work groups such as existed in the southern zone. Germany also counted on using the remaining colonial troops who had not been captured in 1940, or repatriated, as labour. In June 1943 there were 212 white officers, four coloured officers, 422 white NCOs and 633 coloured NCOs and 15,335 colonial men remaining in France. The suggested as the primary suggested as a suggested that French officers supervise some CPOWs. The suggested as a suggested that French officers supervise some CPOWs. The suggested as a sugge

<sup>73</sup> AD Gironde, 61W5, Giberton, monthly report, 30 July1942.

<sup>76</sup> BA-MA, RW34/77, Special report no. 3, Kontrollinspektion der DWStK, 5 June 1943.

<sup>74</sup> SHD, 3P84, Fourquet, note for La Direction des troupes coloniales, bureau technique, 29 March 1943.
75 SHD, 2P64, Le Gouest, 'l'Encadrement des prisonniers indigènes des *Frontstalags* par des Français', 25 August 1943.

Despite the initial French reservations, converting CPOWs into a form of colonial civilian labour in semi-militarized formations had the benefit of requiring French NCOs and officers with colonial experience to supervise them. Vichy saw this as an opportunity to obtain the release of more French prisoners. Once constituted, these groups would be placed at the German authorities' disposition.<sup>77</sup> The French and German authorities disagreed on what exactly the French role was. According to the Germans, it was a simple switch of nationalities with all responsibilities remaining the same including preventing escapes and imprisoning misbehaving soldiers.<sup>78</sup> Fearing reprisals on their officers should CPOWs escape, Vichy argued that the new guards should merely ensure that work was completed correctly. The German view prevailed. Despite the disagreements a trial-run was attempted in 1943. Captain La Touche took charge of the group of camps in the experiment: Nouserd, Seychapré, Xivry and Mailly. Colonel Dantan-Merlin reported at length on *Frontstalag* 194 Nancy.

The new system was designed to increase productivity, compared with the work CPOWs had previously done on French farms and forestry. A team of white officers, ranging in rank from captains to aspirants, and occasionally native NCOs, supervised the CPOWs. The example of CPOWs working in a steel mill illustrates the dramatic change in their work. Unlike previously where the CPOWs' employers' complained that the Germans limited the number of hours in the working day, now CPOWs were organised into shift work. Three teams of CPOWs were organized so work could continue twenty-four hours a day. Consequently, kitchen staff was also organised to provide meals for each shift separately. Having CPOWs working on different shifts throughout the day and night effectively destroyed any sense of community that previously existed in the camps. Conditions were difficult. The steel mill burnt and destroyed the CPOWs' clothes and shoes. Conversion to the status of civilian workers meant, as the French POWs had discovered in Germany, forfeiting Geneva Convention protection as well as extra packages from Pétain or the Red Cross. After November 1942 entire camps of CPOWs were converted without their permission.

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>78</sup> Mabon, 'Indigènes', p. 140.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>79</sup> SHD, 3P84, Daveau to Secretaire général à la Defense terrestre, 7 July 1943.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

Although technically Vichy assumed responsibility for the CPOWs, the German authorities continued to impose their decisions. The German authorities did not always respect Vichy's choice of guard and sometimes took civilian volunteers with no colonial experience. According to Commandant Daveau, one of the French officials responsible for the CPOWs' in their new status:

The first trial of supervision by civilians recruited by the German authorities did not yield satisfactory results, and our natives expressed it often: not finding the support and assistance that they expected in the French staff. By placing career cadres who know the natives, we may be able to achieve in Bordeaux what we already have in Nancy, Vesoul and Chartres, namely a situation where the natives congratulate themselves warmly for being placed under French authority.<sup>81</sup>

Daveau continued with another plea for the liberation of French POWs with colonial experience. Daveau's assumption that CPOWs would welcome this change in situation if their new guards had colonial experience was naïve and short-sighted. It also overlooked the real difficulties faced by the CPOWs: harder work under more difficult conditions. By October 1943 the majority of the 1,000 French supervising the CPOWs were officers or senior employees of the Armistice army. 82

The French officers placed in charge of the CPOWs expressed concerns at this unusual arrangement. Active members of the French army, who were not prisoners, were now forced to guard their own soldiers who were German prisoners. Dantan-Merlin felt that such an abnormal situation placed the French guards in an awkward, and potentially dangerous, position of responsibility to both the German authorities and to their prisoners. He wondered whether 'there is reason to fear that the natives will, in little time, realise that their former officers have simply become their jailers? Is there not reason to fear that this realisation might have grave consequences for the future and that French prestige will suffer from it?'83 Dantan-Merlin believed that the French public also regarded the change as undignified for the French military.

As discussed previously, during the first few years of occupation, Vichy had attempted to mask collaboration from the CPOWs and colonial populations, fearing that

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>81</sup> SHD, 3P84, Daveau, Note for the Direction du Personnel Militaire, 11 November 1943.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>82</sup> BA-MA, RW34/77, units of coloured colonial soldiers in France, 1 October 1943.

<sup>83</sup> SHD, 2P78, Dantan-Merlin, report on the inspection of Frontstalag 194 Nancy, 16-20 February 1943.

the nuances of its relations with the Germans would confuse loyalties and make CPOWs more susceptible to German propaganda. With the use of French officers to supervise CPOWs the reality of collaboration became clear to the CPOWs. To mitigate this, Vichy sought to use respected native officers. Captain Rafa in *Frontstalag* 153 in Orléans recalled that: 'I was solicited by the German authorities, represented on this occasion by a Battalion chief from Scapini's services, in order to convince my Algerian compatriots to agree to accept command of the POW camps which would become North African labour camps (this would have contributed to freeing all the German guards who would then be sent to combat units). Having refused his proposition, he responded that I understood nothing and would regret it later.' Vichy felt that using colonial officers was both the problem and the solution. On the one hand, there were legitimate fears of the CPOWs' reaction to this peculiar situation, but on the other hand, colonial officers understood the French way to manage colonial subjects.

German priorities prevailed decisively in the continuing political tug of war over CPOWs. For despite Vichy's hopes, few French POWs were released to act as guards - a mere forty, and they were not 'proper colonials'. Most of the guards came from the Armistice army and civilians. Despite Vichy's disappointment, after five months it decided to continue, since the French believed that the CPOWs' conditions had improved and they were happy to have the French with them. From June to December 1943 Vichy attempted to reorganize the system: 'the goal has become: overcome the existing difficulties, increase the advantages for the cadres and the natives, and try to obtain further releases.' Daveau hoped to increase the number of French cadres from sixty to 300, but only received vague promises from the German authorities. <sup>86</sup>

Despite Vichy's enthusiasm for the new arrangement, it was not clear that either the CPOWs or the French guards enjoyed the new system as much as Daveau claimed. Frontstalag commanders often treated the guards as menial subordinates, which they felt undermined their attempts to regain the 'confidence and affection of our former *tirailleurs*'. <sup>87</sup> The CPOWs complained that the quality and quantity of food declined with

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>84</sup> SHD, 1K908, Ahmed Ben Rabah Rafa, report on his activities during captivity, 10 July 1948.

<sup>85</sup> SHD, 2P78, Daveau, note, 20 December 1943.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

the change.<sup>88</sup> German reports glossed over any potential problems and claimed the CPOWs maintained excellent attitudes and discipline and were allegedly uninterested in politics.<sup>89</sup> Mabon asserts that using the French to guard the CPOWs was the origin of their disillusion with France due to their betrayal during captivity, which confirmed that they were little more than colonial subjects. 90 The change in the guards was just one more event that shaped the CPOW experience and ultimately their disillusionment with Vichy and France. The most difficult aspect of the change was: 'For the natives, the arrival of French staff should have equalled liberation, but they have had to face the truth that they are still required to work and in conditions that appear very similar to before. 91 Some CPOWs survived this experience better than others. Raffael Scheck argues correctly that while a few CPOWs appreciated the freedoms under the new regime, more complained about corrupt practices and the racism of the old-school colonial officers. 92 The major disadvantage of the new arrangement was that instead of intervening to protect CPOWs who were clearly German prisoners, Vichy now seemed to assume responsibility through its guards for the work CPOWs undertook ever more thoroughly for the German war economy.

The unsupervised contact with French people in town and workers worried Vichy more than ever in view of changed popular attitudes to the occupation. In a significant change from life in the *Frontstalags*, CPOWs were given limited freedom to visit local towns when not working. Vichy's fear of the resistance, in general and from its colonial subjects particularly, motivated the supervising officers to limit the CPOWs' contact with the population:

The *tirailleurs* work and fraternise with French workers, but an insidious propaganda from these might bring them to voice dissatisfaction, or even to revolt (under the influence of other circumstances). The workers earn 10 francs an hour and do not try to hide from the *tirailleurs* that he is 'stupid' to work for 10 francs a day. For the moment his propaganda is ineffectual, the *tirailleurs* are well in

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>88</sup> AN, F/9/2351, SDPG, note for the 'camp inspection' service, 8 December 1943.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>89</sup> BA-MA, RW34/77, units of coloured colonial soldiers in France, 1 October 1943.

<sup>90</sup> Mabon, 'Indigènes', p. 152.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>91</sup> SHD, 2P78, Daveau, note, 20 December 1943.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>92</sup> Scheck, 'French Colonial soldiers', p. 442

hand, and have not forgotten that yesterday they were still prisoners in the Stalags. 93

CPOWs earned the same salary as in the *Frontstalags* but Daveau was studying the possibility of a bonus of six, eight or twelve francs per day depending on productivity.<sup>94</sup> By September 1944, some French officials were increasingly growing frustrated with the CPOWs' attitudes:

On the other hand, I realized that the indiscipline shown by many *tirailleurs* [came from] four years of contact with Germans and with some dubious elements of the population. Because of the frequent talks made by qualified officers, we must make them understand their duty and provide wise advice. If, however, some continue to show indiscipline, severe sanctions will be imposed on them.<sup>95</sup>

Despite the new arrangement Vichy expected CPOWs to demonstrate the loyalty and obedience worthy of a colonial soldier. However, CPOWs had already survived two years of captivity, while material conditions in France from 1943 steadily worsened. They were also now deprived of all contact with their families. If their work remained the same, it was now their former officers who punished them for trying to escape, not the Germans. Any expression of discontent was met with accusations of parroting German propaganda. Vichy's underlying attitudes did not radically change during the winter of 1942-1943 but with the new system their effects on the CPOWs did.

Despite Vichy's reluctance, faced with the insatiable German demand for labour, the programme expanded. Daveau, stating that 'our hopes were dashed', advised reducing the number of groups with French guards if the requested colonial officers were not released. Vichy did not control the choice of guards and it showed the Germans that it would do no more than protest. By the end of 1943, 3,751 CPOWs worked for the Todt organisation. Approximately 1,200 CPOWs worked directly for the German armed forces, and the German secretary for labour wanted CPOWs for chemical factories. Most CPOWs continued to work in groups similar to those in 1940-1942 in French

<sup>93</sup> SHD, 3P84, Daveau to Secretaire général à la Defense terrestre, 7 July 1943.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>94</sup> SHD, 2P78, Daveau, note, 20 December 1943.

<sup>95</sup> SHD, 9P8, Le Tacon, note de Service, 9 September 1944.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>96</sup> SHD, 2P78, Daveau, note, 20 December 1943.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>97</sup> SHD, 3P84, Daveau, note for Services Liquidateurs de la Défense Terrestre, 30 November 1943.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>98</sup> BA-MA, RW34/77, units of coloured colonial soldiers in France, 1 October 1943.

agriculture and forestry. Another 5,450 CPOWs were used as workers in the Occupied Zone. <sup>99</sup> The remaining 5,000 CPOWs were divided into smaller work groups 'without German command and only in the custody of French guards who will be responsible for their supervision. <sup>100</sup> CPOWs in Orleans who had been converted into workers were used in German factories and supervised by NCOs on captivity leave. <sup>101</sup> Those CPOWs from *Frontstalags* in Vesoul also working in German factories were supervised either by French officers and NCOs from the colonial army sent from the southern zone or by NCOs on captivity leave living in the region and designated by the German authorities. <sup>102</sup> In one case, the mayor was given control of the CPOW camp in his town when the company of German guards was removed. <sup>103</sup> Whereas during the period 1940-1942, some of the work done by CPOWs had been created by French communes to keep them occupied, now the CPOWs were integrated into the German war economy in France.

By 1944 the system was well-integrated in the former Occupied Zone. Two different kinds of work groups existed: semi-free and free. In the first the prisoners had a German guard but were free to move about outside work hours and on Sunday. In the second, only a French NCO was responsible. The 950 CPOWs in the Somme, Oise and Aisne were all in semi-free work groups. Both the German authorities and the CCAPG provided food for the CPOWs. The free work groups were only nominally free, and prisoners remained under the ultimate control of the *Frontstalag* commanders.

Vichy continued to try to negotiate with the Germans. By December 1943, Germany was increasing control over the French led work groups. German suspicion that the French career officers might bring the CPOWs over to the allies in case of a landing continued to prevent new releases. <sup>106</sup> To fix this, Daveau suggested changing the status of the CPOWs so that they were no longer prisoners as in the southern zone. Scapini had requested transforming the CPOWs into workers with a status similar to being

<sup>99</sup> SHD, 3P84, Sarrat, note for le Général de corps d'armée, 4 March 1943.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>101</sup> SHD, 2P64, Le Gouest, prisoners working in the Occupied Zone, 30 April 1943.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>103</sup> AD Landes, RS88, prefect des Landes to Commander of *Frontstalag* 222, 17 February 1944.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>104</sup> SHD, 3P84, Commissaire Régional à la liberation des Prisonniers de Guerre d'Amiens to Secretary of State for Defence Paris, 6 March 1944.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>106</sup> SHD, 2P78, Daveau, note, 20 December 1943.

released.<sup>107</sup> However, an end of year German report on coloured units in France claimed: 'Both natives and white leaders came to their tasks willingly. No case of conflict has been recorded. The conduct of the officers has been entirely loyal, and the natives' work has been satisfactory.'

After the Allied landings in Normandy on 6 June 1944 the German authorities recalled CPOWs to the *Frontstalags*, leaving the French with no one to guard. In some cases the guards were detained for a few hours and allowed to leave. Without the legal framework provided by the Geneva Convention or even the Armistice agreement, the French staff were in unmapped territory. Some were technically on captivity leave and thus subject to recall by the German authorities at any time. Yet despite the renewed fighting, the French guards were not returned to captivity. The Ministry of Colonies and Commandant Daveau were responsible for their well-being. At Charleville, the NCOs and officers were told they remained free but under the authority of Capitan Bouzigues. In Vesoul, the NCOs were released after their workers were re-interned. No information was available from Bordeaux. Some CPOWs, like thirty-five Moroccans in Nancy, took advantage of the confusion to escape. Captain Boutier and his assistant travelled through the department and recaptured all but two of them. That Vichy actively sought its escaped prisoners and returned them to the detaining power shows the perverse nature of the new arrangement instituted after November 1942.

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While Vichy's legitimacy was initially anchored to the protection of the prisoners and the French Empire, by 1944 Vichy was doing neither. The Empire had been lost while the CPOWs, with Vichy's assistance, were fully integrated into German war production in France. Despite ample proof between 1940 and 1942 that its tactics did not work, Vichy granted ever-greater concessions in order to maintain German interest in

<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>108</sup> BA-MA, RW34/77, units of coloured colonial soldiers in France, 1 October 1943.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>109</sup> SHD, 3P84, Dupuy, note for the Cabinet, situation in the *Frontstalags*, 22 June 1944.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>111</sup> SHD, 3P84, report on the state of native workers in the northern zone, Secretary of State for Colonies, 13 June 1944.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid.

negotiations. During the first half of the occupation, CPOWs' benefited from being a serious political stake in Vichy's relationship with the German occupiers. Vichy attempted to ensure their repatriation or improve their conditions. Yet witnessing the massive French defeat, combined with close interaction with the French population while in the *Frontstalags*, disillusioned many CPOWs about the Empire. Constantly concerned that the Germans might exacerbate this situation with anti-French propaganda, Vichy redoubled its efforts to release the CPOWs. As this proved impossible, the Vichy government and aid-groups tried to improve their conditions. All this yielded some benefits, not just for the 10,000 North Africans or First World War veterans who were released due to Scapini's negotiations, but for CPOWs in their continued captivity. If CPOWs had been of no political concern to Vichy, fewer efforts to improve conditions in the *Frontstalags* would have been made, and such benefits forgone.

However, as the occupation advanced, it became increasingly obvious to the French population that French prisoners in Germany were not returning anything like as quickly as promised. In 1940, 90,000 French prisoners were repatriated, 193,000 returned in 1941 and 75,000 in 1942. However, in 1943 almost one million French men remained in Germany. Vichy sought new concessions from the Germans who were even less willing to consider Vichy's propositions and this resulted in the new dispensation for CPOWs in France. At the same time, the loss of the Empire and German total occupation of France cancelled out the value of CPOWs in Franco-German negotiations over the Empire. From the German perspective, the labour power of the CPOWs (an important consideration from the start) was now their only value.

Taking financial and eventually legal responsibility for CPOWs began gradually, but culminated in 1943. The next logical step was total Vichy responsibility for guarding the CPOWs, but under German military control and with no real power to make decisions. Vichy saw an opportunity to negotiate for the release of French prisoners with colonial experience but this cut no ice with the Germans. In 1944, Germany became increasingly suspicious of France and feared that Vichy planned to surrender the remaining 30,000 CPOWs to the Allies. 113 By the end of the German occupation, Vichy

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>113</sup> Scheck, French Colonial Soldiers, pp 167-168.

had no control at all, and the CPOWs were left to the vicissitudes of war and liberation, which was a process barely different from that of being made captive in 1940.

# Chapter eight

# CPOWs under the influence: German and French propaganda

As just explained, the CPOWs were a significant political issue because of the complex and contentious role played by the Empire in Vichy's relations with the German occupiers. For Germany, the CPOWs represented only a small portion of their greater North African propaganda strategy. For Vichy, close control of CPOWs, who might prove a disturbing element for future French colonial rule because they had experienced the defeat and collaboration, now became vital. By the Second World War, the use of propaganda to influence public opinion was widespread. It was used to maintain morale, justify participation in the war and vilify the enemy. Propaganda during the phoney war, unlike in the First World War, emphasised the captor's benevolence towards their prisoners. After the Armistice the French government turned its efforts towards promoting the National Revolution and collaboration. Vichy worried about outside influences on the colonies and the CPOWs, and how one might affect the other. Unless there were one French message to the colonial peoples, Vichy was anxious that the latter would be swayed by external propaganda. With the CPOWs, the Germans literally had a captive audience to that end. Vichy's fear of German propaganda was therefore both paramount and not unreasonable, and led Vichy to try to control the flow of information to CPOWs, notably through a propaganda campaign to counteract that of the Germans.

The unity of the French Empire, as previously discussed, was fragile. Reinforcing the colonial *status quo* was central to Vichy's need to prove that France remained a great power, firmly in control of its colonies and dependent territories despite proof to the contrary. Germany, by contrast, exploited independence movements and encouraged revolt in the British and French colonies, while threatening Vichy with intervention if it could not maintain stability in the Maghreb. Both powers exploited Islam to gain influence over CPOWs, but what actually influenced the CPOWs' captivity experience had little to do with religion. Propaganda remained an area of concern for Vichy even after the events of November 1942. Later, the Provisional Government of the French

Republic would share Vichy's concern that captivity had spoilt the hearts and minds of some subjects, but blamed both Germany and Vichy for it.

## CPOWs as targets of propaganda

Pétain firmly believed that collaboration would give France a significant role in the new German Europe; this miscalculation left Vichy vulnerable. The Reich's Propaganda Ministry declared in July 1940 that not only did Germany not consider France an ally, but all decisions would be made during peace talks and not before; furthermore, France's future role was in tourism and perhaps fashion. German Ambassador Abetz was not alone in believing that National Socialism should replace French culture. Vichy did not misread everything. It understood that the Empire was only a useful barginning tool if France controlled it. In September 1940, Germany attempted to reopen its consulates throughout the French Empire. The *Ministre des Affaires Etrangères* felt this was merely a way of installing German influence without any reciprocity. Vichy used Germany's usual excuse against it, claiming that the question could be studied after the war. Vichy correctly assumed that if Germany had more access to the Empire, it would encourage anti-French action. This was one of the only times Vichy refused to allow the Germans into the French colonies.

Intelligence briefings and monthly reports detailed Vichy's growing concern over Germany's interest in the French colonies. The CPOWs became a subject of contention between conflicting German and Vichy French aims. Vichy was invested in the fate of the CPOWs, and Germany used that for its advantage. As seen, Germany understood two things: first that Vichy wanted to prove its commitment to collaboration and, as such, was willing to take on greater financial responsibility in the hope of greater authority. Secondly, Vichy needed to be seen as the legitimate French government of the Empire as of metropolitan France. However, competing claims on the colonies, from Charles de

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Jacques Nobécourt, 'L'Occupant allemand' in Laurent Gervereau and Denis Peschanski (eds) *La Propagande sous Vichy*, 1940-1944 (Nanterre: BDIC, 1990), p.82.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 90.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> ANOM, 1AFFPOL/363, Ministre des Affaires Etrangères, note for the Ministre de la Défense Nationale, 9 September 1940.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> See SHD, 1P200 for regular intelligence reports on German propaganda for North Africa.

Gaulle in Africa or the Japanese in Indochina, forced Vichy to bargain for colonial loyalties. Vichy dreamt of colonial expansion to compensate for its territorial losses in metropolitan France, but never even received concrete assurances from Germany that the Empire would remain intact after the war. Germany, in turn, hid promises made to Italy and Spain from France. In the meantime, the CPOWs became one of the main arenas for competing French and German propaganda efforts. Tensions built up because Vichy feared German influence over the CPOWs but lacked the political clout to back up its complaints.

German propaganda towards North Africa was as organized and detailed as Vichy feared. During the First World War, Germany had used the call for Jihad to motivate its East African troops and the Arab corps. The Second Reich also courted Ottoman Turkey in attempt to foster a revolt against the British and French Empires. Jeffrey Herf has shown how the Nazi regime sought an unholy alliance with North African and Middle Eastern revolutionaries and Islamists by fusing Nazi ideology with Quranic scripture through a mutual hatred of Judaism.<sup>5</sup> Under Wilhelm Melchers, head of the Oriental Department in the Foreign Ministry and Kurt Munzel, head of the Department of Radio Policy, Berlin in Arabic and the Voice of Free Arabism (VFA) made daily broadcasts between 1939-1944 urging Islamic listeners to revolt against colonial powers, and even to kill the Jews. 6 In December 1940 the German authorities staffed the Maghreb Propaganda Bureau in Occupied France with Algerians, Tunisians and Moroccans, favouring those from active independence groups.<sup>7</sup> They coordinated the radio broadcasts and publications transmitted to prisoners in the Frontstalags, often parroting the Berlin broadcasts. From July 1942, the German broadcaster Jakob Mar led a popular radio show with music and culture from the French Empire, all the while referring to 'our' Empire.9 He combined German colonial ambitions with Vichy's ideas of French imperial

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> Jeffrey Herf, *Nazi Propaganda for the Arab World*, (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2009), p. 3.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> Ibid., p. 9 and p. 11.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> Thomas, 'French Colonial POWs', p. 670.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup> Mabon, 'Indigènes', p. 155.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup> Ageron,, 'Vichy, les Français et l'Empire', p.130.

duty, the Empire's wealth and the need for industrialisation, setting the stage for German claims to the Empire.<sup>10</sup>

German propaganda towards CPOWs was less extreme than that for North Africa and took a two-pronged approach. First, general propaganda was aimed at all the Frontstalags and could be quite generic, using Arabic speaking officers or evoking German military prowess. Second, small numbers of motivated CPOWs received special training and attention, often in Germany. After training they would be released to North Africa to continue spreading pro-German propaganda. These prisoners were either true believers or merely sought the benefits associated with helping Germany such as better food, increased freedoms and even early release. Vichy's Section des Affaires Musulmanes reported in 1942 that Germany had a coherent propaganda system for Muslims combining cautious promises and secretive plans. Using both German and Muslim agents, it encouraged Muslims from different socio-economic backgrounds from the Maghreb to the Middle East, as well as non-Muslims in the Far East and India, to act against their colonial powers.<sup>11</sup> The Nazis built, in a far more radical form, on a longstanding German championing of Islam. German propaganda highlighted, and sometimes invented, the similarities between National Socialism and Islam. 12 However, none of the sources consulted encouraged Muslim prisoners to react violently against the Jews.

Effective propaganda was usually linked to military victories. This gave Germany an immediate advantage. CPOWs could compare the well-organized German military machine with the disorganized French retreat. Harold Lasswell's 1927 work *Propaganda Technique in the World War* explained that 'great movements of retreat cannot be concealed for long, and prolonged humiliation spreads the seeds of discord and defeatism.' Vichy could not allow the CPOWs to become agents of discord. Germany's propaganda was simple. It made promises it had no intention of keeping. While Vichy had to justify the defeat and the abrupt change in allies to a population it felt was

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>10</sup> Ibid., 131.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>11</sup> ANOM, 1AFFPOL/363, Section des Affaires Musulmanes, Germany's Islamic policy, 20 July 1942.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>12</sup> Herf, Nazi Propaganda, p. 36.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>13</sup> Harold D. Lasswell, *Propaganda Technique in the World War* (1927, new ed., Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 1971), p. 189.

incapable of comprehending. When necessary, Vichy explained that the defeat had been material, compounded by French overextension to protect its allies.

While it was impossible to hide the magnitude of defeat from the CPOWs, Vichy tried to mitigate its importance for the colonial populations. Vichy found itself in the awkward position of having to remind its colonial subjects of their loyalty. Pétain's first speech to the Empire in September 1940 explained that France remained united despite the defeat, occupation and the difficult winter ahead. He added that 'the first duty, today, is to obey. The second is to help the government in its task, without second thoughts, without hesitation. To the call of the fatherland, the Empire, this jewel in the French crown, will respond.' Here Pétain connected the symbol of the Empire to a pillar of the National Revolution: obedience. Vichy considered that obedience was the greatest quality the colonial subjects, and especially the CPOWs, could demonstrate. In shifting focus away from the defeat to rebuilding France, Vichy incorporated the colonial subjects in its task, even if their role was only passive obedience. Inherent in Pétain's message was his paternalism. As the father of the French nation, he would lead all his children, white and 'native', into France's future. Two months later, Secretary of State for Colonies Platon echoed Pétain's language in instructions to the colonial administrators: to maintain France's world status, its propaganda must convince the overseas populations, in the spirit of unity and national discipline, to obey. 15 In the Soudan, Colonel Duboin concluded that 'since the natives are ignorant of the geography and the consequences of the Armistice, and since nothing has changed in their lives, the Armistice was, for the majority of them, a news item that they have already forgotten.'16 However, he held a minority opinion. Outside the remote regions of the colonies, most colonial subjects were aware of the defeat.

Vichy was also vulnerable to British influence in the colonies. Admiral Platon was warned that, on British instructions, the use of the 'V' sign and the *Croix de Lorraine* began to appear in cities in France and he should prepare the colonies for the same.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>14</sup> ANOM, 1AFFPOL/355, Leméry, Direction des Affaires Politiques, 4 September 1940.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>15</sup> ANOM, 1AFFPOL/355, telegram, Platon to Dakar, Hanoi, Tamanarive, Fort de France, Djibouti, Saint-Denis 3 November [no year].

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>16</sup> ANS, 17G174, Duboin, excerpt from Soudan's annual political report for 1940, 31 January 1941.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>17</sup> ANOM, 1AFFPOL/355, telegram to Platon, [n.d. but probably 1940 or 1941 when Platon was Secrétaire d'Etat aux Colonies].

London influenced the Egyptian press. In the summer of 1940 several Arabic newspapers insisted that the French people fundamentally disagreed with the Vichy government, even though Pétain, at this time, enjoyed almost universal support.<sup>18</sup>

Compared to 1939-1940, France's message had suddenly changed, and unfortunately for Vichy, the 'natives' noticed. Consequently, Vichy's language did not always translate well into the colonial context. The Governor of French Guinea complained that:

The word "collaboration" causes some concern among the natives to whom we have spoken so negatively about Germany (commentaries on *Mein Kampf*, Seydou Nourou Tall's propaganda tour, etc.). We have all taken up the task of explaining to the natives what is meant by "collaboration". This is not to question the Marshal's word, but I believe in the propaganda texts for the natives, it would be prudent to avoid the word "collaboration". First, give a greater emphasis to the future our own country, and then, the new aspect of our relations with England rather than the development of our relations with Germany.<sup>19</sup>

The Governor of Senegal, Parisot, worried that the sarcastic headlines in the monthly bulletin would affect the local population. He suggested 'making the monthly bulletin, which is currently written for more informed readers, accessible to the less-evolved masses who so respect the written word that everything is taken quite literally.'20 The real problem was not that the colonial populations did not understand the change, but rather, that they understood it too well. The colonial populations had received dogmatic and one-dimensional descriptions of Germany because France did not encourage their political consciousness. These descriptions included accurate references to German racism. After the defeat, it became difficult to explain why France was allied with a country that so contradicted Republican ideals of race, even though most colonial subjects were acutely aware of the limits of those ideals. Weygand explained after a visit to the African colonies that, 'on this continent, Germany and Italy remain the enemy. Any concessions that may be made to one or other of these powers of our naval and air

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>18</sup> ANOM, 1AFFPOL/363, press review and Muslim questions, 2e Bureau, Colonies, June-July 1940.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>19</sup> ANS, 2D3/14, Giacobbi à Boisson, 27 November 1940.

bases in any of our African territories will ruin [the natives'] trust in their leaders and provoke reactions that may divide the French Empire.'21

Of course, the French also had to perform mental gymnastics to accept the new situation of German dominance. The major difference was that the French had witnessed the defeat and the collapse of their government. They had a visceral reaction to it and many were happy to accept Pétain's leadership and put the perceived weaknesses of the Third Republic behind them. The French, unlike the colonial populations, had looked into the abyss caused by 'Republican decadence'. Furthermore, the colonial authorities implemented only the aspects of the National Revolution they felt best suited the colonies. Pétain's paternalism and emphasis on work and obedience resounded with Pierre Boisson's administration in French West Africa. He encouraged colonial governors to use European and colonial personalities, elected officials, and religious leaders with influence and prestige to encourage unity and loyalty.<sup>22</sup> Ruth Ginio argues that Vichy propaganda in French West Africa had two goals: to ensure African obedience through censorship and the official interpretation of events and also to promote Pétain's National Revolution whose values were better suited to the colonial context than the Third Republic's ideals of race had been.<sup>23</sup> Vichy's propaganda also contained colony specific information praising French colonial leaders, demonstrating the technological advances brought by France, and the Empire's role in France's post-war future.<sup>24</sup> Moreover, Vichy had no desire to upset colonial hierarchies. Instead it used the colonies to implement practices that would have had difficulty being accepted in Republican France. 25

Neither French nor German propaganda was revolutionary in its arguments. Both exploited their knowledge of colonial cultures and religions to create effective messages. Between the wars the French had tried to reconcile their protection and even advocacy of Islam with their colonial interests in West and North Africa. CPOWs were a concentrated group, in a peculiar position, whose environmental conditions could easily

<sup>21</sup> SHD, 1P89, Weygand to Pétain, 10 November 1940.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., p. 295.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., p. 138.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>22</sup> ANS, 2D3, Boisson, Memo to governors and commissioners of AOF, November 1940.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>23</sup> Ruth Ginio, 'Marshal Pétain Spoke to School Children: Vichy Propaganda in French West Africa, 1940-1943 in *International Journal of African Historical Studies*, xxxii, no. 2 (2000), p. 295.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>25</sup> Ginio, French Colonialism Unmasked, p. xv.

be manipulated. They were neither like most of the French, who, initially at least, actively welcomed Pétain and the Armistice, nor like the colonial populations who had not witnessed the defeat. They were the exception. They had experienced the defeat and its consequences but sooner or later they would go home. They were thus a critical group in terms of negotiating what the defeat might mean in the Empire. Vichy criticised the Germans for creating self-fulfilling prophecies:

The recent regrouping of [CPOWs] into camps following the closure of many work camps has facilitated this propaganda. Propaganda, carefully maintained by the Germans, has found more fertile ground because of sagging morale due to the length of captivity and the apprehension about the future. This corresponds to the profusion of false news claiming that France has lost interest in her native subjects, leaving their families in poverty, having plundered their country. These rumours cannot be denied, because the Germans refuse to distribute response cards to North Africans and the lack of news increases the prisoners' depression.<sup>27</sup>

This created a propaganda round-Robin. Germany blamed the French authorities for problems in the *Frontstalags*. This prompted Vichy to provide extra food, clothing, and supplies specifically to disprove German claims and to be seen as a benevolent, but powerful, colonial regime. Both sets of propaganda attempted to exploit the particular concerns of CPOWs and promote French or German post-war aims.

As always the CPOWs were to be symbols of colonial unity, not participants in a political discussion. French prisoners in Germany were expected to contribute actively to collaboration. CPOWs received portraits of Pétain but were not encouraged to join the *Cercles Pétains* common in Stalags and Oflags. The *Cercles Pétains* were political groups committed to promoting the National Revolution through discussions and conferences concentrating on Pétain as a leader. In 1941 the prefect of the Vosges praised French prisoners saying, 'the prisoners returning from Germany are whole heartedly collaborationist [...] especially those who had been in contact with the German people, they found no hatred against the French, and have been treated well.'<sup>28</sup> Vichy was uneasy when CPOWs expressed similar positive opinions about the Germans, preferring

<sup>27</sup> SHD, 1P200, De Bourget to the DSA Algiers [n.d.].

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>28</sup> AD Vosges, 3W2, cabinet of the prefect of the Vosges, Report, 2 June 1941.

CPOWs to associate captivity with German brutality. Vichy feared that German propaganda had given the CPOWs' the idea that

the Frenchman used the natives for defence, while he himself was too cowardly to fight, so it is right for the native to demand full equality with his former master. A serious filtering of the natives must be done, a certain number (native officers and NCOs in particular) could become dangerous propagandists.<sup>29</sup>

It was this fear that the CPOWs might effectively influence opinions at home, that motivated Vichy to take action on their behalf.

Vichy officials were divided on the best way to influence the CPOWS. It had fifteen Minister-Secretaries of State for Radio and eight for Information between 1940 and 1944. Hoang Van Co, chief of the imperial section of the Ministry of Propaganda, coordinated the French propaganda efforts for approximately 40,000 Indochinese, Malagasy and Senegalese near Marseilles. Two bilingual publications (French and Vietnamese and French and Malagasy) attempted to bring this imperial propaganda to both the CPOWs and colonial civilian workers. Van Co passionately believed that propaganda was an essential political question which could prevent the CPOWs from moral and intellectual collapse. In May 1942 he wrote to Paul Creyssel criticising the Vichy leadership for lacking a clear mission:

Its action can be summed up by this response: "Today everything is uncertain. We live in the interim, waiting for the future to become clear. The key for now is to occupy the men, give them food and heating." [...] If ever there was a time when France must rally all her willing colonial subjects, rich or poor, to her cause, it's when the Empire's integrity is threatened.<sup>33</sup>

As discussed, under normal colonial circumstances France would not have to negotiate for its subjects' loyalty, since the question of legitimacy was irrelevant, but that changed after the defeat and division of the Empire between Free French and Vichy forces.<sup>34</sup> Before 'loyalty to France' held one meaning with one France. When the colonial

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>29</sup> SHD, 2P82, Barret, Troisième Bureau, note, 25 July 1941.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>30</sup> Paxton, Vichy France, p. 200.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>31</sup> AN, F/41/279, Micheal Favre, report on imperial propaganda, 9 March 1944.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>32</sup> Ageron, 'Vichy, Les Français et l'Empire', p. 128.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>33</sup> AN, F/41/279, Hoang Van Co to Paul Creyssel, 11 May 1942.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>34</sup> Ginio, French Colonialism Unmasked, p. xiv.

governors began choosing sides between Pétain and de Gaulle, this opened the waterways for colonial subjects to potentially consider other forms of rule. Van Co's assessment was correct. Vichy wanted short-term solutions to alleviate suffering while the CPOWs remained under German control, but nothing more. To that end, Vichy went to great lengths to promote the rhetoric of unified Empire while improving the CPOWs' physical conditions, without conceding or improving legal rights. Captivity was never meant to change the colonial subjects' fundamental status.

However, sometimes Vichy's actions betrayed an attention to colonial sensibilities that went beyond the usual maintenance of the *status quo*. CPOW Bibi Traoré wrote to the commander of the *Cercle* at Goumbou, Soudan, claiming payment for a steer that had been eaten by a French delegation fifteen years previously. Despite inquiries showing the steer had been reimbursed at the time, Traoré's claim was forwarded through the West African administration, eventually reaching the Secretary of State for Colonies. Boisson's explanation revealed, precisely because of the inconsequentiality of the incident, the fundamental issue at stake – loyalty to the Empire from its colonized subjects:

The case is of minor importance, and does not exceed, in itself, the territorial scope of the [local administration]. But I felt obligated to inform you since Bibi Traoré intends to write to the Ambassador of France, Scapini. I also believe it is necessary to inform the applicant that the request has been studied, and make him understand why it is unfounded. While they suffer the rigours of captivity, during which they may be tempted to stray from us, our native prisoners need to be imbued, by any means, with the certainty that we do not neglect their interests.<sup>36</sup>

While acknowledging that Traoré's complaint had no basis, Boisson was still concerned to show this CPOW that his claim had been heard, especially if Scapini was to be informed. Duty required Vichy to take care of their loyal native soldiers. This time duty was also a calculated political decision in a time where France desperately needed its subjects' loyalty.

<sup>35</sup> ANS, 2D23/28, Cercle Goumbou to Governor of Soudan, 15 October 1941.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>36</sup> ANS, 2D23/28, Boisson to Secretary of State for Colonies, POWs service, 7 November 1941.

### Propaganda for the average CPOW

Propaganda varied from camp to camp and depended on its population. There is little evidence of German propaganda efforts for Indochinese prisoners, presumably because they were far removed from Germany's theatre of operations. Vichy, on the other hand, searched for NCOs who spoke Malagasy or Vietnamese in order to remind those CPOWs that they were excellent soldiers and to provide some sort of professional training.<sup>37</sup>

A major theme in German propaganda was the Reich's eventual victory and takeover of North Africa. As the only major European power without an Empire, Germany presented itself as anti-imperialist. Its propaganda ignored what had happened to Germany's Empire and the inherent contradiction of an anti-imperialist nation taking possession of North Africa after the war.

Some of these claims were idle chatter and bravado rather than conscientious efforts at influencing CPOW opinion. CPOWs were told that the Muslim population in North Africa would obtain self-determination.<sup>38</sup> German soldiers also told them that the Germans would be their rulers after the war.<sup>39</sup> This contradiction was explained away by the argument that North Africa would require Germany's help to free it from the French yoke.<sup>40</sup> In Epinal, the German commander discussed the events in Iraq with the North African prisoners, evoking the 'English' subjugation of their brothers in the Orient and again promising German material assistance in their struggle against foreign dominance.<sup>41</sup> To demonstrate the greater freedom awaiting them, the guards liberally promoted the CPOWs and distributed 'stripes'.<sup>42</sup> Elsewhere, camp guards mocked and criticised the CPOWs' participation in French wars.<sup>43</sup> Deliberate lies were told in an effort to discourage escapes. Camp authorities informed CPOWs that Germany occupied

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>37</sup> ANOM, 1AFFPOL/920, Richert, Service des Prisonniers de guerre, 'Propagande auprès des tirailleurs Malgaches et Annamites', 20 March 1941.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>38</sup> Herf, Nazi Propaganda, p. 61.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>39</sup> SHD, 1P200, intelligence from an escaped prisoner, Centre de Rassemblement de Marseille, 30 July 1941.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>40</sup> SHD, 1P200 note, intelligence on German propaganda for North African prisoners, 23 August 1941. <sup>41</sup> Ibid., 26 July 1941.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>42</sup> ANOM, 1AFFPOL/920, intelligence from occasional but sincere source, 25 November 1940.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>43</sup> SHD, 1P200, note, intelligence on German propaganda for North African prisoners, 21 July 1941.

Tunisia, Morocco and Algeria and that all escaped CPOWs would be returned to the *Frontstalags*. <sup>44</sup> In general, German propaganda tried to 'distract Moroccan, Algerian and Tunisian prisoners from their duty towards France and entice them to opt for the German civilisation. <sup>45</sup> Most CPOWs saw the German propaganda for what it was. Nevertheless, Vichy invested time and effort into investigating it.

Propaganda for West African prisoners differed from that for the North Africans. In the summer of 1940 the German officers started cultivating Black African prisoners, which French prisoners felt revealed German colonial designs. Michel Gnimagnon reported that the Germans distributed cigarettes at Chaumont camp to cultivate select CPOWs while also seeking information on the colonies, their resources, and motivation for fighting against Germany. Much of the information provided was false. Scheck argues that German attempts to curry favour with some prisoners simply increased the hostility of the rest towards the captors and not towards France.

To complement the everyday promotion of German interests, Arabic-speaking officers went on tours of the *Frontstalags*. They were often accompanied by their CPOW agents who

eat with the Germans, dress as civilians, move about freely and their mission is to listen and report everything said in town. At the camp in Bayonne, an Algerian interpreter, who advised the prisoners to write their letters home in Arabic, accompanied German inspectors from Saint-Médard.<sup>49</sup>

A German officer interrogated CPOWs at Mont-de-Marsan in Arabic and recorded their addresses saying he would visit them in Morocco. <sup>50</sup> Kriebs, the chief German propaganda officer, visited CPOWs at Germignan, Laharie, and Mont-de-Marsan. He spoke Arabic fluently and conducted interviews with North African NCOs in the *Frontstalags* and in Stalag III A on

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>44</sup> Ibid., 20 June 1941.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>45</sup> SHD, 1P200, Inspecteur de Police Spéciale Martin to the Commissaire Spécial chef de service, 19 July 1941.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>46</sup> Scheck, 'French Colonial Soldiers', p. 428.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>47</sup> SHD, 14P46, Gnimagnon, captivity report, 21 January 1941.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>48</sup> Scheck, 'French Colonial Prisoners in Germany', p. 428.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>49</sup> SHD, 1P200, note, intelligence on German propaganda for North African prisoners, 28 June 1941.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>50</sup> SHD, 1P200, DSA to DSPG, note, intelligence on German propaganda for North African prisoners, 9 August 1941.

their parentage, their origin, their way of life. He is familiar with North African ethnography and knows the principal native chiefs by name. He readily involves himself in the conversations of prisoners gathered in small groups and questions them about things and people in their country. In Berlin, he often drives the prisoners on their tour of the city.<sup>51</sup>

He also warned CPOWs not to escape since conditions in the *Frontstalags* were better than those in North Africa where the French would force them back into tedious military service.<sup>52</sup> He made references to North African independence leaders like Habib Bourguiba in Tunisia in an attempt to influence literate North Africans, and motivate prisoners to continue their oral propaganda in the southern zone.<sup>53</sup>

Kriebs' visit to the *Frontstalags* coincided with increased German propaganda efforts and publications. CPOWs from Saint-Médard were given copies of *Doumia jdida*, (The New World) a newsletter allegedly published by CPOWs, before being released. It showed, through illustrations and photographs, German strength and its consideration for Muslim prisoners. Written propaganda obviously targeted literate prisoners, but also encouraged those prisoners to read the articles to their comrades. Articles played on the CPOWs' legitimate fears of finding work upon return home. One article claimed that after 'fifteen years of service, [the North African soldiers] receive a pension of 4 francs 50 per day and a job sweeping in the Jewish quarter where the French mock him.' The strength of these arguments combined some truth, colonial pensions were lower than their French counterparts', with emotional fears, that after their sacrifice they would be in an inferior position to the Jews.

These articles blamed France for the continued captivity of Moroccan prisoners despite their presence in German prisoner of war camps. *La Voix du Prisonnier*, another free Arabic language publication distributed to CPOWs described why Germany treated the Moroccan prisoners so well:

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>51</sup> SHD, 1P200, intelligence on Stalag IIIA Luckenwald, 22 July [no year].

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>52</sup> SHD, 1P200, note, intelligence on German propaganda for North African prisoners, 23 August 1941.

<sup>53</sup> SHD, 1P200, De Bourget to DSA, Algiers [n.d.].

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>54</sup> SHD, 1P200, DSA to DSPG, note, intelligence on German propaganda for North African prisoners, 9 August 1941.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>55</sup> SHD, 2P66, Rivet, DSPG report, 23 July 1941.

We are convinced that the Moroccans did not fight voluntarily, but were forced to fight us, and thus are innocent prisoners. If France had left them alone and had not led them to war, they would currently be enjoying a quiet life in their country. Germany is aware of this situation and is also sympathetic to the small nations that are under French and English subjugation, which is why Moroccan prisoners get better treatment.

The author, ostensibly a Moroccan prisoner, concluded, 'I am convinced that all Muslims must openly acknowledge the great leaders of Germany and the German army for the way prisoners are treated in Germany. <sup>56</sup> Being forced to fight for France was a common theme. Another article stated: 'God grant victory to Germany and her armies. The Germans captured us and have rewarded bad with good: they play and laugh with us as though nothing had happened, because they know the Arabs are not their enemies. <sup>57</sup> Religious imagery dominated these texts. From interviews with ex-CPOWs, the *Capitaine-Chef du BMA* decided that the Arabic language newspapers and multiplying propaganda centres posed a real danger. They proved that the Germans planned to coordinate uprisings in North Africa to coincide with greater military action in the Mediterranean. Finally, he feared that these ideas would, over time, grow and encourage political opposition, which might be turned against France. <sup>58</sup>

Articles equating the CPOWs' duty as Muslims with the call for independence<sup>59</sup> also reflected themes presented by Kurt Munzel's Orient Office broadcast on 3 December 1940, which reminded listeners that a good Muslim obeys God's law and fights against those who oppress Muslims, i.e. the French.<sup>60</sup> Reacting against this double threat - radio broadcasts to North Africa and the influence of returning CPOWs - Vichy severely punished those caught distributing these anti-French publications in North Africa. Ahmed Ben Hadj Ali, a career soldier with the 3<sup>rd</sup> *spahis* released as a First World War veteran, was caught distributing these pamphlets in Meknès, and arrested for 'endangering the

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<sup>57</sup> SHD, 2P66, Rivet, DSPG report, 23 July 1941.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>56</sup> SHD, 1P133, succinct analysis of La Voix du prisonnier, 1 July 1941.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>58</sup> SHD, 7NN2022, Capitaine Chef du BMA 15 to Capitaine chef du centre interrogatoire des militaires nord africaines camp de Ste Marthe, 6 October 1941.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>59</sup> SHD, 1P133, succinct analysis of *La Voix du prisonnier*, 1 July 1941.

<sup>60</sup> Herf, Nazi Propaganda, p. 44.

external security of the state' and imprisoned.<sup>61</sup> Ben Bouchta was also arrested after distributing the German articles. The punishment in North Africa was severe as CPOWs had various opportunities to surrender the German propaganda once leaving the Frontstalags, and most did.

#### Religion as an influence

Both France and Germany tried to increase their hold over the CPOWs by addressing their religious faith. Muslim holidays were celebrated throughout the Frontstalags. In December 1940 the over-seas section of the CCAPG provided sweets, fruit, food and tobacco to be distributed for the Muslim holidays.<sup>62</sup> General Andlauer explained to the departmental delegates how Ramadan was celebrated, and that this was an occasion for Muslim CPOWs to:

observe the rites of their religion to emphasize France's solicitude and large tolerance. [...] so that Ramadan and Eid Seghir are, for our North African and Senegalese Muslim prisoners, an occasion to feel all the love we have for them and all the interest that we show them to soften the hard times of this captivity of which they do not always understand the necessity and duration.<sup>63</sup>

The Comité Algérien d'assistance aux prisonniers de guerre sent 1,000 packages for North African prisoners in the Marne for Eid<sup>64</sup> while the *Comité d'assistance aux troupes* noires sent 400 Christmas packages to the Senegalese prisoners in the region. 65 In January the Muslims had religious services. '66

While German support of Muslim prisoners was mostly rhetorical or limited to select prisoners, Vichy tried to provide all the CPOWs with the necessary means to practice their religion.<sup>67</sup> This focus on religion combined France's traditional support for Islam as a pacifying factor in many of its colonial conquests with Vichy's general return to religion. The French Red Cross provided one Koran per camp, but they were unable to

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>62</sup> SHD, 2P67, Louis Morand, CCAPG, role of the Comité de l'Afrique du Nord, 16 October 1941.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>63</sup> AD Marne, Reims, 6WR819, Andlauer, memo to CCAPG departmental delegates, 27 September 1941.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>64</sup> AD Marne, Reims, 6W R819, Chef des Services du Comité Algérien to Popelin, 9 December 1941. 65 AD Marne, Reims, 6W R819, Bouret to Popelin, [n.d.].

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>66</sup> AN, F/9/2351, Anderson and Senaud, visit to POW camps in Occupied France, 20 January 1941.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>67</sup> AN, F/9/2351, Andlauer to the departmental delegates, 18 March 1942.

purchase prayer beads. Instead prisoners were given wooden beads to string themselves.<sup>68</sup> The Muslims at Chanzy had their own cook and food even though only a dozen celebrated Ramadan.<sup>69</sup> Separate cooking facilities to accommodate religious or cultural preferences were common. In camps with only one kitchen, alternatives to pork were provided for Muslim prisoners.<sup>70</sup> In Orléans, nothing official was organized for Muslim prisoners, but some of them gathered together for their daily prayers.<sup>71</sup> Germany also allowed greater religious freedoms when it coincided with their propaganda goals. For example, in March 1942 Germany decided that prisoners were no longer allowed to wear beards for sanitary reasons.<sup>72</sup> However, in June the OKW reversed their decision, allowing beards for religious reasons.<sup>73</sup> This practical approach to encouraging religious practice in the camps revealed differences between the French and German propaganda styles.

The concern with religion was not confined to Muslims. Catholicism played an important role in French colonialism, and was also facilitated in camp life. Catholic prisoners at Montargis were lucky to have a priest among them who said mass daily.<sup>74</sup> But elsewhere, and at the guard's discretion, Catholics were allowed to attend mass in the local church. One priest requested Scapini's help to obtain permission for all Catholic prisoners working for Ostland to attend Sunday mass.<sup>75</sup>

The effectiveness, as determined by French or German propaganda aims, of religious practice depended on the local leaders in the camp system. Both regimes depended on important individuals to ensure the correct messages reached CPOWs during religious services. The German camp authorities at Luçon chose loyal imams to lead the prayer sessions and give sermons reminding the 'North Africans that they live under the domination of a foreign race.' <sup>76</sup> Sometimes the guards joined the prisoners at prayer. To counteract the influence of these pro-German imams, Vichy negotiated for

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>68</sup> AN, F/9/2351, S. Kieuty of OFALAC to Bonnaud, 15 September 1942.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>69</sup> AN, F/9/2351, YMCA, report of camp visits, 1-10 April 1941.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>70</sup> AN, F/9/2351, YMCA, visit to Vesoul, 7 April 1941.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>71</sup> AN, F/9/2351, Anderson and Senaud, visit to POW camps in Occupied France, 20 January 1941.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>72</sup> Vourkoutratis, *Prisoners of War*, p 62.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>73</sup> BA-MA, RW6/270, OKW, Az 13 Chef Kriegsgef. Gr. St. 26 June 1942.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>75</sup> AN, F/9/2351, Father Collin to R. Mérillon, forwarded from Mérillon to Scapini, 2 October 1942.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>76</sup> SHD, 1P200, note, intelligence on German propaganda for North African prisoners, 16 May 1941.

access to the *Frontstalags* for the 'right' sort of Muslims. Vichy asked the *Institut Musulman de Paris*, whose mosque was a gift to the First World War North African veterans, to choose three imams from North Africa to visit specifically the North African CPOWs.<sup>77</sup> From Vichy's point of view this effort was not terribly successful. Vichy financed the imams but the French press praised this as an OKW initiative to bring religious support to the Muslim prisoners.<sup>78</sup> Germany never gave the French imam access to the camps. Instead he visited sick CPOWs in Parisian hospitals<sup>79</sup> and was eventually sent to minister to Tunisian ex-prisoners in the southern zone.<sup>80</sup> Despite the limited successes of the North African imams, in January 1941, Vichy requested that the West African prisoners receive similar visits from a religious leader.<sup>81</sup> While much of West and North Africa shared Islam as a religion, their practices were quite different. Senegalese Islam has distinct brotherhoods with different and influential religious leaders, which is why Vichy wanted a West African imam for those prisoners.

The search for the Senegalese imam exemplifies the battle between German and Vichy propaganda, combined with general ignorance on how to choose an imam. While Vichy officials in Senegal and France argued over the imam, in February 1941 the CAA informed Vichy that it had already chosen Prince Aliou Kane. Ee Georges Mandel, Minister of Colonies before the defeat, had named Kane as leader of the African soldiers. His early role is difficult to evaluate. With German authorisation to circulate for his Oeuvre d'Assistance aux Prisonniers Sénégalais et leurs familles, Kane had unprecedented access to the CPOWs. He received significant donations of food, petrol and chocolate from French prefectures. The YMCA had reported that his visits were

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>77</sup> AN, F/9/2959, Bigard, note for the DSPG, 18 September 1941.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>78</sup> AN, F/9/2959, Secretary of State for the Interior to Secretary of State for War, 26 August 1941; AN, 72/AJ/1840, AFIP, 24 May 1941.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>79</sup> AN, F/9/2959, Bonnaud to Bigard, 29 May 1942.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>80</sup> AN, F/9/2959, Bigard, Note for the DSPG, 19 June 1942.

<sup>81</sup> AN, F/2/2002, Doyen to Von Stüpnagel, 14 January 1941.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>82</sup> ANOM, 1AFFPOL/920/bis, Boehme to DFCAA, 4 February 1941.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>83</sup> ANS, 2D23, Boisson to Secretary of State for Colonies, 15 March 1941; AD Loiret, 138W26009, Bigard, police report, 8 March 1941.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>84</sup> AD Loiret, 138W 26009, Director of Ravitaillment general to Mamadou Kane, 24 January 1941.

greatly appreciated.<sup>85</sup> Vichy worried as Kane's influence increased and they remained unsure of his loyalty.

Vichy, in typical fashion, sought to avoid direct conflict with the German authorities by simply ignoring Kane's presence in France. Instead it attempted to find its own imams who spoke one of the major West African dialects and who belonged to a Senegalese brotherhood. Boisson's choice was Seydou Nourou Tall, the grandson of a great religious and military leader, El Hadj Oumar Tall. However, Platon believed that Tall's influence over the Senegalese populations was too important to allow him to leave Senegal. Tall's political discourse resonated with the rural populations; he argued that loyalty to God meant loyalty to the French. In June 1941 he told repatriated *tirailleurs* to

Behave correctly towards the French. Their politics and treatment of us are superior to all other treatments and politics. Before their arrival in our home, wars between tribes existed: homicide, looting, violence, oppression was rampant. When Allah brought them to us, their arrival brought peace. We ask Allah to grant them peace, as their peace is our own. Sufficient proof that the goodness of the great French government, their nobility and perfection of its intelligence is that it considers the sons of former enemies as its own sons. Know that it is God himself (his name be exalted) that made the French superior to us.<sup>89</sup>

Tall brought enormous support to Boisson's regime in Senegal. Boisson feared that Kane's charity was being used by the Germans to gather information, which eventually convinced Platon to request access to the *Frontstalags* for Tall. Unsurprisingly, the Germans denied the request.<sup>90</sup>

Kane's story started with the confusing and descended into the ridiculous. He introduced himself as Grand Marabout Prince Mamadou Aliou Kane, but his real name

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>85</sup> AN, F/9/2351, Anderson and Senaud, report of YMCA visits to POW camps in Occupied France, 4 February 1941.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>86</sup> ANOM, 1AFFPOL/920/bis, Platon to Boisson, 13 September 1941.

<sup>&</sup>quot; Ibid.

<sup>88</sup> Ginio, 'Pétain Spoke to School Children', p. 307.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>89</sup> ANS, 2D29, Translation of El Hadj Seydou Nourou Tall's advice to all Muslims especially returning tirailleurs, 25 June 1941.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>90</sup> ANOM, 1AFFPOL/920/bis, Platon to Boisson, [n.d.].

was Alphonse William Kane and he was most likely Catholic.<sup>91</sup> Since Vichy's attempts to distance Kane from the CPOWs quietly had failed, it accused Kane of being a German agent and stealing supplies destined for the CPOWs. Kane was unapologetically grateful to the Germans:

Everyone, from the generals to the privates who received me, treated me not only with respect, but with cordiality. In contrast, the controller Bigard's reception was glacial. The latter refused to do anything for me outside of the petrol he gave me, which he took back a few days later, against his boss' orders. Since then a noxious uncertainty hovers around me increasing daily.<sup>92</sup>

Kane's writing had a flaire for the dramatic. Nevertheless, his arrest and trial revealed many existing racial tensions in France. A former CPOW, Saliou N'Doye, rushed to Kane's defence and wrote to the judge:

My imprisoned countrymen and I owe only thanks and gratitude to the Marabout Prince Aliou Mamadou Kane for the great moral and material comfort he gave us with total devotion and lack of self-interest. [...] He is our only benefactor. One must be noble to risk one's life and suffer from cold and hunger only to bring us relief. The person who claimed he solicited money in the camp and that he sold us sand or took our savings is an infamous villain and a liar.<sup>93</sup>

Kane did not appear to have suffered as much as N'Doye feared. He claimed to have 450,000 francs and 1,450 dollars in gold from his apartment. <sup>94</sup> In February 1942, Kane wrote to the prefect of Loiret, who had helped Kane in his actions for the CPOWs, in his own defence, believing that his success in helping the CPOWs had kindled jealousy. In a letter that hints at paranoia, Kane explained how he was being blackmailed, and that former classmate in whom he had confided and sought legal advice had colluded against him, stolen his money and seduced his secretary. <sup>95</sup>

Kane's trial was followed with interest in the press. *Paris-Soir* used the occasion to mock Mandel with the headline, 'Mandel turns con man into Great *Marabout*!' The

<sup>91</sup> ANS, 17G110 17, 'Renseignements P.C.C.', Dakar, 16 March 1942;

<sup>92</sup> SHD, 7NN 2031, Ailoune Mamadou Kane to Estarèllas, 20 January 1941.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>93</sup> AD Loiret, 138W26009, Saliou N'Doye to the judge for Mamadou Kane's case, 9 February 1942.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>94</sup> AD Loiret, 138W26009, Mamdou Kane to prefect of Loiret, 9 February 1942.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>96</sup> Ginio, French Colonialism Unmasked, p. 131.

trail ended with Kane paying a small fine. His lawyer successfully argued that 'blacks are big children who do not understand our complex and cruel politics. There are frequent pitfalls, and even the most experienced navigators can run aground.'97 The comments were published in the paper prompting Boisson to protest. He considered especially misplaced the references to:

our tirailleurs who "died for us without ever having understood anything." It seems highly inappropriate to represent so lightly, at the helm of a public prosecutor and under the eyes of the occupying authorities, the quality of ties that unite our black army to France. It also seems equally inappropriate to treat such a seasoned crook who was perfectly aware of his actions with such indulgence. [He] was hardly a naïve native, as I believe the article reported with glee, but a dishonest individual who shamelessly exploited his fellow countrymen. 98

The court accepted the lawyer's argument. This trial took French paternalism to the extreme conclusion. If colonial subjects were not considered adults, then they were not responsible for their actions. Whether Kane was a thief or a great comfort to the Senegalese prisoners, or both, it is interesting to note that N'Doye considered him the only person who had helped the Senegalese prisoners. This marked a huge failure for French propaganda after the considerable efforts by the French Red Cross and other charities in sending packages and assistance to the camps.

#### Special German Propaganda

North Africa's strategic position in the war effort made its CPOWs particularly valuable targets of propaganda. German propaganda focused on populations with strong regional or national identities that could be exploited like Bretons, Alsatians, Lorrains and North African Muslims. As in the First World War, Germany targeted educated prisoners to influence the North African populations. It began selecting prisoners

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>97</sup> ANS, 17 G 110/17, Boisson to Contre-amiral, Secretary of State for Colonies, 21 August 1941.
<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

immediately after the Armistice. Literate prisoners or those with religious education were removed from the general *Frontstalag* population. <sup>99</sup>

Several camps catered to these chosen prisoners. A section of Stalag VIIA was specially built for North African prisoners whose letters to Morocco, Algeria and Tunisia could be written in Arabic. <sup>100</sup> After their spy training some, like Staff Sergeant Ben Ali, were given positions of power to influence CPOWs. French intelligence reports accused Ben Ali of 'propagating, with German approval, anti-French propaganda to North African prisoners in Mulberg and discussing the French administration in North Africa. <sup>101</sup> Others taught Arabic to German officers. <sup>102</sup> Still others were sent to North Africa to spread their propaganda. Both Germany and Vichy used methods designed for a mostly illiterate population. North Africans loyal to either government spread propaganda in areas inaccessible to Europeans like the *cafés maures*, the *bains maures*, markets and other informal meeting places. <sup>103</sup> A few spies were sent directly from a training camp in Angers to North Africa on mission. <sup>104</sup> Multiple sources provided the 'evidence that Germanophile propaganda is actively conducted in [French North Africa] by natives indoctrinated in Metropolitan [France] and Europeans who have "bet" on German victory. <sup>105</sup>

In Stalag IIIA, the Germans tried to recreate life in an idealised North Africa. Located in Luckenwalde, it was one of the largest training camps for potential spies of all nationalities. *Abwehr* members taught the prisoners covert spy craft. Here North African prisoners were favoured with comfortable lodgings and abundant food. French reports suggest between 300 and 500 North African prisoners were interned here. Prisoners were separated by country and then by region. Much of camp life was centred on Islam. The mosque had a minaret and a space for ablutions and prayers. During

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>99</sup> SHD, 1P200, note, intelligence on German propaganda for North African prisoners, 15 April 1941.

SHD, 31N123, CCPPG, report on the French prisoners in Germany, Occupied France and Switzerland, 18 August 1940.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>101</sup> SHD, 7NN2022, secret intelligence for 10.000, 5 March 1941.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>102</sup> SHD, 1P200, note, intelligence on German propaganda for North African prisoners, 20 June 1941.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>103</sup> SHD, 1P200, note on Germanophile propaganda in Algeria, 15 February 1941.

SHD, 1P200, German propaganda for North African POWs, February 1941 – January 1942.
 Thomas, 'Vichy Government and Colonial prisoners', p. 671.

<sup>107</sup> SHD, 1P200, note, intelligence on German propaganda for North African prisoners, 6 September 1941.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>108</sup> SHD, 1P200, note, intelligence on German propaganda for North African prisoners, 15 April 1941; intelligence on Stalag IIIA Luckenwald, 22 July [no year].

special occasions and or camp inspections the religious ceremonies were filmed. The camp flew the German and 'Arab' flags over the minaret. Every Friday, the Muslim holy day, an important ceremony was held with military honours presented to the flags. Everything was carefully constructed to demonstrate German appreciation for Islam and to imply that under German rule Islam would have a significant role in North Africa. North African deserters selected a few of these prisoners for tours of Berlin. They were exposed to all manners of propaganda: 'city walks, conferences, press, radio, cinema. On Friday, the neophytes return to Stalag IIIA and [were] instructed to keep absolutely silent. They [were] then dispersed among the different *Frontstalags* the Occupied Zone.' Herf confirms the existence of Germanophile Arab exiles in Berlin.'

Vichy was aware of Germany's activities in Stalag IIIA and the DSA asked the French delegation at Wiesbaden to lodge a complaint about its anti-French actions. The DSA acknowledged that the German authorities could explain away the presence of imams, mosques and traditional clothing as simple measures to improve the North African prisoners' experience but the deliberate anti-French tendencies in the newspaper *Alhilal* were unacceptable. The French delegation diplomatically allowed that such a publication must have slipped the camp authorities' attention and requested that *Alhilal* and any similar papers be forbidden and remaining copies confiscated. Vichy's complaints were ignored and German propaganda efforts continued.

German officers with experience in North Africa provided a personal touch to the propaganda. Every Monday, two German officers, one speaking French, the other Moroccan Arabic and Berber, visited the CPOWs in Germany. Several Moroccan prisoners remembered meeting this officer in Fez in 1932 where he was an 'itinerant pharmacist' pretending to be a Turkish Muslim. He told CPOWs that France was a defeated and unimportant nation and that after the war the Germans would settle in Morocco, expelling the French and dethroning the Francophile Sultan who had forced the Moroccans to fight for France. He continued stating that 'all Jews would be stripped of

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>109</sup> SHD, 1P200, intelligence on Stalag IIIA Luckenwalde, 22 July [no year].

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>110</sup> Herf, Nazi Propaganda, p. 3.

<sup>111</sup> SHD, 1P200, Bourget, note for the DFCAA, 22 August 1941.

<sup>112</sup> SHD, 1P200, Michelier to Vogl, 29 August 1941.

<sup>113</sup> SHD, 14P31, Nardin, special native office report, 2 November 1940.

their belongings and returned to the miserable life they had before the protectorate.' He also promised a bonus and better treatment to prisoners who succeed in discovering the soldiers and officers in the camp who hid their Jewish origins. Despite the heavy anti-Semitic tones in the German broadcasts in North Africa, this was one of the few examples mentioned in Vichy's propaganda review. Either Germany did not find anti-Jewish rhetoric particularly useful in influencing CPOWs or Vichy did not feel the need to comment on it. Since Vichy was particularly meticulous in recording German propaganda, it was probably the former. Nardin doubted this man's influence over the CPOWs but feared that his previous relationships with certain Muslims might negatively influence the colonial subjects. <sup>115</sup> Nardin was concerned that through his knowledge of North Africa this officer might be able to spread German propaganda directly to the local population. Lahssen Ben Bouchta reported that this man visited Angoulême before he and 180 North African First World War veterans were released. <sup>116</sup> Vichy's greatest fear was allowing such propaganda into the colonies where it might find fertile ground.

Training or influencing CPOWs was only half of the German project. The goal was to encourage uprisings to coincide with German military advances in the region. To do so, Germany had different actors in France and the colonies. An Algerian named Mekari had a *café maure* in Clermont-Ferrand that he transformed into a backroom spy centre for providing propaganda in North Africa. The Germans used their influence in the colonies to continue propaganda begun in the *Frontstalags*. Vichy knew that CAA officials made contact with repatriated CPOWs in North Africa. French intelligence also suspected Germany of using private companies to solicit information on electrical installations throughout West Africa in order to set up a clandestine radio network. The CAA had an important presence in North Africa which reinforced Vichy's decision to keep tabs on former CPOWs.

German propaganda was designed to maximise distrust of Vichy in the Empire. After training, CPOWs were reintegrated into the *Frontstalags* with films and brochures.

114 Ibid.

<sup>115</sup> SHD, 14P31, Nardin, special native office report, 2 November 1940.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>116</sup> SHD, 7NN2666, Dody, report on Lanssen Ben Bouchta Ben X, 4 November 1941.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>117</sup> SHD, 7NN2022, secret intelligence for 1.300, 27 February 1941.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>118</sup> SHD, 7NN2281, Nemo to Secrétaire d'Etat aux Colonies, 6 July 1942.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>119</sup> SHD, 1P200, De Bourget to DSA, Algiers [n.d.].

They were subsequently released as ill or allowed to escape. Some reported directly to the French authorities once free which is how the Vichy authorities knew some CPOWs were being surreptitiously released. One CPOW confessed that he and 100 of his comrades had been allowed to escape to the Free Zone to spread pro-German propaganda among Muslims. Even white French prisoners with knowledge of North Africa were targeted. By forcing Vichy to question the loyalty of its CPOWs, Germany effectively undermined that which it had criticised for decades: French pride in its colonial troops.

Not all CPOWs were tempted by these proposals. North African CPOWs near Bordeaux refused the German offers of early release. Captain Rafa explained t throughout my captivity, I did my best to counteract the negative propaganda in the German North African [POW] camps and as a result of the fifty colonial or North African officers, only seven of us were not released. Before the war Rafa was described as an 'évolué in the good sense of the term and perfectly devoted. He was named a chevalier de la legion d'honneur in 1950.

Recruiting CPOWs for military roles was largely unsuccessful. At Quimper, German officers tried, and failed, to convince North African prisoners that due to 'improved Franco-German relations, they could fight for the French cause in the ranks of the soldiers of the Reich.' Even without all the details of collaboration few CPOWs were willing to fight for Germany. CPOWs at Charleville categorically refused to fight against Russia and Great Britain. 127

There were a few exceptions. A few hundred CPOWs volunteered to fight in the anti-Bolshevik league or in the *Phalange Africaine* in North Africa. Seven Moroccans joined the German Army. This impressed the Moroccan population of Dakar who felt that having one of their own leading the Moroccan volunteers on the Russian front made

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>120</sup> Thomas, 'Vichy Government and Colonial prisoners', p. 671.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>121</sup> ANS, 2D23, French general resident in Morocco, bulletin of political findings, 2-8 August 1941.

<sup>122</sup> SHD, 7NN2022, intelligence, excerpt of Henri Macker's letter to his family, 17 December 1941.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>123</sup> SHD, 1P200, intelligence note on German propaganda for North African prisoners, 15 April 1941.

<sup>124</sup> SHD, 1K908, Rafa, report on his activities during captivity, 10 July 1948.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>125</sup> SHD, 1K908, Rafa, report card from 13<sup>th</sup> R.T.A., 10 January 1940.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>126</sup> SHD, 1P200, note, intelligence on German propaganda for North African prisoners, 20 June 1941.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>127</sup> Ibid., 6 September 1941.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>128</sup> SHD, 1P200, note, intelligence on German propaganda for North African prisoners, 15 April 1941.

Germany a protector of Islam.<sup>129</sup> These recruitment attempts show the multinational nature of the Waffen SS, which also used Muslim divisions on the Eastern Front.

Without knowing who was a German spy and who was legitimately sick or had escaped, Vichy invested time and resources in interviewing and following its own subjects. It had several interrogation centres to interview repatriated CPOWs. The most important was Clermont-Ferrand. From these interviews, Vichy made lists of suspicious CPOWs and German 'orientalists'. The accusations against Mohamed Ben Amar were confirmed when he was arrested for 'making comments potentially diminishing our prestige in the native's eyes by glorifying German strength. Following CPOWs in the colonies was common practice. This gave Vichy real information on how easily, or not, CPOWs readjusted once home. Vichy placed Warrant Officer Boukahri under surveillance in Tunisia after he allegedly recruited forty spies for North Africa. Shortly afterwards forty 'sick' CPOWs were released from Germinian.

Using the colonial administrators to observe returned CPOWs helped Vichy avoid being dependent on CPOWs and local sources for intelligence, and helped reduce false claims. An anonymous source in Senegal claimed the local population was influenced by the claims of two recently repatriated CPOWs that the Germans were not racist, treated them like equals, spoke their language and ate the same food. However, none of this was true. The two CPOWs in question were loyal to France. One had been released from captivity immediately. The other, Bari Diop,

did not seem to have kept good memories of his detention in Epinal, despite being properly treated. [...] The fact that he escaped in mid-winter tends to prove that he was hardly satisfied with his lot. He is intensely grateful to the French civilians who looked after him completely after his escape and without whom he would never have been able to cross into the Free Zone. 135

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>129</sup> ANS, 2D23/28, confidential native informant, intelligence, 23 July 1941.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>130</sup> SHD, 7NN 2022, Capitaine Chef du BMA 15 to Capitaine chef du centre interrogatoire des militaires nord africaines camp de Ste Marthe, 6 October 1941.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>131</sup> SHD, 7NN2664, Laroubine to Général de Corps d'Armée, Secrétaire d'Etat à la Guerre, Service de la Justice Militaire à Chamalieres, 22 July 1942.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>132</sup> SHD, 1P200, interrogation of Brahim Ben Seghir Ben Mohammed, 13 April 1941.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>133</sup> SHD, 1P200, note, intelligence on German propaganda for North African prisoners, 15 April 1941.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>134</sup> ANS, 2D23/28, intelligence, 29 April 1941.

ANS, 2D23/28, A. Beraud to Govenor of Senegal, 28 May 1941.

While the information was not always reliable, it remained Vichy's primary insight into the CPOWs' mentality.

By concentrating on German propaganda, Vichy underestimated the CPOWs' overall commitment to France at least during the early years of captivity. Very few CPOWs were convinced by vague promises of independence under German rule. The effect of German propaganda was underwhelming. The native populations remained generally indifferent to German propaganda or, at best, reluctantly neutral towards France. 136 In Tangiers, native agents working for Germany were accused of attempting to organize, without much success, a pro-German and anti-Bolshevik demonstration to coincide with German entry into Moscow. 137 In Algeria, in August 1941, the rural native populations were indifferent to the form of government but remained loyal to the Marshal.<sup>138</sup> Many Algerians regarded Germany as a strong country and supported them against the Russians, and followed the measures taken against the Jews with interest. Again, this was not unlike a strong current of French opinion at the time. Boisson responded to the Secretary of State for Colonies' request for information on counterpropaganda in AOF by reiterating that anti-French propaganda was largely ineffective and the colonial administration actively counteracted any acts of denigration. Boisson added, that he felt the most effective neutralisation of German propaganda should be done directly in the Frontstalags. 139

There were incidents that worried the colonial administrators and the response to anti-French behaviour was severe. CPOW El Hachemi Ben Moussa was arrested and sent to prison for declaring at Tedders, Morocco, that 'the French are dogs. The Germans are much better than them. Wait until they arrive, then the rich will be like the poor and the poor like the rich.' 140 In the Ivory Coast, a returned tirailleur refused to participate in the rubber harvest, saying: 'The French can't count on me; they brought me to fight in a country that isn't mine and I owe my return to my country and my family to the English. If the English ask me to work for them, I will.'141 He was promptly arrested. Boisson felt

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>136</sup> SHD, 2P82, Unsigned letter for Professor Berthier, 16 May 1941.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>137</sup> ANS, 2D23, zone de Tanger, information Bulletin, 17 – 23 October 1941.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>138</sup> SHD, 7NN2022, Roubard, report on life in Algeria during August 1941, 30 August 1941.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>139</sup> ANS, 2D23/28, Boisson to Secretary of State for colonies, 15 March 1941.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>140</sup> SHD, 7NN 2666, summary of arrest, 12 November 1941.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>141</sup> ANOM, 1AFFPOL/920, Boisson to Secretary of State for Colonies, [n.d.].

that the incident was an isolated one but it showed the influence the British neighbours had.

The French generally believed that different races were more or less susceptible to German propaganda. However, there was no consensus on which race was at the greatest risk. French doctor Jean Guérin's observations show his prejudices: the North Africans, prone to lying and laziness, promoted resistance through inertia, whereas the Malagasy passively obeyed and were often used as workers. Guérin felt that 'the loyalty of the Senegalese and the Malagasy appeared intact. However, the North Africans, who were targeted by discrete German propaganda and having characters that tend towards protest, often underestimate the French government's interest in them.' There were also morale issues among the Indochinese civilian workers as well: Nguyen-Van-Lai claimed that Indochina was better under Japanese rule. Others believed that as a professional army the Moroccans were least likely to be swayed. Martin Thomas argues that Algerians living in France before the war and Berber Kabylie intellectuals, as well as Tunisian conscripts, were likely to accept anti-French propaganda.

Concrete differences of treatment naturally drew the CPOWs' attention. North African civilians working 'in the Occupied Zone earn[ed] up to 130 or 150 francs per day. Many of them seem amazed and [were] sincere in their spontaneous propaganda for Germany to their co-religionists in the Free Zone or in Algeria.' Vichy preferred to keep the CPOWs segregated to avoid the spread of this kind of information. Even when CPOWs were converted to labour units working directly for the Germans, they were paid the normal prisoner salary of 10 francs per day. Vichy regularly, either obstinately or naively, conflated legitimate queries with German propaganda. Anyone, regardless of nationality and without undue outside influence, would wonder why one worker was paid ten times more than another.

Not every CPOW was targeted by German propaganda. CPOWs Makan Traoré and Mamadou Koné recalled that they did not feel they were exposed to propaganda except when their guards informed them that after the war the Germans would come to

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>142</sup> SHD, 34N1081, Jean Guérin, release report, 22 December 1941.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>143</sup> ANOM, 1AFFPOL/920, Laitard to Commander of MOI camp, Marseilles, 31 July 1941.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>144</sup> Thomas, 'Vichy Government and Colonial Prisoners', p. 671.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>145</sup> ANOM, 1AFFPOL/363, note on German Islamic propaganda in Paris, 9 August 1941.

Africa and become their chiefs. A group of seventy North African prisoners repatriated in May 1941 had no knowledge of it. Overall, the interviews reassured Vichy that

German propaganda has not deeply touched the mass of North African prisoners. Most of those who return remember the abuse of which they were victims, the harsh treatment that was imposed upon them and the acts of cruelty they witnessed. They are unanimous in praising the kindness of the French doctors and effectiveness of relief efforts by the Red Cross. Overall the repatriated North Africans, the Moroccans in particular, display good spirits and their morale does not appear to have suffered much from the hardships endured during their captivity.<sup>148</sup>

The German dependence on educated CPOWs for their propaganda also backfired since it failed to take account of the vernacular. An escaped prisoner reported:

The radio propaganda is in a literary Arabic that most natives do not understand and written publications (distributed on two separate occasions during March 1941 and around 15 June 1941) contained numerous photos with misleading captions. The Germans have mostly worked the Moroccan POWs but without results. The Senegalese community remain tightly sealed against them and completely hostile. [...] On the other hand, the discrete propaganda carried out by the French Red Cross in the camp (distribution of two highly appreciated weekly meals of Couscous) has had the best effect. 149

Koeltz, commander of the 19<sup>th</sup> Military Region (Algeria and Tunisia), reported to the Governor of Algeria that 'it seems to me that the German propaganda efforts have not been rewarded as they had expected.' As seen, loyal prisoners like Rafa and Guérin, fought informally against German propaganda.

Both Vichy and the Germans understood the potential for propaganda that the CPOWs provided. This went beyond cultivating the opinions of a relatively limited population. Propaganda was another arena where Germany could exercise their political and practical dominance over Vichy. In the spring of 1942, the German authorities asked

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>146</sup> ANS, 2D23/28, telegram, Magendie to Gouvernor in Loulouba, 19 November 1941.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>147</sup> SHD, 1P200, note, intelligence on German propaganda for North African prisoners, 23 May 1941.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>148</sup> SHD, 1P200, note, intelligence on German propaganda for North African prisoners, 21 July 1941.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>149</sup> SHD, 1P200, report, escaped prisoner from Frontstalag 184 for the DSA, 1 July 1941.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>150</sup> ANOM, Alg GGA 1CM/73, Koeltz to the Gouveneur Général d'Algérie, 14 March 1942.

Vichy's permission to bring 250 Senegalese prisoners to Italy to make a film. Vichy felt that using CPOWs as extras in a propaganda film benefited the occupying authorities to the CPOWs' detriment, but feared that if they refused Germany would only force the issue without listening to Vichy's concerns. In this instance, Vichy was aware of its own limitations and hoped cooperation would minimize the impact on the CPOWs. So François Darlan, *de facto* head of the Vichy government as Pétain's trusted advisor, gave his permission and pushed Scapini to request continued Geneva Convention protection for these prisoners, and that they be accompanied by someone familiar with Senegalese troops who could protect them, if necessary, from racism in a population unfamiliar with Africans. As we have seen, while Vichy could influence the CPOWs' conditions through measures that simultaneously benefited Germany, extra food or better clothes, actual control over the CPOWs remained firmly in German hands. Vichy tried to make the best of the situation, all the while hiding its impotence from the CPOWs. The risk Vichy took was that the CPOWs would begin to question why the French government seemed to actively participate in German efforts.

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Whose propaganda was more effective? Vichy's goal was to that ensure colonial prisoners would remain obedient to France, while Germany encouraged revolt. Germany's propaganda towards the CPOWs was persistent but rarely effective. Less than one per cent of CPOWs were targeted in the special propaganda camps. Vichy's fear of German propaganda had a much more significant impact on the CPOWs' experience than the propaganda itself. As explained in chapter six, Vichy feared losing influence over colonial prisoners when they returned home, and so mobilized philanthropic efforts on their behalf which proved to be of real benefit.

Vichy was aware that German propaganda generally failed in its aims. Despite this, Vichy continued to use the spectre of propaganda as the catchall explanation for any colonial conflicts. Much of the CPOWs discontent was due to the difficulty of captivity, rather than to unsettling German propaganda. The postal censor revealed that 'the

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>151</sup> SHD, 2P77, Darlan to Scapini, 26 February 1942.

Toucouleur and Foulah are not in good spirits and outwardly wonder when they will be released.' Generally, however, CPOWs were described as reacting stoically to the length of their captivity: 'the colonial prisoners in France naturally wish to return home but bear their captivity with courage.' Characterising CPOWs as bravely enduring the difficulties of captivity served two purposes: it equated complaints with cowardice and imposed a sense of unity, through loyalty, on a diverse population.

The vast majority of CPOWs did remain loyal to France and only tiny numbers joined the German army directly or became propagandists. Nevertheless, as the occupation and captivity continued, CPOWs became increasing disillusioned with their situation. With the allied takeover of North Africa both Vichy and Germany were forced to change tactics in their propaganda. Vichy could no longer claim to have an Empire, unified or not, once the remaining colonies declared allegiance to the Free French. The Germans continued broadcasting to in North Africa but could no longer use the threat of intervention in the Empire against Vichy. As CPOWs lingered in France their frustration with the lack of change grew. This can be seen clearly in the CPOWs' reactions to repatriation and release. Vichy and later the Provisional Government assumed that the CPOWs' complaints were the result of German propaganda. However, legitimate but unpalatable concerns like delayed repatriation, fear of unemployment, problems with demobilisation bonuses and pensions were much more damaging to colonial loyalties.

For Vichy, propaganda was a political question and concern. Vichy's intervention, on all levels from Scapini's negotiations to debriefings after escape or repatriation, was all driven by the fear of politicized CPOWs returning to their home colonies. On a material level, the CPOWs benefited from Vichy's fear which translated into interest in their care. However, the consequences of this French assumption, that politically aware CPOWs spelt the beginning of the French downfall in the colonies, would be seen the violent repressions of the first signs of 'disloyalty'. Holding tightly to the idea of Imperial France was beneficial to CPOWs, but once the war was over it blinded French officials to legitimate colonial demands.

<sup>152</sup> ANOM, 1AFFPOL/929, note summarizing the principal intelligence gathered from the AOF postal censor, January 1941.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>153</sup> ANOM, 1AFFPOL/929, Service des Contrôles Techniques des Colonies, Secrétaire d'Etat aux Colonies, 13 September 1941.

### Chapter nine

### The Long Road Home, 1940-1945

The long road home began as early as June 1940. As soon as a prisoner was captured, he began to wonder when he could return to his family. Some prisoners were released through diplomatic negotiations between Vichy and Germany. Other prisoners actively sought a way home either by feigning illnesses or escaping. For the CPOWs, leaving the Frontstalags was only the first in many steps home. Once CPOWs reached the Free Zone, to maintain discipline and counteract any residual German propaganda, Vichy grouped them into camps until repatriated to their colony of origin. During the first part of the war, this could happen rather quickly. CPOWs, with rare exceptions, were demobilised in the colonies. The length of time spent in southern France depended on the available transportation. After November 1942, CPOWs lingered until the maritime routes were reopened in 1944. Upon arrival in the colonies, CPOWs were welcomed with a fanfare and quickly dispersed to their villages. The French government changed with the liberation of France but conditions for CPOWs did not. As in June 1940, many of the colonial administrators remained the same. Disappointment, frustration and conflicting expectations led to clashes between colonial authorities and CPOWs. A few incidents were noted during the Vichy regime. However, most dissatisfaction, understandably, came from CPOWs repatriated in 1945 after five years of captivity and internment, the last two without news from home. The most famous of these incidents was the massacre at Thiaroye, Senegal. The complaints leading to Thiaroye were representative of the ex-CPOWs' frustrations, but the episode itself was not.

#### Release

CPOWs who were released, rather than who escaped, had to follow a complex administrative process. Like prisoners repatriated for health reasons, CPOWs travelled to the southern zone by train. Warmly welcomed, they were provided with all necessary health care and reintroduced to the strong military discipline typical of the colonial

troops. Vichy considered the return from captivity to be a crucial time in terms of the mental stability and loyalty of the men.

If the prisoner, still mentally numb, is welcomed warmly, he will discover, with love, the new face of France. Poorly received upon arrival and neglected in the first weeks home, he will choose a spiritual and moral path unfavourable to the new society. This is extremely important. It is essential he avoid cumbersome administrative formalities. It is appropriate to clothe him, feed him, pay him and guide the individual, as early as possible, to his new existence. What has been said is broadly applicable to native North Africans and colonials, with the difference that their repatriation to their country of origin is required as soon as possible.<sup>1</sup>

However, for the CPOWs, the new face of France was actually the old, conservative colonial one. By providing shelter and guidance, a paternalist Vichy hoped to reorient the CPOWs to their proper role in French society, a role that was subservient to that of returning white prisoners. The French press reported that CPOWs were welcomed with mulled wine, biscuits, chocolate and cigarettes to reiterate Vichy's continued commitment to the French Empire.<sup>2</sup> Sick CPOWs received a similar welcome: 'usual ceremony. Attended by civilian and military authorities. Appropriate allocation. Hot meal. Red Cross distributed five cigarettes per man. In Lyons, received by the civilian and military authorities. Platoon of mobile troops, trumpeters of the guard. His Excellency, Monsignor Gehlier, *Primat des Gauls* [the Archbishop], was present. No speech.'<sup>3</sup>

Naturally, the CPOWs expected conditions to improve after being released. To avoid outside influences, they were kept in camps in the southern zone and their movements restricted. Darlan believed that these refreshments and speeches missed the point: 'It is essential that these men are informed, as soon as they enter France, of the Marshal's work, his politics, and his government's actions and that they do not feel they

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> SHD, 2P82, Barret, note, 25 July 1941.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> AN, F/9/2929, Le Matin, 3 January 1942.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> SHD, 2P82, 'Service d'accueil et d'information auprès des prisonniers de guerre', 19 January 1943.

have arrived in a country where they will find indiscipline and slackness.' Darlan wanted the CPOWs to understand that their sacrifice had been recognised but that it had already been rewarded through Pétain's efforts on their behalf. They in turn were expected to respond with loyalty and, more importantly, discipline.

The general principle of welcoming returning prisoners held for both French and colonial prisoners. Vichy needed to prove to the French prisoners that France had changed, that the failings leading to the defeat and their capture had been fixed. Since France had never admitted, and would not admit, failings or weaknesses to the CPOWs, it needed a different approach. Even the parallel reactions had totally different goals for the French and CPOWs. Sending the white prisoners home quickly demonstrated Vichy's support for French families. Since the CPOWs could not immediately return home, Vichy used this period to reiterate the healthy opinions expected of colonial subjects. Upon their eventual arrival home, CPOWs were sent back to their villages as soon as possible. This was not to show concern for the CPOWs' families, but rather to disperse them and avoid potential conflicts in the cities. Individual CPOWs were easier to control and more easily reintegrated into their pre-war roles. All of Vichy's actions towards returning CPOWs reflect the mentality of a government conforming to the imperial status quo. Vichy and the colonial administration feared that de Gaulle's distant alternative regime opened the possibility for rebellion. Vichy felt the solution was to show that nothing had changed and CPOWs were expected to act appropriately.

Upon arrival in the southern zone most CPOWs were sent to camps around Fréjus. In March 1941 a centre for triage was opened near Limoges to welcome returning prisoners. Limoges' role was to greet returning prisoners, facilitate a medical exam including chest x-ray, and separate those prisoners needing immediate hospitalization. The rest were sent to a regrouping centre for North African and colonial prisoners. These centres aimed to get prisoners ready for the next stage of the journey as soon as possible. They provided military or civilian clothes, gave the men an advance on their salary (200 francs for soldiers on a daily wage), provided rations for the next stage of their trip and

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> SHD, 2P82, Darlan to Secretaries of State for War and Information, Scapini, president de la commission du retour des prisonniers, 25 June 1941.

separated CPOWs by destination.<sup>5</sup> These centres could accommodate prisoners released individually as well as large groups. One centre received about 3,000 repatriated prisoners during its first three months of service with each prisoner spending on average two days there.<sup>6</sup> Vichy used the colonial officers who had been released for the defence of the Levant and who the German authorities required to remain in the Unoccupied Zone to escort the CPOWs from triage to their new camps.<sup>7</sup> Once released, and if possible, the CPOWs were sent home.

As prisoners made their way from the *Frontstalags* to their home colony they came under the legal jurisdiction of several offices. Obviously in the *Frontstalags* decisions depended on the camp commander and the OKW. In the southern zone once prisoners were repatriated, the *Etat-Major de l'Armée* took responsibility for the first and fourth offices. The First Office organised massive and progressive repatriation, divided the tasks, set the budget for personnel, material, locations, as well as setting the rules for captivity leave, demobilisation and discharge for different kinds of prisoners. The Fourth Office concentrated on transportation and organising convoys. French prisoners were assisted in their reintegration to civilian society by the *Commissariat au Reclassement*. The Residents General in Tunisia and Morocco and the Governor General of Algeria held a similar role and were tasked with helping CPOWs find work upon return.

Much of the frustration that arose after the war grew from accusations that colonial prisoners of war were not given the same rights as their white comrades. In order to assess the veracity of that claim, it is essential to understand what legal rights CPOWs had, what rights French POWs had and whether the CPOWs were allowed to exercise those rights. One major difference was the right to be demobilised in France. Following the tradition established after the First World War colonial soldiers had to be demobilised in their colony of origin. In 1942, Vichy used a Third Republic law to allow hospitalised metropolitan prisoners to be demobilised *in situ*. These prisoners were

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> SHD, 9R37, report, 'Palais Centre sanitaire de reception et de triage', 29 June 1941.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> AN, AJ/41/796, Bourget, note DFA from DSA, 23 December 1943.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup> SHD, 2P66, Chef du 1er bureau, note for Cabinet du Ministère, 10 September 1941.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup> SHD, 2P64, summary of 27 February 1942 meeting on POWs, 2 March 1942.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>10</sup> Michel, Appel à l'Afrique, p. 197.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>11</sup> AN, F/9/2007, Salland, memo, Service de liberation des prisonniers de guerre, de documentation, et de placement des militaries de carrière, 22 May 1942.

allowed to remain in military hospitals but were considered free. However, CPOWs were never given the same liberty of movement. In March 1942, an exception to the rule was made for North African CPOWs who could not be immediately repatriated or who had lived in France before the war. They were demobilised at the Centre Démobilisateur de Montferrand (Puy-de-Dôme) and from there went to the Centre de Regroupement de Sainte Foy les Lyon (Rhône) where they remained until they could obtain individual work contracts. Most of the 10,000 North African prisoners released by the German authorities in 1942 were heathly and were repatriated to be demobilised in North Africa. 13

The voyage home for sick CPOWs was long and gruelling. Oumar Diallo travelled by sea to Porthos and overland from Oran to Casablanca. From Casablanca he was given one month's leave before returning to his military service in Thiès, Senegal. Tirailleur Aba Mame was a repatriated on the *Canada*, arriving in Dakar on 2 January 1942 and sent on to the infirmary in Thiaroye where he remained until invalided out of the army.

Transportation home was affected by the external political and military situation. Factors, outside of Vichy's control, the allied blockade, lack of available ships, and changing military loyalties, all determined when the CPOWs could return home. Martin Thomas argues correctly that Vichy's inability to repatriate CPOWs released by the Germans concretely demonstrated Vichy's lack of imperial sovereignty. For example, the British attacked Madagascar in May 1942, but did not occupy it until November. In September 1942 the hospital boat the *Canada* was supposed to transport sick Malagasy prisoners home. Both the *Direction des Troupes Coloniales* and the *Colonies* agreed that the boat's departure should be delayed due to the British attack. However, the Admiralty wanted to keep the original departure, despite the risk of capture or, simply not arriving. <sup>16</sup> It is unclear what happened to the CPOWs on the *Canada*.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>12</sup> AN, AJ/41/2230, Vialet, note for Colonel Reichel, native units stationed in France, 8 March 1943.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>14</sup> ANS, 2D23/28, Creuse to the Govenor of Senegal, 13 September 1941.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>15</sup> ANS, 2D25/28, Direction du Cabinet oeuvres d'assistance to Secretary of State for Colonies, [n.d.].

#### Upon arrival home

Repatriation to the colonies was the moment for Vichy to assess the impact of their experience on the CPOWs. Vichy had been discreetly supervising the return of colonial soldiers, later the CPOWs, from June 1940. Duboin's 1940 annual report for the Goa *cercle* (Mali) commented on the different mental status of returned soldiers from Goa and Dahomey. Those from Goa behaved perfectly. They were excited to return home to their families. They discussed, without bitterness or complaints, the battles that they had fought. Those from Dahomey had different mindsets and forced Duboin to crack down on the ringleaders. In Morocco in October 1940, the returning soldiers appeared tired but loyal to France: 'their spirit of simple and fatalistic men makes it difficult for them to understand such a rapid and brutal defeat. The general feeling is that our setbacks were due to lack of material.' 18

The High Commissioner for French West Africa, Pierre Boisson, requested local authorities to report on CPOWs' character and readjustment to civilian life. The authorities used these reports to both gather information on captivity, especially in the early days when Vichy had little information on their prisoners, and to subtly assess the returned CPOWs' attitudes and potential claims. These reports could be quite detailed, even when the CPOW had not remained in captivity long. The Governor of the Ivory Coast reported at length that former prisoner Touré Vamoutari led a quiet life and appeared to be a devoted and conscientious civil servant. His only friend, Amara Touré, worked for Customs. He avoided political discussions and there were no questions on his morality or behaviour. Weekly reports recorded the CPOWs' reintegration in Algeria. In Bou-Saada, 'the repatriated prisoners have taken up their old habits. They are dispersed throughout the population and their activities do not lead to any negative observations. Some work in the *Section Artisanale* where one in particular, was assigned as a storekeeper. In Berrouaghia, most prisoners had been released for health reasons

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>17</sup> ANS, 17G174, Duboin, excerpt from the annual political report for 1940, 31 January 1941.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>18</sup> SHD, 3H257, General Vergez to EMA 2e Bureau.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>19</sup> ANS, 2D23/28, Governor of Soudan to Boisson, 16 May 1941.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>20</sup> ANS, 2D23/28, Governor of Ivory Coast to Boisson, 24 May 1941.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>21</sup> ANOM, Alg GGA/1CM/73, Administrateur de la Commune mixte de Bou-Saada, from weekly report, 21 February 1942.

or as farmers. Their morale was high and their loyalty and fidelity did not appear affected by captivity.<sup>22</sup> Most returning prisoners were more preoccupied with practical concerns than disloyalty. In Tablat, Algeria, quite a few prisoners returned in early 1942. Overall they were in good spirits and remained loyal. However, the local French administrator reported 'a certain brevity in their responses to questions asked about the camp authorities' behaviour towards them. This attitude does not appear to respond to orders, but rather [displays] a desire to forget a period of physical and mental suffering.'<sup>23</sup> Reintegration to the colonial system was designed to reduce the potential for conflicts. Generally these reports reassured Vichy that its subjects remained loyal to France.

Not all repatriated soldiers brought home the official pro-French attitude. Former *tirailleurs* from AEF could not go home since Felix Eboué had declared his support for de Gaulle, and Platon feared these reservists would be used against Vichy. They had caused problems in Morocco where they had been sent to work. Boisson suggested sending them to the Soudan, which had a similar climate as their home and which would avoid them infecting the populations in French West Africa with their negative attitude.<sup>24</sup> Usually soldiers returning with negative attitudes were dispersed and sent home as soon as possible.<sup>25</sup> Any signs of discontent were attributed to outside influence, never to potentially legitimate grievances.

Colonial officials used the CPOWs' arrival home as an opportunity to show the defeat had not affected the colonies. In North Africa, General Beynet felt it essential that returning CPOWs feel warmly welcomed by the prestigious *Armée d'Afrique* and not an indifferent military administration. This would have the double advantage of proving that the *Armée d'Afrique* remained intact, strong, hiding the reduction in numbers, as well as disproving German propaganda whose 'principle themes were the debasement of the French military, the loss of its prestige in Africa, and its indifference or impotence towards the natives.' The reception held for 300 CPOWs in Sétif, Algeria, was fairly typical. The sous-prefect Lauvel, Colonel Schwartz and the mayor of Bordj Catoni

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>22</sup> ANOM, Alg GGA/1CM/73, Administrateur de la Commune mixte de Berrouaghia, excerpt from weekly report, 24 January 1942.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>23</sup> ANOM, Alg GGA/1CM/73, Administrateur de la Commune mixte de Tablat, excerpt from weekly report, 24 January 1942.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>24</sup> ANOM, 1AFFPOL/636, telegram Boisson to Colonies, 28 October 1941.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>25</sup> ANOM, 1AFFPOL/636, telegram Amirauté Française to Colonies, 14 November [no year].

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>26</sup> ANOM, Alg GGA/1CM/73, General Beynet, service note, 17 July 1941.

attended. There was a parade, and a wreath was laid on the *Monument aux morts*. The ceremony ended with a parade by the former prisoners. A small party in the local hall followed the military events. The Governor-General sent 500 francs that paid for coffee after the traditional couscous. At the end of the party the CPOWs were given fabric to make new clothes.<sup>27</sup> The cloth was in direct response to complaints that CPOWs had to leave their uniforms behind in France. It was important for the CPOWs to return home from war well-clothed.

The first few days after return to the colonies were similar to those when prisoners arrived in the unoccupied Vichy zone. In Algeria returning CPOWs spent a few nights in the *Centre Militaire de Bastion* before their demobilisation during which they were medically examined and their travel organized.<sup>28</sup> Additionally, the *Direction du Travail au Gouvernement Général* organized a welcome centre for returning CPOWs looking for work complete with fifty beds, showers, and a kitchen capable of serving 1,000. The prisoner of war service was also busy, during the month of August 1941 when 3,800 escaped or repatriated CPOWs were interviewed upon arrival in Algiers.<sup>29</sup> Upon arrival at Oran, some CPOWs complained that before their departure they had comfortable warm clothes that were exchanged for cheaper clothes.<sup>30</sup> Senghor noted a similar trend in the *Frontstalags*, where released prisoners received as many new clothes as possible but were required to leave their gloves and any extra clothes they had for those who remained in captivity.<sup>31</sup> When colonial soldiers arrived in Algeria in uniform they were given military clothes, a greatcoat, underclothes and a pair of work boots.<sup>32</sup>

Generally, the CPOWs reacted positively to French efforts to facilitate their reintegration into civilian life were positive. In Morocco:

the actions taken at the end of December to welcome the released Moroccan prisoners have had an excellent effect on them. Overall, it does not appear their loyalty has been affected by the anti-French propaganda that they were exposed to during captivity: nevertheless, some of them had difficulties hiding their

<sup>27</sup> ANOM, Alg GGA/1CM/73, Lauvel to prefect of Constantine, 27 May 1942.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>28</sup> AN, F/9/2828, Secretary of State for Home Affairs to Secretary of State for War, 27 November 1941.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>29</sup> ANOM, Alg GGA/1CM/73, POW service in Algiers, activity report, 1-31 August 1941. <sup>30</sup> ANOM, Alg GGA/1CM/73, Centre d'information et d'Etudes, Oran, 14 February 1942.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>31</sup> SHD, 2P70, Senghor, captivity report, 7 July 1942.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>32</sup> ANOM, Alg GGA/1CM/73, Koeltz to Governor General of Algeria, 14 March 1942.

admiration for the German military force deployed on the French and Belgian battlefields. At any rate, the mindset of our former prisoners is closely watched. Their placement in new jobs is proceeding in normal conditions.<sup>33</sup>

A key element was rapidly dispersing the former prisoners to their villages. In North Africa, in order to facilitate integration back into colonial civilian society, returning prisoners were given parcels on collective or state-owned land which allowed them to return immediately to work.<sup>34</sup> If no collective land was available then authorities were told to purchase lots. Returning CPOWs were also allocated an advance to permit them to survive until the next harvest. By July 1941 over 1,500 families were placed on these allotments.<sup>35</sup> A year later, houses were under construction on lots ranging from 70 ha to 200 ha. The goal was to create a model hamlet where a dozen families, equipped with the necessary tools for tilling and for livestock, would live and work. These developments responded to local needs, like in Srharna, where 100 families were settled on irrigated land.<sup>36</sup> These allotments were for soldiers demobilised after the Armistice and for CPOWs. Did these actions help the CPOWs or merely isolate them further? Vichy praised this 'return to the land', believing that the strong peasants were the backbone of France. However, in the colonies, this effectively ensured that the CPOWs were indebted to the government, for their new homes and land, and the government knew where they were. Despite leaving captivity, CPOWs found their movements restricted.

France felt that it had made a considerable effort to help the CPOWs reintegrate. However, many CPOWs felt that they had been promised more. Rural CPOWs, who were the majority, were strongly encouraged to return home as soon as possible. In some cases bonuses were only paid in the home administrative region or *Cercle*. Returning urban CPOWs posed greater difficulties for the colonial regime, who feared they might organise. A limited number of jobs were made available for them in the administrations. Guidelines stated that CPOWs should be sent home immediately while these measures

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>33</sup> SHD, 3H159, French Resident General in Morocco, weekly memo, 3-9 July 1942.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>34</sup> SHD, 1P133, 'Recasement des prisonniers de guerre musulmans' to Governor of Algeria, Resident Generals of Morocco and Tunisia, 1 April 1941.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>35</sup> SHD, 3H159, political and economic information bulletin, 19-15 July 1941.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>36</sup> SHD, 3H159, Résident général de France au Maroc, political information bulletin, 30 January to 5 February 1942.

were prepared.<sup>37</sup> According to the law of 30 June 1941 companies could be required to hire a greater number of returned soldiers than numbers of their former employees who had signed up for the army.<sup>38</sup> Differing expectations led to frustrations for both CPOWs and employers. Reserving jobs for returning soldiers was also fraught in other countries like the United Kingdom and Ireland. Colonial officials complained that CPOWs felt entitled to office jobs and 'systematically refused all job offers for manual workers or labourers. We are trying to make them understand that the 'jobs' that they want are limited and it is in their best interest to accept what they are offered. '<sup>39</sup> The Governor General of Algeria warned that returning CPOWs felt entitled to prestigious jobs, such as foremen or rural policemen, and were often disappointed. He thought that the problem lay with the demobilisation centres that led CPOWs to believe the local authorities owed them a good job with benefits.<sup>40</sup> As seen before, the French authorities were generally nervous when CPOWs and colonial subjects felt they were owed things.

Generally one does not find major complaints about repatriating CPOWs between 1940 and 1942. The revolt in Kindia, Guinea, on 28 November 1940, was a notable exception. Frustrated by the lack of transparency regarding their demobilisation bonus of which only 500 francs was paid in two portions, 400 demobilised *tirailleurs* wounded a few Europeans, who in turned killed one of the *tirailleurs*. Others were imprisoned. The governor of Guinea initially recognized that lack of payment had inspired the Kindia revolt, but later blamed it on German propaganda.

After years of Vichy rhetoric praising the loyalty of the Empire and expressing their appreciation for the CPOWs' sacrifices, the cold reality of return could be difficult. This was compounded by a conservative colonial regime which expected its subjects to respect the hierarchy. The Governor General of Algeria recognized in early 1942 that CPOWs were returning to much harder conditions than those before their mobilisation: '[this] difficult economic situation and lack of clothing especially provoke their

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>37</sup> SHD, 1P133, 'Recasement des prisonniers de guerre musulmans' to Governor of Algeria, Resident General of Morocco and Tunisia, 1 April 1941.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>38</sup> AN, F/9/2828, Secretary of State for Home Affairs to Secretary of State for War, 27 November 1941.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>39</sup> SHD, 3H159, political and economic information bulletin, 5-11 January 1941.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>40</sup> ANOM, Alg GGA 1CM/73, Koeltz to the Généraux Commandant les divisions territoriales: d'Alger, Oran, Constantine, 18 May 1942.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>41</sup> Julian Fargettas *Les Tirailleurs Sénégalais, les soldats noirs entre légendes et réalités 1939-1945* (Paris: Tallandier, 2012), p. 255.

disappointment and a particularly sharp discontent since they were assured of benevolence and a special concern.'<sup>42</sup> He warned against blaming the CPOWs' reaction on German propaganda, but noted that the increased repatriations called for vigilance. By acknowledging, at least within the French administration, the legitimate reasons behind the CPOWs' malaise, he was able to effectively fight it, at least in the short term. In his region, returning CPOWs were given double rations the month they returned home, a double allocation of fabric, as well as the assurance of either a job or loans of seeds.<sup>43</sup> Two months later the prefect of Algiers noted that returning CPOWs in his region were generally happy with the assistance, small amounts of cash and extra supplies provided and proved able to bear the current difficulties, which they found easier than captivity.<sup>44</sup> He noted that the employment problems facing other areas had not yet affected his prisoners who were mostly small or medium farmers who had retaken control of their farms.

In May 1943, 37,000 CPOWs remained in captivity and would stay in France until the end of the war. However, only 29,000 were counted in captivity at the liberation, of whom 16,000 were North Africans. The difference might be due to the prisoners converted into civilian workers for the German economy in France. After the Allied landings, the German army feared that the remaining CPOWs would be reintegrated into the allied armies, so retreated with 10,000-13,000 CPOWs in tow. The speed of the Allied advance meant that many CPOWs could escape *en route*. Thirty-eight who did so were brought from Brussels to Lille in September 1944. The retreat to Germany was possibly the most dangerous time for CPOWs since being captured in 1940, due to allied bombing. Eleven CPOWs were killed and fifty-three were wounded

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>42</sup> ANOM, Alg GGA/1CM/73, Governor General of Algeria to the prefect of Affaires Musulmanes, 4 February 1942.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>44</sup> ANOM, Alg GGA/1CM/73, Prefect of Alger to Governor General of Algeria, 27 April 1942.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>45</sup> SHD, 2P64, Le Gouest, Numbers in the *Frontstalags* on 30 November 1942, 9 January 1943; AN, AJ/41/2053, SDPG, information bulletin, 6 March 1943; SHD, 1P33, approximate numbers of natives and North Africans stationed in the *Métropole*, 23 July 1943.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>46</sup> SHD, 9P8, information on numbers in the *Frontstalags*, 31 July 1944.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>47</sup> Scheck, French Colonial Soldiers, p. 293.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>48</sup> Ibid., p. 294.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>49</sup> BAVCC, 22P3046, list of escaped prisoners who passed through CRF in Brussels in September 1944.

when Dungen (Rhineland) was bombed on 30 October 1944.<sup>50</sup> The wounded were hospitalized in Germany. The Colonial Service recorded 252 CPOWs in Germany in December 1944.<sup>51</sup> Scheck has established that the conditions for prisoners deteriorated rapidly as they moved east. Camps were over-crowded, the CPOWs were forced to do dangerous war work under allied attack, and supplies were limited.<sup>52</sup> The provisional French government tried to obtain lists of CPOWs in Germany, but to no avail.<sup>53</sup> Twenty-two Moroccans were liberated from the Russian Front in April 1945.<sup>54</sup> The last group of CPOWs to be released on 9 May 1945 were working for the Todt organisation on the Channel Islands.<sup>55</sup> In 1945 the context for returning soldiers and ex-CPOWs was very different to that returning before 11 November 1942. By this stage, CPOWs had endured five years in captivity, either as German prisoners or on semi-militarized work groups guarded by French officers. Echenberg accurately describes 1944-1945 as the 'winter of the CPOWs' greatest discontent' due to lack of food, clothing, often housing and severe military discipline.<sup>56</sup> With the liberation of France the Provisional Government took control and on 10 September 1944 declared all laws passed under Vichy illegal and void.

#### Return to the colonies 1945

Did the liberation of France significantly change how CPOWs' were treated? The external context shifted: France had its Empire back and Germany was the enemy once again. The CPOWs' were no longer politically significant and the primary concern was a return to colonial normalcy. The Provisional French Government had two things to blame for the CPOWs' 'indiscipline': Vichy and the Germans. The new regime did fear the danger of repatriating CPOWs with low morale, due to Vichy's incompetence:

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>50</sup> BAVCC, 22P3026, Directeur des Réfugiés to Directeur du Fichier central, Ministère des P.G., 4 March 1945. Raffael Scheck has determined that this town is most likely Düngenheim. For a complete discussion on the return of the CPOWs from Germany see Raffael Scheck, *French Colonial Soldiers*, pp 294-302.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>51</sup> BAVCC, 22P3046, Colonial Service, list of French native colonial soldiers currently located in Germany, 7 December 1944.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>52</sup> Scheck, French Colonial Soldiers, pp 295-296.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>53</sup> Ibid., p. 298.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>54</sup> BAVCC, 22P3046, Ministère des Prisonniers de guerre, déportés et Réfugiés to délégation Ministère Prisonniers Casablanca, 6 April 45.

<sup>55</sup> Scheck, French Colonial Soldiers, p. 302.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>56</sup> Echenberg, Colonial Conscripts, p. 99.

It follows that under these conditions the morale of the North Africans suffered, and they remain resentful towards France, having been abandoned after giving their health for its service, which will certainly hurt French interests on their return to Africa. It is desirable to get these seriously ill or disabled prisoners packages like the ones they received in captivity; the médecin-colonel in each hospital in the southern zone could provide a list. Amitiés africaines was only able, on one occasion, to provide them with biscuits and a little jam. 57

The Provisional Government's solution was to provide better packages for the former CPOWs, which was the exact same action Vichy took. This text clearly acknowledged that these North African former prisoners would be justified in their frustration with France, but blamed Vichy's actions. This placed the Provisional Government in a similar position to that of Vichy during the first year of the occupation: searching for ways to improve conditions for the CPOWs while blaming the former regime for the situation. While it acknowledged that the CPOWs might be resentful, no significant policy changes ensued. Instead, following Vichy's example, commanders were told to ensure that the former CPOWs were supervised and occupied with work.<sup>58</sup>

In 1944 the French army found itself with a number of CPOWs who had not reported directly to the Centres de libération after escaping or being released. In September 1944 General Noiret proposed allowing a temporary demobilisation for North Africans resident in metropolitan France before 1 September 1939 and who currently had housing and work. This would give the Centres de liberation and the Centre de démobilisation de Clermont-Ferrand time to conduct thorough investigation to confirm their identities.<sup>59</sup> Once the CPOWs' situation was regularised they were sent to the Centres de démobilisation which were responsible for ensuring a medical visit, providing a provision demobilisation document, and paying the 200 franc advance. 60 In 1945 civilian and military authorities were tasked with finding and regrouping the missing CPOWs, some of whom were living with civilians, while others had joined the resistance.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>57</sup> AN, F/1a/3780, Provisional Government of the French Republic, repatriating the North African troops to France, 21 May 1944.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>58</sup> SHD, 9P8, Noiret to the commanders of the Military Regions, 8 September 1944. <sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

The conservative colonial regime remained in place throughout Vichy and under the Provisional Government. If anything, the events in France reinforced a desire among imperial officials to preserve the status quo. Whereas there was an utter change of view with regard to the returning French POWs, Vichy views of CPOWs and the Empire in general were maintained and strengthened by the Provisional Government and post-war governments. The two demobilisations took place in dramatically different contexts. Fargettas argues that after the liberation prisoners were not a priority as the Provisional Government struggled to feed France.'61 While there were certainly many factors that contributed to the returning CPOWs' protests, financial ones were the most important. CPOWs complained that their demobilisation premiums were unpaid or were less than expected, and that the exchange rate between French and West African francs changed when the French franc was devalued. 62 As Gregory Mann points out, many of these CPOWs remembered their fathers' return from the First World War so their collective memories of unpaid pensions and benefits combined with confusing payments bred distrust.<sup>63</sup> In 1919 a demobilisation allowance was given to families of French citizen soldiers Mort Pour la France, which disenfranchised the majority of the colonial soldiers except those from the older French colonies or the four communes in Dakar.<sup>64</sup> The amount of the demobilisation bonus raised questions in France in 1945 as well. Femme de prisonnier published an editorial criticising the fact that the bonus of 1,000 francs had not increased since 1940, despite the increases in cost of living during the occupation.<sup>65</sup> The idea that colonial troops could not manage their full allowances and wasted it on expensive gifts influenced the decision after the Second World War to split payment between the transit camp and their home. 66 Soldiers were told that the rest of their payments would be made upon arrival in their homes but colonial officials were not given the money to honour the commitment.<sup>67</sup> Since many CPOWs had large amounts of cash,

62 Lawler, Soldiers of Misfortune, p. 198.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>61</sup> Julian Fargattas, Les Tirailleurs Sénégalais, les soldats noirs entre legends et réalités 1939-1945 (Paris: Tallandier, 2012), p. 264.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>63</sup> Gregory Mann, *Native Sons, West African Veterans and France in the Twentieth Century* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006), p. 115.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>64</sup> J.O. A.O.F., 8 Mai, 5 juin, 18 octobre, 8 novembre 1919 in Michel, Appel à l'Afrique, p. 201.

<sup>65</sup> AN, F/41/226, 'Ce n'est pas une aumone, c'est un du', Femme de prisonniers.

<sup>66</sup> Michel, Appel à l'Afrique, p. 201.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>67</sup> Lawler, Soldiers of Misfortune, p. 198.

colonial officers assumed, despite proof to the contrary, that it was stolen, and more importantly, that there was no rush to pay them. Some CPOWs had over 80,000 French francs, mostly earned working and sometimes supplemented by selling their cigarettes, chocolate and American uniforms on the black market. Either intentionally or due to the chaos of post-war France, the French government misled CPOWs about their payments.

As much as possible the government prioritized the return of CPOWs.70 Repatriations began in the autumn of 1944. Despite the difficulties of captivity and the delays in return many CPOWs were repatriated without incident. In October, 400 CPOWs were sent to Liverpool to await British ships to send them home. During their stay the CPOWs forced their way into a sergeants' mess hall. After the incident no more CPOWs were repatriated via Great Britain.<sup>71</sup> Between November 1944 and April 1945 almost 10,000 men were repatriated to AOF including 3,261 ex-CPOWs, and 6,334 from the armies in North Africa.<sup>72</sup> Anger and protest were unavoidable. As noted, the most famous incident occurred at Thiaroye in Senegal. Twelve hundred ex-CPOWs disembarking from the Circassia revolted there on 1 December 1944, protesting at the lack of back-pay and demobilisation bonus as well as having their French francs confiscated by the authorities. During the protest the men refused to obey their officers and held some French officers hostage. The French military officials fired on the protesters. Thirty-five CPOWs were killed, hundreds were injured and thirty-four were arrested and sent to prison. Echenberg correctly emphasises the point that while former prisoners are notoriously difficult to reintegrate into civilian life, these soldiers had reasonable complaints about discrimination and unfair treatment.<sup>73</sup> In June 1947 a general amnesty was announced for Thiaroye but five men had already died in prison. Neither the French nor colonial authorities considered the financial question when seeking an explanation for Thiaroye. The events at Thiaroye sent shock-waves through the French and British colonial administrations.<sup>74</sup> The Senegalese tirailleurs had the reputation for

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>68</sup> Echenberg, *Colonial Conscripts*, p. 101.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>69</sup> Lawler, Soldiers of Misfortune, p. 199.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>70</sup> Ibid., p. 196.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>71</sup> Ibid., p. 197.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>72</sup> SHD, 5H16, De Boisboissel to Ministre de la Guerre, Direction des troupes coloniales, 29 March 1945.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>73</sup> Echenberg, *Colonial Conscripts*, pp 97 – 98.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>74</sup> SHD, 5H16, De Boisboissel to Ministre des Colonies, Direction des Affaires Militaires, 21 December 1944.

being loyal and child-like, but Thiaroye directly contradicted the previously patronizing views on POWs. Authorities in Senegal and France sought explanations and placed blame.

Thiaroye threw a harsh light on the tensions between a paternalist colonial rhetoric and the realities of demobilising CPOWs who had developed an understandable sense of entitlement. It revealed, retrospectively, much of what had been at stake in the CPOWs' position during the war. The French officers involved were quick to defend their actions. The official report written in Senegal claimed that neither the military nor civilian authorities in AOF were to blame. It attributed the events in Thiaroye to decisions and measures taken in metropolitan France, but felt that it would do no good to look for those responsible as the authorities were forced to make difficult and dangerous choices.<sup>75</sup> Tensions increased between metropolitan and colonial administrators. Laurentie, the Director of Affaires Politiques, felt that the report confirmed that 'most of the *Inspecteurs des Colonies*, after having spontaneously failed at their national duty in 1940, remain incapable, in 1945, of fulfilling the smallest demands of their professional duty. 76 Instead of using Thiarove to revaluate responses to the CPOWs' demands, the French fell back on their usual reasoning: 'the undeniable mark of German propaganda on this incident, and its disastrous effects on the mentality of the native ex-prisoners.'77 For many officials, propaganda was the explanation that neatly placed responsibility on those who, with the fortunes of war, had once again become the enemy.

France repeatedly showed its reluctance to acknowledge that CPOWs had reasonable complaints. To address these complaints might create an unfortunate precedent whereby colonial subjects might feel they could make demands on the government. Instead, France preferred to blame an abstract: German propaganda. The report on Thiaroye concluded:

Far from their country and separated from their officers for five years, successively subjected to captivity then freedom that did not often assuage the discipline, sometimes chosen as insidious propaganda instruments, often

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>75</sup> SHD, 5H16, Merat, detailed report on the events at Thiaroye, 14 February 1944.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>76</sup> SHD, 5H16, Laurentie, note for M. le Ministre, 31 March 1945.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>77</sup> SHD, 5H16, De Boisboissel to Pierre Charles Counarie, 14 December 1944.

abusively spoilt, the Senegalese ex-prisoners suffer from the turmoil that follows troubled times and particularly affects crude natures.<sup>78</sup>

The idea that CPOWs had been 'abusively spoilt' certainly contributed to the repressive measures taken in response to events seen to challenge the colonial regime. At a time when the colonies began to demand recognition for their contribution to the victory, it encouraged a return to the repressive practices of the conquest era: 'The results of this path will be positive and will see our protégés fully realize, again, the greatness and the civilizing power of France.'79

France had changed after the Second World War, but the colonies had not. Eric Deroo and Antoine Champeaux add the lack of experienced NCOs, combined with irregularities in payments due to CPOWs arriving from different camps, and disbelief that the situation would be fixed contributed to the frustration generally and Thiaroye specifically.<sup>80</sup> Gregory Mann correctly concludes that Thiaroye was neither an isolated event nor characteristic of the CPOWs' repatriation.<sup>81</sup> After Thiaroye, repatriations went more smoothly. Three hundred and fifty ex-CPOWs returning on the Hoggar arrived in Dakar 1 February 1945. While their behaviour had led to an official report, the crossing was uneventful. Upon arrival in Dakar, Boisson credited their smooth transition home to payments made in the métropole and firm discipline en route. 82 Boisson urged the Ministry of Colonies to pay CPOWs before they embarked for Dakar. 83 News of the changes for payment reached the 523 ex-CPOWs en route for Dakar while at Casablanca, subsequently improving their behaviour.<sup>84</sup> Four days later they were on their way home. Despite not receiving payment before departure, CPOWs repatriated on the Faucon and the Montaigne arrived in Dakar 2 March 1945 without incident during the trip or upon arrival in Dakar. In Dakar over four million AOF Francs were paid to exchange sums in Banque de France bills, reimbursing the CPOWs' saving accounts opened during captivity as well as their payments due at the end of captivity. 85 The 877 CPOWs on the

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>78</sup> SHD, 5H16, De Perier, appendix to report on the events at Thiaroye, [n.d.].

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>79</sup> SHD, 5H16, Digo for the absent Governor General to Ministre des Colonies, 22 December 1944.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>80</sup> Deroo and Champeaux, Force noire, p. 201.

<sup>81</sup> Mann, Native Sons, p. 117.

<sup>82</sup> SHD, 5H16, De Boisboissel, report, 8 February 1945.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>83</sup> SHD, 5H16, telegramme Boisseau to Colonies Paris, 25 February 1945.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>85</sup> SHD, 5H16, De Boisboissel to Ministre de la Guerre, Direction des troupes coloniales, 14 March 1945.

Providence, Marrakech, Dunkerque and Schiaffino arrived without incident in Dakar. The only punishments were on the Marrakech for drunkenness while docked at Casablanca.<sup>86</sup>

One of the most contested colonial incidents happened on 8 May 1945. A fairly moderate parade of 5,000 in Sétif, Algeria, degenerated into violence when the gendarmes tried to remove anti-colonial placards. Both *gendarmes* and protesters were shot. The violence continued into the evening and approximately 100 European settlers were attacked and killed. Tensions were high. The indigenous population was severely malnourished due to famine conditions from 1944. The French response to the violence was completely out of proportion. Racism, fear and hysteria promoted the French civilians to take up arms and kill, essentially at random, thousands of Algerians. The historiography of Sétif has shifted from blaming a colonialist conspiracy to a combination of fear and hatred leading to violence. The events at Sétif are now considered a turning point in Franco-Algerian relations. While there is no evidence that any CPOWs were involved, the episode speaks to the mood and tensions throughout the French Empire. It highlights the fear the white settlers had of the native populations and the idea that any change might bring about their downfall.

Both Thiaroye and Sétif were, however, symptomatic of the structural violence inherent in colonialism. Despite the reluctance of many colonial soldiers to be sent to war in France in 1940, once engaged, they had a real sense of loyalty to the motherland. This can be seen in the almost total rejection of German propaganda efforts. The French authorities consistently underestimated this loyalty and commitment. That led to misinterpreting the returning colonial soldiers' demands that the payment schedule, biased as it was against them be enforced properly, as signs of a general revolt. At Thiaroye the consequences of five years of captivity, the hyper-masculinity of the French army and POW regime, combined with tensions and mistrust between previously Vichyist administrators and the new Provisional Government created a tinderbox. One

86 Ibid., 29 March 1945.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>87</sup> For more on Sétif see Jean-Charles Jauffret, La Guerre d'Algérie par les documents (Vincennes: Sérvice historique de l'armée de terre, 1990); Guy Pervillé, Pour une histoire de la guerre d'Algérie, 1954-1962 (Paris: Picard, 2002); Jean-Louis Planche, Sétif, 1945, histoire d'un massacre announce, (Paris: Pérrin, 2006); Annie Rey-Goldzeiguer, Aux Origines de la guerre d'Algérie, 1940-1945, de Mers-el-Kébir aux massacres du Nord-Constantinois (Paris: La Décourverte, 2002).

major difference between the two acts of brutal repression, besides the obvious difference in the numbers of victims, was the French reaction to the aftermath. Obviously the French authorities did not admit to over-reaction in either case, but the reactions after the 'revolts' foreshadow the future French attitude to each territory. After Thiaroye the 'rebels' were sent to prison and served real sentences. However, there was a concerted effort to ensure it would not happen again by paying the soldiers before they left France, which was exactly what the *tirailleurs* at Thiaroye wanted. In Algeria, Sétif become one of many incidents of violence spiralling out of control and into the Algerian War; whereas, Senegal would continue to maintain privileged relations with France even after independence.

The real repercussions of Thiaroye and Sétif were to come slowly. Echenberg argues that French officials did not recognize that captivity changed and united the African CPOWs. 88 The unity Echenberg evokes was not simple loyalty to France, but rather the beginning of collective consciousness that captivity meant something, and the CPOWs deserved more than a return to the harsh reality of forced labour and minimal rights. French prisoners too felt that their suffering entitled them to a significant role in post-war political and social life.<sup>89</sup> While French prisoners were shocked at how much France had changed during the war, 90 the CPOWs were shocked at how little the colonies had changed. Both colonial and French prisoners suffered the consequences of a rhetoricfilled captivity. French prisoners were disillusioned to find that the country had survived without them. 91 CPOWs learnt that the imperial rhetoric of the Vichy years was replaced by reactionary efforts to reassert control over the native populations. While the massacre at Thiaroye was not representative of the CPOWs' experiences of repatriation, it revealed the underlying issues and tensions. The colonies had fought for France during the war. Some had even continued fighting after the Armistice. As Charles-Robert Ageron argued, popular opinion in France remained at best paternalist and more often self-centred, hence the surprise when colonial populations started demanding change.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> Echenberg, Colonial Conscripts, p. 103.

<sup>89</sup> François Cochet, Les Exclus, p. 36.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>90</sup> Ibid, p. 137.

<sup>91</sup> Christophe Lewin, Le Retour des prisonniers de guerre français: naissance et développement de la Fnpg, 1944-1952 (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 1986), pp 88-89.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>92</sup> Ageron, 'Vichy, les Français et l'Empire', pp 131-132.

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It was during the process of leaving captivity that CPOWs had the most contact with the French. On a personal level, escaping CPOWs were helped by French civilians and organised escape networks. On an administrative level, the CPOWs were faced with a large and conservative French bureaucracy limited by the constraints of an on-going war. The lack of movement frustrated CPOWs who assumed that being released from captivity equalled freedom, as it did for the white French prisoners. The lucky ones were repatriated quickly. They experienced the best efforts of Vichy and the colonial regime on their behalf: fanfares, couscous and limited assistance finding housing and work. Even then, Vichy remained suspicious towards their CPOWs and tried to ensure that they only brought pro-French attitudes home to the colonies. Already the discrepancies between what Vichy and the CPOWs expected could be seen. Some returning CPOWs assumed they would be given important jobs and consequently resisted the return to manual labour. Others, through their contact with civilians in France, thought hierarchies were crumbling. They had worked and eaten, and sometimes even lodged, alongside the French. On the other hand, some French officials shared Darlan's belief that supporting the CPOWs during their captivity was recognition enough for their sacrifice. The reactionary colonial regime remained in place throughout Vichy and under the Provisional Government. If anything, the events in France reinforced a desire among imperial officials to preserve the status quo. Whereas there was an utter change of view with regard to the French POWs, Vichy views of CPOWs and the Empire in general were maintained and strengthened by the Provisional Government (and post-war governments). The two demobilisations took place in dramatically different contexts. Hints of change were seen as the result of dangerous German propaganda and as something to be quashed. Coming home, after five years of combat and then captivity, brought many of the tensions of imprisonment, and the contradictions between French principle and prejudice, to a head.

#### Conclusion

While it is clear that Vichy acted in its own self-interest, seeking closer and closer collaboration with Germany, the colonial prisoners remain one area where Vichy may have offered some protection from Nazi racial politics. Caught within its own rhetoric of a unified Empire Vichy had to ensure that the CPOWs were not neglected. Unexpectedly, CPOWs held a privileged and contradictory position within Vichy negotiations. On the one hand, Vichy prioritized the return of the French prisoners; on the other hand Vichy could not afford to isolate the colonial prisoners completely.

Since the Paxton 'revolution' major questions in relation to Vichy focused on whether Vichy was able to protect its population 'from worse' under a German occupation. The early scholarship, seeking to justify a period that seemed incongruous with France's Republican traditions, focused on Pétain. It was difficult to believe that Pétain, the hero of Verdun, could have knowingly implicated France in anything as terrible as the Nazi war effort. The post-war trials argued that Pétain never lost contact with the British and was playing a *double-jeu* with the Germans. Robert Paxton disproved this theory in 1972 exposing French collaboration as voluntary. He argued Pétain could not have been a shield as it was he who sought further and closer collaboration with Germany. Historians have revised and built upon Paxton's work but it has remained the dominant analysis of the Vichy regime.

Vichy's negotiations rarely benefited France. At first the Empire appeared a powerful bargaining chip. The Armistice granted France autonomy over all its overseas territories; which was more than Vichy had in France. Charles de Gaulle and the British immediately challenged this autonomy. Germany did not want another front in the colonies. British attacks on Mers-el-Kébir and Dakar reminded France of their historical imperial rivalry. Vichy chose to believe, naively and incorrectly, that Germany would honour French colonial interests after the peace. Vichy did obtain the release of 10,000 North Africans through political negotiations and generous release measures for sick CPOWs. But that was fewer than Vichy hoped, and the Armistice restrictions limiting the army in the colonies remained. A neutral French Empire suited German interests and gave Vichy some traction in negotiations. By the time Darlan had offered Germany the use of French bases in North Africa in exchange for

suspending the Armistice agreement, however, German focus had shifted to the East. The Empire no longer interested Germany and France needed other ways to keep the occupier interested in collaboration. Vichy could not use the threat of reciprocity to protect its prisoners. The only thing France had that Germany needed and could not already take was labour: prisoner and civilian.

Previous historiography of colonial prisoners has emphasized their neglect under Vichy. It focused on the influence that French and German racism had on the CPOWs' captivity, resulting in harsher conditions than those for French prisoners. This is true if one looks exclusively at the beginning and end of captivity. CPOWs were at risk of being killed outright in June 1940 and they were not the priority for the Provisional Government in 1945. Overall, conditions in France were better than those in Germany or the eastern occupied territories, and this was reflected in conditions in the *Frontstalags*. Furthermore, CPOWs were not systematically killed or worked to death like Soviet or Polish prisoners. Instead they were given Geneva Convention protection and had much lower mortality rates than previously assumed and compared to their Soviet counterparts. Due to their internment in France, a friendly country that was not at war, the CPOWs fared better than many French prisoners in Germany. They certainly fared better in captivity in Occupied France than they would have done in Germany.

Nevertheless, captivity remained a difficult period for CPOWs. The French climate was harsh and many CPOWs lacked the clothing needed to protect themselves. As the occupation went on, conditions in France generally, and the *Frontstalags* in particular, grew worse. Pressure for greater productivity increased. Food shortages increased as the war went on. The second turning point in the war, the allied landings in North Africa, the battles of El Alamein and Stalingrad and the German invasion of the Free Zone, significantly changed the CPOWs' experience. Vichy simultaneously gained more influence over the CPOWs and lost its Empire. The CPOWs were no longer a strategic concern for Vichy. There was no need to negotiate for the CPOWs' loyalty. The CPOWs were no longer at risk from German propaganda and they could not return to the colonies and thus could not affect the local populations. Once Vichy lost the Empire, Germany also lost its previous ease of infiltration in North Africa. The primacy of labour replaced training spies and encouraging revolts. The CPOWs became one of many forms of essential labour for their total-war economy. The CPOWs were increasingly isolated after November

1942. Correspondence from the colonies was scarce and there was no hope of repatriation. Some remaining CPOWs were brought to Germany in 1944. After the German defeat, their repatriation was slow and difficult. Other issues, such as the *épuration* and repatriating French POWs and civilian deportees from Germany, preoccupied the Provisional Government. CPOWs were not their priority. Many did not return home before 1945.

Vichy's efforts to protect their colonial prisoners stemmed from the political importance that the Empire, and thus the CPOWs, represented for Vichy. Vichy struggled to reinforce its imperial identity and maintain the loyalty of its subjects while other influences, the Free French, the Japanese in Indochina, or even the Germans in North Africa, threatened the Empire. Reacting to German propaganda Vichy sent CPOWs care packages and colonial foodstuffs. Racism certainly existed under the Vichy regime and efforts for the CPOWs in no way implied equal rights for 'natives'. Soldiers, be they French or colonial, were doing their duty for France and nothing more. However, Vichy racism differed fundamentally from Nazi racism. It was paternalist in nature. Colonial subjects were considered children, placing the French, and especially the officers, in a father-like role. Having a superior 'civilization' imposed civic obligations towards their subjects, including improving their conditions so that one day they could benefit from a similar 'civilisation'. Vichy's actions for CPOWs were not unselfish but were based both on political ideology and a sense of responsibility. Vichy assumed that the CPOWs would respond to the efforts made on their behalf with obedience and appreciation.

However, the CPOWs were changed by captivity. Witnessing the defeat and the German occupation encouraged some CPOWs to question France's right to rule the colonies. Contact with the French population encouraged friendships and exposure to ideas that differed from strict military policy. Through these connections CPOWs formed relationships that undermined strictly segregated colonial hierarchies. When working on local farms the CPOWs ate at the same table as their French employers. Local communities supplied extra food and prepared it for CPOWs on road crews. Women and girls adopted CPOWs, writing them letters and sending packages. Other French men and women risked prison and deportation to help escaping prisoners. While in captivity, CPOWs were generally treated with a sense of solidarity. They

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> For a detailed exploration of the relationships between Marraines and their CPOWs see Mabon, *Indigènes* ', pp 90-98.

were helped and their complaints about the Germans were listened to. Once Vichy gained unfiltered control over the CPOWs, either in the southern zone or once French officers had replaced the Germans in the *Frontstalags*, the CPOWs were surprised to find this solidarity evaporated.

Indeed, ironically, CPOWs fared better while in the Frontstalags than in the southern zone. Vichy's negotiations on the CPOWs' behalf were designed to remove them from German influence and restore them firmly to French rule. Ideally, this meant repatriation. In reality, many remained in the southern zone of France under Vichy control. Since Vichy feared the German influence it increased efforts for CPOWs held by former enemy. The German authorities took advantage of Vichy's desire for collaboration and more contact with the CPOWs by transferring financial responsibility for the CPOWs to Vichy. This meant French towns and prefectures were building work camps and feeding CPOWs in their area. Extra comforts were sent to remind the CPOWs that the French had not forgotten their sacrifice. Once back in the southern zone, however, Vichy's priorities changed. No longer were the CPOWs in direct danger from German propaganda. The French authorities in charge of the CPOWs wanted an immediate return to the discipline of the colonial army. They seemed shocked that CPOWs did not recognize Vichy's efforts on their behalf. Complaints, even legitimate ones, were attributed to the residual German propaganda. This discrepancy between the rhetoric of imperial solidarity and the reality of an unchanged colonial system exacerbated the returning CPOWs' complaints. Continued delays in repatriation and lack of payment at the end of the war left many former prisoners feeling they had been abandoned and used by the French government.

While life for the CPOWs was easier than it would have been in Germany, certain things still made it a difficult experience. Vichy's first priority was always France and the French prisoners. However, to promote France, Vichy had to call on the Empire as a symbol of French greatness. Vichy commitment to collaboration allowed Germany to abdicate responsibility for financial accountability, but not control, over the CPOWs. This meant that CPOWs were fed, housed by the French authorities and enjoyed generally friendly, if sometimes reluctant relations, with the French population. This was a huge advantage over the German population who were increasingly restricted by the total war. Conditions for French and allied prisoners in Germany were worse than for CPOWs in France. France's Armistice protected the CPOWs from the pressures of a country in war. Prisoners working in Germany were

an integral part of the German war economy, and subjected to difficult working conditions. Even when helped to escape, they would have to traverse Germany and Occupied France before attempting to cross the French demarcation line. The one area where CPOWs suffered disproportionately was their health. As CPOWs were unused to the harsh French climate, many got sick. About five per cent of CPOWs died during captivity. The majority succumbed to tuberculosis or other pulmonary infections. Despite efforts to improve camp conditions many colonial prisoners died during captivity from natural and unnatural causes. The fear of colonial diseases and tuberculosis meant sick CPOWs were released to hospitals in Marseilles. CPOWs were also cut off from their homes and native lands in a way that was not true for French prisoners in Germany. Distance, reduced shipping, and low literacy rates hindered correspondence with families. After November 1942 communication with the colonies ceased. Repatriating released prisoners was slowed by the lack of ships. CPOWs left German Frontstalags to be interned in French camps in the Free Zone. Repatriation only began again after the liberation of France. Most CPOWs from North and sub-Saharan Africa were repatriated by the middle of 1945. However, some stayed in transit camps in France until January 1946.<sup>2</sup> The Indochinese prisoners remained in France the longest, due to the Japanese occupation of Indochina and subsequent war for re-colonisation.

The paradox of the CPOWs' captivity experience is that they fared better when Vichy only had indirect influence. As long as they had political significance for Vichy, as prisoners who would return and potentially influence things in the Empire, they benefited. Since Vichy feared German sway, they went to great lengths to improve CPOWs' conditions. This allowed Vichy to portray the French government in a benevolent light. The French uniform protected CPOWs from the fate of Russian or Polish prisoners. Within the constraints negotiated by Vichy CPOWs were granted the basic Geneva Convention protections like white French prisoners. Vichy could not protect the CPOWs against acts of violence from their guards. Yet, when Vichy had direct control of CPOWs, after repatriation for illness or conversion into civilian workers, conditions for CPOWs worsened. This was partially due to the general degradation of conditions in France as the war continued, but mostly because CPOWs were no longer a priority when under Vichy's direct control. While CPOWs were at

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Scheck, French Colonial Soldiers, p. 315.

risk for German propaganda Vichy used the carrot. When back under French control it used the stick. Vichy France needed to reassert its dominance over their colonial subjects whose obedience had been affected by German propaganda and schisms in the Empire. The consequences of this paradox were soon felt. After years of Vichy rhetoric praising imperial loyalty and sacrifice, many CPOWs were shocked to find themselves back under a strict regime. Their legitimate complaints were often dismissed as echoes of German propaganda. After the liberation of France, prisoners were not a priority. France had no resources and the countryside was devastated. As always, metropolitan interests prevailed and CPOWs were sent home as quickly as possible.

The consequences of the return of the colonial soldiers would be felt in the following two decades. Open frustration once captivity had ended, combined with the French government's lack of recognition for their contribution and frustration, fuelled complaints. These complaints turned to violent reactions at Thiaroye when the French officers refused to give the CPOWs what they were owed. Veterans and former prisoners, with extremely active membership groups, were often at the forefront of these movements. During captivity CPOWs gained increased political awareness and the recognition of French fallibility. As Gregory Mann argues, the returning soldiers were not necessarily looking for independence for a nation, but from the idea of a nation in which they had no influence.<sup>3</sup> The Second World War has long been seen as the watershed of the African independence movements. One root of these movements was in the lessons learnt from a shared experience of captivity.

Raffael Scheck's forthcoming book focuses on CPOWs caught between Vichy and the German authorities. Scheck goes into great detail on the CPOWs' experiences in 1944 and 1945. Using private sources, Armelle Mabon shed light on the intricacies of relationships between CPOWs and French civilians, specifically social workers. This thesis argues that through the CPOWs, another vision of collaboration emerges. The combination of German lack of interest in the CPOWs and Vichy's fear of propaganda created a favourable situation for CPOWs. This favourable period lasted from the winter of 1940 to November 1942. This period was not without difficulties; such as food shortages, cold weather, and lack of supplies. Germany imposed greater

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> Mann, *Native Sons*, p. 109.

financial responsibility for the CPOWs on Vichy, but ultimately this protected them from the harsh captivity forced on the Reich's other prisoners.

This thesis also casts the experience of colonial prisoners of war in a new light. During the first half of captivity, from June 1940 to November 1942, the CPOWs represented an important political stake for Vichy. Vichy policy towards CPOWs was fluid and reactive. There was not, as Mabon has suggested, a deliberate policy of neglect. That said, conditions were difficult and CPOWs, like French prisoners, did suffer during their five years of captivity. Those who were released early benefited from a fairly organized camp regime, and repatriation. Those who remained in France for five or six years experienced the worst: shortages, removal to Germany, liberation and repatriation to France, then further internment in *centres de regroupement* awaiting repatriation home. Many of the complaints and ensuing conflicts from CPOWs came from the final phase of captivity under the new French government.

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Revisiting the question of collaboration through the experience of the CPOWs thus sheds new light on an old question. It also reveals much about Vichy's relationship to the colonies. Vichy did manage to shield the CPOWs from 'worse', although it would be an error to claim Vichy collaborated to protect the CPOWs. Rather it was a fortuitous result of Vichy's collaboration in general. Vichy did not act alone. Many of these circumstances were imposed by Germany. The presence of CPOWs in Occupied France was purely a German decision motivated by racism and a desire to make France pay, figuratively and literally, for using 'natives'. France was a relatively privileged location for POWs, especially as conditions worsened in Germany and in the East. This protection was limited in scope and time. Once CPOWs came under direct French authority, in the Occupied Zone or with French officers as guards, the advantages evaporated. France took this opportunity to reestablish the military discipline they felt befitted the colonial troops. Even before the war was over, it was clear that the imperial contributions, from CPOWs and the Free French alike, would not bring about change in the imperial regime. The colonial administrators under the renewed Republican regime recommitted to an oppressive

policy. Events like Thiaroye and Sétif prove tensions were high. After the war everyone wanted change. However, not everyone wanted the same change.

## Appendix A:

#### A statistical discussion

A variety of factors make it difficult to establish exact statistics for prisoners of war in general and CPOWs in particular. The chaos surrounding the defeat and internment of the army allowed many soldiers to escape and disappear into civilian crowds. Official statistics were not compiled until prisoners reached a semipermanent or permanent camp where they could complete Red Cross postcards. From studying the different reports, one can presume between that between 65,000 and 85,000 colonial soldiers remained in captivity in 1941. The first official list of prisoners held by the Germans, including British, Danish and Norwegians, was published in September 1940. However, one of the first available statistics from the French side is from Georges Scapini. He noted on 16 December 1940: 'the number of coloured prisoners is approximately 300,000 men which includes 80,000 Senegalese, and the remaining 220,000 North African soldiers.' This statistic is over three times higher than any other found. On 1 March 1941 the German authorities counted 81,301 CPOWs in the Frontstalags.<sup>3</sup> In May 1941, General Andlauer asked prefects for the numbers of CPOWs interned in their departments, resulting in a figure of between 85,937 and 87,330.4 French reports were often contradictory. One from November 1941 calculated 55,400 CPOWs.<sup>5</sup> and another estimated 70,000 at the end of 1941.<sup>6</sup>

Secondary sources are equally divided on the subject. David Killingray calculates that in 1940 colonial troops represented one tenth of the French army in Europe. Nancy Lawler cites the colonel in charge of *Section d'Etudes d'Information des Troupes Coloniales* who calculated that there were 58,500 tirailleurs held in

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Vourkoutiotis, *Prisoners of War and the German High Command*, p. 35.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> SHD, 2P66, Scapini to Tiepelmann, 16 December 1940.

AN, F/9/2959, Anzahl der Kriegsgefangen weisse und farbige Frz. in Frankreich, 1 March 1941.
 AN, F/9/2351, Approximations concerning prisoners from Algeria, the colonies, protectorates and

AN, F/9/2351, Approximations concerning prisoners from Algeria, the colonies, protectorates and countries under mandate for General Andlauer, 5 May 1941. This total was calculated adding statistics from each department sent to Andlauer. Variations are due to different racial categories.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> AN, AJ/41/2053, note for Mr Lucas regarding meeting with Captain Roussane, 27 November 1941. <sup>6</sup> SHD, 2P63, Dupuy, analysis of reports on the *Frontstalags* from 1 October to 1 April 1942.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> David Killingray, 'Africans and African Americans in Enemy Hands', in Bob Moore and Kent Fedororwich (eds) *Prisoners of War and their Captors in WWII* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 181.

Stalags in 1940.<sup>8</sup> This number does not include North African prisoners of war. Armelle Mabon and Martine Cuttier<sup>9</sup> used the official OKW report for 8 October 1941 giving 68,550 CPOWs.<sup>10</sup> Martin Thomas warns that German newsreels exaggerated the numbers of CPOWs to prove German racial superiority.<sup>11</sup> This might explain why the German statistic for 1 March 1941 is one of the highest. As France subsidized CPOWs' food in the Frontstalags it is possible that camp authorities exaggerated numbers in hopes of receiving more supplies. A safe figure seems to be somewhere in excess of 80,000 CPOWs in the spring of 1941.

The quantitative data for this thesis comes from the BAVCC's collection of captivity cards. These cards are housed in 131 boxes by colony, in the following order: Algeria, Tunisia, Madagascar, Soudan, Senegal, Côte d'Ivoire, Dahomey/Togo, Guinea, British India, AEF, Reunion, Niger, Morocco and Indochina, then alphabetically by last name. The French territories in Soudan correspond roughly to present day Mali. Dahomey is present-day Benin. Unlike the Tirailleurs Sénégalais who came from all over West Africa, here Senegal refers only to the colony. Togo was a German colony placed under French mandate after the First World War. There was no conscription in Togo for the French Army.

These capture cards were used to create a database of CPOWs. The flaws in the source were quickly revealed. Recording every 160<sup>th</sup> CPOW created a dataset of 1,603 CPOWs. Unfortunately, this would suggest that there were over 250,000 CPOWs, which we know is incorrect. The multiple cards that exist for each CPOW may explain this discrepancy. Prisoners filled out a new card every time they changed camps or when ICRC representatives inspected a camp. Names were phonetically transcribed resulting in variations depending on the scribe. Sometimes last names and first names were inverted. Sometimes the extra cards were near the recorded prisoners. In those cases all the information was recorded as one entry. More often these cards were not filed together. The archivists at the BAVCC have integrated the cards using the most common duplications. Despite their enormous efforts, many

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup> Nancy Ellen Lawler, *Soldiers of Misfortune, Ivoirian Tirailleurs of World War II* (Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1992), p. 93.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup> Armelle Mabon and Martine Cuttier, 'La singulière captivité des prisonniers de guerre africains (1939-1945)' in Sylvie Caucanas, Rémy Cazals and Pascal Payen (eds) *Les Prisonniers de guerre dans l'histoire, contacts entre peoples et cultures* (Carcassonne: Les Audois and Toulouse: Editions Privat, 2003), p. 138.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>10</sup> SHD, 2P78, Dupuy, Analysis of Dr Bonnard's reports from 1 October to 1 April 1942, 13 July 1942. <sup>11</sup> Martin Thomas, 'The Vichy Government and French Colonial POWs, 1940-1944' in *FHS*, xxv, no. 4 (Fall 2002), p. 663.

prisoners remain scattered throughout the source. One example illustrates the difficulty and the role of luck. The prisoner from Soudan, Califa/Kalifa Koly from 40R2948 was also listed under Konly Alkifa, a completely different name. The second listing was exactly 160 prisoners from the first, which is how it was found. Both the German and French matriculation numbers matched which suggests they are the same person despite the names. The cards contain other serious errors like Trân-Vân Hôi from Tonkin who was reportedly buried seven days before his death. If this were not an error it would certainly explain why he died.

The information recorded varied widely from prisoner to prisoner. For some CPOWs we have a record of their entire captivity as they moved from Germany to Frontstalags and eventual release. For others we can only assume they survived the war as they personally collected their pensions in the 1950s.

This source is most useful in demonstrating how CPOWs returned to unoccupied France. They left captivity in a variety of ways both dependent and independent of their own volition. In the following charts *Ancien Combattant* (AC) refers to First World War veterans who were released following Scapini's agreement with the German authorities. Other political releases include the farmers and miners who were released for vital war work in North Africa. 'Full captivity' is defined as prisoners who were still in captivity in 1944 as well as those deported to Germany and liberated by the allies in 1945. The distinction has been made between those prisoners released for ill health and those released for unknown reasons. The unknown reasons could be either health or politically motivated. Prisoners whose records indicate they were still in captivity in 1943 even if the final years were not recorded were noted separately.

In order to test the validity of the information found in this source a control group, Reunion, was included. Reunion was chosen, as it was the smallest sample size. Only one prisoner from Reunion was counted in the larger database. Separately the information for all 128 prisoners from Reunion was recorded for comparisons with the full dataset.

Comparing the control group with the overall sample reveals interesting information. We know very few CPOW First World War veterans were released and this is reflected in the percentages 0.8% for Reunion versus 0.6% for the total population. Yves Durand's statistics give 3.8% of all French prisoners of war released

as veterans.<sup>12</sup> The difficulty in proving their status as veterans negatively affected the chances of CPOWs to be released.

### **Key to abbreviations:**

AC: Ancien Combattant

FFL: Forces France Libre

Table A.1: Comparisons between control group (Reunion) and full dataset:

	Reunion	Reunion	All CPOWs
	numbers	Percentages	percentages
AC	1	0.8%	0.6%
Captivity			
leave			0.1%
Civilians			0.1%
Died in			
captivity	5	3.9%	3.4%
Escaped	10	7.8%	8.2%
FFL	1	0.8%	0.2%
Full			
captivity	30	23.4%	9.4%
Miner /			
Farmers			1.8%
Released			
due to			
illness	24	18.8%	18.2%
Released			
for			
unknown			
reasons	6	4.7%	11.8%
Still in			
captivity in			
1943	4	3.1%	1.9%
Unknown	44	34.4%	44.4%
Volunteered			
for Kdo			
d'Afrique			0.1%
Captured in			
Indochina	3	2.3%	
Subtotal	128	100%	100.0%

Generally, the Reunion control group demonstrates similar trends to the overall CPOW group. The average age of the control group at 28.8 was slightly higher than the overall CPOW population of 26.7 years old in 1940. Similar rates of

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>12</sup> Yves Durand, La Vie quotidienne des prisonniers de guerre dans les Stalags, les Oflags, et les Kommandos 1939-1945 (Hachette: 1987), p.302.

illness and death were also found: 3.9% of Reunionais versus 3.4% CPOWs died and 18.8% versus 18.2 % were released due to illness. As seen in chapter five, a much greater proportion of CPOWs (18%) than French prisoners (11.6%) were released due to illness. <sup>13</sup>

In examining the release of prisoners from Reunion versus that of the overall CPOW group striking differences emerge. Fewer prisoners from Reunion (24.3%) were released than from the overall CPOW population (32.6). Logically, it follows that more Reunionnais (23.4 %) were interned for the full five years of captivity (versus 9.4% for all CPOWs). A few factors may explain this discrepancy. The first lies with reporting and statistical errors. Overall, the fate of 44% of CPOWs in the database is unknown versus a lower 34.4% for Reunion. Madagascar had the lowest rate of 'unknowns' in the entire sample. Indochina was the highest at 57.7%. Algeria, the largest sample size of 592, had an unknown rate of 42.7%. Most were somewhere between the two.

Having more information for the Reunion group would give a more reliable number of prisoners who remained in captivity in 1945. Politically, prisoners from Reunion were not a priority for either Vichy or the Germans. They represented a tiny minority of CPOWs (less than one per cent in the database), nor did they fit into the three usual categories for whom Vichy argued: North Africa, Sénégalais or Indochinese. They were probably considered similarly to the Malagasy. Reunion was far removed from the political concerns of the German war effort. Additionally, the prisoners from Reunion were not eligible for the releases of miners and farmers accorded to 10,000 North African prisoners.

A comparison of the control group and the 57 Malagasy and one Reunion prisoners from the full sample revealed fewer differences (table A.2 below). Prisoners from Reunion escaped slightly less than the overall average of CPOWs. The difference between those prisoners who had a full captivity experience is now only four per cent. Fewer prisoners from the control group died in captivity 3.9% versus 8.6%. Interestingly, 7.8% of the control group escaped versus 3.4% of the Madagascar/Reunion group.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>13</sup> Ibid., p.302.

Table A.2: Comparisons between the control group and prisoners from Madagascar and Reunion

		Reunion
1	Reunion	and
	control group	Madagascar
AC	0.8%	1.7%
Captivity		
leave		
Civilians		
Died in		
captivity	3.9%	8.6%
Escaped	7.8%	3.4%
FFL	0.8%	
Full		
captivity	23.4%	19.0%
Miner /		
Farmers		
Released		
due to		
illness	18.8%	20.7%
Released		
for		
unknown		
reasons	4.7%	5.2%
Still in		
captivity in		
1943	3.1%	1.7% 39.7%
Unknown	34.4%	39.7%
Volunteered		
for Kdo		
d'Afrique		
Captured in		
Indochina	2.3%	

# Statistical breakdown of the full 'capture cards' dataset

Table A.3: How CPOWs left captivity by colony of origin:

	AEF / British India / Niger / Reunion	Algeria	Côte d'Ivoire	Dahomey / Togo	Guinea	Indochina	Madagascar	Morocco	Senegal	Soudan	Tunisia	Subtotals
AC		5		0		1	1	0	0		3	10
Captivity leave		1					0	0	0		0	1
Civilians		0		0		1	0	0	0		0	1
Died in captivity		16	2		1	3	5	17	6	2	2	54
Escaped		76	2		3	3	2	24	4		17	131
FFL	1	1					0	0	0		1	3
Full captivity		54	5	1	10	6	11	29	5	9	21	151
Miner / Farmers		20					0	6	0		3	29
Released due to illness	2	74	30	8	13	13	12	49	27	16	48	292
Released for unknown reasons	1	83	2		2	3	3	41	4	31	19	189
Still in captivity in 1943		8	1		1		1	10	0	1	8	30
Unknown	5	253	28	9	25	41	22	194	42		92	711
Volunteered for Kdo d'Afrique		1					0	0	0		0	1
Subtotal	9	592	70	18	55	71	57	370	88	59	214	1603

Table A.4: Leaving captivity as a percentage of total CPOWs

	AEF / British India / Niger / Reunion	Algeria	Côte d'Ivoire	Dahomey / Togo	Guinea	Indochina	Madagascar	Morocco	Senegal	Soudan	Tunisia	Subtotals
AC		0.3%		0.0%		0.1%	0.1%				0.2%	0.6%
Captivity leave		0.1%					0.0%					0.1%
Civilians						0.1%	0.0%					0.1%
Died in captivity		1.0%	0.1%		0.1%	0.2%	0.3%	1.1%	0.4%	0.1%	0.1%	3.4%
Escaped		4.7%	0.1%		0.2%	0.2%	0.1%	1.5%	0.2%	0.0%	1.1%	8.2%
FFL	0.1%	0.1%									0.1%	0.2%
Full captivity		3.4%	0.3%	0.1%	0.6%	0.4%	0.7%	1.8%	0.3%	0.6%	1.3%	9.4%
Miner / Farmers		1.2%						0.4%			0.2%	1.8%
Released due to illness	0.1%	4.6%	1.9%	0.5%	0.8%	0.8%	0.7%	3.1%	1.7%	1.0%	3.0%	18.2%
Released for unknown reasons	0.1%	5.2%	0.1%		0.1%	0.2%	0.2%	2.6%	0.2%	1.9%	1.2%	11.8%
Still in captivity in 1943		0.5%	0.1%		0.1%	0.0%	0.1%	0.6%	0.0%	0.1%	0.5%	1.9%
Unknown	0.3%	15.8%	1.7%	0.6%	1.6%	2.6%	1.4%	12.1%	2.6%	U.L.	5.7%	44.4%
Volunteered for Kdo d'Afrique	0.0.0	0.1%	217,72	0.0.0	110.0	210.0		261270	210.10		3.7.0	0.1%
Subtotal	0.6%	36.9%	4.4%	1.1%	3.4%	4.4%	3.6%	23.1%	5.5%	3.7%	13.3%	100.0%

Table A.5: How each colony left captivity as a percentage of the colony's total.

	AEF /										
	British										
	India /										
	Niger /		Côte	Dahomey							
	Reunion	Algeria	d'Ivoire	/ Togo	Guinea	Indochina	Madagascar	Morocco	Senegal	Soudan	Tunisia
AC	Reamon	0.8%	u Ivone	/ 10g0	Guinea	1.4%	1.8%	11010000	Schegui	Soudun	1.4%
Captivity leave		0.2%									
Civilians						1.4%					
Died in											
captivity		2.7%	2.9%		1.8%	4.2%	8.8%	4.6%	6.8%	3.4%	0.9%
Escaped		12.8%	2.9%		5.5%	4.2%	3.5%	6.5%	4.5%		7.9%
FFL	11.1%	0.2%						0.0%			0.5%
Full captivity		9.1%	7.1%	5.6%	18.2%	8.5%	19.3%	7.8%	5.7%	15.3%	9.8%
Miner /											
Farmers		3.4%						1.6%			1.4%
Released due											
to illness	22.2%	12.5%	42.9%	44.4%	23.6%	18.3%	21.1%	13.2%	30.7%	27.1%	22.4%
Released for											
unknown											
reasons	11.1%	14.0%	2.9%		3.6%	4.2%	5.3%	11.1%	4.5%	52.5%	8.9%
Still in											
captivity in											
1943		1.4%	1.4%		1.8%		1.8%	2.7%		1.7%	3.7%
Unknown	55.6%	42.7%	40.0%	50.0%	45.5%	57.7%	38.6%	52.4%	47.7%		43.0%
Volunteered											
for Kdo											
d'Afrique		0.2%									
Total CPOWs											
per colony	9	592	70	18	55	71	57	370	88	59	214

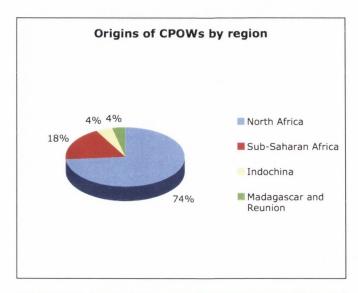
### **Analytical conclusions**

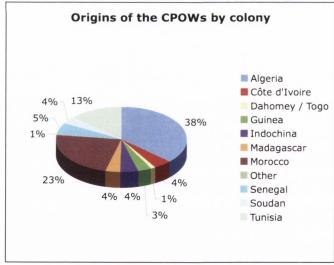
The statistical data shows the influence of a CPOWs' origin in determining the length of captivity. As seen, North African prisoners benefited from specific political releases, as well as assistance in escaping. The demographic breakdown of CPOWs by colony of origin shows approximately three-fourths of the CPOWs came from North Africa, eighteen per cent from sub-Saharan Africa, and four per cent from Indochina and four per cent from Madagascar and Reunion combined.

Prisoners from Madagascar were most likely to die in captivity (18.8%) and those from Tunisia least likely (0.9%). This is most likely due to the length of time Malagasy prisoners spent in captivity. North African prisoners escaped more than the rest (Algeria: 12.8%, Morocco: 6.5% and Tunisia: 7.9%). Escape rates of prisoners from sub-Saharan Africa were generally between 4.5% and 5.5%. These prisoners also had the greatest chance of remaining in captivity until the end of the war (Guinea: 18.2%, the Soudan: 15.3% and, outside continental Africa, Madagascar: 19.3%). One area where the North Africans did not benefit in comparison to their sub-Saharan comrades was in release due to illness: around 13% for Algeria and Morocco versus a high of 43% for Côte d'Ivoire or 31% for Senegal. The 'unknowns'

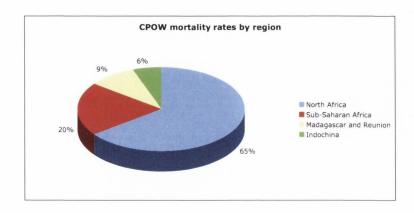
dominiate the data. Of those released for illness approximately 10.3% had a pulmonary infection, but 80.2% had an unknown illness. Of those released, five died in southern France before repatriation. Two of those deaths were from tuberculosis. Two prisoners of the total 1,603 were released for mental illnesses.

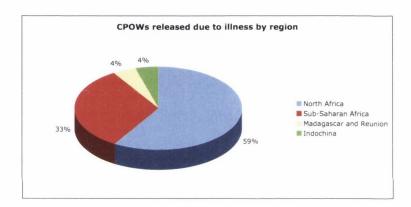
## **Origins of CPOWs**



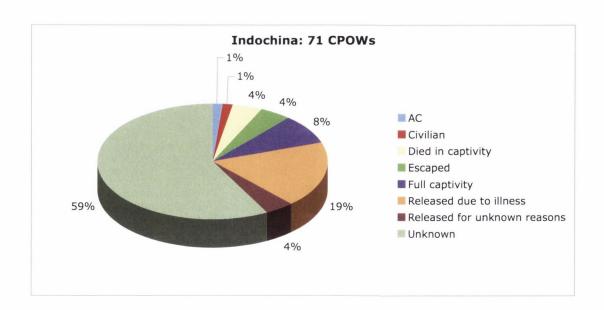


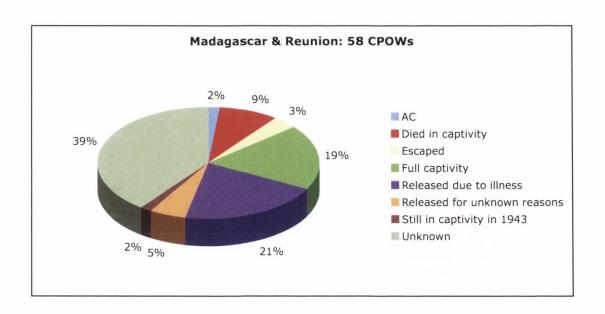
## Health and sickness

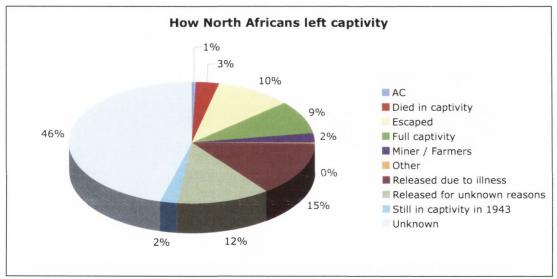


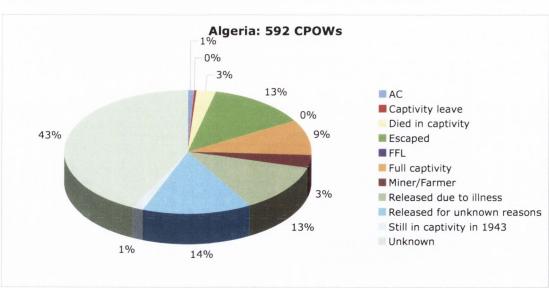


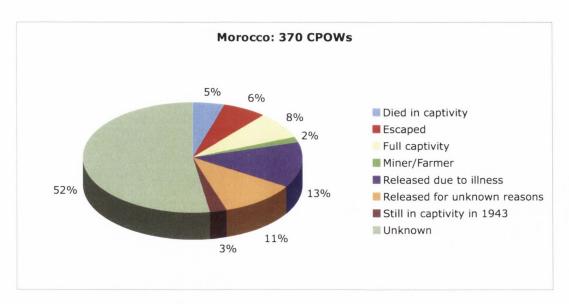
## How the CPOWs left captivity by region and then by colony

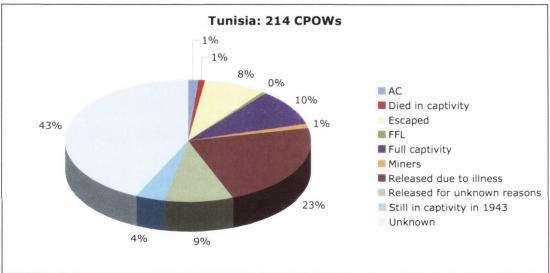


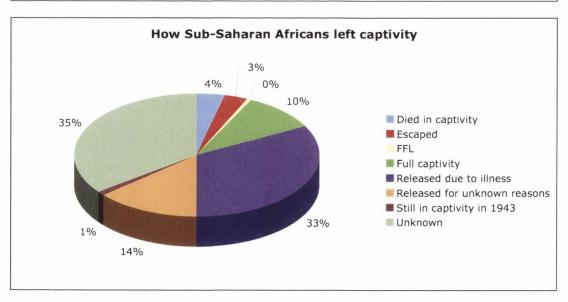


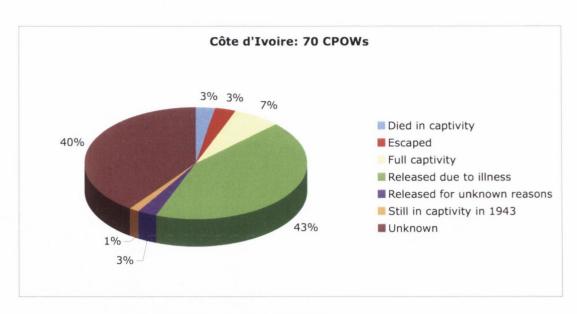


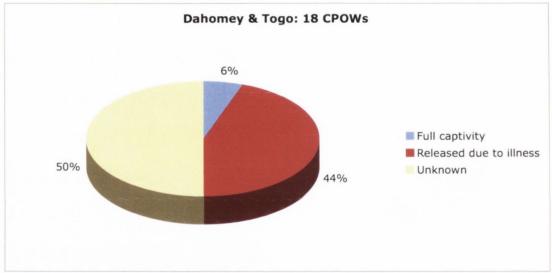


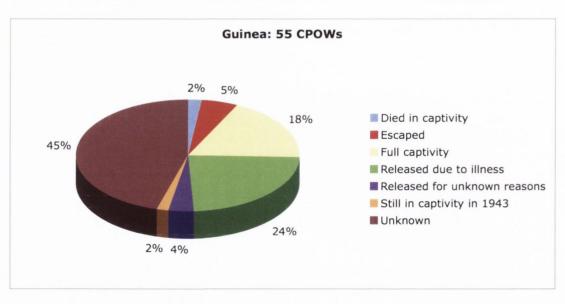


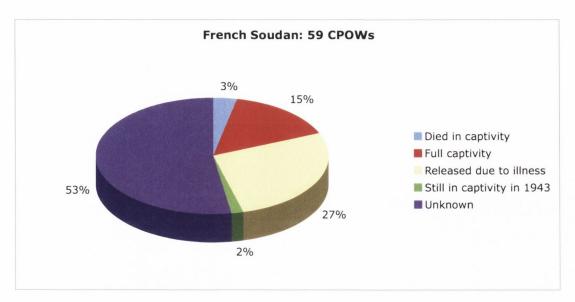


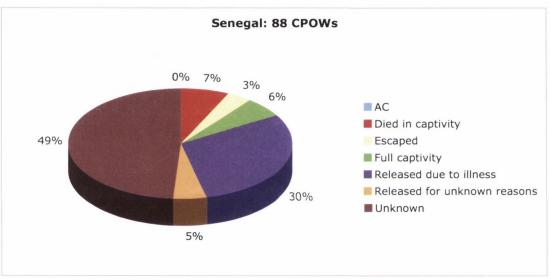












## Appendix B

## Convention Relative to the Treatment of Prisoners of War, Geneva, 27 July 1929.

#### Selected articles

#### Preamble:

Recognizing that, in the extreme event of a war, it will be the duty of every Power, to mitigate as far as possible, the inevitable rigours thereof and to alleviate the condition of prisoners of war; Being desirous of developing the principles which have inspired the international conventions of The Hague, in particular the Convention concerning the Laws and Customs of War and the Regulations thereunto annexed have resolved to conclude a Convention for that purpose and have appointed as their Plenipotentiaries:

(Here follow the names of Plenipotentiaries)

Who, having communicated their full powers, found in good and due form, have agreed is follows.

#### Part 1: General provisions

Art. 2. Prisoners of war are in the power of the hostile Government, but not of the individuals or formation which captured them.

They shall at all times be humanely treated and protected, particularly against acts of violence, from insults and from public curiosity.

Measures of reprisal against them are forbidden.

Art. 3. Prisoners of war are entitled to respect for their persons and honour. Women shall be treated with all consideration due to their sex.

Prisoners retain their full civil capacity.

Art. 4. The detaining Power is required to provide for the maintenance of prisoners of war in its charge.

Differences of treatment between prisoners are permissible only if such differences are based on the military rank, the state of physical or mental health, the professional abilities, or the sex of those who benefit from them.

## Part III: Captivity

Art. 8. Belligerents are required to notify each other of all captures of prisoners as soon as possible, through the intermediary of the Information Bureaux organised in accordance with Article 77. They are likewise required to inform each other of the official addresses to which letter from the prisoners' families may be addressed to the prisoners of war.

As soon as possible, every prisoner shall be enabled to correspond personally with his family, in accordance with the conditions prescribed in Article 36 and the following Articles.

Art. 9. Prisoners of war may be interned in a town, fortress or other place, and may be required not to go beyond certain fixed limits. They may also be interned in fenced camps; they shall not be confined or imprisoned except as a measure indispensable for safety or health, and only so long as circumstances exist which necessitate such a measure.

Prisoners captured in districts which are unhealthy or whose climate is deleterious to persons coming from temperate climates shall be removed as soon as possible to a more favourable climate.

Belligerents shall as far as possible avoid bringing together in the same camp prisoners of different races or nationalities.

No prisoner may at any time be sent to an area where he would be exposed to the fire of the fighting zone, or be employed to render by his presence certain points or areas immune from bombardment.

Art. 10. Prisoners of war shall be lodged in buildings or huts which afford all possible safeguards as regards hygiene and salubrity.

The premises must be entirely free from damp, and adequately heated and lighted. All precautions shall be taken against the danger of fire.

As regards dormitories, their total area, minimum cubic air space, fittings and bedding material, the conditions shall be the same as for the depot troops of the detaining Power.

Art. 11. The food ration of prisoners of war shall be equivalent in quantity and quality to that of the depot troops.

Prisoners shall also be afforded the means of preparing for themselves such additional articles of food as they may possess.

Sufficient drinking water shall be supplied to them. The use of tobacco shall be authorized. Prisoners may be employed in the kitchens.

All collective disciplinary measures affecting food are prohibited.

Art. 12. Clothing, underwear and footwear shall be supplied to prisoners of war by the detaining Power. The regular replacement and repair of such articles shall be assured. Workers shall also receive working kit wherever the nature of the work requires it. In all camps, canteens shall be installed at which prisoners shall be able to procure, at the local market price, food commodities and ordinary articles.

The profits accruing to the administrations of the camps from the canteens shall be utilised for the benefit of the prisoners.

Art. 13. Belligerents shall be required to take all necessary hygienic measures to ensure the cleanliness and salubrity of camps and to prevent epidemics. Prisoners of war shall have for their use, day and night, conveniences which conform to the rules of hygiene and are maintained in a constant state of cleanliness. In addition and without prejudice to the provision as far as possible of baths and shower-baths in the camps, the prisoners shall be provided with a sufficient quantity of water for their bodily cleanliness.

They shall have facilities for engaging in physical exercises and obtaining the benefit of being out of doors.

Art. 14. Each camp shall possess an infirmary, where prisoners of war shall receive attention of any kind of which they may be in need. If necessary, isolation

establishments shall be reserved for patients suffering from infectious and contagious diseases.

The expenses of treatment, including those of temporary remedial apparatus, shall be borne by the detaining Power.

Belligerents shall be required to issue, on demand, to any prisoner treated, and official statement indicating the nature and duration of his illness and of the treatment received.

It shall be permissible for belligerents mutually to authorize each other, by means of special agreements, to retain in the camps doctors and medical orderlies for the purpose of caring for their prisoner compatriots.

Prisoners who have contracted a serious malady, or whose condition necessitates important surgical treatment, shall be admitted, at the expense of the detaining Power, to any military or civil institution qualified to treat them.

Art. 15. Medical inspections of prisoners of war shall be arranged at least once a month. Their object shall be the supervision of the general state of health and cleanliness, and the detection of infectious and contagious diseases, particularly tuberculosis and venereal complaints.

Art. 16. Prisoners of war shall be permitted complete freedom in the performance of their religious duties, including attendance at the services of their faith, on the sole condition that they comply with the routine and police regulations prescribed by the military authorities.

Ministers of religion, who are prisoners of war, whatever may be their denomination, shall be allowed freely to minister to their co-religionists.

Art. 27. Belligerents may employ as workmen prisoners of war who are physically fit, other than officers and persons of equivalent statue, according to their rank and their ability.

Nevertheless, if officers or persons of equivalent status ask for suitable work, this shall be found for them as far as possible.

Non-commissioned officers who are prisoners of war may be compelled to undertake only supervisory work, unless they expressly request remunerative occupation. During the whole period of captivity, belligerents are required to admit prisoners of

war who are victims of accidents at work to the benefit of provisions applicable to workmen of the same category under the legislation of the detaining Power. As regards prisoners of war to whom these legal provisions could not be applied by reason of the legislation of that Power, the latter undertakes to recommend to its legislative body all proper measures for the equitable compensation of the victims.

Art. 28. The detaining Power shall assume entire responsibility for the maintenance, care, treatment and the payment of the wages of prisoners of war working for private individuals.

Art. 30. The duration of the daily work of prisoners of war, including the time of the journey to and from work, shall not be excessive and shall in no case exceed that permitted for civil workers of the locality employed on the same work. Each prisoner shall be allowed a rest of twenty-four consecutive hours each week, preferably on Sunday.

Art. 31. Work done by prisoners of war shall have no direct connection with the operations of the war. In particular, it is forbidden to employ prisoners in the manufacture or transport of arms or munitions of any kind, or on the transport of material destined for combatant units.

In the event of violation of the provisions of the preceding paragraph, prisoners are at liberty, after performing or commencing to perform the order, to have their complaints presented through the intermediary of the prisoners' representatives whose functions are described in Articles 43 and 44, or, in the absence of a prisoners' representative, through the intermediary of the representatives of the protecting Power.

Art. 33. Conditions governing labour detachments shall be similar to those of prisoners-of-war camps, particularly as concerns hygienic conditions, food, care in case of accidents or sickness, correspondence, and the reception of parcels. Every labour detachment shall be attached to a prisoners' camp. The commander of this camp shall be responsible for the observance in the labour detachment of the provisions of the present Convention.

Art. 34. Prisoners of war shall not receive pay for work in connection with the administration, internal arrangement and maintenance of camps. Prisoners employed on other work shall be entitled to a rate of pay, to be fixed by agreements between the belligerents.

These agreements shall also specify the portion which may be retained by the camp administration, the amount which shall belong to the prisoner of war and the manner in which this amount shall be placed at his disposal during the period of his captivity.

Pending the conclusion of the said agreements, remuneration of the work of prisoners shall be fixed according to the following standards:

- (a) Work done for the State shall be paid for according to the rates in force for soldiers of the national forces doing the same work, or, if no such rates exist, according to a tariff corresponding to the work executed.
- (b) When the work is done for other public administrations or for private individuals, the conditions shall be settled in agreement with the military authorities.

The pay which remains to the credit of a prisoner shall be remitted to him on the termination of his captivity. In case of death, it shall be remitted through the diplomatic channel to the heirs of the deceased.

Art. 36. Each of the belligerents shall fix periodically the number of letters and postcards which prisoners of war of different categories shall be permitted to send per month, and shall notify that number to the other belligerent. These letters and cards shall be sent by post by the shortest route. They may not be delayed or withheld for disciplinary motives.

Not later than one week after his arrival in camp, and similarly in case of sickness, each prisoner shall be enabled to send a postcard to his family informing them of his capture and the state of his health. The said postcards shall be forwarded as quickly as possible and shall not be delayed in any manner.

As a general rule, the correspondence of prisoners shall be written in their native language. Belligerents may authorize correspondence in other languages.

Art. 37. Prisoners of war shall be authorized to receive individually postal parcels containing foodstuffs and other articles intended for consumption or clothing. The parcels shall be delivered to the addressees and a receipt given.

Art. 39. Prisoners of war shall be permitted to receive individually consignments of books which may be subject to censorship.

Representatives of the protecting Powers and of duly recognized and authorized relief societies may send works and collections of books to the libraries of prisoners, camps. The transmission of such consignments to libraries may not be delayed under pretext of difficulties of censorship.

Art. 42. Prisoners of war shall have the right to bring to the notice of the military authorities, in whose hands they are, their petitions concerning the conditions of captivity to which they are subjected. [...]

Art. 43. In any locality where there may be prisoners of war, they shall be authorized to appoint representatives to represent them before the military authorities and the protecting Powers.

Such appointments shall be subject to the approval of the military authorities. The prisoners' representatives shall be charged with the reception and distribution of collective consignments. Similarly, in the event of the prisoners deciding to organize amongst themselves a system of mutual aid, such organization shall be one of the functions of the prisoners' representatives. On the other hand, the latter may offer their services to prisoners to facilitate their relations with the relief societies mentioned in Article 78.

In camps of officers and persons of equivalent status the senior officer prisoner of the highest rank shall be recognized as intermediary between the camp authorities and the officers and similar persons who are prisoners, for this purpose he shall have the power to appoint an officer prisoner to assist him as interpreter in the course of conferences with the authorities of the camp.

Art. 46. Prisoners of war shall not be subjected by the military authorities or the tribunals of the detaining Power to penalties other than those which are prescribed for similar acts by members of the national forces. [...]

Art. 50. Escaped prisoners of war who are re-captured before they have been able to rejoin their own armed forces or to leave the territory occupied by the armed forces which captured them shall be liable only to disciplinary punishment.

Prisoners who, after succeeding in rejoining their armed forces or in leaving the territory occupied by the armed forces which captured them, are again taken prisoner shall not be liable to any punishment for their previous escape.

Art. 54. Imprisonment is the most severe disciplinary punishment which may be inflicted on a prisoner of war. [...]

Art. 66. If sentence of death is passed on a prisoner of war, a communication setting forth in detail the nature and the circumstances of the offence shall be addressed as soon as possible to the representative of the protecting Power for transmission to the Power in whose armed forces the prisoner served.

The sentence shall not be carried out before the expiration of a period of at least three months from the date of the receipt of this communication by the protecting Power.

#### Part IV: End of captivity

Art. 68. Belligerents shall be required to send back to their own country, without regard to rank or numbers, after rendering them in a fit condition for transport, prisoners of war who are seriously ill or seriously wounded.

Agreements between the belligerents shall therefore determine, as soon as possible, the forms of disablement or sickness requiring direct repatriation and cases which may necessitate accommodation in a neutral country. Pending the conclusion of such agreements, the belligerents may refer to the model draft agreement annexed to the present Convention.

Art. 69. On the opening of hostilities, belligerents shall come to an understanding as to the appointment of mixed medical commissions. These commissions shall consist of three members, two of whom shall belong to a neutral country and one appointed by the detaining Power; one of the medical officers of the neutral country shall preside. These mixed medical commissions shall proceed to the examination of sick

or wounded prisoners and shall make all appropriate decisions with regard to them. The decisions of these commissions shall be decided by majority and shall be carried into effect as soon as possible.

Art. 74. No repatriated person shall be employed on active military service.

Art. 75. When belligerents conclude an armistice convention, they shall normally cause to be included therein provisions concerning the repatriation of prisoners of war. If it has not been possible to insert in that convention such stipulations, the belligerents shall, nevertheless, enter into communication with each other on the question as soon as possible. In any case, the repatriation of prisoners shall be effected as soon as possible after the conclusion of peace. [...]

#### Part VI: Bureaux of relief and information concerning prisoners of war

Art. 77. At the commencement of hostilities, each of the belligerent Powers and the neutral Powers who have belligerents in their care, shall institute an official bureau to give information about the prisoners of war in their territory.

Each of the belligerent Powers shall inform its Information Bureau as soon as possible of all captures of prisoners effected by its armed forces, furnishing them with all particulars of identity at its disposal to enable the families concerned to be quickly notified, and stating the official addresses to which families may write to the prisoners.

The Information Bureau shall transmit all such information immediately to the Powers concerned, on the one hand through the intermediary of the protecting Powers, and on the other through the Central Agency contemplated in Article 79. The Information Bureau, being charged with replying to all enquiries relative to prisoners of war, shall receive from the various services concerned all particulars respecting internments and transfers, releases on parole, repatriations, escapes, stays in hospitals, and deaths, together with all other particulars necessary for establishing and keeping up to date an individual record for each prisoner of war. [...]

Art. 78. Societies for the relief of prisoners of war, regularly constituted in accordance with the laws of their country, and having for their object to serve as intermediaries

for charitable purposes, shall receive from the belligerents, for themselves and their duly accredited agents, all facilities for the efficacious performance of their humane task within the limits imposed by military exigencies. Representatives of these societies shall be permitted to distribute relief in the camps and at the halting places of repatriated prisoners under a personal permit issued by the military authority, and on giving an undertaking in writing to comply with all routine and police orders which the said authority shall prescribe.

Art. 79. A Central Agency of information regarding prisoners of war shall be established in a neutral country. The International Red Cross Committee shall, if they consider it necessary, propose to the Powers concerned the organization of such an agency.

This agency shall be charged with the duty of collecting all information regarding prisoners which they may be able to obtain through official or private channels, and the agency shall transmit the information as rapidly as possible to the prisoners' own country or the Power in whose service they have been.

These provisions shall not be interpreted as restricting the humanitarian work of the International Red Cross Committee.

Source: Convention relative to the Treatment of Prisoners of War. Geneva, 27 July 1929, (https://www.icrc.org/applic/ihl/ihl.nsf/INTRO/305?OpenDocument).

## Appendix C

Armistice Agreement between the German High Command of the Armed Forces and the French Plenipotentiaries, Compiègne, June 22 1940

#### Selected articles

Between the chief of the High Command of the armed forces, Col. Gen. [Wilhelm] Keitel, commissioned by the Führer of the German Reich and Supreme Commander in Chief of the German Armed Forces, and the fully authorized plenipotentiaries of the French Government, General [Charles L. C.] Huntziger, chairman of the delegation; Ambassador [Léon] Noel, Rear Admiral [Maurice R.] LeLuc, Army Corps General [Georges] Parisot and Air Force General [Jean-Marie Joseph] Bergeret, the following armistice treaty was agreed upon:

#### ARTICLE I.

The French Government directs a cessation of fighting against the German Reich in France as well as in French possessions, colonies, protectorate territories, mandates as well as on the seas.

It [the French Government] directs the immediate laying down of arms of French units already encircled by German troops.

#### ARTICLE II.

To safeguard the interests of the German Reich, French State territory north and west of the line drawn on the attached map will be occupied by German troops.

As far as the parts to be occupied still not in control of German troops, this occupation will be carried out immediately after the conclusion of this treaty.

#### ARTICLE III.

In the occupied parts of France the German Reich exercises all rights of an occupying power. The French Government obligates itself to support with every means the regulations resulting from the exercise of these rights and to carry them out with the aid of French administration.

All French authorities and officials of the occupied territory, therefore, are to be promptly informed by the French Government to comply with the regulations of the German military commanders and to cooperate with them in a correct manner.

It is the intention of the German Government to limit the occupation of the west coast after ending hostilities with England to the extent absolutely necessary.

The French Government is permitted to select the seat of its government in unoccupied territory, or, if it wishes, to move to Paris. In this case, the German Government guarantees the French Government and its central authorities every necessary alleviation so that they will be in a position to conduct the administration of unoccupied territory from Paris.

#### ARTICLE IV.

French armed forces on land, on the sea, and in the air are to be demobilized and disarmed in a period still to be set. Excepted are only those units which are necessary for maintenance of domestic order. Germany and Italy will fix their strength. The French armed forces in the territory to be occupied by Germany are to be hastily withdrawn into territory not to be occupied and be discharged. These troops, before marching out, shall lay down their weapons and equipment at the places where they are stationed at the time this treaty becomes effective. They are responsible for orderly delivery to German troops.

#### ARTICLE VIII.

The French war fleet is to collect in ports to be designated more particularly, and under German and/or Italian control to demobilize and lay up—with the exception of

those units released to the French Government for protection of French interests in its colonial empire.

The peacetime stations of ships should control the designation of ports.

The German Government solemnly declares to the French Government that it does not intend to use the French War Fleet which is in harbours under German control for its purposes in war, with the exception of units necessary for the purposes of guarding the coast and sweeping mines.

It further solemnly and expressly declares that it does not intend to bring up any demands respecting the French War Fleet at the conclusion of a peace.

All warships outside France are to be recalled to France with the exception of that portion of the French War Fleet which shall be designated to represent French interests in the colonial empire.

#### ARTICLE X.

The French Government is obligated to forbid any portion of its remaining armed forces to undertake hostilities against Germany in any manner.

French Government also will prevent members of its armed forces from leaving the country and prevent armaments of any sort, including ships, planes, etc., being taken to England or any other place abroad.

The French Government will forbid French citizens to fight against Germany in the service of States with which the German Reich is still at war. French citizens who violate this provision are to be treated by German troops as insurgents.

#### ARTICLE XVIII.

The French-Government will bear the costs of maintenance of German occupation troops on French soil.

#### ARTICLE XIX.

All German war and civil prisoners in French custody, including those under arrest and convicted who were seized and sentenced because of acts in favour of the German Reich, shall be surrendered immediately to German troops.

The French Government is obliged to surrender upon demand all Germans named by the German Government in France as well as in French possessions, colonies, protectorate territories, and mandates.

The French Government binds itself to prevent removal of German war and civil prisoners from France into French possessions or into foreign countries. Regarding prisoners already taken outside of France, as well as sick and wounded German prisoners who cannot be transported, exact lists with the places of residence are to be produced. The German High Command assumes care of sick and wounded German war prisoners.

#### ARTICLE XX.

French troops in German prison camps will remain prisoners of war until conclusion of a peace.

#### ARTICLE XXII.

The Armistice Commission, acting in accordance with the direction of the German High Command, will regulate and supervise the carrying out of the armistice agreement. It is the task of the Armistice Commission further to insure the necessary conformity of this agreement with the Italian-French armistice.

The French Government will send a delegation to the seat of the German Armistice Commission to represent the French wishes and to receive regulations from the German Armistice Commission for executing [the agreement].

ARTICLE XXIII.

This armistice agreement becomes effective as soon as the French Government also

has reached an agreement with the Italian Government regarding cessation of

hostilities.

Hostilities will be stopped six hours after the moment at which the Italian

Government has notified the German Government of conclusion of its agreement. The

German Government will notify the French Government of this time by wireless.

ARTICLE XXIV.

This agreement is valid until conclusion of a peace treaty. The German Government

may terminate this agreement at any time with immediate effect if the French

Government fails to fulfil the obligations it assumes under the agreement.

This armistice agreement, signed in the Forest of Compiègne, June 22,1940, at 6:50

p.m., German summer time.

HUNTZIGER

KEITEL

Source: (http://avalon.law.yale.edu/wwii/frgearm.asp)

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## Appendix D

## Report from the *tirailleur* Michel Gnimagnon escaped from prisoner of war camp Epinal 21 January 1941

#### A. Vie de prison

#### **Preamble:**

The French government, the French military authorities and the civilian population of the Free Zone who have not had any contact with the prisoners of war often wonder how their prisoners fare in the Occupied Zone. Guided by the desire to instruct them on the prisoners' way of life, I have undertaken the task to write this modest report inspired from the notes I wrote from the date when my regiment was captured (19 June 1940) to the day I managed to escape the prison (21 January 1941).

Thus, this is the real reflection of the life of a prisoner in the eastern region, as I lived it during seven months, as many of my comrades lived it, and as many other comrades are still living it since they have not yet had the chance to 'leave'; that precious word incarnates all the hope that homesick prisoners of war hold for their home and everything they hold dear.

\* \*

## Capture of the 12<sup>th</sup> RTS:

On 19 June 1940, the 12<sup>th</sup> RTS, under the leadership of Captain Souverain, was captured in Aulnois (Vosges) while attempting to reach Switzerland to escape being totally surrounded by the German armies. For nine days the regiment walked, day and night, without news or word from the provisions train, eating nothing and drinking practically nothing, exhausted, and subjected to constant bombing from German planes.

Upon arrival at the entrance to the small village of Aulnois, we noticed, approximately 400 meters to our left, a group of German cavalrymen galloping towards us. We thought to ourselves: 'that's it, we are prisoners'. Not enough ammunition to attempt to resist. By the time the native Sergeant-Major of the CAB3 ordered: 'Bayonets in the cannon', the captain had already been captured. On his

order we surrendered our arms. With a thousand curses, the German cavalrymen, who had increased in number significantly, marched us to Neufchâteau (12 kilometres from Aulnois) where we were interned in a camp. Prisoners from the 14<sup>th</sup> RTS and the 6<sup>th</sup> RTS were already in the camp. Others arrived over the following days. Upon arrival in the camp, the German commander had us meticulously searched: knives, blades, razors, scissors, forks etc. were taken from us. Thus began our series of miseries as prisoners.

#### Prisoner life:

From 19 June 1940, we were forced, for three days, to live on one spoonful of barley lapped up from our hands, and a quart of water per person per day. On the third day, to everyone's great satisfaction, a providential rain fell. In this way we were delivered, at least, from the worry of thirst. But the question of food remained critical; it preoccupied everyone: the barley ration was increased to two spoonfuls at each meal (one meal at 1pm, the other at 6pm). A week later the menu was increased to include four biscuits per prisoner, distributed once a day at 9 or 10 am; then they started distributing a sort of coffee without sugar in the morning. This noticeable improvement was thanks to the *Chef de Bataillon* Graff of the 1<sup>st</sup> battalion of the 12<sup>th</sup> RTS, who represented the French military authorities to the German authorities. A distribution of clean water was organised: a truck providing this service brought water from the town, and thanks to a certain amount of discipline, each day everyone filled his water bottle. We were haggard and collapsing with weaknesses. The Germans were really horrid to us. Machine guns were turned towards the draughty buildings where we slept badly on a small layer of straw with hardly any blankets. We said to ourselves: 'if we aren't killed by the sword or the bullet, it will be hunger that kills us'. But, over time, the German authorities sympathised with us and our situation began to improve. French prisoners began leaving for work duty in town; they were able to get food, especially bread, which they sold to their comrades at exorbitant prices.

Here are some examples of the going prices:

1 loaf of bread of 1kilogram between 30 and 50 francs

1 packet of tobacco between 25 and 45 francs

1 packet of cigarettes between 15 and 25 francs

Then, some Senegalese were allowed on the work groups and others were employed as batmen for the German officers.

Eventually, the only kitchen that fed the 12<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> RTS began to double as a private kitchen, and the crafty managed to cook all kinds of 'stews': grilled horse skin, scraps cooked in water, biscuits boiled into dough, etc. But diarrhoea took its hold.

\* \* \*

The 23 June 1940, we left Neufchâteau for Chaumont (Haute Marne) and arrived at midday. We would not be happier there. But over time the German discipline lessened. The Camp commander, who had been a French prisoner during the other war and who had been treated humanely, gave us leeway. The menu improved noticeably. At Chaumont, the Germans undertook a policy of active and informed colonisation, by distributing cigarettes or cigars when passing by the colonial natives; they tried to obtain information on the colonies, their resources, on the sectors they fought, and why they had come so far to fight Germany who had no foul intentions towards them. But led by their informed comrades, the natives did not misinterpret the false nature that hid behind the kindnesses the Germans showed them. They also provided false information.

It is important to note that the civilian population of Chaumont was very kind to the prisoners. From time to time the mayor sent the prisoners bread as well as cheese, jams, etc. The prisoners greatly appreciated these gifts.

On 30 August 1940, the German authorities, under the pretext of sending us (us the colonials) to the warm region of Bordeaux, boarded us onto trains at Chaumont station. All the Senegalese were shut into hermetically sealed wagons, escorted by German sentries. The train left at midday. There was no straw in the wagons. We were squeezed tightly. We suffocated and were bothered by the incredible dirtiness of our comrades who were unable to alight, even at train stations, to relieve their urges.

At midnight cries of 'Haus! Haus!' drew us from our stupor, and, to our great surprise, new sentries hit us with rifle butts to get off the wagons and brought us to a barracks (Gibon neighbourhood) situated about one kilometre behind the station. In the middle of the night we were settled into darkened rooms where were slept haphazardly, even on the ground, in a dreadful untidiness. We were at <u>Rambervillers</u>.

The next day, or at least in the next two or three days, we hoped to continue on our way to Bordeaux, but our expectations were wrong, because one month later we were set to leave this eastern town (strange warm region to which they said they were sending us!) for another eastern region! When the day arrived, we noticed lots of other Senegalese in the camp who had been there for a long time. Most of them were reservists from the 5<sup>th</sup> RTS, mostly from the health services from which they were discharged. We also observed a large number of Arabs who had preceded us from Chaumont; we also saw many officers who had left Chaumont for an unknown destination. Two days after our arrival the rest were dispatched, emptying the camp of all the Europeans, with the exception of a few Bretons employed in the camp. It seems that the Germans favoured this policy of separating the natives from the Europeans to avoid any contact between them.

At Rambervillers, we experienced misery like we had never known before. The discipline was austere: roll calls followed roll calls that lasted all day, searches followed searches; threats followed threats – only the Europeans and Arabs were allowed to leave on work groups. They could not bring anything back to the camp and were searched each time they returned. We were forced to make do with the meagre pittance they distributed to us.

A corps of native policemen, recruited from among the prisoners, maintained the order and discipline. Soon, the Senegalese were allowed on the external work groups; upon return to the camp, those who participated regularly on a work group, received an extra ration of German bread or biscuits. On 5 September, during one of the distributions, a German sentry fired into the *tirailleurs*' ranks. The *tirailleur* Aton, of the CRE of the 12<sup>th</sup> RTS was killed. We made him a coffin from crude wood, and the next day he was buried; a delegation of his comrades from Dahomey escorted his body to his last resting place, behind the Gibon barracks; a collection was held to buy a wreath. During the same incident, the *tirailleur* KIN, Joseph of the E.M. of the 12<sup>th</sup> RTS was severely wounded in the forehead. He was brought to the infirmary where vigilant care saved his life.

Such severity could not help but frighten us strangely and add dread to the miserable state of our physical conditions. We desperately wanted to leave this crucible.

It was with great joy that we learnt, the evening of 3 October, the news that we were changing camps the next day.

On 4 October, we left Rambervillers for Epinal (29 kilometres). The company finished the journey on foot arriving in that town at 2pm. The civilian population gathered around us to show their pleasure at our arrival and to bring us tobacco and bread; but the sentries who were escorting us stopped them from approaching us, and more than one woman cried to see us forced to refuse their generosity. We were brought to the Courcy barracks where we met up again with thousands of other comrades: French, Senegalese, Malagasy, Indochinese, Annamites, North Africans. We were split into blocks. But despite our high numbers (at least 4,000 Senegalese) life was better than in all the other camps in which we stayed. Without being well, which is incompatible with a prisoner's life, we had the minimum necessary to survive. The discipline, without being relaxed, was without austerity. Work groups abounded, and those who went could bring back all sorts of foodstuffs (potatoes, bread, tobacco, etc.) which they are and shared the extras with their comrades at reasonable prices. Thereafter, the French Red Cross deliveries became a highly appreciated food supplement. To that, you must add the private initiatives by the civilian population to improve the prisoners' conditions (especially adoption of godsons, distributions of warm soup to workers in some areas, all kinds of services given kindly and unselfishly: buying potatoes, bread, tobacco, etc.). I can attest that the population of Epinal and suburb (Golbey-Thaon) is, in many regards, the nicest region in the east where I sojourned, and the one that provided the most services to prisoners in the east

From November, at the camp significant improvements were obtained in sleeping arrangements, lighting, heating, communal and personal hygiene (rooms equipped with beds and lit by electricity, installation of stoves, periodic distributions of coal, regular shower access, health services, setting up canteens). The French and [prisoners from] Dahomey gave even theatrical performances on Christmas and New Year's Day; the German authorities attended and applauded each play enthusiastically. Every week (Sunday), music and dance sessions were given, organised by Sergeant-Chief Akoujénou Isaac, music chief for the 12<sup>th</sup> RTS. Many prisoners, European and natives, came for the distractions. Catechism classes were held every evening, Mass was held every Sunday at 7am, 8am, and 10am. Many baptisms were held. All prisoners on an organised work group, and who participated regularly, as well as all those who have an official role in the camp (police, company chiefs) were paid a monthly salary that varied between seventy-five and 200 francs.

The certified stretcher-bearers who could present a certificate signed by one of their officers, attesting that they had held that function during the hostilities, received the sum of 200 francs every ten to twelve days.

One can say, that until recently, a prisoner's life in Epinal was not much different to that led in French garrisons during peacetime. Unfortunately, at the time when all these organisations were about to reach the highest level of perfection, a large detachment of Senegalese were sent to Rennes (Brittany), other French detachments were sent to Germany, and a group of workers was created and isolated from those in the camp who could not work, totally forbidding access from one camp to another, so that those who work could no longer supply their friends stuck in the camp and who were mistreated.

Thus, all that wonderful organisation born in the beginning of December and so full of hope for the future collapsed sadly.

\* \* \*

#### B. Escapes:

No prisoners' lives, no matter how little misfortune there is, were untouched by escapes. Our life, as prisoners in the east, was not the exception to the rule.

The first escapes were attempted about one month after our regiment was captured, at Chaumont (Haute-Marne)- Europeans tried first. The [escapes] worked out well as few prisoners were recaptured. They continued, with greater success, in the other camps where we stayed (Rambervillers, Epinal). It was at Epinal, from the month of November, that they reached their zenith for attempts and success. This success was entirely due to the civilian population who gladly offered their assistance and support. This help and support was offered initially at Chaumont where we were informed that a special escape network existed. But it appears that the Intelligence Service in Epinal was better organised, the strongest and that which helped the most French prisoners escape after the war.

At Neufchâteau, there were no escapes from our camp. Some isolated cases had happened in the surrounding camps that the German authorities noted on posters proposing to vigorously crack down on the same if they happened in sectors under their control.

At Chaumont, an important number of officers escaped, especially those who managed to get on the list for a dental consultation at the Military Hospital Daurémont where there were amenities to facilitate an escape. Very few escapees left directly from the camp (Foch neighbourhood) or from the workgroups in town.

At Rambervillers, there were departures from the work groups. The soldier Delaville who worked at the forestry sawmill was able to leave around 15 September. Others left around the same time.

There were massive departures from Epinal. Many happened before we arrived: in the middle of the day, even from the camp while working on the barbed wire, which surrounded the camp at Courcy, or from workgroups. Our arrival interrupted them somewhat. The French and North Africans prisoners resumed escaping in November. Escapes happened at night from the camp, or during the day from work groups. We were told that entire sections left together (destroying the barbed wire, using holes in the sewers or tunnels with openings outside the barracks, etc.). During this period, selling civilian clothes was profitable in the camp.

On 5 November 1940, an Arab was killed during the night by a German sentry while attempting to escape, when, the last of a large group, he got entangled in the barbed wire.

But until the second half of November there was no mention of escapes from among the Senegalese or any other colonial native, besides the North Africans. As such, we earned the Germans' trust. The first Senegalese to escape left successfully on 23 November 1940. This had serious repercussions, a *coup de Trafalgar*, when we learnt that Lucien Aïkounabouba escaped, since this opened the way for the colonials to escape. Unfortunately, no one has had any news since his escape.

Another Senegalese prisoner left on 2 December 1940. It was from this day that our dreams of escape soon became projects and then attempts. But without a regular work group in town (I was part of the lame section), I resolved to periodically replace a comrade, so as much as possible, I could get my plan together outside.

The 15 December 1940, I went on a work group for the first time, at Golbey, near the Haxo hospital. I was able to slip into Mrs. Bruand's house, located about fifty meters from where we were working. This lady regularly made soup for the workers nearby. I revealed my intention to escape and asked her if she could give me her help and hospitality. She informed me that she had helped many Europeans and was inclined to help me too, but that under no circumstances could I escape from the

Golbey work group; she was the only one in the region to approach the prisoners and would be the only suspect; the Germans could search her house that would be a huge risk! Her arguments were valid. Thus I had to change work groups, escape somewhere else, find an intermediary person to hide me until night where I could reach Mrs. Bruand's house. Despite the extensive research I was unable to find another work group with suitable conditions for what I wanted. I went successively to:

Work group Jeanne d'Arc: 19 and 20 December 1940

Work group train station: 24 and 25 December 1940

Work group in the feed park: 26 and 27 December 1940

Even though there were a lot of escapes from most of these work groups (especially Jeanne d'Arc), it took time to learn its secrets, a difficult task!

18 December 1940 – I learnt that Sergeant Chief Ba escaped.

20 December 1940 – my friend Alexandre Seka Ayékoué managed to escape from the work group Jeanne d'Arc, but betrayed by the person he asked for hospitality, he was recaptured the next day and brought back to camp where he was placed in the local disciplinary cell awaiting judgement, like all those who were recaptured after an escape attempt. (Prisoners were only killed if caught in *flagrant délit* [sic] escaping or trying to escape).

26 December 1940, I saw Tiékouna and learnt of his adventures: escaped for a month, he was caught at the demarcation line and brought back to camp.

Following the numerous escapes by the Senegalese, we lost the Germans' trust in us, by whom we had been seen as well-behaved people. On work groups sentries guarded us strictly. Plus one could not trust the first civilian one met: one needed to proceed slowly with lots of distrust. On the other hand, in most cases, we could not escape during the day like the Europeans; despite the best disguises our colour betrayed us. Furthermore, the bad weather upset our plans: it snowed continuously, making it impossible to escape during the day from any work group and hide in a bush until nightfall. As for me, even escaping from a work group in the middle of town, and assuming I managed to hide in a secure location until nightfall, I would not be able to find my way from town to my correspondent's house at Golbey: there were no lanes to follow; all the routes I could take were full of German patrols, sentries were posted at each crossroads and I would inevitably have to cross the P.N. [sic] of

Golby (alongside the edge of the woods were guarded). I could not use a car: the use of civilian cars, especially at night, was highly regulated; and the area I needed to access was particularly calm and any nighttime traffic would raise suspicion and as we would inevitably be arrested. No one would take that kind of risk for me. The only thing left was to try and make contact with Mr. the Director of Cours ménager of villa, 2, avenue Victor Hugo in Epinal, near where I was working at that time. He told me he could not help.

In desperation, while escapes continued daily for the Europeans, among some natives rumours of a departure from Epinal abounded, I resolved to totally abandon my first plan and to find assistance from someone else in town centre, or whose house I could reach safely from the town centre. I was given the following addresses:

Mr. Bourrillon – villa Gabriel, 34 rue Foundations Prud'homme in Epinal

Marie Philippe – rue du Faubourg d'Ambrail, grocery in Epinal

But first I had to be able to escape and find someone to shelter me while reaching out to these people. One must not trust the first person who arrives; additionally my things were already at Mrs. Bruand's, who sent me encouraging notes from time to time. Plus, the possibility of work groups in town was rare: only the batmen went. I went back to my first plan to escape from the work group at Golbey which was almost finished. I found the chief of the work group to plan with him so my escape would not raise suspicion. He objected, saying there was a time when my plan would have worked but now the work group left the camp too late (9:15am) to manage this plan. Nevertheless, he promised me a trial run- 30 December 1940, we undertook an attempt that failed; 31 December 1940 we tried again but it was no more successful than the first attempt. I had to give up the Golbey plan once and for all. The only thing left was to find a work group outside of town, after Golbey and far enough to escape and be able to reach Mrs. Bruand's house that night. I was lucky to find a recently formed work group that corresponded. It was in an ammunitions depot (Fort d'Uvegney) situated five kilometres from the barracks, where we went by truck and came back the same way each evening around 5pm – night started to fall around 7pm. When I told Mrs. Bruand about the work group she said it was the perfect one for my undertaking and that ammunitions depot (Fort d'Uvegney) was only three kilometres from her house (as the crow flies) and that there was nothing to fear along the Domèvre road. All that remained to do was inform the work group chief, corporal Benjamin, who was not very malleable. Nevertheless, I went to see him 4 January

1941, and with a bribe, I was able to convince him of my plans. Until that date, the work camp was made of all the workers regularly working in the Courcy Annex. The other prisoners stayed in the Courcy barracks. Access between the camps was highly regulated and supervised. Despite it all, I managed to infiltrate the annex where, since I was not counted among the prisoners, I had to survive on my own and on handouts from my comrades until the day I was able to escape.

After a series of hitches (the Fort d'Uvegney work group was interrupted due to bad weather and transportation trucks having difficulties circulating) I started attending the work group on 12 January 1941. The fort did not lend itself easily to an escape (barbed wires, guarded exits, sentries posted at the main gate at night, etc.). Also, the itinerary I needed to follow to Golbey was criss-crossed night and day with German patrols. I needed to find someone who knew the region well and who would accept to lead me on diverted routes. I eventually found someone (Mr. Mangin Roger, himself an escapee from Troyes, demobilised), who worked in the fort like other civilians. He promised me his help.

On 21 January 1941, I left for the 'Nationale' where the distribution of workers was done for the Fort d'Ureguey, the Fort du Bois l'Abbé and the work groups who stayed at the 'Nationale' itself. As soon as the numbers for the Fort d'Ureguey were complete and by the usual 'guéma' [sic] the Germans gave the order to get on a truck, I left my hiding place in the toilets from where I kept a close eye on the operation. I went calmly towards the truck where the group for the Fort d'Ureguey was getting on, I slipped in among the 17 tirailleurs assigned to the fort's work group (17 tirailleurs; 75 annamites) without being noticed by the security agents or the German guards who were busy around the trucks preventing traffic jams.

My first stroke was a success, I only wished for one thing: that there would not be an inspection when we arrived, as was often done. The heavens granted my prayer, and as I hoped, we were sent to work as soon as we got off the truck: the weather was bad, snow was falling delicately. I wandered around the groups without really working, pretending to be very busy, surreptitiously studying the appropriate locations for my undertaking, trying to avoid the Germans' notice so that my departure would not raise suspicions. During the midday meal I went and hid in the toilets (I feared an unforeseen inspection). When work began again at 1:30pm I went and stayed with the *tirailleur* left in a room to maintain the fire, there my plan matured and I took the last steps: at 4pm I went and hid in a small corridor, behind a

pile of planks. But the work, which usually finished at 4:30, unfortunately that day went on until 5pm, and contrary to my predictions, I was forced to stay for a full hour, freezing in my hiding place, unable to cough or to blow my nose, until I caught a cold. But my sacrifice was worth my salvation.

Finally, when everyone had left and I could no longer hear the 'plop plop' of the snow on the roof, I left my hiding place, I took off my work boots and got rid of my military clothes. I went and hid in a nook near the principle façade to wait for nightfall, which would facilitate my departure. From there I watched the sector I had in front of me. At 6pm the sentry who monitored the fort's entrance arrived, it was about fifty meters from me. I did not know whether the other exits that were guarded during the day were also guarded at night, but I decided to try despite the associated risks. At 7pm night was beginning to fall, I observed the guard pacing. When he turned his back and was approximately fifty meters from the entrance (which was about 100 meters from my observation post), I quickly left my hiding place, leaping into the pit that surrounded the fort's inside walls, followed it for about thirty meters and, through deft movements got through the network of barbed wire installed in the bend of the wall facing east. These networks could stretch over five metres and blocked the access to the rampart which led to a private path along the fort from east to west. I managed to get through the barbed wire. I stayed hidden on the ground and from that position I climbed the rampart. When I hurtled down the slope and reached the private path, I followed the landmarks that I had previously chosen - a group of pine trees approximately 200 meters from the path. That is where my guide was waiting who, upon seeing my signal, replied with another signal (owl cries). I joined him. It was 7:35pm. We took a detour, sodden by the recent snow, muddy in certain places, and after three quarters of an hour's walk we gained the route de Domèvre which, as I knew, was not covered by patrols at night. We increased our pace and at 8:30pm we arrived at Lné Messen's Maison Forestière from where I informed Mrs Bruand that I had arrived; she lived one kilometre from there, about 300 meters from the canal de l'Est (roughly). My former guide, whose job was just to bring me here, took his leave.

I arrived at Mrs Bruand's at 9pm. She welcomed me warmly. I spent the night there and the next day I prepared to leave Epinal. She gave me victuals for the road (bread, cheese, hard boiled eggs, cake, apples). At 10pm, Mrs Bruand's young friend, Mr Georges, who is most probably linked to the intelligence service and who saw to

many escapes, collected me at the house. We both left by bicycle. Disguised as I was, I did not raise suspicions when were passed in front of the German post that was along our route; I was lucky since the guard who was at the post would have certainly recognised and arrested me had he turned his flashlight on us, his favourite activity. Additionally, the patrol that we met did not arrest us. After a long detour we arrived at the Epinal train station around 8:30pm. I was entrusted to a railway worker who got me on the train. The train left at 8:39pm. At Neufchâteau, I was made to change carriages; the train went towards Chaumont. The next day at 9am, I was at the Dijon train station. Another employee helped me change train and put me in a mail-service train that was leaving for Marseilles. I hid behind the piles of empty crates 'returned packaging'. But the train did not leave until 8pm, I had to wait, immobilised in that station, for eleven hours, in an unheated train, in the most uncomfortable position, without coughing or blowing my nose, despite a nasty bronchitis. I nevertheless managed that sacrifice for my own salvation; I had to repeat it each time the train stopped.

Towards 1am, the train crossed the demarcation line at Châlons-sur-Saône, without me realising. On 24 January, at 1:30pm, I arrived at the Rogune [sic] train station where the train stopped. I had gone further than my destination: Marseilles; no one, not even the employees who escorted my train from Dijon, suspected that I was there and could not warn me of our arrival in Marseilles. Those who hid me at Dijon had stayed in that town. I was forced to buy a third class ticket for Toulon where I thought I might find some friends. But on my arrival in that town (8:30pm) I learnt that my friend was away. I was forced to take a room in a hotel (I did not know that there was a *centre d'accueil* in that town). On 26 January I took the train to Marseilles where I reached the *Dépôt des Isolés des Troupes coloniales* (Bussevade barracks) who sent me to the Camp de la Delonne, in Aygalades (2<sup>nd</sup> company). I was taken care of there until 30 January 1941, on which date I was sent to the C.T.T.I.C. number 2 at Fréjus (Caïs camp).

Thus, after many twists and turns, and after having overcome a thousand and one difficulties, at great risk to my life, I managed to escape the hands of the German authorities and place myself once again in the service of Generous France. But if I managed this *coup*, I must bear witness to do justice to everything I owe to Mrs Bruand. That person took care, with a praiseworthy selflessness, to soften the French prisoners' lot. Every day she distributed hot soup to the prisoners working near her

house. Every day her daughter Simone made the three-kilometre journey with their cart, good weather like bad, to do the prisoners' shopping (bread, potatoes, tobacco, etc.) Nether one wanted to be paid; they never accepted a single subsidy for their services. Mrs Bruand took care of many escapees; and is still doing so, since I left Epinal many of my comrades who have joined me here said that they too went through her.

Her husband, Mr Henri Bruand, was a lieutenant in the 170<sup>e</sup> *Régiment d'infanterie*. A career officer, he participated in the Great War of 1914-1918, and it was not until last June that he died of natural causes after an illness.

If the French government wanted to recognise the civilian population of the Occupied Zone who contributed largely to the improving the French prisoners' fate, and who helped the most with escapes, I would be grateful if they thought of:

Mrs Henri Bruand, 8 route de Domèvre à Golbey (Vosges) and her daughter Simone H. Bruand.

[map of the area]

### [Gnimagnon's] Complementary study

# Relations between the German authorities and the French prisoners (eastern region):

Generally, the German authorities and German soldiers had an appropriate attitude towards the French prisoners of the Occupied Zone. If the discipline was austere at the beginning of our captivity and if the physical conditions of our existence were deplorable, a substantial improvement occurred. After August we no longer had to lament the brutality. Even if our conditions were not that of which we dreamt, they were better than those of the average prisoner of war (from November).

Reciprocally, the prisoners' behaviour towards the Germans was dignified and correct. Friendships were born between German soldiers and French prisoners, and it was not rare to see them conversing freely and cordially. Those prisoners, ranked or not, usually interpreters, ate and drank with them in restaurants. They amused themselves together, throwing snow balls, etc.

But, it is important to note that the Germans always tried, wherever they went, to prevent contact between the white prisoners with the prisoners of colour, and always kept them separate. Even among the other white prisoners, they separated the officers' camp from that of the other French prisoners.

As I have already mentioned, they undertook a concerted policy of colonisation, which pretended to take a keen interest in the natives of the colonies, especially the Senegalese. But they [the Senegalese] were never taken in by the hypocrisy of this interest, and they always responded to tricks with tricks.

It was curious to note that the Germans totally distrusted the Arabs, North African *tirailleurs* (except at Rambervillers were they had the monopoly). These feelings of distrust were justified since the Arabs were thieves, and working in the storerooms and they proved their deceitfulness— this distrust increased when the Arabs started escaping *en masse*.

#### II. Relations among the prisoners:

The prisoners maintained excellent relations among themselves, without regard for colour, race or rank. They saw themselves as brothers-in-arms, united by the same misfortune. One could see at the beginning, and it was painful, some hostility between race and colour due certainly to the shortages and the misery in which were brutally found ourselves. But immediately the brotherly instinct quashed the instinct for egoism and petty mindedness and [now] all fraternize in the common fate.

#### III. German solders' morale

Since the Armistice, the Germans no longer had hostile feelings towards France, at least until recently; but they harbour a terrible hatred towards England. The German soldiers passionately believed in their victory and that of their ally Italy over England. But the situation has begun to change and Italy has found itself in a difficult place, the German soldiers have started to lose faith. Their morale has weakened strangely and winter's arrival has contributed to the guards' worries. We saw German guards leave their uniforms and flee with the French prisoners that they were escorting into town; others allowed prisoners to escape from the camp while they were on guard duty. Others recently confided in the Senegalese work group leaders they trusted that they had unfailingly lost the war and considered themselves already as prisoners. Even NCOs confided that they had received letters from home and they were surviving on nothing, that they had lost hope for the future... [sic]

What is at least surprising, is the Germans' current overexcitement, the reasons for their sharpness, the increase in discipline against us, and the increased

speed of the massive transfer of French prisoners to Germany, in one word a change

in the active policy they have had towards us since November, even though there has

not been any change in the environment or authorities.

Recently much material has been sent away to an unknown destination.

IV. Prisoners' Morale

Overall, the French prisoners' morale is excellent. See the various activities:

football and different games, music and dance, theatre, constant good humour. One

can sense, through conversations with them, through their secrets, that they have

maintained a certain hatred towards the Germans. They know that the current

situation is precarious and they maintain a fervent hope for better days.

Only the Senegalese and other colonials have started to worry about the

upcoming winter, which will find them in quite cold regions, and this worry adds to

the anxiety of the austere nature of their life as prisoners. But they try to rise above

their fears.

V. Conclusions

The French government has done a great amount for its prisoners abroad and

in the occupied territory: the work of Secours national, the Red Cross donations,

private undertakings.... [sic] were all born from its appeals, and have largely

improved the prisoners' fate. The prisoners appreciate enormously these

enhancements. They hope that the Government will continue to remember and take

care of them, and that the dawn they can make out on the horizon of a coming day,

the confidence that galvanises the strength of their hope, will not prove fanciful.

Camp de Cais, 7 February 1941

Michel Gnimagnon

Source: SHD, 14P46

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- 7N<sup>2</sup> 2663: intelligence reports on North Africa
- 7N<sup>2</sup> 2664: military justice reports
- 7N<sup>2</sup> 2666: intelligence on German spies and propaganda in the *Fronstalags*
- 7N<sup>2</sup> 2873: propaganda

# P series: Second World War, Vichy, Free French, Provisional Government

- 1P 5: Armistice agreement texts
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- 2P 11: demobilising native soldiers, colonial labour units
- 2P 54: press on prisoners
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- 2P 85: native colonial prisoners
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- 3P 69: demobilising native and North African soldiers, 1943-44
- 3P 82: use of and demobilisation statistics for native soldiers
- 3P 83: use of colonial labour units
- 3P 84: use of colonial labour units
- 3P 85: use of colonial labour units
- 3P 131: location of POW camps in France
- 3P 143: numbers of North African soldiers in France 1940-42

3P 161: main d'oeuvre indigène, 1943-44

5P 34: German defence of the coast, information on the Vichy regime

6P 6: Minister for War, reports on colonial prisoners

7P 128: former prisoners' reports on Germany, 1943-44

9P 8: correspondence from Algiers, 1944

9P 37: DSPG correspondence

9P 151: interrogations of former prisoners, 1940-45

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14P 17: RTM

14P 31: RANA

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14P 47: colonial artillery

#### R series:

9R 8: Amitiés africaines reports

9R 36: organisation of POW services

9R 37: liberation of POWs

9R 38: supplying POWs, 1942-44

9R 48: official documents from service main d'oeuvre indigène

#### T series:

19T 253: reports by escaped prisoners

## Bibliothèque de Documentation et Information Contemporaine (BDIC)

O 14168: report Comité d'Aide et d'Assistance Coloniale 1914-1915

Q 16314: Colonial exhibition 1931

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## Bundesarchiv-Militärachiv, Freiburg

RW6/270: OKW reports

RW34/77: Official correspondence

# **Primary Sources in Senegal**

## Archives Nationales du Sénégal

D series: French West Africa, military affairs

2D 1 (14): First World War demobilisation of black troops, 1916-1920

2D 3 (14): propaganda, 1940-1944

2D 5 (14): censorship of the press, morale reports on population and trooops

2D 15 (23): postal censorship for Cameroon

- 2D 23 (28): native prisoners of war, 1941-1942
- 2D 24 (28): prisoners of war 1939-1949, principles, correspondence
- 2D 25 (28): correspondence with prisoners in Europe 1941, death notices
- 2D 28 (28): Mort pour la France
- 2D 29 (28): demobilisation, morale of ex-tirailleurs, jobs for ex-tirailleurs
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- 17G 477 (132): charities 1939-1942, Amitiés Africaines
- 17G 478 (132): donations for POWs, POWs from AOF, Red Cross individual cases, 1943-1944
- 17G 480 (132): parcels for colonial and French prisoners, 1942
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