A TOTAL REVERSAL OF THE BALANCE OF POWER? GERMAN PRISONERS OF WAR IN NORMANDY, 1944-1948

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Abstract

This dissertation interrogates the relation between the French national identity, constructed around the idea of hereditary enmity with Germany, and the behaviour between French and German prisoners of war on the individual level in Normandy between 1944 and 1948. This question is important since it is widely accepted that Franco-German relations reached an all-time low during World War II, especially in areas like Normandy that had been heavily occupied between 1940 and 1944. This position is examined through an entangled analysis of low and high level records both from German and French sources, but also from American, British, and Swiss origins. It appears that individual Franco-German relations depended on the distance between the French official discourse of national recovery and the reality experienced by the civil population. During the Allied presence in Normandy, contradictions were obvious and the relations between French and German prisoners of war in Allied hands were marked with violence. When discourse and reality began to overlap, after the transfer of the prisoners to French custody, individual Franco-German relations normalised. This rapid evolution points to the symbolic character of the enmity between French and Germans, used as a tool to reinforce the national cohesion in times of threat.

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Introduction

Since its creation in 1963, the Franco-German Youth Office (FGYO) has enabled more than 8.2 million young French and Germans to participate in Franco-German gatherings of various kinds, both in France and Germany. This organisation was brought to life with the Elysée Treaty, signed on 22 January 1963 by President Charles de Gaulle and Chancellor Konrad Adenauer, and which specified that "young people in the two countries will be given every opportunity to strengthen the bonds which link them and to increase mutual cooperation. In particular, collective exchanges will be increased[1]." On its official website, the FGYO states today that, "through the participation in one of the programmes supported by the FGYO, one is enabled to improve language skills, get to know country, people and culture, gain valuable experience, improve one's chances during studies and on the job market"[2]. Interacting with locals and other foreigners, improving language learning and intercultural skills, acquiring a better understanding of the other's cultural background: side effects of time spent abroad during school or study exchanges and for professional needs and training that seem obvious in 21st century peacetime Europe[3].

French and Germans did not wait for the 1963 Elysée Treaty to meet each other: the preceding World Wars saw an unprecedented density of interactions between French and Germans, due to military occupations, war captivity, population displacements and forced labour. It must be asked whether peace is an indispensable prerequisite in the process of getting to know the other and whether military occupation and war captivity produce comparable effects: What is the impact of encounters of enemy nations members in wartime and immediately afterwards on public opinion, official discourse and ultimately, national identity and international relations?

The aim of this thesis is to answer this question, using the example of German prisoners of war (POWs)[4] in Normandy, France, between 1944 and 1948 and the evolution of the complex relations between Germans and French during this period. Conceived as regional social history of Normandy in the period 1944-48, with a specific focus on the presence of German POWs, this study has the particularity to address the question of enemy POW presence with an approach "from below", that is to say with a

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[1] French-German treaty of 22 January 1963, http://www.ofaj.org/sites/default/files/ofaj_traite_de.pdf, accessed on 28 November 2014.

[2] Http://www.dfjw.org/dfjw, accessed on 28 November 2014.

[3] On the effects of the exchange programmes of the FGYO on the Franco-German relations after 1963, cf. C. Defrance and U. Pfeil, *50 Jahre Deutsch-Französisches Jugendwerk/L'office franco-allemand pour la jeunesse a 50 ans* (Berlin, Paris, 2013), 127 p.; Defrance and Pfeil, eds, *La France, l'Allemagne et le traité de l'Elysée, 1963 – 2013* (Paris, 2012), 503 p.

[4] Military authorities of the United States, the United Kingdom and France used the term of "prisoner of war" well beyond 8 May 1945 and the end of the war in Europe. Although they could be considered as "prisoners of peace" beyond that date, we have chosen to use the contemporary terminology throughout this study. Cf. also B. Moore and B. Hately-Broad, eds, *Prisoners of war, prisoners of peace* (Oxford, 2005), pp. 3-22.

special consideration of low scale testimonies and documents, which were taken as the starting point to this research.

The relevance of regional studies to contemporary history has been well documented. Through the change of scale and a historical approach "from below", such studies are capable of presenting a more precise analysis of the evolution of opinion and behaviour among civilian populations[5]. Normandy represents an interesting case of an area which featured a heavy German presence during an after World War II. By focussing on a single region, this dissertation is able to answer questions and uncover details that are lost in studies with a broader focus. The chosen geographical framework covers five French départements – Manche, Calvados, Orne, Eure and Seine-Inférieure[6] – an area that corresponds approximately to that of the historical province of Normandy[7].

This thesis addresses three historiographical fields, usually considered separately dealing with: 1) the German occupation of France; 2) German POWs in France; and 3) post-war Franco-German relations. Moreover, two conceptual frameworks and their mutual interconnections are central to this thesis: 1) cultural and social effects of wartime encounters; and 2) national identity construction. In the context of Franco-German relations at a time when people were generally unfamiliar with international travel, the consequences of wartime encounters were manifold and sometimes paradoxical in appearance: on the one hand, encounters with the other strengthened the sense of national identity, in opposition to the other's actual or supposed characteristics, while, in return, national identity and official discourse had an important impact on the nature of these wartime encounters; on the other hand, these encounters enabled people to challenge stereotypes and propaganda and tacitly undermined the official discourse as they tended to reveal the many cultural similarities between both groups.

Considering at the same time the construction of the French national identity, the impact of a lasting cohabitation between Germans and French and the political use made of the "enemy presence" in France during and after World War II, this thesis addresses the following set of research questions, through the study of the presence of German POWs in Normandy between 1944 and 1948, after four years of German military occupation:

- How did the Norman population react to the German POWs at the moment of their capture and during their captivity in the context of a reversal of the balance of power after the end of the occupation?

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[5] Regarding history "from below" in the context of relations between nations, for example C. Hill, "«Where are we going?» International relations and the voice from below", *Review of International Studies* 25 (1999), pp. 107-122. For regional studies, cf. especially I. Kershaw, *Popular opinion and political dissent in the Third Reich, Bavaria 1933-1945* (Oxford, 1983); Quellien, *Opinions et comportements politiques dans le Calvados sous l'occupation allemande (1940-1944)* (Caen, 2001); R. Gildea, *Marianne in Chains, Daily life in the heart of France during the German occupation* (New York, 2002).

[6] In 1955, the département Seine-Inférieure is renamed Seine-Maritime.

[7] Moreover, these départements formed between 1941 and 1946 the administrative region of Normandy, placed under the authority of a "préfet de région" during the Vichy régime, and the under the control of a "Commissaire de la République" during the Provisory government of the French republic. After the liberation, these five départements form also the 3rd military region.

- To what extent was this reaction shaped by the self-conception of the French and dominating narratives and opinions at that time and did the reaction of the Norman civilian population comply with these? To what extent did French civilians consciously ignore or overturn the official idea of the French-German antagonism and dominating narratives?
- What is the correlation between the multifaceted local experience of the German presence and the local discourse on Germans and Germany and how did this local experience and discourse impact on the broader national discourse and the French decision making process pertaining to the Germans and Germany?
- To what extent did the lasting German presence alter the self-conception of the French and found the groundwork for the reconciliation process between France and Germany?

While the answers to these questions will bear a regional form, the question will be raised to what extent these conclusions can be applied to the wider context of the Franco-German relationship. The systematic approach from below of this work constitutes a key difference from many other studies, including the major 2014 study by Fabien Théofilakis[8]. While it mainly uses archival material and testimonies from the highest levels of the involved bodies and although it sets a very complete and useful institutional background for the history of POWs, Théofilakis' study sometimes disregards the important regional differences of the experience of war captivity, especially in those areas of France dominated by Allied military ruling between 1944 and 1945/46. More importantly, the crucial role of the Germans and the Allies in the difficult reconstruction of the French national identity after four years of enemy occupation is literally drowned in a plethoric mass of technical detail about all things POW. Other publications by the same author deal closely with the place of German POWs in France, without however taking into consideration the continuous nature the forced cohabitation between both nations since 1940[9].

Other recent publications focus on living conditions, diplomatic and humanitarian issues as well as employment policies like for example, Matthias Reiss's „*Die Schwarzen waren unsere Freunde": deutsche Kriegsgefangene in der amerikanischen Gesellschaft 1942 – 1946* published in 2001 and Renate Held's *Kriegsgefangenschaft in Grossbritannien*, of 2008[10]. Works such as *Kriegsgefangene im Europa des Ersten Weltkriegs* by Jochen Oltmer (2006) and *Gefangen im großen Krieg: Kriegsgefangenschaft in Deutschland 1914 – 1921* by Uta

[8] F. Théofilakis, *Les prisonniers de guerre allemands, France, 1944-1949 : une captivité de guerre en temps de paix* (Paris, 2014).

[9] Théofilakis, 'La sexualité du prisonnier de guerre. Allemands et Français en captivité (1914-1918, 1940-1948)', *Guerres mondiales et conflits contemporains*, n° 99 (2008), pp. 203-219; 'Les prisonniers de guerre allemands en mains françaises dans les mémoires nationales en France et en Allemagne après 1945', *Cahiers d'histoire*, n° 100 (2007), pp. 67-84; 'Les autorités françaises face aux prisonniers de guerre allemands SS (1944-1948)', *Guerres mondiales et conflits contemporains*, n° 223 (2006), pp. 93-107.

[10] M. Reiss, *Die Schwarzen waren unsere Freunde, Deutsche Kriegsgefangene in der amerikanischen Gesellschaft 1942-1946*, (Paderborn, 2002); R. Held, *Kriegsgefangenschaft in Grossbritannien, Deutsche Soldaten des Zweiten Weltkriegs in britischem Gewahrsam* (Munich, 2008).

Hinz (2006), deal respectively with war captivity as an experience which is common to individuals of all belligerent nations, and with the particularities of captivity in German hands[11]. While connecting the experiences of the Great War to World War II, by depicting the European preconceptions of prisoner detention and employment as being still in force twenty years later, the authors of both books overlook the question of fraternisation between enemy nations and, more particularly, the fact that several meetings between former German and French POWs took place during the interwar period. The collective work *Prisoners of War, Prisoners of Peace: Captivity, Homecoming and Memory in World War II*, edited by Bob Moore and Barbara Hately-Broad (2005), goes further and considers war captivity beyond the end of fighting, centring on policies and repatriation agreements as experienced by POWs[12]. The international conference *Les prisonniers de guerre dans l'histoire : contacts entre peuples et cultures*, held in Toulouse in May 2002 dealt with POWs no longer as with a group isolated inside the environment of detention, but more as with actors in the transnational relations between two states at war[13]. The international conference organised by Théofilakis with Anne-Marie Pathé in 2011 and published in 2012 can be considered a synthesis of the work of the past decade[14].

Low level relations between French and German individuals during and after the war are almost totally absent from studies treating the process of rapprochement and reconciliation[15]. In fact, the rapprochement process between France and Western Germany after World War II had been regarded until now solely through consideration of government policies and the *raison d'état* of both countries in the larger context of the Cold War, as well as being the result of the will of two influential statesmen on both sides, General Charles de Gaulle and Konrad Adenauer, leading to the conclusion of the Elysée Treaty in January 1963 that is still in force today. However, the important achievements of this treaty: frequent governmental and parliamentarian meetings between both countries, establishment of a youth exchange programme etcetera, hide the fact that, until now, little attention has been paid to the role held by French and German individuals in this reconciliation process before its instrumentalisation.

A number of recent publications have enlarged the knowledge on the process of reconciliation between the two "ennemis héréditaires" after World War II. The collective work *Wandel und Integration, Deutsch-französische Annäherung der fünfziger Jahre*, directed by Hélène Miard Delacroix and Rainer Hudemann (2005) insists on the role of politics and

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[11] J. Oltmer, *Kriegsgefangene im Europa des Ersten Weltkrieges* (Paderborn, 2006); U. Hinz, *Gefangen im Großen Krieg: Kriegsgefangenschaft in Deutschland 1914-1921* (Essen, 2006).

[12] Moore and Hately-Board, eds, *Prisoners of War, Prisoners of Peace*.

[13] S. Caucanas, R. Cazals and P. Payen, eds, *Les prisonniers de guerre dans l'histoire : contacts entre peuples et cultures* (Toulouse, 2003).

[14] A.M. Pathé and F. Théofilakis, eds, *La captivité de guerre au XX^e siècle, Des archives, des histoires, des mémoires* (Paris, 2012), 373 p.

[15] Even though nearly 800,000 German POWs stayed and worked in France between 1945 and 1948, half of which were employed by farmers, they appear almost nowhere in publications. German POWs are absent from such scholarship standards as *La France de 1914 à nos jours* edited by Jean-François Sirinelli (Paris, 2004) and *Histoire militaire de la France de 1940 à nos jours* edited by André Martel (Paris, 1994). The German POWs working by the hundreds of thousands in French agriculture after the war are hardly mentioned with a single sentence in George Duby's standard *Histoire de la France rurale* (Paris, 1986-1987).

economy in the 1950s as the principal motor for the rapprochement[16]. As far as the civil societies in both countries are concerned, the work shows up the implication of intellectuals and labour unions of both countries in the reconciliation process as they both had similar ideas for a changing world, irrespective of what side of the Rhine they were. Growing exchange programs between the people of both countries in the 1950s, for example in schools, labour unions, cultural associations, and other communities such as the Catholic or Protestant churches, while implying at most a few hundred individuals, are described as the main foundations of further political rapprochement. The presence of nearly one million German POWs in France in the second half of the 1940s is not addressed by any of the contributions. Another collection of articles entitled *La réconciliation franco-allemande, Les oublis de la mémoire* and published in the review *Cahiers d'Histoire* (2007) is mainly based on the memorial perceptions of Franco-German after-war history. Even though an article by Théofilakis is dedicated to the German POWs in France after World War II, its author somewhat disregards the consequences of the massive presence of the former enemy amidst the French civilian population, on the individual perception of the other and on the rebalancing of the mutual relations[17].

Thus, while studies dedicated to the history of war captivity in the twentieth century fail to connect to the broader evolution of transnational relations, studies on Franco-German relations both during and after World War II fail in return, to integrate the history and role of German POWs in France between 1944 and 1948.

The goal of the present study is to fill in these gaps. By placing the individual voice in the centre of this study, it is sought to determine to what extent the diverse forms of individual relations between French and Germans suited the mainly anti-German opinion and whether or not the continued German presence in Normandy and the individual relations that ensued gave birth to mostly hostile behaviour from the civilians against the POWs, after four years of enemy occupation. This study will also ask whether or not the dominating anti-German public opinion in Normandy reflected the nature of the individual relations between French and Germans in the after-war period.

Extent of the German presence in Normandy

As a region that had experienced a heavy German occupation during World War II, Normandy represents a good case study for exploring this problem. In this region with a civil population of roughly 2.3 million during the war, the number of German troops underwent a constant evolution. After the French military defeat in June 1940, Normandy was immediately heavily occupied when the Wehrmacht was planning to pursue the war against Great Britain on English soil. In August 1940, more than 375,000

[16] H. Miard-Delacroix and R. Hudemann, eds, *Wandel und Integration, Deutsch-französische Annäherungen der fünfziger Jahre*, (Munich, 2005).
[17] Théofilakis, 'Les prisonniers de guerre allemands en mains françaises dans les mémoires nationales en France et en Allemagne après 1945', *Cahiers d'histoire* 100 (2007), pp. 67-84.

German troops were billeted in Normandy to prepare the crossing of the Channel, an operation plan known as operation Sea Lion.

After the German defeat in the Battle of Britain, this plan was ultimately cancelled by the German high command, which now began to focus on the preparation of the war against the Soviet Union. In Normandy, this change in military priorities led to a progressive decline in the number of German troops. A low point in occupation was reached between February and August 1942, when less than 140,000 Germans occupied the region.

The Dieppe raid led by Anglo-Canadian forces on 19 August 1942 brought this continuous decline to a halt. The conception of the occupation in the West was totally reconsidered by Hitler and, from then on, the number of troops under German authority stationing in the region steadily increased until the Allied landings, two years later reaching almost 325,000 men in May 1944 – of which 21 per cent were not German citizens, but foreign members of combat units and the Organisation Todt[18]. The climax of the German presence in Normandy was reached during the battle of Normandy, when more than 500,000 soldiers under German command were stationed in the region. 185,000 of them entered war captivity during the battle.

The physical proximity between the Germans and the civil population of Normandy however, was not limited to the traditional chronology of World War II in France and thus did not end with the Occupation. In fact, in May 1945, there were still some 270,000 German POWs held in Normandy inside British and American enclosures or as part of labour units. One year later, most of these prisoners had been transferred to French custody and the French civil authorities subsequently proceeded to their transfer to other regions in order to distribute the benefits brought by this valuable pool of manpower to the French civil economy. Nevertheless, there were still more than 40,000 German POWs held and employed in Normandy in 1946, a number that would now only slowly decrease until the last German POW was released from captivity in France in December 1948.

During the occupation, Normandy primarily represented for the German army almost half of the French Channel coastline: 638 km out of 1400 km in total. With its deep water ports and inland waterways, its geographical situation facing England was at first an offensive advantage, before becoming crucial for the German defence strategy against Allied landing plans, both fostering the density of the local presence of German troops. The success of the Allied landings on 6 June 1944 and the liberation of the region after the Battle of Normandy logically transformed the region into a rear base for Allied forces during their pursuit of the German army towards the *Reich*. Until the activation of the port of Antwerp for Allied use in early November 1944, Normandy remained the principal entry for Allied supplies on the continent. Thereafter, the importance of the region in Allied logistics declined only slowly and at the end of the war in Europe in May

[18] Quellien, *Opinions*, p. 391.

1945, about 40 per cent of the German prisoners employed by the US Army were still held in Normandy[19].

It must be said here that the continued contact between Germans and French between 1940 and 1948 has to be considered in terms of national groups, not of individuals. While Germans were present continuously, they were subject to a high level of personnel rotation, first inside the German armed forces, then within the POW administrations of the United States, Britain and France. German soldiers rotated not only from one theatre of operations to another in Europe, they also moved very frequently from one village in occupied France to the next, often as part of a routine-breaking policy and in order to get the units trained on varying military installations and in different topographic settings. German POWs were brought from the front to rear area camps and labour units, where they rotated according to the current needs and capacities of their detaining powers. This led to the fact that individual relations between French and Germans were often interrupted by this rotation while the German and French people as a whole remained in steady contact. Ultimately, only a few of the German soldiers who had stayed in Normandy as occupiers lived in the region also as POWs, while the majority came from other French and European regions. Some had been captured in North Africa and arrived in Normandy after having stayed for several years in the United States. Of the roughly 1 million German POWs in French hands after the end of the war, more than 70 per cent had been captured by American and British troops, not only in France, but also in North Africa and Belgium, and most importantly in Germany itself.

Those soldiers captured after the unconditional surrender of Germany were no longer considered POWs *strictu sensu* but as Disarmed Enemy Forces (DEF), in American terminology, and as Surrendered Enemy Personnel (SEP) in the British army[20]. Allied authorities administrating DEF or SEP were officially not constrained to the letter of international law in force, even though generally this status was considered temporary and camp commanders mostly treated their prisoners in the spirit of customary law. In early July 1945, France received some 175,000 men from Allied DEF/SEP camps in Germany. Given that France had not agreed with the creation of this special status, these captives officially became POWs again as soon as they were registered in France[21]. The creation of this status and the question of the mortality of German POWs in Allied and French hands became part of a larger debate after the publication of James Bacque's book *Other*

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[19] Cf. US Army, Normandy Base Section, Progress Report, 1 Mai 1945, NARA, RG 498, Normandy Base Section, Box 1; for British figures, cf. 21 A Gp/3769/68/A (PW), Subject: PW Holdings, Number of Enemy PW held in theatre at 1800 hrs 15 May, (1945), TNA, WO 229/7/1.

[20] For the question of the creation of the status of 'Surrendered Enemy Personnel' or 'Disarmed Enemy Forces', cf. B. L. Villa, 'The Diplomatic and Political Context of the POW Camps Tragedy', in G. Bischof and S. E. Ambrose, eds, *Eisenhower and the German POWs. Facts against Falsehood* (Baton Rouge, 1992), pp. 58-60; R. Overmans, "Das Schicksal der deutschen Kriegsgefangenen des Zweiten Weltkriegs", in R.-D. Müller, ed, *Der Zusammenbruch des Deutschen Reichs 1945*, vol. 2, *Die Folgen des Zweiten Weltkrieges* (Munich, 2008), pp. 413-425; Overmans, 'German Historiography, the War Losses, and the Prisoners of War', in Bischof and Ambrose, eds, *Facts against Falsehood*, p. 147; R. D. Wiggers, 'The United States and the Denial of Prisoner of War (POW) Status at the End of the Second World War', *Militärgeschichtliche Mitteilungen* 52 (1993), pp. 91-94.

[21] Villa, 'The Diplomatic and Political Context', p. 64 et sqq.

losses in 1989[22]. This book drew popular attention due to the serious accusations that it expressed against the American and French high commands: Bacque states that these had voluntarily let hundreds of thousands of German POWs die in camps in Germany, Belgium and France. According to Bacque, ill-treatment and malnutrition due to the retention of food ordered by general Dwight D. Eisenhower had led to these deaths. This elaborate decision would have been motivated by the growing aversion felt by Eisenhower against the Germans after the discovery of the Nazi concentration camp system. When first published, the book received an important international reaction, and criticism was intense not only in the American press, but also in France and Germany. Renowned historians such as Henry Rousso, who wrote for *Le Monde* on 27 April 1990, disputed Bacque's argument by stating that his work was characterised by many imprecisions, a use of testimonies out of their context and the abusive extrapolation of statistics from the few quoted documents[23]. Two years later, an important group of historians subjected Bacque's work to meticulous criticism, unveiling a wide array of incorrect information and purposeful misinformation[24]. Ultimately, the debate contributed greatly to improve our knowledge of the history of German POWs after World War II. Although not central to this study, the question of living conditions and mortality of German POWs in France in British, American and French hands, especially in 1945, will be addressed since they reflect not only the material conditions in Europe after the end of the war, but also because their public representation was part of the complex evolution of the relations between Paris, London and Washington in the framework of France's difficult return to national sovereignty at the eve of the Cold War.

The continuous presence in Normandy of German soldiers until December 1948 as POWs and "free civil workers" – after a period where Germans had stayed in that same region as occupiers and combatants between 1940 and 1944 – enable the analysis of the repercussions of this presence on the life of the local inhabitants and their reactions towards the German prisoners after the war. In an entangled approach, the life of the Germans within Norman society, their relations with the French and the impact of these relations on the French national discourse can be studied in detail, in the framework of a progressive reversal of the balance of power between German soldiers and French civilians after the end of four years of military occupation. By devoting the analysis to a single region, this dissertation will detect phenomena and dynamics in the opinion and behaviour between both groups, not only for the region as a whole, but also with a close-up view on what happened in cities and countryside, near the coast and in the hinterland.

An entangled history of Franco-German relations

Since the nineteenth century, Franco-German relations have unfolded on two separate, though interconnected levels: on the one hand, the relations between governments or, at

[22] J. Bacque, *Other losses, An investigation into the mass deaths of German POWs at the hands of the French and Americans after World War II* (Toronto, 1989).
[23] H. Rousso, "Seconde Guerre mondiale : l'invention d'un genocide", *Le Monde* (27 avril 1990).
[24] Bischof and Ambrose, eds, *Facts against Falsehood.*

least, between legitimate powers representing their nation's alleged interests – that is to say the international relations –, and, on the other hand, the relations between the actors of the civil societies of both nations – so-called transnational relations[25]. As far as the relations between Germans and French are concerned, World War II and its aftermath represent a period of massive forced cohabitation for individuals of both groups. Between 1940 and 1948, almost two million Frenchmen and an unknown number of several million Germans lived in each other's countries for extended periods, in some cases of up to eight years[26]. They were occupiers, forced labourers and prisoners of war (POWs).

From a purely numerical point of view, never before had so many Germans lived in France, nor so many French in Germany. Never before had Germans and French lived in such close physical proximity to each other. Despite the experience of suffering, death, hardship, privation and sometimes extreme violence, French and Germans were forced to meet, usually in the framework of individual, non-violent relations. These forced transnational encounters took place between soldiers, POWs and civilians, in camps, factories and occupied towns and villages. They were human encounters of various forms, and the question of the cultural impact of these encounters will be raised by this thesis.

The continuity of the presence of Germans in France, first as occupiers and combatants, between 1940 and 1944, and then as POWs, between 1944 and 1948, and therefore the continuity of the forced human encounters between Germans and French beyond 1944, have been neglected in the historiography. Studying the German presence in France between 1940 and 1944 might seem logical, as these dates stand as boundary stones in the collective memory, and synonymous with the German occupation. By contrast, studying such relations between 1944 and 1948 might surprise, as the Liberation in 1944 has become equated with the end of the German occupation and thus, with the presence of Germans in France. This discrepancy reveals the weight of the French national memory on historiography, which fails to dissociate the phenomenon of the Franco-German cohabitation from the occupation context, to the extent that one gains the impression that the forced cohabitation ends with the liberation of France, just as presented in the French memory after the war.

One of the goals of this dissertation is to contest the traditional typology of Franco-German relations by examining continuities in individual encounters between French and Germans *beyond* the "liberation" and extending our analysis until 1948. In fact, the distance between the collective memory of that period and the most basic historical data – Germans being massively present in France not only between 1940 and 1944, but also between 1944 and 1948 – already shows that the German soldiers, as men and as alien elements within French society, have to be distinguished from what they

[25] Whereas the soldiers of the German army, occupiers or POWs, do not exactly fit the definition of a civil society, they constituted, as conscripted troops, a representative part of Germany's male adult population and thus of the German civil society.

[26] While the number of Germans in France at a time never exceeded one million between 1940 and 1948, the total number of German soldiers that had stayed at one moment or another of the war in France remains unknown. Due to the frequency of rotation of troops between the different theatres of operations, the number of Germans with an experience as occupiers in France between 1940 and 1944/45 is expected to be much higher than one million.

successively represented to the opinion all over the considered period. Dissociating the reality of the Franco-German forced and continuous cohabitation from the traditional historiographical limits and their symbolic value in order to analyse the relations between the French and the Germans according to the different balances of power in force, thus, appeared as a central requirement of this study.

1940: Towards a "gigantic crisis of national identity"[27]

National identity, as a feeling of belonging to a state or a nation shared by a group of people, is believed to be reinforced in periods of military, economic or cultural conflict. National identity is therefore not to be considered a constant, but is rather a collective feeling that experiences an evolution according to changing contexts. Hence, national identity is invariably constructed in opposition to the marking characteristics of the groups defined as threatening[28].

Germany and France stand as a good example of national identity construction in opposition to the other. In fact, the recurrence of armed conflicts between Germany and France since the end of the 17th century and the Nine Years' War, followed by the Napoleonic Wars, French designs on the left bank of the Rhine, the Franco-Prussian War in 1870/71 and World War I, in combination with growing economic competition and numerous veterans' testimonies passed on to younger generations, had given birth during the 19th century to the idea that both countries were "hereditary enemies". With growing national feeling on both sides of the Rhine, especially after the proclamation of the German Empire on 18 January 1871 in Versailles, on French territory, and the annexation by Germany of the French regions of Alsace and Lorraine, the differences between the French and German nations were deliberately aggravated and soon to be considered fundamental, for example in school books[29]. The Franco-German component of the Great War between 1914 and 1918, marked with an increasing propaganda activity on both sides, perpetuated the idea that the military conflict was due to essential differences between both nations[30].

Especially the evolution of the French national identity and self-conception after 1918 needs to be understood to explain the conditions in 1944, at the beginning of the period studied in this thesis. After the end of the Great War, France sought to secure its position in Europe and its borders against Germany through a treaty of "hard peace"

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[27] P. Buton, *La joie douloureuse, La libération de la France* (Paris, 2004), p. 229.

[28] On national identity construction, cf. especially M. Détienne, *L'identité nationale, Une énigme* (Paris, 2010); B. Anderson, *Imagined communities, Reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism* (London, 2006); A.-M. Thiesse, *La création des identités nationales, Europe XVIIIe-XXe siècle* (Paris, 1999); P. Cabanel, *La question nationale au XIXe siècle* (Paris, 1997); G. Noiriel, *Population, immigration et identité nationale en France, XIXe-XXe siècle* (Paris, 1992); A. D. Smith, *National identity* (London, 1991).

[29] M. Espagne, "Sur les limites du comparatisme en histoire culturelle", *Genèses* 17 (1994), pp. 112-121.

[30] A. Kramer, *Dynamic of destruction, Cutlure and mass killing in the First World War* (Oxford, 2007). On propaganda during World War I, cf. especially D. Welch and J. Fox, *Justifying War: Politics, Propaganda and the Modern Age* (Basingstoke, 2012); N. Gullace, "Allied propaganda and World War I: interwar legacies, media studies, and the politics of war guilt", *History Compass* 9 (2011); J. Verhey, *The spirit of 1914: militarism, myth and mobilization in Germany* (Cambridge, 2000).

signed in Versailles on 28 June 1919, considered a humiliation by many Germans. The treaty was a failure insofar as it confronted the German national identity with total defeat and guilt, without giving Germany an acceptable perspective for the future. In the French society however, war fatigue became general, in spite (or because) of the achievement of the war goals, mainly the victory over Germany and the reconquest of Alsace and Lorraine. The sacrifice of 1.4 million dead soldiers and countless severely injured combatants and the sufferings endured by those parts of the country held under German occupation between 1914 and 1918, were now presented as the price for peace, rather than the cost of military victory – not the least by veterans' associations. Soon after 1918, the war was colloquially named *"la der des ders"*, the last of the last ("the war to end all wars", in its British and American version), reflecting the collective will to never see a war again involving the French[31].

The trauma of the bloodletting of the Great War had lasting consequences for the readiness of the Western Allies to engage into a new conflict in Europe. In fact, the rearmament of Germany after 1933, the remilitarisation of the Rhineland, the participation of the German Legion Condor in the Spanish Civil War, the annexation of Austria and the Sudetenland in 1938 and the annexation of the Czech parts of Czechoslovakia in early 1939, did not provoke any military reaction against Germany. Things changed only slightly when Germany aggressed Poland on 1 September 1939 and thus forced France and Britain to declare war at last. But both Paris and London had merely switched to a very careful military policy of containment, known as the "phoney war" (*la drôle de guerre*). The goal was to prevent, through extensive defensive measures such as the Maginot Line (a line of bunkers, trenches and fortified strongpoints along the Franco-German border), another Great War, when hundreds of thousands lost their life for insignificant gains of ground. Facing an aggressive German adversary willing to erase the "shame of the Versailles Treaty" by all means, the Western democracies were incapable of equally reactivating a patriotic feeling within their societies, also by lack of mobilising themes such as "the lost provinces" in France[32].

Considering the general apathy fostered by a war without action, the German offensive in the West on 10 May 1940 and especially the surprise crossing of the River Meuse at Sedan on 13 May 1940, definitely invalidated any French projections into the future. The advancing German troops and the perspective of defeat and enemy occupation, produced a moral shock that transformed the French society rapidly into a society of panic and chaos, the French state and its institutions facing a situation that no one had been prepared for[33]. Rumours dating back to World War I suddenly re-emerged,

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31 A. Prost, *Les Anciens combattants et la société française, 1914-1939* (Paris, 1977); J. Eichenberg and J. P. Newman, eds, *The Great War and veterans' internationalism* (Basingstoke, 2013); K. Wilson, ed, *Forging the collective memory, Government and international historians through two world wars* (Oxford, 1996); C. Fink, I. V. Hull and M. Knox, eds, *German nationalism and the European response, 1890-1945* (Norman, OK, 1985).

32 J. Vavasseur-Desperriers, "La France dans la deuxième guerre mondiale (1939-1945)", in J.-F. Sirinelli, ed, *La France de 1914 à nos jours* (Paris, 2004), p. 166.

33 On the French exode of May-June 1940 and its consequences on the French society, cf. especially E. Alary, *L'Exode* (Paris, 2010); P. Miquel, *L'exode, 10 mai-20 juin 1940* (Paris, 2003); P. Vallaud, *L'exode, mai-juin 1940*, (Paris, 2000); J. Vidalenc, *L'Exode de mai-juin 1940* (Paris, 1957).

describing the Germans as bloodthirsty monsters, eating babies and cutting the men's trigger fingers so that they could never use a firearm again. Panic could no longer be contained with public administrations and state officials among the first to flee, thus increasing panic through a feeling of insecurity and abandonment. This uncontrolled mass psychosis resulted in the rushed exodus of up to 10 million civilians fleeing from the advancing German troops towards the southeast of France.

The defeat of June 1940 was not only a defeat of the French army, but also marked an almost total failure of the French state, seemingly abandoning the French to the enemy. The sudden defeat against the old enemy and the occupation destroyed all certitudes for the future of France and the French. The Wehrmacht had smashed the benefit of the costly victory of 1918 within only six weeks; Alsace-Lorraine reverted to the *Reich* in a de facto annexation. Consequently, this loss of certainties as to the future of France gave rise, in Philippe Buton's words, to a "gigantic crisis of national identity"[34].

To simplify, the context of the German occupation offered the French two main options for the future: either the more or less active collaboration with the enemy in the framework of a future Europe under German domination; or the continuation of the war against the occupier with different means. These two opposite perspectives bore the potential to split French society, not the least because of the personalities of those who represented them: Philippe Pétain and Charles de Gaulle. On the one hand, marshal Pétain was unanimously fêted as the heroic saviour of France due to his military leadership in the battle for Verdun in 1916. On the other hand, Charles de Gaulle was a two stars general and short-lived secretary of state in the ministry of war, and thus initially widely unknown to the public, who appointed himself head of Free France and managed to seize the role to represent French combatant and republican values through his call for resistance. Both views were marked with patriotic values, but while Pétain's views and prestige were founded on the past, De Gaulle had more of a vision for the future of the country. Pétain relied on Germany to build the Europe of tomorrow, whereas De Gaulle envisioned a Europe without German hegemony. Both views were supported by large parts of the population: while people clandestinely listened to De Gaulle's BBC speeches, others (and sometimes the same) welcomed Pétain's visits to the people with warm cheers.

From the end of 1942 however, the vision of De Gaulle progressively established its dominance: the German occupation of southern France in November 1942 deprived Pétain's discourse of a collaboration between equals of its credibility; moreover, the obvious German military setbacks in Russia and North Africa over the winter of 1942/43 cast doubts on the confidence of those who viewed the future of France within a German dominated Europe. Thus, well before the Allied Landings of 6 June 1944, the idea of Liberation was present in form of a mental projection in the future[35]. From one alternative vision of the future, De Gaulle's views became more and more accepted, increasingly influencing public opinion. His idea of a Free France progressively turned

[34] Buton, *La joie douloureuse*, p. 229.
[35] Ibid., p. 15.

into the dominating public discourse; hence, the damaged French national identity was being reconstructed around De Gaulle's ideas of resistance against and liberation from the Germans.

The defeat of 1940 against Germany had plunged the French society into a deep crisis of national identity. The progressive reconstruction of this identity during the occupation, following the patriotic views of Charles de Gaulle, would again mobilise the theme of the historic opposition between French and Germans – a renewed self-conception that would find a large popular approval in 1944, at the Liberation of France. It can be reminded here that this new discourse had been shaped while France was under German occupation, that is to say while the French population was forced into a cohabitation with German nationals. At the same time the idea of the liberation from this German presence was a substantial part of this discourse of Franco-German opposition. In that sense, the fact that German POWs were held in large numbers in France after the Liberation had the potential to interfere with the public reception of that national discourse. Hence, one of the central themes of this study will be to analyse how this self-conception of the French reacted with the German POWs between 1944 and 1948, during their capture and their captivity in Allied hands on French soil and while under French authority.

A forced cohabitation of French and Germans

In the context of military conscription, war captivity and forced labour, it can be said that Germans and French did not enter each other's countries voluntarily. On the contrary, they can be considered as forced migrants, moved around in the slipstream of higher political and military decisions on which they had little or no influence, transposed from one cultural environment to another. However, the only groups that have been considered so far as migrants in research on World War II, are the displaced civil populations, that is to say, forced labourers, the persecuted, expelled and refugees[36] – and not the soldiers themselves, even though they stayed in almost permanent contact with foreign cultures. Especially the soldiers of German citizenship have long been considered as being voluntary (or professional) combatants and thus also voluntary in their movements through Europe – although the majority of them had been recruited through conscription[37]. Workers of the Organisation Todt and foreign soldiers in German

[36] For example C. Harzig and D. Hoerder (with D. Gabaccia), *What is migration history?* (Cambridge, 2009) and G. Noiriel, *Le creuset français, Histoire de l'immigration XIXe-XXe siècle* (Paris, 2006).

[37] At most 30 percent of the troops had volunteered for military service, generally in order to anticipate conscription orders and to choose a specific branch of the Wehrmacht or the Waffen-SS; also, soldiers were generally unable to personally choose a theatre of operations. On the mobilisation of the German armed forces during World War II and the shares of voluntary and conscripted soldiers, cf. P. E. Schramm and H. Greiner, *Kriegstagebuch des Oberkommandos der Wehrmacht (Wehrmachtführungsstab) 1940-1945*, vol. 4, (München, 1961), p. 66; B. R. Kroener, "Die personellen Ressourcen des Dritten Reiches im Spannungsfeld zwischen Wehrmacht, Bürokratie und Kriegswirtschaft 1939-1942", in B. R. Kroener, R. D. Müller and H. Umbreit, *Organisation und Mobilisierung des deutschen Machtbereichs*, vol. 1 (Stuttgart, 1988), pp. 693-1001; Kroener, "« Menschenbewirtschaftung », Bevölkerungsverteilung und personelle Rüstung in der zweiten Kriegshälfte (1942-1944)", in Kroener, Müller and Umbreit, Op. Cit., vol. 2 (Stuttgart, 1999), pp. 777-1001.

uniforms have equally been neglected by migration studies. As for the German POWs held in France – and in other European countries –, they have mostly been considered a means of legitimate reparation after the end of the German occupation, in the framework of national history writing.

In the field of migration history, the presence of Germans in France during and after the end of World War II corresponds to two types of movements[38]. Firstly, the occupation period, which initially brought the German soldiers to France, can be defined as "colonisation migration", forcing the native population to live under a regime of oppression. Secondly, the period of war captivity can be considered as "cross-community migration", equivalent to the involuntary transport of slaves for their employment to the benefit of the members of a community of a different culture. Applying categories established in migration studies to the history of World War II can help to overcome methods of national history writing that traditionally divide the actors into categories such as victims, perpetrators, heroes, traitors, etc. Harzig and Hoerder define seven groups of migrants[39]:

- *free migrants* who decide when to depart and where to go according to their own desires and life-projects within the frames states impose on out- and in-migration;
- *labour migrants,* the traditional "free" migrants of the proletarian mass migrations who decide to depart under often severe economic constraints;
- *bound labour migrants* who have to sell their labour for a number of years because of poverty;
- *forced labour migrants* who are enslaved for menial work for life, enslaved for service or intellectual labour, bound for a certain period of their life against their will, or kidnapped and placed in labour camps for an indeterminate period;
- *involuntary migrants* displaced by political or religious intolerance, or other causes, such as ethnic or gender-based inequalities;
- *refugees* from war and other violence;
- *persons displaced by ecological disasters,* whether natural or men-made.

According to this typology and given the massive forced mobilisation of adult men of German citizenship as ordered by their government through conscription and their forced stay in France after the end of the war as POWs for an undefined duration, these Germans can only be considered as "forced labour migrants".

While the social and cultural impact of this massive and relatively prolonged foreign presence has been usually overlooked both in studies of population migration and in works dealing with international conflicts, it seems clear that this form of migration had characteristics that are similar to any other form of foreign presences, whether civil or military. The German presence abroad during and after World War II not only entailed the forced stay of numerous foreigners, bearers of their own culture, in regions with equally strong identities. The Germans did not simply transpose their space of origin into the

[38] Harzig and Hoerder, *Migration*, p. 10.
[39] Ibid., p. 67.

places they inhabited, nor did they completely merge into them. In fact, as Harzig and Hoerder have shown, migrants generally give birth to what is called a "third space", born from daily contact with the indigenous inhabitants and from the mutual cultural influence between the foreigners and natives[40]. The international conference *Les prisonniers de guerre dans l'histoire : contacts entre peuples et cultures*, held in Toulouse in May 2002, presented a similar approach when dealing with POWs no longer as an isolated group inside the environment of detention, but more as actors in the transnational relations between two states at war[41]. Consequently, this study will analyse to what extent the German presence in Normandy between 1944 and 1948 also caused the appearance of a "third space" where elements from German and French cultures were brought together.

It is argued that the Franco-German cohabitation during and after World War II generated a common Franco-German past that has to be looked upon, as it seems, not with one or another national perspective but with an entangled transnational approach, using methods of *histoire croisée*, as described by Michael Werner and Bénédicte Zimmermann[42]. As Michel Espagne reminds us, "historiography, especially in the Franco-German field, has been connected for a too long period of time to a model of legitimation that led it to define its objectives in national terms"[43]. In fact, as soon as the Germans entered France, they were no longer an alien element on their own, but more of a decisive element that participated in the perpetual construction of the French self-conception. Moreover, the German experience of an extended stay in France was not without its effect on the German identity. Therefore, it seems essential to address the question of the degree of acclimatisation and even cultural integration to the identity of the other, beyond the balance of power ruling the relations between French and Germans. In Michel Espagne's words, we have to ask the question whether or not the cohabitation pierced the walls of the French and German cultural areas[44].

Until the mid-1990s, historians hesitated to depict forced transnational encounters in the context of war, only timidly hinting at these through intuition rather than with a detailed analysis of the available sources[45]. The publication in 1995 of Philippe Burrin's *La France à l'heure allemande* marked an important evolution of the view on the Franco-German cohabitation under the occupation[46]. Burrin created the concept of accommodation, suggesting that, apart from those authentic resistance fighters, the majority of the French accommodated in one way or another to the German presence. Those who sought to survive by carrying on with their usual activities and those who chose to collaborate actively with the enemy were separated only by shades, between a compulsory and structural accommodation on the one side, and a voluntary and

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[40] Ibid., p. 82. For a similar argument relating to the French presence in Algeria, cf. J. K. Gosnell, *The politics of frenchness in colonial Algeria, 1930-1954* (Rochester, NY, 2002).
[41] Caucanas, Cazals and Payen, eds, *Les prisonniers de guerre dans l'histoire.*
[42] B. Zimmermann and M. Werner, "Penser l'histoire croisée : entre empire et réflexivité", *Annales. Histoire, Sciences Sociales* 58 (2003), pp. 7-36.
[43] Espagne, "Limites", p. 112.
[44] Ibid.
[45] For example H. Umbreit, *Der Militärbefehlshaber in Frankreich, 1940-1944* (Boppard/Rhein, 1968), p. 170 and L. Steinberg, *Les Allemands en France, 1940-1944* (Paris, 1980), pp. 8, 333-335.
[46] P. Burrin, *La France à l'heure allemande* (Paris, 1997).

opportunistic accommodation on the other side. Although Burrin's work added a new level of sophistication to the study of the occupation, it was limited in that it did not take into consideration the various forms of everyday, non-organised resistance to the occupier, especially in the heavily occupied regions. The fact that Burrin mainly uses examples from the Paris area and mostly out of the higher spheres of the French society is certainly connected to this simplification of the French attitudes under the occupation. However, Burrin's merit is also to dedicate a whole chapter to the individual relations between French and Germans during the occupation[47]. He attempts to sketch the contact zones between the occupier and the occupied while however, minimising these: "The troops have their own places for life, leisure, prayer and even shopping, which limits the meeting occasions, especially for the operation troops. […] The French would have mainly met Germans searching their road[48]." Especially, he notices a difference in the behaviour in the public space and those in the private apartments, for example inside houses requisitioned to accommodate soldiers, as well as an apprehension of the soldier that differed according to the own social background, workers being by nature more distrustful towards any form of authority than bourgeois classes, who were more used to international contacts[49]. Jerzy Kochanowski's *In Polnischer Gefangenschaft: Deutsche Kriegsgefangene in Polen 1945-1950*, published in 2004, showed how important prior knowledge of the other was in post-war Poland, for the nature of the relations between German POWs and the civil population. While German POWs were employed on farms and in coal mines, they had a very different experience of the contacts to the population according to whether locals were used to German presence or not. Especially outside of Silesia, German POWs became targets of intense hostilty[50]. The present thesis embraces a similar approach and extends to the post-war period in France the analysis of topography and social background as important factors for the evolution of the relations between French and Germans.

Furthermore, Burrin exposes a difference between the opinion, generally anti-German, and the individual behaviour with the troops, which could sometimes be heartfelt, especially when French and Germans had similar social origins, when they were part of the same generation or when they had a comparable life experience[51]. A similar

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47 Ibid., pp. 198-215.
48 Ibid., pp. 202-204.
49 Ibid., p. 206-207.
50 J. Kochanowski, *In Polnischer Gefangenschaft: Deutsche Kriegsgefangene in Polen 1945-1950* (Osnabrück, 2004). German presence during and after World War II in other European countries is expected to have had similar effects on the identity of the locals as well as on that of the Germans. However, due to the historical importance of Franco-German relations in the construction of French and German national identities, also with regard to the prominent post-war reconciliation process, the Franco-German case seems unique and appears as hardly comparable to other contexts of war captivity during World War II. The specific conditions of captivity for German POWs in the Soviet Union for example, were marked with the general isolation of the prisoners from the surrounding society, which was far from being the case in France. Cf. A. Hilger, *Deutsche Kriegsgefangene in der Sowjetunion, 1941-1956, Kriegsgefangenenpolitik, Lageralltag und Erinnerung* (Essen, 2000); cf. also B. Moore, "British perceptions of Italian prisoners of war", in Moore and Hately-Broad, eds, *Prisoners of war, prisoners of peace*, pp. 25-40. However, it would go far beyond the scope of the present study to offer a genuine comparative analysis between Normandy and one or several other regions in Europe.
51 Burrin, *La France*, p. 208.

approach inhabits Ian Kershaw's *Popular Opinion and Political Dissent in the Third Reich*, published in 1983, wherein he showed how Bavarian rural societies partly integrated Soviet prisoners of war working as farmhands: according to Kershaw, the forced everyday cohabitation had achieved to undermine the anti-Soviet Nazi propaganda, by showing to the Bavarians for example, that most Russians were practising Christians, like the Bavarians themselves[52]. In 2001, Matthias Reiss's *„Die Schwarzen waren unsere Freunde": deutsche Kriegsgefangene in der amerikanischen Gesellschaft 1942 – 1946* suggests that the integration of German POWs into the society of the United States was often limited to equally low classes of that society[53]. These studies provide an important point of departure for this thesis, which will apply these ideas to the analysis of the forced Franco-German cohabitation in Normandy between 1944 and 1948.

In 1998, Ludger Tewes's *Frankreich in der Besatzungszeit 1940-1943* pointed to the differences between the public space and the private sphere in French-German relations during the occupation years – an approach that is equally useful for the present study, where it will be extended to the post-war years and the relations between German POWs and French civilians[54]. Based on nearly 830 narratives and testimonies of German veterans of the Occupation, Tewes book shows what life as an occupier looked like for the German rank and file. The various narratives express an evolution in the relations between German troops and French civilians during the Occupation, especially in public space: Whereas at first, German soldiers easily got in touch with the civilians in the cities and villages, relations cooled from the winter of 1942-1943. Such an evolution however, seems absent from the inside of the houses where German soldiers were billeted and where they faced, according to the personality of their host, welcomes that were sometimes cold, sometimes heartfelt, mostly non hostile, independent from exterior events. This thesis will examine if such a clear distinction between public and private space can be observed with the relations between Germans and French after the Liberation.

The private sphere is central to Fabrice Virgili's study of sexual relations between German soldiers and French women. In his 2000 book, *La France « virile », Des femmes tondues à la Libération* he analyses at first the shearings of women accused with "horizontal collaboration" in the larger context of the wild Épuration that shattered France during the liberation, but does not fail to position the encounters between German soldiers and French women in the context of the German occupation[55]. The theme of the private sphere is more especially used in *Naître ennemi, Les enfants de couples franco-allemands nés pendant la Seconde Guerre mondiale*, published nine years later, where Virgili presents the hypothesis of a relation of cause and effect between the heavy presence of German troops north of the demarcation line and the rise in illegitimate births in these regions[56]. The various degrees of cohabitation between French civilians and German POWs, ranging from exploitation to friendship and sometimes love, will be analysed under a

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[52] Kershaw, *Popular opinion.*
[53] Reiss, *Die Schwarzen waren unsere Freunde.*
[54] L. Tewes, *Frankreich in der Besatzungszeit 1940-1943, Die Sicht deutscher Augenzeugen* (Bonn, 1998).
[55] F. Virgili, *La France « virile », Des femmes tondues à la Libération* (Paris, 2000).
[56] Virgili, *Naître ennemi, Les enfants de couples franco-allemands nés pendant la Seconde Guerre mondiale* (Paris, 2009), pp. 155-156.

similar angle in the present study, by asking the question of the factors influencing these relations: personal experiences with the other; local density and duration of stay of the German POWs; life perspectives and expectations.

From the early 2000s, two British scholars attempted to write the history of the German occupation in France as the history of a foreign presence, an approach that will be widely applied to the present thesis in the context of German war captivity in France. Thus in 2001, Julian Jackson, in his anthology *France, The Dark Years*, wrote that "in smaller communities, the Germans inevitably become part of the rhythms of local life"[57] – an assertion that will be tested on the post-war period in this thesis. Just one year later, Robert Gildea published his *Marianne in Chains*, a detailed study of everyday life of the Loire valley between Saint-Nazaire and Tours during the German occupation[58]. Gildea dedicates a chapter to the "cohabitation" between occupiers and occupied, in which he describes the different facets that the Franco-German contacts could bear during the occupation, explaining that these depended largely on the individual personalities of the persons concerned and on the social environment where they took place[59]. To conclude, Gildea writes that "ordinary French and Germans also learned to live together" during the occupation[60]. The present study of the German POWs in Normandy after the Liberation will investigate whether individual post-war relations were modulated in a similar way, and fill in the historiographical gap which puts an end to individual Franco-German relations at the Liberation.

The historiography of war captivity in the twentieth century also only slowly departed from national history writing, which generally considered war captivity as an experience mainly marked with suffering, deprivation and hardship. Only a few publications reticently approached the question of its indirect cultural and social consequences, such as they will be discussed in this thesis. In 1971 Kurt W. Böhme published *Die deutschen Kriegsgefangenen in französischer Hand* and therein only hinted at the evolution "from below" of the relations between French and Germans after an extended cohabitation. He identified the fact of working together at a same task as a main condition for a successful integration of the foreign group into the autochthonous society:

> Beyond the significant material benefits, the work of the POWs in France also brought an equally significant psychological value. The common work place, and this only, offered to the French and the Germans after the Occupation and the war a favourable occasion to learn to know and to respect each other as humans. But before the wall of prejudices, false estimations and hatred could be overcome, the prisoners had some bitter stages to leave behind. At the end of the path, that passed through a strict reservation and sometimes apathy, there was tacit or open acknowledgment from the civil population, and sometimes lasting friendship. Even though the times that passed contributed to that, the work in common was the determining catalyser that enabled this evolution[61].

[57] J. Jackson, *France, The dark years, 1940-1944* (New York, 2003), p. 285.
[58] Gildea, *Marianne*.
[59] Ibid., pp. 42-69.
[60] Ibid., p. 404.
[61] K. W. Böhme, *Die deutschen Kriegsgefangenen in französischer Hand* (Bielefeld, 1971), p. 209.

The aim of this thesis will be to show that the process of "reconciliation" was not only based on the peaceful cohabitation of individuals of both groups after a time of suffering as postulated by Böhme, but that a multitude of factors influenced on the post-war relations and led to the overcoming of old stereotypes – especially since it has been shown by historians, such as Jackson and Gildea, that the preceding experience of German occupation in France had not been uniformly negative and, as shown by Tewes, could also lead to "lasting friendship". Similarly, Helga Bories-Sawala pointed in 2003 to the consequences on post-war Franco-German relations of the forced labour engagement of Frenchmen in Germany during World War II:

> There are human contacts with work colleagues, with German women, with the civil population in general, which contributed to a very differentiated appreciation of the neighbour people as reflected by the testimonies of former POWs or labour deportees. An everyday understanding, solidarities, sometimes friendship or even love could arise within a situation of exception and often beyond political considerations. These experiences are certainly an explanation for the fact that many French who experienced an often painful period of exile were nevertheless among the most active in the creation of Franco-German twinnings and the exchanges with both Germanies after the war[62].

In 2008, Rüdiger Overmans asked a similar question, regarding repercussion on the Franco-German relations of the forced cohabitation of both peoples, almost four decades after the conclusion formulated by Böhme:

> What experiences did the German soldiers bring home from France? While misery is present in every narrative, especially when dealing with the time of the capitulation and the immediate post-war period, there are also generally positive personal relations, taking place after a first phase of hatred, which are underlined. The fact that most of the POWs lived within the life sphere of their employers had a greater impact on the change of ideas than would have had the omission of re-educational measures. Remains to be studied to what extent these experiences have contributed to make of the Franco-German reconciliation a success[63].

Both Bories-Sawala and Overmans have pointed the way to the importance of captivity for post-war identity and relations but did not deepen their exploration of the identified phenomena. The aim of this study will therefore be to take on the analysis of "these experiences" in order to evaluate how they influenced the French self-conception in the context of the dominating anti-German discourse, and to perceive the indirect consequences of this cohabitation, as well as their long-term impact on the relations between France and Germany.

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[62] H. Bories-Sawala, "Aspects de la vie quotidienne des requis en Allemagne", in *La main-d'œuvre française exploitée par le III*ème *Reich* (Caen, 2003), p. 145.
[63] Overmans, "Das Schicksal", p. 464.

The Germans in the (re)construction of the French national identity

As already mentioned, the representation of the Germans as a national enemy to the French had largely been used since the 19th century in the construction of the French national identity. After a short hiatus during the defeat of France in 1940, the rising French resistance reinitiated the process of using the image of the German enemy to shape the French national identity. This development was indirectly fostered by the paradoxical change the image of the Germans had undergone among a majority of French within a few weeks, and which was seen as a call for action among the first members of the resistance. In fact, after a phase of collective demonisation of the Germans after the entry of Wehrmacht troops into France, the armistice and the German occupation of the country surprisingly gave birth to the almost unanimous idea of the Germans being "correct". The explanation for this sudden change in perception lay not only in the actual behaviour of the Germans – by far less violent towards the French population than expected –, but above all in the de facto disappearance of the French state during the exodus. The context of this institutional void in France enabled German propaganda to play out its strengths very efficiently, notably by replacing the negative image of the German soldiers by a much more positive one: on posters the Germans were now depicted as well-mannered and sympathetic men who brought an end to the chaos in France. In coordination with a severe enforcement of discipline within the German army and an efficient care programme for the refugees organised by humanitarian organisations such as the Nationalsozialistische Volkswohlfahrt (NSV, "National Socialist People's Welfare"), providing civilians with food, health care and housing, the results of this policy were significant. According to official reports, between 6 June and 20 August 1944 the NSV distributed in France 42.6 million meals, and provided healthcare in 93,000 cases; 700,000 children were taken care of and NSV nurses assisted the birth of 600 babies[64].

From the summer of 1940, the goal of the young French resistance was to reverse this positive opinion of the Germans, by re-mobilising the image of the German as a common enemy to the French. For the next four years, this idea was continuously used and developed by De Gaulle and in underground resistance literature and publications. It can be noticed that the type of representations of the Germans used by the French resistance during the occupation varied strongly from those images created during World War I and which had been reused in 1939-1940, until the French defeat. Eventually, this type of anti-German propaganda had proven inefficient, and new images had to be found. Therefore, from his first public appearances through BBC radio speeches from London, De Gaulle inserted a renewed anti-German discourse to resuscitate the shattered French national self-esteem. Surprisingly, the actual behaviour of the German soldiers in

[64] Der Chef der Militärverwaltung in Frankreich, Kommandostab, Abt. Ia, Br.B.Nr. Ia 60/40 g.Kdos., Lagenbericht des Chefs der Militärverwaltung in Frankreich – Kommandostab – für den Monat August 1940, Paris, 2 September 1940, Bundesarchiv-Militärarchiv (BA-MA), RW 35/10. Cf. also H. Vorländer, *Die NSV, Darstellung und Dokumentation einer nationalsozialistischen Organisation* (Boppard/Rhein, 1988); P. Hammerschmidt, *Die Wohlfahrtsverbände im NS-Staat, Die NSV und die konfessionellen Verbände Caritas und Innere Mission im Gefüge der Wohlfahrtspflege des Nationalsozialismus* (Opladen, 1999).

France and the policy of repression and economical exploitation played only a minor role in De Gaulle's eyes. His point was clear right from the beginning of the German occupation, when most of the crimes and injustices were still to be committed by the Germans: the French have not lost the war, and will continue the fight. In his first BBC speech of 18 June 1940, De Gaulle – a specialist of mechanised warfare whose concepts had inspired the German tactics – already reduced the German victory to their superior use of "mechanical force, on land and in the air". Considering the chaotic situation of France at this time, with millions of refugees away from their homes, this was a surprisingly unemotional way to analyse the French defeat! Contrary to the rumours that circulated in France until then, he did not mobilise any images of World War I. According to him, "it was the tanks, the aeroplanes, the tactics of the Germans that surprised our leaders". He rhetorically asked: "But has the last word been said? Must hope disappear? Is defeat final?" Before replying:

> No! Believe me, I who am speaking to you with full knowledge of the facts, and who tell you that nothing is lost for France. The same means that overcame us can bring us victory one day. (…) Vanquished today by mechanical force, in the future we will be able to overcome by a superior mechanical force[65].

Military logic prevailed in De Gaulle's views on the German occupation of France and over the four years of the German occupation, this line would remain more or less the same, pulling from the actual occupation experience of the French only those examples capable of supporting it, and never transforming the French into helpless victims of the Germans, but presenting them as a fighting nation, waiting for the right moment to enter into action. More: De Gaulle painted the picture of a French nation that was not condemned to defeat, but that would be victorious again over the Germans through the renewed strength of its armed forces and the efficiency of its strategy[66]. The scheme of a fighting France and the perspective of a victorious France would prove successful and gain the adherence of large parts of the French population.

The manifold characteristics of the German presence during the occupation, and especially those patterns of behaviour that could not be qualified as hostile, humiliating or violent, remained unaccounted for. The question of the varying living conditions of the civilians during the occupation is certainly an important one, but has ultimately only little significance for the identity construction of the French: It is unlikely, for example, that a considerable improvement of these conditions would have strongly altered the French opinion on the German occupation.

More importantly, writers participating in the French Résistance who had stayed in France contributed to the construction of an invisible wall between the Germans and those of the French who were forced to endure their presence. As early as August 1940,

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[65] Speech by Charles De Gaulle, 18 June 1940, http://www.charles-de-gaulle.org/pages/l-homme/dossiers-thematiques/1940-1944-la-seconde-guerre-mondiale/l-appel-du-18-juin/documents/l-appel-du-18-juin-1940.php, accessed on 15 November 2014.

[66] Cf. M. Waechter, *Der Mythos des Gaullismus. Heldenkult, Geschichtspolitik und Ideologie, 1940-1958* (Göttingen, 2006).

the journalist Jean Texcier clandestinely published his *Conseils à l'occupé* ("Advice to the occupied"), a small guide to a dignified behaviour under the enemy occupation[67]. According to Texcier, honourable behaviour included the refusal to speak to German soldiers, even those who spoke French, and avoiding contact with French sympathisers of the occupiers. Two years later, *Le Silence de la mer* ("The Silence of the Sea") of Jean Bruller alias Vercors was published, and the view turned towards the inside of the requisitioned houses – reflecting the reality that many French were forced to accommodate German soldiers and, thus, to meet them everyday[68]. The author described the life in a house occupied by a German officer who, cultivated and Francophile, hit the obstinate refusal of his hosts to communicate with him – to his great frustration.

While it was difficult to keep a physical distance from the occupiers, the French indeed started to build the collective narrative of an invisible wall between themselves and the omnipresent Germans, following the examples of Texcier and Vercors. Especially in the public space, the French tried increasingly to ignore the Germans[69]. In spite of an active collaborationist counter-propaganda, this vision of the occupation became more and more widely accepted and after the military turning point of the winter 1942-43 it became the only socially tolerated view in the public space, especially in the cities. While until then, people could still have talked to German soldiers on the streets, this now became more and more dangerous, as most of the French knew that the liberation was only a matter of time and that the resistance had already started to compile lists of collaborators. Pierre Laborie remarks a "hardening of Germanophobia" in the French public opinion from 1943[70]. In Normandy in February 1943, the German authorities reported that "the attitude of the population becomes more and more distant these days"[71].

During the liberation of France, the German enemy had to play a similar role to unite the French society and the idea of isolated Germans was collectively mobilised during the Épuration, the phase of political cleansing in France, in order to enforce the new union of the society by identifying and punishing those French who were suspected of not having respected the invisible wall between both groups. A very visible means of retaliation of "unhonourable" behaviour during the occupation was the shearing of

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[67] Extracts of Jean Texcier's *Conseils à l'occupé* were repeatedly read by Maurice Schumann, the spokesman of Charles de Gaulle and Free France, during his BBC radio broadcast *Honneur et Patrie*. Cf. Comité des Amis de Jean Texcier, *Jean Texcier, Un homme libre, 1888-1957* (Paris, 1960).

[68] In 1941 Jean Bruller, together with Pierre de Lescure, created Les Editions de Minuit, one of the most prolific clandestine publishing houses in occupied France, in order to organise the anonymous publication of *Le Silence de la Mer*. A first edition of 350 copies ran quickly out of print, and Charles De Gaulle, who had received a copy of *Le Silence de la Mer* in London, ordered an extended reprint to promote its reach and impact. Cf. A. Simonin, *Les Editions de Minuit, 1942-1955, Le devoir d'insoumission* (Paris, 1994). Cf. also B. Moore, ed, *Resistance in Western Europe* (Berg, 2000).

[69] Others were not contented with the idea of an invisible wall: In a heavily occupied village near the coast of Calvados, a family forced to house a group of German soldiers, erected a palisade to close the court yard to avoid any form of contact with the occupiers. Cf. testimony of Mr G, quoted in Quellien, *Opinions*, p. 77.

[70] Cf. P. Laborie, "1943 : solidarités et ambivalences de la France moyenne", in J.-P. Azéma and F. Bédarida, eds, *La France des années noires*, vol. 2, *De l'Occupation à la Libération* (Paris, 1993), p. 365.

[71] Gen.Kdo. LXXXI. A.K., Tätigkeitsbericht Ic, 16.12.1942 – 6.6.1943, Lagebeurteilung vom 15.2.-21.2.1943, BA-MA, RH 24-81/81.

women who were found guilty of sexual involvement with Germans[72]. Fabrice Virgili sees in the shearings a way for the French manhood to reconquer France after a humiliating defeat, the war captivity in Germany and the enemy occupation at home. Failing to ensure their protecting role over France in 1940 and unable to effectively resist the German occupier over four years, Frenchmen, Virgili states, needed to reaffirm their virility through violence in the track of the liberation. In his book *La joie douloureuse* Philippe Buton depicts the shearings of French women as an almost religious ceremony designed to purify the local communities after four years of collective atony and a feeling of guilt[73]. A central theme to the present thesis will be to analyse how the paradigm of the invisible wall was dealt with in presence of thousands of German POWs being employed for French benefits after the Liberation.

Available literature dealing with the German POWs in France after World War II generally defends the political interpretation that considered the German occupation of France as the absolute low point of the Franco-German relations – relations that the POWs, held as a measure of reparation in France, would then be the first to renew, mainly due to their work and their everyday contact with the French, making them the pioneers of the reconciliation process, almost twenty years before its officialisation. The present thesis aims to verify this assumption and to confront it with an approach that focuses on low-level individual relations, not only under the angle of political modulation, but also in the framework a forced cohabitation giving rise among other things, to economic pragmatism and banal human relations.

Sources

The chosen regional framework for this dissertation enables the study to be pushed to a granular level and thus expose aspects of the evolution of Franco-German relations between 1944 and 1948 that would not be reflected by documents from higher governmental offices. The in-depth examination of such local level records and their utilisation in a transnational approach, using personal testimonies and narratives as well as the local press, enables an analysis beyond larger official political and operational interests down to the very base of the French society and its relation to the foreign individuals represented by thousands of German POWs.

Governmental sources include military and ministerial archives of the countries involved during the considered period, that is to say Germany, France, the United Kingdom and the United States. Military archives issued by different levels of the hierarchy concede information in relation to different aspects of German war captivity. Allied and German high command or ministerial documents inform on organisational questions and on policies, as well as on general statistics without precise geographical references, whereas military documents issued on a company level report to losses at a

[72] Similar operations of unorganised retaliation took place in most of the countries formerly under German occupation, cf. K. Ericsson and E. Simonsen, eds, *Children of World War II – the hidden enemy legacy* (Oxford, 2005).
[73] Buton, *La joie*.

precise place on the German side, and to prisoners made or employed on the Allied side, often with a precise geographical localisation. Thus, documents from governmental offices allow us in the first place to gain knowledge on numbers of prisoners held and on the location of the camps and labour units. Therefore, we are enabled to compare these numbers with general statistics on the French civil population in order to show the proportion and the local conditions of German prisoners living among the civilians. To cite one example, British and American labour company reports can show the number of prisoners working in one location and on the problems they are enduring while in contact with the French. Identifying those Allied companies holding German POWs for the use as labour presents however, several difficulties common to most archive centres visited, which can only be resolved by systematic identification of the troops involved by going through the military hierarchy in place and searching new indications on each lower level. Low level governmental documents, either coming from military or civil offices moreover, contain important sections relating to "public opinion" and "local economy". Produced by different information services which document public sayings and thoughts. For example, in bars or other public locations, "opinion reports" reflect what people think about German POWs living or working close to them. These documents thus show us the evolution of the public opinion toward the Germans as individuals and not as a state or an army. Finding their way "up" through the hierarchy to higher administrative or military levels, these seemingly low scale reports actually have an important influence on decision makers as they show whether or not a political decision will be supported by the population.

Non-governmental sources include the archives of the International Committee of the Red Cross, those of the World Council of Churches, and documents belonging to the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA). Documents from these offices shed light on the living and working conditions of the POWs and can thus detail the evolution of these conditions throughout the period and from one custody power to another. The reading of these reports however, requires special attention since the wording proves quite flexible according for example, to the living conditions of the surrounding population or inside the army holding the prisoners[74]. These reports contain information on the localisation of the camps and on the numbers of prisoners locally held, thus enlightening the relationship between prisoners and the civilians living close to the camps.

Personal narratives play a particular role in this project as they give us an in-depth insight into thoughts, feelings and experiences of POWs and French civilians who are in contact with each at the start of the post-occupation period. Crossing both German and French narratives should enable us to test my hypotheses. Besides local narratives on the liberation period, several Germans, formerly POWs in France, have published their memories of captivity in form of books. Other testimonies include short letters or small memoires mostly written for friends and family, which I collected during my research.

[74] On the particular wording and phrasing of the Red Cross reports, cf. V. Vourkoutiotis, 'What the Angels Saw: Red Cross and Protecting Power Visits to Anglo-American POWs, 1939-45', *Journal of Contemporary History*, vol. 40 (2005), pp. 689-706; cf. also C. Winter, 'Neutral intermediaries? The role of the Swiss Government in looking after internees during the Second World War', in J. Beaumont, I. Martinuzzi O'Brien and M. Trinca, eds, *Under suspicion: Citizenship and internment in Australia during the Second World War* (Canberra, 2008), pp. 52-66.

However, the most notable collection of individual memories of former German POWs was gathered in the late 1950s and the early 1960s for the account of the Maschke Commission, charged by the German government to compile the series of publications *Zur Geschichte der Deutschen Kriegsgefangenen des Zweiten Weltkrieges*. The series include three volumes of interest to this project and treating the German war captivity in France under 1) American authority (volume X/2), 2) British authority (volume XI/1), 3) French authority (volume XIII). These three volumes include numerous accounts on living conditions and interaction with the civil population. Additionally, I was enabled to directly consult some of these written testimonies at the Bundesarchiv-Militärarchiv in Freiburg-im-Breisgau, where they are conserved today. Recent major pieces of work by Sönke Neitzel and Felix Römer compile and analyse conversations between German POWs taped by the British and American military intelligence services shortly after the capture of the soldiers. These exceptional documents allow an important insight into the state of mind of the German POWs[75]. Moreover, a series of French collective publications can be relied on, the most notable being *La Bataille de Normandie* (2 volumes), directed by René Herval and published as early as 1947[76]. Including more than one hundred personal narratives by French civilians or Résistance fighters, the series depict many aspects of the battle through a very local point of view. German POWs are frequently present in these local accounts, thus giving an insight into the civilians' knowledge about their living conditions and the thoughts about the Germans in general. Another collection of contemporary narratives has recently been compiled by Marie-Josèphe Bonnet under the title *Les voix de la Normandie combattante*[77]. While focusing on the narratives of Résistance fighters in Normandy this collection points, for example, to the German war captivity in the hands of FFI combatants[78].

Finally and in spite of the difficulty in finding reliable witnesses to the events under study, I have been able to personally interview forty-four witnesses, French and Germans, who contacted me after reading requests of testimonies in the local press of Normandy as well as the in main German veterans' magazine, *Stimme & Weg*, edited by the Volksbund Deutsche Kriegsgräberfürsorge e.V. After a first written contact, I generally visited and sometimes phoned to the witnesses in order to deepen the interview. Questions asked to these witnesses revolved around living conditions, everyday life and the contact to the other. Several witnesses passed away before scheduled interviews, which made the collection of testimonies more difficult, also from a psychological point of view. Moreover, it is expected that a French witness is likely to relate differently, Franco-German relations during and after the war whether he talks to a German interviewer like myself, or to one of his fellow citizens. In the introduction to *Marianne in Chains*, Robert Gildea asks the question whether the fact of being himself a British citizen and thus belonging to none of the "sides" of the French society, could

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[75] S. Neitzel, ed, *Abgehört, Deutsche Generäle in britischer Gefangenschaft 1942-1945* (Berlin, 2009); Neitzel and H. Welzer, *Soldaten, Protokolle vom Kämpfen, Töten und Sterbe* (Frankfurt, 2011); F. Römer*, Kameraden, Die Wehrmacht von innen*, (Munich, 2012).

[76] R. Herval, ed., *Bataille de Normandie. Récits de témoins* (Paris, 1947).

[77] M.-J. Bonnet, ed, *Les voix de la Normandie combattante, été 1944* (Rennes, 2010).

[78] Forces Françaises de l'Intérieur, French Forces of the Interior.

have influenced the French witnesses he interviewed in the way they related their experience during the occupation. However, experience tends to prove that the witnesses are more likely to modulate their narrative in terms of its form, insisting for example on the good Franco-German relations nowadays, rather than in terms of its proper content. Thus, Gildea's method will be followed, according to whom "personal narratives are shaped by dominating discourses, but they differ also either wholly or at crucial points, and these privileged moments can allow the historian to glimpse alternative interpretations which had until then been marginalized or suppressed"[79].

Chapter outline

The thesis will follow a chronological outline of six chapters, divided into two parts; the first part dealing with the German POWs in Normandy under Allied control, the second part addressing the question of French administration of German prisoners in this region.

The first chapter examines the transformation of the German from occupiers to prisoners during the battle of Normandy. The capture of the Germans, mostly by Allied and not by French troops, actually exacerbated the frustration of the French national feelings, after four years of German occupation and in the context of a rising national discourse proclaiming the self-liberation of France by the French themselves. This feeling of frustration was increased from August 1944, when the German troops in Normandy appeared more and more frequently to the French as poorly equipped and disciplined.

The second chapter addresses another reason for the frustration of the French national feelings, that is to say the use made by the Allies of these prisoners during the battle. The question will be raised as to know how this influenced relations between Germans and French. While the French population experienced the long expected liberation, Allied military interests had the effect of isolating German prisoners from the French population, thus favouring the rise of generalised opinions on the Germans and outbursts of collective violence against them in the framework of the progressive reconstruction of the French national identity, partly based on the idea of a Franco-German antagonism.

The third chapter explores the continuity and fractures in relations between German prisoners under Allied custody and French civilians beyond the end of the summer 1944 and the completion of the liberation of the region Normandy. The Allied military presence was labelled by some French as a new form of occupation, but the increasingly open criticism towards the liberators must be seen as the expression of a growing frustration about the lack of control on the own land and on the German prisoners locally held. Ultimately, the Allies prevented the balance of power ruling the relations between Germans and French to be reversed.

[79] Gildea, *Marianne*, p. 367.

The second part starts with chapter four, which examines the transfer of the German POWs from Allied to French authorities. The transfer agreements on the high level can be seen as a reversal of the balance of power between Germans and French after four years of German domination in France. These transfers fit De Gaulle's discourse of a victorious France holding enemy prisoners as a proof of this victory, and they respond to a growing will for revenge of the civil population, strongly influenced by De Gaulle's own conceptions of the reconstruction of the French identity in unity against Germany and the Germans.

The fifth chapter will then analyse the consequences of this transfer on Franco-German relations inside the prisoner camps, now under French authority. At this intermediate level of relations, midway between the decision makers and the public opinion, the increased surface of contact between French and Germans led to differentiated patterns of behaviour, clearly departing from the direct application of attitudes dictated by the dominant anti-German discourse.

Finally, the sixth and last chapter focuses on the relations between the German prisoners under French control and the civil population outside the camps in the working places. The employment of the Germans by the French consolidated the reversal of the balance of power between both groups after the end of the German occupation in France. While one of the goals of De Gaulle's programme was being realised, the numerous lasting everyday contacts between French and German individuals finally undermined the anti-German public discourse. In fact, the indirect side effects of the prisoner presence started to counterbalance the goals of the initial direct political use of their captivity in France.

Chapter 1
Battle of Normandy: Turning occupiers into POWs

Until the Allied landings[1], the German troops in Normandy represented in the eyes of the civilian population, the German occupation of France, regardless of the actual role of these troops as combat forces, administrative services or technical units. Since their arrival in 1940, the German soldiers had acted in France within the legal framework of their own army, the French having no power over them. Regardless of the manifold character of the relations between German occupiers and French civilians over four years, this constituted a huge humiliation to the French feeling of national pride, mainly because a large part of the French national identity had decidedly been constructed in opposition to Germany and the Germans.

The Allied landings on the Normandy beaches on 6 June 1944 transformed this relationship and challenged German power over the French. For the French, the landings represented the hope of an end to the national humiliation of enemy occupation. However, those hopes were soon to be disappointed, and a number of reasons hindered civilians from facing the future with serenity: The rapid disembarkation and the billeting of hundreds of thousands of Allied soldiers; the destruction created by the intense fighting and bombing; the replacement of the German military authorities by Allied army services; the uncertainty as for the future of the region from the military as well as the political point of view made people fear a German counter attack no more than the establishment by the Allies of a new military administration. Around 20,000 civilians died during the battle, mostly as a consequence of Allied air bombing[2]. In no way did the civilian population consider the progressive liberation of Normandy as a return to normal pre-war conditions.

At the same time, the liberation of France had to receive an official interpretation, to serve the reconstruction of the French national identity. As shown in the introductory chapter, this interpretation had two main elements: on the one hand, the official discourse as propagated by De Gaulle presented "the Germans" as a homogeneous enemy group in opposition to which the quarrelling French could unite. In order to reinforce the effect of this discourse, the Germans were never described in a

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[1] A great number of books have been published on the battle of Normandy. The most important are: A. Beevor, *D-Day, The battle for Normandy* (London, 2009); O. Wieviorka, *Histoire du débarquement en Normandie, Des origines à la libération de Paris 1941-1944* (Paris, 2007); D. Vogel, "Deutsche und alliierte Kriegführung im Westen", in H. Boog, G. Krebs and D. Vogel, *Das Deutsche Reich in der Defensive* (Stuttgart, 2001), pp. 419-639; N. Zetterling, *Normandy 1944, German Military Organization, Combat Power and Organizational Effectiveness*, (Winnipeg, MB, 2000); S. E. Ambrose, *D-Day, June 6, 1944. The climactic battle of World War II* (New York, 1994); Quellien, *Jour J et bataille de Normandie : La Normandie au cœur de la guerre* (Rennes, 2004); M. Hastings, *Overlord, D-Day and the Battle for Normandy* (New York, 1984); C. D'Este, *Decision in Normandy* (New York, 1983); D. Ose, *Entscheidung im Westen, 1944. Der Oberbefehlshaber West und die Abwehr der alliierten Invasion* (Freiburg, 1982); M. Blumenson, *La Libération, L'histoire officielle américaine : la percée, l'échappée et la poursuite* (Condé-sur-Noireau, 1993).

[2] J. Quellien and F. Passera, *Les civils dans la bataille de Normandie* (Bayeux, 2014).

differentiated way. De Gaulle thus consciously ignored the realities on the ground, as experienced by the French, in order to promote the popular adhesion to his programme and his person. On the other hand, the French had to liberate themselves from this enemy, and they had to gain consciousness of this self-liberation. Therefore, De Gaulle would present them as patriotic *résistants* having fought the occupation since 1940, the most prominent part of this narrative of national resurrection being the liberation of Paris by the 2nd French Armoured Division on 25 August 1944. De Gaulle immediately seized the moment to deliver one of his most famous speeches, from the balcony of the Paris City Hall. In it, he insisted that the city was "liberated by itself, liberated by its people with the help of the French armies, with the support and the help of all France, of the France that fights, of the only France, of the real France, of the eternal France (…) France returns to Paris, to her home"[3]. In this constellation, the German POWs would ideally come to symbolise France's self-liberation[4]. Of course, the German soldiers captured during the battle in Normandy played only a minor role in the every day concerns of civilians, especially as they were generally evacuated from the region shortly after their capture. Indirectly however, the circumstances of their capture had the potential to challenge the official discourse as propagated by De Gaulle of the self-liberation from a uniformly odious German enemy. In fact, the discourse meant to foster the national identity was challenged in Normandy by a nuanced reality during the battle.

This chapter will first examine how the battle revealed to many civilians in Normandy that there was no such thing as "the Germans". The German armed forces were in no way a coherent group uniformly fighting for political goals. The troops were divided by deep inner fractures that became increasingly visible to the French during the battle. Testimonies of Normans will be used to shed light on how the local population received the Germans in their midst. We will then explore how De Gaulle's idea of the French self-liberation was challenged by the reality of the minor role played by the French in the capture of German soldiers in Normandy, the region being mostly liberated by the Allies. French sources will be used to test whether the inhabitants of Normandy bought into De Gaulle's discourse and whether their experience reflected or contradicted the narrative De Gaulle wished to place on the events. Finally, we will address the issue of the frustration resulting from the obvious distance between the ideas promoted by the official discourse and the reality in Normandy revealed to the civilian population during the entry into war captivity of the German soldiers. Especially through Allied action, the French were denied the psychological release of a clear unambiguous military victory over the Germans, to symbolically throw off chains and reverse the roles after four years of German occupation and in the context of a rising national discourse proclaiming the self-liberation of France by the French.

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[3] Speech by Charles de Gaulle in Paris on 25 August 1944, published on http://www.charles-de-gaulle.org/pages/espace-pedagogique/le-point-sur/les-textes-a-connaitre/discours-de-lrsquohotel-de-ville-25-aout-1944.php, accessed on 7 January 2015.

[4] Although not directly mentioned by De Gaulle during the summer of 1944, the German POWs captured by the French armed forces from autumn 1944 on hold an important place in his *Mémoires de guerre*, where they are mentioned (and counted) at pages 36, 165, 183, 193 and 204. Cf. Ch. de Gaulle, *Mémoires de guerre*, vol. 3, *Le salut, 1944-1946* (Paris, 1959).

I – Revelation: Heterogeneity and dissensions within the German army

After four years of occupation, the battle did not disconnect French civilians and their occupiers from each other. To some extent it even increased the surface of contact: during the battle of Normandy around 500,000 combatants under German command stayed in the region, more than ever before. The nature of the relations between civilians and combatants was far from uniform and ranged from organised local massacres committed by German troops, to Wehrmacht soldiers organising the rescue of civilian victims of air bombing; from soldiers pillaging empty houses, to those seeking shelter with inhabitants to share a moment of quietness and warmth in the middle of the battle. The French also exhibited a wide variety of attitudes, from rescuing injured German soldiers, to letting others die.

While certain patterns of behaviour of the German troops in Normandy fitted into the general conception of strength and discipline, sometimes violence and arbitrariness, other types were contrary to these and thus did not correspond to the general idea of the Germans promoted by the official discourse: panic, lack of discipline, war weariness, desertion. The internal tensions, also due to the fact that many soldiers of the German army were non-Germans, became now more visible to the eyes of the civilians. This differentiated image of "the Germans" became increasingly apparent to the French during the entry into war captivity of their occupiers.

1) The initial shock of the landings disintegrated the morale

The Allied Landings on the Normandy beaches between Ouistreham and Quinéville (codenamed from east to west as Sword, Gold, Juno, Omaha and Utah) constituted a shock to the morale for the German units facing what they called then "the invasion". While the simple sight of the landing fleet was often enough to provoke terror among onlookers and those manning the defences, the ensuing bombings and combat strongly compromising the men's discipline.

The heavily defended areas around the "fortresses" of Cherbourg and Le Havre had been left aside on purpose in the Allied landing plans. The men of static units in charge of poorly fortified coastal strong points between these "fortresses" could only offer limited resistance to the Allied armada and the landing troops and were tempted to surrender quickly. Often, just the view of the Allied fleet facing the Normandy coast was enough to make them realise the hopelessness of their situation. Using equipment that was often outdated and ammunition sometimes available in insufficient quantities, the devastating effect of bombing from both the air and naval artillery, a morale already low in scattered and motley units, as well as the high average age of soldiers, numerous groups surrendered as soon as the Allies stepped on Normandy ground. This was especially true for 716th German Infantry Division between Arromanches and Ouistreham, locally pushed away over almost ten kilometres on D-Day and suffering

significant losses. On the evening of 6 June, grenadier regiment 736 registered the loss of 107 soldiers as prisoners while 93 were reported missing (out of approximately 2,000 men, that is to say 10 per cent), exclusive of the heavy losses of Ostbataillon 642, part of this regiment; the anti-tank battalion of 716th Infantry Division counted 125 soldiers missing, out of around 400 men[5]. Kenneth Taylor, a signals officer with the 6th Battalion of the Green Howards, attached to the 50th British Infantry Division, landed on Gold Beach on the morning of 6 June. He wrote in his diary that "quite a number of prisoners coming in [were] looking completely dazed[6]."

German troops engaged on D-Day often succumbed to alcohol abuse[7]. The French civilians were aware of these problems; in Tribehou, département Manche, wounded soldiers were observed by the civilian population as early as 8 June, "some of them wearing civil clothes, others being drunk[8]."

2) Desertion and surrender dynamics

Decreasing morale is expected to have an impact on the tendency of soldiers to desert[9]. In his study on the 253rd German Infantry Division engaged on the eastern front, Christoph Rass has shown that desertions, whether they headed for the rear area of the own army or into the hands of the adversary, cannot always be explained either by an unfavourable course of military events or a political resentment, but by the individual conception of one's personal situation at a given point of the war. This may be discouragement, depression, the will to see one's relatives again, problems with the hierarchy, traumas due to the fighting, etc. Moreover, considering that German units rarely counted more than 20 per cent of non-German personnel, it may be noticed that within this division, the deserters of non-German origin were overrepresented: 6 out of 11 deserters (55 per cent) in 1943, and 15 out of 19 (79 per cent) in 1944[10]. However, Rass's study takes place within the eastern theatre of operations that was much less mobile than Normandy, at least from the end of July 1944. Also, it seems that the reasons to desert in Normandy – or to surrender to the enemy individually or in small groups – were quite different from those advanced by Rass, also because the enemy was not the

5 Casualty lists, 716th Infantry Division, WASt, unlisted series. However, a great number of losses on 6 June were not registered immediately, either due to the loss of the pertaining documents, or to the loss of the officers in charge of carrying these documents. Cf. also Zetterling, *Normandy*, pp. 297-300.

6 War diary of Kenneth Taylor, entry of 6 June 1944, published by his son on http://www.patricktaylor.com/war-diary-1, accessed on 15 March 2011.

7 On the interior evolution of the troops during the battle of Normandy, especially the destruction of the so-called "primary groups", cf. P. Lieb, *Konventioneller Krieg oder NS-Weltanschauungskrieg? Kriegführung und Partisanenbekämpfung in Frankreich 1943/44* (Munich, 2007), p. 424 and C. Rass, *'Menschenmaterial', Deutsche Soldaten an der Ostfront. Innenansichten einer Infanteriedivision 1939-1945* (Paderborn, 2003), pp. 192-204.

8 Narrative on the liberation of Tribehou, by M. Hélie, former director of the school of Tribehou, collected by M. Patry, undated, published in Bonnet, *Voix*, p. 75.

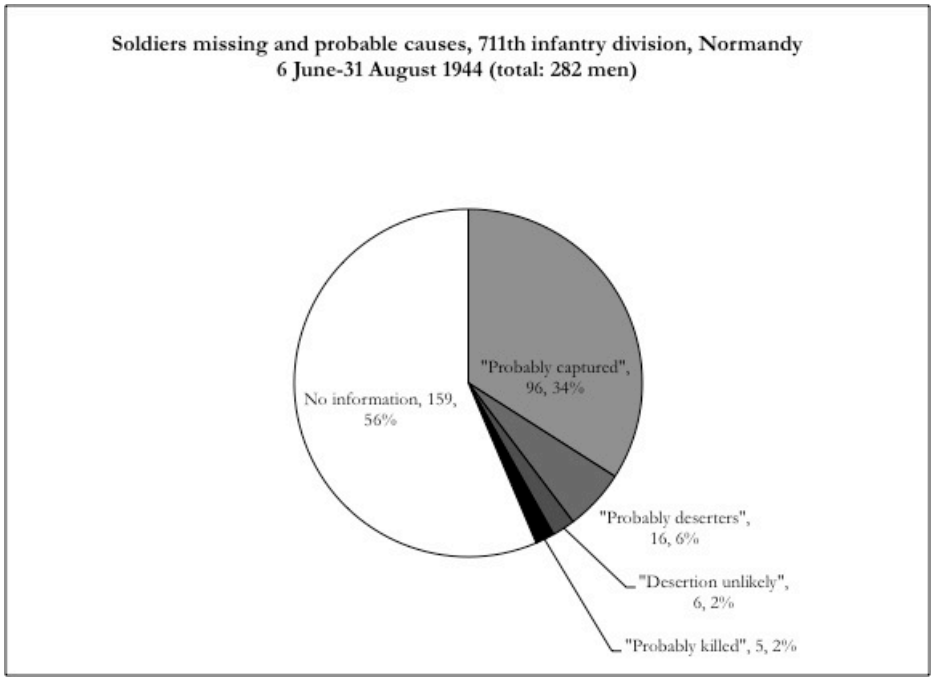
9 H. Afflerbach and H. Strachan, *How fighting ends, A history of surrender* (Oxford, 2012), pp. 1-4.

10 Rass, *Menschenmaterial*, pp. 169-178.

Soviet army but armies whose governments were signatories of the 1929 Geneva Convention relative to the treatment of prisoners of war.

How could it be told that a soldier missing in a combat situation actually deserted? During the battle of Normandy, it was generally difficult for unit commanders to assess whether a missing soldier had deserted, had been killed or was made prisoner. The casualty lists of the German divisions engaged in Normandy between June and September 1944 generally state only an assumption of desertion, for example: "missing, probably deserter", or "missing, probably captured by enemy". Mostly, the only comment made was "missing", without more detail. The following graphic shows how a formation such as the German 711th Infantry Division, engaged in the battle of Normandy from June to August 1944, evaluated why soldiers were missing. To judge if a missing soldier was either "probably captured" or had "probably deserted", the staff relied on information provided by company commanders and on previous evaluations of the soldiers in terms of loyalty and defeatist behaviour. The analysis of the casualty lists of the 711th Infantry Division, which did not count more than 20 per cent of non-German personnel, confirms the strong propensity of non-German soldiers to desert from their units in Normandy, similar to what Rass showed for the eastern front. Out of 16 missing soldiers likely to have deserted between 6 June and 31 August 1944, 11 men were registered as germanised Poles, that is to say more than two thirds[11].

Table 1



Source: WASt, casualty lists of the 711th Infantry Division, unlisted series.

[11] While the political convictions of the commanding staff of this division could lead to suspect of desertion more frequently missing Poles than missing Germans, this assertion needs however to be differentiated: in fact, among those missing from the 711th Infantry Division, 6 soldiers were considered as loyal and not likely to desert – two of them were registered as germanised Poles.

Allied psychological warfare had an important impact on the German soldiers' inclination to desert or surrender, especially since the German propaganda apparatus had failed, until then, to integrate defeated German soldiers into a discourse which had been glorifying combativeness until death from the beginning of the war[12]. In order to contain the proliferation of rumours, stating for example that German POWs would be executed by the Allies, Allied planes started dropping hundreds of thousands of leaflets on German positions and occupied towns on 7 June 1944 assuring enemy soldiers of good treatment. During the summer of 1944 the Allies would drop some 86 million leaflets, mostly in German language. Many soldiers picked them up and, although it remains difficult to measure the precise impact on the German soldiers' psychology to this form of propaganda, 70 to 80 per cent of the German prisoners in American hands admitted having read at least one of these leaflets, while 40 per cent of them had a sample with them during their capture[13].

In addition to the leaflets airdropped over Normandy, the Allies tried to take the psychological edge on the entrenched soldiers of the German army, by means of lorries equipped with loudspeakers, appealing to them in various languages and reassuring them of the humane treatment they would receive in captivity. US Army No. 13 Amplifier Unit, equipped with an amplifier van, entered into action several times on June 26 and 27 in the surroundings of Cherbourg. In the afternoon of 26 June, the unit managed to convince German troops dug in to a wood facing 76th US Infantry Division to surrender, by broadcasting, in English, Polish and German, the following statement:

> Your position is hopeless. If you come over to us you will be treated as honourable POWs. If you insist on fighting this out, you will sacrifice your lives in vain. It is for you to decide whether you desire to see the Fatherland again or to be buried here in France. You have 10 minutes in which to decide. Should you decide to come over, you will approach this van with your hands on your head, and showing a white emblem[14].

Approximately 600 men surrendered within a couple of minutes. The officers, however, tried to negotiate a more honourable exit. In fact, before they surrendered, the commander of the unit required the Americans, for form, to employ phosphorus grenades, as he had at his disposal no means to fight this type of weapon. The Americans agreed to the request and threw six grenades towards the German positions. After the grenades exploded, the German officers inspected them, noted that they had been attacked with phosphorus and therefore surrendered[15].

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12 Théofilakis, *Les prisonniers de guerre allemands*, p. 385.
13 Quellien, *Les Américains en Normandie* (Bayeux, 2012), pp. 178-179. Cf. also N. Wylie, *Barbed Wire Diplomacy, Britain, Germany, and the Politics of Prisoners of War, 1939-1945* (Oxford, 2010), p. 256. On Allied psychological operations in the Pacific, cf. A. B. Gilmore, *You can't fight tanks with bayonets, Psychological warfare against the Japanese army in the southwest Pacific* (Lincoln, NE, 1998).
14 21st Army Group, Psychological Warfare Division, Secret, Subject: Operations of No. 13 Amplifier Unit Against the Cherbourg Garrison on 26-27 June 1944, undated, TNA, WO 171/168.
15 Ibid.

3) An important part of the "Germans" are not Germans

As shown by the example of a call for surrender being sent in Polish, not all of the soldiers fighting with the Wehrmacht were German: up to 20 per cent of the troops under German command in Normandy in 1944, including working parties, were non-Germans. The foreign soldiers incorporated in the German army can be split in two groups: those Osttruppen operating with its own unit – often bearing the name of their nation, such as the Georgisches Infanterie-Bataillon 795, designed to reinforce their will to fight –, and those soldiers of foreign origin integrated in the regular German units. In fact, a series of laws in the annexed regions – especially in Poland, Czechia, Austria and Alsace – had transformed foreign individuals with rather vague German origins into German nationals likely to be incorporated into the Wehrmacht. German troops engaged in Normandy also included a number of Italian volunteers.

During the first stages of the battle of Normandy, the propensity of foreign soldiers, less well integrated in the units and certainly less motivated to fight Germany's war is attested[16]. Despite a few attempts of German propaganda to enliven the national feelings of those minorities repressed by the Soviet Union, the morale within the Osttruppen was generally considered low because their soldiers mostly did not see the logic of their fighting against the Anglo-Americans[17]. Thus, the combativeness of these units serving the coastal defences was generally equally low and surrender, partial or complete, took place in the early stages of the battle.

Although we do not have access to complete figures, soldiers coming from the Osttruppen were overrepresented among deserters. Allied propaganda specifically targeted foreign soldiers in the German army. Shortly after 6 June, the British major L. H. Manderstam landed in Arromanches, having orders of Special Operations Executive (SOE) to demoralise Russian soldiers engaged with the German troops. Due to his messages delivered in Russian, "thousands of Russians surrendered and came across our lines, forming a large part of the soldiers gathered in the prisoner camps"[18]. SHAEF statistics show that amid the soldiers captured in the first days after the landings, non-German soldiers were overrepresented. On 14 June, of a total of 409 war prisoners received at the American base camp at Devizes, Wiltshire, 65 per cent were non-German, with fifty Russians[19].

As long as non-German troops would be engaged during the battle, they would surrender more often than units made of German soldiers. On 9 June 1944, the Russian Ostbataillon 635 failed in front of the Americans and surrendered en masse[20]. On 16

16 Cf. also Vogel, "Kriegführung", p. 500.
17 Lieb, *Krieg*, p. 124.
18 Quoted by G. Coudry, *Les Camps soviétiques en France. Les Russes livrés à Staline en 1945* (Paris, 1997), pp. 125-126.
19 SHAEF, G-2, operational and intelligence summary n° 12, 17 June 1944, TNA, WO 208/5562. It remains to be explored to what extent non-German units were placed in worse positions, sacrificed or not provided with transport to withdraw, allowing "German" units the chance to escape capture or annihilation.
20 Walther Hansen, Tätigkeit bei den Freiwilligenverbänden, Bd. 2, Private Notizen 1942-1945, Maschinenabschrift, entry of 9 June 1944, p. 77, BA-MA, N 304/6.

June, the Georgians of Ostbataillon 561 based at Flamanville deserted[21]. On 6 July 1944, in the region of Saint-Hilaire-du-Harcouët, three Russian deserters joined the local Résistance group, who supplied them with civil clothing and forged papers[22]. On 17 July 1944, during the American progress through the Cotentin region, numerous soldiers of the Georgian infantry battalion 797, stationed in Créances, swam across the inlet of Lessay to surrender to the American troops in front of them, at Saint-German-sur-Ay[23].

The tendency of the non-German soldiers to surrender, or to desert, was no secret to the civilian population. On 28 July, the Georgians of Coutainville allowed themselves to be captured by French gendarmes and a part of the local population without resisting[24]. An inhabitant of Avranches remembers an encounter with a Russian soldier of the German army at the end of July:

> While walking down the road of the Croix-Verte, I met another German – or rather a Russian holding a safe-conduct, paper "colour of hope", thrown in great numbers by plane. He interrogated me on the position of the Americans to do "kamarade". This pseudo-combatant is the last one I saw in a Wehrmacht uniform[25].

Often, the civilian population assisted those soldiers wishing to desert. On 3 September in Limerville, east of Fécamp, a number of Russian soldiers surrendered. Up until then, families had supplied them with civil clothing, and had hidden them[26]. In the northern Cotentin at the end of June, Polish and Italian soldiers were reported to have deserted from their units to find shelter among the civilian population, who accommodated and fed them until the arrival of the Americans[27]. As a result, the tensions within the German units were no longer a secret to the civilian populations, as the narrative of an inhabitant of the Cotentin shows: "After the first engagements, it seemed to me that many soldiers refused to remain in the battle. Officers had to arrest and to force them, under the threat of a revolver, to take back and to conserve their fighting position, but these men were Austrians and Polish[28]." Sometimes, mutinies took place. Between mid-June and early July, members of the Ostbataillone 627 and 797 assassinated their German commanders before surrendering to the Allies[29]. The foreign soldiers incorporated in the German army

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21 Narrative of L. Le Marinel, Les Pieux, undated, published in Herval, *Bataille*, vol. 1, p. 150.
22 'Groupe de Saint-Hilaire-du-Harcouët. Activités depuis le 8 juin', Ray Lefèvre, undated, published in Bonnet, *Voix*, p. 223.
23 Narrative on the liberation of Saint-Lô by M. Charles, teacher at the school of Saint-Lô, communicated by M. Patry, undated, published in Bonnet, *Voix*, p. 213.
24 Narrative of abbot Georges Candel, Coutances, undated, published in Herval, *Bataille*, vol. 1, pp. 181-183; cf. also the narrative of M. A. Legoy, Saint-Lô, undated, published in Herval, *Bataille*, vol. 1, p. 104. However, all the Georgian soldiers did not seem to trust the civilians and the granted conditions of captivity: one retreating Georgian soldier made use of his weapon and killed a young man who attempted to arrest him.
25 Narrative of Jean Seguin, Avranches, undated, published in Herval, *Bataille*, vol. 1, p. 211.
26 Narrative of Pierre Maurice, Valmont, undated, published in Herval, *Bataille*, vol. 2, p. 301.
27 Narrative of Françoise Duroy, La Hague peninsula, undated, published in Herval, *Bataille*, vol. 1, p. 143; cf. also the narrative of Alfred Mouchel, Quettehou, undated, published in Herval, *Bataille*, vol. 1, pp. 123-124; cf. also the narrative of Yves Desbouis, Bernay, undated, published in Herval, *Bataille*, vol. 2, p. 86.
28 Narrative of abbot Paul Levert, parson of Varenguebec, undated, published in Herval, *Bataille*, vol. 1, p. 161.
29 Walther Hansen, Tätigkeit bei den Freiwilligenverbänden, Bd. 8, Dienstliche Notizen 1942-1951, Maschinenabschrift, entries of 16 June, 2 and 6 July 1944, BA-MA, N 304/12, also quoted in Lieb, *Krieg*, p.

as regular German nationals were no less violent. On the Cotentin peninsula, a group of Polish soldiers killed their single German comrade as early as 6 June, during the landing of the first Allied gliders in that region[30].

Hence, an important part of the first POWs in Normandy were non-German soldiers, complicating the discourse that insisted on the need for the French to liberate themselves from the Germans. Instead, they were liberated from the non-German part of the occupation troops. After the first shock however, the proportion of non-German soldiers captured by the Allies became more representative of their effective number among German units. Of 24,289 POWs registered in Great Britain until 28 June inclusive, 3,519 men, that is 14.5 per cent, were identified as non-Germans: 1,723 Russians, 1,408 Poles, 181 Italians, 92 Yugoslavs, 60 Czechs, the remainder coming "from every other Nazi occupied European country except Norway, Bulgaria and Hungary", according to SHAEF intelligence[31].

4) Lack of uniformity of "the Germans" as a group and its visibility to the population

Not only were non-German soldiers or those recently germanised likely to surrender voluntarily to the enemy. While the rotation of personnel within the units had corroded the inner cohesion of almost every formation, German soldiers were also liable to desert when the situation became inextricable to their eyes. As for the non-German soldiers, desertion often took the shape of a collective surrender – when the lower hierarchy was preserved –, and was sometimes preceded by internal negotiations. In Bayeux, on 7 June, a civil witness observed a German unit parleying before splitting up in two groups, one bearing a white flag going towards the Allied lines, the other returning to the German lines[32]. In the region around Vire, the image given by German troops before the liberation of the area was also highly contrasted, as shown by the narrative of a civilian:

> Some [SS soldiers] try to enter into conversation with their involuntary hosts and their belief in the final victory of Germany seems sincere. We were quoted the words of a young SS from the tanks – who expressed himself in the best Parisian argot […]. He had a certain consideration for the Americans, and despised the English. […] Some of his comrades, also full of illusions, primarily think of taking advantage of the circumstances to enrich their postal stamp collections. God knows if they knew to loot those of our unlucky compatriots. […] But beside these fanatics and these maniacs, how many have we met – but they were not SS – who sabotaged carefully their lorry or their tank, to stay longer at the rear[33]!

124; cf. also the narrative of L. Le Marinel, Les Pieux, undated, published in Herval, *Bataille*, vol. 1, p. 152, describing the capture of Osttruppen close to Rozel and Saint-Germain-le Gaillard. Whereas all the prisoners were evacuated in lorries, one of the captured Russians was authorised to take place in one of the passenger cars. The morning before the capture, he is said to have killed three German soldiers, probably belonging to the staff of his unit.

[30] Beevor, *D-Day*, p. 72.

[31] SHAEF, G-2, operational and intelligence summary n° 25, 30 June 1944, TNA, WO 208/5562.

[32] Narrative of Pierre Desprairies, Bayeux, undated, published in Herval, *Bataille*, vol. 1, p. 57.

[33] Narrative of André Létondot, Vire, undated, published in Herval, *Bataille*, vol. 1, p. 295.

Surrender and massive desertions became commonplace when the Americans achieved their breakout from the bridgehead at the end of July 1944. Wounds, war fatigue, lack of transportation and little food supply caused many German soldiers to slow down their retreat and seek a way out of the war. However, not every attempt was successful, as shows the testimony of an inhabitant of Avranches, reflecting the mind-set of the German troops at the end of July 1944: "Then arrived a wounded, and then a soldier of 20 years. He told us that he was from Danzig where his sister and his father had been killed. He decided to wait the Americans to surrender, when an officer came and managed to lead him away[34]." Conflicts also arose more and more frequently between Wehrmacht soldiers and those belonging to the Waffen-SS. In fact, the pressure was high on the SS soldiers as they had been indoctrinated more than the regular soldiers: they feared capture more because of the reports of SS prisoners having been executed, and it remained for them a greater disgrace than for most German troops[35]. The growing pressure sometimes broke out in violent disputes between the two groups; on 27 July civilians reported fighting "with knives and bayonets" between Wehrmacht and SS soldiers near Falaise[36]. In Saumont-la-Poterie, southeast of Forges-les-Eaux, an inhabitant recorded that Wehrmacht soldiers, "always correct in Saumont", "did not hide their weariness of war and exhibited their disregard for the SS, who they however feared[37]".

5) Rout and panic among German troops

Surrender of massive groups of soldiers as experienced during the initial shock of the D-Day Landings, sometimes marked with panic, were to be repeated at least at four other occasions during the battle of Normandy. Every time, the local populations got to see the Germans as routing soldiers, lacking orientation and orders. Many narratives insist on the notable difference between the German troops of 1944 and those of 1940. It can be seen as the need for revenge that many witnesses compared the sight of the defeated Germans with that of the French soldiers entering war captivity in June 1940.

The first of these episodes took place during the American breakout toward the western coast of the Cotentin peninsula, on the night of 17 June 1944. This operation cut the German disposal of units in Normandy in two halves, leading tens of thousands of soldiers to retreat north towards the "fortress" Cherbourg. Inside what was about to become the pocket of Cherbourg, the morale of the troops decreased quickly. Major Leonhard Mayer, captured in Cherbourg, later disclosed to some of his camp mates that among his soldiers, he "had noticed a certain demoralisation, although they had a faultless attitude. It can be added that the enemy propaganda leaflets had a certain influence on our

[34] Narrative of Jean Seguin, Avranches, undated, published in Herval, *Bataille*, vol. 1, p. 211.
[35] J.-L. Leleu, *La Waffen-SS. Soldats politiques en guerre* (Paris, 2007), pp. 516-518 and Lieb, *Krieg*, pp. 439-440.
[36] Narrative of Jean Boullé and Léonce Macary, Falaise, undated, published in Herval, Bataille, vol. 1, p. 378.
[37] Narrative of M. Enoch, Saumont-la-Poterie, undated, published in Herval, *Bataille*, vol. 2, p. 317.

men, especially regarding the treatment of prisoners etc[38]." Sometimes German soldiers tried to escape the perspective of war captivity, now considered by many as inevitable, appropriating civil clothes and even French identity cards, as for example, on 23 June in Urville, west of Cherbourg[39]. In late June, confusion was still growing, and some German officers were seen asking civilians to help locate their men again[40].

The second large operation was again conducted by the Americans, on the morning of 25 July 1944, when operation Cobra was launched west of Saint-Lô, alongside the road to Périers. In only one week, American troops managed to break out of the attrition warfare of the battle of the Bocage, "la guerre des haies" (the war of the hedgerows), and engage in manoeuvre warfare. On 31 July, the German lines were definitely surpassed, allowing the Americans access to the roads to Brittany and the Loire basin. According to their degree of mobility, German troops retreated to the east towards Mortain, or to the west to find shelter in more or less durable islands of resistance, in Rennes and Saint-Malo, as well as in Brest, Lorient and Saint-Nazaire. Others were left behind, and entered war captivity. For 4th US Armoured Division, the number of captures was so high that the American soldiers could only force their prisoners to lay down their arms and walk to the rear without guards[41]. During this phase of the battle, captures were mostly accomplished through the "cleansing" of rear areas already passed by lead elements and armoured units. In the Avranches area, German soldiers were so confused that they resorted to the small regional maps displayed in the traditional French postal calendars[42].

The third major mopping-up took place after the closure of the Falaise pocket on 21 August when the Allies launched the bulk of their forces in the pursuit of German troops trying to find a way to cross the Seine River. Slowed down by fatigue and lack of transportation, numbers of them were captured even before they reached the riverbank. Those who arrived at the great river – almost 200 metres wide at Rouen and 700 metres at its estuary – were faced with destroyed bridges and a lack of boats, making it almost impossible to get to the other side. Moreover, the few existing means of transportation were mostly incapable to bringing heavy equipment across the water. The ferries if not already sunk, were harassed all day by Allied aircraft. A great number of soldiers headed for Rouen, the historical capital of Normandy, where they hoped to find a way over the Seine. Upon arrival, they were dismayed to find that the Allied raids had successfully destroyed the provisional bridges built by German engineers in place of those hit during the bombings of the "Red Week", between 30 May and 5 June 1944. A local inhabitant reports the scenes of chaos at the end of August:

> At this time the German retreat was at its climax. The exterior boulevards were permanently covered with convoys. One could even see ambulances on them, slowly getting backwards.

[38] Room Conversation, Mayer – Ahnelt, 5 July 1944, NARA, RG 165, Entry 179, Box 441, quoted in Neitzel and Welzer, *Soldaten*, pp. 301-302.
[39] Narrative of Françoise Duroy, La Hague peninsula, undated, published in Herval, *Bataille*, vol. 1, p. 141.
[40] Narrative of Françoise Duroy, Jobourg Peninsula, undated, published in Herval, *Bataille*, vol. 1, p. 143.
[41] *CSI Battle Book 21, Operation Cobra, 4th Armoured Division, Deliberate Attack, Exploitation* (Fort Leavenworth, 1968), pp. 4-3.
[42] Narrative of Jean Seguin, Avranches, undated, published in Herval, *Bataille*, vol. 1, p. 211.

> Sometimes armoured matériel and horses passed, of which one might ask how they could have crossed the Seine; then there were feldgrau soldiers without equipment, without weapons, survivors of the river crossing. One was to learn later that isolated soldiers seized barrels, tubs, coppers to try the crossing. Cables made of telephone wires knotted together had been thrown from one bank to the other, and the fugitives, with the strength of their arms, endeavoured to cross the river like this, fighting against the current.
>
> In their haste to escape the hail of fire discharged on the left bank, some of them fixed empty bottles around their kidneys as rescue belts. They then went on facing the current and trying their luck. Others jumped in the water and swam. There were thousands of cases like these all along the Seine. The riparians could even hear the cries of fear of those who called their God or the name of their mother before sinking to the bottom with a jerk of supreme effort that soon petrified[43].

This narrative clearly shows that the civilian saw the Germans as soldiers in extreme distress, sometimes panic; a far cry from the common image of German domination. Other testimonies point to the huge differences between the visual aspects of the victorious Wehrmacht in 1940 and German soldiers on the run in 1944. Although these images were very real in the eyes of the civilians in 1944, they were not to enter the collective memory of the German presence in the region, as they contradicted the public discourse. On the contrary, other testimonies perpetuated the discourse of arbitrary Germans by stating that a number of German soldiers instead of lightening their luggage to accelerate their retreat, actually burdened themselves unnecessarily not only with personal belongings, but also with booty and stolen objects. Only upon arrival at the Seine river bank did they realise the uselessness of their plunder and left almost everything on the river's edge.

Finally, the last great capture of German soldiers took place in the remains of "fortress" Le Havre at the end of the Anglo-Canadian operation Astonia. Of 12,000 men forming the garrison after its encirclement, 11,300 entered into captivity between September 10 and 12, and approximately 600 Germans were killed during the bombing and fighting[44]. Morale and discipline of these trapped soldiers were generally low. Mostly dug in in bomb shelters, the garrison had indulged, until their capture, in feasting thanks to the abundant stocks of food and drinks[45]. Thus, even from early September, the civilian population of Le Havre was to meet plenty of drunken soldiers[46]. Here civilians and soldiers lived virtually together in the pocket for several days, thus giving civilians the opportunity of gaining a differentiated image of the German occupier.

Surprisingly the sources provide no evidence of triumphalism, hatred and joy being expressed by the civilians at routing German troops. The Normans were certainly

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[43] Narrative of André Renaudin, Rouen, January 1945, published in Herval, *Bataille*, vol. 1, p. 205.

[44] A. Knapp, "The Destruction and Liberation of Le Havre in Modern Memory", *War in History* 14 (2007/4), p. 484. The figures of daily captures by Anglo-Canadian troops reported to SHAEF, G-1 Division, state 9,178 POW registered between September 10 and 12; the figures for 13 September are not reported. HQ British Army of the Rhine, Notes on the Operations of 21 Army Group, 6 June 1944-5 May 1945, 1 September 1945, states 12,000 captures and the intake of 500 wounded soldiers left in military hospitals. Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Forces, *Psychological Warfare Division, An Account of its Operations in the Western European Campaign 1944-1945* (s.l., 1951), p. 123 states 11,302 soldiers captured in Le Havre.

[45] M. Bengtsson, *Un été 44* (Le Havre, 1994), p. 100.

[46] Narrative of Julien Guillemard, Le Havre, undated, published in Herval, *Bataille*, vol. 2, p. 363.

too cautious by nature and might have feared a reversal of the situation, with ensuing German reprisal actions against them. As we will see in the following chapter, forms of collective behaviour expressing the relief of being liberated took place only in presence of Allied troops or at least French armed personnel capable of creating a barrier of security between the Germans and the civilian population.

II – Realisation: Captures mostly by Allies, little proportion of captures by FFI

The illusion of a French self-liberation as built and promoted by De Gaulle was seriously challenged in Normandy by the overwhelming role of the Allies in the capture of the German soldiers. During the crucial parts of the battle, the French were mostly unable to liberate themselves. The Forces Françaises de l'Intérieur (FFI) played only a small role, and were supervised in their action by the Allied armies.

1) The Allies liberate Normandy from the German occupiers

As early as 6 June 1944, the Allies captured their first POWs on the Normandy coast, certainly several thousand. On 10 June, some 6,000 POWs had already been captured[47]. Lieutenant Ernst Th. Schnöring, serving at resistance nest W 5 facing Utah Beach, entered American war captivity after having been hit in the head[48]. Entry into captivity often happened in confusion, as shown by the events endured by young Joseph Merks, on 6 June 1944, serving at a strong point 500 metres west of Courseulles:

> In the early morning of 6 June 1944, it was still dark, I heard violent explosions from the north-nest, which I took for an aerial attack. Like a thunderstorm, the explosions approached quickly. I remember that, suddenly, a little dog appeared close to me, shivering and searching for protection. On the road, an open German military vehicle rolled eastwards and someone shouted: invasion, invasion. At daybreak, several shells hit the strong point and transformed everything, men, ditches, tents, weapons, into a heap of rubble. I was wounded twice by shrapnel. Despite the injuries, I succeeded in reaching a field surrounded by walls (supply bunker) in Courseulles-sur-Mer. En route I was wounded again. On the named field, where I found 6 to 8 German soldiers dead, I was found by a Canadian soldier who gave me first aid[49].

The soldier Alfred Mertens and a comrade, engaged in the region of Bayeux, were captured on the morning of 7 June by British soldiers while resting in the barn of a farm in Juaye-Mondaye[50]. In Bayeux itself, a number of soldiers notified the British of their

[47] SHAEF, G-2, operational and intelligence summary n° 4, 10 June 1944, TNA, WO 208/5562.
[48] Narrative of Ernst Th. Schnöring, 31 March 2004, collection Pascal Vannier.
[49] Narrative of Joseph Merks, 19 January 2004, collection Pascal Vannier.
[50] Narrative of Alfred Mertens, circa 1985, collection Pascal Vannier.

intention to surrender by waving white flags, while some of their comrades attempted to delay their capture by hiding in the local Feldpost building[51].

In a few days, all of these captives were evacuated to Great Britain by naval transportation[52]. Until the first American breakthrough towards the Western coast of the Cotentin peninsula, on the evening of 17 June 1944, the prisoner camps on the British soil showed a total figure of more than 12,000 soldiers captured, more than 7,000 in British custody and 5,000 under American authority[53].

A little more than a week after the split of the Cotentin peninsula on the evening of 26 June 1944, the commander of the "fortress" Cherbourg, Generalleutnant Wilhelm von Schlieben, surrendered without having fought "until the last man standing", as ordered by Hitler. Schlieben's decision to surrender engendered a relief among most soldiers. Many troops entered American war captivity during the following days. A soldier serving in one of the fortifications surrounding Cherbourg, narrates his entry into captivity on 27 June 1944, after the commander of this fort has ordered a cease-fire:

> We receive the order to come out through the front, one by one. The American is in the fort, the white flag had just been taken out. In brief, someone needs to be the first so I leave in front of my comrades. A couple of soldiers armed to the teeth behind a captain, whose rank I recognise immediately, receive me at the gate of the fort, as they have not yet come closer. They are very careful. I reassure these men and tell them that the occupiers of this fort are mainly composed of unarmed or wounded soldiers. I call the others to come to the gate. Obviously, our behaviour shows to the Americans that no trap is to be feared. […] By orders of the captain, the bulk of the occupiers arrives in rows of two. Again, it is the human need for mutual support which surfaces. I translate with my dusty English knowledge. Everyone sits down. Obviously, the Americans are definitely convinced that no threat emanates any longer from us after our surrender. […] The captain asks me if I have gun. I reply that according to my duty I had thrown it away. He is satisfied. Now I am prisoner[54].

Apart from Luftwaffe ground units and Kriegsmarine terrestrial units, as well as the men of the coastal artillery batteries, almost complete, the bulk of the trapped units were composed of more or less important elements of 91st, 77th, 243rd and 709th Infantry Divisions. On 18 June, a SHAEF intelligence report estimated the numbers of German soldiers trapped equivalent to "at least three divisions", that is to say between 30,000 and 40,000 men, taking into account the real strength of German troops[55]. On 2 July, the morning after the complete liberation of Northern Cotentin, the SHAEF intelligence officer estimated in his daily report, that 31,000 men had been captured since the split of the Cotentin, "figures to be confirmed". Other estimations show captures in the Cotentin

[51] Narrative of Pierre Desprairies, Bayeux, undated, published in Herval, *Bataille*, vol. 1, pp. 57-59.
[52] For the reasons of these transfers, cf. infra.
[53] All figures considered here stem from daily SHAEF reports on captures of enemy soldiers between 12 June and 30 November 1944; cf. SHAEF, G-1, Daily POW report, 12 June-30 November 1944, TNA, WO 219/1449.
[54] Diary of a German POW, entry of 27 June 1944, BA-MA, B 205/225, WKU-094, also published in K. W. Böhme, *Die deutschen Kriegsgefangenen in amerikanischer Hand – Europa* (Munich, 1972), pp. 16-17.
[55] SHAEF, G-2, operational and intelligence summary n° 13, 18 June 1944, TNA, WO 208/5562.

after the split between 21,000 and 27,000 men[56]. Considering an average transfer delay of 10 days between the moment of capture and the arrival at the place of registration, we reach a total of 35,804 German army soldiers captured by the Americans between the split of the Cotentin and the surrender of the Jobourg Peninsula[57].

Table 2

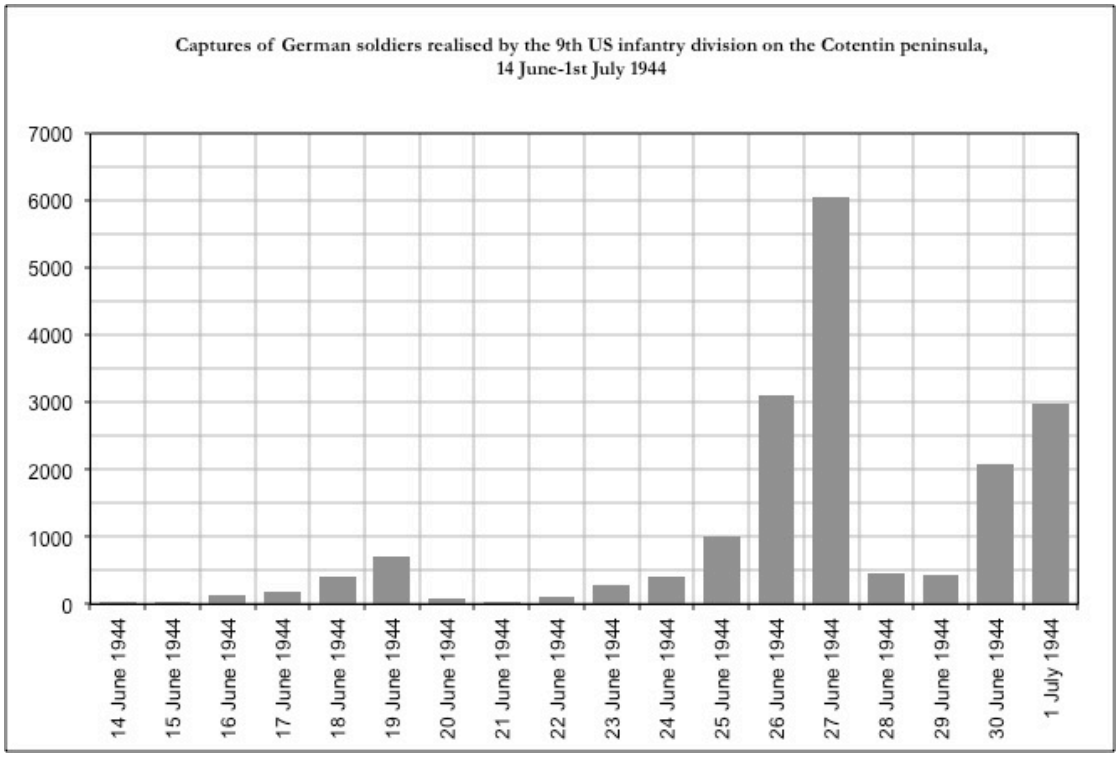


German POWs being escorted by American troops to a transit camp near Cherbourg, end of June 1944 (Source: NARA).

[56] Lieb, *Krieg*, p. 437 and footnote 98. Lieb estimates at 25,000 the number of soldiers captured in the Cotentin until 1 July. Cf. also Vogel, "Kriegführung", p. 546. Vogel states a total of 21,000 captures at Cherbourg after von Schlieben's surrender, but does not seem to include those approximately 6,000 soldiers captured until 1 July on the Jobourg Peninsula.

[57] On 6 July, that is 10 days after the beginning of captivity for the garrison of Cherbourg, the Americans held 32,102 POWs within their camps overseas and 13,062 men in transit in Normandy. By subtracting those 9,361 soldiers captured before the split of the Cotentin peninsula from the total of 45,165 held prisoners, one obtains 35,804 soldiers captured in the Cotentin from 18 June, inclusive. Considering the estimations over 21,000 to 27,000 captures in Cherbourg itself and on the Jobourg peninsula, it can be said that the Americans have captured between 8,804 and 14,804 men who had no time or not the will to reach the fortifications in Cherbourg or on the Jobourg peninsula.

Table 3



Source: Headquarters Ninth Infantry Division A.P.O. 9, *Report on operations conducted by the 9th Infantry Division U.S. Army, Cotentin Peninsula France, 14 June-1 July 1944* (Washington, DC, 1944), p. 18

After the surrender of Cherbourg and until the beginning of operation Cobra, on 25 July 1944, American troops progressed slowly. Between July 16 and 24, they captured as few as 1,049 enemy soldiers, that is less than 120 men per day. However, morale remained low on the German side, especially among infantry units who resisted with increasing difficulties. Generally, they only achieved to hold the front line with the support of German tanks. The situation worsened as the Allies gained ground. Thus on 17 July, close to Mesnil-Vigot, in the département Manche, the civilian population noted that "the German soldiers seem demoralised and get to the front only under the armed threat of their non-commissioned officers[58]." More eastwards, in the part of the theatre under British authority, captures were higher, but progress was equally slow and caused heavy losses to the Allied side. Thus, between July 16 and 24, British and Canadian troops captured 4,709 enemy soldiers in the Caen region, an average of more than 520 men per day, as a result of the partially successful operations Charnwood, Goodwood and Atlantic[59]. Between July 18 and 20 alone, Anglo-Canadian troops captured 3,175 men in Caen and its surroundings.

On the American side, things accelerated with the start of operation Cobra on the morning of 25 July 1944. Between July 25 and 31, American troops captured no less than 18,588 enemy soldiers, that is a daily average of more than 2,655 men. The bulk of the

[58] Narrative on the liberation of Tribehou, by M. Hélie, former director of the school of Tribehou, collected by M. Patry, undated, published in Bonnet, *Voix*, p. 79.
[59] SHAEF registers give daily capture figures only from 16 July 1944.

captures took place on July 30 and 31 when, respectively, 4,450 and 7,812 enemy soldiers were taken.

The number of German army soldiers captured in the Falaise pocket after the junction of Canadian and Polish armoured units in the evening of 21 August 1944 is not known precisely. While it is generally admitted that between 40,000 and 50,000 men had been captured in the pocket[60], it seems that this figure rather reports the number of enemy soldiers captured from 17 August, when the pocket started to form, until the complete "cleansing" of the pocket and the accounting of the whole prisoners taken after its closure. In fact, captures realised by SHAEF troops between August 17 and 25 totalled 45,469 men, of which 23,397 were registered by the Americans and 21,178 by the British.

In total, almost 185,000 German soldiers were captured by the Allies during the two and a half month battle of Normandy. Three weeks later, at the surrender of Le Havre, on 12 September 1944, a total of 355,000 men had been captured by the Allies since 6 June[61]. Whether they were soldiers who had been surprised by a sudden Allied progression on D-Day, during Cobra or the pursuit to Seine River, the bulk of the captures was realised during "cleansing" operations at the rear of the main combat line. The lack of transportation was felt by the Germans even more after the closure of the Falaise pocket: while, until 22 August 1944, the Allies had registered 184,533 enemy prisoners – an average of 2,428 men per day since D-Day – they took 170,348 POWs between 23 August and 12 September 1944, which is an average of 8,112 men per day.

2) The French also liberate themselves, a little

During the liberation of France, members of the Forces Françaises de l'Interior (FFI) have officially captured 20,000 soldiers under German command, while the regular French troops are credited with 117,000 captures[62]. These figures hardly reflect the regional and chronological differences of the French captures.

The first Frenchmen to act according to De Gaulle's vision of the French self-liberation were the members of the FFI. Officially, 10,900 FFI fighters were registered in Normandy after the liberation. However, their role in the battle of Normandy was more than limited, not only because of the high density of regular Allied troops in the theatre of operations, but also because most of these armed resistance fighters actually stationed

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[60] Cf. for example SHAEF, G-2, operational and intelligence summary n° 83, 27 August 1944, TNA, WO 208/5562: "Prisoners captured from pocket West of Argentan Trun now estimated to have been between 40,000 and 50,000."

[61] These figures do not report the sole captures realised by the Allies in Normandy, but all of those soldiers captured by troops under SHAEF command since 6 June 1944. Thus, from 1 August, these figures also include the captures realised in Brittany and the Loire basin, and then in Northern and Eastern France. They do not include the captures realised since 15 August 1944 in Southern France. By the third week of August, Field Marshal Montgomery reported that some 440,000 Germans had been "written off", with 40,000 dead, 200,000 injured, and another 200,000 captured; cf. Montgomery to Churchill, 24 August 1944, Churchill College Archive Centre, CHAR20/170/81, as quoted in Wylie, *Barbed Wire Diplomacy*, p. 213.

[62] Théofilakis, *Les prisonniers de guerre*, p. 56.

in the rear area of the battle: 7,200 men were present in Seine-Inférieure and Eure, while only 3,700 fighters acted in the embattled départements of Calvados, Manche and Orne (in comparison, approximately 500,000 German combatants and 1.5 million Allied soldiers fought in these départements at the height of the battle)[63].

Nevertheless, the men of the FFI were involved in capturing German soldiers in Normandy, generally by mopping up smaller resistance pockets or by rounding up those soldiers willing to surrender, behind the main front. Here the French enabled themselves to gain a certain authority over their previous occupier. The prisoners were carefully registered – as a proof of the regular involvement of the Résistance in the liberation of the region. A member of the Lisieux résistance describes the processing of some POWs captured on 24 August 1944 on a reconnaissance operation:

> During this operation, we took two prisoners, one of Polish nationality named Buezhowsky Bogdan, born on 12 March 1921 in Koronowo (Poland), the other of German nationality named Willbold Joseph, born on 22 October 1911 in Finningen (Bavaria). The group is in possession of the receipt of delivery of these prisoners to the English authorities[64].

Most prisoners made by the FFI entered captivity towards the end of the battle of Normandy, and were made of routing Germans. Thus, in Quillebeuf, on the southern bank of the Seine river, the Germans surrendered in masses to the FFI around 25 August 1944[65]. For the sole département Eure, the FFI registered the intake of nearly 4,000 POWs, while 350 German soldiers are stated as having been killed in action[66]. In the department Orne, the FFI allegedly put "out of action" 3 German senior officers, 21 officers and 517 non commissioned officers and troops, while one senior officer and 3,854 troops were captured[67]. According to these figures, the FFI captures represent 4 per cent of the total of captured German soldiers during the battle of Normandy. In other French regions, especially in the south of the country, the proportions of Germans captured by FFI units was much higher, but almost nowhere could the French resistance really pretend to have defeated the Germans in a regular military combat.

Regular forces of Free France entered the theatre of operations on 1 August in the American sector, in the form of the French 2nd Armored Division under General Philippe Leclerc de Hautecloque, counting 14,500 men. The unit supported the American movement towards the Loire basin and on the southern front of what would become the Falaise pocket. While its military action contributed to push the Germans out of Normandy, the unit's results in terms of POW intake was rather modest: between August 14 and 27 only 3,624 German POWs were registered. This is certainly due also to the fact

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63 Buton, *La joie*, p. 96.
64 'Rapport d'activité,brigadier Jean Goret, Lisieux (France d'abord)', undated, published in Bonnet, *Voix*, p. 301.
65 Narrative of Robert Leblanc, undated, published in Herval, *Bataille*, vol. 2, p. 104.
66 Letter of Monsieur Bodot-Breteuil, director of the archives and president of the departmental commission for the history of the occupation in Eure, to the director of documentation at the ministry for Information, Evreux, 9 February 1946, published in Bonnet, *Voix*, p. 338. Other sources state that the FFI of the département Eure made 4,000 prisoners and "exterminated" 311 Germans, cf. the narrative of Marc Duhl, Damville (Eure), January 1945, published in Herval, *Bataille*, vol. 2, p. 130.
67 Narrative of commandant Richard Mouton, Alençon, undated, published in Herval, *Bataille*, vol. 2, p. 20.

that the priority of this armoured division was not to stay behind counting German prisoners, but to push forward in direction of the Seine River and Paris.

Additionally to the FFI and the 2nd Armoured Division, an unknown number of routing German soldiers was made prisoner directly by the civilian population. This is shown for example by the testimony of an inhabitant of Avranches, describing the situation at the end of July 1944: "All around Avranches, civilians took prisoners. The mayor of Ponts negotiated the surrender of eighty Germans whereas a little housemaid of fourteen years led one to the authorities[68]." German soldiers also surrendered to the population in Bernay, around 23 August 1944, "handing their weapons to the mayor"[69]. Surprisingly, the surrender of German soldiers to the civilian population does not seem to have happened in an atmosphere of violence, contrary to the moments when prisoners made by the Allies were marched through the cities, as we will see.

French captures during the battle of Normandy are not expected to total more than 15,000 men, that is to say 8 per cent of the total of German POWs made by the Allies in the region – a reality which hardly supported De Gaulle's vision of the French liberating themselves from the occupier.

III – Frustration

The distance between De Gaulle's widely accepted vision and the reality in Normandy as well as the circumstances of the capture of German soldiers, were at the origin of frustrations for the newly liberated civilian population, thus delaying the planned reconstruction of the French national pride. In fact, while being liberated, the French had not become sovereign over their soil again, now being de facto occupied by the Allied armies who granted only little authority to the French officials appointed by De Gaulle.

1) German refusal to surrender to the French

A first source of frustration was the lack of regard paid by the Germans to the resistance and the refusal of many of them to surrender to the French. It can be seen as symptomatic of this attitude that the French population is totally absent from most German narratives of this time, although French civilians were almost omnipresent during the battle. In many cases, the Germans refused to surrender to the French despite inextricable situations. In the pocket of Cherbourg, for example, this refusal can obviously not be explained with the fear of being mistreated by the French population. Generally, the Germans wanted to surrender to "honourable" enemies and not to civilians or "irregular" forces. This refusal might also find an explanation in the fear felt

[68] Narrative of Jean Seguin, Avranches, undated, published in Herval, *Bataille*, vol. 1, p. 211.
[69] Narrative of Yves Desbouis, Bernay, undated, published in Herval, *Bataille*, vol. 2, p. 85.

by many soldiers to be treated inhumanely by the opponent and especially by Afro-American soldiers[70]. An inhabitant of the Jobourg peninsula, west of Cherbourg, recalls a group of German soldiers wandering about the region, asking civilians how far the American troops were and above all, if there were black soldiers: "We would surrender if only we could be sure they won't harm us…"[71].

Most Germans would also refuse to surrender to the FFI, especially when they were still under the command of a determined hierarchy. While lacking enough men and material to pursue the combat or to attempt to reach their own lines, the Germans preferred waiting the arrival of American or British regular troops, to conclude their entry into captivity. On 23 August in Honfleur, the German sergeant Rudi Spizer declared "that he prefers to die than to surrender", when summoned by the local FFI fighters[72]. On the same day in another part of the town, the negotiations between FFI fighters and German soldiers ended with a shooting:

> 20 hours: Seven of my comrades are designated to parley with a group of seven Germans. The chief of the group presents himself armed with a revolver, six of them raise their hands as a sign for surrender; the seventh, farer away, defends himself and fires on our comrades, injuring three of them, including one seriously wounded. Using a gun taken up immediately, one of our comrades fires and, facing the inversion of the situation, the Germans all run away, leaving a canon, five Mausers, and a harnessed rocket launcher[73].

This form of refusal can be seen as a consequence of the German propaganda, depicting the Free French fighters as combatants with criminal behaviours towards German POWs. Thus, a part of the German soldiers who pursued the fight against FFI troops did so only because they believed that the French would chop off their arms and legs or execute them systematically[74]. In parallel, the lack of transparency on the actual living conditions of German POWs in FFI hands fostered the spread of rumours about poor treatment[75].

Beyond the impact of propaganda and rumours, the refusal of many German soldiers to surrender to FFI fighters can also be explained by a fear of reciprocity in poor treatment. In fact, contrary to members of the *Forces Françaises Libres* (FFL) – grouped in units fighting under American command – the FFI had not been recognised as legal combatants by the German high command. This policy can be traced back until the battle of Bir Hakeim in May-June 1942, when Hitler instructed captured Free French troops to be shot as mercenaries – an order that was ultimately cancelled for diplomatic

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[70] For the German propaganda on black soldiers, cf. especially R. Scheck, *Une saison noire. Les massacres de tirailleurs sénégalais, mai-juin 1940* (Paris, 2007), pp. 97-132.
[71] Narrative of Françoise Duroy, Jobourg Peninsula, undated, published in Herval, *Bataille*, vol. 1, p. 143.
[72] 'Rapport des groupes MNL et OCM d'Honfleur', the chief of the canton Honfleur Paul Bodenan, the deputy chief of the canton Charles Leclerc, 9 September 1944, published in Herval, *Bataille*, vol. 1, p. 327.
[73] 'Front national de lutte pour la libération et l'indépendance de la France', the commander in chief of the FTP, commander Veto, undated, published in Bonnet, *Voix*, p. 332.
[74] Théofilakis, *Les prisonniers de guerre*, p. 52.
[75] Ibid., p. 57.

reasons following OKW instructions wanting Free French prisoners to be treated in the same way as British POWs[76].

During the battle of Normandy, considering the armistice of 1940 still in force, the Germans considered the *Forces Françaises de l'Intérieur* as illegal partisans, while the FFL were more considered as foreign auxiliaries to the Allied troops. On the contrary, the FFI – wearing insignia visible at a distance and carrying their arms openly – considered themselves as legal combatants of France, and therefore saw the armistice breeched. The Allies had tried to give the FFI an equally legal status by integrating them as auxiliary troops under the command of Marie-Pierre Koenig[77]. But the German government was still refusing on principle to grant regular combatant status to the FFI, thus bypassing the Geneva Convention when dealing with captured FFI fighters, and hence opening the door to reciprocal treatment for German POWs in FFI hands[78]. Aware of the uncompromising attitude reserved for the FFI fighters by the German high command, no German soldier expected a good treatment in the event of being captured by FFI fighters.

For the French it was certainly a new humiliation to face German soldiers unwilling to surrender to them on French soil, preferring instead to wait for American or British regular troops in a clear denial of French sovereignty. The psychological impact of this refusal can be measured when faced with the assumption formulated by Niall Ferguson, positing that wars are generally won not through killing one's opponents but by capturing them[79]. In this case France had not only to win a war, but take revenge for its painful recent history.

An increasing use of means of psychological warfare, such as leaflets and loud speakers, hardly altered the situation[80]. Recollections of this lack of credibility in the eyes of the German "hereditary enemy"– and the will to finally turn the German soldiers into POWs as a symbol of the French victory[81] – might be an explanation for the fierce battle of the Royan pocket in April 1945, lead by French troops after the almost total destruction of the city, resulting in some 5,000 German soldiers being forced into French captivity.

2) Incapacitation of the French by the Allies

French national feelings were moreover offended by the fact that the limited numbers of Germans captured by the FFI, French regular troops or the civilian population, were generally to be handed over to the Allies, denying the French the possibility to durably reverse the balance of power between themselves and the former occupier. Measures taken

[76] Wylie, *Barbed Wire Diplomacy*, p. 125.
[77] For the complex legal situation of the FFI troops in France and its evolution, cf. the very complete analysis in Lieb, *Krieg*, pp. 233-258. Cf. also Théofilakis, *Les prisonniers de guerre*, p. 392.
[78] Théofilakis, *Les prisonniers de guerre*, p. 384.
[79] N. Ferguson, 'Prisoner Taking and Prisoner Killing in the Age of Total War: Towards a Political Economy of Military Defeat', *War in History* 11 (2004), pp. 148-192. Also quoted in Wylie, *Barbed Wire Diplomacy*, p. 20.
[80] Théofilakis, *Les prisonniers de guerre*, p. 55.
[81] Ibid., p. 56.

by the Allies to incapacitate the French date back at least to the spring of 1943. At the end of combat action in North Africa, the Allies gave instructions to stop the transfer of German POWs into French custody and pressed the French authorities to improve the living conditions of those German prisoners already held in order to prevent Berlin from taking reprisal action against Allied POWs in Germany[82]. After the Landings, the Allies were only willing to tolerate nearby FFI activity as long as it would not stiffen the German will to resist. In July 1944, the British government urged De Gaulle to stop the executions of German POWs as a reprisal for the killing of FFI fighters for the same reasons[83].

In Normandy, the policy of having all German POWs captured by French troops transferred to Allied custody equally reflected the lack of trust shared by London and Washington towards the French government. In fact, after a short time of captivity under French authority – generally in fields, stables, yards of public buildings, warehouses or hangars –, German POWs had to be transferred to the Allied authorities in charge of the respective sector. The same was true for the regular French troops, especially the 2nd Armoured Division, fighting with the Americans. A witness described a situation in Domfront on 14 August that represents the lack of power experienced by the civilian population in military matters as far as German POWs were concerned. In this case German latecomers were taking sanctuary in a civilian home before entering into American captivity:

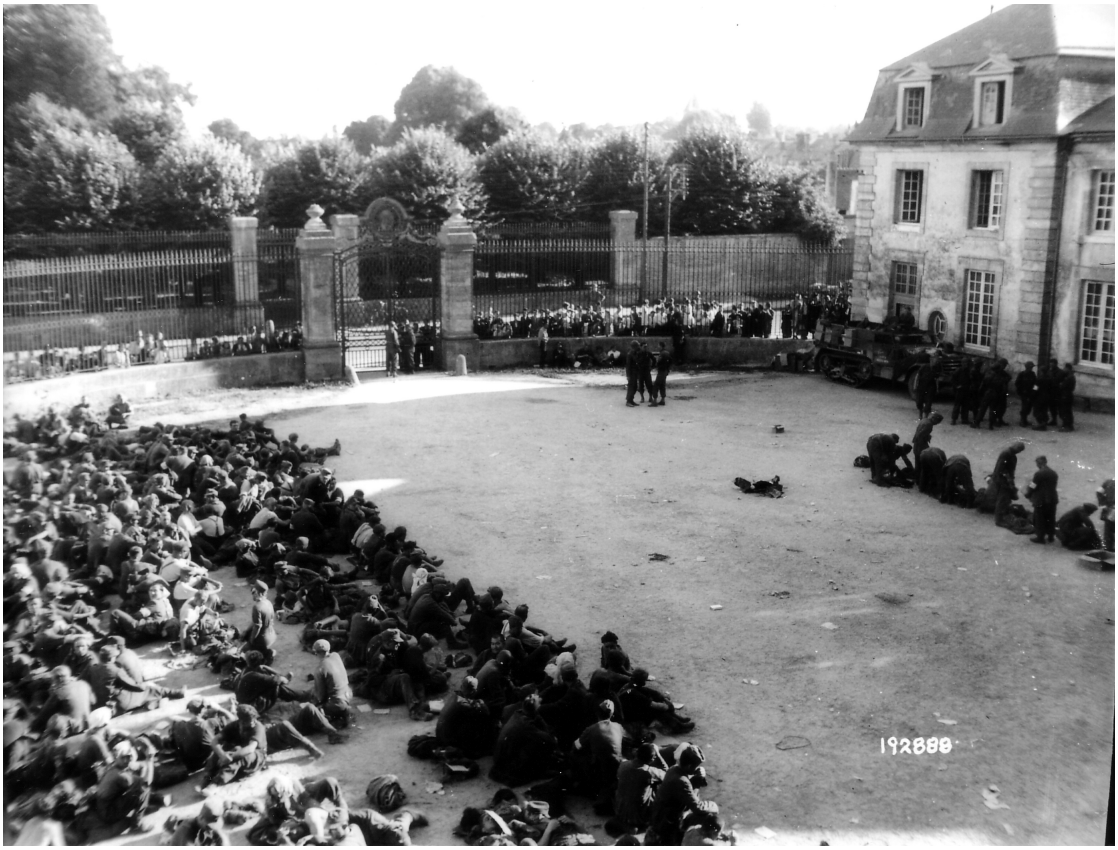
> The house was immediately surrounded and, without attempting the slightest resistance, the colonel, followed by his officers, went out of the house, doing "kamarad" to perfection. The evening before, this same officer, full of haughtiness, had forbidden the bells to be rung. These officers, quite boisterous to have been taken this way, were aligned in front of the presbytery's wall, then searched and disarmed. A few moments later, an American officer left with the German colonel. He soon came back, bringing with him a hundred more soldiers, taken at "La Rimbert". They surrendered, without firing a shot, by order of their chief. Ranged on the square in front of the church, these soldiers were searched conscientiously. Then, this operation done, everyone took possession of their belongings again, even items that had clearly been stolen. On the evening, they were routed to Alençon[84].

This example clearly shows the lack of power of the civilian population over the Germans during their capture by the Allied troops. They were unable to retrieve those articles that the German soldiers had apparently stolen before. The Americans did not question matters of private property at this stage, unless they wanted specific items from the Germans, such as war trophies.

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[82] Wylie, *Barbed Wire Diplomacy*, p. 159. Cf. also B. Moore, "Unruly Allies: British Problems with the French Treatment of Axis Prisoners of War, 1943-1945." *War in History* 7 (2000), pp. 180-198.
[83] Wylie, *Barbed Wire Diplomacy*, p. 228.
[84] Narrative of G. Hubert, A. Paillette, A. Thimothée, Domfront, undated, published in Herval, *Bataille*, vol. 1, p. 337.

Table 4



German POWs in the yard of a hôtel particulier, separated from the locals by a fence, June 1944 (Source: NARA).

This form of incapacitation of the French, at a time when De Gaulle was propagating the idea of recovery of French sovereignty, certainly constituted a deep injury to the self-conception of the French. While the French armed resistance had brought a first set of answers to the crisis of the virile identity that had arisen from the defeat and the occupation, the presence of the Allied troops brings this dynamic to a brutal halt. Not only the American GIs were now charming the French women, but also they refused to allow the French to keep the German prisoners[85]. The appointment of Free French officials in the liberated parts of France had only little impact on the overall feeling of sovereignty: the Allied authorities were not requested to officially interact with these before the recognition of the GPRF on 23 October 1944.

3) Disbelief of the total liberation by the Allies

Finally, the liberation of Normandy resulted in frustration for the French because it became an Allied success. For many it was difficult to admit that the Americans and the British achieved in three months, what the French were incapable of during four years. An indication to this mindset of the liberated French is the reaction to the fact that isolated

[85] Buton, *La joie*, p. 230.

German soldiers were captured in some regions several weeks after the liberation. This was for example, the case in Launay, ten kilometres east of Bernay, where a British patrol captured a German Waffen-SS soldier on 8 September 1944. These occasional late captures contributed to the birth of dramatic rumours. The British authorities were for example informed by the local Résistance on 15 September 1944 that an important group of German soldiers was hiding in the Forêt de la Londe, south of Rouen. After an intensive but unsuccessful search of the woods, the British had to admit by 18 September, that the rumours were totally without foundation, and concluded that "the local civilians appear prone to the circulation of rumours of the wildest kind"[86]. Similar stories circulated in the areas around Argentan and Falaise. It can be argued that these rumours also played a role in reassuring the French that even the Allies did not manage to capture all of these dominant Germans under which the civilians had to suffer for the past years.

The need of the French for a strong German enemy to interpret the painful past of the enemy is also present in De Gaulle's own thoughts, brought to us through the notes of the French writer Paul Valéry, who dined with the leader of Free France in Paris on 4 September 1944. In fact, in De Gaulle's opinion, the "outrageously rapid" advance of the Allies through France could only be explained by a secret agreement between the Americans and either the Germans themselves or the Soviets, or both, in order to allot time to the Germans to liquidate themselves "the Hitler-Himmler gang"[87].

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When the Allied armada crossed the Channel to disembark the troops in Normandy, in the night of June 5/6, De Gaulle remained ignorant of the situation until the morning, when he was finally informed that the Landings on "his" soil had begun. Nevertheless, he pursued his political programme to gain the legitimacy and the acknowledgement of his sovereignty over France. More importantly, the French national identity had to be rebuilt around the themes of self-liberation from, and victory over a strong German enemy.

The actual evolution of the fighting and the liberation in Normandy, which would open the road to the symbol city of the nation, Paris, included however ingredients that had the potential to severely undermine De Gaulle's programme of national recovery: the Germans were not (and had not been) a uniformly formidable enemy; the region was liberated by the Allies, and not by the French; the military interests of the Allies resulted in a almost total incapacitation of the French in military terms, especially when it came to German POWs – all of them were handed to British or American camps, none were left with the French at this stage of the war. While De Gaulle's speeches had an important impact on the new self-conception of the French in many parts of France (especially those where only little or no fighting took place), their content was seriously challenged by the reality in Normandy, where the battle and the making of POWs mostly took place in presence of the civilian population.

[86] HQ 9 L of C Sub-Area, War Diary, G, entries from 8 to 18 September 1944, TNA, WO 171/764.
[87] J. Lacouture, *De Gaulle*, vol. 2, *Le politique* (Paris, 1985), p. 19.

In fact, ultimately only a few French civilians and Résistance fighters had actually been involved in the capturing of German soldiers. The huge majority of the German POWs came directly under British or American authority, thus preventing the French from recovering power over the German enemy who had dominated them since 1940.

However not only the concept of national self-liberation was undermined, but also the idea of the strength of the German enemy itself, captured in unpredictably great numbers and at an increasing pace. In fact, the entry into captivity revealed to the French the internal tensions and differences of the German army, thus participating in the tacit deconstruction of the idea of a uniformly strong enemy under whose occupation the French had suffered for four years. Conditions of surrender and entry into war captivity varied for the German soldiers engaged in Normandy according to the time and place of their capture. Thus, for the civilian population, the experience of seeing their occupiers becoming POWs was very different depending on the locality and the stage of the battle. Whereas soldiers captured during the fierce fighting in the Caen area, for example, showed a high combativeness until the end, those made prisoners in Cherbourg, the Falaise pocket, the Seine banks or Le Havre, gave the impression of a high lack of discipline within the German army. Numerous desertions of German soldiers and their obvious war fatigue, displayed to many that not all Germans stood behind the politics of their country and that deep ideological fractures passed within the fighting units. The early stages of German war captivity in Normandy showed to the civilians that an important part of the German soldiers could not be associated with the collective idea of strength of the German occupier. In turn, the discovery of the relative German weakness had the potential to indirectly raise the question as to know why the vast majority of the French had stayed inactive over so many years.

The Allied liberation of Normandy, although it was publicly acclaimed in many towns and cities (especially if these had not suffered from Allied bombing), ultimately gave rise to a new source of frustration for the French. Contrary to the official discourse, as propagated by De Gaulle, the French in Normandy had been incapable of liberating themselves from Germans that turned out to not have been that fearsome after all. The people of Normandy were not given the psychological satisfaction of freeing themselves from their former occupiers. Instead they had been rescued by the Allies, who additionally now figured as new military occupiers to the region. While De Gaulle sought to make the French believe that they were a combatant and victorious nation again, the people in Normandy knew that without the Anglo-Saxons, the Germans would still be there[88]. The increasing distance between discourse and reality can be seen as one of the origins of the frustration of the French national feelings during the liberation. This frustration, as we will see in the following chapters, conditioned the early relations between the French civilian population of Normandy and the German prisoners of war. The feeling of incapacitation was to be nourished by an increasing separation of German POWs and French civilians by the Allies and the little influence of the French civil authorities on Allied military matters in the region.

[88] Buton, *La joie*, p. 230.

Chapter 2
Utilisation and perception of German POWs during the battle of Normandy

During the summer of 1944, the Allies exerted an increasing control over the liberated parts of Normandy, and did so in order to serve their military priorities in the battle against the German forces. Although the Allies had come as "liberators", in reality, the interests of the liberated civilian population received only slightly higher consideration from the Allies as they had from the Germans. Thus, for many French, the joy of the liberation was short lived. The massive material destruction, the high losses among civilians and the heavy Allied presence in Normandy induced a new shock for the population. This ultimately prevented the French from "returning home". The new French administration which was slowly being installed in the region had only marginal impact on affairs involving Allied military interests; that is to say nearly all aspects of the life of a region of highest strategic interest for the future Allied operations in Western Europe. Contrary to the expectations of many, the liberation therefore was not synonymous with the return of the status ante bellum and rather created a feeling of disillusionment.

The Allied military planners paid little attention to the need of the French to gain sovereignty over their soil and power over the Germans after four years of a humiliating occupation. Moreover, the change of status of the Germans in Normandy – the occupiers being turned into POWs – did not have the consequences many expected. Whereas their capture had initially been seen by many French as an opportunity to reverse the Franco-German balance of power, the early Allied surveillance and utilisation of their prisoners hindered this transformation – a fact that would soon become a new source of frustration for the French population. Clearly, the psychological aspects of France's liberation had been neglected by the Allied military command.

The distance between De Gaulle's dominant discourse about the recovery of French sovereignty, and the reality on the ground in Normandy marked with Allied military interests, became therefore increasingly obvious. The outcome of the battle had shown that the Germans were not that strong after all, and that the self-liberation of the French was rather limited. On the Allied side of the front, the new foreign military occupation and the continued presence of German soldiers, now as POWs, undermined the paradigm of national liberation and recovery, so important for De Gaulle's discourse. In the context of a growing distance between the official discourse and the reality of the triangular relations between the French population, Allied military personnel and German POWs, the French sought to show that the Franco-German balance of power had indeed been reversed – by collectively exerting violence against the Germans. The Allied military interests and the utilisation of the German POWs however, would prevent this reversal being completed, thus adding to the frustration of the French national feelings.

In its first part, this chapter will show that the liberation of Normandy and the Allied administration of German POWs in the region constituted an amplified and continued incapacitation of the French, when set aside De Gaulle's proclaimed goal of a national recovery and the lack of acceptance by the Allies of the institutions and representatives of the Gouvernement provisoire de la République française (GPRF). In its second part, we will show how the French attempted to overturn this incapacitation, not only by promoting the acceptance of Free French representatives by the Allied authorities at the local level, but also by trespassing the invisible (and sometimes visible) barrier, built by the Allies, separating them from the German POWs in the region.

I – An amplified and continued incapacitation?

During the battle for Normandy, the Allies took control of a region that had suffered severe damage and losses prior and during the fighting. In parallel, the region faced a surge in the number of Allied troops stationing in the area, with up to 1.5 million soldiers under SHAEF (Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Forces) command in Normandy by end of July 1944. During the battle British and Americans were to show little interest in a participation of French authorities in civil affairs, thus continuing the incapacitation of the French on the Allied side of the front. Moreover, the Allies soon started to make a mostly pragmatic use of their German POWs, much to the frustration of the French, who wanted to see their former occupiers treated in a manner that reflected the suffering endured by the French civilian population over the last four years.

1) A somewhat condescending Allied management of the liberated region

Contrary to the widely accepted idea of a joyful liberation during summer 1944, the relations between liberators and civilians were far more complex[1]. Especially during the first weeks of the Allied presence in Normandy, these relations were marked with mutual suspicion. The Normans showed a very careful attitude towards the Allies in the beginning, not knowing whether they would stay or be pushed back by the Germans. On 15 June 1944, Roger Greene wrote for *Stars and Stripes*, the American newspaper for the troops, that he "has met nowhere extreme joy among the liberated French". A war

[1] The Allied management of the liberated areas of continental France is a field of study that has been neglected by research. To date, the work of Stéphane Lamache, dealing with American presence in Normandy and based on reports from intelligence and civil affairs officers, can be relied on to draw some conclusions. No comparable study exists for example for the areas under British authority. Cf. S. Lamache, "Les Américains dans la région de Cherbourg en 1944 et 1945, L'implantation de la Normandy Base Section dans le Nord Cotentin et ses consequences." (Caen, 2010); Lamache, *La Normandie américaine* (Paris, 2010). The following part is based on Lamache's work. Cf. also H. Footitt, *War and Liberation in France, Living with the Liberators* (Basingstoke, 2004); P. Schrijvers, *The crash of ruin, American combat soldiers in Europe during World War II* (Basingstoke, 1998); G. M. Maddaloni, "Liberation and Franco-American relations in post-war Cherbourg ."(Fort Leavenworth, KS, 2008).

correspondent for Associated Press spoke of the "apathy and indifference" of the liberated populations. The most negative article by far was by Rex North, published in the English *Sunday Pictorial*, which claimed that some liberated Normans had fired in the back of their liberators[2].

The impact of these articles, read by thousands of soldiers, on the relations between Allies and French cannot be underestimated. They complemented the general cautiousness ordered by the Allied high command and a feeling of suspicion shared by many soldiers vis-à-vis civilians that were thought to have massively collaborated with the Germans – French civilians were even suspected of spying for the Germans. As a consequence, fear of being poisoned was widespread and water tanks for example were controlled systematically. When food was offered, American troops often asked civilians to try it beforehand. US troops were warned of the danger of sexually transmitted diseases from "contaminated" French women. More generally, the Allies sought to control the liberated civilian populations, who they did not really know. In the attempt to identify collaborators, interrogations of civilians, especially women, were commonplace. Identified collaborators, including Organisation Todt workers, were arrested. In the Cherbourg area at the end of June 1944, American troops forced civilians to guide them to German positions, threatening them with guns and forcing them to march 50 metres ahead of the soldiers[3].

The atmosphere of suspicion was fostered also by the fact that the Allies did not trust the new French civil authorities to successfully track down collaborators. As early as 25 June 1944, the Psychological Warfare Division of the US Army stated that anti-collaborationist feelings in Normandy were rather moderate, even among local members of the resistance. Especially in the eyes of the Americans, Normandy had never been a centre of resistance against the Germans, notably due to the relatively high level of food supplies distributed during the occupation. Observers noted the absence of any "lynching mood" in the liberated towns and villages. By contrast, US Army Counter Intelligence Corps, which exerted a strict surveillance of the American districts, received many letters from civilians about non arrested collaborators – a fact that would not add to the credibility of the new French authorities in the eyes of the Allies[4].

After several weeks into the fighting, mutual confidence would however see a slight improvement. The progress of the battle enhanced the level of contact between the Allies and the French civilian population. Allied troops stationed everywhere, in villages and on the countryside, and units stayed on average between two and three weeks, often housed in tents. As a consequence, Normans got to know the Allied soldiers in more peaceful conditions than during the liberation itself. Three weeks after the Landings, an estimated 85-95 percent of the population were undoubtedly pro-Allied, according to American intelligence reports. Between 10 and 25 July 1944, SHAEF organised Gallup type polls in North Cotentin, to the general satisfaction of the Allies: the French society

[2] Lamache, *La Normandie*, pp. 20-24. Cf. also A. L. Funk, "Les soldats américains en Normandie", in *L'été 44 – Les Normands dans la bataille* (Caen, 2000).
[3] Lamache, *La Normandie*, pp. 11-15.
[4] Ibid., pp. 15-17, 78.

was generally looking forward to the battle's aftermath, promising and uncertain at the same time. Questions on the previous coexistence with the Germans during the occupation were meant to provide information on what the Allies (as new occupiers) could do and what they should not do[5].

The first officers to handle civil affairs in French liberated territories landed in Normandy alongside the paratroopers in the first hours of 6 June 1944. Their range of activities behind the frontline was progressively extended to include all questions pertaining to relations between military and civilians (requisition buildings; feed and transport refugees to their homes; collaborate with the French Gendarmerie to prevent trafficking between civilians and military personnel; limit the movements of civilians that might hinder military operations; supervise the distribution of food supplies carried out by the French). Humanitarian aid to France was meant not only to compensate for the damage caused by aerial bombing, but also ensure social peace and prevent the civilians from being a problem to military operations. Also, the Allies were not supposed to requisition food supplies in France, contrary to German practice. Generally, Allied supplies were handed to the local civil authorities and only rarely distributed directly to the population[6].

But a certain degree of Allied condescension over the liberated populations prevailed. In order to preserve the morale of the troops, Allied propaganda unanimously depicted the situation in Normandy in a positive light and attributed the destruction and civilian deaths to the action of the Germans. Similar information was issued to the civilian population via loudspeaker vans that were despatched locally. To promote the idea of a peaceful cohabitation with the local population amongst Allied soldiers, the American authorities in Cherbourg organised celebrations for the French national holiday on 14 July, around the common value of freedom. This was at the same time a good opportunity for the Americans to publicly display their good will towards French sovereignty. On the contrary, the fact that Franc notes made in USA, printed by SHAEF, were introduced in France without the consent of the GPRF was seen by many French as a clear proof of the Allied determination to ignore that same French sovereignty[7].

Allied reconstruction activities in Normandy pursued almost exclusively military ends and focused on the rehabilitation of damaged infrastructure such as harbours, roads and railways. After its liberation, the port of Cherbourg was thus transformed into a logistics centre: on 16 July 1944, the first four Liberty ships arrived at Cherbourg to unload US Army supplies. The increasing activity in the Norman ports and, more generally, at the rear of the shores induced a surge of the Allied troops density – and it quickly appeared that almost nothing had been planned to handle the problems resulting

[5] Ibid., pp. 25-26, 69.
[6] Ibid., pp. 35, 42-56.
[7] De Gaulle, who already feared the installation of an Allied Military Government of the Occupied Territories (AMGOT) in France, simply labelled the money as "counterfeit". In the end, AMGOT was not applied to France, now considered a "liberated territory", and the idea of SHAEF money was being rejected. Instead, commerce between French and Americans, for example, took often place using US dollars, although this was illegal. Cf. Maddaloni, "Liberation", p. 88; Lamache, *La Normandie*, pp. 30, 38-39.

from the close cohabitation with the civilian population[8]. For instance, on 14 August 1944, the command of the Normandy Base Section was unable to precisely quantify the American troops present in its area of authority[9].

At the same time, the battle and its effects prevented Norman farmers from harvesting, selling and distributing their annual production at a time when sales would be at their highest. This was due firstly to an impenetrable front line between them and their traditional markets outside of Normandy, and then to the priority given to military transport on roads and rails anyway in very poor condition[10].

At least from August 1944, the Allies became aware of the risks of a prolonged military presence in France for their image in the French opinion. A report of the First United States Army stated even that "the enthusiasm (of the Normans) for the Anglo-American forces is at risk in inverse proportion to the duration of their stay in Normandy". A number of Allied troops distinguished themselves with theft and careless driving in the rear areas. Numerous cases of rape and extreme violence were also registered, especially in the American district[11].

Another major issue for the liberated French, especially the young men prone to reconquer their virility after four years of German incapacitation, would become the fact that Allied soldiers enjoyed great success with French women. Parties and balls were organised at many occasions to attract French women, and soldiers would pick them up with GMC trucks at places that had been previously designated in newspaper announcements and bring them to the military camps. Generally, French men were not welcome to participate at these balls[12].

2) An Allied use of German POWs stacked against French civil interests

The territories liberated by the Allies during the battle of Normandy experienced a variable influx of German POWs, according to the actual development of operations on the front. Whereas important numbers of prisoners constantly passed close to the beaches, where they embarked for Great Britain during the first two months of the battle, their presence was more intermittent in other areas and depended on the chronology of captures. Civilians encountered German POWs during their transfer movements to the beaches, on foot or in lorries, or when employed by the Allies for temporary work.

[8] Lamache, *La Normandie*, pp. 60-61.
[9] Ibid., p. 67.
[10] However no elements show that these economic factors might have led to local disaffection between the Norman population and the Allies, maybe also because troops locally stationed purchased great amounts of agricultural products directly at the farms, just as the Germans had done during the years of occupation. Moreover, Normandy had become increasingly isolated from an economic point of view during the last year of the occupation, mainly due to the lack of means of transportation for long distance export to other regions of France, cf. Quellien, *Opinions*, pp. 389-399.
[11] First United States Army – Reports of Operations, 20th October 1943 – 1st August 1944. Annex 1, book n° 2, Neptune plan (psychological), p. 114, Archives du Mémorial de Caen (AMC); Lamache, *La Normandie*, pp. 18, 106-110, 129.
[12] Lamache, *La Normandie*, p. 115.

Forced contact between the Norman population and the Germans was thus not interrupted by the liberation. But these contacts between civilians and German prisoners were now shaped in first place by the Allied military authorities in Normandy – the responsibility for POW policy, including daily food rations for enemy POWs, had shifted from the Allied governments to the theatre commander Eisenhower, thus giving priority to military considerations rather than to diplomatic ones[13]. After four years of German domination, the French still had no authority over the Germans on their ground.

a) The impact of Allied POW administration on the local population during the battle

The Americans and the British had prepared the prisoners administration for a long time, and certainly better than for the management of the civil affairs in France. From the first day of fighting, the Allied armies thus paid particular attention to the administration of their war captives, mainly for two reasons: firstly, fair treatment of enemy prisoners in respect to the international conventions was meant to prevent reprisals against Allied POWs in German hands; secondly, POWs constituted a first-order source of information and a potentially numerous workforce, which was to be put into action as soon as possible. Measures included the establishment of POW camps in Great Britain, the issue of instructions relative to the treatment of POWs to be captured in Normandy were formulated in respect of the Geneva Convention, and a policy of evacuation to Great Britain of all enemy soldiers captured at least during the first thirty days of land operations in Normandy[14]. Both British and American authorities could rely on their experience gained with Axis prisoners in North Africa and Southern Italy.

The first structures dedicated to receiving POWs were installed immediately after the initial landings. On 6 June 1944, the United States Army established the first POW enclosure on Utah Beach, guarded by military police from fighting units. This provisional camp played the role of a transit platform gathering the soldiers captured that day before evacuating them to Great Britain by naval transportation. On Omaha Beach, another provisional camp was installed and received the first 66 prisoners captured in this sector on D-Day[15].

During the battle, these rudimentary camps were progressively adapted to the growing influx of POWs. Their guard was now entrusted to Military Police Escort Guard Companies. Alongside the beach enclosures located directly on the beaches, during the next days the Americans established two permanent camps, improving their capacity to transfer prisoners overseas[16]. Ships that had landed matériel would bring prisoners back to Great Britain. In its sectors, the British army landed guard units to keep the POWs

13 Wylie, *Barbed Wire Diplomacy*, p. 210; Villa, 'The Diplomatic and Political Context', p. 56.
14 Böhme, *In amerikanischer Hand*, pp. 11-16; cf. also *History of Prisoner of War Division*, vol. 1, *31 December 1943 – 1 October 1944* (s.l., undated), p. 14; G. G. Lewis and J. Mewha, *History of Prisoner of War Utilization by the United States Army 1776-1945* (Washington, DC, 1955), p. 208.
15 Lewis and Mewha, *Utilization*, p. 213.
16 For Utah Beach, this rear camp was located between Foucarville and Ravenoville. For Omaha Beach, the first camp was close to Saint-Laurent-sur-Mer, at the place of the future emergency airfield, but moved after a couple of days to Ecrammeville, between Formigny and Trévières.

and established as early as 7 June a provisional camp in Ver-sur-Mer, behind Gold Beach[17]. The numerous captures realised on the Cotentin peninsula at the end of June 1944 prompted the US Army to establish two additional enclosures for 1,000 men on Utah Beach and the installation of a temporary camp for 10,000 men in Valognes[18]. After the American breakout towards Avranches, US Army troops also installed a transit camp in Damigny, north of Alençon, containing up to 5,000 POWs on 30 August 1944[19]. Finally, a large temporary enclosure with a capacity of at least 10,000 men was established after 21 August by the US Army in Nonant-le-Pin, département Orne, in order to collect a part of the soldiers captured in the Falaise pocket and during the pursuit of the German army towards the Seine and Paris[20].

The impact on the civilian population of these first moments of German military captivity in Normandy had two main aspects. Firstly, the former German occupiers could now be *seen* as prisoners, yet not as prisoners of the French but as prisoners of the Americans and the British. In fact, between the place of capture and the camps close to the beaches, the prisoners generally went through a number of provisional camps, hastily established and without permanent structures. Often they were simple meadows surrounded with barbed wire, airfields such as that in Querqueville close to Cherbourg, or market squares, as in Bricquebec. These camps were installed according to current needs, often for a very short time, for a night or the searching of the prisoners. Secondly, all of these camps, especially the more permanent ones, were installed either on former German military sites or on land freshly requisitioned from civil owners – in both cases they prevented a civil use of these lands after the liberation.

b) An increasing preference for German POW labour instead of French civil workers

The Geneva Convention did not permit POWs to be employed by the detaining power close to the combat zone, but only after their transfer to base camps far away enough to prevent any danger due to military action. Article 31 specified that "work done by POWs 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[21]."

The employment of civilians therefore not only provided the Allied armies with manpower for tasks that were not allowed to be carried out by POWs, it also met the

[17] Other provisional camps were established by the British army in Meuvaines, Reviers and Maisons.
[18] M. A. Reckord, ed, *MP: The Story of the Corps of Military Police* (Paris, 1945).
[19] N. Meunier, "Damigny, une commune rurale de l'Orne pendant la 2e guerre mondiale" (Caen, 1996), p. 12; cf. also the extract of Headquarters, Com Z, ETOUSA, Theater Provost Marshal, War Diary, entry of 30 August 1944, published in P. Delacroix and A. Avenel, *C.C.P.W.E. n° 23. Le camp de prisonniers de guerre allemands de Bolbec (février 1945-août 1946)* (Bolbec, 2005), p. 12.
[20] S. Bayne-Jones, "Enemy Prisoners of War", in L. D. Heaton, ed, *Preventive Medicine in World War II*, vol. IX, *Special Fields* (Washington, DC, 1969), p. 376.
[21] Convention relative to the Treatment of Prisoners of War. Part III, Captivity, Section III, Work of Prisoners of War, Chapter 3, Prohibited Work, Article 31.

Allies' plan to provide work for unemployed French in order to ensure social peace in the liberated areas – ultimately meant to serve the good progress of the military operations.

As early as 27 June, the day of the liberation of Cherbourg, American Civil Affairs officers organised a meeting with local authorities to address the question of civil labour. Major James M. Akerman, head of the local American Economic and Labour services immediately got in touch with André Philipaux, the Labour inspector for the département Manche. The Americans expressed their desire to employ as many civilians as possible and asked Philipaux to open an office to register job seekers. The office opened on 4 July, and on 5 July 171 civilians were placed with American military units or private companies working exclusively for them. On the next day, another 199 French workers were placed, at a time when Cherbourg was still largely devoid of inhabitants.

In order to improve the efficiency of the recruitment, the American authorities created on 12 July an intermediate office (Labor Section) charged with the collection of all labour requests coming from units and their transmission to the French labour office. However, many units working on the reconstruction of the port of Cherbourg were already recruiting civilians directly themselves, paying the workers by task.

For reasons of military intelligence, civilians were mostly employed for non-military tasks, including burials and exhumations on military cemeteries. Frustration soon arose from the relatively small salaries paid by the Allies, in comparison for example to what the Germans used to pay to civilian labour under the occupation. The main difference lay in the fact that the Germans did not pay net salaries like the Allies, but also a series of special allowances covering workers' expenses related to family, transportation, health, risks and pensions. The salaries were also kept low under the pressure of the local French authorities seeking to prevent a salary competition between Allied employers and the local economy, in which the latter could only lose[22].

In order to circumvent these problems and not to become fully dependent on civil labour, the Allied authorities relied in parallel on the employment of German POWs. Clearly military priorities as set by the theatre commander prevailed here on political conceptions formulated by London and Washington. In fact, the Allies employed POWs from as early as 6 June 1944. The prisoners' work was requested on the landing beaches, where matériel continuously brought in from Great Britain and the United States was beginning to pile up. The young Alfred Mertens, captured by British troops on the morning of 7 June near Bayeux, was employed as soon as he arrived on Gold Beach: "Here, we were assigned to clearance works, to the handling of ammunition on the ships. On the second day, there on the coast, we carried wooden poles, those poles that we had installed ourselves on the beaches a few weeks ago, and which were now removed with bulldozers by the English[23]." During the first weeks, the Allied command allowed the utilisation of enemy prisoners for tasks not exceeding twelve hours of continuous work in order to allow a quick evacuation and reduce to minimum the number of captured men to guard in the bridgehead. Although contrary to article 31 of the Geneva

[22] Lamache, *La Normandie*, pp. 74-88.
[23] Narrative of Alfred Mertens, circa 1985, collection Pascal Vannier.

Convention, prohibiting "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[24]", Americans and British troops frequently employed POWs for the handling of ammunition and weaponry – officially to empty transportation volume for the subsequent evacuation of the prisoners and the wounded[25]. Around 19 June, in Varenguebec, a few kilometres northeast of La Haye-du-Puits, the parson noticed that "very quickly, the German POWs were employed to the transport of American wounded. They do not seem unhappy about their fate[26]." Others were in charge of collecting and burying the waste from military hospitals, others had to bury the bodies of fallen Allied and German soldiers in most of the newly opened military cemeteries of the region. "We arrive at a new heroes' cemetery," wrote one German soldier captured in Cherbourg while being transferred to Utah Beach. "Digging graves and burying fallen soldiers. 600 of ours have buried today 570 fallen soldiers. Mostly blacks or coloured people. An unpleasant work. These bodies and faces, for a part of them horribly disfigured, bore the horrible smile of death. – I realised that one could even get used to that[27]." Between 9 and 26 June 1944 the US Army alone employed 4,455 POWs[28].

Tension was not long to arise between German POWs and French civilian as to know who would perform labour for the Allies. In fact, many French were eager to work for the Allies, even for ignominious tasks, and were not willing to cede this opportunity in front of the former occupiers. As early as 8 June, Colonel Elbert E. Legg, commanding the 4th Platoon of the 603rd Quartermaster Graves Registration Company, engaged with the 82nd US Airborne Division near Sainte-Mère-Eglise, requested German POWs to bury the dead. However, even if POWs were already available in numbers, the lack of tools did not always enable their effective utilisation. When on 9 June, the commander of the company, Lieutenant James Fraim, finally obtained a group of prisoners to be employed, he had no tools at his disposal to employ them: "Late in the afternoon, Lieutenant Fraim arrived with a big civilian truck loaded with POWs. They had military police guards but no tools. The Frenchmen were not eager to lend their tools, so the prisoners were sent to the beach for evacuation[29]."

With the influx of more and more prisoners, the organisation of their utilisation became more precise and more systematic. On 15 July, SHAEF issued instructions for the classification and the payment of work done by POWs. Payment was made monthly, according to the rank of the prisoner. One part of the amount was credited into an individual account, the remainder was handed out to the prisoner in the form of coupons to be used in camp canteens[30]. A pay scheme that increased frustration among those

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[24] Convention relative to the Treatment of Prisoners of War. Part III, Captivity, Section III, Work of Prisoners of War, Chapter 3, Prohibited Work, Article 31.
[25] Lewis and Mewha, *Utilization*, p. 216.
[26] Narrative of abbot Paul Levert, parson of Varenguebec, undated, published in Herval, *Bataille*, vol. 1, p. 164.
[27] Diary of German POW, entries of June 27-28, 1944, BA-MA, B 205/225, WKU-094, also published in Böhme, *In amerikanischer Hand*, p. 18.
[28] Lewis and Mewha, *Utilization*, pp. 213-218.
[29] E. E. Legg, "Crosses at Normandy, June 1944", *Quartermaster Professional Bulletin*, Autumn/Winter 1994, narrative published on http://www.qmfound.com/crosses.htm, accessed on 14 March 2011.
[30] Lewis and Mewha, *Utilization*, pp. 216-217.

French labourers that were seeking work with the Allied troops more and more often in vain, as we will see in the next chapter.

During the establishment of the US Army on the Cotentin peninsula in July 1944, the manpower needs increased significantly. Prisoners of war were now mainly requested for the reconstruction of the destroyed port equipment in Cherbourg and to unload supply ships. At the end of the month the American engineer corps in Normandy employed 1,250 prisoners[31].

Table 5



German POWs employed in American logistics on an airfield in Normandy, undated (Source: NARA).

The success of operation Cobra at the end of July 1944 resulted in the sudden extension of the Allied lines of communication as well as an important increase in all kinds of tasks linked to army logistics: routing of supply, transport of matériel, construction of airfields, clearance of roads, etc. While French voluntary workers no longer sufficed to fill Allies' manpower needs, the recruiting of additional work force became quickly indispensable. Until 25 August 1944, different units of the American logistics branch alone accrued requests for more than 25,000 prisoners[32].

[31] Ibid., p. 218.
[32] Ibid.

c) The evacuation to Great Britain and North America

After their capture, a brief employment under Allied command and their transfer to the embarkation beaches, German POWs were transferred to Great Britain. The goal of this evacuation was first of all a military one. On one hand, the Allies had to prevent the Germans, in case of a successful counter-attack, from liberating their POWs. On the other hand, the bridgehead had to be cleared of unnecessary obstruction with huge prisoner enclosures likely to interfere with the movements of fighting units and supplies. At no point during these evacuations were the possible French needs for German manpower in the framework of the reconstruction of the country taken into consideration.

At the end of their Channel crossing, the prisoners in American hands generally disembarked at Southampton, whereas those under British authority were unloaded in Portsmouth. From there they were directed to transient enclosures, for registration and transit. The transit camp for prisoners in American hands was located at Devizes, in Wiltshire, twenty miles east of Bath, while the British transient enclosure was installed at Kempton Park, southwest of London. After their registration and often interrogation, the prisoners were brought to one of the base camps under British or American authority. This maximum reception capacity of only 30,000 prisoners for each power was reached no later than mid-July 1944[33].

With fighting still intense in Normandy at this time and the impossibility of establishing larger camps directly on the continent at this stage of the war, the Allies proceeded simultaneously to enlarge their reception structures in Great Britain and to evacuate a number of their POWs to the United States and Canada[34]. Until 12 July, the Allies evacuated 29,330 soldiers captured in Normandy to North America. On 28 August 1944 the number of evacuated exceeded 50,000 men: 32,481 under American custody and 17,749 in British hands[35].

3) Relations between German POWs and Allies in the eyes of the French

Equally, the relations between Allied troops and German POWs during the liberation, mainly marked with military pragmatism, developed without taking into consideration French sensitivities. Between the moment of their capture and their subsequent transfer to Great Britain, German POWs were in fact in close contact with Allied guards and escorts. During compulsory searches and interrogations, or at moments of supply and temporary employment, tension but also pacific exchanges emerged between the

[33] War Office, 0103/5639 (P.W.1), Memorandum for: General Officers Commanding-in-Chief, North Western and Scottish Commands, General Officer Commanding, London District, The principles governing the movement, documentation and accommodation of enemy POWs evacuated to the United Kingdom during the early stages of the operation "Overlord" before POW camps are established overseas, 24 May 1944, TNA, WO 199/3171

[34] Wylie, *Barbed Wire Diplomacy*, p. 75.

[35] Böhme, *In amerikanischer Hand*, p. 13.

prisoners and their guards. The French were confined to the role of passive onlookers to the unfolding of human relations between their liberators and their former occupiers[36].

a) Variable living conditions that fostered the French covetousness for food

In application of the Geneva Convention – requesting food rations for prisoners to be "equivalent in quantity and quality to that of the depot troops[37]" – German soldiers captured in Normandy received, before their processing to Great Britain, a food supply that was very similar to the one given to their captors. This fact responded as well to political necessities as to a pragmatic conception of the prisoner administration: during the first days after the landings, the only regular food supplies available were those of the fighting troops. At last, a proper supply of food should break the will to escape. Compared to the poor food supply available to German soldiers through their own chains of logistics during the battle, the supplies granted by their Allied guards were in fact far better and more constant.

Prisoners in British hands received 24 Hour Ration Packs from the stock of the British army, containing canned meat, bagged food, cake, crispbread, etc. Those prisoners in American hands received C-Rations – an assortment of canned food and dry bread with a total energetic value of 3,700 calories[38]. Water was generally made drinkable by the dissolving of chlorine tablets. For Josef Gerhard, captured in Cherbourg, "the food was the typical supply for soldiers: by batches of four, we were given one light can and three heavy cans. In the light can were cigarettes, sweets, cake and chocolate; the heavy cans contain complete meals of different kinds, meals prepared with vegetables, meat, pasta, rice or potatoes[39]." The treatment granted to the German POWs did not remain invisible to the civilian population, as shown by the testimony of an inhabitant of Trévières, who noted that the Germans were "fed and supplied with cigarettes like the American soldiers who treat them very well"[40]. An inhabitant of Valognes remembers the food supply of

[36] Executions of prisoners of war took place on both sides in Normandy, however the extent was limited. Especially the commando order was applied only very reluctantly by German troops, who generally measured the difference between the Allied landings and a simple commando operation. Reversely, executions of Allied prisoners in Normandy and the earlier execution of the Great Escapers in March 1944 seem to have had only a limited impact on the propensity of Allied troops to execute German prisoners out of revenge. The violent reaction of Canadian troops after the execution of Canadian POWs by German SS troops does not change this general assertion. Considering the numbers of soldiers engaged in the battle, executions of prisoners in Normandy seem to have been exceptionally rare on both sides and will therefore not be analysed further. Cf. Lieb, *Konventioneller Krieg*, pp. 154-174 and Wieviorka, *Histoire du débarquement*, pp. 288-289. Even though the shooting of the Great Escapers decisively shaped the official attitude of the British government towards German POWs under its authority until the end of the war, it does not seem to significantly impact the treatment of German POWs in Normandy, cf. Wylie, *Barbed Wire Diplomacy*, p. 214. Cf. also A. J. Kochavi, *Confronting Captivity. Britain and the United States and their POWs in Nazi Germany* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2005), pp. 171-202.

[37] Convention relative to the Treatment of Prisoners of War. Part III, Captivity, Section II, Prisoner of War Camps, Chapter 2, Food and Clothing of Prisoners of War, Article 11.

[38] For the American C-Ration, cf. S. R. Wadell, *United States Army Logistics, The Normandy Campaign, 1944* (Westport, CT, 1994), p. 50; cf. also F. A. Koehler, *Special Rations for the Armed Forces, 1946-53* (Washington, DC, 1958); cf. also http://www.olive-drab.com/od_rations_c.php, accessed on 14 March 2011.

[39] Narrative of Josef Gerhard, April-June 2001, collection Pascal Vannier.

[40] Narrative of Mme Georges Guernier, Trévières, undated, published in Herval, *Bataille*, vol. 1, p. 70.

the German POWs in American hands at the end of June 1944: "One says that their food is similar to that of the American soldier. They receive oranges of which our children of France do not even know the taste and the prisoners, laughing, throw the peel at their heads[41]." The French resentment at the sight of German POWs eating Allied combat rations was understandable when one considers the difficult living conditions of the civilian population during the liberation[42].

As soon as the lines of communication were lengthened, at the end of July 1944, the supply to newly captured prisoners however became more erratic. German soldiers captured on 12 August 1944 by soldiers of the French 2nd Armoured Division at La Bellière, fifteen kilometres south of Argentan, and transferred on 13 August to American custody before being locked up in Sées "in a narrow court under blazing sunshine", spent several days without food supply[43].

In this time of transition, when prisoners were no longer regularly evacuated, but still held in temporary enclosures, the living conditions quickly degraded. After his capture in August 1944, Johann Held stayed for three weeks in a provisory camp of the US Army in the Cotentin, most likely the camp of Valognes. After receiving at first the usual US Army rations, supplies were quickly disrupted and hunger became an obsession. Some prisoners ended up eating the leaves of an apple tree standing in the middle of that camp. It had no tents to house the prisoners and the great number of captives as well as the bad weather contributed to transforming the camp into a quagmire. In order not to sleep in the mud, Johann Held attempted in vain during the first nights, to sleep on his canteen[44].

b) Fraternisation between Allied and German soldiers under the eyes of the French?

The frequency of forced contacts between Allied soldiers and German POWs, as well as the mostly rational nature of their relationship raises the question whether phenomena of fraternisation really took place between these two groups of soldiers, or if they originated from the French civilians' imagination, sparked for example, by pictures of German POWs receiving Allied field rations and fostered by the lack of their own supplies.

In truth, behaviour between Allies and German POWs seems to have been extremely diverse and depended much on military culture, discipline, and personal experiences during the war and the degree of confidence accorded until then, to the propaganda of its own side. A mix of arbitrary actions, sometimes favourable, sometimes hostile, as well as measures inspired by the Geneva Convention, shaped the everyday life of German POWs in Normandy during the battle.

German prisoners were subject to repeated searches during the battle of Normandy, and Allied soldiers not only searched for any information that might be

[41] Narrative of Christian d'Als, Valognes, undated, published in Herval, *Bataille*, vol. 1, pp. 118-119.
[42] A similar phenomenon can be observed when Allied POWs in Germany received Red Cross parcels, in a country that was increasingly suffering from poor food supplies, cf. Wylie, *Barbed Wire Diplomacy*, pp. 238-242.
[43] Narrative of a German POW, WKU-044, published in Böhme, *In amerikanischer Hand*, p. 20.
[44] Oral testimony of Johann Held, Bräunlingen, 13 February 2012.

useful from a tactical point of view but also for weapons. The prisoners were to be prevented from organising a rebellion. The searching of POWs was defined by article 6 of the Geneva Convention:

> All personal effects and articles in personal use – except arms, horses, military equipment and military papers – shall remain in the possession of POWs, as well as their metal helmets and gas-masks. Sums of money carried by prisoners may only be taken from them on the order of an officer and after the amount has been recorded. A receipt shall be given for them. Sums thus impounded shall be placed to the account of each prisoner. Their identity tokens, badges of rank, decorations and articles of value may not be taken from prisoners[45].

In spite of these regulations, the repeated searches were frequently linked with Allied soldiers' desire to acquire war trophies, such as weapons, helmets or German insignia, but also watches, cameras, knifes, food, money, etc., often through simple theft[46]. A German soldier captured in Cherbourg was searched three times on his journey up to Ravenoville from 27 to 28 June 1944[47].

But the encounter of German POWs and Allied soldiers was also very frequently the opportunity for peaceful bargaining. While British and American currencies engendered little trust among the Norman population – especially those Francs made in U.S.A. – Allied soldiers were disposed to bargain with prisoners in order to get Francs or Reichsmark. Relating his memories of black Allied guards, a German soldier recalled that "their behaviour is irreproachable, but they want souvenirs of all kind. They propose cigarettes. For 20 cigarettes they want 300 Francs, which equals 15 Reichsmark. Their invasion money is not yet appreciated by the French who are particularly careful in this respect[48]." These exchanges also took place directly on the beaches, during the employment or when on the ships to Great Britain. The narrative of Alfred Mertens, boarding a British ship at Gold Beach on 8 June 1944, relates that the German prisoners "bartered and bargained with the soldiers[49]." A prisoner of the Americans embarked at Utah Beach, at the end of June 1944, became a witness of intensive bargaining aboard the ship, between the prisoners and the crew: "We camped by the hundreds on the lower deck. The ventilation is good, I hope the sea stays calm otherwise this will get worse. The surveillance and the crew are very humane. We already know that every American wants souvenirs. The old barter trade begins. Watches are still strongly demanded… During the night, the crossing begins…[50]"

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[45] Convention relative to the Treatment of Prisoners of War. Part II, Capture, Article 6.
[46] Wieviorka, *Histoire du débarquement*, p. 288.
[47] Diary of a German POW, entries of 27-28 June 1944, BA-MA, B 205/225, WKU-094, also published in Böhme, *In amerikanischer Hand*, pp. 17-18.
[48] Diary of a German POW, entries of 27-28 June 1944, BA-MA, B 205/225, WKU-094, also published in Böhme, *In amerikanischer Hand*, p. 18.
[49] Narrative of Alfred Mertens, circa 1985, collection Pascal Vannier.
[50] Journal of a German POW, entry of 30 June 1944, BA-MA, B 205/225, WKU-094, also published in Böhme, *In amerikanischer Hand*, p. 18.

A soldier captured near Cherbourg describes the ambiguous atmosphere, between the guards' brutality and abundance of food supply, which prevailed, in late June 1944, in a provisional enclosure next to Utah Beach:

> We are close to Ravenoville, on the coastal road. This is one of the Allied bridgeheads. Ships alongside ships… I explain to an American who pushes people in front of him with his bayonet – he spikes the leg of a man in the fifties – that we are older ones and that we have no longer our comfortable shoes and our equipment. He leaves me in peace. A lorry accompanying us picks up the exhausted… Finally we arrive in the camp surrounded with barbed wire on the coast… There is plenty of water and the usual field ration. We are piled up like herrings in a tin…[51]

German captives were sometimes confronted by behaviour meant to humiliate or intimidate them. Some American soldiers made out to their prisoners that they were about to be executed, as it is shown by the narrative of a German soldier captured in July 1944 in the region around Coutances: "A slightly catchy situation arose when several sergeants, among them myself, were taken apart, given a spade and ordered to dig out holes of two metres in length, half a metre in width and one and a half metres in depth. We had hardly done a couple of spade cuts when this embarrassing game was put to an end[52]."

More generally, Allied soldiers paid attention to an appropriate treatment of their prisoners, mostly in their own interest. In fact, soldiers found guilty for exactions theoretically exposed themselves to heavy penalties from the military justice of their own army. However, we lack elements to measure the impact of the military justice on the behaviour of soldiers toward the Germans captured in Normandy.

Many German prisoners, through their testimonies, kept good memories of black American soldiers, whose "humane, sometimes even friendly treatment" was frequently praised, certainly because it was unexpected. A prisoner transferred by lorry to a camp at Isigny-le-Buat, département Manche, describes the attitude of Afro-American soldiers during mid-August: "The surveillance teams were American negroes; they treated the prisoners humanly, even friendly and were visibly decided to protect them against the violence from the civilian population[53]." The German soldiers were certainly surprised to receive correct treatment, as black soldiers had often been depicted by the German propaganda as "bloodthirsty monsters" armed with "coupe-coupe" knives, torturing, emasculating and killing the soldiers who dared surrender to them. However, the seemingly paradoxical situation can partially be explained by the fact that the Afro-American soldiers found themselves marginalised within their own army[54]. Racial discrimination in the US Army occurred through the systematic assignment to tasks

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[51] Diary of a German POW, entries of 27-28 June 1944, BA-MA, B 205/225, WKU-094, also published in Böhme, *In amerikanischer Hand*, pp. 17-18.

[52] Diary of a German POW, July 1944, DCV-1047, published in Böhme, *In amerikanischer Hand*, p. 19. This type of exactions, however, seems to have been perpetrated by a minority of soldiers, wanting to frighten German soldiers in order to demonstrate their position of strength.

[53] Narrative of a German POW, WKU-044, published in Böhme, *In amerikanischer Hand*, p. 20.

[54] C. P. Moore, *Fighting for America, Black soldiers, the unsung heroes of World War II* (New York, 2005); M. L. Lanning, *The African-American Soldier: From Crispus Attucks to Colin Powell* (New York, 1997); N. Brandt, *Harlem at war, The black experience in WWII* (Syracuse, 1996).

considered as inferior, such as handling of matériel and POW surveillance[55]. Thus, it is not surprising that black American soldiers sometimes caught up with the equally marginalised prisoners, whose unenviable status could not be the object of any jealousy. The rapprochement between the captives and some of their guards, expressed for example through the allotment of additional food rations or a looser surveillance, thus operated despite the racist ideology that the German prisoners were still carrying in the eyes of the American soldiers[56]. As shown by Matthias Reiss in his study on German war captivity in the United States, this type of rapprochement also occurred on the other side of the Atlantic, in the camps established on American soil and where German prisoners were frequently guarded by black American soldiers. Thus, the propaganda against black soldiers seems to have been successful on a long term only among a minority of Germans. The continuous contact between both groups has seemingly erased most of the prejudices. Also, the attempts of certain white farmers in the South of the United States to convince the German prisoners working for them of their hostility for black people succeeded only rarely[57].

II – An attempt to overturn this incapacitation

The French were being liberated by the Allies from four years of German occupation. In many regards this liberation however remained incomplete as long as the war went on: in the liberated parts of France and especially in Normandy, Allied military interests prevailed over the interests of the French who became increasingly eager to recover control over their country and livelihoods. In the context of De Gaulle promoting the idea of a French self-liberation and a national recovery, the distance between discourse and reality of a de facto Allied occupation was growing rather than diminishing over time, especially in Normandy. The French attempted to overturn this continued incapacitation on three different layers of the society: the administration of the liberated territory; the French armed forces; and finally the population itself.

While the new French administration had no authority over the German POWs held in the region, the combatants of Free France as well as the population locally aspired to gain power over German soldiers in Allied captivity. It will be examined whether the symbolic place of the Germans as the main enemy to the French in the new national discourse was a determining factor for the nature of the relations between French and German POWs during the battle.

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[55] For instance, 73 per cent of the drivers of the Red Ball Express Highway, transporting supplies from Normandy to Chartres and Dreux from 25 August, were of Afro-American origin. Cf. Lamache, *La Normandie*, p. 62.

[56] Interestingly, the opposite is true as far as Koreans in the ranks of the Japanese army are concerned. Although they held inferior positions, they had the reputation among POWs to be arbitrarily violent guards. Cf. for example G. Daws, *Prisoners of the Japanese, POWs of World War II in the Pacific* (New York, 1994).

[57] Reiss, *Die Schwarzen*; cf. also A. Krammer, *Nazi POWs in America* (Lanham, MD, 1991).

1) The beginning of the French administration of the liberated region

After the departure of the German armed forces, the Western Allied liberators stood as the main obstacle to the realisation of the reconstruction of the French national identity. For the Allies the liberation of France was merely a prerequisite for the defeat of Nazi Germany. From the Allied landings in North Africa, Vichy was considered a regime that collaborated with the enemy. Hence, no collaboration with Vichy officials in liberated France should take place; but no replacement solution had clearly been set up by the Allies in advance. Officially, troops were requested to seek the support of trustworthy local authorities in interacting with all civil affairs in Normandy[58]. The Allies' confidence in De Gaulle as the leader of Free France was limited, to say the least.

For a brief time, the Allies flirted with a plan to bring liberated France under the control of an Allied military administration, called Allied Military Government for Occupied Territories (AMGOT), until the end of the war and the organisation of elections. This scheme had been applied with some success in Italy after the Sicily landings in summer 1943. De Gaulle was driven by the obsession to prevent such a foreign administration of France, which he would have considered a new national humiliation[59]. In his monumental biography on Charles de Gaulle, Jean Lacouture qualifies the attitude of the leader of Free France towards his Allies as a "nationalism more jealous and more irritated than ever that comes close to xenophobia"[60]. Meanwhile, on 10 June 1944 the command of the 3rd US army recalled to its civil affairs officers (G-5) "that is not planned that a military government will be installed in France. At the local level, the administration will be carried out and controlled by the French themselves. Only if the French civil authorities prove unable to satisfy the requests of the military command, which would threaten the execution of a military operation and/or Allied security, a direct control could be carried out[61]."

Although the Allies finally decided to consider France as "liberated" and not "occupied" territory, De Gaulle was not the least reassured regarding their intentions[62]. He ultimately managed to overturn Allied (supposed) plans with a series of determined actions: on 3 June, a few days before the Allied landings in Normandy, his *Comité français de la Libération nationale* (CFLN) was renamed into a more official *Gouvernement Provisoire de la République française* (GPRF)[63]. On 12 June, François Coulet, a diplomat close to De Gaulle and member of the Free French administration, was named the first *Commissaire de la République* in Bayeux, mere five days after the liberation of the city, to serve as an official representative of this provisory government and to take over the civil affairs from the former Vichy representatives[64]. As his first action, Coulet thus removed the Vichy

[58] Lamache, *La Normandie*, p. 34.
[59] Vavasseur-Desperriers, "La France", p. 219.
[60] Lacouture, *Le politique*, p. 18.
[61] Wieviorka, *Débarquement*, pp. 362-363.
[62] Lamache, *La Normandie*, p. 35.
[63] Buton, *La joie*, p. 59
[64] Lacouture, *Le politique*, p. 57.

sous-préfet in Bayeux and replaced him with Raymond Triboulet, a local figure of the resistance and member of the Comité de Libération[65].

On 13 June Roosevelt and Churchill agreed with De Gaulle's request to visit the liberated parts of Normandy – not only to improve their relations with him, but also to test the welcome that he would receive from the liberated French[66]. The next day, the leader of Free France and his staff arrived aboard the French destroyer *La Combattante* to visit Isigny, Grandcamp and Bayeux. In the areas visited, the Allies remained quite unsure about the attitude to adopt towards these Free French who pretended taking over the military and civil administration of liberated France from the defunct Vichy government, mainly through the *Mission militaire française de liaison administrative* (MMLA) under Claude Hettier de Boislambert[67]. While Coulet in Bayeux reached an agreement with the local British authorities, the situation was more difficult in the American sectors. In the département Manche, US authorities appointed new mayors in liberated towns and villages without consulting the MMLA, at least until the liberation of Cherbourg on 27 June when local American authorities began to hand these matters over to the MMLA. Ultimately, the French authorities appointed by the Americans were not challenged by the population, and were even regularised later by the GPRF officials themselves, as for example in Montebourg and Saint-Vaast[68].

The actual impact of De Gaulle's conceptions on the French nation was significant and the forms of popular approval that he received during the Liberation were various. Jean Lacouture writes that "this humiliated country had seen too much, had received or inflicted on itself too many wounds, felt too much shame for not being athirst of revenges over the fate and theatrical restorations"[69]. De Gaulle's speeches of the Liberation received wide approval by France, "surprised but glad that someone gives her a place among those who are and those who still consider themselves great"[70]. Especially in Normandy, where De Gaulle first stepped on liberated soil of continental France after four years of exile, he was welcomed by cheering crowds, particularly in addressing the French in Bayeux on 14 June 1944[71]. While Montgomery is quoted as having judged the welcome De Gaulle received as not really warm, without real enthusiasm, Civil Affairs officers noticed that the welcome was warm especially in devastated areas such as Isigny and that De Gaulle's visit gave the impression to the people to get back their sovereignty[72]. In Cherbourg, a central square was renamed Place Charles de Gaulle on 14 July 1944, two weeks after the liberation of the city[73].

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65 Wieviorka, *Débarquement*, p. 385.
66 Ibid., pp. 384-386.
67 Lamache, *La Normandie*, p. 36.
68 Ibid., p. 37.
69 Lacouture, *Le politique*, p. 77.
70 Ibid., p. 78.
71 Buton, *La joie*, p. 69; Quellien, *Opinions*, p. 419.
72 Wieviorka, *Débarquement*, pp. 384-385.
73 M. Boivin, *1939-1945, Les Manchois dans la tourmente de la Seconde Guerre mondiale*, vol. 6, *Les lendemains de la Libération, Nouveaux pouvoirs, épuration et renaissances* (Marigny, 2004), p. 6.

Table 6



Charles de Gaulle addressing the population of Isigny, 14 June 1944 (Source: Ouest-France).

In early July, De Gaulle received an official invitation to Washington and a few days later, on 11 July 1944, Roosevelt announced at a press conference that he recognised the GPRF as a de facto authority in the liberated territories. Many problems between Allied troops and the French civil administration were solved in Normandy by this decision – although the GPRF was yet to be officially recognised as the legal government of France[74]. The rapid installation of the new French administration in Normandy, in the slipstream of the Allied liberation, and the massive Allied military presence itself prevented a revolutionary atmosphere from arising in that region. While other parts of France were struck by violent eruptions of political cleansing in the summer of 1944 – in the Dordogne for example, an estimated 375 alleged collaborators were executed during the liberation[75] –, such phenomena did not occur in Normandy. The numbers of political executions were low in reverse proportion to the density of Allied presence: one single execution is accounted for in département Manche, 12 in Calvados and 43 in Orne[76].

2) "La France combattante" and her handling of enemy POWs

Beyond the efforts to install a new French administration in the liberated parts of France, De Gaulle took every possible measure to increase the role of French troops in the liberation of France: this "self-liberation" was intended to erase the memory of 1940, when the French army collapsed within six weeks. In his eyes, France had to become a nation that was capable again of ensuring its own sovereignty, not only over the national territory but also in the eyes of the international community. While the image of a strong German

[74] Lamache, *La Normandie*, p. 40.
[75] Wieviorka, *Débarquement*, p. 388; Vavasseur-Desperriers, "La France", p. 225.
[76] Quellien, *Jour J*, p. 16.

enemy had to be promoted, the role of the Allies in the liberation of France and its acknowledgement had in no way to be increased. On the contrary: it had to be minimised.

a) Enhancing the scope of "La France combattante"

In fact, a number of units, manned with French and colonial soldiers (however mostly equipped with American and British weapons and means of transportation) participated in the liberation of France. In the context of the rationalisation of warfare as promoted by the Allies, wanting to use all available resources, these units effectively participated in military action. First, in Normandy where the 2nd French armoured division under General Philippe Leclerc de Hauteclocque landed on 1 August 1944; then, from 15 August, in Provence where the French army B under general Jean De Lattre de Tassigny was disembarked as part of operation Dragoon; finally, the action of the *Forces Françaises de l'Intérieur* (FFI) in the southwest of France, the Massif Central, the Jura and Savoy. In Normandy however, the military role of the FFI was generally small due to the massive presence of German and Allied troops, not only on the frontline itself, but also in the rear areas, as we have seen in the previous chapter.

The liberation of Paris by the 2nd French armoured division on 25 August 1944 cemented this discourse of national rebirth. The day after his famous speech at the Paris City Hall, Charles de Gaulle strode down the Champs Elysées in the middle of a huge crowd, also to receive the popular approval of his authority face to the Allies who had still not fully acknowledged his legitimacy. In the context of this narrative of French glory, the role of the Allies was to be denied. De Gaulle's suspicion towards the Allies appeared more than once, for example in a conversation with his personal secretary Claude Mauriac on 5 September 1944, when he complained that "the Allies betray us, they betray Europe, these bastards (…). But they will pay it back to me (…). Americans who take Brussels! What a shame… They would have taken Paris also if I would not have been there[77]."

[77] Quoted in Lacouture, *Le politique*, p. 20.

Table 7



Charles de Gaulle arriving at the Place de la Concorde in Paris on 26 August 1944 (Source: Libération).

In De Gaulle's speeches, the enemy was sometimes dehumanised but never ridiculed and mostly considered with awe. In his speech of 6 June 1944, the day of the Allied landings in Normandy, De Gaulle reminded that "France, subdued for four years, but not reduced, nor vanquished (…) stands up to participate" in the battle. He then appealed to the "sons of France (…) to fight by all means at their disposal", to "destroy the enemy, this enemy who crushes and befouls the fatherland, the hated enemy, the dishonoured enemy"[78].

In order to unite the French around the idea of self-liberation, De Gaulle aimed at inflating the scope of *La France combattante*[79]. In fact, while French troops participated in the war, thus feeding the new narrative of national liberation with battle stories, De Gaulle depicted these combatants as only the most visible part of a nation that had

[78] Speech by Charles de Gaulle on 6 June 1944, published on http://www.charles-de-gaulle.org/pages/l-homme/accueil/discours/pendant-la-guerre-1940-1946/discours-radiodiffuse-londres-6-juin-1944.php, accessed on 7 January 2015.

[79] The idea of *"la France combattante"* does not seem to include French colonial troops. Already in May-June 1940 the German massacres of several thousands of French black African POWs did not prevent the French public opinion from considering the overall German behaviour at that time as correct. In 1944, the role of French colonial troops is downplayed by the French authorities on favour of French metropolitan troops. The Thiaroye Massacre on the night of 30 November to 1 December 1944, when several dozens of conscript *Tirailleurs Sénégalais* who had mutinied for not having received the promised salary were shot by French troops, stands as the most prominent example of the French policy towards colonial troops. Cf. M. Echenberg, "Tragedy at Thiaroye: The Senegalese Soldiers' Uprising of 1944", in P. Gutkind, R. Cohen and J. Copans, eds, *African Labor History* (Beverly Hills, 1978), pp. 109-128. Cf. also Scheck, *Une saison noire.*

resisted the enemy as a whole, ever since the beginning of the German occupation in 1940. By the means of powerful public speeches he taught the French that they all had been resistant fighters, at various degrees, against the German occupation and that collaboration was only the fact of a small number of traitors. On 14 June, he addressed a crowd of several thousand in Bayeux: "What the country needs you to do, at the rear of the front, is that you continue today the fight, as you never stopped it since 1940"[80].

b) Sporadic attempts to overturn the national incapacitation from below

How did the French deal with German POWs made either by FFI troops, FFL units or brought in by civilians? How did the handling of POWs reflect the will to overturn the national incapacitation?

Soldiers captured by FFL units or by civilians were generally forwarded without delay to the Allied command in charge of the respective sector. However, this policy did not prevent unlawful behaviour, which in turn fed the rumours on the German side, as seen in the previous chapter. These actions can be considered the expression of a will to reverse the balance of power between Germans and French through violence, "from below", without being part of a higher official policy. FFI fighters were thus involved in unlawful actions, for example, in the region of Deauville, as shown by the narrative of Roger Benoist, head of the resistance group of this town since 1941: "I recognise to have killed two Boches together with Dobert to get hands on their weapons and, under the command of lieutenant Besson, we buried them in the strictest privacy in the oven of the gas-works of Touques, transformed for this occasion into a crematorium[81]." In the region around Vire, on 14 June, the "detachment William the Conqueror" reported that, "during a reconnaissance, a German soldier has been captured; trying to escape, he was shot[82]." Some of these executions of German POWs took place as reprisals for crimes committed by German combatants. For example, several wounded FFI combatants of the maquis of Moulins-la-Marche, in the département Orne, were executed by the Germans in mid-August 1944[83]. In total, 3,000 FFI fighters are believed to have been executed by the Germans during the liberation of France [84]. Although no precise numbers exist for Normandy, the region cannot be considered a centre of the German policy of executions, mainly because FFI activity was low. Therefore it is difficult to measure the impact of reprisal measures on prisoners held by both sides.

Tension rose towards the end of the battle when the frontline lost its clear contours in many places and German latecomers failed to follow the general retreat. On 27 August 1944, eight prisoners, seven Germans and one Italian, were executed near Livarot by FFI fighters, possibly in retaliation for the killing by SS soldiers of a family of

[80] Quoted in Buton, *La joie*, p. 69.
[81] 'Rapport de Roger Benoist', Deauville, 24 January 1945, published in Bonnet, *Voix*, p. 322.
[82] 'Détachement Guillaume le Conquérant', undated, published in Bonnet, *Voix*, p. 188.
[83] Narrative d'Odette, Michelle et Colette, maquis of Moulins-la-Marche, undated, published in Bonnet, *Voix*, p. 48.
[84] Quellien, "Les pertes humaines", in J.-L. Leleu, F. Passera, J. Quellien and M. Daeffler, eds, *La France pendant la Seconde Guerre mondiale, Atlas historique* (Paris, 2010), pp. 262-263.

seven that had cheered on British troops, ten days earlier[85]. The regular French troops were not unfamiliar with this type of war practice. Especially the 2nd armoured division of Leclerc is known to have conducted a number of POW executions. For example, on 19 August 1944, a group of three commanded by a French captain publicly humiliated and executed three German soldiers who had constituted themselves prisoners at a civil hospital in Giel, département Orne[86].

c) Trying to overturn the national incapacitation on the high level

Despite these isolated unlawful actions, and contrary to other parts of France were the FFI exerted a much greater level of control over the country, the French interior resistance in Normandy generally treated its German prisoners well. Execution of German POWs by FFI members appears to have been relatively rare in Normandy[87]. Many more German soldiers captured by the French entered captivity in a quite regular way. For the period of June 18 to 20, the résistance group of Flamanville, in the département Manche, reported that, "after having killed the adjutant and captured the second officer, the group makes 37 prisoners which, disarmed, are brought to the gendarmerie of Les Pieux"[88]. Resistance fighters in Rouen, where thousands of Germans sought a way over the Seine during the retreat, had received the following order: "When the Germans do not resist, do not shoot"[89]. The figures of captures realised by the FFI in the two Norman départements where their activity was the strongest, Eure and Orne, and where some 7,854 German POWs had officially been registered by the resistance fighters, underline the extent of this policy[90].

More than a simple act of humanity, the regular treatment of German POWs in French hands reflects a higher political will of the Free French government: in the eyes of De Gaulle, respecting the international laws of warfare was a way not only to build up credibility of the FFI as regular combatants, but also and foremost to cement his authority over France in the eyes of the Allies and the international community[91]. The

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[85] Beevor, *D-Day*, p. 490.

[86] A. Pinot, *Histoire de l'E.S.A.T. orphelinat de Giel de 1869 à 1985* (Giel-Courteilles, 1985), p. 17.

[87] Lieb counts more than 375 German POWs executed by the FFI between the beginning of August and 22 September 1944 in the départements Haute-Savoie, Jura, Ardèche, Côte-d'Or, Vienne, Ariège, Meuthe-et-Moselle, Dordogne and Finistère, cf. P. Lieb, *Krieg*, pp. 584-585. No such mass executions are registered for one of the five Norman départements.

[88] The men captured are part of a company grouping German and Georgian soldiers, cf. 'FFI – Canton des Pieux – Actions auxquelles les groupes ont pris part', undated, published in Bonnet, *Voix*, p. 72.

[89] Narrative of lieutenant Liorel, Rouen, 12 December 1944, published in Herval, *Bataille*, vol. 2, p. 212.

[90] Letter of Monsieur Bodot-Breteuil, director of the archives and president of the departmental commission for the history of the occupation in Eure, to the director of documentation at the ministry for Information, Evreux, 9 February 1946, published in Bonnet, *Voix*, p. 338. Other sources state that the FFI of the département Eure made 4,000 prisoners and "exterminated" 311 Germans, cf. the narrative of Marc Duhl, Damville (Eure), January 1945, published in Herval, *Bataille*, vol. 2, p. 130; narrative of commandant Richard Mouton, Alençon, undated, published in Herval, *Bataille*, vol. 2, p. 20.

[91] Local agreements were often found between the German army and the FFI, as for example during the siege and the battle of La Rochelle, where it had been agreed during parleys that any French combatant wearing a brassard in German hands would be treated as a prisoner of war. Cf. R. Desquesnes, *Les poches de résistance allemandes sur le littoral français, août 1944-mai 1945* (Rennes, 2011), p. 49.

will of the GPRF to have the ICRC participating in the control of French-held POWs, expressed from August 1944, followed the same logic of improving De Gaulle's position as the legitimate head of post-Vichy France. De Gaulle himself announced that the enemy soldiers captured during the liberation of Paris would be treated according to the Geneva Convention[92]. This was not only an attempt to press the German authorities to grant combatant status to FFI fighters and thus treat captured FFI men with respect to the Convention, but above all a means to affirm the return of France among the international community.

As seen in the previous chapter, the proportion of German POWs made by French fighters in Normandy is rather limited in comparison with those numbers realised by British and American troops. In the context of overwhelming Allied military power however, the intervention of FFL and FFI fighters in Normandy can be seen as an attempt to overrun the incapacitation of the French in the slipstream of the liberation, both from the low level and on the high level of policy making. Consequently, the narrative of these actions against the Germans would naturally find their way into De Gaulle's discourse of national recovery and self-liberation, as will be shown[93].

3) Distant and violent relations between the French civilians and German POWs

Alongside the French administration and the Free French fighters, the civilian population of Normandy itself constituted the third element set in place to attempt to overrun the continued incapacitation forced upon them by the Allies. The situation in which German POWs in Allied hands were guarded, employed and transported under the eyes of a civilian population that mostly shared anti-German feelings after four years of enemy occupation, was generally highly tense. In fact, in the liberated and Allied controlled parts of Normandy, the presence of POWs was commonplace and the liberated population was constantly confronted by soldiers who personified the detested German occupation regime. This part will show to what extent the uniform opinion dominated the relations between the French and the Germans at this stage of the war and how collective behaviour reflected the will of the French to take their fate finally in their own hands.

a) A wide range of human behaviour between German POWs and French civilians…

Which was the mental state of the Germans shortly after their surrender? With their entry into captivity, many German soldiers resigned to their fate as they were partly ripped out of the set of mental references constructed by Nazi rule in Germany[94]. German

[92] Théofilakis, *Les prisonniers de guerre*, pp. 390-399.
[93] Cf. chapter 3.
[94] For the state of mind of the German soldiers before, during, and after their surrender, cf. Neitzel, *Abgehört*; Neitzel and Welzer, *Soldaten*; Römer, *Kameraden*.

propaganda immediately lost its weight when soldiers saw with their own eyes that most of its content was a false or a strongly modified version of the actual facts. Josef Gerhard wrote of the first days of captivity: "At this time, many things surprised me a lot: First, the huge quantities of war matériel behind the enemy lines, then the unusually good supply – mainly made of canned food […][95]."

For others, the belief in a German victory or some sort of revenge was still alive and was reflected in their behaviour. These men remained loyal to Nazi Germany. After the fall of Cherbourg, end of June 1944, a captured German soldier wrote in his diary: "With a certain satisfaction, I hear that a big part of our fortress had defended herself with courage…[96]." At the very end of the battle of Normandy, early September 1944, German soldiers still surrendered with pride. An inhabitant of Le Havre described the prisoners he saw, captured after a military operation which caused more sufferings among the population than in the ranks of the German units: "They are serious and tired. Straight and proud, they vaguely watch the horizon. […] These men still have style despite the defeat[97]." Openly hostile behaviour from POWs against the civilians could often be observed when the Germans were captured in a situation that they assessed until then, as favourable to their troops. The most arrogant or aggressive prisoners were those who still believed in the final German victory – a paradigm that has never ceased to increase in the German propaganda. Hoping for their personal liberation after a possible German counterattack or for a reversal in the course of the war to Germany's advantage in the longer term, some Germans expressed their optimistic views to the civilians. In his narrative, an inhabitant of Valognes describes the attitude of the POWs passing through the city in June 1944. Seemingly, the prisoners' good mood was not due to relief felt at the end of their individual engagement in the war, but rather to a certain confidence in the German final victory:

> A group of German POWs is directed, the hands on the neck, into camps surrounded with barbed wire meant to receive men from eighteen to fifty years. These soldiers did not look unhappy. Well, their cloths were ragged, their faces badly shaved, but they sometimes still dared to insult the French and announce that they will have a revenge in fifteen years[98].

As late as September 1944, German prisoners captured in Le Havre expressed confident attitudes. This is what an inhabitant of Fécamp remarked during the transit of an important convoy of POWs through the town: "Then an endless convoy of lorries full of German prisoners flowed back. Brutal and dirty faces. Some passed singing in spite of the boos. Others smiled. Still others fixed harshly, their eyes armed with arrogance, with defiance, a last grin, with clenched teeth[99]."

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[95] Narrative of Josef Gerhard, April-June 2001, collection Pascal Vannier.
[96] Diary of a German POW, entries of 27-28 June 1944, BA-MA, B 205/225, WKU-094, also published in Böhme, *In amerikansicher Hand*, pp. 17-18.
[97] Bengtsson, *Été*, p. 97.
[98] Narrative of Christian d'Als, Valognes, undated, published in Herval, *Bataille*, vol. 1, pp. 118-119.
[99] Narrative of André Chardine, Fécamp, undated, published in Herval, *Bataille*, vol. 2, p. 350.

Table 8



German POWs under the observation of the Norman population, June-July 1944 (Source: NARA).

The attitude of the German soldiers did not always have a negative impact on the reaction of the French civilians towards them. As early as 6 June, in the region around Sainte-Mère-Eglise, a farmer (who obviously did not fear being branded a collaborator) saved several very young German soldiers from being executed by men of the 82nd US Airborne Division[100]. Near Courseulles, two civilians transported a young wounded soldier on a barrow to a house, where they realised that he needed emergency care. They finally organised his transfer in a civil bus up to the Canadian field hospital established west of the town[101]. Some French even had a nostalgic view on the former occupier, especially when they had not directly suffered from the German presence, or if they had an economical benefit through the occupation. A quarter of the French, those most devoted to maréchal Pétain, felt defeated through the liberation[102]. A situation that is reflected by the testimony of a German prisoner passing through Querqueville at the end of June 1944:

> Querqueville had suffered only little damage. We arrive at a crossroads. At the edge of a window, a French women breaks down in tears. […] Her compassion is probably the expression of her sorrow felt while seeing her chéri leave. The owner of the bar where we used to stop before

[100] Beevor, *D-Day,* pp. 68-69.
[101] Narrative of Joseph Merks, 19 January 2004, collection Pascal Vannier.
[102] Lacouture, *Le politique*, p. 34.

> getting back to our position stays with several men and women in front of his door with an embarrassed face. Good clients go away[103].

In Le Havre, an inhabitant wrote about the German prisoners: "We stop to observe the column. I am searching, among these captives, a familiar face[104]." As during the fighting, some civilians tried with human gestures to relieve the distress of the prisoners. Despite the scarcity of testimonies, rarely including POWs into the narratives of the liberation, we can only assume that the phenomenon of mutual help probably tended to increase whenever the Germans were visibly lacking food or water supply, or subject to a great distress.

b) …overshadowed by collective civil violence

More frequently, the collapse of the front, the capture of the Germans and the arrival of new troops under British or American command had the scent of a revolution within the French society. During four years of occupation, people had acclimatised themselves to German authority and its rules. Then, during the battle of Normandy, within the space of one day, a great number of towns and villages passed from German occupation to the arrival of liberating Allied troops. The change of status of the German soldiers after their capture, passing from armed occupiers to POWs without any authority over the French, created a vacuum of power which some people sought to fill with violence. The transfers of the prisoners were often the occasion for a confrontation with part of the civilian population. Clashes were inevitable and resulted in numerous insults, threats and physical aggression. Violent scenes took place as early as 7 June 1944 in Bayeux:

> The English capture seven Germans who had sought refuge in the Feldpost. The crowd which assists to the scene is yelling. Someone rushes on a POW, throws him to the ground and beats him. The English have to take out their guns to overawe the crowd. Others snatch the Germans' helmets[105].

In a provisional camp established by the Americans at the end of June on an airfield close to Querqueville near Cherbourg, German prisoners were threatened by "the French with throat cutting and verbal insults"[106]. In the region of Les Pieux, in the north of the Cotentin, the violence towards the prisoners seems also to have remained verbal: "We look at them mockingly, some sharp words, but no one overruns the limits of correction", wrote an inhabitant at the time of events[107]. In Le Havre, the insults thrown to the German prisoners were virulent, as shown by the narrative of an inhabitant of this city:

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[103] Diary of a German POW, entry of 28 June 1944, BA-MA, B 205/225, WKU-094, also published in Böhme, *In amerikanischer Hand*, p. 17.
[104] Bengtsson, *Été*, p. 97.
[105] Narrative of Pierre Desprairies, Bayeux, undated, published in Herval, *Bataille*, vol. 1, p. 59.
[106] Diary of a German POW, entry of 27 June 1944, BA-MA, B 205/225, WKU-094, also published in Böhme, *In amerikanischer Hand*, p. 17.
[107] Narrative of L. Le Marinel, Les Pieux, undated, published in Herval, *Bataille*, vol. 1, p. 152.

> A column of German prisoners walks at fast pace through the city. They bear a kitbag, a sack or a bundle. No more helmet or belt. Many of them wear a coat. […] During this time, we arrive at their level. […] The officers walk ahead, wearing their famous cap. […] Civilians arrive running. They insult the unhurried prisoners. Some spit on their faces, others try vainly to beat them. British soldiers who escort this column intervene. People are at their windows and jubilate to see the German prisoners. They applaud and then participate to the concert of insults. How many are they shouting insanities? The column passes quickly. People accompany them, still screaming insults[108].

Hostile actions of the crowd against the German POWs are comparable with the extrajudicial purge measures and especially the shearing of women accused of "collaboration horizontale", carried out at the same time by a part of the civil society[109]. As such, the aggression against German prisoners does not seem to have been directly linked to the arrogant behaviour of some. It can be considered rather as an expiatory measure, a symbolic fight against the former occupier, the goal of which was to purify the society of the Libération from the mostly passive attitude of the French and a more or less pronounced accommodation during the Occupation. By publicly showing one's hostility for the former occupier when he was processed through towns and villages of Normandy like during a procession, the civilian populations openly sought to display their resoluteness to resist this enemy. Rather than avenging the personal prejudices suffered during the Occupation or arrogant behaviour of the German prisoners, the civil society sought to free itself from the memory of a generally passive attitude between 1940 and 1944. The aggressions against German POWs can be considered, like the shearing of women, "as acts of cathartic release, both regulating a tension and purifying a community", to quote Philippe Buton[110]. Following René Girard, one can even state that the German POWs played the role of a scapegoat for the hardship endured by the French during the war[111].

A proof for the symbolic character of these acts might be the lack of distinction between prisoners who really were German and those non-Germans, who were simply wearing the German uniform. Even though generally recognised as being non-Germans, prisoners of Polish or Russian origin were publicly shouted down in the same way as their German comrades. An inhabitant of Damville, in the département Eure, recalls the events after the liberation of the town on 21 August 1944: "A stir. A patrol pushes before it two German soldiers. As Polish deserters, they had hidden since this morning in the railway station, awaiting the Americans to surrender. They are now passing, their arms in the air, hands joined behind the head. People shout: "To death!"…[112]" During the liberation, the attitudes towards German prisoners and the shearing of women accused of intimate relations with the occupier were often events that happened during the same

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[108] Bengtsson, *Été*, p. 97.
[109] Rousso, "L'épuration en France. Une histoire inachevée", *Vingtième siècle* 33 (1992), p. 85. The Americans disapproved these reprisals against women, but did not intervene, cf. Lamache, *La Normandie*, pp. 15-17.
[110] Buton, *La joie*, p. 123.
[111] R. Girard, *Le bouc émissaire* (Paris, 1982).
[112] Narrative of Marc Duhl, Damville (Eure), January 1945, published in Herval, *Bataille*, vol. 2, p. 122. This episode moreover shows that the civilians involved clearly do not care about the POW status of these soldiers.

day. This is shown by the testimony of an inhabitant of Elbeuf, describing the course of the liberation day, at the end of August 1944:

> Sometimes a lorry passes with dazed prisoners piled up on it, the only Boches we would now see. The chase for known collaborators has begun, promptly collected and now out of harm's way. In the streets, strange processions are passing, unchaining jibes: a drum followed by women and girls with shorn hairs, evil eyes and bitter mouths, framed by armed "resistants" – and Gavroche is romping and singing the song of 1918: "Ah! She shouldn't, she shouldn't have gone there!" Everywhere people tear off signs and posters affixed by the occupier, and on the walls very French posters are displayed, freshly glued and which talk about freedom, order and dignity[113].

Concerning the reasons which motivated the shearing, Fabrice Virgili asks whether the arrival of FFI combatants on site have had an incidence or not on the collective acts of the civilians: "Are they [the FFI fighters] the indicators of a community frustration which only waits for a pretext to be exposed, or do they drive thanks to a prestige mixed with a fear which they might inspire (they are "red", they are young, they are armed) the remainder of the population into the track of their own action[114]?" This question can also be applied to the violence towards the German prisoners. However, it seems that the FFI combatants took it to heart to show themselves as regular troops by treating their prisoners with respect to the provisions of the Geneva Convention, which aimed for war captives to be protected "particularly against acts of violence, from insults and from public curiosity"[115]. The testimony of a civilian living in Louviers, describing the events in this town on 25 August 1944, tends to reinforce this idea: "Many children have climbed on the fence alongside the road to better see the Americans and the British on their arrival. While waiting, we see passing German prisoners; they are received with boos. Some people threaten them and the FFI seek to protect them[116]." The difference with the women shearing as we will see, consisted essentially in the fact that the German prisoners did not depend on the civil society but benefited, at various degrees, from the protection of their detaining power, which delayed the purging process and the rebalance of power between the French and the German people[117].

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The distance between the official discourse of a French national recovery and self-liberation and the reality in Normandy of a heavy Allied military presence and strong interference in the field of civil affairs was at the origin of a continued feeling of incapacitation among the French. The collective frustration over what Philippe Buton has

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113 Narrative of Charles Brisson, Elbeuf, undated, published in Bonnet, *Voix*, p. 183.
114 Virgili, *La France*, p. 219.
115 Convention relative to the Treatment of Prisoners of war. Part I, General Provision, Article 2.
116 Narrative of J.-L. Cailly, Louviers, undated, published in Herval, *Bataille*, vol. 2, p. 161.
117 While certain soldiers intervened to help these accused women, they generally acted individually and not according to the instructions of their army. On the contrary, the soldiers who did not intervene in these inter-civilian issues acted accordingly to their orders, cf. Virgili, *La France*, pp. 131-132.

called the "painful liberation"[118] was not yet publicly expressed but was indirectly reflected by the various attempts to challenge Allied custodianship over liberated France. Some of these attempts, especially the progressive installation of a new French administration under the control of De Gaulle in the liberated territories, were crowned with some success. In parallel, the liberation of Paris by Free French troops was used as a symbol for the recovery of the French combativeness and the self-liberation from the Germans, when the reality in Normandy told a different story.

But these partial successes of De Gaulle's tenacious policy could not outshine the fact that a region like Normandy was being transformed into a gigantic Allied base where French authorities had only limited influence, especially in military questions. The question of German POWs in Allied hands was to become more and more sensitive, as a part of the French national discourse was constructed around the liberation from and the victory over the Germans. As a consequence, the attitude of the French towards their former occupiers was generally hostile in the public space, an attitude that corresponded to the dominant anti-German public opinion of that time. Ultimately, the relative protection granted by the Allies to their German prisoners for political and military reasons, mostly prevented the French from gaining a direct and continuous authority over their former occupiers. But despite the multiple occurrences of public violence, individual relations between civilians and POWs were not always labelled with hostility – a sign that not everyone's humanity had been overwhelmed by the general anti-German atmosphere.

Towards the end of the battle of Normandy the density of Allied troops began to cause increasing problems for the liberated populations who desired a quick return to normal living conditions. In the eyes of the population, pacific exchanges between the liberators and the former occupiers were assimilated with a form of fraternisation. It appears however that the "good treatment" given to the POWs by their captors was more a result of military priorities and a political will to respect at best the Geneva Convention, rather than the expression of a supposed friendship between the Anglo-Americans and the Germans. As we will see in the following chapter, the reality of the living conditions of the German POWs in Normandy remained however unknown by the majority of the civilian population, due to the partial isolation of the Germans.

The public discontent generated by the heavy Allied presence in Normandy and the seemingly good relations between the Allies and the Germans was not yet to be expressed during the liberation period. In fact, the liberation of summer 1944 represented for most Normans a most awaited relief from deprivations and fear, to a point that critics remained unheard. However, with the return to everyday life from autumn 1944, the critical voices over the arbitrariness of the Allied presence became louder – and the Allied treatment of the German POWs was given a central role in these criticisms. As we will see, SHAEF was now brought into a position where it had to react to these voices.

[118] Buton, *La joie*.

Chapter 3
Utilisation and perception of German POWs in Allied hands after the summer of 1944

The military evolution in north-western France from the end of July 1944 gave the Allies control over large parts of French territory. At the end of August, the combat zones were sufficiently distant from Lower Normandy to allow the establishment of POW camps in that region without violating the Geneva Convention, stipulating that POWs had to be held away from the theatre of operations. From then, the decision was taken by the Allied governments to discontinue evacuation of German prisoners to Great Britain and the United States, mainly to reduce transportation expenses and satisfy their own population that was unwilling to house ever increasing numbers of enemy prisoners. In parallel, the need for manpower had become crucial at this time, as the lines of communication between the rear and combat zones had been lengthened considerably after the ejection of the Germans from Normandy and Northern France. Less than one and a half months after operation Cobra, Allied troops entered Belgium, Luxembourg and approached the Vosges mountains; the distance between Cherbourg and the frontline was extended from less than 90 kilometres to up to 750.

While the plan was to finish the war before the end of the year, the fighting troops began to be short of supplies[1]. Thus, Normandy, as the main point of entry for troops and military goods into continental Europe, developed into a major logistics area. Most of the POWs who were once the occupiers had been evacuated overseas. Now, the vast majority of the Germans who arrived in Normandy had not stayed in the region before, either as occupiers or as combatants: they were progressively brought in as the front progressed eastwards, through Northern France, Belgium, the Netherlands, Luxembourg, Eastern France, and finally Germany itself.

This chapter will explore how the Allied military and political interests led to a continued presence of very large numbers of German POWs in Normandy, thus prolonging the forced Franco-German cohabitation in that region and contradicting the French national discourse of liberation, combativeness and sovereignty. The first part will address the question of the organisation of the prisoner administration by British and American authorities and show how the frustration over the distance between the French national discourse and the reality in Normandy set the ground for an embittering of reactions between the local population and the German POWs, in an attempt to reverse the balance of power of the Franco-German relations through violence.

The second part of this chapter will then point to the differences between the actual living conditions of the prisoners and their perception. Finally, this chapter will show how the prolonged presence of Germans in the region fostered the frustration of

[1] Quellien, *La Seconde Guerre mondiale* (Caen, 2004), p. 455.

the French, who were unable to gain full sovereignty over their fate after the long awaited Liberation.

I – A durable Allied presence after the battle that increasingly contradicts the French national discourse

After four years of German occupation of the region, the Allied military and political interests contributed to a continued presence of German soldiers in Normandy. While wanting to prevent the numbers of enemy prisoners in the homelands from increasing uncontrollably, Americans and British military authorities opted for the installation of huge POW enclosures in France, at a time when food was still lacking for the local population. In fact, the enthusiasm of the liberation – at a time when no one expected food rationing to last for the next five years – calmed down with the first cold days of what would become "one of the harshest winters one has seen", according to De Gaulle himself[2]. Clothing was lacking, as well as heating fuel. Average food rations for the French population had dropped to 1,000-1,200 calories per day (when an adult normally requires around 2,400)[3]. The minister of supplies Paul Ramadier thus quickly received nicknames such as "Ramadan" or "Ramadiet"[4].

But the increasing distance between a discourse of great national ambitions and the material reality of the liberated French was not only reflected by "a thousand jibes and sarcasms"[5], but also by new forms of violence against the German prisoners.

1) A more durable Allied POW administration

From the end of August 1944, prisoner transfers to Allied camps in North America were discontinued. This reflected a policy pursued by Washington that wanted to prepare the American society for the end of the war as soon as possible, and disregarded the situation in the European theatre of operations where SHAEF was confronted with growing numbers of enemy POWs to administer and no more possibility to evacuate them[6]. Rapidly though, this discontinuation of transfers was turned into a major advantage for SHAEF. In fact, from autumn 1944, a very pragmatic conception of the prisoner situation in the Allied rear areas led to an increasingly systematic employment of POW

[2] Vavasseur-Desperriers, "La France", p. 221; Lacouture, *Le politique*, p. 115; De Gaulle, *Le salut*, p. 114.
[3] Lacouture, *Le politique*, p. 114; De Gaulle, *Le salut*, p. 113.
[4] Lacouture, *Le politique*, p. 115.
[5] Ibid.
[6] Théofilakis, *Les prisonniers de guerre*, p. 411.

workforce alongside the lines of communication, especially in the ports of Cherbourg and Le Havre and along the road railway networks of Northern France[7].

While the plans for operation Overlord had envisioned the establishment of several central camps for German POWs in the liberated zones of northern France, the capacities of these camps had been calculated far below the real need that arose. Initially, only a small number of central enclosures for up to 6,000 prisoners had been planned, as well as a series of transient enclosures (also called evacuation enclosures) with capacities between 500 and 1,000 men. In parallel, a number of labour enclosures were planned for working parties from 500 to 1,000 prisoners[8]. These figures point to the fact that initially, the Allies had largely underestimated the numbers of German soldiers to be captured – and certainly also, the repercussions their massive presence would have on the French public opinion. However, these plans quickly became obsolete, as the envisioned capacities were greatly exceeded in the course of the battle, forcing the Allies to establish larger permanent continental prisoner enclosures.

The first permanent camp outside the landing areas was established by the US Army in La Glacerie, two kilometres south of Cherbourg on 11 August 1944, some 66 days after D-Day. Initially named "Cherbourg PW Base Camp", the installation was renamed on 22 August 1944 "Continental Central PW Enclosure No 10"[9]. The unit in charge of administrative and surveillance tasks was Overhead Detachment 2027, subordinate to the military police and transferred from its original station in Great Britain. At first, the camp could house up to 6,000 men in "one storey barracks made from wooden bricks comprising each several rooms connected to each other by a corridor. The camp was divided into three enclosures, each with separate kitchens and a free recreation and sports area, etc[10]." Housing at this time a total of less than 5,300 prisoners, the camp made a rather good impression on the Red-Cross delegates upon their visit[11].

Faced with a growing number of prisoners, the camp was progressively enlarged and reached a capacity of at least 20,000 men by mid-September. In parallel, the US Army established a series of Continental Central Prisoner of War Enclosures (CCPWE) in the liberated areas of northern France, with capacities around 20,000 men each[12].

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[7] Held, *Kriegsgefangenschaft*, p. 237; cf. also Lewis and Mewha, *Utilization*, p. 219. Théofilakis posits that prisoner transfers to the United States were put to a halt in order to prepare the American society for the end of the war and not confront it any longer with enemy prisoners.

[8] Directive 'SHAEF AG 383.6-3 GAP-AGM : Employment of Prisoners of War', 11 April 1944, in *History of Prisoner of War Division*, vol. 1, *31 December 1943 – 1 October 1944* (s.l., undated), annexes; Böhme, *In amerikanischer Hand*, pp. 13 and 83; Bayne-Jones, "Enemy", p. 376.

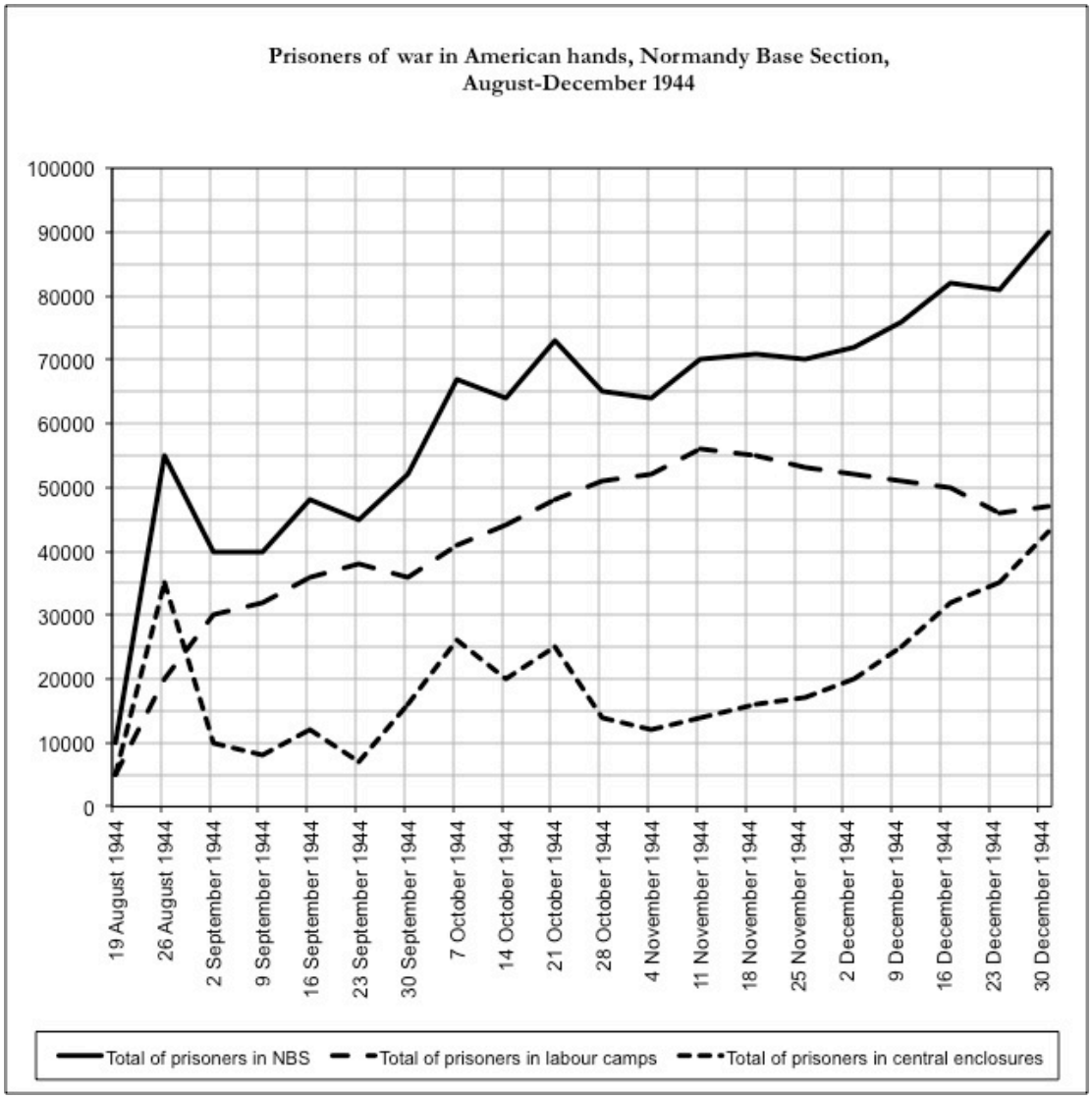
[9] Headquarters, Cherbourg PW Base Camp, US Army, General Orders Number 1, 11 August 1944 and Headquarters, Continental Central PW Enclosure No 10, US Army, General Orders Number 5, 22 August 1944, both files in NARA, RG 407, Entry 427, Box 22070, MPPC-10-1.13.

[10] Comité International de la Croix-Rouge (CICR), Rapport de visite, Prisoner of War Overhead Detachment 2027 (camp en mains américaines), visité le 18 octobre 1944 par MM. N. Burckhardt et W.H. Michel. Unless otherwise indicated, all Red Cross reports are undated and come from a collection without signature in the Archives of the CICR. Cf. also the extract of the war diary, Theater Provost Marshal, entry of 30 August 1944, published in Delacroix and Avenel, *C.C.P.W.E. n° 23*, p. 12.

[11] CICR, Rapport de visite, Prisoner of War Overhead Detachment 2027 (camp en mains américaines), visité le 18 octobre 1944 par MM. N. Burckhardt et W.H. Michel.

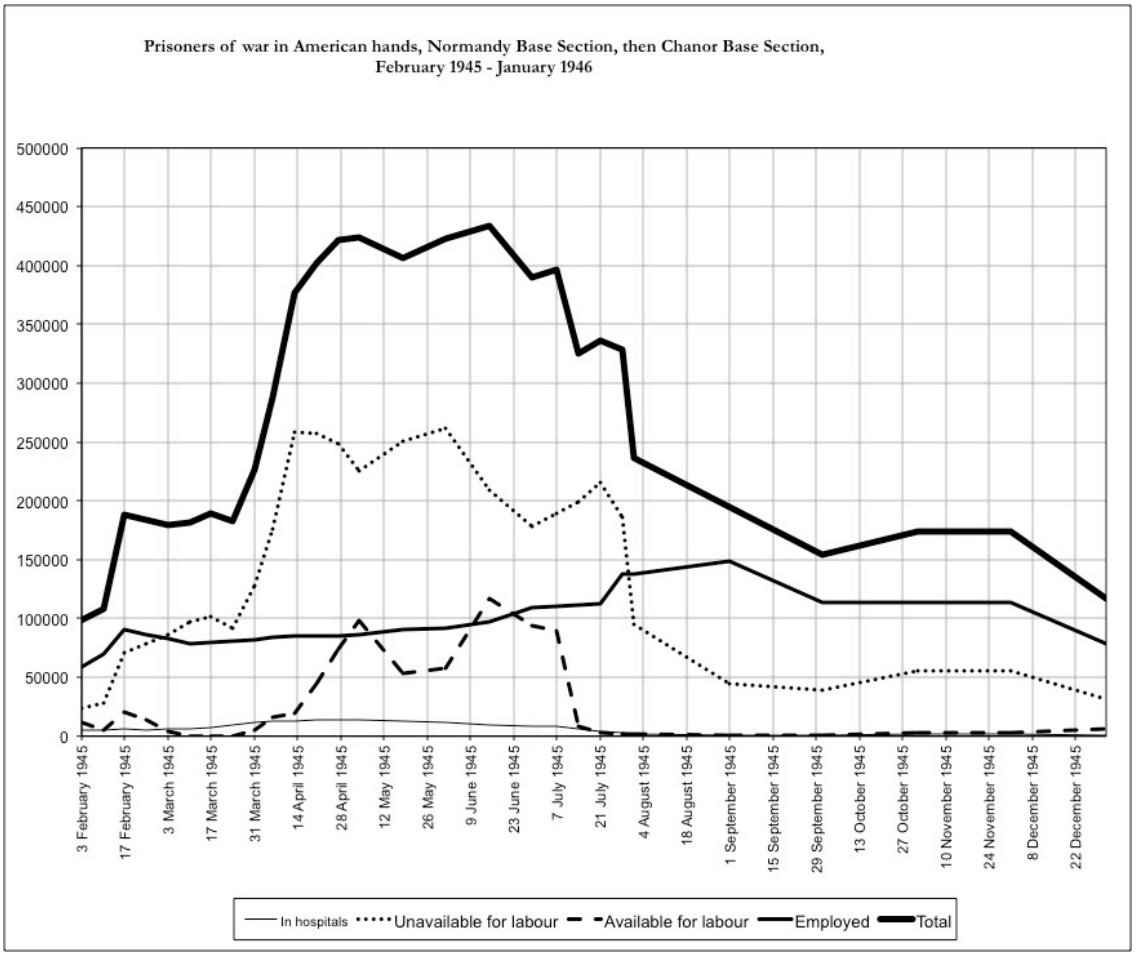
[12] These camps were located as follows: CCPWE n° 10 La Glacerie; n°11 Rennes; n° 12 Saint-Thégonnec; n° 13 Le Mans; n° 14 Chartres; n° 15 Attichy. Cf. Böhme, *In amerikanischer Hand*, p. 13.

Table 9



Source: Normandy Base Section, Logistical History, 6 June 1944-31 Dec. 1944, undated, NARA, RG 498, Normandy Base Section Box 1.

Table 10



Source: Historical reports of Normandy Base Section, NARA, RG 498.

With more prisoners coming in, the capacities were constantly increased. Between November 1944 and February 1945, the American authorities established four additional central camps in Normandy with capacities as high as 65,000 prisoners, three on the Cotentin peninsula and one close to Le Havre.

Table 11

American central enclosures for German POWs in Normandy

Place	Name	Presence	Maximum capacity
La Glacerie	Cherbourg PW Base Camp	11 – 22 August 1944	25,000
	CCPWE No. 10	22 August – 27 December 1944	
	CCPWE No. 20	27 December 1944 – August 1945	
Foucarville	CCPWE No. 19	27 November 1944 – December 1945	60,000
Nacqueville	CCPWE No. 10	27 December 1944 – September 1945	40,000
Tourlaville	CCPWE No. 24	5 February 1945 – December 1945	40,000
Bolbec	CCPWE No. 23	19 January 1945 – August 1946	65,000
		Total :	**230,000**

Sources: Böhme, *In amerikanischer Hand/Europa*, pp. 32-33; Delacroix and Avenel, *C.C.P.W.E. n° 23*, p. 31; Headquarters, Continental Central PW Enclosure No. 19, US Army, Historical report, undated (summer 1945), NARA, RG 407, Entry 427, Box 22073, MPPC-19-0.2; Chanor Base Section, Provost Marshal History, 31 January 1946, NARA, RG 498, Chanor Base Section Box 2.

Table 12

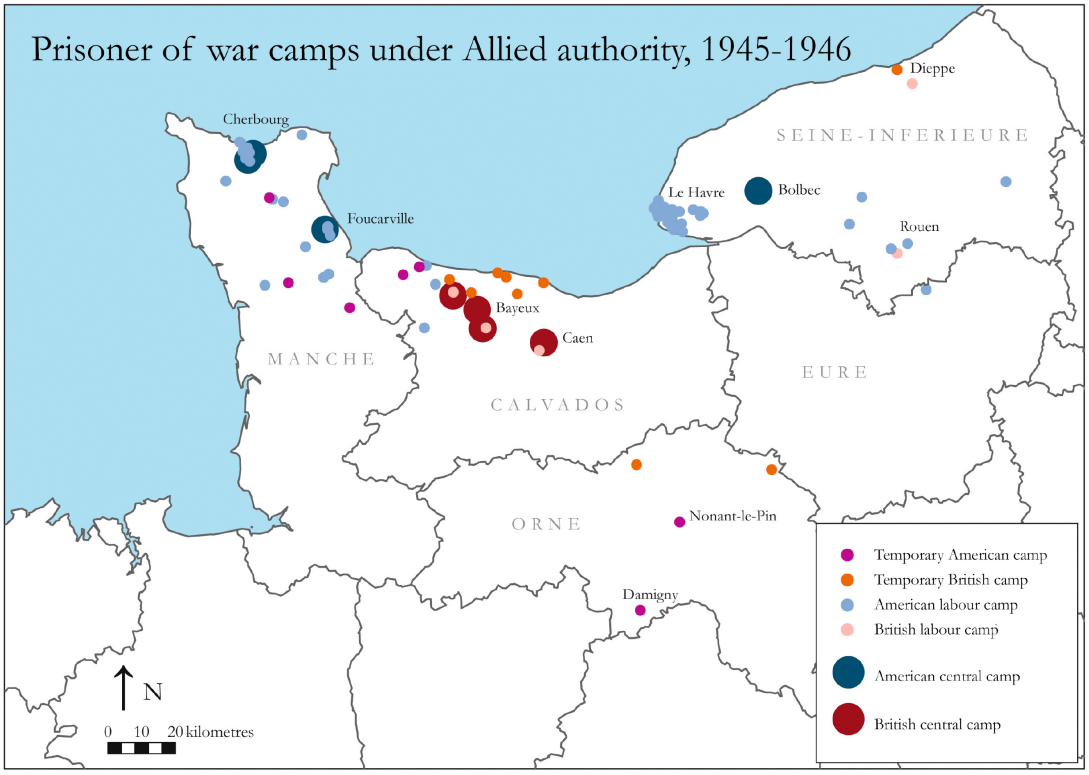


Table 13



CCPWE 23 Bolbec, August 1945 (Source: ICRC).

Within its area of authority, the British army organised its own system of prisoner camps. In comparison to the American system however, the British enclosures tended to be smaller – between 5,000 and 20,000 men – and had generally a shorter lifespan: most of them were closed before the end of 1944. Only three British camps, one close to Caen and two near Bayeux, were maintained beyond this time.

Table 14

The British central camps for German POWs in Normandy

Place	Name	Presence	Capacity
Sully/Vaucelles	223 B	7 September – October 1944	5,000
	2225 C	October 1944 – 6 September 1945	
Saint-Vigor-le-Grand	218	31 July – August 1944	10,000
	223 A	August – 30 September 1944	
	2223 A	1 – 5 October 1944	
Nonant	225	25 August – 4 September 1944	5,000
	225 B	4 – 30 September 1944	
	2225 B	1 October – 1 December 1944	
	2221 C	1 – 12 December 1944	
Fleury-sur-Orne	221	1 – 14 September 1944	20,000
	221 A	14 – 30 September 1944	
	2221 A	1 October 1944 – 7 June 1945	
	2225 C	7 June – 6 September 1945	
Audrieu	225 A	4 – 30 September 1944	10,000
	2225 A	1 October 1944 – 27 April 1946	
Langrune	375	19 August – September 1944	10,000
	221 B	September – 17 November 1944	
		Total (October 1944):	**60,000**

Source: TNA, WO 171, war diaries of camp guarding units

The camp sites were never chosen without purpose. Above all, they had to be located close to the units working within the rear areas of the Allied armies in order to supply them with prisoner manpower. For the American army, the principal areas of supply activities were located on the Cotentin peninsula and in the Le Havre region. The British activities were concentrated around Bayeux and Caen as well as to a smaller extent, Dieppe and Rouen. The nearness of roads and railways was another determining point for the location of a camp, as the prisoners needed to be brought in without delay and distributed efficiently to their working sites. Most POW camps were thus located within densely populated areas of Normandy.

2) The place of Normandy in the Allied rear area

At the end of May 1945, the European theatre of operations counted 890 American labour units grouping a total of 318,120 German POWs, of whom a great part was based in Normandy. Their employment as auxiliary manpower within the continental rear areas of the Allied armies had been authorised by an agreement in principle issued by the American military justice[13]. Within the American Zone of Communications (ComZ), Normandy represented the principal region for logistics activity. Until May 1945, the bulk of the supply for the front was unloaded in the region. After the victory over Germany, Normandy became the main hub for the evacuation of men and material. No other rear zone of the American army in Europe experienced a similar level of activity. Also the POWs working for the US Army were mostly employed in that region. Within Normandy Base Section – which covered the five Norman départements (Manche, Calvados, Orne, Seine-Inférieure, Eure) and a large part of Brittany and Loire basin – around 85 percent of the labour units employed by the US Army were working in Normandy in May 1945. For the whole area of ComZ – which covered at the end of the war, large parts of France, Belgium, the Netherlands and Germany – the five Norman départements still housed between 31.7 per cent (1 May 1945) and 43.6 per cent (31 March 1945) of all German prisoner units employed by the American army.

[13] W. F. Ross and C. F. Romanus, *The Quartermaster Corps: Operations in the War Against Germany* (Washington, DC, 1963), p. 372.

Table 15

Prisoner of war labour units employed by the US Army within Normandy Base Section, by district and task, March to May 1945

District	Unit type	31 March 1945	1 May 1945	31 May 1945
Beach District (Manche, Calvados, Orne)	Chemical weapons	1	1	0
	Engineers	28	7	10
	Medical	23	54	38
	Ordnance	25	20	25
	Quartermaster	72	40	26
	Signals	2	4	4
	Transportation	45	36	39
	Total:	**196**	**162**	**142**
% of all prisoner units in American hands within NBS:		**64.3 %**	**47.5 %**	**35.1 %**
Northern District (Eure, Seine-Inférieure)	Chemical weapons	0	0	1
	Engineers	16	44	115
	Medical	5	2	4
	Ordnance	4	6	8
	Quartermaster	10	32	21
	Signals	2	2	0
	Transportation	20	33	61
	Total:	**57**	**119**	**210**
% of all prisoner units in American hands within NBS:		**18.7 %**	**34.9 %**	**52.0 %**
Southern District (Mayenne, Sarthe, Eure-et-Loir, Maine-et-Loire, Indre-et-Loire, Loir-et-Cher)	Engineers	3	2	1
	Medical	7	8	12
	Ordnance	7	7	13
	Quartermaster	11	14	11
	Total:	**28**	**31**	**37**
% of all prisoner units in American hands within NBS:		**9.2 %**	**9.1 %**	**9.2 %**
Western District (Ille-et-Vilaine, Côtes du Nord, Finistère)	Special	1	1	1
	Engineers	8	5	1
	Medical	1	5	1
	Ordnance	2	4	0
	Quartermaster	12	14	12
	Total:	**24**	**29**	**15**
% of all prisoner units in American hands within NBS:		**7.9 %**	**8.5 %**	**3.7 %**

Source: Historical reports of Normandy Base Section, NARA, RG 498.

The activity of the prisoner labour units was already very important from the second half of February 1945, when between 80,000 and 90,000 POWs were employed by the different services of Normandy Base Section. At the time of the German surrender, 46 per cent of the personnel available to the American quartermaster were German POWs. Within some services of the American quartermaster corps, the prisoner

manpower represented up to 85 per cent of those employed[14]. However, the German labour units were even more numerous after the end of the war in Europe, during the evacuation and redeployment of American troops and matériel. Almost 150,000 German POWs still worked for the Americans at the end of September 1945, more than a month after the surrender of Japan, within Chanor Base Section, most of them in Normandy. In January 1946, the labour units employed in the port of Le Havre alone grouped no less then 34,000 German POWs, the equivalent of nearly one third of the city's population.

As with the Americans, the British army employed German POWs for various tasks, such as logistics inside matériel depots, vehicle maintenance, work on cemeteries, loading and unloading of cargo ships in the harbours of Caen and Dieppe. However, contrary to the intense use of Normandy by the American logistics, the region held only a minor place on the rear of the British army. At most, around 40 labour companies with 350 POWs worked under British authority in Normandy, between autumn 1944 and spring 1945. After the German capitulation, the British use of prisoner manpower in the region was reduced to a few auxiliary missions with direct recruitment in the central camps, without passing through the creation of real labour companies.

[14] Lewis and Mewha, *Utilization*, p. 244.

Table 16

Geographical distribution of German POWs in American hands, Normandy Base Section then Chanor Base Section

	Département/Province	1 May 1945	1 June 1945	1 August 1945
Beach District	**Manche**	140,000	135,000	155,000
	Calvados	30,000	10,000	10,000
	Orne	< 5,000	< 5,000	< 5,000
Northern District	**Eure**	< 5,000	< 5,000	10,000
	Seine-Inférieure	30,000	70,000	70,000
Western District	**Finistère**	< 5,000	< 5,000	< 5,000
	Côtes-du-Nord	< 5,000	< 5,000	< 5,000
	Ille-et-Vilaine	60,000	70,000	< 5,000
Southern District	**Mayenne**	< 5,000	< 5,000	< 5,000
	Sarthe	90,000	90,000	25,000
	Eure-et-Loir	50,000	45,000	< 5,000
	Maine-et-Loire	< 5,000	< 5,000	< 5,000
	Indre-et-Loire	< 5,000	< 5,000	< 5,000
	Loir-et-Cher	< 5,000	< 5,000	< 5,000
	Somme			< 5,000
	Pas-de-Calais			< 5,000
	Nord			< 5,000
Belgium	**West Flanders**			< 5,000
	East Flanders			< 5,000
	Hainaut			25,000
	Brabant			< 5,000
	Namur			< 5,000
	Liège			25,000
	Limburg			< 5,000
	Antwerp			10,000
	Luxemburg			< 5,000
Netherlands	**Zealand**			< 5,000
	Limburg			< 5,000

Sources: Progress Report, Normandy Base Section, Communication Zone, European Theatre of Operations, 1 May 1945, NARA, RG 498, Normandy Base Section Box 1; Progress Report, Normandy Base Section, Communication Zone, European Theatre of Operations, 31 May 1945, NARA, RG 498, Normandy Base Section Box 1; Progress Report, Chanor Base Section, APO 562, 1 August 1945, NARA, RG 498, Chanor Base Section Box 4.

Table 17

Geographical distribution of German POWs in American hands, Chanor Base Section, 31 January 1946

	31 January 1946	% of total
Le Mans Area (Mayenne, Sarthe, Eure-et-Loir)	644	0.6 %
Cherbourg Area (Manche, Calvados without arrondissement of Lisieux, Orne)	3,150	3.1 %
Le Havre Area (Seine-Inférieure, Eure and arrondissement of Lisieux)	51,997	51.4 %
Lille-Charleroi Area (Somme, Pas-de-Calais, Nord, Hainaut)	16,576	16.4 %
Brussels Area (West Flanders, East Flanders, Brabant)	1,417	1.4 %
Namur-Liège Area (Namur, province of Luxemburg, Limburg (Belgium), Limburg (Netherlands))	11,239	11.1 %
Antwerp Area (Netherlands without province of Limburg)	16,047	15.9 %
Total:	**101,070**	**~ 100 %**

Source: Progress Report, Chanor Base Section, APO 562, 31 January 1946, NARA, RG 468, Chanor Base Section Box 4

Table 18

Geographical distribution of German POWs in British hands, 21st army group, 15 May 1945

Camp n°	Place	Occupation	% of total
2218	Vilvorde (Brabant)	14,124	7.3 %
2221	Fleury-sur-Orne (Calvados)	7,776	4.0 %
2223	Brasschaat (Antwerp)	6,820	3.6 %
2224	Jabbeke (West Flanders)	17,091	8.9 %
2225	Audrieu (Calvados)	7,469	3.9 %
2226	Zedelgem (West Flanders)	21,195	11.0 %
2227	Zedelgem (West Flanders)	16,742	8.7 %
2228	Overijse (Brabant)	32,697	17.0 %
2229	Zedelgem (West Flanders)	15,689	8.2 %
2230	?	21,372	11.1 %
2231	Enghien (Hainaut)	10,075	5.2 %
2232	Kraai (East Flanders)	14,318	7.4 %
2375	Zedelgem (West Flanders)	168	0.1 %
Zedelgem 4	Zedelgem (West Flanders)	6,034	3.1 %
Beeringen Mine	?	504	0.3 %
	Total:	**192,074**	**~ 100 %**

Sources: 21 A Gp/3769/68/A (PW), Subject : PW Holdings, Number of Enemy PW held in theatre at 1800 hrs 15 May, undated, TNA, WO 229/7/1; H. Wolff, *Die deutschen Kriegsgefangenen in britischer Hand. Ein Überblick* (Bielefeld, 1974), p. 76.

3) Violence in the context of strong anti-German feelings

The official discourse on Franco-German relations being uniformly anti-German, violent behaviour from French against Germans was tolerated by the public opinion and thus took place within a fertile environment. Violent behaviour towards German POWs in Normandy was displayed on the one hand by the French civilian population and on the other by French guards working as auxiliaries in the Allied armies within the prisoner camps or on the working sites.

a) Violence from the civilian population

Violent behaviour of the civilian populations against German POWs in Normandy took place while the prisoners were outside their camps; that is to say either during transfers from the front or between different camps, on trains, on foot or on lorries, or during their labour service for the Allies in places that remained accessible for civilians, such as railway stations, harbours or on roads. Thus, on 10 September 1944, a group of German POWs in British hands working at the Caen railway station endured stone throwing from civilians[15]. News of the liberation of the German concentration camps might have boosted the motivation to act violently against Germans, but is not a sufficient explanation. Most of the violence took place when large numbers of prisoners were transferred from one place to another, surrounded by relatively small numbers of military guards. The limited Allied surveillance during these transfers offered the opportunity for the civilian population to attempt a rebalancing of their relationship to the Germans after four years of humiliation during the occupation. Those prisoners transiting by train in open waggons became easy targets while passing through towns and cities between the place of their capture and their camp of destination. Testimonies describing civilians standing on bridges in order to throw stones at the prisoners passing underneath are very numerous. A German POW being transferred to Cherbourg in March 1945 wrote: "Inside the railway waggons (goods waggons) there were often heavily wounded and wounded as the population threw big stones upon us etc. Also upon waggons carrying soldiers who were already heavily injured[16]."

Herbert Hohage, a German soldier aged 17 when captured in Germany on 6 March 1945, remembers certain places on his way from the front to Caen via Brussels where the locomotive driver stopped the train under a bridge to enable the civilians to urinate on the prisoners[17]. After his capture in Germany, young Johann Samlowski was transferred to Bolbec in April 1945. During the journey, Frenchmen were constantly throwing stones on the open charcoal waggons were the prisoners were kept. In Bolbec,

[15] 221 PW Camp, War Diary, entry of 10 September 1944, TNA, WO 171/3741.
[16] Testimony of a German POW, March 1945, DCV-1074, published in Böhme, *In amerikanischer Hand*, p. 21.
[17] Telephonic interview given by Herbert Hohage to the author, 13 August 2010.

inhabitants emptied their chamber pots over the POWs[18]. Walter Bernhardt arrived as a POW in Bolbec on 20 May 1945, after having suffered similar stone throwing during his train transfer. In Bolbec, the prisoners were received by the local population with insults; a woman spat in Bernhardt's face[19]. The narrative of Josef Schröder, forced by their American guards to parade with his comrades in Cherbourg on 8 May 1945, the day of the German surrender, also describes collective violence:

> In every street where we walked, there were French, either accompanying us on foot or sitting on the windowsills and enjoying the spectacle passing in front of them. They threw at us whatever they could catch: stones, tomatoes, cups, dishes, glasses, eggs and much more. Their eyes were full of hatred and they stared at us, they shouted at us whatever they thought would improve the atmosphere and alone the Americans around us could hold them off beating us with sticks and iron bars. Probably we were saved by the lots of calvados they drank for this celebration of victory[20] .

The end of the narrative shows, however, the symbolic character of the violence: "Finally, at the end of this long walk, at the corner of a street, it happened. While I was walking on the outside of the platoon, a young French woman, she probably was no older then twenty years, suddenly threw an apple to me and shouted: « Over, the war is over »[21]." In fact, not all the civilians participating in the parade were personally opposed to the Germans. While the German soldiers were publicly shouted at for what they represented – the occupation period and the Nazi crimes –, many Normans already showed an individual attitude that remained apart from the collective behaviour. A witness transferred by train to Cherbourg at the end of March or the beginning of April 1945, gives a contrasting picture of the civilians' behaviour: "During the carriage, the French civilian population threw stones on our waggons. But we also saw a French who came close to our waggon and said: I was myself in German captivity. No one threw stones at us. Don't be cross with my fellow citizens when they do it, they are simply indoctrinated[22]."

As we will see in the following chapters, former French POWs expressed feelings of compassion to the German prisoners at various occasions. Furthermore, this narrative shows that the Franco-German relations took place on two distinct levels, one collective, the other individual: there were firstly violent actions with people throwing stones at POWs without fear of punishment, enabled by a strongly anti-German official discourse; secondly, there were compassionate gestures, often expressed by French who had experienced nonviolent individual relations with Germans during the war, either in occupied France or in Germany as POWs or forced labour, and had a different opinion of the Germans in general. Many of them no longer saw in the German POWs, the

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[18] Testimony of Johann Samlowski, *Von Sensburg nach Amerika*, 2006, published on http://www.jugendzeit-ostpreussen.de/sensburg-kriegsgefangenschaft.html, accessed on 16 April 2011.
[19] Testimony of Walter Bernhardt, undated, published in Delacroix and Avenel, *C.C.P.W.E. n° 23*, p. 66.
[20] J. Schröder, *Cherbourger Notizen* (Ulm, 1997), p. 102.
[21] Ibid.
[22] Diary of a German POW, spring 1945, BA-MA, B 205/223, WKU-052. A German POW withheld in Brittany describes the behaviour of the civilians as follows: "In Rennes, spitting, stone throwing, etc., more northerly, women bring milk to the train.", the testimony of a German POW, September 1944, WKU-036, published in Böhme, *In amerikanischer Hand*, p. 22.

representatives of Nazi Germany but persons similar to those Germans they might have met in Germany or during the occupation of France and with whom they might have had some kind of relationship[23]. Thus, mass violence occurred only in those relations that took place in the public space because these relations did not allow the building of individual ties to the prisoners; moreover, the prisoners who experienced most of the public violence where those passing through, especially those on trains. The civilians on the bridges knew that they would not see them individually again, a fact that certainly enhanced the willingness to behave violently and the local societies to accept this type of behaviour from its members. While some prisoners experienced physical violence, others were targets of humiliation and degrading behaviour; however, both modes seem to have occurred in parallel and it is not possible to draw a clear line between them, according to the prisoners' testimonies.

b) Violence from the French auxiliary guards

To face the lack of personnel within the rear areas, the Allies started to employ French auxiliaries, military and civil. While civil labour worked within the Allied logistics, French soldiers from the recently created units of the Liberation army were employed as guards over the German POWs in France. Out of 400,000 FFI fighters, 180,000 chose to continue the war in the ranks of the new French army under De Lattre de Tassigny, from September 1944[24]. At this stage, only non-colonial soldiers recruited locally seem to have been attached to auxiliary guard duties under Allied command, without this being part of a policy of active *blanchiment* or whitening of these troops[25]. It can be questioned whether the motivation of many of the French soldiers was to form authority on Germans after four years of occupation. Certainly enrolment first into the resistance, then in the new French armed forces constituted "a first reply to the crisis of masculine identity" of the French men, which had been shattered first by the German occupation, and then by the continued incapacitation during the Allied presence[26]. In his report dated 15 January 1945, the commander of the Gendarmerie of Pont-l'Evêque stated that the population "is happy to see that Frenchmen will participate in guarding enemy POWs"[27]. Michel Gourbin, an 18 years old soldier of the 129th French infantry regiment, was assigned to the surveillance of the American central enclosure n° 10 in La Glacerie, south of Cherbourg: "We did not go inside the enclosure, we went upon the watch-towers at a height of three metres and we guarded. We had no contacts with the prisoners, I do not even know how they ate. But we were happy to keep Germans[28]."

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[23] Cf. also C. Klein, *Et moi je vous dis: aimez vos ennemis*, *L'aumônerie catholique des prisonniers de guerre allemands, 1944-1948* (Paris, 1989), p. 51.
[24] Lacouture, *Le politique*, p. 63.
[25] Contrary to a racial policy applied to those colonial troops participating in the Provence landings, for example. Cf. G. Aubagnac, 'Le retrait des troupes noires de la 1ère Armée', *Revue historique des armées* 1993 (n°2), pp. 34-46.
[26] Buton, *La joie*, p. 230.
[27] Monthly information report of the Gendarmerie of Pont-l'Evêque, 15 January 1945, AD 14, 808 W 34691.
[28] Oral testimony of Michel Gourbin made to the author, 10 August 2010, voice record.

Other narratives from La Glacerie camp talk of the severe tension between French and American guard teams during spring 1945, thus giving birth to a climate of insecurity at the expense of the German prisoners. A reason for this upsurge of tension between French and American guards at this stage of the war could not clearly be identified. At least one prisoner was injured when a guard fired on a tent during the night[29]. A similar situation occurred in Nacqueville and as early as May 1945, the interview given to the Red Cross delegate by the camps man of confidence revealed an "attitude full of hatred of the 500 French in charge of the exterior guard of the camp. In fact, these men are said to have shot wildly during one night inside the camp, injuring 4 prisoners during their sleep. Detachments of these French units are charged with the escorting of the prisoners to the railway station, during their arrival or their departure; several times, prisoners who were getting off the trains were divested of their watches, rings, etc[30]." A prisoner remembers random violence of French guards under US command during a transfer from Nacqueville to Tourlaville in early July 1945: "9/7/45. [Moving from cage 25 to the camp Cherbourg-East.] We were walking under the heat over 14 kilometres to the camp East, escorted by very young French soldiers who did not hesitate to beat us or to hit us with their rifle butts. I lost consciousness twice[31]."

Soon the random and violent behaviour of some French guards resulted in reprimands from both the ICRC and the American services in charge of the French military auxiliaries. In Bolbec, the employment of French militaries for guard duty was considered by the American camp administration command "very unsatisfactory", due to their "lack of training, discipline, and sense of duty"[32]. In spring 1945 at Tourlaville, French guards bore the responsibility for the death of two prisoners, as reported by the Red Cross delegate Amsler[33]. Slights were regularly noticed within the camp of Bolbec, especially during May 1945, where French guards forced the prisoners to move running or to stand under the sun for hours under the threat of a weapon[34]. The historical report of the command of the camp in Bolbec sets a devastating balance of activity of the French auxiliaries in and around this camp:

> The 2d Battalion, 95th French Light Infantry Regiment, commanded by Major Brasseur, arrived this station 27 Feb 1945 for guard duty. Many problems of supply, discipline, housing, and similar

[29] Diary of a German POW, entry of 6 April 1945, BA-MA, B 205/224, WKU-084.
[30] CICR, Rapport de visite, C.C.E. 10, Nacqueville, Cherbourg (Camp de transit, en mains américaines), visité les 4 et 9 mai 1945 par M. Amsler.
[31] Diary of a German POW, BA-MA, B 205/56, WKG-087; also published in Böhme, *In amerikanischer Hand*, p. 35.
[32] Lack of humanity is not mentioned in this report. Cf. Headquarters, Continental Central PW Enclosure No. 23, US Army, Unit History, undated (Summer 1945), NARA, RG 407, Entry 427, Box 22073, MPPC-23-0.2.
[33] CICR, Rapport de visite, C.C.E. 24, Overhead Detachment, Tourlaville, Cherbourg (en mains américaines), visité par M. Amsler le 11 mai 1945.
[34] CICR, Rapport de visite, C.C.E. 23, Bolbec (en mains américaines), visité le 2 mai 1945 par M. Amsler.

> difficulties were solved to the best of our ability, but conditions were never entirely satisfactory, and it was with relief that we saw them depart this station on 4 July 1945[35].

The question whether violence and looting from French guards towards German prisoners was more or less tolerated by the American authorities remains to be answered, especially after the German surrender and the repatriation of Allied ex-POWs.

II – A distorted perception of the POWs' living conditions that reflect the public frustration over the continued Allied presence

1) Despite deteriorating living conditions inside the camps…

Between the end of the battle of Normandy and the end of 1945, when most camps and prisoners were transferred to French custody, the living conditions inside the Allied POW camps in Normandy evolved constantly. This evolution was due in part to the ever-changing material conditions within the Allied armies in Europe. The question has to be raised whether, until the end of the war in Europe, deteriorating living conditions for German POWs in Normandy were the result of a reciprocity of reprisals between Germany and the western Allies. In fact, a certain radicalisation of the German POW policy took place after the failed attempt against Hitler, when POW camp commanders were placed under the command of SS General Gottlob Berger at the end of September 1944. However, contrary to what London and Washington feared, this change ultimately remained without much negative effect on American and British POWs in Germany, and thus did not give rise to reprisals against German POWs in American and British hands[36]. The only time the Allies questioned the policy of treating German POWs according to international law was in the aftermath of the Malmédy massacre on 17 December 1944, when more than 70 American POWs were executed by German SS troops. The American Joint Chiefs of Staff in fact planned to banish 1,000 German POWs to remote overseas camps for every Allied prisoner killed by the Germans, but this proposal was ultimately dismissed for various reasons, also to not hinder the Allied re-education programs for German POWs well underway at this stage of the war[37]. And from January 1945 onwards, the question of reciprocity in POW treatment started to lose its weight since the German government increasingly considered the high numbers of German POWs in Allied hands in the west as defeatist deserters and therefore lost more and more of its interest in their actual living conditions as captives[38].

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[35] Headquarters, Continental Central PW Enclosure No. 23, US Army, Unit History, undated (Summer 1945), NARA, RG 407, Entry 427, Box 22073, MPPC-23-0.2. The second sentence only appears on the draft report, the final version simply states: "This Bn remained at this station until 4 July 1945."
[36] Wylie, *Barbed Wire Diplomacy*, pp. 232-233, 261.
[37] Ibid., p. 258.
[38] Ibid., p. 230.

Based on the materials that we have analysed, the only factor not directly related to material matters that significantly deteriorated the living conditions of German POWs in this region was the unconditional surrender of Germany on 8 May 1945 and the loss of Switzerland as a protecting power for German captives[39]. This deterioration however, does not seem connected to the creation of new statuses for soldiers captured after 8 May 1945, who officially became 'Surrendered Enemy Personnel' or 'Disarmed Enemy Forces', and were thus deprived of the status of POWs granting protection by the Geneva Convention[40]. In fact, those prisoners in Allied custody held in France remained POWs and thus were not officially affected by this new status. Decreasing living conditions for German POWs in Allied camps in Normandy are therefore thought to have other reasons, as we will see now.

a) Accommodation

The accommodation of the German POWs in Allied hands in Normandy experienced varying situations, in time and space and according to whether a camp was under American or British authority, which makes it difficult to generalise. It can be said, however, that in the beginning, the Americans faced fewer difficulties in organising their central prisoner camps than the British. While the US camp in La Glacerie was equipped with permanent structures, the British camp of Fleury-sur-Orne did not even have tents at first and as a consequence, German POWs were forced to sleep in holes dug into the ground, covered with tarpaulins or coats[41].

The increasing influx of prisoners from the front, especially after the Allies had evacuated the more eastern camps after the German offensive in the Ardennes in December 1944, led to the overcrowding of hastily enlarged camp structures in Normandy. Within one week, the prisoner population of the newly opened US camp of Foucarville rose from some 4,000 men to 15,000[42]. Tents were now the most frequent type of accommodation, grouping up to 60 prisoners each; they would ideally sleep on wooden berths or wooden floors, on a layer of straw, or blankets. But in practice the tents were often poorly equipped as a result of a poor material preparation for the prisoner administration: some tents had little or no heating, in others the prisoners had to sleep on the ground, sometimes on a simple layer of carton. Mud in the winter, dust in the summer, were soon to become the prisoners' worst enemies. Blankets were not always available for everyone, especially when the camps were facing a sudden influx of new prisoners.

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[39] Villa, 'The Diplomatic and Political Context', p. 66.

[40] For the question of the creation of the status of 'Surrendered Enemy Personnel' or 'Disarmed Enemy Forces', cf. Villa, 'The Diplomatic and Political Context', pp. 58-60; Overmans, 'German Historiography', in Bischof and Ambrose, eds, *Facts against Falsehood*, p. 147; Wiggers, 'Denial', pp. 91-94.

[41] CICR, Rapport de visite, Prisoner of War Overhead Detachment 2027 (camp en mains américaines), visité le 18 octobre 1944 par MM. N. Burckhardt et W.H. Michel. Cf. also F. Dutour and G. Fournier, *Le Calvados : 1945-1947* (Caen, 1995), p. 87.

[42] Headquarters, Continental Central PW Enclosure No. 19, US Army, Historical report, undated (summer 1945), NARA, RG 407, Entry 427, Box 22073, MPPC-19-0.2.

While some camp commanders apparently did their best to improve the prisoners' material situation, the problems remained particularly severe in some camps, such as the transit camps of Bolbec and Dieppe. The rotation of prisoners made the tents and installations wear out more quickly than in those camps where prisoners could take continuous care of their accommodation with improvised means and a few allotted materials. The British camp in Dieppe had a capacity of 10,000, but counted more than 27,000 prisoners in October 1944 due to lack of transportation volume to evacuate them[43]. As late as February 1946, the German prisoners in Bolbec – then counting 43,000 men – still slept on the wet ground of their tents, only protected from moisture by a layer of blankets[44].

Accommodation of prisoners transferred to labour camps was quite different from that experienced by their comrades in the central enclosures. The camps were much smaller and more numerous. Between 1944 and 1946, Normandy counted at least different 60 Allied labour camps, housing between 200 and 5,000 prisoners[45]. While the bigger camps were equipped with tents, the smaller ones were installed in permanent structures, such as industrial buildings or military barracks. Due to their activity outside the enclosures, prisoners were enabled to gather construction materials and tools to improve their living conditions inside the camps, sometimes against the will of the camp commander. Josef Schröder was transferred to a US labour camp near Cherbourg: "After the end of the war, the carpenters among us constructed wooden beds. Finally we could sleep correctly. The tools, we had stolen them bit by bit in the port, where one could always find something useful. The Americans gave us nothing – they feared, as they said, we could make rifles[46]."

b) Supplies and health care

The living conditions of the German POWs in Allied hands in Normandy, in terms of food supply and health, can also hardly be generalised. While some would literally starve to death in the central enclosures during the summer 1945, others would have enough food to sell the surplus to the civilian population.

During the first months, in autumn 1944, living conditions were generally satisfactory according to Red Cross reports and prisoners' testimonies alike. The prisoners of the US camp of La Glacerie and the British camp in Audrieu received three hot meals per day; clothes were frequently disinfected to improve the hygiene inside the

[43] 6 L of C Sub-Area, War Diary, October 1944, Appendix 'E', 11 L of C Area, Subject: Report – 2375 PW Camp, 19 October 1944, TNA, WO 171/747.
[44] CICR, Rapport de visite, C.C.P.W.E. No. 23, Bolbec (en mains américaines), visité les 4, 5 et 6 février 1946 par M. R. Amsler.
[45] Visiting reports of the International Committee of the Red Cross, ACICR; historical reports of the Normandy Base Section, NARA; historical reports of the Chanor Base Section, NARA; war diaries of British labour camps, TNA; Böhme, *In amerikanischer Hand*, pp. 106-107.
[46] Schröder, *Notizen*, pp. 48-50.

camps and the prisoners could take hot showers[47]. Johannes Börner was a prisoner in Audrieu in 1944 and 1945 and remembers that the prisoners "never starved to death from hunger, we had all we needed"[48].

The situation deteriorated first in the British camps. Typhus broke out in the camp in Dieppe as early as October 1944, prompted by an overoccupation of up to 270 per cent of the original capacity, thus leading to the saturation of sanitary installations and a lack of fresh water, after heavy rain had transformed the camp into a gigantic quagmire. Emergency measures were immediately taken by the British authorities, including the arrival of mobile bath lorries and 120 tons of new clothes and underwear from US Army stocks. Moreover, all working parties were brought back to the camp to avoid the disease spreading among the civilian population[49]. At the same time, in October 1944, up to 12 per cent of German prisoners in US hands in Normandy were reported sick[50]. In December 1944, the British camp in Fleury-sur-Orne experienced conditions similar to those in Dieppe, counting up to 10 per cent of sick prisoners each week. Only a determined reorganisation of the camp including an improved fresh water supply and enlarged latrines, could prevent a new deterioration of the situation[51].

During spring and summer 1945, the situation worsened again, now in most of the camps under British as well as under American authority. However, sources other than testimonies of POWs, are lacking. Red Cross reports are absent from the Red Cross archives for the period between mid-May and early September 1945, a period that is described in many prisoners' narratives as the most difficult in Normandy, marked with poor food supply and sometimes extreme hunger. According to a witness, typhus broke out in Foucarville in August 1945, certainly fostered by the lack of food and bad physical state of the prisoners: "We are hungry. The supply is not enough at all. The meals are only there to prevent us from starving […]. I lose weight quickly, and my last corporal reserves will soon be gone[52]."

Another prisoner held in the US camp in Nacqueville described the food as "very good and abundant" in his diary on 30 March 1945; but he noticed a decrease on 2 April, before writing on 21 May: "Now we know what hunger is." On 2 June he wrote that "suddenly again very good food" was handed out. The improvement was only short-lived as he wrote on 22 June that "our capacity to think decreases. We tremble from hunger. Everyone only talks about food. Next to us, the Americans waste the food. Mountains of bread and meat are burnt. We go crazy[53]."

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47 CICR, Rapport de visite, Prisoner of War Overhead Detachment 2027 (camp en mains américaines), visité le 18 octobre 1944 par MM. N. Burckhardt et W.H. Michel; cf. also CICR, Rapport de visite du POW Camp No. 2225 par M. Nicolas Burckhardt, 1 December 1944.

48 Testimony of Johannes Börner to the author, Ouistreham, 28 June 2011.

49 6 L of C Sub-Area, War Diary, A.Q., October 1944, Appendix 'E', 11 L of C Area, Subject: Report – 2375 PW Camp, 19 October 1944, TNA, WO 171/747.

50 Historical reports of Normandy Base Section, NARA, RG 498.

51 Quarterly Report by D.A.D.M.S. 101 Beach Sub-Area, 31 December 1944, TNA, WO 222/1469.

52 Diary of a German POW, entry of 29 June 1945, BA-MA, B 205/221, WKU-013, also published in Böhme, *In amerikanischer Hand*, pp. 38-39.

53 Diary of a German POW, BA-MA, B 205/1542, DCV-2102, also published in Böhme, *In amerikanischer Hand*, pp. 34-35.

This diary shows the general deterioration of the food supply in one of the central camps in Normandy, mostly due to lack of adequate transportation, punctuated with sudden arrivals of unexpected food, relieving the prisoners from hunger[54]. Quantities of food arriving at the camps after being in transit for long periods of time, thus becoming improper for consumption, were destroyed in order to prevent more serious health issues among the prisoners[55]. The natural propensity of military authorities to give prisoner affairs a low priority was enhanced after 8 May 1945 and the unconditional surrender of Germany: while all Allied POWs until then held by Germany had been liberated, the motivation to respect the Geneva Convention towards the German POWs in Allied hands, certainly decreased rapidly among local camp commanders and authorities. In certain cases, a direct retaliation against the Germans, especially after the discovery of the concentration camps and the liberation of Allied POWs in a bad health state, cannot be excluded. In fact, from April 1945, the first American ex-POWs arrived at the repatriation camp Lucky Strike, near Le Havre – one GI out of five was sent to hospital in a bad physical state[56]. Red Cross reports are available again from September 1945, stating unanimously that the food situation had become satisfactory, as for example in Fleury-sur-Orne and Audrieu[57].

Generally, the living conditions in the small labour camps were better than in the huge camp-cities. Working prisoners had to be maintained in a good physical state to improve their output and, depending on their personalities, the commanders of these smaller camps were more or less willing to search for means of improvisation to improve the everyday life of their prisoners[58]. Moreover, the food rations given to working prisoners were theoretically identical to those provided to the American guards – a standard K Ration of the US Army having a caloric value of 2,800 per day[59].

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[54] Lamache, "Les Américains", p. 377.

[55] The Americans also destroyed foodstuff outside the camps, under the eyes of the hungry civilian population, Boivin, *Les lendemains de la Libération*, p. 120. Cf. also Wiggers, "The United States and the Refusal to Feed German Civilians after World War II", in S. B. Vardy and T. H. Tooley, eds, *Ethnic Cleansing in Twentieth-Century Europe* (Boulder, 2003), who mentions an American order wanting to destroy military food surplus instead of distributing it to the POWs.

[56] Cf. for example Schröder, *Notizen*, p. 53: "When the Americans had liberated Buchenwald and Dachau, our rations were reduced by order of Eisenhower for many months to the level of those of the prisoners in the concentration camps." Cf. also Lamache, "Les Américains", p. 373 footnote 819.

[57] CICR, Rapport de visite, British Annexe Camp 2225 C, Caen – Fleury s/ Orne (Calvados), visité par M. Amsler les 4 et 5 septembre 1945. Cf. also CICR, Rapport de visite, British Main Camp 2225 A, Audrieu près Bayeux, Calvados, (en mains britanniques), visité le 6 septembre 1945 par M. Amsler.

[58] In theory, the food supply of the working prisoners was identical to that of the guarding personnel. Cf. the letter of a YMCA delegate who visited the camps in Northern and Eastern France to M. Jung of the Maschke commission, Douai (Nord), 18 March 1961, BA-MA, B 205/41.

[59] Letter of a YMCA delegate having visited camps in Northern and Eastern France to M. Jung of the "Maschke" commission, Douai (Nord), 18 March 1961, BA-MA, B 205/41. Cf. also Koehler, *Special Rations*, published on http://www.qmfound.com/ army_rations_historical_background.htm, accessed on 9 January 2015.

c) Discipline

Enforcement of discipline in the often overcrowded central camps frequently gave rise to abuse of the prisoners, especially when guard duties were handed to American or British military personnel that had been judged unfit for combat service, generally for reasons of poor discipline. This added to the difficulties due to violent French auxiliary guards, as mentioned above. The commander of CCPWE n° 23 Bolbec stated that the American guard unit of this camp "is predominately composed of ex-combat men of which a large number have been assigned to rear echelon duties because of combat exhaustion, psychoneurosis, nervous instability, and psychopathic traits"[60]. Some prisoners soon suspected their guards to be convicts and former inmates of infamous Sing Sing prison near New York[61]. The camp of Foucarville was equipped with confinement cells dug into the ground, simple holes not big enough for the prisoners to sit, let alone to lay down[62]. Captives identified as former members of the Waffen-SS became the targets of special punishment, certainly due to their reputation as ferocious combatants and the fear they might have spread among Allied guard troops. At the camp of Bolbec, the Red Cross reported a collective punishment of 30 SS prisoners (for an incorrect disposal of a food pot by a single man) consisting of standing to attention for 23 consecutive hours. Another SS prisoner of this camp was punished to stand to attention for 48 consecutive hours without receiving food, for having attempted to go to the latrines at night through a non-authorised door of his tent[63]. Hermann Guderian, aged 20 and the young cousin of Heinz Guderian, famous for establishing motorised warfare in the German army and his success in Sedan in 1940, was a prisoner in Bolbec: "The personnel of the camp treated us in a terrible way. The German camp guard was assassinated and disappeared in the latrines. The SS prisoners were forced to break stones and bear their helmet on the back. The newly arrived SS had to get naked[64]."

Inside the American labour companies, discipline was enforced by the presence of US Army guards who could apply a series of measures against insubordinate prisoners. According to the prisoners' activity outside the camps, the guards were particularly interested in discovering tools or stocks of food that would enable the prisoners to attempt an escape: the tents and barracks were frequently searched. Prisoners who infringed the rules would be punished with confinement, generally in small compounds called "pill boxes" or "puppy tents"[65]. Josef Schröder recalls the punishment of prisoners who had attempted to escape:

[60] Headquarters, Continental Central PW Enclosure No. 23, US Army, Unit History, undated (summer 1945), NARA, RG 407, Entry 427, Box 22073, MPPC-23-0.2.
[61] Testimony of Hermann Guderian, published in Delacroix and Avenel, *C.C.P.W.E. n° 23*, p. 63.
[62] Diary of a German POW, May 1945, BA-MA, B 205/223, WKG-057.
[63] CICR, Rapport de visite, C.C.P.W.E. No. 23, Bolbec (en mains américaines), visité les 19, 20 et 21 septembre 1945 par M. Amsler.
[64] Testimony of Hermann Guderian, published in Delacroix and Avenel, *C.C.P.W.E. n° 23*, p. 63.
[65] Böhme, *In amerikanischer Hand*, p. 105.

> Their hair were cut off, they received even in the winter only very light clothes and were locked up in a special cage in front of which the other prisoners had to pass every day. They would quickly lose weight because they received as special runaway diet and after one week of jail they laid lifeless on the ground. They crawled, if they were still able to crawl, always in circles, until they would let go to their fate. Only now they would be brought back among humans again[66].

Only rarely would prisoners become the target of direct physical violence from their American or British guards, although in several US labour camps in Le Havre in January 1946, guards tended to beat and verbally humiliate prisoners[67].

d) Estimated death rates

How many German POWs died during their captivity in Allied hands in Normandy? No precise statistics exist to adequately answer this question, Red Cross reports, existing studies and testimonies have to be dealt with carefully, especially since they bear important differences as far as mortality is regarded[68]. August Laufgens, one of around 20,000 prisoners in La Glacerie during the summer 1945, remembers that "twenty to thirty dead were taken out of the camp every day", stating that he saw it with his own eyes[69] – a minimum daily death rate of 0.1 per cent. A witness having lived in the camp of Bolbec states that "we learned in autumn 1945 that the daily death figures were around 150 dead"[70]. On the contrary, the Red Cross reported, after a three-day visit in September 1945, that "since 6 February 1945, there were 58 dead on 120,000 prisoners having passed by the camp during this period". Moreover, the report specified that "the dead prisoners had been buried at the Saint-André cemetery"[71]. The war diary of CCPWE 23 reports the death of 35 prisoners between 5 April and 10 July 1945, and specified that

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[66] Schröder, *Notizen*, p. 57.

[67] During a Red Cross visit in January 1946, a prisoner showed severe wounds on his abdomen after having been beaten by a guard. The delegate reported several similar cases of physic violence, CICR, Rapport de visite, Labor Supervision Centres de la région du Havre, visités par M. R. Porchet le 28 janvier 1946.

[68] For a discussion of Bacque's problematic *Other losses*, cf. especially Bischof and Ambrose, eds, *Facts against Falsehood*.

[69] Oral testimony of August Leufgens, Düren, 15 March 2012. The camp for German POWs in Le Coudray, south of Chartres, counted around 30,000 prisoners. A total of 332 dead were buried in the municipal cemetery during the existence of the camp, a death rate of 1.1 per cent without taking into account fluctuations. Information given by H. Briand, charged with the conservation of the camp site, 16 May 2012. Lamache quotes the testimony of the German prisoner Füss Höller, captured on 17 March 1945 and transferred to CCPWE n° 12 in Rennes, counting around 50,000 prisoners, who mentions that 40 to 50 prisoners were missing at every daily roll call. One night, he counted 57 dead. Lamache, "Les Américains", p. 376. This would be between 8 and 10 dead for any 10,000 prisoners per day, some 2,500 prisoners for the period of July and August 1945. Another witness mentions 5,000 dead in that camp during summer 1945, testimony DCV-1109 quoted in Böhme, *In amerikanischer Hand*, p. 46. The records of the Cimetière de l'Est in Rennes, where the dead prisoners of both camps of the city (counting together up to 63,000 prisoners) were officially buried, mention 435 dead between mid-June and mid-September 1945, that is to say an average of 145 per month, or less than 5 dead per day, which contradicts the direct testimonies. Cf. F. Jesse, "Les prisonniers de guerre allemands en Bretagne, Rencontres et expériences entre capture, captivité et vie parmi les Français, 1944-1948/1949." (Rennes, 2004), p. 68.

[70] Diary of a POW, undated entry, BA-MA, B 205/223, WKU-052, also published in Böhme, *In amerikanischer Hand*, p. 46.

[71] CICR, Rapport de visite, C.C.P.W.E. No. 23, Bolbec (en mains américaines), visité les 19, 20 et 21 septembre 1945 par M. Amsler.

"the cemetery [of Saint-André-de-l'Eure] was 90 miles away, thus requiring precious time and the use of means of transportation which are badly lacking"[72]. Ludwig Zuckerschwerdt, a former member of the NSDAP and the SS and the German medical officer in charge of several field hospitals in Normandy, had a total of about 80,000 patients under his responsibility. In August 1946 he declared to the Red Cross having "registered 80 dead only"[73].

Rüdiger Overmans has established a reliable overall death rate of German POWs in American hands at 0.7 per cent, and that of the soldiers in British captivity at 0.5 per cent for the entire war[74]. Of course, Overman's rates are averages for the entire war, including many theatres and circumstances much more amenable to POWs than the situation in northern France and thus levelling out higher death rates inside overcrowded central camps. Also, when applying Overman's death rate for American camps to the 120,000 passing through Bolbec between February and September 1945, we find 840 dead – which still is a theoretical figure considering the rotation of the prisoners and the different durations of stay – that is more than 14 times higher than the Red Cross figure. The difference is certainly too big to be neglected. Therefore, it can be supposed that only those dead buried in Saint-André-de-l'Eure had been taken into account in the original figure, and that the others had been buried near the camp. In fact, it can be questioned whether the American guard units would take the risk of spreading germs among the civilian population by transporting bodies carrying contagious diseases over a distance of 90 miles through Normandy.

During summer 1945, some 270,000 German POWs were held in Normandy in Allied camps and labour units, a majority of which was in US custody. When applying Overman's death rate of 0.7 per cent to these 270,000 prisoners, we find a total of 1,890 dead, which has to be considered a low estimation considering that this rate comprises various theatres. However if we apply to these 270,000 men the average daily death rate of 0.1 per cent, as mentioned by several witnesses, on the 62 days of July and August, we arrive at 16,740 dead, that is to say an absolute death rate of 6.2 per cent. Considering that the rate calculated by Overmans is an average rate, taking into account deaths in the camps in the United States, where the living conditions where much better, and those occurring inside the overcrowded and poorly supplied camps in continental Europe, we can suggest that the absolute death rate in Normandy was above 0.7 per cent. Given that many POWs also died before and after summer 1945 and considering that former POWs could have a tendency to exaggerate figures of mortality, it can be stated that the total number of German POWs dead in Normandy under Allied authority is certainly around 10,000 – a death rate of 2.7 per cent. The significance of this rate lies in the fact that a relatively low percentage of German soldiers had been captured after episodes of intense fighting and that most entered Allied custody en masse at the end of local battles and

[72] Headquarters, Continental Central PW Enclosure No. 23, US Army, Unit History, undated (summer 1945), NARA, RG 407, Entry 427, Box 22073, MPPC-23-0.2.
[73] CICR, Rapport de visite, 128th L. Supv. Center Stockade No 7, Camp Philip Morris, Gainnerville-Le Havre (en mains américaines), visité le 1er août 1946 par M. Amsler.
[74] Overmans, *Deutsche militärische Verluste im Zweiten Weltkrieg* (Munich, 1999), p. 286.

towards the end of the war in Europe. In other words, few German POWs died in custody as a consequence of war wounds, and that most died because of the poor living conditions inside the camps.

2) … a growing criticism over a too German-friendly Allied POW administration

The public perception of the Allied POW administration in Normandy reflects the fact that SHAEF authorities, mainly driven by military interests and public opinion back home, clearly underestimated the impact of the presence of German POWs on the French society. The distance between the reality of the living conditions of these prisoners and their perception by the population can be seen as an indicator for the need to blame the everyday difficulties in liberated France on the Allies, and on the Germans.

a) The public opinion

The constant visibility of those German prisoners working for the Allies under the eyes of the civilian population was at the origin of an undifferentiated opinion towards the whole of the German POWs in Allied custody. Allied military interests which ultimately resulted in a relative freedom and good treatment of these working prisoners resulted in public opinion considering that the bulk of the German prisoners in Allied hands were uniformly well treated – thus ignoring the difficult living conditions of tens of thousands of German POWs in the nearby but hardly visible central enclosures. As early as 17 August 1944, the newspaper *La Presse Cherbourgeoise* published an article which severely criticised the American treatment of German POWs and especially the distribution of oranges and bananas allegedly handed out for their benefit – and not to the civilian population[75]. On 12 October 1944, a civilian letter intercepted by the American censorship services in the département Manche revealed that "here in Cherbourg the Americans are rather unpopular with the Civilian population. Firstly because of the extremely free behaviour they have toward the women, and secondly by the exceptionally gentle treatment they accord to the German prisoners – these two reasons justify the displeasure of the people of Cherbourg[76]." On 30 October 1944, it was the newspaper *La Renaissance du Bessin* which relayed public criticism of the supplies granted to German prisoners, deploring the fact that they received cigarettes, white bread and canned meat[77]. In his report on the general situation in Calvados between 25 October and 10 November 1944, the prefect of that département noted that "the population […] does still not

[75] Lamache, *La Normandie*, pp. 100-101.
[76] SHAEF, G-2, Censorship Civil Communications, Summary of: Relations between Americans in general and French Civilians, Record No. 1580, Compagnie du PART, quartier Rochambeau, Cherbourg, 12 October 1944, TNA, WO 219/1792B.
[77] Lamache, *La Normandie*, pp. 101-102.

understand that the Allied armies treat the German prisoners with such regards" [78]. The captain of the Pont-l'Evêque Gendarmerie platoon noticed on 16 November 1944 that "the population does not understand that the Germans are treated with regards that no Frenchmen had known in Germany"[79]. At mid-December, the prefect of Calvados wrote:

> The Allied authorities continue to be criticised on the way that are treated the German prisoners, better supplied and better clothed than the French. One compares in fact the arrival on the working sites of German prisoners and French engineers. The first come in cars, all clothed with raincoats, well shoed; the latter arrive afoot with bad shoes and half civil, half military clothes[80].

In the département Orne, criticism was equally harsh, as shown by civil correspondence intercepted by the American censorship. Thus, on 17 October 1944, an inhabitant of Saint-Sulpice-sur-Risle, northeast of Laigle, wrote to a relative that "there are still Germans who commit crimes in order to procure food and civilian clothes. There are number of prisoners who work at clearing or constructing the railroad lines, they are badly guarded by the negroes and take the chance to escape. What a pity that they are not guarded by French men or women[81]!" One week later, a resident of Almenêches, about ten kilometres southeast of Argentan, wrote to a friend that the Germans "are better off than our soldiers, […] they escape at will, […] you must kill as many of them as possible"[82].

From December 1944, the civilian population of Normandy lived under the increasing fear that the German prisoners held in the region could organise a massive escape in a joint action with the German counter-offensive in the Ardennes. The monthly opinion report by the Gendarmerie of Calvados reflects these fears:

> The population declares that the prisoners are insufficiently guarded and that it is easy for them to commit acts of sabotage, given the great number of depots for explosives of all kind that exist in the region. Moreover, the abundant food which they receive enables them to constitute stocks necessary for their escape[83].

On 7 January 1945, in a letter sent to the head of SHAEF Mission to France, major-general John T. Lewis, general Alphonse Juin, chief of staff of the National defence within the GPRF, relayed publicly the criticism of his fellow citizens over the Allied treatment of German POWs, insisting on "the bad influence of these facts on the French

[78] Report of the prefect of the département Calvados relative to the situation of the département between 25 October and 10 November 1944, undated, AD 14, 9 W 45.
[79] Monthly report of the Pont-l'Evêque Gendarmerie platoon, 16 November 1944, AD 14, 808 W 34691.
[80] Report of the prefect of the département Calvados relative to the situation of the département between 25 November and 10 December 1944, undated, AD 14, 9 W 45.
[81] SHAEF, G-2, Censorship Civil Communications, Summary of: Relations between Americans in general and French Civilians, Record No. 1631, Saint-Sulpice-sur-Orne, 17 October 1944, TNA, WO 219/1792B.
[82] SHAEF, G-2, Censorship Civil Communications, Summary of: Relations between Americans in general and French Civilians, Record No. 1639, Almenêches, 23 October 1944, TNA, WO 219/1792B.
[83] Report of the Gendarmerie of département Calvados on the general state of mind of the populations, 19 December 1944, AD 14, 21 W 15/2.

public opinion"[84]. In fact, the evolution of the public opinion was similar in other French regions. But, confronted with often far less numerous POWs, the civilian population mainly relied on rumours and media to form their opinion over the Germans prisoners[85] – and not in contact with them and their Allied guards like in Normandy.

Locally, public criticism did not only concern the food supply of POWs, but also their accommodation facilities, as noticed in March 1945 by the police of Vire, a town that had suffered severe damage during the battle of Normandy: "The retailers are disgusted to see the barracks for the German prisoners being quickly constructed while they are still waiting for their promised barracks and which are indispensable for the practice of their business[86]."

However, whereas large numbers of German prisoners were present in Normandy after the liberation, public opinion towards the Germans was not always formed by those who were in permanent contact with them. Thus, often public opinion reflected rumours rather than real facts. The report of the Lisieux Gendarmerie, dated 15 January 1945, reflects perfectly, the discrepancy between the public opinion and the individual experiences made by the civilians: "There are no POWs in this district. However, it is pointed out that the latter are treated with to many regards by the Allies[87]."

Between March and July 1945, the Gendarmerie of Pont-l'Evêque stated in several reports that the attitude of the civilian population towards the German POWs was "hostile", without giving more details on the reasons for that hostility[88]. While only few German POWs stayed in the region of the Pays d'Auge in early 1945, the main discourse of the public opinion in Lisieux stated that "the POWs are treated too humanely in comparison with the treatment inflicted to ours" [89]. In June 1945, a time when German prisoners suffered the worst living conditions in Allied camps, the Gendarmerie of Calvados noted in its monthly opinion report that "the population still requests that they [the POWs] may be treated with the same fierceness than ours have been in Germany. People understand hardly that they are so well fed and that their working conditions are not harder[90]." The comparison with the living conditions of French prisoners in Germany is a recurrent theme in a great number of reports relative to the opinion of civilian populations. Considering the generally sympathetic attitude of

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[84] Bureau du président du gouvernement provisoire de la République française, état-major de la Défense nationale, 4ème section, N° 10 DN/4, General Juin, chef d'état-major de la défense nationale, to the General commanding SHAEF Mission to France, Objet : Prisonniers de guerre allemands sous juridiction américaine, Paris, 7 January 1945, NARA, RG 331, 383.6.

[85] Théofilakis, *Les prisonniers de guerre*, pp. 346-348.

[86] Information report of the Inspecteur régional d'Etat acting as the head of the police of Vire, 17 March 1945, AD 14, 21 W 16.

[87] Report of the commander of the Lisieux Gendarmerie platoon relative to the general situation of the district during the preceding month, 15 January 1945, AD 14, 808 W 34691.

[88] Cf. for example the report of the Gendarmerie of Pont-l'Evêque dated 16 June 1945, AD 14, 808 W 346914.

[89] Report of the commander of the Lisieux Gendarmerie platoon relative to the general situation of the district during the preceding month, 14 February 1945, AD 14, 808 W 34691. The public opinion relative to the German POWs remained unchanged one month later, the report of the commander of the Lisieux Gendarmerie platoon relative to the general situation of the district during the preceding month, 15 March 1945, AGN, 14 E 39.

[90] Report of the Gendarmerie company for Calvados relative to the general situation in the département, Caen, 18 June 1945, AD 14, 21 W 16.

former French POWs towards German POWs in France, these direct comparisons by people who (generally) have not been prisoners themselves hint again to the symbolic character of the germanophobia as an element of the French national discourse. The idea of allegedly uniformly bad experiences of French prisoners in Germany and in contact with stereotypical Germans was mobilised to support anti-German opinions and behaviour in post-occupation France. More generally, this attitude also reflects a general dissatisfaction over the continued lack of sovereignty of the French in France.

At the same time, Norman hostility towards the German POWs was frequently explained by the painful memory of the occupation period. Thus, the French intelligence services for the département Calvados observed in a report dated 24 October 1945, that the "American attitude towards France concerning the question of the German prisoners has been judged severely. The population of this département, which had suffered so much under the Germans, thinks that the American policy towards the prisoners is not compatible with justice[91]." The population of the small coastal town of Carteret, on the western shores of the département Manche, was shocked by the arrival without guards, of more than one hundred German POWs in early July 1946, so that they could spend a day on the beach[92].

Finally, it can be stated that the uniformity of public opinion relative to the German POWs reveals that the civilian population either lacked or ignored information on their real living conditions. Whereas the general situation of the prisoners in Normandy deteriorated during the year 1945 especially after the end of the war in Europe, public opinion continued to portray the idea of prisoners being too well treated, with too many favours from their British and American guards. Whereas the image of pampered prisoners arose already during the battle of Normandy, when large numbers of prisoners received Allied combat rations including chocolate, cigarettes and oranges, the new and often disastrous conditions and the decrease of food rations inside the camps in 1945 were not taken into account in the public discourse. At most, one could hear the comment that "those suffering only got what they deserved"[93].

The discrepancy between the state of knowledge of the masses and the realities of the prisoners' life can be explained by a crucial lack of communication between both groups, mainly due to a policy of isolation set up by the Allied authorities to protect their political and military interests. Possible vectors would have been the humanitarian organisations, such as the Red Cross and the YMCA, who were granted access to the interior of the central camps where the living conditions were worst. But their criticism found no echo in the French media either because they were not sharp enough, or

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[91] Bi-monthly report of the Renseignements généraux for the period between 1 and 20 October 1945, Caen, 24 October 1945, AD 14, 21 W 18.

[92] Letter of the préfet of the département Manche to the general commanding the Western Base Section, Coutances, 11 July 1946, AD 50, 1004 W 916. However, the reactions of the population could be very different from one place to another. Thus, in Petit-Quevilly, close to Rouen, where German POWs under American custody "walk to their work place without guards", the ICRC found "no complaints about this matter", CICR, Rapport de visite, 138 Labor Supervision Center, Région du Havre, visité le 9 février 1946 par M. R. Porchet.

[93] Klein, *Aimez*, p. 51; also Lamache, *La Normandie*, p. 99.

because they were too distant from the common idea on the living conditions of German POWs in Allied hands in France, thus becoming hardly credible.

b) The Allies' reactions on the public opinion

Progressively, the Allies became conscious of the conflict potential lying in the way they treated their German POWs in a formerly occupied region. There was a need for balancing the military and political reasons pursued by the application of the Geneva Convention on one hand, with the will to preserve the positive image of the Allied armies in France on the other hand. Thus, as early as the end of August 1944, SHAEF sent delegates to military working sites in order to make sure that the prisoner manpower was working efficiently and not being pampered[94]. On 16 September 1944, the staff of the British 101 Beach Sub-Area, settled in the Caen region, reminded those units employing German manpower "that if PW are attacked by civilians, the escort is to call a French gendarme if possible, & in no circumstances to use force against French civilians"[95]. However these instructions were unequally applied and in many cases the German POWs enjoyed the protection of their British and American guards against collective violence from the French.

Facing recurring allegations towards the Allied administration of German POWs in France, also in the media, the American Army replied with determination by organising, on 21 November 1944, a joint press conference with the French office for information[96]. In his statement, general Milton A. Reckord, American Provost Marshal of the European theatre of operations, insisted on how important it was to respect the Geneva Convention relative to enemy POWs, insisting on the political and military value of a correct treatment of captured enemy soldiers. This appeared particularly important since the war was not over yet and that there will still thousands of Allied POWs in German hands. Finally, Reckord pointed to the rumours about German POWs being pampered by the Allies, trying to discredit them as "enemy propaganda". He denied that prisoners received "luxury items of food", although he specified earlier that they received supplies equal in "quantity and quality to that of troops at base camps". Certainly, his conception of "luxury" was not the same than for the majority of the French population at this time:

> Reports that German prisoners are being coddled or have been issued luxury items of food are utterly without foundation. Nothing beyond the literal obligations of the Geneva Convention has been or will be conceded by the United States Army. Let every person who hears or transmits these baseless rumours realize, therefore, that they have their origin with enemy agents and fifth columnists, and are skilfully designed to cause friction among the Allies and thus to prolong the war[97].

[94] Böhme, *In amerikanischer Hand*, p. 86.
[95] 221 PW Camp, War Diary, entry of 16 September 1944, TNA, WO 171/3741.
[96] Böhme, *In amerikanischer Hand*, annexe X, pp. 300-303.
[97] Statement by Milton A. Reckord, Major General, U.S. Army, Theater Provost Marshal, entitled "German POWs are treated strictly in accordance with the terms of the Geneva Convention", published in Böhme, *In amerikanischer Hand*, p. 304.

Answering the question of a journalist, Reckord replied that contrary to the rumours, "there were no cigarettes in German prisoner camps, that none were available at that time, and in this respect the prisoners are not even getting the service to which they are entitled under the Geneva Convention". He went on, stating that "definitely not an orange has been distributed in any prisoner camp of the American section"[98]. In order to scotch these rumours, the American authorities organised, on 25 November 1944, a visit of CCPWE n° 14 in Chartres for twenty-four French press and radio journalists. In spite of certain comments in the French national and regional press, the American information offensive had very limited effects on public opinion. The American intelligence services in France issued a complete report on this matter on 7 December 1944:

> The full coverage in the Paris press possibly scotched a few rumours about the issue of oranges, chocolate and American cigarettes to captured Germans. But it also confirmed the fact that the bread ration was higher for German prisoners than for French civilians; that the former received butter, real coffee and far more meat; that they frequently ride to "work" in trucks when civilians go on foot; and that some prisoners have been provided with leather shoes and overcoats from captured stocks while FFI fighting the Germans in the Atlantic Coast pockets still do not have enough shoes and coats to go round[99].

The report continues, pointing to the fact that most journalist noticed "the contrast between the living conditions of the German prisoners in American hands and those of the French prisoners now spending their fifth winter in the Oflags and Stalags of the Reich"[100]. Also the report addresses the question of the behaviour of the Allied troops in France, who seemingly ignored the hardship endured by many of the French during the German occupation, revealing that "they link the "soft" treatment of prisoners with American disbelief in stories of Nazi atrocities in France […]." Finally, the report raises the question of the overall difference of living standards between the United States troops and the French civilian population, talking about the French and American people as "Allies of sharply different levels of material well-being"[101].

The will of the Americans to respect their signature of the Geneva Convention was again expressed in early February 1945, in a letter sent by the chief of staff of SHAEF, lieutenant general Walter B. Smith, in reply to the complaints previously expressed by general Alphonse Juin, chief of staff of the French army (and a former French POW liberated in June 1941). In his letter, Smith explained that the United States army needed to respect the Geneva Convention "not only as a national obligation, but in order to avoid reprisals by the enemy against our own soldiers, held as POWs". For that, the ration granted to the German POWs in American hands in France "may be slightly

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98 Böhme, *In amerikanischer Hand*, annexe X, p. 302. Reckord protected the American interests in France by a false truth: while oranges may not have been distributed inside the central camps, many prisoners received fruit with their combat rations when captured in Normandy and, later, when having access to military food depots on their work place, supra.

99 Office of Strategic Services, European Theater of Operations, US Army, APO 887, Weekly French Intelligence Report No. 12, 7 December 1944, NARA, RG 331, 383.6.

100 Ibid.

101 Ibid.

better than that enjoyed by a similar element of the French population, although every effort will be made to avoid this condition, while still complying with the requirements of the Geneva Convention".

The reference to Allied POWs in Germany was not a hollow argument to silence French critics. In fact, approximately 220,000 American and British prisoners were held at this time in Germany and, generally, treated with respect to the Geneva Convention. A fragile balance of reprisals was in force: whenever the German authorities were informed of bad treatment received by their own soldiers in Allied hands, for example through the Red-Cross, the Allied prisoners in German hands were at risk of becoming the victims of reprisals[102].

Concerning the freedom of movement of certain POWs, Smith explained that "the guarding of POWs constitutes a very heavy drain on our own forces, both from the point of view of guard units and of supply. Because of this, we have been forced to accept a less effective scale of guarding then we would like"[103]. Contrary to these high level discussions, the question of the Geneva Convention never entered the debate "from below", that is to say through the public opinion, as mentioned before. Given the context of food shortage in France and the general attitude of the French towards the treatment of German POWs, the stipulations of the Geneva Convention might anyway have been considered as a warranty for luxury, even though we lack hard evidence to support this theory.

3) A continuous disregard for civil interest from the Allied POW administration

After the liberation, most of the German POWs held in Normandy had remained at the exclusive disposal of the Allied armies. While a small number of prisoners were made available for specific civil needs, French authorities had de facto no power over German prisoners in Allied hands in France; neither had they any authority over the grounds used to install the camps. In fact, like any terrain or building used by the Allied troops, the sites chosen for the establishment of prisoner camps, generally farm land, were requisitioned from their owners. On the Cotentin peninsula, where several American central enclosures were located, the impact on the everyday life of the local populations was significant, as shown by the report of the Sous-Préfet of Cherbourg, dated 26 May 1945: "The prejudices generated, for the local economy, by the organisation of the camps

[102] This reciprocity in the treatment of prisoners is perfectly illustrated with the "shackling crisis", initiated by the British who, contrary to the laws and customs, bound German soldiers captured during the Dieppe raid in August 1942 "in order to prevent them from destroying their archives". The documents seized by the German army after the raid revealed the official character of these instructions, which led as a reprisal, to the chaining of British POWs in Germany. J. F. Vance, "Men in Manacles: The Shackling of Prisoners of War, 1942-1943", *The Journal of Military History* 59 (1995), pp. 483-504. For similar episodes, such as the German "commando order" enforcing the execution of Allied paratroopers, or the execution of the "Great escapers" of Stalag Luft III in March 1944, cf. Kochavi, *Confronting*, pp. 175-182 and Wylie, *Barbed Wire Diplomacy*, passim.

[103] Letter of Walter B. Smith, Lieutenant General, US Army, Chief of Staff, SHAEF, to general Alphonse Juin, chef d'état-major de la Défense nationale auprès du gouvernement provisoire de la République française, undated (February 1945), NARA, RG 331, 383.6.

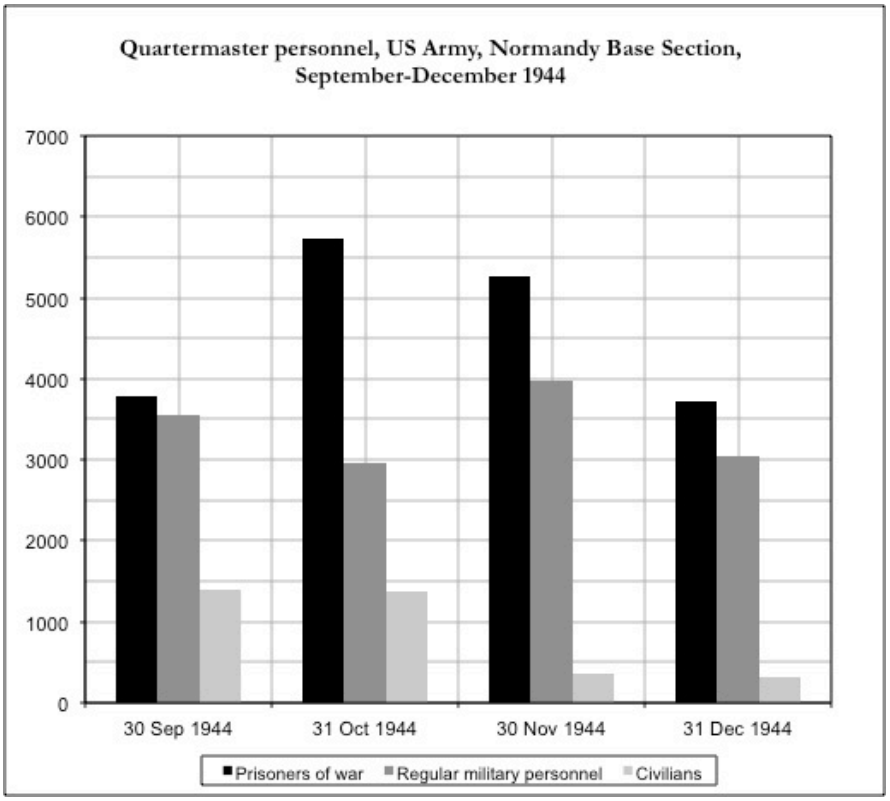
(requisitioning of farm land, intense traffic on rural roads, various damages caused on the nearby real estates) are only partly outweighed by the benefits gained by the population (allocation of German manpower)[104]."

Often, the local civil authorities faced a *fait accompli*. The lack of communication from the Allied authorities tended to exacerbate the problems caused by the massive requisitioning of farmland and construction materials. Moreover, the influx of thousands of German POWs fanned feelings of insecurity amongst the local population. But contrary to public fear, the Allies isolated German soldiers from the surrounding civil society, resulting in a decline in individual contacts between civilians and prisoners. The absence of individual relations in turn prevented the building of a differentiated image of the German prisoners at this stage, as they remained distant, anonymous groups held and employed under foreign control.

Discontent among the civilian population originated also from the fact that the Allies more and more preferred working with German POWs instead of civil labourers. In fact, whereas the employment of German POWs became more and more systematic, the recruiting of civilians by Allied services in Normandy showed, in comparison, a continuous decline. In the eyes of the military, civil workers were a manpower that was more difficult to handle in wartime than soldiers because they could not be put under the same rules of discipline and obedience. While the Allies however, employed a certain number of civilians for their services, they were dismissed when POWs with equivalent skills became available. Thus, in Le Havre, the American army recruited civilians from mid-December 1944, before discharging most of them as early as January 1945[105]. As the two graphs below show, both US quartermaster and ordnance corps continuously employed more POWs than civilians. However, while both branches began with employing large numbers of civilians, the numbers quickly declined in comparison with German prisoner labour.

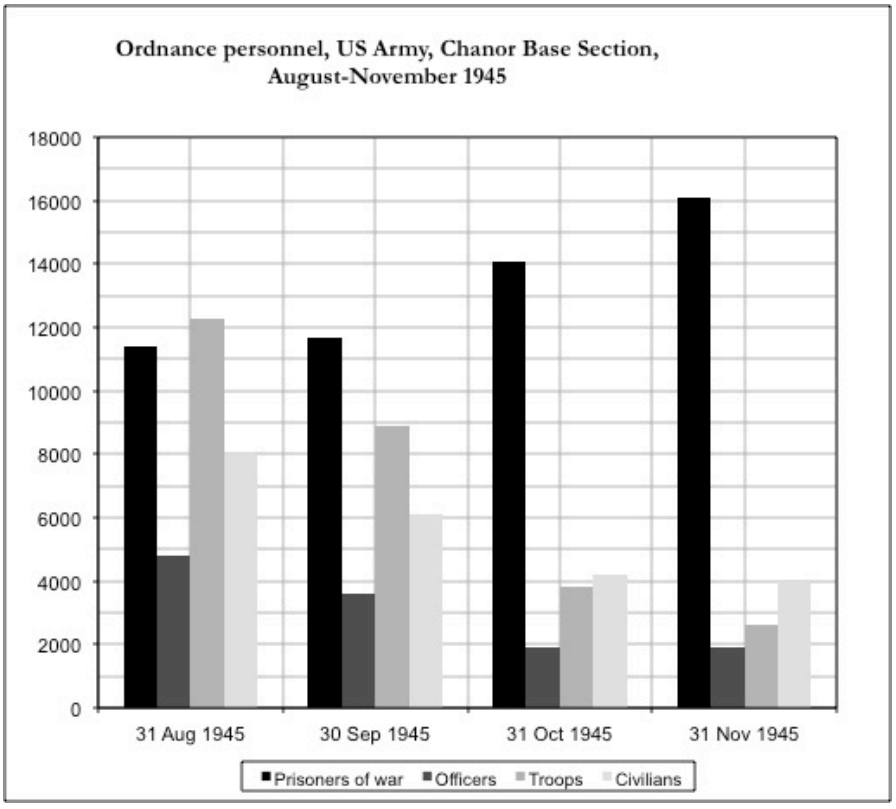
[104] Letter of the Sous-Préfet of Cherbourg to the Préfet of the Département Manche, 26 May 1945, AD 50, 145 W 69.
[105] Bengtsson, *Été*, pp. 143 and 158.

Table 19



Source: Historical reports of Normandy Base Section, NARA, RG 498.

Table 20



Source: Historical reports of Normandy Base Section, NARA, RG 498.

In general terms, German POWs were considered by their Allied employers as efficient, reliable and very disciplined[106]. Initial reticence expressed by some unit commanders to employ German prisoners, mainly for military security reasons, were erased by their efficiency at work[107]. In November 1944, the Red Cross delegates visiting Labor Enclosure 114 in Cherbourg wrote in their report that "the commander is satisfied with the work of the prisoners"[108]. In March 1945, the commander of 726 PW Labour Company, stationed in Vaucelles, noted that "the standard of discipline, conduct and morale of the P.O.W. during the period has been very good. The employing services have invariably stated that the P.O.W. of this Coy have been very good workers[109]."

Theoretically, the POWs were protected against collective violence from the civilian population. Article 2 of the 1929 Geneva Convention states that POWs "shall at all times be humanely treated and protected, particularly against acts of violence, from insults and from public curiosity"[110]. For example, in Bayeux, British guards defended working prisoners against violence from civilians during autumn 1944[111]. But the protection and isolation of German POWs from the civilian population followed not only political and humanitarian reasons. In fact as the work of Mewha and Lewis shows, working prisoners were also isolated from the civilians on the work place in order to improve their efficiency – certainly to prevent not only exactions, but also barter trade[112]. Food supply and clothing quality were often placed higher than the minimum standards set by the Geneva Convention in order to improve the prisoners' motivation at work.

German POWs worked in very large numbers within Allied army logistics to complement the lack of manpower and to free soldiers for the combat zones. At the same time, Allied personnel remaining in the rear areas of the theatre of operations were mostly made up of poorly disciplined and inappropriately trained troops. The result was a relationship between guards and prisoners varying between random violence and open fraternisation. While violence contravened the Geneva Convention, fraternisation between Germans and Allied soldiers had been explicitly forbidden by Eisenhower in September 1944[113]. But, whereas some guards beat their prisoners, others helped to improve the prisoners' living conditions through food supply or a lighter surveillance,

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106 This was not always true for Italian POWs or civil labourers. In fact, in the eyes of the American army, the labour companies formed with Italian POWs were only half as efficient as comparable American military units whereas labour units with German prisoners reached between 80 and 100 per cent of the results of similar American troops, Lewis and Mewha, *Utilization*, p. 245. Cf. also Lamache, *La Normandie*, p. 96.

107 Lamache, *La Normandie*, p. 94.

108 CICR, Rapport de visite, Overhead Detachment 2023 Labour Enclosure 114, visité le 15 novembre par MM. N. Burckhardt et W. Michel.

109 726 PW Labour Company, War Diary, Sheet V, entry of 16 March 1945, TNA, WO 171/7469. The labour of German POWs was also appreciated in Great-Britain where "the work done by the P.O.W. is excellent – about 3 times the output per man compared with the troops", the letter of Major C. E. Walker, in charge of POW Camp No. 42 (Exhibition Field Camp), Holsworthy, Devon, to Wing Commander F. H. Hitch, in charge of POWs affairs within the political warfare executive of the Foreign office, 27 April 1945, TNA, FO 939/379.

110 Convention relative to the Treatment of Prisoners of War. Geneva, 27 July 1929. Part I, General provisions, Article 2.

111 Oral testimony by Johannes Börner given to the author, Ouistreham, 28 June 2011.

112 Lewis and Mewha, *Utilization*, p. 220.

113 S. E. Ambrose, 'Eisenhower and the Germans', in Bischof and Ambrose, eds, *Facts against Falsehood*, pp. 33-34.

thus sometimes knowingly enabling the prisoners to steal inside the depots. In this context, incidents that offended the public opinion for alleged fraternisation between Germans and Allies were soon to occur. The supposed rapprochement between guards and prisoners took place especially in working parties outside the camps and often under the eyes of the civilian population. Michel Boivin, a specialist for the history of the département Manche during and after the Second World War, even mentions "provocations" that "throw a great discredit on the whole American army", which was soon "accused of being an army of occupation"[114]. The abuses perpetrated in Manche were considered particularly offensive given the four years of German occupation. They occurred certainly due to a lack of Allied control in the rear area and a low priority for French civil affairs, especially regarding their relationship to the Germans. On 3 October 1944, the American military police encouraged 2,000 German POWs to parade and sing in the streets of Cherbourg; a fortnight later, on 17 October, prisoners on an American truck sang and showed their fists to the population; on 7 January 1945, the American authorities of Cherbourg distributed new clothes to the German prisoners whereas their used clothes marked "PW" were given to the local population[115]. It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that at least some of these American actions may have been deliberately designed to hurt French sensitivities. At least however, this type of American behaviour can be seen as a proof of the lack of knowledge of the French mentality.

Table 21



The Allied supervision of German POWs could sometimes be perceived as rather loose by the population of Normandy, June 1944 (Source: NARA).

[114] Boivin, *Les lendemains*, pp. 121-122. Cf. also Théofilakis, *Les prisonniers de guerre*, p. 193.
[115] Boivin, *Les lendemains*, pp. 121-122. Cf. also Lamache, *La Normandie*, pp. 102-103.

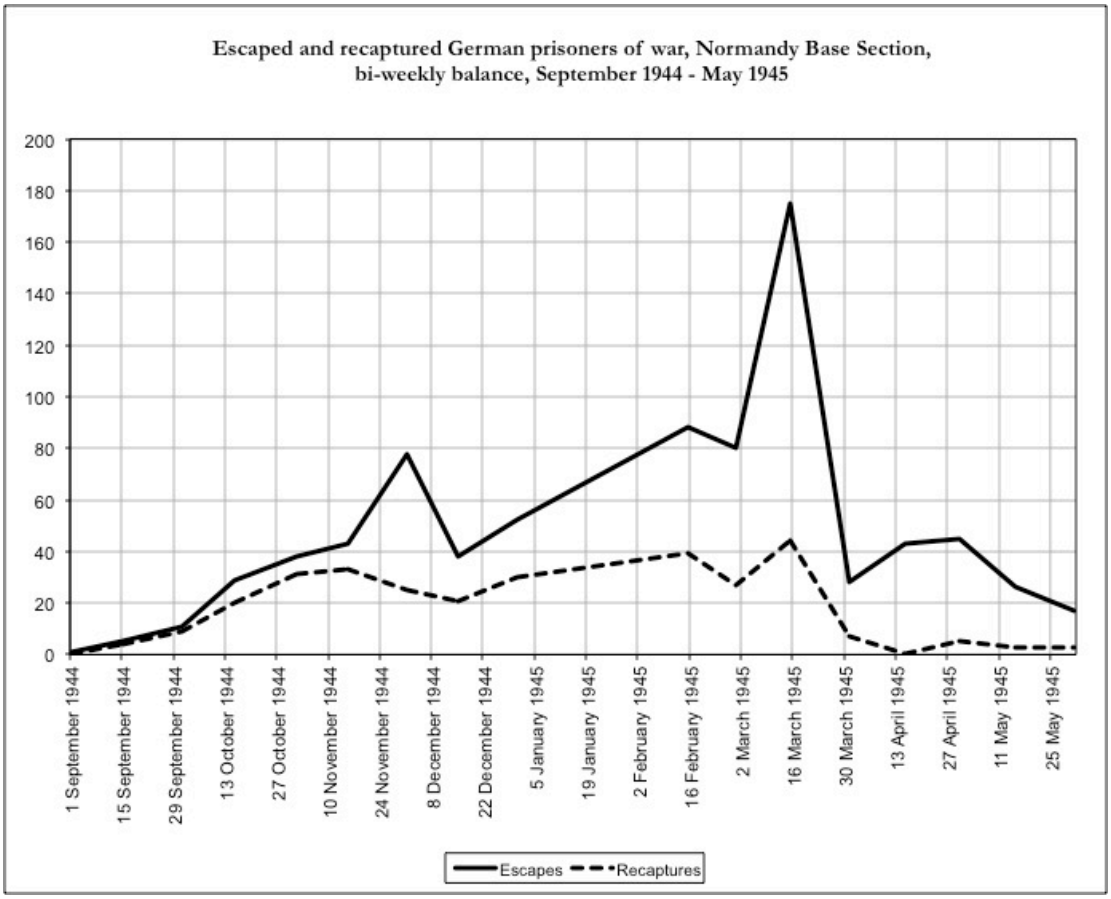
From 1945, the Allied surveillance of German POWs in Normandy became more relaxed, especially within the labour units. This was also due to a lack of guarding personnel. After the Allied victory in Europe, public opinion in Great Britain as much as in the United States, demanded the return of their servicemen as soon as possible. On the American side it was initially planned for security reasons, that each guard had to be in charge of no more than 10 prisoners. However, the capture of massive figures of German soldiers brought this ratio as high as 50, sometimes 150 prisoners per guard[116]. On the British side, the guard units always had a strength of approximately 370 men, independent of the number of prisoners held. In a camp with 10,000 men, this meant that each guard was in charge of 27 prisoners. The ratio rose to 54 prisoners for one guard in Fleury-sur-Orne, where up to 20,000 German soldiers were held. The result was an increase in the number of escapes. In January 1945, the Gendarmerie of Calvados observed that a great number of escapes were due to "a poor surveillance of the work outside and the easiness with which the escapees can get Allied military effects"[117]. However it must be said that, at this time, during the German counteroffensive in the Ardennes, the French public opinion was struck by panic, fearing that the regular German troops might team up with escaping POWs[118]. This situation certainly also led to a public perception that exaggerated the scope of the escapes.

To further reduce the figures of American and British soldiers engaged in guard duties, the Allies authorised from June 1945 that prisoner labour companies may be administered directly by German officer prisoners[119]. During a visit in September 1945 to the American labour camp 112 F close to the Cherbourg arsenal, a Red Cross delegate discovered that "the work is supervised by 20 German prisoner officers of the kommando, who are treated in conformity with the Convention"[120].

As shown by the graph below, the ratio of recaptured escapees oscillated. Successful escapes seem to have been more frequent when Allied personnel were recalled from the rear areas to fill vacant positions in the combat zones, as for example in November 1944 during the battle of Metz and in March 1945 during the battle of the Rhineland, thus loosening the surveillance of the prisoners.

116 Reckord, *MP*.
117 Report of the Gendarmerie of Calvados relative to the general situation of the département, 18 January 1945, AD 14, 21 W 16.
118 Lacouture, *Le politique*, p. 69.
119 Headquarters, Chanor Base Section, History of the Provost Marshal Section, For Period of V-E Day, 9 [sic] May 1945 to 31 January 1946, NARA, RG 498, Chanor Base Section Box 2.
120 CICR, Rapport de visite, Stockade No. 112 F, P.W. Labor Service Comp. No. 8483-6, Arsenal de Cherbourg (Manche), visité par M. Amsler le 10 septembre 1945.

Table 22



Source: Historical reports of Normandy Base Section, NARA, RG 498.

Good escape conditions became more and more frequent after the end of the war. For the labour camp of Mosles, the American commander "agrees very voluntarily" to the request of the Red Cross delegate who inspected the camp in September 1945, aiming at "letting the prisoners out in the countryside for a couple of hours, every fortnight"[121]. More and more smaller labour camps under American custody were directly subordinate to the surveillance of POW squads. Commanded by captured German officers they were responsible for the good order and the security of their camp. While facing an increasing lack of manpower for those tasks, the American army achieved, thus, to maintain a high level prisoner employment. In fact, the historical report of the Military Labor Service of Chanor Base Section, dated 10 January 1946, states that the lack of personnel resulted in "labor details being sent to and from Prisoner of War enclosures, without guards. Convoys, with POW drivers, proceed freely along the roads, without guards." However, the report says, "as a result, escapes and attempts at escapes, have increased to an extent that has captured the attention of higher headquarters, and it is hoped that replacements will be made in U.S. personnel in Military Labor Service so that this situation may be

[121] CICR, Rapport de visite, Stockade No. 22 Mosles, Labor Supervision Center No. 146 Carentan (Manche), (en mains américaines), visité le 18 septembre 1945 par M. R. Amsler.

corrected[122]." In Caen, German prisoners in British hands enjoyed a good deal of freedom while working, according to a report of the local Renseignements généraux, dated 16 January 1946, that mentioned "extensive fraternisation" between guards and prisoners; "they smoke together, they drink tea together and on some days one could see a POW carrying the gun and holding his drunken guard"[123]. Although this report might be somewhat prejudiced, it nevertheless points to a high degree of laxness in the application of discipline regulations which can be explained both with the lack of British personnel and the decreasing numbers of German prisoners under their custody in early 1946. Moreover, the growing distance in time to the war seems to not to have positively affected the discipline of the guards. Unfortunately, the available escape statistics do not extend into this period.

In the context of lax surveillance, the prisoners were able to bargain with civilians when working outside the camps. Firstly, they could exchange goods in relative freedom, for example on the way to work or on the work site itself. Secondly, they had good access to poorly guarded depots, which included food depots. The prisoner Josef Schröder, age 20, worked in the harbour of Cherbourg in 1944-1945. His work allowed him to eat his fill and to steal goods that could be sold to civilians: "What we could not digest ourselves, we sold it to the French. They were much hungrier than us, but they were not allowed to penetrate the port area. We exchanged fresh chicken against Chesterfields, chocolate against nails, corned-beef against a saw and light bulbs against eggs[124]."

While the need for manpower in the American army started to decrease, the Provost Marshal of Chanor Base Section wrote in his monthly report that "on 22 December [1945] the 16th Port of Le Havre found itself with 36,000 PWs not gainfully employed, thus free to engage in Black Market activities, and further causing a security problem"[125]. These commercial activities between German POWs and French civilians contributed to foster the image of Germans being pampered by the Allies – in contrast to the often disastrous living conditions in the central enclosures, which were mostly invisible to the civilian population.

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After the end of the battle of Normandy, large numbers of German soldiers remained present in Normandy. During the summer of 1945, when their number was highest, about 270,000 German prisoners lived in Normandy, either in central enclosures or in labour camps and units. This was twice as many as during the winter of 1941-1942 and equivalent to the German presence in December 1940 or March 1944. At times, Normandy counted more prisoners than it had experienced occupiers!

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122 Headquarters, 4th Labor Supervision Area, APO 562, History of Military Labor Service, 10 January 1946, NARA, RG 498, Chanor Base Section Box 2.
123 Report of the Caen Renseignements généraux, 16 January 1946, AD 14, 21 W 19.
124 Schröder, *Notizen*, p. 56.
125 Headquarters, Chanor Base Section, APO 562, Office of the Provost Marshal, Subject: History of PM Section, December 1945, 4 janvier 1946, NARA, RG 498, Chanor Base Section Box 2.

Between one third and one half of these prisoners were attached to labour units stationed outside the huge central enclosures. These working prisoners benefitted from improved living conditions due to better food supplies and the possibility to steal complementary foodstuff from the military depots. At least until the German surrender on 8 May 1945, the Allies tried to maintain the living conditions in compliance with the Geneva Convention. But the increasing number of prisoners to feed and house led to overcrowded camps and a general deterioration of the captives' physical state and created problems that became ever more difficult to handle. With the war's end the prisoner administration was pushed even further down the priorities of the Allied armies, which sometimes resulted in disastrous living conditions. A part of these problems would later be handed over to the French during the transfer campaign, as we will see in the two following chapters.

While being hostile towards the German POWs, public opinion in Normandy quickly became sceptical vis-à-vis the Allied military administration. From autumn 1944, the voices that complained about the German prisoners merged with those criticising the Allies still present in Normandy: the Germans moved freely and escaped in great numbers? It was the fault of the Allies who did not guard them sufficiently or worse, who fraternised with them! Did the prisoners eat better than the civilian population? It was again the fault of the Allies who preferred to supply the Germans rather than the French whom they disliked! Very quickly, the Allies and especially the Americans, were forced to note that their attempts to show that they only respected the international agreements in their treatment of the German prisoners, remained ineffective. Testimonies of Norman civilians at this time suggest that the Norman civilian population mostly suffered a strict rationing of food and thus was very sensitive to rumours relative to the better treatment granted to German POWs, especially in the context of an anti-German atmosphere. They could only (or wanted to?) see the relatively good living conditions of the working prisoners, totally disregarding the often much more difficult situation inside the overcrowded central camps. But the collective discontent after the liberation had far more reasons: the extension of the state of war; the massive presence of foreign soldiers, especially American and British; the rationing of food; destroyed towns and landscapes; the waiting for French POWs and forced labour living in Germany to come home; the crisis of national identity due to the distance between discourse and reality, etc. In an official discourse that was mainly germanophobic, the German prisoners thus became the catalyst for a much deeper malaise of which the collective, though symbolic violence became the most visible and socially accepted manifestation.

The fear of seeing the Allies fraternise with the Germans, the former occupier of France, developed into a determining element for the evolution of Franco-German relations in Normandy. The resentment was even greater as French officials had almost no authority on Allied services of the region. However, the systematic use made by the Allies of the prisoners also showed to the Normans that employment of the Germans for the common interest was possible – beyond the Germans' designated fate as a scapegoat.

Chapter 4
Transfer to French authority:
Reversing Franco-German relations on the high level

Although several hundred thousand German POWs were held in Normandy after its liberation by Allied armies, France *de facto* had no authority over them. Their manpower was used almost exclusively for the benefit of British and American military interests. The deliberate isolation of the Germans from the French to preserve Allied interests prevented Franco-German relations from being reversed, although many Frenchmen were still eager to gain power over the Germans after four years of a humiliating occupation. However, the massive use of this manpower by the American and British armies under the eyes of the civilian population also showed how enemy soldiers could be used for the benefit of France – something that might have been out of reach in case all of the POWs in Allied hands had been evacuated outside of France. While the military and political priorities of the Allies had initially prolonged the forced cohabitation between French and Germans after the end of the occupation period, the economic and national interests of France would now extend this cohabitation even further, also by taking an example from the Allied model of labour use.

This chapter addresses a crucial point in the evolution of individual Franco-German relations in the post-war period, that is to say the transfer of the German POWs from Allied hands to French custody. Most of them were already held in France, many of them in Normandy, but others were brought to France from the United States and from camps in Germany. The transfer to the French authorities of German POWs previously held by the Allies represents an important turning point in the evolution of individual Franco-German relations because, for the first time since the end of the German occupation, Frenchmen were about to be given the opportunity to fully exercise their own authority on German soldiers. These prisoners were not the former occupiers, as most of these had been evacuated during the battle of Normandy, but the symbolism of a reversal of the balance of power was nevertheless extremely important for French society, especially in the context of the dominating discourse in France and the evolving relations between the provisional government of Charles de Gaulle and the Western Allies.

The first part of this chapter will explain how the French determination to obtain their own German POWs resulted from four factors: 1) the French self-conception, 2) the evolution of the relations between Paris and Washington, 3) the actual economic needs of the country, and 4) a restrictive Allied policy to employ German POWs for French benefits. The experience of effectively working German POWs in Allied hands, combined with a collective desire for revenge against the former occupier, the crucial need for manpower for the physical reconstruction and economical recovery of Normandy, and finally the political will to enhance the idea of France as a victorious power of World War II not only on the international scene but first and foremost in

French opinion needed to be cemented. In its second part, this chapter clarifies the conditions of the transfers and analyses the state of mind of the prisoners themselves during these transfers; the disillusionment about their potential liberation and the uncertainty about their future – the old framework of references set up by Nazi Germany was destroyed, while a new one was yet to be created – led many of them to consider their prolonged stay in France with fatality, which certainly helped to create ties with the civilian population later on. The main argument of this chapter is to say that the motivations for, as well as the modalities of the transfer of German POWs from Allied to French custody both prefigured the future relations between French and German individuals in France.

I – The German prisoners: a war reparation for the people and the nation?

Four main reasons, linked to each other, were the origin of the request to obtain agreement from the American and the British authorities to the transfer of German POWs to French custody.

1) The evolution of the French national discourse after the liberation

On 12 September 1944, during his speech at the Palais de Chaillot in Paris, Charles de Gaulle stated that "never the mass of the French took the defeat for granted and never our flags were away from the battle fields"[1]. It was the hour of birth of the *mythe résistancialiste*, following the expression of Henry Rousso[2]. While many French had indeed had a passive attitude during the occupation, De Gaulle offered them the unique opportunity to feel as *résistants* and thus gave them back their honour: a way not only to rebuild the nations identity after the great humiliation of defeat and occupation, but also to group behind his own person the majority of the French, grateful to be enabled by De Gaulle to make their peace with the four preceding years of relative inaction. However, according to Philippe Buton, the liberation only provisorily masked the crisis of national identity: while one part of France was willing to believe the narrative of the glorious self liberation, another part was aware that this liberation would have been impossible without the help of the Anglo-Saxons[3].

But the narrative of the self-liberation was insufficient to De Gaulle's eyes: more than a sovereign country, France had to shine again through its *grandeur*, to recover its *rang* among the society of nations, become a victorious nation again in the collective conscience.

[1] Speech by Charles de Gaulle on 12 September 1944, Paris, Palais de Chaillot, cf. http://www.charles-de-gaulle.org/pages/l-homme/accueil/discours/pendant-la-guerre-1940-1946/discours-du-palais-de-chaillot-12-septembre-1944.php, accessed on 10 January 2015.
[2] Rousso, *Le syndrome de Vichy* (Paris, 1987).
[3] Buton, *La joie*, pp. 229-230.

Ultimately, the recovery of the French national identity had to be realised by a French victory over Germany. Therefore, De Gaulle sought to increase the role of French troops in the war against Germany, also outside France's national borders. As early as 25 August 1944, during his speech at the Paris City Hall, he had declared that "we want to enter his territory as is fitting, as victors (…). It is for this revenge, this vengeance and justice, that we will keep fighting until the final day, until the day of total and complete victory[4]." But for most of the French, increasingly concerned with everyday problems, the liberation of Paris and the biggest part of France – six départements were still under German occupation – already stood as a symbol for the victory over Germany[5].

However for De Gaulle, this was not enough. During his speech at the Palais de Chaillot he thus stated that "while a people such as ours, used to great misfortunes and great glory, can acknowledge that each of the states that form with it the team of freedom has merited its friendship and respect, it is also able to judge itself and measure, without making a fool of itself, the role that it will have played in the future common victory"[6]. He prepared the French people for the continuation of the war against Germany and the role that France would have to play in it: "Everything points to the fact that the enemy (…) prepares for a new great battle to save his territory until the winter and, as he hopes, slow down the offensive operations of the Allied and French armies. Well, in this battle and those that might possibly follow, we intend to participate as much as possible. The same will apply to the occupation of Germany"[7].

His vision of a French participation in the victory over Germany was intended to promote the enrolment of French men into the new army, which in turn would reinforce the credibility of his idea of *La France comabattante* and thus help to unify the French society around the youth, at a time when most of the veterans of 1940 were still held as prisoners of war in Germany. Interestingly, the possible liberation of the French prisoners of war and forced labourers held in Germany were not mentioned by De Gaulle as a reason to continue the war: they represented the defeat of France – a souvenir that had to be silenced at this stage of the French national recovery. Moreover, the increasing role of the new French army was intended to entitle France to an important place in post-war Europe in terms of international politics. De Gaulle's views found a large approval among the French population and in November 1944, 70 per cent of the French declared they would agree with a general mobilisation if the war was not over by the beginning of the winter. First, some 180,000 FFI men, that is almost half of the total of French interior combatants, were integrated into the new French army. Then, the enrolment of French young men liable to military service significantly increased the size of the French army: at the end of the war in Europe, the French terrestrial forces alone would count again 1.3 million men[8].

[4] Speech by Charles de Gaulle on 25 August 1944.
[5] Lacouture, *Le politique*, p. 58.
[6] Speech by Charles de Gaulle on 12 September 1944.
[7] Ibid.
[8] Buton, *La joie*, p. 157.

At the end of September 1944, the front had come to a halt at the borders of the Reich. For De Gaulle, this evolution of the operations on the western front was considered an opportunity since it gave time for the development of the French forces and, thus increasing the role of the French in the future victory of the Allies over Germany. De Gaulle wrote in his *Mémoires de guerre*:

> The fact that the war had to continue was certainly painful considering the losses, the damages, the expenses that we, the French, would have to bear. But considering the superior interest of France – which is something very different from the immediate benefits for the French – I would not regret it. As, with ongoing fighting, our support would be necessary in the battle of the Rhine and the Danube (…). Our rank in the world and, even more, the opinion that our people would have of itself for long generations, would mainly depend on it (…). Finally, what an opportunity was offered to the national unity by the supreme phase where all the French went through the ordeal, no longer separated as they were yesterday (…) but now placed in identical conditions and ruled by one power only![9]

The popular reaction to De Gaulle's visit to Normandy in October 1944 showed that the support for his person and his ideas was continuous: thousands of people gathered in Caen to see and praise the general who walked through the city in ruins[10]. A report of the police of Condé-sur-Noireau, an industrial town of the département Calvados dated 17 October 1944, stated: "The whole opinion follows General De Gaulle in his efforts for the reconstruction; his personality meets only admirers and his action raises no criticism at all[11]." After the end of the war in Europe, the general enthusiasm did not calm down. A report of the Renseignements généraux stated in July 1945 that "the public, for many months, stays fond of him (De Gaulle) without the appearance of dissidences, and the criticism directed against him is extremely rare[12]." The broad popular support to the person of De Gaulle reinforces the idea that his conception of the French nation and his vision for the future of the country remained also widely accepted by the population, especially in Normandy.

2) The evolution of the Franco-Allied relations after the liberation

After having convinced the French people of the need of a French participation in the ongoing war against Germany, De Gaulle had to receive the approval of his plans from the Western Allies: the GPRF was at last officially recognised by London and Washington on 23 October 1944. To Churchill, with whom De Gaulle had a less conflictual relationship than with Roosevelt, he exposed the necessity of the French participation, in the name of the stability of France, stating, during a political meeting in Paris on 11 November 1944, that "the French army has to take part in the battle so that

[9] De Gaulle, *Le salut*, p. 38.
[10] Quellien, *Opinions*, p. 424.
[11] Quoted in Ibid., p. 424.
[12] Ibid.

the French people gains conscience, like its allies, of having defeated Germany"[13]. Georges Bidault, minister of Foreign Affairs of the GPRF, who also attended this meeting, added that "the French do not want to be, in Germany, the heirs of the victors. (…) These men do not only have an enemy to fight. They have a revenge to take on the past[14]." These exact words received De Gaulle's support, who considered that "all this is very important from a psychological point of view"[15].

The following negotiations were difficult, but during the Yalta Conference in February 1945, which took place without France, Washington and London obtained from Stalin the agreement to concede to France a seat in the future Allied Control Council and occupation zones in Germany and Austria[16].

Ultimately the Allies granted France a place among the victorious nations of the Second World War also because Great Britain was unwilling to police Western Europe alone after the end of the war. On 8 May 1945, De Lattre de Tassigny received in the name of France the German capitulation in Berlin, just like the other Allied military commanders. That same day, De Gaulle could speak to the nation, stating that "the war is won. Here is the victory. It is the victory of the United Nations and it is the victory of France[17]." Within less than a year he had managed to turn France from a defeated nation under enemy occupation that needed the help of its Allies to recover sovereignty, to a victorious power of World War II, occupying in Germany a zone that was comparable to those of the Soviet Union, the United States and Great Britain. In De Gaulle's views this recovery of the *rang* marked the end of the humiliation of the French people[18].

However, the durable installation of the Allies in Normandy and other parts of France contradicted both De Gaulle's national discourse around the recovery of national sovereignty and his ambitions in terms of foreign policy. In private, he expressed his thoughts on this more than once, often with force. During a meeting on 31 August, De Gaulle told his personal secretary Claude Mauriac: "Remember that they (the Americans and the British) will not leave until we kick them out![19]"

During his speech at the Palais de Chaillot on 12 September 1944, De Gaulle quoted the official number of 350,000 German prisoners in Allied hands, of which 105,000 were stated to have surrendered to the French. The enemy was somewhat magnified in order to increase the value of these French captures, and therefore increase the value of the resurrection and the self-liberation of the French. De Gaulle indirectly praised the German army as a "military power founded on the exceptional capacity to fight, to undertake, to suffer, of a great fanaticised people"[20]. The French press actively

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[13] Document "Entretien avec M. Winston Churchill, en présence de MM. Georges Bidault et Anthony Eden, rue Saint-Dominique, le 11 novembre 1944", published in De Gaulle, *Le salut*, p. 380.
[14] Ibid., p. 381.
[15] Ibid.
[16] Lacouture, *La politique*, p. 98 et sqq.
[17] Speech by Charles de Gaulle on 8 May 1945, cf. http://www.charles-de-gaulle.org/pages/l-homme/accueil/discours/pendant-la-guerre-1940-1946/la-victoire-du-8-mai-1945.php, accessed on 10 January 2015.
[18] Lacouture, *Le politique*, p. 112.
[19] Ibid., p. 20.
[20] Speech by Charles de Gaulle on 12 September 1944.

contributed to this discourse, portraying the German POWs as the proof of France's combativeness and of the reversal of the balance of power in the Franco-German relations[21]. In his memoirs, De Gaulle gives moreover a detailed account of the numbers of German soldiers taken prisoners during French operations, in France and in Germany. As the front moved quickly towards the borders of the German Reich from September 1944, General De Gaulle became conscious of the economic and especially, political interest of the German prisoners stationed on French soil. Beyond their place within the national discourse of French combativeness and victory, the German POWs could also be conceived as a collateral for the safe return of French prisoners of war and forced labourers still held in Germany.

But in fact, none of these prisoners in French hands was held in Normandy at this moment. On the contrary, the Allies were rapidly developing their own system of prisoner camps for German POWs, as we have seen in the previous chapter. But the requests expressed by public opinion, as we will see now, ideally concurred with the will of General De Gaulle to give France the status of a real victorious power in the war against Germany.

3) An economic need for manpower

Whereas the liberation of French territory was yet to be completed, the French minister of Labour Alexandre Parodi, a former administrator within the French resistance, had started to work on the question about the reconstruction of France and of the role meant to be played by the German POWs therein from 1944[22].

In post-war France, the need for manpower was in fact crucial: total losses in France are estimated between 460,000 and 485,000 military and civilians[23]. Many workers had been killed in action or had died in captivity; others were unfit for labour after their repatriation from Germany where they themselves had been POWs, civil labourers or deportees. Horst Wagenblass estimates a lack of 400,000 workers in the French economy after World War II. Moreover, around 300,000 foreign labourers had left France at the beginning of the war[24].

Beyond human losses, material damage to the country was immense, especially in Normandy, the North and the Vosges region. Many centres of industrial activity were in ruins after aerial bombings or sustained ground fighting. French industrial production in 1944 reached an output that equalled only 50 per cent of that of 1938. The railway network was paralysed, with 82 per cent of locomotives and 5,000 km of rails out of use.

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21 Théofilakis, *Les prisonniers de guerre*, pp. 336-338.

22 L. Erbs, "Le recyclage des soldats allemands en Moselle à partir de 1947", *Revue historique des armées* 256 (2009), p. 80.

23 Quellien, "Les pertes humaines", in Leleu et al. *La France*, pp. 262-265.

24 H. Wagenblass, 'Die Bedeutung der Arbeit deutscher Kriegsgefangener für die französische Wirtschaft in den Jahren 1945-1948', in Böhme, *In französischer Hand*, p. 222. Cf. also H. Sieber, "Die wirtschaftliche Entwicklung Frankreichs seit 1945" (Heidelberg, 1949), p. 21.

Agriculture suffered from the destruction of arable lands, the huge reduction of cattle procured by the Germans to feed the occupation troops, the lack of machines (partly requisitioned and brought to Germany during the occupation) and fuel, and the presence of mines or the flooding of certain coastal areas and valleys. The 1945 harvest represented only 60 per cent of that of 1938[25].

The restart of the national economy thus, did not only depend on a successful replacement of the missing labourers, but also on a preceding recovery of lost farmland and a reconstruction of the production sites. This would require a large number of workers, for the pre-war figures to be equalled quickly. Production was soon to become an imperative that was emphasised by politicians and the media; the economic recovery being assimilated as a new "battle of France" that had to be won very soon[26].

Soon it became clear that the prisoner manpower at the direct disposal of the French authorities was insufficient to accomplish the fixed objectives: in May 1945 the French army only held some 300,000 POWs under its direct control, which was far from fulfilling the need for manpower in France, especially as the majority of these prisoners were not held in metropolitan France, but in French camps in Northern Africa, Germany and Austria.

At the same time, between 600,000 and 800,000 German POWs under Allied authority were held on French metropolitan territory[27]. The temptation was to try and convince the Allies to approve a transfer of these prisoners to the French authorities. In fact, in spite of complicated conditions of use of prisoners in Allied hands for civilian employers, the demand had remained on a high level. Whereas at first, the civilian population expressed the will to see the German prisoners working on mine clearance tasks as a war reparation, the need for labourers fit for any task quickly became prevalent. In Normandy, this need was expressed in particular by the farmers who had to face an increasing depletion of available manpower. Firstly, part of the adult male population was enrolled with the new French armed forces at war against Germany; secondly, the rural milieu was about to experience a massive exodus of unqualified manpower heading for the working sites in the cities where better wages were paid. As early as January 1945, the Préfet of Calvados warned the regional commissioner of the Republic in Rouen on this subject: "The rural manpower leaves the countryside. We will soon be forced to requisition personnel to address this crisis[28]."

The need to employ the manpower of numerous prisoners in Normandy was applicable to the following: during the battle of Normandy, close to 300,000 buildings had been entirely or partly destroyed; 43,000 hectares of agricultural land had been made temporarily unusable; 1,600,000 square metres of industrial buildings had been lost[29].

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25 Vavasseur-Desperriers, "La France", p. 220.
26 Vandenbussche, "La IVe République", p. 228.
27 Precise numbers exist for the different powers of custody, but it is not always clear whether the prisoners were held in or outside of France, since areas of Allied military authority did generally not overlap national borders in Europe.
28 Fortnightly report of the Préfet of Calvados to the Regional commissioner of the Republic in Rouen, 24 January 1945, AD 14, 9 W 45.
29 Quellien, *Jour J*, p. 284.

Charles de Gaulle visited Normandy again in June 1945, this time with his Minister for Urbanism and Reconstruction, Raoul Dautry. He wrote in his memoirs:

> With the same intention to somewhat electrify the atmosphere, I visited on 10 June the départements Manche and Orne which were, with Calvados, those that had suffered most. Accompanied by Dautry, I visited Saint-Lô, Coutances, Villedieu-les-Poêles, Mortain, Flers, Argentan, Alençon, as well as many other towns. A flow of testimonies ran over the ruins[30].

This situation resulted in the urgent need not only for a material reconstruction, but also for a quick restart of the agricultural and industrial production, heavily slowed down by the destruction. Thus, the employment of workers coming from POW camps proved necessary not only for the reconstruction process itself but also within the producing companies and farms.

4) Allied restrictions that lead to the public demand for German POW labour

a) A policy that restricts employment of German POWs for French benefits

The massive use of German POWs for the continued Allied war effort not only gave birth to jealousy on the level of food supply, as seen earlier, but the Allies also preferred to employ POWs, who were less demanding and easier to control, rather than use French civilian workers[31]. Beyond that rather clear preference, the systematic use of German soldiers often took place in front of civilians, sometimes even alongside civil working parties – such as in the case of 56 German POWs of 714 PW Labour Company who were employed at Caen railway station in March 1945 in conjunction with a group of French civilian labourers, although initial measures had been instigated to avoid the mixing of both groups[32]. Very quickly, the use of German POWs by the Allies gave birth to the desire among the civilian population, to see them work for their own benefit and thus for the direct benefit of France.

At the end of summer 1944 a small number of prisoners employed by the American Quartermaster Corps had already been employed occasionally to help with the harvest in Normandy[33]. From the end of December 1944, the agriculture of the département Calvados benefitted from "10 prisoner squads representing 200 men"[34]. In January 1945, several contingents of prisoners under the authority of British engineers were employed for clearance in the city of Caen[35]. At the same time, German prisoners belonging to 712 PW Labour Company were employed for mine clearance operations on

[30] De Gaulle, *Le salut*, p. 302.
[31] Lamache, *La Normandie*, pp. 97-98.
[32] 714 PW Labour Company, War Diary, Volume 3, Sheet 1, entry of 3 March 1945, TNA, WO 171/7457; cf. also Lamache, *La Normandie*, p. 97.
[33] Lewis and Mewha, *Utilization*, p. 220.
[34] Report on the agricultural situation of Calvados on 20 December 1944, AD 14, 21 W 15/2.
[35] Report of military liaison section of the Préfecture of Calvados, 31 January 1945, AD 14, 21 W 16.

farm land around Ranville, close to Caen[36]. Prisoners employed for civil tasks always remained under Allied authority.

However, the provision of POWs for the benefit of the civil economy had a number of important limitations. Farmers asking for manpower needed to fulfil strict requirements before being enabled to pick up their prisoners at British camps. For example, the work place had to be within a range of five kilometres around the prisoner camp, officially for security reasons[37]. These measures prevented a massive use of the prisoners by civilians. Moreover, the prisoners employed under these conditions disappointed the farmers, who frequently complained about the prisoners' "poor performance"[38].

b) The growing pressure of the public opinion

The failure of these measures indirectly gave birth within the public opinion, to the growing desire to see the German POWs work under French authority for the interests of the population – a desire marked with a strong feeling of revenge. According to Fabien Théofilakis, the press increasingly reflects this autonomisation of the representation of the enemy in comparison to the goals initially set by the French government[39]. In fact, while De Gaulle considered the Germans as an enemy to defeat in order to make France a victorious nation again, the French people who saw the Germans work locally for the Allies had a less abstract approach to them as an enemy. As early as 27 September 1944 an inhabitant of the Cherbourg area expressed in a letter to the editor of the local newspaper *La Presse Cherbourgeoise* the thoughts of many:

> Reading the article « Danger de mort » published in your newspaper suggests to me a solution so simple and so normal that I am surprised that it is up to me to submit it to you. Does it not seem logical to you that those who created this situation are immediately requested to make it disappear? Can we not leave to the representatives of the race of the S and the super S[40], now in the hands of our brave FFI, the task to undo the work of their likes? I can imagine very well these captive masters employed every day to take away those dangerous devices, with or without a wooden box. At the end of the day, it would certainly be useful to make them parade, arm to arm, very tightly one against each other, in line, with the military step or the goose step, in all directions on the cleared terrain, so that there is no possibility to forget something. Is this not the normal solution to this problem of public danger which in any case requires an immediate solution in spite of the current lack of manpower? Too many French have already become victims of the Boches and their destructive devices[41].

[36] During one of these operations, prisoners hit a phosphorus bomb which exploded, injuring eight prisoners, one of them severely. Cf. 712 PW Labour Company, War Diary, entry of 14 February 1945, TNA, WO 171/7455.
[37] Report of the Préfet of Calvados to the Ministre de l'Intérieur for the month of March 1945, 31 March 1945, AD 14, 9 W 45.
[38] Report on the agricultural situation of Calvados on 20 December 1944, AD 14, 21 W 15/2.
[39] Théofilakis, *Les prisonniers de guerre*, p. 341.
[40] Certainly "S" for seigneurs, masters; "super S" certainly referring to the SS.
[41] Boivin, *Les lendemains*, p. 111, note.

Mine clearance and economic recovery were clearly linked, since mined fields and abandoned weaponry prevented in many places the restart of the agriculture. However, public requests undoubtedly bore a revengeful character, wanting the Germans to clean up what they had left behind. Mid-January 1945, the Gendarmerie of Calvados wrote in its monthly opinion report that the population "considers generally that the German POWs, who are seen with an undisguised satisfaction passing and working every day on the Allied working sites, are insufficiently guarded and treated too well. The population requests that these prisoners be used for the dangerous and urgent mine clearance works of the arable land[42]." Accidents were frequent and painfully reminded the war. The police of Vire wrote in an opinion report of March 1945 that "the frequency of accidents caused by mines and ammunition remaining in the fields does not decrease. The farmers are vehemently opposed to this situation and ask why the mine clearance is not actively pursued. People declare that this work should be done by German prisoners[43]." In April 1945, in the village of Rémilly-sur-Lozon, near Saint-Lô, four schoolchildren died in the explosion of anti-tank mine; over the period from 15 August 1944 to 30 June 1945, "several hundred" civilians died in accidents involving mines or grenades in the département Manche[44]. On 29 April 1945, the newspaper *La Manche Libre* expressed a somewhat nuanced criticism over the situation, however also requesting the employment of German POWs for mine clearance tasks:

> There are fields and meadows nearby where no one dares to go. We denounce the inactivity of the competent authorities. The mine scandal has to come to an end. Why is there no employment of the perfected means of defence that we now have for mine clearance in order to protect our population? Why are the German prisoners not employed to get us rid of what had been their work?[45]

It can be assumed that without the holding of hundreds of thousands of German POWs in France by the Allies and their employment in the public space, the French population would not have expressed the will to see the Germans work for them so early. But the desire of revenge that marked the will to see Germans work for French interests also overlapped an actual need for manpower in Normandy.

II – Taking over the German POWs from Allied hands

The transfers became the framework to tough negotiations between France and its Allies, mostly with Washington, where decision makers remained cautious towards the new French authorities. After the Allies' agreement in principle to transfer to the French authorities a part of the POWs held by them in November 1944, the first transfers took

[42] Report of the Gendarmerie company of Calvados on the general situation of the département of Calvados, 18 January 1945, AD 14, 21 W 16.
[43] Information report of the Inspecteur régional d'Etat faisant fonction de Commissaire de Police de Vire, 17 March 1945, AD 14, 21 W 16.
[44] Boivin, *Les lendemains*, p. 107.
[45] Ibid.

place only in February 1945. A great number of them happened in Normandy and sealed the fate of hundreds of thousands of German prisoners in France for the years to come. This section will show how the transfer of German POWs – initially motivated by reasons of domestic and foreign politics – indirectly prefigured the future relations between these POWs and the French people.

1) Long and difficult negotiations

During the autumn 1944, De Gaulle approached SHAEF for the first time to express France's "vital need" for possessing POWs fit for labour. This marked the starting point to five months of difficult negotiations that took place in the context of normalising but still tense Franco-Allied relations, after the official recognition of De Gaulle's provisory government on 23 October 1944. It must be noted right away that Allied POW matters in Europe depended on SHAEF only from a military point of view; political aspects of the German war captivity in Allied hands remained the apanage of London and Washington. Contrary to the American government, still reluctant towards the GPRF and its leader De Gaulle, SHAEF considered the French demand for German POW labour with pragmatism, seeing there a solution to its problems in handling steadily increasing numbers of enemy prisoners on the European continent[46] – especially since at this stage of the war, the American and British armies were merely starting to organise a more effective and systematic POW labour employment for their own benefit.

Official French requests for German POWs expressed at this time, in mid-September 1944, remained modest, with a total of 55,000 workers required by the GPRF – for instance, on 11 September 1944, the secretary general for agriculture expressed a request for over 2,000 German POWs to be employed for the harvest in Normandy[47]. It can be noted that this first official request indicated to the Allies the way the French intended to use this manpower (as agricultural labour), and was far from bearing the characteristic of an overall demand for war reparations in the shape of German POWs fit for labour. However, the French government already indicated that considerably higher numbers of German POWs would be requested in the future. Officially, the CCS in Washington answered favourably to the French demand on 16 October 1944, also to satisfy Eisenhower who sought for his fighting troops to lighten the burden of guarding enemy POWs[48]. This agreement in principle for the transfer of POWs toward French custody was forwarded by the US War Department to general Eisenhower through a confidential note dated 4 November 1944, explaining the reasons for that decision:

[46] Théofilakis, *Les prisonniers de guerre*, p. 411.
[47] Letter of the Ministre de l'Agriculture & par délégation, Le secrétaire général à l'Agriculture, 11 September 1944, Subject: Request for POWs, Justifications particular to Normandy (Orne – Manche – Calvados – Eure), NARA, RG 331, 383.6.
[48] Théofilakis, *Les prisonniers de guerre*, p. 412.

> In order to preserve American and British manpower for combat use and at the same time to make PW labor available for essential work, SHAEF is authorized to turn over as many as possible of the PWs in Europe to the French de facto authority as can be used by them in agriculture and rehabilitation work[49].

As generous as it might have seemed, this agreement was not immediate to come into effect, not only because its terms had been kept rather vague and difficult to apply[50], but also and foremost since Allied needs for prisoner manpower in continental Europe were now rapidly growing. In fact, contrary to this note, the best way to "preserve American and British manpower for combat use" was still to employ loosely guarded German POWs! This agreement therefore seemingly was a somewhat anticipated promise to temporarily satisfy French demands. In practice, SHAEF organised from November 1944 the loan – against a reimbursement of expenses and under ultimately very restrictive conditions – of a part of its prisoner manpower to the French economy, especially for agriculture, clearance and reconstruction[51].

With this rather unsatisfactory solution at hand, the GPRF issued on 21 November 1944 a memorandum that renewed in a more self-confident manner its demand for German POWs, now numbered between 500,000 and one million, and without openly connecting these figures to any precise assessment of France's actual need for labour force[52]. Not surprisingly this new request did not impress the Allies. The principal point of contention for Washington and London was the lack of guarantees relative to the treatment of the prisoners provided by the GPRF. The general situation of France after the war was catastrophic on its own and in this context, the fate of prisoners already held by France was characterised by poor food supply, a deplorable health situation and the lack of clothing and medication. In order to keep all options open, a new statement of intent was nevertheless concluded between Eisenhower and De Gaulle on 23 December 1944.

One month later, on 26 January 1945, the GPRF received a new offer from the CCS. The framing was still tight and marked with a lack of trust towards the French government, but more realistic and closer to the French conception of the transfers than the previous offer. Most importantly, the western Allies – that is to say the powers who were about to cede a part of their German POWs to France – empowered themselves to a high level of authority over the prisoners transferred to French custody. Firstly, through the instalment of the ICRC as a neutral power in charge of reporting the living conditions of the transferred POWs to their former powers of custody; secondly, by putting down in black and white in the final agreement that the transfer would not remove from the ceding powers the ultimate responsibility towards the Geneva Convention[53].

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[49] Quoted in Krammer, *Nazi POWs*, pp. 238-239.
[50] Théofilakis, *Les prisonniers de guerre*, p. 412.
[51] Supreme Headquarters Allies Expeditionary Force, APO 757, AG 383.6-19 GAP-AGH, Subject: Employment of Prisoners of War, 8 November 1944, TNA, WO 219/1365.
[52] Théofilakis, *Les prisonniers de guerre*, p. 221.
[53] Ibid., pp. 412-414.

In early February 1945, at the Yalta Conference, the Franco-Allied agreement received an official framing when it was agreed in the final protocol of proceedings that "use of German labour" was granted as a means of reparation to "those countries which have borne the main burden of the war, have suffered the heaviest losses and have organized victory over the enemy"[54]. But even though France had in parallel received the confirmation that there would be a French occupation zone in post-war Germany, it had to get back to the negotiating table over the attribution of German POWs, since other countries now also coveted this manpower. Active bargaining started between European nations, each of them wanting to obtain a part of the available workforce. Besides France, the Netherlands, Belgium, Luxemburg, Yugoslavia and Greece also requested their part; France stuck out with a demand for 1.75 million men[55]. But since Washington and London would agree under no circumstances to more than 1.3 million prisoners, negotiations resumed, now principally dealing with the quantitative aspects of the transfers to come[56].

While compliance with the Geneva Convention was at the heart of the negotiations, the question whether or not the idea alone of a transfer of POWs was a violation of the international laws in force, did not openly enter the debate. The final transfer agreement between Paris, London and Washington was signed on 14 February 1945[57] – five months after the first French request.

2) Modalities and chronology of the transfers

SHAEF fixed the date of the first transfer of POWs on 22 February 1945 – a delay that came as a means of political pressure, officially to ensure that France would meet the requirements of the Geneva Convention.

The first contingent counted 50,000 men: 15,000 prisoners from the British camps in Normandy and Belgium and 35,000 captives from American central enclosures on the Cotentin peninsula. The British army would later only cede 10,000 more prisoners to France, 4,000 of them coming from Dunkirk and about 6,400 from the camp in Fleury-sur-Orne, close to Caen[58]. The total of 25,000 prisoners transferred to France by the British were brought to newly created French camps or remained in their original enclosures if

54 Protocol of Proceedings at the Yalta Conference, 11 February 1945, published on http://www.cvce.eu/obj/protocol_of_proceedings_at_the_yalta_conference_11_february_1945-en-0ef9e6d6-17a2-480d-864e-992d5558c520.html, accessed on 10 January 2015.

55 F. Cochet, "France 1945, le dossier controversé des prisonniers de guerre allemands", *L'Histoire* 191 (1995), p. 44.

56 Krammer, *Nazi POWs*, p. 239. The issue of transferring POWs between different coalition partners had already come up in late 194/early 1943 in North Africa, when the French had also wanted a "cut of the booty". Cf. B. Moore, "Unruly Allies: British Problems with the French Treatment of Axis Prisoners of War, 1943-1945", *War in History* 7 (2000), pp. 180-198.

57 Théofilakis, *Les prisonniers de guerre*, p. 415.

58 2225 Prisoner of War Camp, War Diary, Sheet 1, entries from 6 to 18 September 1945, TNA, WO 171/8325. For comparison cf. also the figures quoted in Böhme, *In französischer Hand*, pp. 14-20. Cf. also L. Buisson, *Historique du service des prisonniers de guerre de l'Axe, 1943-1948* (Paris, 1948), pp. 39-40.

these were also transferred to the French. The relatively low figures of the British transfers can be explained by a policy that, from the end of the war favoured – besides the employment of the prisoners in Great-Britain – their repatriation towards the British occupation zone in Germany in order to revitalise its administration and economy[59].

In parallel to the first transfers of prisoners, the Americans continued negotiating with the French authorities on the conditions for those transfers to come and the treatment of the transferred prisoners, who were subject to special attention. In fact, the United States granted themselves a say in the food supply of their former prisoners, mainly to ensure that the terms of the Geneva Convention would be honoured. To this end, the US high command promulgated on 13 March 1945 a decree, defining the precise development of the transfers and repeating the commitments made by the GPRF[60].

Between June and July 1945, a second contingent of 50,000 prisoners was delivered to France by the American army. The cadence of the transfers thus remained low. General Louis Buisson, head of the Direction générale des prisonniers de guerre (DGPG) since 9 July 1945, explained in the closing report of his service that "France did not want to receive more POWs than it could employ"[61]. It would certainly have been more correct to state that the American authorities did not want to cede to France more prisoners than it could feed.

However, the transfers settled to an increased rhythm from summer 1945 when the US authorities began to demobilise a great number of their labour units on the European continent. While the French received the majority of German prisoners after the integral transfer of an American camp, about 15,000 POWs were transferred during the summer 1945 outside their camps of origin and directly assigned to the French dépôts that were already operating. At this point, the transfers exclusively concerned prisoners captured on the continent. Those held in Great Britain and in the United States were not affected by the transfers, at least for now.

Table 23

Chronology of transfers of whole camps, Chanor Base Section (US)

Date	Camp	Place	Numbers transferred
25 June 1945	CCPWE n° 11	Rennes	14,867
	CCPWE n° 12	Rennes	48,380
28 June 1945	CCPWE n° 13	Le Mans	36,984
5 July 1945	CCPWE n° 14	Chartres	28,251
6 July 1945	CCPWE n° 22	Thorée-les-Pins	32,039
	CCPWE n° 25	Voves	21,105
10 August 1945	CCPWE n° 21	Champagné	23,379
11 August 1945	CCPWE n° 20	La Glacerie	~ 20,000
		Total :	**~ 225,000**

Source: Chanor Base Section, Provost Marshal History, 31 January 1946, NARA, RG 498, Chanor Base Section Box 2.

[59] Held, *Kriegsgefangenschaft*, pp. 219-234.
[60] Decree of Headquarters Communication Zone, European Theater of Operations, relative to the transfer of POWs to France, 13 March 1945, published in Böhme, *In amerikanischer Hand*, pp. 253-257.
[61] Buisson, *Historique*, p. 39.

In parallel to these transfers, the American army ceded to France in early July 1945, several of the prisoner camps operated inside the French occupation zone in Germany. These were part of the infamous *Rheinwiesenlager* ("camps on the banks of the Rhine"), installed on open fields without any hard constructions, where many prisoners lived in simple earth holes[62]. Without running water or medical assistance and with a largely insufficient food supply, these camps drew attention onto them because of their particularly hard living conditions. Most of the German soldiers inside these camps had been captured during the last weeks of the conflict, especially during the reduction of the Ruhr pocket. In fact, during the entry of SHAEF troops into the Reich and the unexpected surrender of millions of Wehrmacht soldiers, the Allies found themselves confronted with the impossibility of granting them a decent food supply and housing.

In order to legally bypass Geneva Convention requirements, the soldiers captured – or registered as captives – after the unconditional surrender of Germany were no longer considered POWs but as Disarmed Enemy Forces (DEF), for the American terminology, and as Surrendered Enemy Personnel (SEP) in the British army[63]. Whereas the term of "POW" had been clearly defined, these new terms were not covered by any international convention – and there lay their main interest. Allied authorities administering DEF or SEP were officially not constrained to the letter by international law in force, even though generally this status was considered temporary and camp commanders mostly treated their prisoners in the spirit of customary law. The Allies justified the creation of this controversial status with the unusual conditions of the German defeat. With the unconditional surrender of the Reich, the German state had *de facto* ceased to exist. While the German soldiers had been considered as the combatants of a state until then, they were no longer represented by such a state after 8 May 1945, given the fact that this state no longer existed. Also, according to the same logic, the German prisoners could no longer be represented by a protecting power such as Switzerland[64].

In spite of the immediate admonitions from the Red Cross, the Allies continued to overfill the *Rheinwiesenlager* with hundreds of thousands of German prisoners. Ultimately, the Allies were little proud of these camps and of the living conditions inside and subsequently decided to close them down from summer 1945 by liberating the weakest prisoners and by transferring those prisoners fit for labour to other authorities. Thus, in early July 1945, France received some 175,000 men out of the *Rheinwiesenlager* that had been assessed as fit for labour under criteria that remain unclear. Given that France had not agreed with the creation of the status of disarmed military personnel, the captives received from the *Rheinwiesenlager* became POWs again as soon as they were registered to the French army[65].

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62 Cf. especially Overmans, "Ein untergeordneter Eintrag im Leidensbuch der jüngeren Geschichte? Die Rheinwiesenlager 1945", in H.-E. Volkmann, ed, *Ende des Dritten Reiches, Ende des Zweiten Weltkrieges. Eine perspektivische Rückschau* (Munich, 1995).
63 Overmans, "Schicksal", pp. 413-425.
64 Villa, "The Diplomatic and Political Context", p. 66.
65 Ibid., p. 64 et sqq.

Finally, between July and September 1945, the US army proceeded with the last delivery of the year, consisting of 100,000 men captured in Norway and transferred to France via prisoner camps in Germany.

However, soon, the transferred prisoners became the object of a diplomatic dispute between France and the United States that gained momentum as the ICRC started to report the poor living conditions of these POWs. As early as 7 September 1945, a confidential ICRC note on the general situation of the German prisoners in French hands was read at the Council of Ministers of the GPRF. There the note had "the effect of a bomb" since De Gaulle was well aware of the possible implications of the prisoners' situation on his political goals on the international scene[66]. On 26 September 1945, Jean-Pierre Pradervand, the Paris ICRC delegate, drew De Gaulle's attention in person to the poor physical condition of the prisoners delivered by the US authorities[67]. In parallel, the ICRC sent a detailed report directly to SHAEF, thus prompting Eisenhower to temporarily put a halt to the transfers on 29 September[68].

In fact, the prisoners were often sick, undernourished and poorly clothed. General Buisson himself later wrote that "the POWs were malnourished, the hospitals crowded and the medical officers overloaded"[69]. It is undeniable that the conditions of captivity were particularly difficult in post-war France, as we will see in the next chapter; but contrary to what the Americans assumed when stopping the transfers, the poor conditions of the transferred men were not only the result of the treatment granted by the French. In fact, many of the transferred prisoners, especially those coming from the *Rheinwiesenlager*, had already been in poor condition before their transfer, and some of them were actually unfit for labour. But also those American camps in France transferred to the French were, as mentioned earlier, in a bad state during the summer of 1945. Shortly before the American camp at La Glacerie was transferred, the municipal council of Cherbourg noticed the generally bad condition of the German POWs, due to the poor food supply while under American custody. The general impression was confirmed after the transfer of the camp. Emile Legoubey, a French conscript, entered the camp at La Glacerie around 25 August 1945, that is to say a fortnight after the transfer of the camp, and reported:

> When we took over the camp from the Americans, we went inside the tents. The soldiers slept on cartons, some of them were really thin. The skin hung down their buttocks. Actually, the Americans gave everything to the leaders who were meant to share the supply among the prisoners but who instead kept it partly for themselves. […] Through the barbed wire, they reached their hands to get some bread… But the FFI in the guard towers had an easy trigger… We were unable to give something to these miserable men. Sometimes despair led a prisoner to attempt an escape. One night I recovered a poor guy who had tried to escape through the sewage[70].

[66] Théofilakis, *Les prisonniers de guerre*, p. 80.
[67] F. Cochet, *Soldats sans armes : La captivité de guerre – une approche culturelle* (Bruxelles, 1998), p. 121.
[68] Théofilakis, *Les prisonniers de guerre*, pp. 70-71.
[69] Buisson, *Historique*, pp. 221-222.
[70] Cited in Lamache, "Les Américains", pp. 374-375.

The perceived distance between the arguments put forward by the American authorities to justify the suspension of the transfers, and the assessment of the situation by the French themselves, for example in Normandy, might also explain the large echo received by this suspension in the French press[71] – beyond the fact that this decision was experienced as a new attempt to prevent the reversal of the balance of power in French-German relations, and thus inhibit the French national resurrection itself.

Publicly facing the accusation of not treating its German POWs correctly, the French government was constrained to reassess its initial demand for prisoner manpower. Thus, on 27 October 1945, it was announced that only 1.3 million men in total were now requested, instead of the initial 1.75 million[72]. Moreover, an inter-ministerial commission was created in November to ensure an administration of POW affairs that would live up to French interior and exterior political ambitions[73].

The US authorities nevertheless, did not immediately restart the transfers, also because they were no longer willing to cede more than one million German POWs to France. On the contrary, Washington expressed an official demand to recover between November 1945 and January 1946, via the American camp at Bolbec about 70,000 sick captives, officially in order to provide them with the necessary health care[74]. The prisoners were again being used as a means of political pressure that was particularly efficient since the idea of retrocession also complied with the interests of the Red Cross who severely criticised the lengthening *sine die* of war captivity.

This outbreak of tensions between Paris and Washington over ICRC reports suggest that the United States would not hesitate to make again political use of any continued ill treatment of German prisoners in order to further increase the pressure on De Gaulle. While the head of the GPRF had always been questionable in the eyes of the US government, the permanent threat of removing large numbers of fit labourers from the French economy thus limited De Gaulle's release from Allied rule and confronted his will to pursue his own way on the eve of the Cold War. As we will see in the next chapter, it was also this constant threat that lead the French authorities to force the improvement of the living conditions of their German POWs, as Paris wanted to prove respectful of the Geneva Convention; the perspective of future relations with Germany was also not alien to this evolution.

A new agreement between Paris and Washington was finally concluded on 7 November 1945, and the last contingent of prisoners was transferred to France[75]. Between February and May 1946, a mixed commission of French and American medical officers proceeded with the selection of 101,000 men "fit for labour" from the American camps of Bolbec, Croutoy, Mailly, Renay, Zimming and Septème-les-Vallons as well as in the camps of the American occupation zone in Germany. From the camp of Bolbec alone, about 75,000 German POWs were ceded to France in early 1946 after passing

[71] Théofilakis, *Les prisonniers de guerre*, pp. 353 & 434.
[72] Ibid., p. 426.
[73] Ibid., p. 81.
[74] Of these, 63,133 prisoners had been retroceded on 1 January 1946, cf. Théofilakis, *Les prisonniers de guerre*, p. 427.
[75] Ibid., p. 422.

before this commission. In spite of this last transfer, the American authorities remained suspicious vis-à-vis France and transferred at the same time, some 138,000 German prisoners to the British ally[76].

Between February 1945 and May 1946, France received a total of 765,000 POWs from the hands of the Allies. It can be added to this figure, the number of POWs made by French troops and those held in North Africa, who amounted to a total of 300,000 men. The total number of POWs under French authority thus being 1,065,000 men. About 158,000 of these were not German citizens and therefore submitted to separate repatriation agreements signed with the states they depended on[77]. However, taking into consideration the retrocession of invalid prisoners, France has never counted more than one million POWs inside its camps.

Table 24

Prisoners of war received by France, until May 1946

Origin	Number
French captures	237,000
North Africa (Free France)	63,000
British transfers	25,000
American transfers	740,000
Total received	**1,065,000**
Part of Germans	**907,000**

Source: Buisson, *Historique.*

3) The impact of the transfers on the prisoners' state of mind

For the prisoners, their transfer from one detaining power to another was certainly one of the most frustrating moments of their lives. Dealt with as booty, they were forced to passively endure the passing of their camp from one authority to another. The facts were often bitter to accept for the prisoners when they became aware that the departure of the American or British guards was in no way synonymous with their liberation, but simply meant that French troops were about to arrive. A German prisoner held in the US camp at La Glacerie since April 1945 described with resignation, the transfer of authority that he and his comrades were forced to experience:

> And so the time passed with a monotonous regularity until August 11th, 1945, when the camp received the visit of high-ranking French officers. Everyone was gathered and the French

[76] Chanor Base Section, Provost Marshal History, 31 January 1946, NARA, RG 498, Chanor Base Section Box 2.
[77] In the case of those prisoners who had fought in the ranks of the Wehrmacht while belonging to states inside the Soviet Union, the forced repatriation played the role of a catalyst for further discrimination and persecution by Soviet authorities. N. Bethell, *The last secret: forcible repatriation to Russia, 1944-7* (London, 1974) and Coudry, *Les Camps*. Cf. also P. Polian, "The Internment of Returning Soviet Prisoners of War after 1945", in Moore and Hately-Broad, eds, *Prisoners of War, Prisoners of Peace* (Oxford, 2005), pp. 123-139, here especially pp. 131-133.

> delegation inspected the camp and its installations. On this day, our fate was sealed for long years to come; because on this day the American handed us over to the French, as if they could not have simply liberated us at that time, the American obviously having no more need for us[78].

Table 25



German POWs saluting the French and American flags in the annexe camp of CCPWE 19 near Sainte-Mère-Eglise, undated (Source: ICRC).

For many prisoners, the transfer of authority was synonymous with new searches. Quite often, the French guards deprived them of the few things they had been able to conserve. The French guards' attitude might best be explained by the ambient opinion stating that German POWs in Allied hands had been treated too well; the guards certainly assumed they would find all sorts of items of supply on these prisoners. A former German prisoner transferred to the French at mid-August via the camp of Bolbec remembers his transfer:

> We stayed here for several weeks before being transferred to the French as a mean of war reparation. A new ordeal awaited us. Half an hour after the departure began the first searching to find weapons, that is to say tobacco and valuables. But it seems that this is the fate of every prisoner. This happened again several times as some of us were unable to repress their smokers' drive. The tobacco had been a gift from the Americans before our departure. The next destination was Damigny. We were now used to be registered and searched[79].

The disappointment of the prisoners during their transfer of custody was often even greater as they had generally been promised a quick repatriation by Allied guards unaware

[78] Narrative of a former German POW, undated, BA-MA, B 205/224, WKU-084.
[79] Narrative of a former German POW, undated, BA-MA, B 205/225, WKU-095.

of the actual future of their captives, or because they spread unverifiable information in order to maintain order among them, especially during the long crossing of the Atlantic ocean. On 15 July 1946, the man of confidence of the Cherbourg dépôt 301 sent a detailed report on the state of mind of the transferred prisoners in his charge, to the ICRC:

> Especially the comrades coming from the United States are for most of them in captivity for more than 3 years, the prisoner's psychosis affects everyone. Depending on the personal situation of everyone, this condition has more or less repercussion on the prisoner. The escape attempts, the suicides or the suicide attempts are for a part of them a consequence of this psychosis[80].

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Compared to many other French regions without Allied camps, the situation remained at first sight, unchanged in Normandy when the French authorities received several turnkey POW camps, such as La Glacerie and Fleury-sur-Orne. However, the transfer of these POWs to the French army in 1945 and 1946 marked a most important turning point in the Franco-German relations. In fact, the transfer instigated an extension for several years of a massive German presence in France and gave the French the unique opportunity to exercise their authority on German soldiers, thus symbolising to many, a complete reversal of the balance of power which had reigned during the four years of German occupation.

While playing the game of De Gaulle wanting to place France as a victorious nation of World War II, especially in the opinion of its fellow citizens, the reversal of the Franco-German relations on the high level *in fine* led to the reversal of individual Franco-German relations on the low level. In fact, the transfer enabled the massive employment of Germans by the French civil economy and created at once an enormous surface of contact between French and Germans.

The transfer of authority was a frustrating experience for German POWs. Some of them, especially those who had been captured in North Africa, had already stayed up to three years in war captivity. After having been promised repatriation by their American or British guards, they were now being transferred to French authority. The frustration was further increased as many German ex-soldiers did not consider France as a victorious nation, but merely as a free-rider on the back of Allied military success, unable to capture German soldiers on its own. While the prisoners had been hoping to be repatriated soon, they now faced captivity under French authority that bore the perspective of an unknown future. But for many Germans, the prolongation of the uncertainty regarding their date of repatriation seems also to have shaped the state of mind of many prisoners, mainly marked with a fatalistic attitude, when employed within the French society. With an unknown future in front of them, most prisoners resigned themselves to an uncertain situation and made the best of it.

[80] Report of Adolf Klein, man of confidence in dépôt 301 Cherbourg, 15 July 1946, sent to the International Committee of the Red Cross, ACICR, collection without signatures.

The transfer of German POWs from Allied to French custody was certainly one of the biggest achievements of De Gaulle's foreign politics. The following two chapters will show whether the reversal of the balance of power outreached the scene of international politics and how it reflected or not in the individual relations between the French and the Germans.

Chapter 5
The Germans in camps under French rule

The transfer of German POWs into French custody raised the question of whether the reversal of the balance of power in the Franco-German relations on the high level would be reflected in the intermediate and lower levels. While France was a signatory state to the Geneva Convention, it was not clear from the beginning that the chain of command within the French army and especially at the level of camp commanders and guard personnel, would follow the higher instructions accordingly. In short, would the French use their newly acquired authority over the Germans to exact revenge for the past four years of German military occupation – for example by voluntarily and systematically ill-treating the German prisoners?

In the perception of De Gaulle, the authority of the French over the Germans was meant to contribute to the reconstruction of the French national identity, severely damaged by the military defeat in 1940 and four years of German occupation. The occupation had started to divide French society, but not only into a few militant *résistants* on the one hand and political and economical collaborators on the other. Rather, the existence of more "civilian resistance fighters"[1], now identifying with the armed resistance against the Germans, alongside many people implicitly complying with the German will for public order by simply going on with their everyday occupations – a phenomenon that can be labelled as "structural collaboration"[2]–, clearly indicated a danger of entrenching a long lasting division in French society after the end of the war. Initially, as a part of the official discourse, the German POWs were to play the role of a scapegoat for these inner fractures of the French society[3] – which in return, brought the danger of a systematic and continuous ill-treatment of the German POWs under French authority.

This chapter will cover the direct and indirect relations between the German POWs and the French policy and administration, reflected by the living conditions on one hand – considered as indirect relations – and the more direct relations with the camp personnel. It will address the question as to whether the political interest of rebuilding the French national identity – traditionally in opposition to the Germans at least since the last third of the 19th century – found itself reflected in the handling of German prisoners inside both the central camps and labour camps, or whether another important component of the French identity, that is to say human rights, dominated the desire to exact revenge. How, then, did the higher level of the administration deal with individual reactions of hatred and revenge from certain camp commanders or guards? Were the interests of French national identity outweighed by those interests of international policy wanting to give France a role in the post-war era, by showing to the world that France

[1] J. Semelin, *Sans armes face à Hitler* (Paris, 1998), p. 50.
[2] Burrin, *La France*, p. 469.
[3] For the concept of the scapegoat, cf. especially Girard, *Le bouc émissaire*.

was capable of complying with international humanitarian law? It can also be questioned whether interests of national identity were more important than economic interests – connected to the labour force of the POWs. Finally, the question will be raised as to whether the progressive improvement of the prisoners' living conditions reflected a form of early reconciliation between the French and the Germans, or if it simply reflected an improvement of the general economical situation in France.

In order to answer these questions, this chapter will at first address the chronological evolution and the geographical disparities of the living conditions of the German POWs inside the central enclosures and the labour camps under French authority. Secondly, it will analyse the relations between the prisoners and the military camp personnel inside and outside the camps. The Red Cross reports, written by ICRC delegates who toured France to inspect the prisoner camps, are the most important source for an analysis of the evolution of the living conditions inside the camps under French authority. The credibility of these documents is increased by the fact that the ICRC acted as a *de facto* inspector for the US authorities, who still considered themselves responsible for the POWs transferred to France: both Washington and Geneva had no interest in embellishing the living conditions in the French camps, even if the language employed by the Swiss delegates was often rather vague[4]. As we will see, the living standards of the German POWs progressively improved for moral, political, and economic reasons.

I – A gradual improvement of living conditions

As France received German POWs from US and British authorities, it not only inherited abundant manpower, but also many of the supply and health problems experienced by the prisoners while under Allied custody, especially during the summer 1945. Whereas the American authorities would later try to hand to France these problems and the hereto connected sickness and death rates among the prisoners, it must be noted that most of the transferred prisoners were already in a bad shape while still under Allied custody[5].

[4] ICRC reports for camps outside of Normandy did not hesitate to openly denounce "particularly bad living conditions", as noticed for example in the French camp of Besançon, before noticing "sensible improvements" after a new visit five days later, cf. A.-L. Charles, "La citadelle de Besançon à l'époque du Dépôt 85, Camp de prisonniers de l'Axe, Octobre 1944-Avril 1948." Master's thesis, Université de Franche-Comté, 2013, pp. 138-141. A similar amplitude of observations can be found in ICRC reports on camps in the Picardy region, which tends to prove the relative freedom of speech granted to the delegates by Geneva. The GPRF had mandated the ICRC as early as 1944 to act as the protecting power for German POWs in French hands (and who had been captured by the French in the first place), cf. Théofilakis, *Les prisonniers de guerre*, p. 68.

[5] Cf. chapters 3 and 4.

1) The general policy and the distribution of POWs over France

As we have seen in the previous chapter, the progressive improvement of the prisoners' living conditions was first and above all a concession made by the French government to satisfy American expectations, in order to receive as many German POWs as possible and not have them taken back to US custody because of poor treatment. Beyond its interest for prestige on the scene of international politics, the French government became quickly aware that it had also a purely economic interest to treat well the German prisoners under its authority if they were to be a working force profitable to the national recovery. Finally, humanistic values traditionally linked to the self-conception of the French nation, such as the respect of universal human and civil rights, also started to influence policy making relative to POW affairs[6].

In the context of a public opinion that was still anti-German and generally opposed to the improvement of the prisoners' lives, also because the French themselves were still suffering from food rationing and war-torn infrastructures, the French government insisted on the higher national economic interest to keep the German prisoners fit for labour. The improving living conditions were thought to be better accepted if the French could see in the POWs the workers of the French national recovery, and no longer simply as defeated enemy soldiers[7].

On 7 August 1945, the Direction Générale des Prisonniers de Guerre (DGPG) published its directive n° 1 relative to the employment of POWs held by France, defining the overall policy as to "obtain a maximum of work for the benefit of France by a maximum of men". Additionally, the text also underpinned "the urgent necessity to maintain the POWs in working condition", and ordered a "strict discipline without vexations or brutalities". General Louis Buisson, head of the DGPG, summed up the double interest for France to correctly treat the German POWs:

> We cannot follow the Germans on the path of cruelty which the whole world blames them for. This would be unworthy of us; and, moreover, we would make a poor calculation. Because those who have destroyed France have to rebuild it; and only men in a good physical condition are capable of doing so[8].

De Gaulle himself expressed his worries on this subject in a letter he addressed on 27 September 1945 to André Diethelm, his minister of war, responsible for the German POWs in French hands:

> I receive through multiple channels information documents relating the physical and sanitary state of a great number of German prisoners of war. This question is of utmost importance. Beyond the simply human point of view, that we have the duty to respect, our international reputation is

[6] Wylie, *Barbed Wire Diplomacy*, pp. 25-31.
[7] Théofilakis, *Les prisonniers de guerre*, pp. 90-91.
[8] As quoted in the article 'Le bilan du voyage de Francisque Gay. Un problème difficile à résoudre : le traitement des prisonniers allemands', *L'Aube*, 4 April 1946.

> at stake, without counting the loss of workforce for our country through such a situation of the prisoners of war in our hands. I request you to take charge of this matter without no delay at all. For all of them food supplies and health care have to be improved; those incurable have to be repatriated[9].

Diethelm was a Gaullist resistance fighter from Alsace who seemed to have a somewhat revengeful view on the German prisoners who, according to his views, deserved to be treated within a rather strict interpretation of the international conventions[10]. De Gaulle's letter to him can therefore be seen as an order to put his personal conceptions of the Franco-German relations behind the overall interests of France after the end of the war. De Gaulle's policy was pursued under the following minister, Edmond Michelet, a former member of the resistance who had been himself a prisoner in Dachau concentration camp from September 1943 until the liberation. In his ministry of Armies, Joseph Rovan, whom he had met in Dachau, was charged to "take every possible action to prevent the multiplication of little Dachaus in France"[11].

Undoubtedly, it was also part of De Gaulle's ambitions to prevent a future conflict with Germany – a correct treatment of the German POWs in French hands could become a means to realise this policy of appeasement. Although we lack evidence to support that De Gaulle considered the administration of the prisoners in French hands as a tool in the context of future Franco-German relations, his views on post-war Germany and the French occupation zone prove that such thoughts were not alien to him. In his memoirs, De Gaulle describes the occupation of Germany as follows:

> A task, essential from the point of view of our rank, of the future of Europe, of the human relations between French and Germanics, but very complicated by the fact of reactions likely to arise among our troops due to the cruelties committed by the Germans, was incumbent on the French army. This task would be accomplished with dignity, moderation, discipline that honoured France. (…) Thus, in the middle of the ruins, the mourning, the humiliation, that submerged Germany for its part, I felt that in my mind, mistrust and severity were diminishing. I even thought to see possibilities of understanding that the past had never offered. Moreover, it seemed to me that the same feeling was emerging among our soldiers. The breath of vengeance that had first come across them had fallen as they advanced on the devastated ground. Today, I see them merciful in front of the misfortune of the defeated[12].

While, in September 1945, abbot Georges Le Meur, head of the French catholic chaplaincy for German POWs, had warned of the weight of the French public opinion opposed to satisfactory food supplies for the enemy prisoners[13], a progressive shift in public opinion started to be noticeable. Indeed, public resentment against a correct

[9] Document "Lettre à André Diethelm, ministre de la Guerre", published in De Gaulle, *Le salut*, p. 500.
[10] Théofilakis, *Les prisonniers de guerre*, pp. 79-80.
[11] H. Ménudier, "Joseph Rovan, les vies multiples d'un citoyen d'Europe", *Documents, Revue des questions allemandes* 60, 2005 (1), pp. 102-118. At least until autumn 1945, the comparison with German concentration camps was used by non-governmental observers and French authorities alike, cf. Théofilakis, *Les prisonniers de guerre*, pp. 88-89.
[12] De Gaulle, *Le salut*, pp. 246-247.
[13] G. Le Meur, "Les PG allemands et l'opinion publique." *Messages* (11 September 1945).

treatment of the German POWs disappeared from French opinion reports in parallel to the transfer of the prisoners into French hands. It is believed that the opinion changed because the transfer resulted in the multiplication of French vectors, such as members of the French clergy, who now brought to public knowledge the actual living conditions inside the camps[14]. At the same time, a number of press articles, especially in the national newspapers, as for example in *Le Figaro* on 19 September 1945, appealed to a correct treatment of the "ennemi" by the French to avoid the risk of "resembling him"[15].

A number of problems inherent to the overall situation in France would prevent this objective from being realised immediately. The first obstacle lay in the French communications network, heavily disrupted during the Liberation. The railway network alone suffered from the partial or total destruction of some 1,900 bridges and tunnels as well as of 115 railway stations. 7,500 road bridges and 4,000 river bridges had been destroyed or damaged. Therefore, until 1946 it remained difficult to transport goods between distant regions[16]. Transportation problems also made it impossible for foodstuff to be available in pre-war proportions in all the French regions, simply because producing regions could not adequately export to consuming regions. Bread, for example, remained strictly rationed for the civilian population until end of 1948[17].

Failing to mobilise sufficient aid in the French occupation zone in Germany, and in spite of his anti-American views, De Gaulle ultimately had no other choice than ask Washington for assistance, especially to provide additional clothing for the German POWs in France before the winter of 1945-46. Until January 1946, the French government spent 5 million dollars alone on clothing purchases in the United States. The dangerous alimentary situation was tackled through the shipping of a total of 3,000 tons of foodstuff to the French camps in October 1945. Supplementary care parcels were sent to the men of confidence in French camps by the United States using channels of the ICRC[18]. For the time being, these concerted actions brought relief to the overall situation of the German POWs in French hands.

But in the long run, the improvement of living conditions would mainly be achieved indirectly, through the rapid redistribution of the manpower not only to other regions outside Normandy, but also to exterior labour parties or civil employers, which would empty the overcrowded camps.

The first camp under French authority in Normandy was established in May 1945 a few kilometres north of Alençon, near the village of Damigny. It played the role of a central camp, or dépôt, designed to take in German soldiers captured by the French forces during the reduction of the German pockets on the Atlantic coast and to house those prisoners transferred by the Allies. The French POW administration was based on an instruction of November 1939, but the French also drew on the ambivalent experience gained in North Africa from 1943 – the problems in terms of prisoners' living

[14] Cf. Chapter 6.
[15] Overmans, "Schicksal", p. 460; cf. also Théofilakis, *Les prisonniers de guerre*, pp. 340-341.
[16] D. Voldman, "Les destructions matérielles", in Leleu et al., *La France*, pp. 266-267.
[17] F. Grenard, "Le rationnement", in Leleu et al., *La France*, pp. 144-145.
[18] Overmans, "German Historiography", p. 152, p. 165; cf. also Théofilakis, *Les prisonniers de guerre*, pp. 99-100.

conditions that had arisen there would partly be duplicated in France, also because the POW administration had not been designed for an enemy captivity in peacetime[19]. Until August 1945, four more dépôts were opened in each of the départements of Normandy, except for Eure which had none and Seine-Inférieure which counted two.

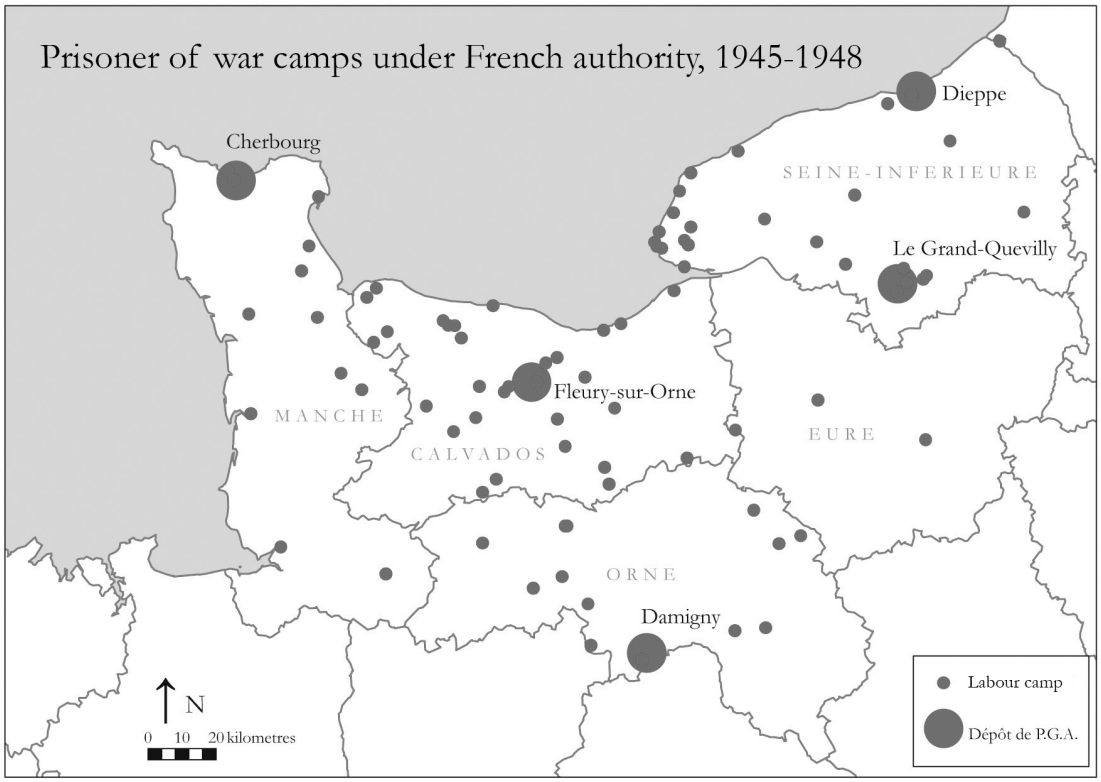
Table 26

Dépôts for German POWs in the 3rd military region (Normandy)

Dépôt n°	Place	Département	Opened	Prisoners registered, summer 1946
31	Damigny	Orne	16 May 1945	7,000
32	Le Grand-Quevilly	Seine-Inférieure	8 June 1945	9,000
33	Dieppe	Seine-Inférieure	1 June 1945	7,000
34	Fleury-sur-Orne	Calvados	6 September 1945	11,000
301	Cherbourg	Manche	11 August 1945	7,000
			Total:	**41,000**

Sources: Lists and administration of dépôts, SHD, 29 R 2; various Red Cross reports, ACICR, collection without signature.

Table 27



The internal organisation of the French dépôts was the same as the central camps operated by the Allies. This procedure was even adopted in those camps taken over with prisoners by the French from the British and the Americans, such as Fleury-sur-Orne and Cherbourg, where the prisoners continued to be housed in tents. In contrast, the camps

[19] Moore, "Unruly", pp. 180-198; Théofilakis, *Les prisonniers de guerre*, p. 172.

newly opened by the French were generally located on sites that allowed the accommodation of prisoners in permanent structures.

The main difference with the Allied system consisted in the new role given to the French camps. Whereas the Allies had established their camps near their lines of communication to enable the utilisation of the prisoner manpower for military use, the French authorities wanted to put the prisoners at the disposal of the civil economy and therefore needed to ensure an equal distribution of the newly acquired prisoners over the entire national territory. One month after the transfer of the camp in La Glacerie near Cherbourg, now called dépôt 301, "3,000 to 4,000 men" out of the 20,000 were sent by train to another dépôt, east of Troyes[20]. Ultimately the goal was also to bring German POWs to every region of France and so promote the idea of the nation's victory over the historic enemy – even if this meant that some regions which had accommodated high numbers of enemy POWs were now confronted with their partial evacuation, which in turn prevented a direct and uncontrolled use of this manpower by the local population[21]. The consequence for Normandy of this policy of distribution was a rapid decrease in prisoner figures to be dealt with in the region. From 270,000 German POWs in Allied hands during summer 1945, the numbers dropped to 57,000 men one year later, of which 41,000 POWs were in French hands and 16,000 inside the remaining US camp of Bolbec. As we will see, this rapid decrease enabled a significant improvement of the prisoners' living conditions.

2) Generally improving housing conditions and food supply

a) In the central camps

The French central camps (dépôts) can be split in two groups: those where the prisoners were housed in tents, and those with solid structures. Most of the central camps with tents had been taken over from the Allies together with their prisoners, such as Fleury-sur-Orne or La Glacerie. The camps built by the French, such as Le Grand-Quevilly, or taken over from the Allies after a period without activity, as for example Damigny, allowed the prisoners to be housed inside wooden huts or at least sleep on a hard-surface floor. The installation of permanent structures pointed to the intention of the French to keep their German prisoners for a long time.

The description of the housing conditions inside dépôt n° 31 in Damigny, north of Alençon, where prisoners were accommodated in horse stables[22], is presented here as an exemple of the evolution in most of the French permanent camps. When visited by the ICRC delegate Bonnet on 4 July 1945 the camp housed only 425 German soldiers, living in "wooden huts covered with tar paper, clay floor". Instead of beds, the prisoners slept on

[20] Diary of a German POW, entries 21-23 August 1945, BA-MA, B 205/224, WKU-084.
[21] Théofilakis, *Les prisonniers de guerre*, pp. 312-313.
[22] Testimony of German POW, summer-autumn 1945, BA-MA, B 205/225, WKU-095.

"straw beds on the ground with borders made out of beams". The ventilation was said to be "good" but there was lack of "some blankets" and the only light came through the windows[23]. From autumn 1945, the size of the camp in Damigny was increased and new huts were built[24]. In November, this dépôt held as many as 18,600 prisoners. Despite the significant increase in the number of prisoners since the last visit, the Red Cross reported a noticeable improvement of the housing conditions: "The dépôt in Damigny is a camp in a very good state. (…) The huts are clean and most of the prisoners sleep in beds. Some of them have no blankets[25]." During a Red Cross visit to Damigny in March 1946, the camp housed as few as 680 prisoners. In fact, the majority of the prisoners administered by the dépôt 31 had been transferred to exterior labour camps or working parties and were now accommodated close to their working sites. Thus, the living conditions for the prisoners remaining in Damigny could now be considered as satisfactory: "The lighting is sufficient in each hut. The prisoners have berths, a sleeping bag and a blanket[26]." From August 1946, the POWs praised the camp as being particularly "convivial", "bright", "clean" and "beautiful"[27]. Finally, in October 1946, the remaining 500 prisoners lived in "heated and very well equipped huts"[28].

The picture was a different one in those enclosures taken over from the Allies. In 1945, in Fleury-sur-Orne, a former British camp, the prisoner Wolfgang Sachtleben lived in "a hole covered with a tarpaulin"[29]. Although having a capacity of 20,000 men, this camp with the official designation of "dépôt n° 34" accommodated a mere 6,240 POWs when visited by the Red Cross on 18 February 1946. In groups of forty, they lived in tents inherited from the British army. In spite of the relative underoccupation of the camp, the living conditions were disastrous during the winter months: "No heating has been installed in the camp. Currently, numerous prisoners lay directly on the moist ground, without straw or planks, lots of them having burnt the straw of their tents to heat themselves[30]."

In general, housing conditions of German POWs inside French dépôts in Normandy were the worst during the winter 1945/46, both in the French built ones and in those taken over from the Americans and the British, due equally to the exceptional harshness of the weather and the occupation of the central camps which was still relatively dense at this time. The housing within the dépôts also suffered from the bad weather conditions because they prevented large-scale employment of the prisoners by the regional economy. Unemployed prisoners were returned to the camps, thus contributing to a new strain on the facilities. However, the prisoners were not the only ones badly housed in

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[23] CICR, rapport de visite, Dépôt d'Alençon – Damigny (Orne), visité le 4 juillet 1945 par M. Bonnet.
[24] Meunier, "Un peu d'histoire… Le camp de prisonniers de Damigny pendant la dernière guerre", *Bulletin municipal de Damigny* (2006), p. 13.
[25] CICR, rapport de visite, Dépôt 31 Damigny 3ème région, visité par le Dr. Egli le 5 novembre 1945.
[26] CICR, rapport de visite, Dépôt No 31, Alençon, visité le 11 mars 1946 par M. Courvoisier.
[27] Several letters of German POWs to their relatives, August 1946-January 1948, extracts recorded by the French censorship, SHD, 29 R 7, sub-folder 301, folios 3 and 31. Although potentially biased through a possible selection by French authorities to draw a positive picture, these testimonies overlap descriptions made by Red Cross delegates.
[28] CICR, rapport de visite, Dépôt 31, Damigny, visité le 20 octobre 1946 par M. J. Courvoisier.
[29] W. Sachtleben, "Témoignages sur ma captivité en Allemagne et en France", in *De la fin des camps à la reconstruction, Les Normands 1945-1947* (Caen, 2001), pp. 213-215.
[30] CICR, rapport de visite, Dépôt No 34, Fleury s/Orne, visité par M. Courvoisier le 18 février 1946.

Normandy, whose reconstruction had hardly begun. As a conclusion to his report of a visit to the French 3rd Military Region, the Red Cross delegate Bonnet noticed that "the housing conditions in Normandy are very bad for everyone and the material difficulties that ensue are considerable. However, the prisoners are rather well housed and means are searched for to actively improve the insufficient premises[31]." This reinforces the view that the difficult living conditions of the German POWs in Normandy were not a form of revenge against the former enemy, but merely a consequence of an overall difficult situation in the region and in France generally.

The food situation followed a similar improvement. Red Cross reports and narratives all indicate hardship in 1945, and a general improvement thereafter, parallel to the redistribution of the prisoners to exterior labour detachments. Inside the central camps, the shortage of food was obvious in the early stages. In August 1945, the theoretical daily ration for POWs in French hands equalled only 1,600 calories. It was made out of 300 gr of bread, 5 gr of coffee, 10 gr of sugar, 10 gr of pasta, 10 gr of dry vegetables, 100 gr of potatoes, 10 gr of fat and 1 gr of salt. Once a week, 50 gr of meat were added to the standard ration[32]. In reality, due to the general food shortage then experienced in France, these figures were almost never reached during summer 1945 and generally prisoners were meant to survive on some 1,000 calories a day. The standard ration was increased theoretically to 1,800 calories in November 1945[33]. In a report, William H. Michel, head of the ICRC delegates in France, explained the reasons for the difference between the theoretical rations and those effectively handed to the prisoners:

> The basic ration meant to be allocated to the prisoners within the dépôts (non working) is fixed at 1,800 calories a day. This ration is theoretical because it is calculated according to the weight of the delivered food and does not take into account the waste and those food parts unfit for human consumption[34].

This statement is backed up by testimonies from inside the dépôts. A prisoner of dépôt 301 (in Cherbourg (a former US camp) reported that, during the month of August 1945, there was "no bread, only some biscuits, the meals becoming very poor". Only towards the month of September did the situation seem to improve: "We eat bread again instead of the biscuits"[35]. Another witness, also a former prisoner of the Cherbourg dépôt, located the period of food shortage at the same time, in a certificate requested by the French camp administration before the repatriation: "Only during three months the food

[31] CICR, rapport de visite, 1ère visite de la 3ème région militaire, effectuée par M. Bonnet dans le courant du mois de juillet 1945.
[32] Klein, *Aimez*, pp. 49-56.
[33] Théofilakis, *Les prisonniers de guerre*, p. 91.
[34] CICR, William H. Michel, Chef des délégations en France du CICR, Rapport sur la situation des dépôts et détachements de travail de prisonniers de guerre allemands en France, 20 April 1946.
[35] Diary of a German POW, entries from 17 August to 21 September 1945, BA-MA, B 205/224, WKU-084.

supply was bad, due to a lack of organisation. But from October 1945, food was almost sufficient in the camp[36]."

It was of no help that Germany and German families were often unable to send supply parcels to the camps in France due to food shortage in their own country, even if Paris had ordered in September 1945 the reactivation of postal contact between the prisoners and their relatives[37]. However, in a report for the same period for the whole 3rd Military Region, the Red Cross wrote that the rations of the POWs "are exactly equivalent to those of the civilian population; if the prisoners do not always have enough to eat, this is due to the fact that their working efforts are superior to those of the civilian population, and that the latter has opportunities besides the official rationing"[38]. This raises the more general question whether detaining powers can be expected to feed their prisoners better than their own civilian population. Clearly, in post-war France, the availability of food in POW camps was much dependent on local realities[39]. Article 11 of the Geneva Convention merely states that "the food ration of prisoners of war shall be equivalent in quantity and quality to that of the depot troops", without specifying a solution in cases where the civilian population of the detaining power received less than its own depot troops due to food rationing. Thus, well before the war, the applicability of article 11 had been questioned, also by German commentators[40].

b) In the labour camps and the working parties

The evolution inside the labour camps under French authority was generally similar; these camps had been progressively installed during the year 1945, mainly close to areas of reconstruction and mine clearance. These provisional camps were generally operated for the length of time of a certain task, before being shut down or moved. Whereas the smaller camps housed barely more than a few dozen prisoners, the larger ones could contain more than a thousand. There were four types of labour camps: 1) camps inside disused factories; 2) camps inside public buildings; 3) camps, where prisoners were housed in huts or tents; 4) camps inside private buildings.

The food situation of the POWs assigned to labour camps varied greatly. It mainly depended on the overall situation in the region, the means of transportation at the disposal of the authorities and the will of the camp personnel to maintain the health of their prisoners. This applied not only to ensure their economical utilisation, but also to comply with the French commitment to the Geneva Convention and to the Allies who were still responsible – morally at least – for the prisoners ceded to France. Generally the food supply was poor in 1945. In Saint-Lô, the prisoners were hungry, as tells the

36 Declaration of a German POW made before being transformed into a free labourer, 2 February 1948, SHD, 29 R 7, sub-folder 301, folio 17.
37 Théofilakis, *Les prisonniers de guerre*, p. 463.
38 CICR, rapport de visite, 1ère visite de la 3ème région militaire, effectuée par M. Bonnet dans le courant du mois de juillet 1945.
39 Théofilakis, *Les prisonniers de guerre*, p. 79.
40 Wylie, *Barbed Wire Diplomacy*, p. 93.

narrative of Rudolf Hagemann, a former prisoner working in the ruins of the city in August 1945:

> In the camp in Saint-Lô, we were given very little food, so that we almost always suffered from hunger. Thus, I tried to find in the straw that served as our berth for ears with some grains left. I prepared and ate nettles. When we worked on the construction of roads, we milked the cows on the pastures and drank their milk. We searched for remains of food in rubbish bins. The little tobacco we had, I exchanged it with the heavy smokers against bread[41].

The German POWs employed in the Lower Norman bocage, a rural region far from being as rich as the Plaine de Caen, suffered also from hunger during the summer 1945. In the labour camp of Flers, "the prisoners, as elsewhere, complain about insufficient food, even more as sometimes delays or certain neglects do not allow the rations to arrive wholly to the cook". But at noon, these prisoners "eat in a room of one of the buildings of the company they are working for"[42]. In Vire, the man of confidence of the camp remarked in July 1945 that "the food is too poor mainly due to the fact that the flour is of a very bad quality"[43]. At the same time, the German medical officer in charge of the prisoners assigned to Saint-Lô noticed that "the food is insufficient and it happens often that people fall from weakness during the roll call"[44].

The small size of a labour camp did not necessarily guarantee appropriate food supply. In Yport, on the Côte d'Albâtre between Fécamp and Etretat, the French guards of a detachment of fifty German prisoners could not prevent their man of confidence from reporting the bad living conditions to a US unit stationing nearby, which in return reported to its hierarchy: "The German told us that the food supply is miserably unsuitable while the men are assigned to hard physical work. He asked whether our unit would be able to help by ceding alimentary surplus, or by allowing them to pick up the rests after every meal[45]."

From 1946, the situation generally tended to improve and almost everywhere the prisoners received more food. In Nonant-le-Pin for example, the prisoners were well fed during a Red Cross visit in November 1946. They were receiving "soup three times per day. The ration of potatoes is very abundant; the prisoners receive two kgs each per day[46]." However, food shortages still occurred in certain camps as late as 1947. The small mine clearance detachment of Heugueville, near Dieppe, counted only eighteen Germans but "the men declare that they are hungry" during a Red Cross visit in July 1947[47].

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41 Captivity diary of Rudolf Hagemann, published in H. Frauenlob and R. Hagemann, *Wie auch wir vergeben. Memoiren und Tagebücher einer Kriegsgefangenschaft in Frankreich 1945-1948* (Eguzon, 2006), p. 126.
42 CICR, rapport de visite, Camp de Flers (Orne), 3ème région militaire, visité le 2 juillet 1945 par M. Bonnet.
43 CICR, rapport de visite, Camp de Vire-Neuville (Calvados), visité le 3 juillet 1945 par M. Bonnet.
44 CICR, rapport de visite, Camp de St. Lô (Manche), visité le 3 juillet 1945 par M. Bonnet.
45 Headquarters, 238th Port Company, 494th Port Battalion, TC, APO 562, US Army, Subject: Report of Incident, 20 October 1945, ACICR, collection without signature.
46 CICR, rapport de visite, Détachement de Nonant-le-Pin, (dépendant du dépôt 31), visité les 1er novembre 1946 par M. J. Courvoisier.
47 CICR, rapport de visite, Détachement de Heugueville (dépendant du dépôt 32), visité le 5 juillet 1946 par M. Wyss.

Hygiene was equally dependent on random factors. The German POWs working in Saint-Lô had no showers or baths and, according to a Red Cross report of early July 1945, "there is moreover no possibility to bath or shower in the destroyed city". For their personal hygiene, "the prisoners have a small uncovered washbasin outdoors, where ten men at maximum can wash themselves at the same time". Given the fact that there were 500 prisoners attached to this camp, "the installation, thus, is clearly insufficient"[48]. Several months later, at the end of November 1945, the situation was still unsatisfactory, according to the report of pastor Lombard:

> No showers. Uncovered outdoors washbasins. Kitchen water being used. For six months, the prisoners have received 90 grams of loam soap; at present, they have none and cannot wash themselves. They have expressed numerous requests, but without results. There are cases of scabies, but no disinfectant at disposal[49].

As was the case with the food supply, the hygienic situation tended to improve from 1946. The Red Cross visit made to the prisoners employed in Saint-Lô in June 1946 revealed that the prisoners now received "two pieces of soap per month"[50].

For the working prisoners the clothing problem was a crucial one since they needed shoes and clothes for their work and those quickly wore out. In the département Seine-Inférieure, an order coming from the direction of Mine Clearance barred the German prisoners from physical exercises until 1946, in order to stop them using their clothes and shoes and thus preserve their effectiveness at work. Sports were forbidden at Sainte-Adresse, probably for the same reasons[51]. Also at the mine clearance detachment of Montivilliers, northeast of Le Havre, "a higher order forbids any physical exercise to conserve shoes"[52].

3) Health care and death rates

The housing conditions and especially the level of food supply had a great impact on the health of the German prisoners in Normandy. Especially during the year 1945, poor food supply and the lack of clothing and sanitary installations were responsible for a catastrophic hygiene situation. Due to the difficult overall situation in France, the camp authorities were unable to match the actual needs within a transitory phase during which the prisoners suffered heavily from the lack of health care and improper sanitation. According to Fabien Théofilakis, the multiple problems in the French logistics "strongly deteriorated the French capital of authority and reinforces anti-French prejudices" among

[48] CICR, rapport de visite, Camp de St. Lô (Manche), visité le 3 juillet 1945 par M. Bonnet.
[49] Report made by M. Robert Lombard, pastor, to M. Daniel Barbey (secretariat of the ICRC), 24 November 1945, relating to his visits to the camps of Saint-Lô, ACICR, collection without signature.
[50] CICR, rapport de visite, Détachement de Saint-Lô, visité le 6 juin 1946 par MM. Courvoisier et Boissier.
[51] CICR, rapport de visite, Détachement 1722 HA, Ste Adresse (dépendant du dépôt 32), visité le 5 juillet 1946 par M. Wyss.
[52] CICR, rapport de visite, Centre de déminage de Montivilliers (dépendant du dépôt 32), visité le 6 juillet 1946 par M. Wyss.

the German prisoners, thus hypothecating the trust in the French state for the duration of their captivity[53].

Whereas sanitary installations existed in sufficient numbers in Damigny, the hygiene of the prisoners was not ensured: "Water, as anywhere else, is rather difficult to obtain. No distribution of soap has taken place since 15 May 1945[54]." For the entire 3rd Military Region, the Red Cross reported that "the water is too rare in every camp and the sanitary installations, sinks or latrines are not numerous enough or unsatisfactorily installed"[55]. Whereas, in October 1945, the prisoners in Damigny were "dressed with rags, badly shoed and without blankets"[56], the situation of this camp started to improve slightly from November 1945, when the visiting Red Cross delegate Eglis underlined in his report "the good hygienic conditions" inside this dépôt[57].

The health care provided to the prisoners suffered from the heterogeneous geographical distribution of the camps and the disorganisation of transportation. The premises used as hospitals were often poorly equipped and the medical officers lacked medication and bandages, as shown by a comprehensive ICRC report for the French 3rd military region in July 1945:

> Generally speaking, health care is provided but material is lacking. There are only very few thermometers, no scissors, pliers, scalpels, etc. The physicians are especially lacking aspirin and pomades. Thus the slightest of fevers cannot be treated at the hospital, due to the lack of aspirin and blankets for the feverish men. However, the hospitals, already full, cannot admit cases of mild or moderate severity. Thus, some cases that could be treated in two or three days with some means, stay for five or six days in the hospital until their recovery. The lack of materials and medication is attributable to the general lack of these supplies in France[58].

The deterioration of the state of health of the prisoners during the year 1945 was a direct consequence of their malnutrition. The risk of an epidemic was real, even for the civilian population living close to the camps[59]. In December 1945, the Directeur départemental de la Santé of the département Manche warned the Préfet over the risks incurred by the population living close to the German POWs:

> Given that a typhus epidemic has broken out in a camp for German POWs in France, and some cases being reported among the civilian population, the physician-inspectors of the health services

53 Théofilakis, *Les prisonniers de guerre*, p. 118.
54 CICR, rapport de visite, Dépôt d'Alençon – Damigny (Orne), visité le 4 juillet 1945 par M. Bonnet.
55 CICR, rapport de visite, 1ère visite de la 3ème région militaire, effectuée par M. Bonnet dans le courant du mois de juillet 1945.
56 Report of information of the préfet of département Calvados for the month of October 1945, 31 October 1945, AD 14, 9 W 45.
57 CICR, rapport de visite, Dépôt 31 Damigny 3ème région, visité par le Dr. Egli le 5 novembre 1945.
58 CICR, rapport de visite, 1ère visite de la 3ème région militaire, effectuée par M. Bonnet dans le courant du mois de juillet 1945.
59 Théofilakis, *Les prisonniers de guerre*, pp. 85-87.

> must get in touch, in every Département, with the health services of prisoner camps, camps for internment or guarded stay and prisons[60].

In the large working parties, the health care was ensured by German military orderlies – in theory one male nurse for every hundred POWs. For the smaller working parties, the health care was theoretically to be provided by itinerant German medical officers or, in some cases, by French civil doctors[61].

In spite of the dangerous nature of their work, the mine clearance parties did not always have at their disposal adequate medical installations. This was true for example, for the detachment of Meuvaines, numbering 180 men: "The prisoners were constantly exposed to working accidents and it is surprising that this kommando almost totally lacks medication and, even worse, bandage materials. (…) This situation is even more regrettable as lots of Frenchmen are themselves continuously exposed to the same dangers represented by the mine clearance of a beach of several kilometres. In case of accidents, the orderly would be unable to make a simple ligature or to treat a wound on a French démineur. The French have already protested against this situation to the civil direction of the mine clearance operations, based in Cabourg, without obtaining any result[62]." In fact, when accidents were not fatal, they often caused severe injuries that required immediate health care. Whereas the wounded from small mine clearance detachments were transported to the closest civil hospital, those belonging to bigger detachments benefitted in theory from specific premises.

The death rates in some camps were at an alarming level during the year 1945. The evolution of living conditions inside the prisoner camps are mirrored by the official death rates established by the French army, included in the final report of General Louis Buisson who evaluates approximately at 24,000 the number of German POWs dead in French captivity between 1944 and 1948. Even though the official statistics can hardly be considered complete, they indicate that the living conditions were most difficult during 1945, with a constant improvement thereafter. In fact, as expressed by Buisson himself, the figures suffer from important gaps in the documentation, mainly during the phase of transfer of the camps to the French authorities until September 1945 – a phase during which the death rates are believed to be the highest, according to the descriptions made by independent inspectors and witnesses. While not representative of the death rate of the POWs, the German military cemetery at La Cambe confirms however, the culmination of mortality during the summer and autumn of 1945, with 26 graves dating from July, 20 from August, 26 from September and 33 from October. For the period between November 1945 and October 1946, there are by average only 13 graves per month, which is only half of the number of graves dated between July and October 1945. Considering the food

[60] Letter of the Directeur départemental de la Santé to the Préfet of département Manche, Coutainville, 5 December 1945, AD 50, 145 W 69.
[61] Report of the German medical offcier of dépôt n° 301 Cherbourg, 21 February 1948, SHD, 29 R 7, sub-folder 301, folio 23.
[62] CICR, rapport de visite, Détachement de déminage de Meuvaines, (Annexe du dépôt 34), visité le 5 juin 1946 par MM. Boissier et Courvoisier.

situation inside the camps, it is likely that during summer 1945 the German prisoners died more often from hunger and its consequences than from actual diseases.

In early 1946, the dépôt n° 301 of Cherbourg registered three to four cases of death every fortnight when the number of prisoners affiliated to that camp was close to 7,000 men. According to the Red Cross delegate visiting in February 1946, "the high number of these cases of death is due to the fact that numerous prisoners are working in mine clearing detachments; deadly accidents are frequent[63]." Whereas a certain number of the deaths were due to working accidents, it seems that most of the prisoners died from hunger, exhaustion or diseases caused by the bad food and sanitary conditions inside the camps. Numerous prisoners also died from badly treated wounds. Given that the Buisson report does not mention those prisoners having died during mine clearing operations, it can reasonably be considered that the total number of dead was higher than 24,000; more recent estimations state that between 30,000 and 40,000 POWs died in French captivity[64]. The death rate of German POWs in French camps is estimated as ranging between 2.7 per cent and 5.3 per cent[65]. In comparison, the highest death rates in Allied camps, that is to say those in the *Rheinwiesenlager*, are estimated at around 1 per cent[66].

Table 28

Death rate among German POWs across all French dépôts, 1944-1948

Year	Number of dead prisoners
1944	2,006
1945	15,767
1946	5,112
1947	1,020
1948	273
Total :	**24,178**

Source: Buisson, *Historique.*

A constant improvement of these living conditions under French administration shows that a policy of revenge towards the German prisoners did not exist, and that Paris had taken into consideration many of the recommendations expressed by the ICRC and its delegates[67].

[63] CICR, rapport de visite, Dépôt No. 301, Cherbourg, visité par M. Courvoisier le 19 février 1946.
[64] Overmans, "Schicksal", p. 464.
[65] Cf. also Overmans, *Verluste*, p. 286 and Overmans, 'German Historiography', p. 151.
[66] Böhme, *In amerikanischer Hand*, p. 204; K. Kleemann, "Die Kriegsgefangenenlager Remagen und Sinzig 1945 aus der Sicht kommunaler Aktenbestände", *Jahrbuch für Westdeutsche Landesgeschichte* 20 (1994).
[67] Théofilakis, *Les prisonniers de guerre*, p. 76.

II – The relations with the camp personnel

After short-lived relations with the civilians during the capture and the transfers, the guards and the personnel of the camps were the first French whom the German prisoners would encounter continually. Due to the authority they now had on the German soldiers, the French shaped a great part of their everyday life and disposed of the power to improve their situation or on the contrary, to put them under a regime of constraints and arbitrary violence. The reality of the relations between the camp personnel and the German prisoners was often very complex and depended not only on the quality of the French troops involved but also on their individual experiences of contact with Germans during the war, in war captivity in Germany or under the Occupation.

Finally, the sense of duty – to protect the interests of France by maintaining the work force of the prisoners – and the humanity of the French guards equally determined attitudes towards the Germans. Especially since the surveillance of the prisoners obeyed to a conflicting double logic, where the enemy was meant to be subdued to military discipline while being made available for labour in the civil society[68].

It can be noticed that those French soldiers who guarded the German POWs in Normandy did not always originate from that region. Whereas some of them came from regions nearby, most were North African troops[69]. At the end of the war in Europe, the French army counted 178 guard companies for a total of 300,000 German POWs, that is to say almost 13 prisoners per guard, which is close to the security rate of 10 prisoners per guard as conceived by the US forces in Europe before the landings in Normandy. However, the French POW/guard ratio quickly suffered from the influx of German POWs during the year 1945 and the demobilisation of the French army at the end of that year. The enrolment of French troops for the war in Indochina from 1946 increased even more the lack of personnel in charge of guarding the POWs. A solution was found with the employment for guard duties of French colonial troops: in 1946, more than 80 percent of the military guards came from outside of continental France[70].

1) Policing the POWs in order to maintain discipline

The French policing of German POWs was one of the main components in the political and economical exploitation of the prisoner manpower. In fact, French authority over the German soldiers was considered a symbol of a national rebirth after four years of a humiliating enemy occupation. However surprisingly, the official disciplinary measures applied to the German prisoners in Normandy were not of a particularly vengeful nature – especially when compared to the disciplinary policy enforced inside the camps under Allied rule. The critical difference here seems to be the fact that if Germans escaped from

[68] Ibid., p. 78.
[69] Ibid., p. 127.
[70] Ibid., pp. 179-180 and pp. 196-199.

Allied custody before the end of the war they may have returned to join forces defending the Reich; when they escaped from French custody, they merely returned home and were lost to the French economy. Moreover, the appearance of brutal behaviour had been fought continuously by the French authorities with a series of orders issued from November 1944 and reminding that the German POWs had to be treated according to the rules and laws in force[71].

As the camps under American or British rule, the dépôts were equipped with small disciplinary premises where prisoners could be locked up for the duration of their punishment. Inside the Damigny dépôt, for example, this area was a simple ditch dug directly into the ground, measuring 2.50 m by 2.50 m and having a depth of two metres. Part of the hole was covered by a piece of corrugated iron. The day of the visit by the Red Cross, on 4 July 1945, a total of eight prisoners were held in that hole after they had tried to escape from exterior labour camps. They were allowed to get out of the hole one hour per day[72]. Dépôt 301 in Cherbourg was equipped with "very bad disciplinary premises, comparable to doghouses"[73]. As within the camps under Allied administration, the policing inside the French dépôts of 3rd military region was partly commended to the German camp leaders, themselves prisoners: "Almost everywhere, the Geman camp leaders are responsible for the discipline, transmitting the orders and suggesting the punishment if appropriate. This system produces excellent results[74]."

In the eyes of the French army, this had the advantage of lightening the weight on the shoulders of the French personnel. Maintaining order and security inside the French dépôts differed from the Allied disciplinary policies only in that the number of prisoners to guard were lower and that the problems, as a consequence, were less frequent. Possible nazification seemingly was not a major concern for French camp commanders, and re-education plans had largely been discarded to favour a maximum work output of the prisoners in French hands[75]. Ultimately, the central camps were equipped with "centres for cultural reorientation", but not before December 1946, when most prisoners were already working in exterior working commandos[76].

Instances of excessive punishment took place at Fleury-sur-Orne, for example, where the international rules for disciplinary measures against POWs were not respected at all, as several prisoners were held in isolation tents for having committed theft and were "waiting for more than 87 days their interrogation and their judgment", whereas an isolation of at most 30 days was allowed[77].

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[71] Ibid., p. 63 and pp. 187-189.
[72] CICR, rapport de visite, Dépôt d'Alençon – Damigny (Orne), visité le 4 juillet 1945 par M. Bonnet.
[73] CICR, rapport de visite, Dépôt No. 301, Cherbourg, visité par M. Courvoisier le 19 février 1946.
[74] CICR, rapport de visite, 1ère visite de la 3ème région militaire, effectuée par M. Bonnet dans le courant du mois de juillet 1945. A German *Lagerpolizei* enforced disciplinary measures in most of the French central camps, cf. Théofilakis, *Les prisonniers de guerre*, p. 126.
[75] Overmans, "Schicksal", pp. 454-455. Some of the early French camps outside Normandy had been equipped with news panels to inform the German POWs on the discovery and liberation of the concentration and extermination camps, a procedure which ultimately proved unsuccessful and had only little impact on the German prisoners, cf. Théofilakis, *Les prisonniers de guerre*, p. 124.
[76] Théofilakis, *Les prisonniers de guerre*, p. 135.
[77] CICR, rapport de visite, Dépôt No 34, Fleury s/Orne, visité par M. Courvoisier le 18 février 1946.

However, it seems that the French authorities mostly complied with the regulations, especially inside the labour camps, as noted by various Red Cross reports. In the camp of Le Grand-Quevilly, there were "no collective punishments (…) regarding food supply". From summer 1945, the camp was equipped with "convenient disciplinary premises provided with straw. Their aeration is sufficient: the detained prisoners are fed normally and can go outside in respect of the Convention. Four prisoners are detained for theft (three to four days); one prisoner is detained for eight days for heavier theft"[78]. Also, in the camp Saint-Paul, at Rouen, "no collective punishment about food supplies has been inflicted, but the detainees are only entitled to soup and bread". The Red Cross visit report points out that "in general the discipline is good" and that "the orders are given by the prisoners' representative. He also suggests the punishments to the camp commander." On 29 June 1945, the day of the visit, "four prisoners were held in solitary confinement inside premises that are installed in a corner of the housing area and surrounded with fences. There is enough straw and one blanket per man. The aeration is very good and the detainees get out one hour per day[79]." However, testimonies sometimes reflect a slightly different reality, compared to the Red Cross reports. According to former POWs and French civilians alike, illegal measures of punishment were observed in Vaucelles, close to Bayeux, in Saint-Lô and in Vire[80].

2) Abuse of power

Over and above the regular policing of German POWs by the French, some guards took advantage of their power with abusive behaviour, including theft, looting, overexploitation of prisoner manpower and physical violence – some camp commanders even organised visits to the camps to give the civilian population the opportunity to insult the German prisoners[81]. However, it can be said that this abusive behaviour was not part of a higher policy and was generally prohibited and punished by the French military authorities, who were keen to comply with the regulations of the Geneva Convention to prevent a forced repatriation of the prisoner manpower on orders of Washington. This had been the case between November 1945 and January 1946, when France was forced to retrocede 70,000 POWs "unfit for labour" to the US authorities, although not for reasons of ill-treatment but for poor food supply[82].

[78] CICR, rapport de visite, Camp de La Tubize près Rouen, III[ème] région militaire, visité le 29 juin 1945 par M. Bonnet.
[79] CICR, rapport de visite, Camp de St. Paul à Rouen, No. 9, visité le 29 juin 1945 par M. Bonnet.
[80] Diary of the German POW Rudolf Hagemann, published in Frauenlob and Hagemann, *Memoiren*, pp. 28 and 126; cf. also the letter of Robert Gasnier to the president of the International Red Cross, Ivry-sur-Seine, 10 November 1945.
[81] Théofilakis, *Les prisonniers de guerre*, p. 62.
[82] Böhme, *In französischer Hand*, p. 19; Buisson, *Historique*, p. 45 et sqq.

a) Theft

After the excessive searches experienced by the prisoners during the hand-over from the Allies, theft and looting by guards would remain at a high level during the stay inside French camps. While the general economic situation remained difficult in France after the war, the POWs became the target of theft and looting by some guards, who sought to obtain things they could later sell on the black market, or simply hand over to their families for their own needs. Illegal activities increased from early 1946, when more and more searches were organised in the central camps and the exterior labour parties, officially in order to prevent escape attempts[83]. The prisoners had very little means for protecting their private property inside the prisoner camps; this was mostly made up of items they were able to keep with them during their entry into captivity, and also some articles acquired from the previous detaining power, such as military clothes for example.

In his conversation with the Red Cross delegate, the man of confidence of the dépôt 33 of Dieppe complained in February 1946 "about the theft done by the guards on the prisoners. It is about clothes given by the English[84]." At the same time, the man of confidence of the dépôt 32 in Le Grand-Quevilly "complains about searchings being operated inside the camp by the guards who use this occasion to steal tobacco and various objects[85]." In Fleury-sur-Orne also "the man of confidence complains about the guards stealing and looting the prisoners under the pretext of searchings[86]." Thefts were also reported in the small labour camp of Mortain where "several pairs of shoes have disappeared from the reserve during the night, while the prisoners were at the roll call on the outside"[87]. The thefts represent the abuse of the dominant position of the camp personnel, but also reflect the material needs of the civilian population – whether the stolen objects were subsequently given to the soldiers' families or ended up on the black market.

Due to the relatively good living conditions enjoyed until then in America and the number of items they were entitled to bring with them during their transfer, German POWs coming from the United States were a target of choice for those French guards intent on looting. While visiting the camp of Fleury-sur-Orne in February 1946, the Red Cross delegate reported that "the prisoners coming from the United States are deprived of those things they were allowed to buy in that country; it was among other things about cigarettes, handkerchiefs, shirts, socks, etc. The protected personnel, that is to say doctors, medical orderlies and chaplains, was searched. This is how the priests and the medical officers were deprived of shirts and tobacco[88]." Given the increase of thefts and the extent of the problem, General Louis Buisson, head of the DGPG, showed determination and sent a reminder to the regional directors of POW affairs in February 1946:

[83] Théofilakis, *Les prisonniers de guerre*, p. 211.
[84] CICR, rapport de visite, Dépôt 33, Dieppe, visité le 9 février 1946 par M. Courvoisier.
[85] CICR, rapport de visite, Dépôt No. 32, Grand-Quevilly, visité par M. Courvoisier le 11 février 1946.
[86] CICR, rapport de visite, Dépôt No 34, Fleury s/Orne, visité par M. Courvoisier le 18 février 1946.
[87] CICR, rapport de visite, Camp de Mortain-Neufbourg (Manche), visité le 3 juillet 1945 par M. Bonnet.
[88] CICR, rapport de visite, Dépôt No 34, Fleury s/Orne, visité par M. Courvoisier le 18 février 1946.

> While POWs are arriving massively from the American camps, the Regional Directors are asked to kindly remind the camp commanders: 1) to take all necessary precautions to ensure that during searchings that would be organised the prisoners would not become victims of theft of any personal items; 2) to severely punish any violation of the personal propriety of the POWs, according to the prescriptions of the Service note n° 12072 DGPG/5 of 26 September 1945[89].

Sometimes, the thefts took grander proportions and resembled organised crime, at a time when black market activities were very profitable. Clandestine pilfering was bemoaned at every level of the supply chain, from the actual producers, to stocks within the camps[90]. This trafficking not only concerned food but first and foremost, cigarettes, particularly desirable as a secondary currency alongside the French franc. Thus, during spring 1946, cigarettes destined for the Fleury-sur-Orne dépôt did not arrive for months, disappearing in some dark channels[91].

b) Physical violence

It was not uncommon for French guards to use physical violence against German prisoners. However, this violence was generally not tolerated by the camp direction and the culprits exposed themselves to serious disciplinary punishment. Thus, the Red Cross delegate Bonnet wrote as early as July 1945, about the 3rd military region, that "from the guards, there had been some brutalities which, after their discovery, have been severely repressed by the Region Commander himself[92]." The POW Anton Bleses, held in the Cherbourg dépôt 301, also gave a suspicious and rather sceptical account of the attitude of French soldiers:

> Generally the French military authorities have acted accordingly to the prescriptions of the Geneva Convention. Some uncontrolled infringements caused by certain French soldiers, especially French Forces of the Interior, only were actions of individual hatred and have never been admitted by the authorities[93].

Senseless violence towards the German prisoners was also reported from within the smaller labour camps. The man of confidence of the camp in Vire declared that "the treatment is not good" and that the comrades "receive kicks as well on the working sites as during the walks; these kicks are given by the guards". The Red Cross delegate who

[89] Letter of General Louis Buisson, head of the Direction générale des prisonniers de guerre, to the regional directors of POW affairs, Paris, 26 February 1946, SHD, 29 R 9.
[90] Klein, *Aimez*, p. 53.
[91] Transcription of a verbal note of the GPRF to the Direction générale des Prisonniers de guerre, June 1946, SHD, 29 R 5, folder 3.
[92] CICR, rapport de visite, 1ère visite de la 3ème région militaire, effectuée par M. Bonnet dans le courant du mois de juillet 1945.
[93] Déclaration of the POW Anton Bleses, prisoner of dépôt 301 Cherbourg, 2 February 1948, SHD, 29 R 7, sub-folder 301, folio 17. A POW held in Rennes wrote that "the French guards shot in the middle of the prisoners inside the camp or, at night, inside the huts", cf. G. L. (pastor), *Bericht über meine Gefangenschaft vom 5.4.45 – 6.1.46*, Dorsten, 18 March 1946, AWCC, 303.007/7.

visited this camp in early July 1945 reported the content of his conversation with the man of confidence:

> He shows us, five metres in front of us, within a barbed wire enclosure, two cobblestones laid on the grass. He tells us that, until now, one non commissioned officer and eight men had been punished for bad work in the following way: they had to get on their knees for one hour on one of these stones without moving, otherwise they would be beaten. The following hour was spent standing upright without any movement, the eyes on the road 20 metres ahead. This treatment went on the whole day with the same alternatives, the prisoners stopping only to drink a bit of water and to eat bread. Hits were also given by the non commissioned officer inside the camp itself[94].

Confronted with these facts by the Red Cross delegate, the sergeant in charge, who had replaced the camp commander in Vire, clarified "that he had the prisoners doing what he had endured in Germany" – one of the few examples of French ex-prisoners acting in a revengeful way[95]. More frequently, abuse towards the captives could be explained by the generally bad discipline of the French soldiers, who benefitted little from a military organisation that was sometimes inefficient and which hardly controlled its subordinates in the rear areas. The man of confidence of the working party in the Forest of Multonne expressed "reservation as for the treatment of the military guard of the kommando. In fact, some guards have been induced to beat the prisoners[96]." In other camps, the prisoners were restrained in their mobility inside the camps, especially relating to access to the latrines during the night. The enforcement of these measures took place with extreme violence. In a conversation with the visiting Red Cross delegate at the end of June 1945, the man of confidence of the camp of Eu "demands for us to intervene in order to obtain from the camp commander that he allows more than one man at once to leave the building to go to the latrines during the night. He explains that recently two men had been killed by a guard. These men were shot because they came out to go to the latrines while a prisoner was already outside[97]." Similar events, though not deadly ones, also took place in Vire and Vaucelles[98].

As was also the case at prisoner camps under American or British custody, the guarding personnel had often little discipline and were of poor military value. The frequent rotation of the guarding troops also affected the behaviour of the French guards towards the German prisoners, as it preserved the anonymity of the prisoners in the eyes of the guards who therefore would not adapt their behaviour to the prisoners' attitude. Thus, as far as the camp of Eu was concerned, the Red Cross reported that "there is no

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[94] CICR, rapport de visite, Camp de Vire-Neuville (Calvados), visité le 3 juillet 1945 par M. Bonnet.
[95] Ibid. It remains unclear whether this sergeant had been a POW in Germany or if he had been held in concentration camps or German civil prisons.
[96] CICR, rapport de visite, Détachement de la forêt de Multonne, visité le 4 juillet 1945 par M. Bonnet.
[97] CICR, rapport de visite, Camp d'Eu (Seine Inférieure), Caserne Drouet, visité le 30 juin 1945 par M. Marc Bonnet.
[98] Letter of Robert Gasnier to the president of the International Red Cross, Ivry-sur-Seine, 10 November 1945, ACICR, collection without signature; diary of the German POW Hellmut Frauenlob, published in Frauenlob and Hagemann, *Memoiren*, p. 28.

coherence in the organisation", "the camp commander being always the head of the guarding company which changes every 24 hours"[99].

However, the abuses were generally not tolerated by the higher military commands. As for the conditions in the labour camp of Vire, the Red Cross delegate reports as early as July 1945 that, "after our conversation with the camp commander and with the regional commander of prisoners affairs, it has been decided that the camp commandant would be replaced the next day, and that a punishment will be requested for the sergeant responsible for the punishments in the camp"[100]. In Mortain, where the sergeant commanding the camp was accused to have "the habit of beating the prisoners", the intervention of the Red Cross was also at the origin of disciplinary measures taken against French military. The report of a visit of July 1945 states that "the regional commander has immediately taken the decision to dismiss the camp commander. He has charged his replacement with the command, while putting him on his guard against the renewal of such facts which he does not want to admit"[101].

c) Pressurising the manpower

In certain camps, however, the abuses committed against POWs by the French personnel, were more systematic and seemed to be part of a policy meant to force by hunger and illegal punishments, the recruitment of mine clearance workers and soldiers for the French Foreign Legion. Some military had found it to be an efficient lever to fill internal contingents. In the dépôt 33 of Dieppe, in February 1946, "the camp commander has forced them (the prisoners) to work on a part of the Sunday"[102].

Moreover, in order to escape the bad conditions of captivity reigning in the French dépôts during the first months, some prisoners did not hesitate to enrol with mine clearance detachments, in spite of them being known for their dangerous activities. While consciously practicing the retention of food, certain ruthless camp commanders aimed to force their prisoners to enrol "voluntarily" during recruitment campaigns for mine clearance or the Foreign Legion. In other places, certain camp commanders tended to coerce prisoners to work in mine clearance, often in a framework of arbitrary "punitive measures". This was simply aimed at increasing the number of mine clearance workers[103].

Recruitment campaigns for the French Foreign Legion benefitted similarly from the poor living conditions of the prisoners. In Normandy, this seemed to be the case mainly in the camps of Damigny and Fleury-sur-Orne[104]. A rumour started to circulate, stating that the French administration consciously decreased the food rations inside the

[99] CICR, rapport de visite, Camp d'Eu (Seine Inférieure), Caserne Drouet, visité le 30 juin 1945 par M. Marc Bonnet.
[100] CICR, rapport de visite, Camp de Vire-Neuville (Calvados), visité le 3 juillet 1945 par M. Bonnet.
[101] CICR, rapport de visite, Camp de Mortain-Neufbourg (Manche), visité le 3 juillet 1945 par M. Bonnet.
[102] CICR, rapport de visite, Dépôt 33, Dieppe, visité le 9 février 1946 par M. Courvoisier.
[103] In some mine clearance detachments, the percentage of involuntary workers could reach up to 60 percent of the total. This was for example the case in detachments depending on dépôt 213 Sarrebourg, in eastern France, cf. Böhme, *In französischer Hand*, p. 175.
[104] Testimonies of two German POWs, BA-MA, B 205/42, WKF-046 and B 205/225, WKU-095.

dépôts in order to increase numbers to enrolling with the Legion[105]. In February 1946, the central bureau for recruitment of the Legion in Europe complained in its report of activity that "the enrolment flow has decreased because of the improvement of the material situation due to the intervention of the International Red Cross and due to the exchange of letters with Germany which has been authorised lately"[106]. Since the beginning of the Foreign Legion in 1831, German soldiers had always enrolled in large numbers. To the eyes of the Legion command, the German soldier was a safe bet. After having been able to recruit numerous German soldiers in the aftermath of World War I, the Foreign Legion sought to renew this fruitful practice after World War II, mainly in the perspective of the Indochina war. Thus, as early as 20 January 1945, the Foreign Legion had received the authorisation to recruit among the German prisoners held in the French dépôts in North Africa and metropolitan France[107]. Until the end of the year 1946, the Legion had enrolled at least 5,000 German prisoners[108].

In short, the freedom of decision inside the hierarchy led some camp commanders to pressurise prisoner manpower in order to comply with certain quotas, for example for the mine clearance or the Foreign Legion, even if the means employed to do so were contrary to the overall policy given by the French government.

3) The will to treat the prisoners correctly

In spite of numerous problems, the French POW administration tried to treat the German prisoners correctly and to comply with the terms of the Geneva Convention. From as early as July 1945, the Red Cross reported that the authorities of the 3rd military region had the will to improve the situation of the German POWs in their custody:

> The Region Commander and the regional commander of Axis POWs affairs have done the maximum possible in order to ensure a normal treatment and maintenance of the prisoners. We are very pleased to notice that, although not everything is perfect, one can feel a constant will for improvement and the concern to be humane that can be observed at every level of the command of the region[109].

Even though these reports reveal that "everything is not perfect" and that things remain to "improve" – formulations that were generally synonymous with serious malfunction in the subtle language of the Red Cross – the authorities seemed to do everything possible

105 E. Michels, *Deutsche in der Fremdenlegion 1870-1965, Mythen und Realitäten* (Paderborn, 1999), p. 159.
106 P. Thoumelin, "Les légionnaires allemands en Indochine 1946-1954" (Caen, 2010), p. 74; cf. also Thoumelin, "Le parcours des légionnaires allemands morts en Indochine (1946-1954)" (Caen, 2011); Thoumelin, *L'ennemi utile, 1946-1954, des vétérans de la Wehrmacht et de la Waffen-SS dans les rangs de la Légion étrangère en Indochine* (Giel-Courteilles, 2013).
107 Michels, *Deutsche*, p. 151.
108 Ibid., p. 164; during the Indochina war, the soldiers of German origin were a large majority within the Foreign Legion; cf. also Thoumelin, "Les légionnaires", pp. 71-76.
109 CICR, rapport de visite, 1ère visite de la 3ème région militaire, effectuée par M. Bonnet dans le courant du mois de juillet 1945.

to respect the commitment of France towards the Geneva Convention. In fact, the problems at this early period were tremendous, but a general good will is undeniable. This is not only shown by the Red Cross reports, the objectivity of which can sometimes be challenged, but also by various testimonies and narratives. For the dépôt 31 of Damigny, the Red Cross reported in November 1945 that "the commander, a former prisoner in Germany, makes all that is possible to improve the situation of the prisoners[110]." However, it must be said here that in these circumstances, patterns of behaviour that complied with international regulations did not only arise from an upsurge of humane feelings, but also because the main provisions of the Geneva Convention had entered field regulations, manuals of military law, and sometimes French legal codes. As stated by Neville Wylie, "individuals who infringed the conventions thus laid themselves open to ligitation on the basis of their own law"[111].

The good will of the camp commanders and, in a great part that of the guards, is also reflected by individual testimonies. Barter trades between the prisoners and their guards took place as early as 1945, when the food situation was at its worst. The report made by prisoner Richard Klinkhardt, employed in various administrative services of the Cherbourg dépôt 301, just before his repatriation in 1948, is representative of the image kept by many prisoners of their captivity in France whenever they had a close contact with the French, especially if they could speak the language:

> As for the treatment received from the French, I was able to observe many times that I was looked at almost as a good subordinate, as an equal man, rather than as a POW; a reason for this treatment was my capability to hold conversations in French language. To sum up, I have the honour to declare that the attitude towards myself of the French soldiers and civilians in the dépôt was always very correct and even kind so that I never had a reason to complain; I have the pleasure to affirm, on the contrary, that their attitude can only bring me a good souvenir[112].

In fact, the ill treatment of the German prisoners by the military camp personnel was not the general rule. More frequently, the French authorities seem to have done everything possible to improve the situation of the German soldiers in order to maintain or increase their economic usefulness. Generally, the authorities could rely on French soldiers convinced by the economic need for a convenient treatment of the prisoners. Moreover, there were many French soldiers who, driven by humane or Christian values, sought to lighten the burden of the Germans held in France. The visit reports of the Red Cross regularly showed the good will of certain French camp commanders to improve the situation of German prisoners. The man of confidence of the Saint-Paul camp in Rouen certified at the end of June 1945, relating to his prisoner comrades, that "the treatment they receive is good. The camp commander takes a lot of care for them, as well as the

[110] CICR, rapport de visite, Dépôt 31 Damigny 3ème région, visité par le Dr. Egli le 5 novembre 1945. The special relationship of the former French POWs with the Germans will be analysed in the next chapter.
[111] Wylie, *Barbed Wire Diplomacy*, pp. 34-35.
[112] Declaration of the POW Richard Klinkhardt, Cherbourg, 18 March 1948, SHD, 29 R 7, sub-folder 301, folio 28.

French medical officer[113]." Similarly in Flers, a few days later, the local man of confidence told the visiting Red Cross delegate that "the received treatment is good, that the camp commander takes a lot of care"[114]. In Condé-sur-Noireau "the camp commander and the sergeant are very good" towards the prisoners and "they treat them well and the food is good"[115]. In the camp of Saint-Lô, "the prisoners are correctly treated by the commander and the guarding personnel", according to the man of confidence of this camp. He also reported that "the food, without being entirely sufficient, has well improved and (he) recognises the efforts made in this sense"[116]. In Dieppe, where, in February 1946, "the dépôt 33 has not left to us a good impression", the food supply of the prisoners, however, benefitted from the good will of the camp commander to obtain supplements from the local fishing port, and "twice per week fish is distributed"[117].

In Caen, POWs in charge of the prison hospital declared to the Red Cross that "the relations with the French medical officer are very good"[118]. In Vaucelles, in contrast to the often abusive and violent behaviour of the guards, the camp commander seems to have tried to improve the food supply of the prisoners with all means at his disposal. This earned him some respect among the prisoners, as shown by the narrative of one of them:

> The new commander was a second lieutenant. (…) Of course, he also sold parts of the huts on the private market, but the earnings were to our benefit as he purchased fresh vegetables at the farmers in order to supply us with at least a few hot meals. It was not a lot and mainly carrots for 18 months, but it helped. Hats off! to this man[119].

Certain guards were willing to help the POWs, either without self-interest, or in the exchange for goods. Thus, in Alençon a guard "closed from time to time his eyes when a dog disappeared inside the camp" to be eaten no doubt by the prisoners[120]. In Vaucelles, a compliant guard supplied the prisoners with food in his own way: "Once, a guard shot a cat for us. I had liked cats when I was a young boy, but this was forgotten now[121]." The diary of Hellmut Frauenlob tells about a special exchange with a member of the guarding personnel, in the camp of Vaucelles:

> 28 July 1945: Today I bartered my wrist watch, that I was able to save through all the controls, against three breads. Three evenings in a row, the guard is meant to hand me bread through the barred window of the hut. At nightfall, he comes in fact and brings me the bread of three pounds.

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113 CICR, rapport de visite, Camp de St. Paul à Rouen, No. 9, visité le 29 juin 1945 par M. Bonnet.
114 CICR, rapport de visite, Camp de Flers (Orne), 3ème région militaire, visité le 2 juillet 1945 par M. Bonnet.
115 CICR, rapport de visite, Camp N° 6 de Condé-sur-Noireau (Calvados), 3ème région militaire, visité le 2 juillet 1945 par M. Bonnet.
116 CICR, rapport de visite, Camp de St. Lô (Manche), visité le 3 juillet 1945 par M. Bonnet.
117 CICR, rapport de visite, Dépôt 33, Dieppe, visité le 9 février 1946 par M. Courvoisier.
118 CICR, rapport de visite, Maison de force de Caen (Calvados), visitée le 2 juillet 1945 par M. Bonnet.
119 Testimony of a former German POW, undated, BA-MA, B 205/225, WKU-095.
120 Diary of a German POW, spring 1945, BA-MA, B 205/42, WKF-046.
121 Testimony of a former German POW, undated, BA-MA, B 205/225, WKU-095.

> I devour everything immediately as otherwise the rats would come during the night or someone will steal it while I am sleeping[122].

Some French soldiers defended the rights of the German prisoners when they became the target of civil violence, mainly during transfers or on the working sites when most abuses took place. In Condé-sur-Noireau, the Red Cross delegate informed the camp commander that some of the prisoners were being beaten by civil workers during work. The commander assured he would inform the company "that the POWs would be retrieved if they would again be beaten by civil workers"[123]. In Caen, the prisoners of the Maison de force, the city's prison, "are often pushed by their guards during the march to the working sites or when coming back", but the will of the camp direction to improve the situation of the prisoners seems nevertheless to have been sincere. In fact, the Red Cross delegate visiting the camp on 2 July 1945 reported that "the commander declares to us that he does anything possible to have the prisoners being treated better and better. He shows us the identity card taken by a guard from a civilian who insulted the prisoners. This card will only be given back after the intervention of the camp commander in the case of the culprit[124]."

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To sum up it can be said, that the living conditions of the German POWs in Normandy were difficult during the first month of French administration mainly due to two independent reasons: firstly, a great number of German prisoners transferred to France were already in a bad physical state after several month of captivity under British or American authority in overcrowded camps[125]. Secondly, the French state was not capable of quickly improving this situation due to general economic problems and the lack of transportation, which had also a great impact on the living conditions of the French civilian population, still living under a regime of food rationing.

The priority of the French administration was to relief the civilians in the cities rather than the German POWs. But a combination of moral, political, and economic reasons was at the origin of a strong will of the French government and its subordinates at various levels of the POW administration to improve the living standards of the German POWs. The entry into French captivity led to an important shift in the Franco-German relations, departing from the need for revenge to a generally less emotional and more rational concept.

An important condition to this improvement was in fact the distribution of prisoners to other French regions, who had been held until then, in overcrowded camps in a few regions under Allied military rule, especially in Normandy. While this happened

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[122] Diary of the German POW Hellmut Frauenlob, published in Frauenlob and Hagemann, *Memoiren*, p. 27.
[123] CICR, rapport de visite, Camp N° 6 de Condé-sur-Noireau (Calvados), 3ème région militaire, visité le 2 juillet 1945 par M. Bonnet.
[124] CICR, rapport de visite, Maison de force de Caen (Calvados), visitée le 2 juillet 1945 par M. Bonnet.
[125] Cf. chapters 2 and 3.

mainly to make prisoners more systematically available to the national economy, it also resulted in food supply being less dependent on long distance transportation and thus less likely to be disrupted. In other words, it was easier for the French authorities to supply ten distant camps with 7,000 prisoners each than one with 70,000 prisoners.

A second main reason for the improvement of the prisoners' living conditions lay in the progressive restart of the French economy after the war and the general improvement of the food situation of the country. With more food available for the civilian population, the supply to the prisoners was also enhanced.

Thirdly, the living conditions of the prisoners improved because it represented important economic interests to preserve and maintain the work force of these labourers, who were needed to restart the French economy. In this sense, a pragmatic concept of these Franco-German relations clearly overweighed the nationalistic one. The Germans were not only a symbol of French victory but, first and foremost, a manpower that was desperately needed and therefore, had to be maintained. The army thus prevented the mainly anti-German public opinion from being systematically expressed towards the German POWs that were in their custody.

Finally, the living conditions of German prisoners in French hands also improved because of many camp commanders' good will and their efforts to enhance the lives of their prisoners by improvised means. Undoubtedly, this phenomenon was not only connected to the French concept of human rights, but also to a historical mutual respect between French and German combatants, beyond – as we will see – the stereotypes of hatred and national differences spread by the propaganda of the respective national governments since the end of the 19th century.

This overall positive evolution of the situation of the German POWs in French custody after the transfer indicates that hatred against Germans was generally not deeply rooted in the French army and the POW administration. The next chapter will explore whether the relations between Germans and French did also improve on the personal level, once German POWs were more systematically brought in contact with the French on the individual level.

Chapter 6
The Germans under French authority and their relations with the civilian population

Holding the Germans, representing the former occupier, as POWs in central camps, was a visible sign for France of victory and power over the old enemy – even though the transferred POWs remained *de facto* under Allied responsibility until their liberation. The enemy was physically controlled in enclosures made of barbed wire and supervised by armed guards on watch towers. Making these prisoners available to the civil economy as manpower can be seen as a loss of control over these Germans – especially in a rural region like Normandy, where an important number of requests for labourers came from the farms, some of which usually employed only one or two farmhands and where surveillance had to be casual if benefit was to be gained from the prisoner employment. Hence, the initial strict measures of control and surveillance were only applied locally. Although public opinion remained generally anti-German, the reality of the prisoner employment by French companies could in fact not take questions of national pride into consideration. The prisoners were to be paid for, and a profitable output was necessary to make the investment worthwhile.

However, the question must be asked as to what extent individual Frenchmen saw the employment of German prisoners and thus the power they could have over them as an opportunity to take a personal revenge on the nation's enemy. Whereas the French authorities clearly expected the relations that would develop between the prisoners and their employers to be one of strict authority, how can it be explained that they would nevertheless promote the employment of the Germans in the Norman agriculture where either farms were so small that close pragmatic relations could only arise, or they were so big that they were used to the employment of foreign seasonal manpower, especially from other "Germanic" regions such as Northern Belgium and the Netherlands? Whatever, the massive employment of the German POWs for the benefit of the region's civil economy considerably increased the opportunity of contact with the civilian population and the question must also be asked how both sides would cope with this situation on an everyday basis.

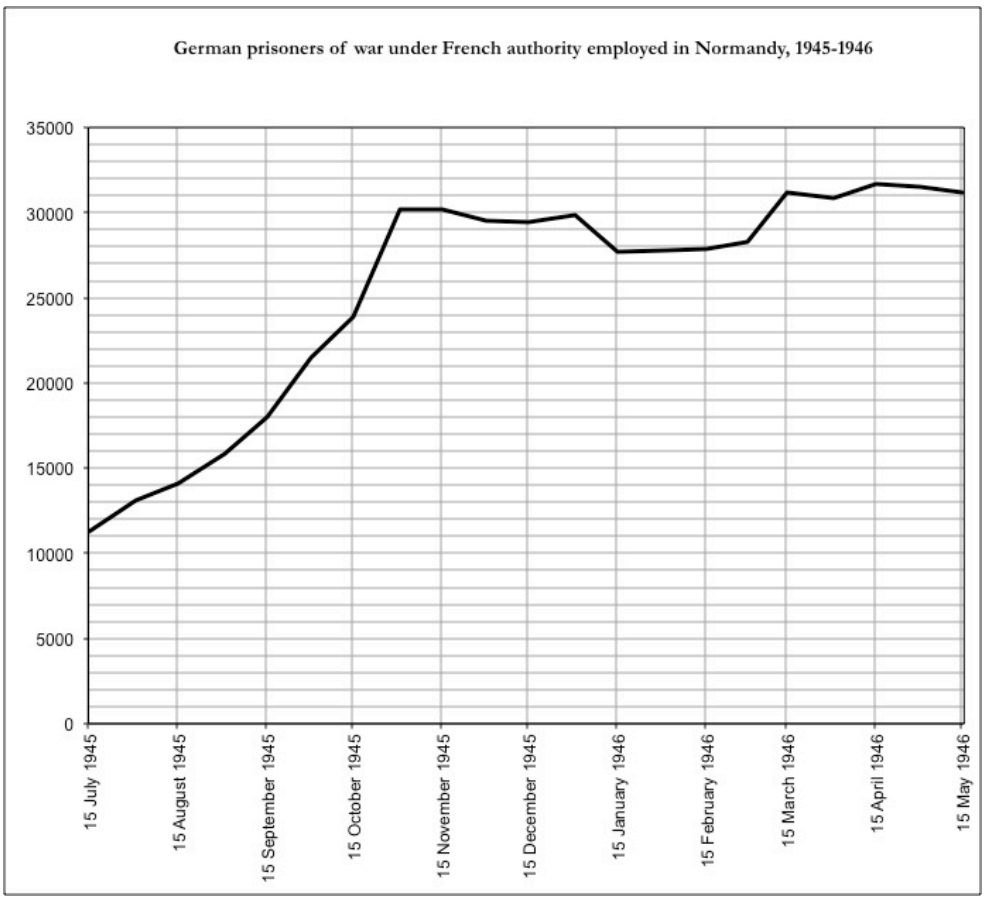
This chapter argues that the economic need for manpower tended to erase the Franco-German antagonism, which demonstrates in return the mainly symbolic character of this antagonism as a means of constructing and reinforcing the French national identity. While the opinion remained clearly anti-German, the relations "from below" were not all black and white. After a short overview of the proportions of prisoners active in Normandy for the civil economy, this chapter will review the relations that existed between the civilians and the Germans employed within large working parties. Thereafter, the more frequent relations that developed between those German prisoners employed individually and their civil environment will be addressed. Finally, the

problematic end of captivity and the return to civil life will be investigated. The major conclusion of this chapter will be that the reversal of the balance of power in the French-German relations lost its political significance once the prisoners had entered personal relations with the French that were mostly marked with banality.

I – German POWs under French authority at work

The first official instructions regarding the employment of German POWs by the French are issued as early as 28 December 1944[1]. In Normandy however, employers were entitled to recruit German POWs only from May 1945, when the first dépôt was opened in Damigny. As most of the prisoners previously held in the region by the Allies were distributed to other parts of France, the total number of prisoners employed for civil utilisation remained far below those figures realised by the British and American services. No more than 32,500 German prisoners in French hands worked for civil interests in Normandy, the peak being reached in April 1946.

Table 29



Source: Tableaux d'effectif et d'utilisation des Prisonniers de guerre ennemis, Ministère du travail et de la sécurité sociale, AD 50, 145 W 69 and SHD, 29 R 5.

[1] Théofilakis, *Les prisonniers de guerre*, p. 276.

The French state sought to promote the prisoner manpower as a revenge on the occupiers, when the General Direction of Manpower, attached to the Ministry of Labour and Social Security, published a brochure during summer 1945, reading as follows: "They have destroyed…they shall repair… Let your ruins be rebuilt by those who are responsible – Let your cities be embellished by those who wanted to destroy them – Make the enemy prisoners work[2]." This brochure was addressed to some 36,000 French municipalities and was also available to small employers, such as farmers. The promotion of the prisoner employment as a form of revenge over the past was clearly an attempt to market this manpower in accordance with the dominant anti-German opinion. The interior of the brochure on the contrary, presented in a much more rational tone the strict requirements to fulfil in order to obtain Germans as labourers in accordance with the Geneva Convention. This reflected the double political interest that weighed on the German POWs: on the one hand, they had to play the role of a sign of victory to the interior, in order to reinforce the cohesion of French society against the common enemy; on the other hand, a correct treatment of these prisoners in compliance with the humanitarian regulations was intended to rebuild the international prestige of France after the end of the war.

Independently from the political implications, most employers acted upon criteria of an economic and pragmatic nature. Employment rates depended not only on varying need for unskilled labourers, mainly in construction work and agriculture, where less manpower was needed during the winter months, but also for example, on the capacity of local employers to afford the payment of a contract with the dépôt and the maintenance of the prisoner in terms of food supply and clothing. In the end, those companies and farms which employed most of the prisoner manpower were those which were large enough to afford the cost and who were already used to working with unskilled and foreign labour[3]. The two following maps, comparing prisoner employment in agriculture after the war and proportion of foreigners in Normandy before the war, underline this point.

[2] Ministère du Travail et de la Sécurité Sociale, Direction générale de la Main-d'œuvre, brochure 'Faites relever vos ruines…', undated (summer 1945), AM Evreux, 4 H 32.

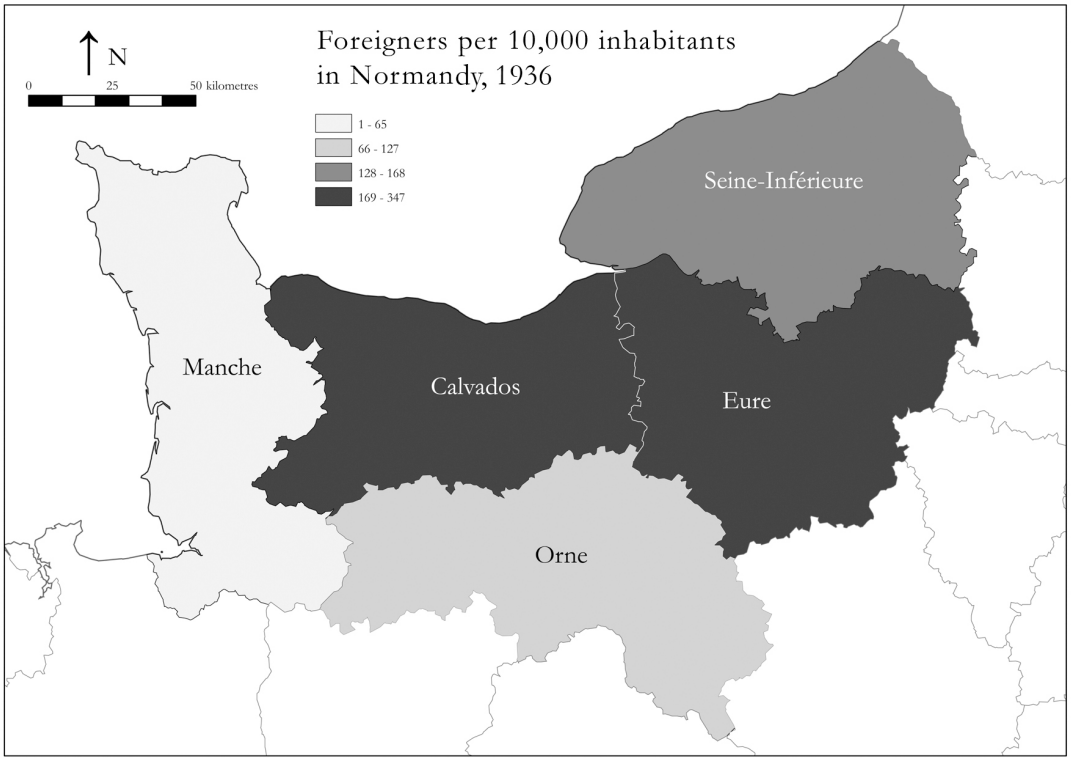
[3] Fabien Théofilakis notices "the absence of high proportions of prisoners in regions with an essentially agricultural economy"; he points to factors such as the type of productions and the size of the farms, as well as to "cultural representations" to explain locally low levels of POW employment. Cf. Théofilakis, *Les prisonniers de guerre*, pp. 233-234.

Table 30



Source: Tableaux d'effectif et d'utilisation des Prisonniers de guerre ennemis, Ministère du travail et de la sécurité sociale, AD 50, 145 W 69 and SHD, 29 R 5.

Table 31



Sources: Ministère de l'économie nationale. Service national des statistiques. Direction de la statistique générale de la France. Résultats statistiques du recensement général de la population effectué le 8 mars 1936; Y. Bourlet, *Les étrangers dans le Calvados de 1911 à 1948* (Caen, 1949), p. 15.

After a series of complaints, the French authorities progressively attempted to alleviate the initial compulsory security measures, such as the presence of armed guards and collective housing of the employed prisoners in groups of fifty, in order to also make the prisoner manpower available to smaller companies and farms[4].

The French delegates at the "United Nations Conference on International Organization", held in San Francisco between 25 April and 26 June 1945, informed attending delegations about the intended sectors of activity for the German POWs as being general clearance, mine clearance and mining[5]. With the subsequent organisation of POW administration in France, the envisioned manpower distribution developed however quite differently from one region to another. Thus, in May 1946, more than 90 per cent of the POWs working in Normandy were employed in agriculture (45.6 per cent), construction work (16.1 per cent) and mine clearance (30 per cent). The proportion of prisoners working on mine clearance tasks in Normandy was much higher than for the rest of France: at the same time, only 6.9 per cent of the total of working German POWs in France was employed at mine clearance; numbers as high as those in Normandy could mainly be found in northern France and the Vosges region[6].

The remaining prisoners were employed in industry, quarries, and transportation[7]. The role for the economy of Normandy of working prisoners was important. In spring 1946, they represented 2.4 per cent of the region's labour force. Their work contributed to the restart of the regional economy at a crucial point, by clearing the fields of mines, working in farms and rebuilding the infrastructure[8].

II – The relations with the civilians in the large working parties

Outside the camps, the German POWs originally came into contact with those civilians who were present on the work sites themselves: their employers, civilian workers, and also armed civilian guards. From June 1945, the responsibility for the surveillance of the prisoners was progressively transferred from the French military authorities to the employers and the mayors of the municipalities where POWs were working[9]. The motivations to treat the Germans correctly or on the contrary, to abuse a position of strength in order to practice physical violence or to divert goods away from the prisoners, were various and largely individual. However, they were closely connected to the size of the labour parties, to the personality of the civilians present and especially, to the location of the working sites, ranging from isolated spots deep in forests, to highly visible sites in the centre of ruined cities.

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[4] Rapport d'activité du Ministère de la Production Industrielle de la région de Rouen, subdivision de Caen, pendant le mois de mai 1945, 21 June 1945, AD 14, 21 W 16.
[5] Théofilakis, *Les prisonniers de guerre*, p. 238.
[6] Böhme, *In französischer Hand*, p. 173.
[7] Tableaux d'effectif et d'utilisation des Prisonniers de guerre ennemis, ministère du Travail et de la Sécurité sociale, AD 50, 145 W 69.
[8] Wagenblass, "Die Bedeutung", pp. 217-254.
[9] Théofilakis, *Les prisonniers de guerre*, p. 201.

1) A public opinion that remained anti-German

As for any question regarding Germany and the German people, public opinion in Normandy remained largely hostile to the German POWs in the aftermath of World War II. While the population rejoiced at the return of French authority and the prisoners' systematic employment for the needs of the restart of the national economy, the German POWs still remained representative of the suffering and humiliation endured during the Occupation.

Initially, the demand for prisoner manpower expressed by the public opinion clearly embraced a will for vengeance motivated by the hatred of the former occupier. On 19 June 1945, the police of the Caen area reported to the préfet of Calvados that "the mine clearance goes on. The arrival of German prisoners of war to execute this work has given satisfaction to the rural population[10]." The Red Cross reported in July 1945 for the whole 3rd military region that, "on their way through the cities, the prisoners are still very often insulted by the population, without the guards intervening". As far as the protected personnel are concerned, who were theoretically entitled to freely circulate on parole, the same report stated that "the advantages of the protected personnel are rarely respected, be it for the augmented liberty of movement or for the benefits of an improved food supply. It is true that, for the moment, it is not prudent to let German officers or soldiers circulate in localities, even accompanied[11]." During a Red Cross visit to the labour camp of Argentan in early July 1945, "the man of confidence tells us that the treatment received in the camp is good. But it seems that this is not true during the transfers, when the prisoners are insulted along the road and receive stone throws; the guards do not intervene[12]." In the public space, this hatred continued to be expressed with collective violent actions, locally until 1946. In Dieppe, as late as February 1946, the man of confidence of the labour camp remarked that "at many occasions, civilians let themselves go to physical violence against detached prisoners"[13].

2) Treatment by the employers

The treatment given to the German prisoners by private Norman employers was generally good. From as early as summer 1945, those who employed Germans became conscious that correct (or improved) food supplies and a humane treatment were part of the economic interest of their business, as they contributed to maintaining the work force of prisoners they were paying for[14]. From July 1945, an ICRC report on the situation

[10] Rapport du commissaire central de la police régionale de l'agglomération caennaise au préfet du Calvados, 19 June 1945, AD 14, 21 W 16.
[11] CICR, rapport de visite, 1ère visite de la 3ème région militaire, effectuée par M. Bonnet dans le courant du mois de juillet 1945.
[12] CICR, rapport de visite, Camp d'Argentan (Orne), visité le 4 juillet 1945 par M. Bonnet (IIIème région militaire).
[13] CICR, rapport de visite, Dépôt 33, Dieppe, visité le 9 février 1946 par M. Courvoisier.
[14] Cf. also Théofilakis, *Les prisonniers de guerre*, p. 93.

within the 3rd military region mentioned that "certain civil employers have completed the rations"[15]. Such examples at the early stage of German prisoners employment in Normandy exist in large numbers. The employer of a working detachment in Nassandres, in the département Eure, added "meat twice a week" to the prisoners' rations and "endeavours to supply a little beer to the prisoners". Moreover, "the factory has given to the German shoemaker the materials necessary for the reparation of shoes"[16]. The lack of military clothing forced the civil employers to provide their prisoners with civil clothing. According to Fabien Théofilakis this contributed to accelerate the way the German prisoners were perceived by the French in the public space[17].

In the small labour camp in Mortain, "the prisoners receive 450 grams of bread instead of the 350 grams that is given to the civilians". But "the meat they receive is given to them in cans, of which generally one eighth is rotten". To compensate this, "they are also given fresh meat once a week"[18]. For many prisoners, the work outside the dépôts was synonymous with an improvement of the level of food supply. The prisoner Hellmut Frauenlob rejoiced at being employed for clean-up tasks, after having suffered from hunger in the dépôt of Damigny. He wrote in his diary : "9 July 1945: at the labour kommando in La Ferté-Macé. Very good. Full for the first time[19]."

The prisoners of the working camp in Argentan – a city that had suffered severe destruction at the end of the battle of Normandy –, in addition to the standard food rations, "receive meat at lunch, which results in them having the same food than the civil labourers they are working with"[20]. At the same time, the POWs employed in Condé-sur-Noireau – a small industrial town that had endured suffering during the occupation and heavy destruction during the Liberation – benefitted from food rations which were "increased by the civil employers who make work the prisoners and who, at certain days, brings the bread ration up to 400 gr. and that of potatoes up to 1 kg. Moreover, there can be found fresh vegetables, either carrots or onions[21]." The prisoners of the Melleville camp near Evreux, received rations that were "improved by the civil canteen cook of the firm which takes care of well nourishing its prisoners. Thus, on the day of our visit, the menu was the following: at breakfast sugared coffee and bread, at lunch soup, peas, potatoes, pasty, at dinner peas and potatoes[22]." In Le Havre, the manager of the labour camp of La Hève remarked that, from 1945 – a little more than one year after the end of the German occupation and the almost total destruction of the city during operation

[15] CICR, rapport de visite, 1ère visite de la 3ème région militaire, effectuée par M. Bonnet dans le courant du mois de juillet 1945.
[16] CICR, rapport de visite, Commando de Nassandres (Eure), visité le 5 juillet 1945 par M. Bonnet.
[17] Théofilakis, *Les prisonniers de guerre*, p. 110.
[18] CICR, rapport de visite, Camp de Mortain-Neufbourg (Manche), visité le 3 juillet 1945 par M. Bonnet.
[19] Captivity diary of Hellmut Frauenlob, entry of 9 July 1945, published in Frauenlob and Hagemann, *Memoiren*, p. 26.
[20] CICR, rapport de visite, Camp d'Argentan (Orne), visité le 4 juillet 1945 par M. Bonnet (IIIème région militaire).
[21] CICR, rapport de visite, Camp N° 6 de Condé-sur-Noireau (Calvados), 3ème région militaire, visité le 2 juillet 1945 par M. Bonnet.
[22] CICR, rapport de visite, Camp d'Evreux/Melleville (Eure), visité le 5 juillet 1945 par M. Bonnet.

Astonia – cigarettes had been "the object of a supplementary distribution during the Christmas celebrations"[23].

Although no higher directives regulated the food supply of the working prisoners beyond Geneva Convention standards, many employers took the initiative to improve their prisoners' living conditions, even if they were employed in cities and regions that had particularly suffered during the occupation and the liberation. As early as 1945, the civil economy thus overlooked the difficult Franco-German past and dealt with the German prisoners according to economic efficiency, rather than passionate national feeling. It can be questioned whether this attitude was the continuation of similar behaviour marked with pragmatism among the company owners and employers of Normandy, especially farmers, of whom many had professional relations with the occupier between 1940 and 1944 and therefore were used to working with German nationals.

3) Relations with the civil workers

The relations between the German prisoners and the civil labourers working for the same employer were more complex. It seems that in general, the Norman cities in ruins received the German prisoners less favourably than more preserved regions. The painful memory of war and destruction was still vivid. Moreover, the size of the large working parties in charge of the clearance in the cities and towns and the creation of separate groups, one French, the other German, generally prevented the development of friendly relations between the prisoners and their civilian colleagues. The locations of working sites within public space, that were visible to the local population, seem also to have accentuated the animosities; the workers often rightly considering that public opinion would not tolerate the occurrence and display of sincere relations with the Germans. Thus, in July 1945, the man of confidence of the labour camp of Condé-sur-Noireau told the visiting Red-Cross delegate that "the civil labourers the prisoners are working with let themselves go from time to time and beat them"[24]. In Caen, the man of confidence of the camp of the city prison stated that "at work, the prisoners are beaten by the civil labourers"[25]. In Saint-Lô, the man of confidence affirmed that "the civil workers insult and beat the prisoners"[26]. Moreover, it can be questioned whether or not certain employers with personal hate for the Germans allowed or fostered this culture of violence. The Red Cross reported from Argentan that "among the different firms employing prisoners from this camp, the labourers of the firm Bollard beat the prisoners

[23] Letter of the manager of prisoner camp of La Hève to M. J. Courvoisier, delegate of the ICRC, 12 February 1946.
[24] CICR, rapport de visite, Camp N° 6 de Condé-sur-Noireau (Calvados), 3ème région militaire, visité le 2 juillet 1945 par M. Bonnet.
[25] CICR, rapport de visite, Maison de force de Caen (Calvados), visitée le 2 juillet 1945 par M. Bonnet.
[26] CICR, rapport de visite, Camp de St. Lô (Manche), visité le 3 juillet 1945 par M. Bonnet.

violently. Five have been mistreated, and three of them had to make use of the doctor's aid and received two to three days of working disability[27]."

Although the locals understood that the Germans were not always directly responsible for the material destructions of their cities – as for example in Saint-Lô, 90 per cent destroyed during the Allied bombings on 6 June 1944, with 1,000 dead among the population – public opinion agreed that the German people were the main responsible for the suffering during the war. The on-going violence in public space against the German prisoners seems therefore to have been promoted by the strong anti-German component of the public opinion.

The situation was totally different in more isolated locations, off the main roads. Not only did the Norman countryside suffer less during the war and the occupation, it was also less likely here that relations between French and Germans would be modulated by social pressure and a generally anti-German public opinion. The relatively small size of these working parties as well as their isolated location seem to have played in favour of an accelerated rapprochement between the prisoners and the civil labourers. While these remote working sites theoretically offered the possibility to exercise violence against the Germans with greater ease because they were less frequently controlled by the French authorities, violence in fact occurred less often than in densely populated areas. This once again shows the symbolic character of the violence exercised against the Germans: violence had to be visible to the population, in order to publicly ascertain one's anti-German feelings. When no one was around, violence would not be visible to many and therefore occurred far less often. As early as July 1945, the man of confidence of the working party in the Multonne forest, numbering less than a hundred prisoners, "compliments the relations between his comrades and the civilians of the firm" which employed them[28]. For the mine clearance detachments, working in isolation from the public due to the dangerous nature of the task, Danièle Voldman even mentions a "fraternity in danger" between German and French workers – even though the civil guards (not the French workers) often behaved with violence, as we will see[29].

4) The relations with the civil guards

On working sites, the surveillance of German POWs was generally the responsibility of armed civil guards employed by the local municipalities. From the beginning, their recruitment proved difficult: the exodus of the capable men to the cities frequently left

[27] CICR, rapport de visite, Camp d'Argentan (Orne), visité le 4 juillet 1945 par M. Bonnet (III^{ème} région militaire).
[28] CICR, rapport de visite, Détachement de la forêt de Multonne, visité le 4 juillet 1945 par M. Bonnet.
[29] On the legal aspects of the French utilisation of German POWs for dangerous tasks, cf. Voldman, *Le déminage de la France après 1945* (Paris, 1998). Surprisingly, Fabien Théofilakis makes an antithetic observation, stating that some French mine clearance workers behaved particularly brutally while the civil guards of the mine clearance parties are said to appear as "very correct". He attempts to explain this with the fact that the French mine clearance workers considered themselves as combatants. Cf. Théofilakis, *Les prisonniers de guerre*, p. 254.

no other choice to the communes but to recruit men without any qualifications and who had been unable to find a job either in the countryside or in the cities – in spite of a general lack of manpower in the region at this time[30]. In a letter to the prefect of the département Manche, the local responsible for the mine clearance wrote that "the personnel at my disposal for the prisoner surveillance is generally recruited among the most doubtful element of the rural populations"[31]. The civil guards displayed abusive, undisciplined and sometimes violent behaviour against the German prisoners they guarded. Jean Philippe, whose father ran a farm of a hundred hectares in Cambes-en-Plaine, near Caen, with the help among others, of two German prisoners, remembers a particularly violent civil guard, who "took some telephone wire to make a whip", before stating that "there were others, however, who behaved very well"[32].

In Normandy, the treatment given to the German prisoners was the worst in the mine clearance detachments. The mine clearance operations were sometimes presented as part of "the last battle of the liberation of France", the French mine clearance workers portrayed as combatants who, in case of accidents, fell "for France" (attribution of the mention "morts pour la France")[33]. The Germans, on the contrary, were denied these honours – their work was considered a banality, a matter of course, the least the Germans could do in these circumstances. Although the vengeful conception of the prisoner employment had changed into a more pragmatic one, the need to clear the minefields was in fact still acute.

[30] Cf. also Théofilakis, *Les prisonniers de guerre*, pp. 202-303.
[31] Letter of the head of mine clearance of the département Manche to the préfet of the same département, Granville, 7 August 1946, AD 50, 1004 W 916 (I 11).
[32] Oral testimony of Jean Philippe, La Cochère, 24 November 2011.
[33] Théofilakis, *Les prisonniers de guerre*, pp. 243-245.

Table 32



German POWs employed in a mine clearance detachment in Meuvaines near Caen, equipped with one of the rare metal detectors, June 1946 (Source: ICRC).

The German POWs working in mine clearance detachments were under the authority of poorly disciplined civilian guards employed by a non-military public service. In addition to a lack of hierarchy, these guards were not under pressure to produce direct economic results. Often, the guards resorted to physical violence against the captives they oversaw. On 20 April 1946, a Red Cross report on "the situation of the dépôts and working detachments of the German POWs in France" gave an idea of the violence to German soldiers and revealed malfunctions as well, in the recruitment of poorly disciplined guards as in the hierarchic control of their action:

> It is deplorable to notice, in many cases, that the formal instructions of the DGPG are disregarded by the civil guards, sometimes even by the detachment commanders who mistreat working prisoners as well as those whose physical state prevent them from making the requested efforts. These abuses mostly come from an insufficient control by the military authority and the punishments provided against the culprits are rarely applied[34].

[34] William H. Michel, chef des délégations en France du CICR, rapport sur la situation des dépôts et détachements de travail de prisonniers de guerre allemands en France, 20 April 1946, ACICR, collection without signature; cf. also CICR, Memorandum concernant la situation des P.G. en mains françaises, April 1946, ACICR, collection without signature.

In spite of Geneva's severe criticism, which pointed to the gap between the official guidelines and their application, there were hardly any repercussions within the working detachments with German POWs – a fact that addresses the problem of lack of surveillance within the French hierarchy and of the degree of priority of these guidelines considering the overall emergency of the task. As late as June 1946, the man of confidence of the mine clearance detachment of Meuvaines begged the visiting Red Cross delegates "that the guards may no longer beat the prisoners"[35]. At the same time, in the mine clearance detachment of Gavrus, the labour inspector and the head of the mine clearance sector exploited the prisoners and frequently became violent towards them. Sometimes, while being part of the protected personnel as defined by article 9 of the 1929 Geneva Convention, "the members of the medical personnel are also forced to work for the mine clearance"[36]. A visit to the camp in Fleury-sur-Orne the next day, confirmed these facts:

> He [the man of confidence] has specifically recommended to the delegate diverse mine clearance detachments where the prisoners are said to be mistreated, beaten daily and undernourished. The German medical officer has shown to the delegate some prisoners who had just come back to the dépôt and wore traces of multiple contusions, results of blows received in the labour camps[37].

However, the fact that Mine clearance was a civil branch of the Ministry of Reconstruction seems to have prevented the French army from intervening efficiently:

> Our delegate has spoken to the commander about the mistreatments inflicted in diverse detachments. Captain Brison was informed of these facts and had to order enquires several times relative to these. He declared that he would do anything possible to avoid a renewal of these facts, but he made him understand that the mine clearance service had refused until now to take his observations into consideration[38].

The reconstruction of France had priority over the fate of the German prisoners, especially over those removing mines. Only rarely was action taken against the most violent unit commanders. In Colombelles, "the former head of mine clearance has been replaced because he had inflicted physical violence against the prisoners; thus, after having chained prisoners considered to be rebels he battered them and left them inanimate on the terrain[39]."

Black market activities of the French surveillance personnel remained a major concern for the German prisoners[40]. The personnel of the mine clearance detachment at Gavrus were reprimanded in autumn 1946, for diverting food tickets designed for the

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[35] CICR, rapport de visite, Détachement de déminage de Meuvaines, (Annexe du dépôt 34), visité le 5 juin 1946 par MM. Boissier et Courvoisier.
[36] CICR, rapport de visite, Détachement de déminage de Gavrus, (Annexe du dépôt 34), visité le 4 juin 1946 par MM. Boissier et Courvoisier.
[37] CICR, rapport de visite, Dépôt 34, Fleury s/Orne, visité le 5 juin 1946 par M. Courvoisier.
[38] Ibid.
[39] CICR, rapport de visite, Détachement de déminage de Colombelles (dépendant du dépôt 34), visité le 15 juillet 1946 par M. Courvoisier.
[40] Cf. also Théofilakis, *Les prisonniers de guerre*, p. 193.

prisoners in order to sell them on the black market[41]. Often, civil guards were suspected of stealing new clothes meant for the POWs before they were marked with the letters "PG", in order to sell them. In January 1946, the phenomenon seems to have accelerated so much that the commander of the 3rd military region, general Petit, felt compelled to remind the regional commissioner of Rouen of the conditions of the distribution of clothes to the prisoners and the recruitment of the civil guards:

> The employer has the entire responsibility for the distribution and the conservation of clothes. Any person responsible for theft or divert will be relentlessly prosecuted before the competent courts. The distributed clothes have to be marked with the letters "PG"; these have to be permanently maintained perfectly readable. […] Perhaps, it would be useful to provide to the replacement of any civil guard who would not give entire satisfaction by his work, his attitude or his morality, before the distribution of new clothing, in order to prevent regrettable incidents which are not be without stirring the public opinion[42].

The slack discipline shown by many civil guards produced on the other hand, another effect, also regrettable in the eyes of the civilian population, that is to say, diverse degrees of fraternisation with the prisoners. In Troarn, east of Caen, the head guard of a mine clearance squad loaned one of the prisoners his rifle so that the latter could go hunting[43]. In Cambes-en-Plaine, near Caen, a field guard in charge of accompanying the prisoners between their hut and their working sites was tired of carrying the rifle he had been given – so he charged one of the prisoners to carry it for him[44]. In the département Manche, the presence of German soldiers caused worries about the security of the civilian population due to an insufficient guard service. Part of the population feared in fact, that escaped prisoners – some of which had previously been publicly humiliated and attacked by the population – might take a revenge on the civilians, with pillage, murder or rape. In Saint-Lô, the replacement of military guards with civilians in November 1945 was the origin of intensive fears, relayed to the prefect of the département Manche by the mayor of the city:

> Had been thought, at higher levels, about the danger that can represent a detachment of 1,100 prisoners only overseen by their non commissioned officers and guarded by a few dozens of civilians? The recruitment of these guards will prove very difficult and will it be possible to obtain the discipline requested for the accomplishment of this task. What security will really result of this for the whole population of Saint-Lô?[45]

In all, between July 1945 and June 1948, more than 170,000 German prisoners under French custody attempted to escape, which is 16 per cent of the total held by French

[41] Rapport de la Direction départementale du Ravitaillement Général du Calvados, situation du mois de novembre 1946, undated, AD 14, 21 W 21.
[42] Letter of the commander of the 3rd military region to the regional commissioner of the Republic of Rouen, Rouen, 31 January 1946, AD 50, 145 W 69.
[43] Rapport du commandant de la compagnie de gendarmerie du Calvados sur la situation générale dans le département, October 1945, AD 14, 21 W 18.
[44] Oral testimony of Jean Philippe, La Cochère, 24 November 2011.
[45] Letter of the mayor of Saint-Lô to the préfet of the département Manche, 2 November 1945, AD 50.

authorities. More than 81,000 escapes were successful, that is an exceptionally high 47.5 per cent of all attempts. Most of these escapers managed to get back to Germany, where well-disposed British and American military authorities would sometimes hand them liberation papers. The remaining prisoners were apprehended after they had covered sometimes considerable distances[46]. The lack of personnel and the often negligent attitude of the civil guards contributed without doubt to the prisoners' escapes, as was formulated by the Renseignements généraux of Coutances in July 1945, who suggested a better control of these surveillants, meant to produce "a decrease in the constantly rising number of escapes"[47].

The two extremes of relations between the German prisoners and their French civil guards, ranging from abuse and violence on one side, to fraternisation and lack of surveillance on the other, tend to prove the non-representative nature of both types of behaviour. The co-existence of violence and fraternisation in similar circumstances is more likely to indicate the poor quality and discipline of the French civil guards, recruited among the unemployed at a time of severe lack of manpower. It also shows that while some took the surveillance task outside the camps as an opportunity to prove to the surrounding population their anti-German feelings, others were on the contrary insensitive to this form of social pressure, which makes it difficult to generalise.

Moreover, the situation shows that the French authorities hardly managed to bring their personnel in line with official guidelines, wanting a "strict discipline without vexations or brutalities" for the German prisoners, thus pointing to weak hierarchies in post-war France. The conditions in which these prisoners where employed were certainly not alien to these difficulties: theoretically since under military custody, they were employed and guarded by civil services; frictions between services or lack of communication seemed inevitable.

To sum up, it can be said that violence was most likely to occur whenever Germans appeared as a group in front of civilians: then the Germans became former occupiers again in the eyes of the formerly occupied, who wanted revenge. Those who continued to act violently towards the Germans acted in the framework of a social reflex conditioned during the occupation, when it became politically correct to be opposed to the Germans, be it symbolically for fear of being put on the list of collaborators or sympathisers by the Resistance, as seen in the introduction of this thesis.

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[46] Böhme, *In französischer Hand*, p. 111. The German prisoner Hans Blickensdörfer escaped three times from dépôt 32 in Grand-Quevilly. The narrative of his captivity was published for the first time in 1973 in Germany, one year later in France, cf. H. Blickensdörfer, *Die Baskenmütze* (Tübingen, 1973). A real success, the book has been translated into a total of eighteen languages. Certainly Blickensdörfer's book benefitted from the international interest in escape stories since the publication, in 1969, of *Papillon* by Henri Charrière, turned into a movie in 1973 by Franklin J. Schaffner with in the lead role Steve McQueen, familiar of the genre since *The great escape* by John Sturges in 1963.

[47] Report of the Renseignements généraux of the département Manche, Coutances, 29 July 1946, AD 50, 1004 W 916 (I 11).

III – Relations between isolated prisoners and the population

After early 1946 no more traces of collective violence against the POWs can be found. This evolution is parallel to the disappearance of the large groups of prisoners from the public space, the dissolution of the large working parties and the individual employment of the prisoners. Physical violence against them became less and less acceptable, especially by the civilians who employed them, because the prisoners were progressively integrated into the rural society. To harm the prisoners, now more and more often meant to also harm those who employed them as single farmhands or workers in small businesses[48].

1) Three vectors of an early rapprochement

The presence of German POWs in Normandy now employed under French authority and for the benefit of the regional economy, deeply modified the relations between French and Germans. On the one hand, the enemy POWs were part of the France's war loot France and had been presented as such to the population, via speeches and mass media; for example, enforcing the idea of a French victory over the old German enemy. On the other hand, individual contacts between Normans and German prisoners multiplied, especially in the countryside; as a result, the population was offered a new opportunity to challenge the official discourse and the stereotypical image of the Germans therein by getting to know the enemy as individuals. The inhibitory barrier constituted by the Allied guards having disappeared, the initiative for the Franco-German relations finally belonged entirely to the French. By the joint effect of the economic need for a correct maintenance of the prisoners and the civil initiative in the relations, public opinion regarding the prisoners settled down progressively. Soon, these relations were no longer one of the main preoccupations, as it had been the case after the battle of Normandy, but they were considered as being simply part of everyday life. Human feelings on both sides did the rest to slowly normalise the relations between the French civilians and the German POWs.

Against the mainstream of the anti-German public opinion, three vectors, that is to say three groups of people distinguished themselves very early with their attitudes at variance from the collective behaviour often marked with violence and hatred: the local clergy, the bearers of humanistic values, and the former French POWs. Mainly, members of these three groups saw the German prisoners no longer as a memory of the Occupation period, but as simple men in need who shared with certain Frenchmen, similar life experiences.

[48] A similar evolution can be observed in Southern France, cf. H. Diamond, "« Prisoners of the Peace »: German Prisoners-of-War in Rural France 1944-1948", *European History Quarterly* 43 (3), pp. 442-463.

a) The clergy

In first place, it was the Norman clergy who looked beyond the political and historical fracture between the French and the Germans in order to bring its spiritual help to the prisoners held in the region. This reconciling conception of the Franco-German relations finds its roots in the intensive activity of French chaplains with French POWs in Germany between 1940 and 1945; after their return to France, they were among the first to assist captured German clergymen and chaplains[49]. In July 1945, the Red Cross reported for the whole 3rd military region that "masses are quite regularly said for the Catholics by French priests, generally within the camp itself, but sometimes also in the church, in presence of the population. There have been no incidents[50]." Officially, simultaneous masses for both French and Germans were not allowed before September 1945[51], but the Norman clergy seems to have adapted its practices according to the local situation without waiting for higher instructions, thus creating a new space for contacts between French and Germans in the region. Every Sunday, "a French priest says a mass at the church of Saint-Lô for the Catholics" among the POWs of the city's labour camp[52]. The situation was similar in Vire where the "catholic [prisoners] go every Sunday to the mass said for them by a French priest in a chapel"[53]. The Trappist monks of the Bricquebec abbey continuously supported the German chaplains of the camp at La Glacerie, among them Franz Stock, the former chaplain of the German prisons in Paris during the Occupation[54]. From the end of July 1945, French military chaplains were despatched by the French army to distant POW camps and German labour parties in case German chaplains were not available[55]. The Norman clergy also supported the German chaplains by putting at their disposal means of transportation for example. Thus, in March 1946, in Damigny, "the chaplain has the possibility to get to the kommandos. During his last visit, he was accompanied by a priest from Alençon"[56].

As soon as there were Protestant chaplains in Normandy, they were equally supported by their French colleagues. Thus, the German Protestant chaplain of dépôt 31 in Damigny received the help of the French Protestant pastor of Alençon who accepted to give him a lift with his car during his tours and to bring him to the exterior labour parties[57]. In fact, the distance between the various dépôts and the detachments attached to them made it difficult for the German chaplains to reach everyone, in spite of the

[49] Théofilakis, *Les prisonniers de guerre*, p. 141.
[50] CICR, rapport de visite, 1ère visite de la 3ème région militaire, effectuée par M. Bonnet dans le courant du mois de juillet 1945. As early as December 1944, the bishop of Bayeux supplies the German chaplains of the British camp in Audrieu with cult items, cf. CICR, rapport de visite du POW Camp No. 2225 par M. Nicolas Burckhardt, 1 December 1944.
[51] Théofilakis, *Les prisonniers de guerre*, p. 148.
[52] CICR, rapport de visite, Camp de St. Lô (Manche), visité le 3 juillet 1945 par M. Bonnet.
[53] CICR, rapport de visite, Camp de Vire-Neuville (Calvados), visité le 3 juillet 1945 par M. Bonnet.
[54] R. Loonbeck, *Franz Stock, La fraternité universelle* (Paris, 1992), p. 221.
[55] Théofilakis, *Les prisonniers de guerre*, p. 143.
[56] CICR, rapport de visite, Dépôt No 31, Alençon, visité le 11 mars 1946 par M. Courvoisier. Cf. also E. Blum, *Kriegsgefangen in Frankreich. Dokumente der Deutschen Evangelischen Kirche* (Tübingen, 1948), pp. 104-105.
[57] Blum, *Kriegsgefangen*, p. 104.

efforts made by the French military chaplaincy to ensure an equal distribution of the German priests and pastors in French captivity.

It can be suggested that the wide support openly granted by the French clergy to the German POWs in Normandy, sometimes giving masses to them in presence of the population and thus creating a new space for interaction, contributed to the evolution of public perception of the captives by the locals. Acting as a vector between previously separated groups, the local clergy is believed to have acted in favour of a normalisation of the relations between French and Germans in the region.

b) Altruistic human values

The second group of people comprised of those civilians who without any apparent reasons, brought help and encouragement to the German prisoners whom they considered above all, as men in need. In fact, as already during the battle of Normandy and the Allied authority over the prisoners, certain Normans did not cede to the social pressure generated by the anti-German public opinion and did not hesitate to help the prisoners accordingly to their own situation. This form of disinterested human charity appeared especially in 1945 when the prisoners, still hardly integrated into the civil society, experienced the worst living conditions. A German chaplain in Cherbourg in 1945 recounts his feelings:

> I think of this peasant family with nine children, who ministers to a young German comrade, as to their own children... There are families, and these are rarely the rich castle owners, but rather the poor tenants, with whom the prisoner is treated as a human being and a brother and where he finds a piece of home in the middle of the outland. God bless these circus people and those brothel girls who, during the first times when the comrades almost fell down from hunger on their way to work, were the only ones in this city who, instead of insults slipped bread and butter to the prisoners, which was dangerous for them by the way, as in this democratic country not everyone is allowed to do something good to whom and in the way he wants…[58]

The prisoner Hellmut Frauenlob, then aged 17, remembers the attention given to him by certain civilians while he is working in Flers:

> 10 July 1945: Clearance of lorries destroyed by the war on the ground of a factory. While carrying bars, I jam the middle finger of my right hand. It is not beautiful. An old woman who lives on the brink of the ground makes me a bandage. The attention does me good.
>
> 12 July 1945: With this finger I can no longer work. I have to return to the camp of Damigny. I am brought to the camp on a lorry. The driver stops in front of a bakery and comes back with a bread under his arm. He gives me the bread and says: toi manger! Even before I am back at the camp, I had devoured the whole bread[59].

[58] Testimony of a Catholic chaplain, Cherbourg, 1945, published in Böhme, *In französischer Hand*, pp. 213-214, DCV-2035.
[59] Diary of Hellmut Frauenlob, published in Frauenlob and Hagemann, *Memoiren*, p. 26.

Others did not hesitate to openly denounce the living conditions of the German prisoners. This is notably the case of Roger Brun, a farmer at Friardel, south-east of Orbec, who urged the ICRC in November 1945 "to make pressure on the French military authority" to distribute appropriate clothing to the prisoners[60].

While it is difficult to correctly evaluate the proportion of Norman civilians entering this category, it can be said, according to the testimonies and narratives that we collected for this thesis, that the expressions "from below" of humanistic values were not isolated phenomena. They seem to reflect a humanistic rather than purely nationalistic component of the French national identity, which approves of France's leading role in the elaboration of universal human rights, represented for example by the 1789 Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen, or the national motto "Liberté, Egalité, Fraternité". Ultimately, these humanistic values were not only brought forward to justify "from above" the improvement of the material conditions of the German POWs and thus allow France to live up to its ambitions on the international scene, as we have seen in the previous chapter, these principles were also defended directly "from below" by a part of the civilian population.

c) Former French POWs

The number of Norman POWs captured in 1940 by département ranged between 80 and 160 prisoners per any 1,000 male actives; this was below the national average of 143[61]. Moreover, some 520,000 French soldiers of World War I had been POWs in Germany; the proportion of Norman soldiers in German captivity during the Great War remains to be estimated. The French repatriated from their own captivity in Germany represented a group of people that proved to be particularly respectful towards the German POWs. What might seem contradictory at first sight emerges as a constant factor in many narratives. While certain French ex-prisoners sought to avenge their own sufferings endured in Germany, as we have seen, others, certainly more numerous, did not endeavour to exact revenge. On the contrary, as shown by numerous testimonies and narratives, some of those who had suffered while in captivity endeavoured to alleviate the sufferings of the German prisoners, whereas those former French prisoners who had benefited in Germany from more convenient living conditions, as farm employees for example, saw no reason for the German soldiers still held in France to suffer gratuitously. It is of course impossible to measure the impact of the immensely successful 1937 movie by Jean Renoir, *La Grande Illusion*, but parallels between the fictional rapprochement between French POWs held in Germany during World War I and the German local population, and the attitude of French ex-POWs towards German prisoners in France are striking.

The phenomenon of rapprochement between the former French POWs and the German prisoners was even more significant as the French authorities fostered the

[60] Letter of Roger Brun to the ICRC, Friardel, 23 November 1945, ACICR, collection without signature.
[61] Quellien, "Les prisonniers de guerre", in Leleu et al., *La France*, pp. 100-101.

employment of German POWs by French veterans or their relatives and, in parallel, the recruitment of liberated French prisoners for the surveillance of the Germans[62]. Thus, from early June 1945, the supervision of Germans employed in agriculture in the département Calvados was conferred to the "recently liberated French POWs"[63]. And from the end of August, it was officially recommended to recruit the civil guards "preferably among the French repatriated former prisoners or political deportees", certainly with the initial goal to give them a chance for a symbolic revenge while expecting them to behave with sympathy[64].

In fact, contacts between the former French prisoners and the German captives soon proved to be particularly peaceful. Some did not hesitate to denounce the living conditions of the Germans in Normandy. As early as November 1945, Robert Gasnier, a former POW, expressed to the ICRC his anger over the situation in Vire, reporting "a very regrettable state of fact and which is unanimously condemned by the repatriated French prisoners, that is to say the bad treatments endured by the German prisoners in France"[65]. In Maizières, near Falaise, Hellmut Frauenlob wrote in his diary what he experienced at Easter 1946:

> I passed by the neighbour's farm, the son of the house was waiting for me. He gave me two cigarettes for me and Hans. He thought that we, too, had to feel that it was Easter. He had himself been for two years in Germany and he had been lucky, so here it was meant to be the same for us[66].

A German prisoner who had stayed consecutively in the camps of Bolbec, Damigny, Vaucelles, Fleury and Cabourg, "noticed that the French who had stayed five years in Germany behaved more decently with us than the younger generation"[67]. In the northern part of the Cotentin peninsula, a cousin of Marguerite Allais' parents employed a German POW and "despite the fact that he had been a combatant during the war of 1940, he had a German under his roof and everything went very well"[68]. Rudolf Hagemann, a young prisoner converted into a civil worker, wrote about a Frenchman who invited him for lunch in Caen in 1947, and explained the "reason for his amiability: He had been POW in Germany and had been very well treated"[69].

The attitude of the former French POWs towards the German captives in France can best be explained by a certain brotherhood in fate which connected them. Most of the French soldiers of 1940 who had stayed in Germany until 1945 found upon their

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[62] Théofilakis, *Les prisonniers de guerre*, pp. 309-311.
[63] Report on the agricultural situation of the département Calvados, 5 June 1945, AD 14, 21 W 16.
[64] Article 4, arrêté de M. le commissaire régional de la République à Rouen du 28 août 1945 'relatif à la création de kommandos de prisonniers allemands et au règlement qui doit présider à leur installation', AD 50, 145 W 69.
[65] Letter of Robert Gasnier to the president of the ICRC, Ivry-sur-Seine, 10 November 1945.
[66] Diary of Hellmut Frauenlob, entries from 3 to 7 April 1946, published in Frauenlob and Hagemann, *Memoiren*, p. 34.
[67] Testimony of a former German POW, autumn 1945, BA-MA, B 205/225, WKU-095.
[68] Oral testimony of Marguerite Allais, Bricquebec, 5 juillet 2011, to the author.
[69] Captivity diary of Rudolf Hagemann, published in Frauenlob and Hagemann, *Memoiren*, p. 128.

return to France, German POWs in the exact reverse situation to their own of five years earlier. The weight of the French veterans' opinion in the French society moreover enabled them to act humanely towards the German prisoners without fear of being treated as sympathisers of Nazi Germany, especially if they were veterans of World War I. Those prisoners who had stayed in Germany between 1940 and 1945 had certainly been prevented them from adapting their behaviour in public to the politically correct anti-German attitude adopted by many French during the occupation, also because the collaborationist Vichy regime had a certain impact on the cultural life inside the French prisoner camps in Germany, through the activity of the "mission Scapini"[70].

Furthermore, their presence in Germany as POWs had enabled many Frenchmen during both wars, not only to how to communicate in German, but also to get to know Germany and the Germans in a different way beyond the stereotype conceptions in force in France after the war. In brief, they knew the Germans and their experience as captives gave them the necessary credit among the population to behave accordingly to their consciences, even in public. Considering their place in post-war French society, it can be assumed that the French veterans acted as a vector, contributing through their relations with the German POWs to the evolution of the public perception of the former enemy in Normandy.

2) The integration of the German prisoners in the countryside

About half of all German prisoners employed in Normandy resided in the rural countryside. In contrast to the prisoners attached to the large working detachments, the prisoners employed in farms generally lived isolated from their comrades, surrounded only by the local population.

a) An integration sometimes hindered due to difficult living conditions…

While certain Norman employers had the resources and the will necessary for the good treatment of German prisoners working for them, this was not always the case, notably in very small farms with very modest revenues. The difficult situation of some prisoners was thus the result of the lack of means of the household which employed them, rather than lack of good will. Near Ecouché, the German prisoner Horst Zetsche, aged 20 years, worked on a farm of around fifteen hectares. He lived in a room which he described as "rudimentary", but which equalled the way of life of the employing family[71]. Difficulties arose from the culinary habits that were generally different from those known to the Germans. Confronted with unknown meals, some prisoners complained about

[70] Y. Durand, *La captivité, Histoire des prisonniers de guerre français, 1939-1945* (Paris: 1981), pp. 315-319.
[71] Telephone conversation with Juliette Saint-Martin, Servai, 28 October 2011.

"bad food"[72]. Some employers, conscious that the Germans "eat differently over there" were willing to modify the daily menu for their prisoners[73]. After complaining about his breakfast, consisting of "a soup with fat things inside", Johannes Börner, who worked on a farm near Falaise at the end of 1945, got "the next morning a bowl of white coffee with bread, butter and jam"[74].

The Red Cross reported in February 1946 that "for the first time the prisoners complained about being ill-treated and fed by the farmers" around Dieppe[75]. While in many cases the housing inside the farms was rudimentary, some prisoners lived worse than others, sometimes due to a lack of good will from the employers. The Catholic chaplain of the POWs in and around Saint-Lô reported several times that "some comrades sleep during months in stables, directly next to horses or cows, without table or bench, without light, sometimes even sharing the bed with an unclean and stinking farmhand"[76]. A German prisoner also working in the département Manche gives an account of similar living conditions:

> Another comrade, more than forty years old, took during this strong cold every evening the stable lantern on his knees in order to dry his clothes and to heat up a little bit. In the shed where he nested, the frost entered through every slit, he was not allowed to dry his wet clothes nearby the chimney of the living house[77].

Some employers still refused to admit a German into their everyday life – equally because of an authentic resentment, or through the often justified fear of a collective stigmatisation in the case of a too visible rapprochement with the former enemy.

b) …but generally a fast acceptance in the families and the villages

In spite of the instruction not "to receive at their table the POWs at their disposal"[78], many farmers who employed prisoner labour understood very early that the whole situation was only bearable when a climate of relative confidence between both parties was established and thus, started to overstep certain restrictions considered as not useful[79].

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[72] It can be noticed that the French workers in Germany during the war complained in a very similar way about food that was "not well prepared". for example P. Arnaud, *Les STO : histoire des Français requis en Allemagne nazie, 1942-1945* (Paris, 2010), pp. 210-213.
[73] Oral testimony of Johannes Börner to the author, Ouistreham, 28 June 2011.
[74] Ibid.
[75] CICR, rapport de visite, Dépôt 33, Dieppe, visité le 9 février 1946 par M. Courvoisier.
[76] Testimony of a Catholic chaplain of the German POWs in Saint-Lô, July 1947, BA-MA, B 205/1647, DCV-2035, also published in Böhme, *In französischer Hand*, p. 56.
[77] Testimony of a German POW, Saint-Lô, undated, BA-MA, B 205/1647, DCV-2035, also published in Böhme, *In französischer Hand*, p. 56.
[78] Article 10, arrêté de M. le commissaire régional de la République à Rouen du 28 août 1945 'relatif à la création de kommandos de prisonniers allemands et au règlement qui doit présider à leur installation', AD 50, 145 W 69.
[79] Kershaw, *Popular Opinion*. Kershaw quotes a report of the SD of Bayreuth of 1942: "Generally, […] the peasants were friendlier to the Russians than the German workers – due to the fact that they had a closer contact with them, as a result of the individual nature of the agricultural work "that allowed much more the expression of the human side", in contrast to the impersonal character of the employment of important groups

Some farmers, especially those who employed only one or two prisoners, made an early effort to give them better treatment, first of all in order to reduce their will to escape, but also to increase their work output. The housing of the prisoners in homes was still forbidden during the summer 1945, but it became general after its explicit authorisation by the circular n° 689 issued by the ministry of labour and social security, dated 5 September 1945. This decision "from above" in fact echoes a reality of Franco-German cohabitation that was already widespread when prisoners where employed in small farms and businesses. The social integration of a prisoner into the employer's family thereafter was mostly only a question of time. The narratives of Germans and French who were accepting this situation are numerous.

Very often, the POWs were treated like family members or at least, like relatives. According to the social-economic background, people were sometimes used to having non-family members in houses, such as domestic servants or farmhands. A prisoner affiliated to the dépôt 31 in Damigny and employed in the countryside of the département Orne wrote to his family that he is "hold like his own son" by the farmer[80]. The prisoner Horst Zetsche, aged about 20 years, was employed on a farm near Ecouché. He was frequently admonished by the farmer's wife who wanted him to write more often to his mother in Germany[81]. In a farm in Fleury-sur-Orne, the German POW Werner Pomikal was soon considered as "a member of the family" and ended up marrying the farmer's only daughter, thus inheriting the whole farm[82]. Wolfgang Sachtleben, who stayed in Normandy after his liberation, remembers the good treatment he received from his employer in Beuvron-en-Auge, and more generally, his integration into the rural world of those days:

> His name was Charles Pierre de La Brière, a very fair man and with a very good heart. Anyway, all the inhabitants of Beuvron, I can say it today, were all brave people, the proof is that I still live there today. Never I heard one of these words used back then like "sale boche, fridolin or vert-de-gris", nowhere[83].

The sincere cordiality of the relations that arose appeared even more openly during the great celebrations. A prisoner working in the département Orne wrote to his family in Germany about attending the "very beautiful" Communion in the village: "I even more appreciated the feast afterwards, as I were allowed to participate as if I was part of the family"[84]. Because the presence of prisoners benefitted local agriculture, anti-German

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of foreign workers in the industry. To what could be added the deep Christian feelings of the rural Catholic population. "For the good Catholic population, the simple fact that the Russian was a Christian and religious" was enough to see in him "another human being". Thus, they opposed the Russian made of flesh and bones to the stereotype of the Bolshevik monster to the point that the propaganda did no longer work and that one could observe an attitude of "deep humanity" towards the Russian. Marked with humanitarian Christian values, the economic pragmatism inspired more the attitudes towards the foreign workers than Nazi racial theories."

[80] Letter of a German POW, undated (probably summer 1946), SHD, 29 R 7, sub-folder 31, folio 31.

[81] Telephone conversation with Juliette Saint-Martin, Servai, 28 October 2011.

[82] Interview of Colette Pomikal, widow of a German POW, realised on 9 June 2009 in Fleury-sur-Orne by Nathalie Lemarchand, Centre régional de culture ethnologique et technique de Basse-Normandie.

[83] Sachtleben, "Témoignages", pp. 213-215.

[84] Letter of a German POW, undated (probably summer 1946), SHD, 29 R 7, sub-folder 31, folio 31.

feelings in the public opinion began to perceptibly lose their strength in the rural world, at least from 1946. In Sacey, in the arrondissement of Avranches, the arrival of a prisoner detachment resulted in surprisingly positive collective behaviour. This is what the general secretary of the préfecture of the département Manche reported on 10 July 1946 in a confidential note:

> From the arrival of the POW kommando stationed in this locality, many inhabitants have shown the interest they had for the prisoners by bringing, gratuitously, on the work sites cider which the prisoners drank there, with the approval of the guards. They acted with the mayor's agreement. These events especially happened on the edge of the roads on which the Germans worked. The farmers, who benefited from these works, considered that the fact of "bringing pleasure" to the prisoners would make them benefit from a faster and more economic work. […] During the Easter celebrations, the farmers living nearby the working sites offered, through the mayor's representative, eggs, milk and cider to the German POWs. That same day, a cinema screening was organised with the approval of the municipal council, for the prisoners, with the collaboration of some municipal councillors and the two public teachers. The committee of the French ex-POWs approves the attitude of the municipality[85].

Only two years after the end of the occupation, the people of this village showed no sign of resentment against the German prisoners, though their collective behaviour drew the attention of the authorities of the département. The attitude of the municipal institutions shows that common sense reigned in the village as far as the German POWs were concerned. Certainly the approval of the French ex-POW association had an important impact on the acceptance in the village of such public care taking of the prisoners. Their weight on opinion as war veterans was considerable. Moreover, the decision to collectively help the German POWs seems to take on similar initiatives during the 1920s when French and German POW associations organised meetings to overcome national stereotypes.

The period of Christmas was particularly favourable for the rapprochement between the German prisoners and their Norman employers. A prisoner working in the département Calvados wrote to his family:

> Today is Christmas and we have just come back from the church. Our farmer has brought us by car with the family. There were more people than usually. Our room is all tidy, on the dresser is a Christmas tree and next to the beloved tree a dish with apples and nuts. The Christmas tree was decorated as usually and there were three cigarettes – It was almost our fir at home – At lunch, I was able to forget that I was here: white wine, pastry, real pure coffee. Brandy (two types) after a neat and abundant meal[86].

Jean Philippe, whose father ran a farm in Cambes-en-Plaine, remembered Christmas 1945 and the contact he then had with the three employed prisoners. His mother ordered

[85] Secret note from the general secretary of the préfecture of the département Manche, 10 July 1946, AD 50, 1004 W 916.
[86] Letter of a German POW, undated, SHD, 29 R 7, sub-folder 34.

him to bring them oranges, "although they were very difficult to get"[87]. The next year, the prisoners were invited "to a meal a little more copious"[88].

c) An integration however, that was not to everyone's taste

The friendly attitudes openly expressed towards the Germans by a part of the population were not however, to everyone's taste. For many, the representation of the German occupation was still present; the public opinion remained anti-German and the relations with the enemy prisoners in France were subdued to the refounded self-conception of the French as a combatant and victorious nation[89]. Many Normans feared the escape of the Germans and the excesses they could then commit. We can notice here a distance between the integration of the German POWs among those parts of the Norman population who employ them, and those who continue to consider them as an alien component to the French society, also because they have not come to know Germans in the framework of individual relations. The hostility against the integration of the Germans in parts of the Norman society indeed shows that this integration was a reality.

In fact, farmers whose oversight of their prisoners was considered as too lax were denounced by neighbours. The reactions were particularly lively when an employer granted his prisoners free time after work, or when the prisoners were allowed to freely choose what to do with their weekly rest day. While the access to public places remained restricted to them, some did not hesitate to go to a restaurant or the village cinema. Others walked around in the countryside, for example to visit their comrades employed on other farms in the region. Still others wanted to visit the towns and cities of the region. The phenomenon reached such a dimension that in May 1946 the prefect of the département Manche, Édouard Lebas, saw no other solution than to inform the mayors of his département on the negative effects that lax attitudes could have:

> I have the honour to bring to your attention that many Gendarmerie reports show that, contrary to all prescriptions in force, POWs at the disposal mainly of farmers are very poorly kept and that some are authorised to go to a restaurant or even the cinema. This lack of surveillance and this complaisance are at the origin of an increase in the number of escapes and may, in a region where many ammunition depots difficult to guard can be found, favour malicious acts[90].

While the theoretical dangers suggested by this note, and notably the theft of explosives by the prisoners, were largely exaggerated – no such "malicious acts" were actually reported –, they nonetheless agreed with the fears of those feeling insecure in the presence of German prisoners in the region. These were often people who had no direct

[87] Oral testimony of Jean Philippe to the author, La Cochère, 24 November 2011.
[88] Ibid.
[89] Cf. also Théofilakis, *Les prisonniers de guerre*, pp. 362-363.
[90] Letter of the préfet of the département Manche to the mayors of the département, Coutances, 20 May 1946, AD 50, 145 W 69.

contact with the prisoners while still having an important influence on public opinion, thus perpetuating the anti-German discourse[91].

However, rather quickly, local agreements were often found which enabled the prisoners to benefit from a certain degree of freedom during their rest days without offending public opinion. The agreements were sometimes made after the intervention of the Red Cross. Thus, after his visit to twelve mine clearance detachments in the Dieppe region, "the delegate has obtained that the prisoners can take a bath in the sea, where the civilian population was not too dense"[92].

d) Integration through work

While some POWs experienced difficult living conditions even in the countryside, it was nevertheless here in the rural world, that the German POWs were the most thoroughly integrated. This integration came also with the quality of the work they delivered, contrary to the large working parties where this would have virtually no effect on the prisoners' integration in the local society. In the countryside and in small business, the German prisoners were generally appreciated by their employers for the quality of their work. Although certainly a partial source, the widow of Werner Pomikal, a prisoner in a farm of Fleury-sur-Orne, remembers that "he worked well, he was very skilled. He could do almost everything, mechanics, he was afraid of nothing. He repaired everything, cars, agricultural machines, he was very skilled[93]." Jean Philippe's father also employed an efficient and skilled German prisoner: "We had a [French] labourer who came daily, but when there were things for which responsibility was required, we had them done by Helmuth rather than by the other. Thus, the other, of course, was a bit jealous. He said: "It's always the same, it's always Helmuth who comes first!"[94]"

Moreover, it was not unusual to see working prisoners offering their services on their free Sundays in the surrounding countryside, as shown by several testimonies. The demand for the prisoners was great and the relative freedom of movement which was tacitly granted to them allowed them to get to the farms according to local needs. From June 1946, in Saint-Lô, the prisoners could on Sundays, "work as volunteers for civilians, which brings them extra food"[95]. A German mine clearance worker near Dieppe remembers that "on Sundays we did not work and I took the occasion to work for a farmer of the village, where I ate well"[96]. Certainly a good opportunity to get food, but

[91] The deliberate exaggeration of danger by this high ranking official might best be explained with his personal life path: Édouard Lebas not only was a veteran of World War I who had been severely injured in 1917, requiring him to recover over two years, he was also a history teacher who had been an active member of the resistance in the département Calvados under the German occupation.
[92] CICR, rapport de visite, Douze détachements dépendant du centre de déminage de Dieppe (dépendant du dépôt 32), visités les 27 et 28 septembre 1946 par M. A. Albaret.
[93] Interview of Colette Pomikal, widow of a German POW, realised on 9 June 2009 in Fleury-sur-Orne by Nathalie Lemarchand, Centre régional de culture ethnologique et technique de Basse-Normandie.
[94] Oral testimony oral of Jean Philippe to the author, La Cochère, 24 November 2011.
[95] CICR, rapport de visite, Détachement de Saint-Lô, visité le 6 juin 1946 par MM. Courvoisier et Boissier.
[96] Testimony of a former German POW, 2002, published on http://www.passionmilitaria.com/t15019-veteran-all-prisonnier-demineur-en-normandie-1947, accessed on 4 June 2011.

maybe also a chance to be recruited by the farmer full time and get out of mine clearing. The daughter of the prisoner Bernhard Krause, employed by the blacksmith of Habloville, between Argentan and Falaise, thinks that her father "was well integrated because he was a worker"[97]. The German catholic chaplain of the prisoners in the Cherbourg area wrote in 1945 that "the busy and conscientious work of our comrades is recognised almost without exception. The German worker has earned a lot of recognition through his effort and his skills, which provoke the jealousy of rivalry of the French. How many firms have I visited that are almost exclusively sustained by POWs[98]."

Table 33



The German POW Herbert Melhase (first row, on the right) as part of a group of farm workers near Trouville, undated (Source: Claude Schopp).

e) Relations of friendship and love

Certain farmers and their wives quickly considered the prisoner who worked for them as a member of the family or as a close relative. Often, the French employers were of the generation of the fathers, while the German prisoners were of the generation of the sons[99]. Due to the responsibility they had for him, contrary to other farmhands, the relations tended to become even stronger. Quite often, the integration of the prisoners into the rural world resulted also in friendship between French and Germans. The

[97] Oral testimony of Véronique Krause to the author, Giel-Courteilles, 22 February 2012.
[98] Testimony of a Catholic chaplain, Cherbourg, 1945, published in Böhme, *In französischer Hand*, pp. 213-214, DCV-2035.
[99] Théofilakis, *Les prisonniers de guerre*, p. 369.

prisoner Rudolf Hagemann, employed at the château of Monts-en-Bessin, in the département Calvados, remembers having "many friends among the French" in the village[100]. The ties were even stronger if Germans and French were about the same age. Jean Philippe, 20 years old in 1945, had met several German prisoners of his age on his father's farm in Cambes-en-Plaine:

> Helmuth became almost a friend for me. He was 22 years old. So, on a Saturday evening, before he left, we played chess. I was very happy because otherwise I had no one to play chess with. And so, Helmuth slept at home and on Sunday I lent him civil clothes and we went both to the cinema in Caen[101].

In La Glacerie, Jean-Baptiste Nicollet's brother became friends with the German prisoner employed at the farm: "He was dressed with his military clothes, he had his camouflage suit to go to work and afterwards, when he went out, because he went out with my brother on Sundays, then my brother borrowed him clothes to go out […]. He spoke a little French[102]."As shown by numerous testimonies that we have analysed for this thesis, it was a widespread attitude for employers to give civilian clothes to their prisoners. This shows firstly, that strong ties of trust and friendship had developed between French and German individuals who knew each other through everyday relations; secondly, the disguising of the prisoners with civilian clothes seems to indicate that those French who had sympathised with a German knew that their individual attitude fitted neither with the legislation nor with public opinion. Civil clothes thus became in many cases a symbol of friendship and a protection against public criticism or violence.

In rural Normandy, one can still hear today many stories about German POWs who have permanently settled down in the region. In fact, while being integrated into the rural society which employed them, the prisoners have not only become friends with the young men of the region, they also got closer in many cases to young women. The opposition of a part of the population against these unions was often not strong enough to prevent them from taking place or from lasting. It remains difficult to precisely evaluate the number of those Germans who made a new life in Normandy or who married into French families after the war, also because many did so after having obtained French citizenship and hence disappearing from the available statistics as native Germans. However, there is no doubt about the fact that marriages between French women and German (ex-) POWs were relatively common. The examples hereafter are only a few among those that we were able to collect.

Véronique, the daughter of the German prisoner Bernhard Krause, who worked with the blacksmith of Habloville, recounts how her parents met:

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[100] Testimony of Rudolf Hagemann, published in Frauenlob and Hagemann, *Memoiren*, p. 133.
[101] Oral testimony of Jean Philippe to the author, La Cochère, 24 November 2011.
[102] Testimony of Jean-Baptiste Nicollet, published in R. Early and C. Person, *La Glacerie (Basse-Normandie – Manche). Le camp de prisonniers de guerre : camp de travail 112 A (1944-1946), Rapport final d'opération* (Caen, 2011), p. 206.

> He met my mother at Le Pirouet which is near the church of Habloville, there is a spring which still exists, […] and where the horses were brought to make them drink, and where people collected drinkable water, because at this time not everyone had a spring and there was no tap water. And so, my mother had spotted this young man and thus voluntarily she went with the horse they owned, whose name was Caribi, at the moment when she knew that he was making drink the horses. So there was a strategy![103]

Véronique's parents married a few years later, in 1954. However, Bernhard Krause was not the only German prisoner who settled down permanently in that precise region between Argentan and Falaise:

> He was not the only prisoner in Habloville, there were others, there was my uncle, who became my uncle afterwards, and whose name was Joseph Strakosh who himself was of Czech origin. […] In the family we had two Germans! Strakosh was placed in a farm in Habloville. And he married my mother's sister, two years older than my mother[104].

Véronique Krause's testimony points to the fact that the perennial settlement of German prisoners in the Norman countryside was rather common, stating that "besides my father and my uncle, there was another ex-POW who stayed in Ri, who had died now, and whose name was Otto Schering. However his daughter still lives in Argentan[105]."

But the parents were not always willing to accept the union between their daughter and a German. The daughter of a farmer in the Laigle region, aged 18, was rejected by her family when she fell in love with the 23 year old German prisoner who worked at the farm. She ultimately followed him to Germany where they got married[106].

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The relations between the German POWs and the Normans whom they were to meet during their captivity depended on two main factors. First of all, the Franco-German relations were ruled by the social pressure of public opinion, as shown in the preceding chapters. In the city, before the eyes of the population the relations remained fierce until 1946 because, under the judgement of the anti-German public opinion, people sought to adapt to it. But as soon as the relations became individual, when they moved to the villages, or when they took place within the framework of the family, they had a strong tendency to become peaceful.

While the initiative for these relations lay preeminently in the hands of the French, they also depended on the nature of the link which tied them to the German prisoners. The relations were generally good when the Frenchman was the employer of the prisoner and saw an economic interest in the physical and moral maintenance of the latter. The

[103] Oral testimony of Véronique Krause to the author, Giel-Courteilles, 22 February 2012.
[104] Ibid.
[105] Ibid.
[106] Telephone conversation with one the daughters of this farmer, 25 October 2011.

relations were sometimes cordial when both shared a common life experience: this clearly showed in the behaviour of former French POWs repatriated from Germany. A certain degree of solidarity, moreover, seems to have appeared within a same age class, especially among young French and young Germans.

The work of the POWs in the countryside, where they were most numerous, unites the conditions which were essential for a rapprochement, since on one hand, the relations between the farmer and his prisoner, that is to say those between an employer and his employee, continued relatively unseen from the judgement of public opinion whilst on the other hand, the joint work in the countryside and the solving of a farm's everyday problems tended to progressively create a tie that did not fit into the official discourse about Franco-German relations. This tie was not necessarily intimate or friendly but was the simple result of a relationship that developed day by day, without necessarily having a political framework. Thus, the POW became a labourer as any other[107].

The past of Normandy as an occupied region played an ambiguous role in the development of individual Franco-German relations after the war. On the one hand, the collective memory of suffering during the occupation gave birth to a climate in the public sphere which was favourable for the unfolding of violent and humiliating behaviour of the French towards the German prisoners. However, this climate was connected rather to the need of the French to unify against a common enemy in order to close the fractures of the French society during the occupation, than to actual German crimes that had affected the local communities during the occupation, as we have seen. On the other hand, the continuously massive presence of German troops in Normandy between 1940 and 1944 had already shown to many that not all of the Germans could be considered war criminals. Peaceful everyday situations with the German occupiers had touched many parts of the population. Therefore, it is certainly interesting to note that those elements of the French society who overcame the anti-Germans feelings and stereotypes first, were those who had already been in close contact with the Germans during the war and thus, had a differentiated image of the other that was not tainted by propaganda: French veterans, company directors, farmers, members of the church were typical for this group of people.

IV – End of captivity, end of German presence?

Soon after the end of the war in Europe, the question about the future of the German POWs had been raised despite the still high need for manpower in France. Official relations between France and Germany however did not exist until May 1949 when the Federal Republic of Germany was created, and thus the question of the future repatriation of the German POWs was mainly negotiated between Paris, Washington and Geneva. In

[107] To a smaller extent, the German POWs were also integrated into the Norman society inside the cities. In Le Havre, the young German prisoner Otto Barthel, from Chemnitz, ended up playing football for the premiere team of AS Sainte-Adresse, cf. Bengtsson, *Été*, p. 162.

parallel, the official policy inside the French occupation zone of Germany was directed both to create a lasting cultural impact and to extract economic benefits. This policy had been outlaid in the Monnet Plan, named after Jean Monnet, the head of the French Plan Commission created in 1946[108]. Although not directly part of the Monnet Plan, the workforce of the German POWs held by France had to be maintained by all means to continue to particpate in the economic recovery of France. The application of this policy did not only have an impact on the economic perspectives of those who employed the prisoner workforce, but also on the state of mind of the German prisoners themselves. Not knowing when or if they would get back home, the German POWs had hardly another choice than adapting to the given situation, which in turn sensitively influenced the shape of the individual relations they had with the French[109].

1) Repatriation plan and conversion into civil workers

The ICRC appealed to the French authorities for the repatriation of the German POWs as early as 21 August 1945[110] – with little result since the transfers of new POWs from the US authorities were still ongoing. On 3 December 1946, the US ambassador to France, Jefferson Caffery, increased the pressure when he presented to the French government the official request to repatriate 475,000 transferred prisoners by 1 October 1947[111]. This had the immediate effect of reminding the French authorities that the German POWs would not be available to the national economy *sine die*. Finally, at the fourth meeting of the Council of Foreign ministers held in Moscow from 10 March to 24 April 1947, decision was taken that all German POWs had to be repatriated until 31 December 1948. A precise repatriation plan had to be established by all detaining powers and was to be submitted to the Allied Control Council before 1 June 1947[112].

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108 P. Mioche, *Le Plan Monnet, Genèse et élaboration*, 1941-1947 (Paris, 1987). One of its goals was to obtain the agreement of the Western Allies to increase economic control in those German areas producing steel and coal, mainly the Saarland, the Rhineland and the Ruhr area. Although the Americans did not agree to the dismantlement of Germany out of fear that this would increase Soviet influence in West Germany, France clinged to its plan regarding the Saar. In 1947, the Saar Protectorate was created, including the institution in 1948 of a "Saar nationality", meant to pave the way to a future annexation by France. This plan ultimately failed as the Saarland joined West Germany in 1957, after a referendum on its statute held in 1955 did not establish the region's independence.

109 For the many aspects of "homecoming", cf. Overmans, "The Repatriation of Prisoners of War once Hostilities are Over: A Matter of Course?", in Moore and Hately-Broad, eds, *Prisoners of war, prisoners of peace*, pp. 18-21. For the various forms of "homecoming" at the end of World War I, cf. H. Jones, *Violence against Prisoners of War in the First World War, Britain, France and Germany, 1914-1920* (Cambridge, 2011), pp. 257-314.

110 Théofilakis, *Les prisonniers de guerre*, p. 431.

111 Ibid., pp. 315-318.

112 Ibid., pp. 439-440.

Table 34
General repatriation plan for German POWs in French hands, 23 April 1947

Group	Criteria	Scheduled date for repatriation
-	Born after 1 January 1929.	Immediate repatriation
1	German resistance fighters or combatants within the French army.	May and June 1947
2	POWs older than 50 years on 1 January 1947.	
3	POWs older than 45 years on 1 June 1947.	
4	NCOs who volunteered for work and have done heavy labour.	July 1947
5	POWs that have provided to France or to French important services (assistance to French POWs and political deportees during the war or to the French population during the occupation period).	August 1947
6	Fathers of four children or more.	
7	Widowers fathers of two children or more.	September to December 1947
8	NCOs who volunteered or were requested for normal or light work.	
9	POWs aged more than 40 years on 1 July 1947.	January to March 1948
10	Fathers of three children.	From April 1948
11	NCOs who have not worked.	April 1948
12	Married or widowers fathers of two children.	May and June 1948
13	Married or widowers fathers of one child.	June and July 1948
14	Married or widowers without children.	July and August 1948

Sources: Buisson, *Historique*, p. 131
Böhme, *In französischer Hand*, pp. 129-130

In order to delay the unavoidable repatriation of the German prisoners back to their own country, the ministry for work and labour published in spring 1947, and thus at the same time as the "general repatriation plan", a text that detailed the conditions for the conversion of the prisoners into free civil workers, that is to say, into foreign labourers like any other[113]. In fact, the French economy needed in order to realise the Monnet plan some 780,000 additional workers to counterweigh the announced effect of the repatriations[114]. From as early as 1945, De Gaulle had in mind an immigration policy that would favour Northern Europeans including Germans, rather than people from the Mediterranean surroundings[115]. In October 1946, the minster of population, Robert Prigent, announced, during a press conference in Ottawa, the fact that 200,000 German POWs were said to have expressed the wish to immigrate to France and that this wish was welcomed by the French government[116]. At latest from now on, the POWs were considered not only from a purely economic point of view, but also from a demographical angle. Thus, on 14 January 1947, the French authorities addressed an official request to the United States Department of State about the conversion of the German POWs into free labourers[117]. Two weeks later an agreement was found whose only condition by the Americans was that

113 For the question of POW conversion into free labourers, cf. B. Moore and K. Fedorowich, *The British Empire and its Italian Prisoners of War, 1940-1947* (Basingstoke, 2002), as well as Moore and Hately-Broad, *Prisoners of Peace*.
114 Théofilakis, *Les prisonniers de guerre*, pp. 437-438.
115 Noiriel, *Le creuset*, p. 39. Cf. also Théofilakis, *Les prisonniers de guerre*, p. 320.
116 Böhme, *In französischer Hand*, p. 133.
117 Erbs, "Le recyclage", p. 80.

the prisoners had to receive a certificate of liberation upon the signature of the work contract, which thus would discharge the United States of the responsibility they had until then for the prisoners they had ceded to France[118]. Clearly, as Fabien Théofilakis puts it, "the economic emergency and the weight of the international context dominate domestic policies", thus overrunning with the transformation of the German POWs "the hostility of the labour unions or of the French opinion"[119].

From then on, all the prisoners had to do was to sign a work contract for one year with a French employer and to obtain the approval of the ministry for their conversion into a civil labourer[120]. In fact, the ministry had to verify through a "screening committee" whether there were any charges against the voluntary prisoner – a procedure meant to prevent possible war criminals gaining freedom before a closer examination of their case[121]. The first conversions took place in July 1947. At the end of the contract, the civil labourer would become totally free and could choose between a renewal of his contract or a return to Germany.

Thanks to the repatriation calendar, each prisoner now knew his approximate date of return and could consequently calculate whether it was better for him to sign a work contract or wait for regular repatriation. The conversion of the prisoners into free labourers did not change their relations with the French, as relatively good relations had already existed before 1947. Even more, the reality of these peaceful everyday relations can be considered as the main condition for the conversion to be applied. Many French testimonies make anyway no difference between German POWs and converted German civil labourers[122]. The voluntary engagement with an employer was, from the beginning, rewarded with a one month's leave to Germany. The workers on leave received a transport ticket which allowed them to travel to Germany for free. During his leave, Johannes Börner managed to visit his father in Leipzig, despite the restrictions to enter the Soviet occupation zone. The living conditions there discouraged him from staying:

> My father lived elsewhere after the bombing, he had nothing left. And he had a tiny apartment. He did not know that I would come, he did not know that I was there. Oh! What a joy, of course!

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118 Böhme, *In französischer Hand*, pp. 134-135; Théofilakis, *Les prisonniers de guerre*, p. 320. Given the fact that no humanitarian law had stipulated the possibility of a POW transfer between allies, the original power of capture and detention remained responsible for the fulfilment of the requirements of the 1929 Geneva Convention.

119 Théofilakis, *Les prisonniers de guerre*, p. 452.

120 Transformation of POWs into labourers had been practiced by the Germans with their French POWs for example, as well as with Italian POWs in British hands. Cf. B. Moore, "Turning Liabilities into Assets: British Government Policy towards German and Italian Prisoners of War during the Second World War", *Journal of Contemporary History* 32 (1997), pp. 117-136; cf. also Durand, *La captivité*; cf. also Quellien, "Les prisonniers", pp. 100-101.

121 CICR, Agence centrale des prisonniers de guerre, Délégation en France, Renseignements pour les travailleurs civils allemands en France, 15 October 1947, BA-Ko, B 150/355.

122 The transformation officialised a change of image of the French in the opinion of the German prisoners, departing from that of an enemy towards that of an employer – notwithstanding the fact the German population in Germany itself remained opposed to the transformation, which they considered a disguised form of continued captivity. Cf. also Théofilakis, *Les prisonniers de guerre*, pp. 473-475.

> And there, I could stay three weeks. The three weeks, always hidden. We had almost nothing to eat. In the evening, sometimes, a little bit, with flour we made our soup, we had nothing[123].

The prisoner Rudolf Hagemann, recently converted into a civil worker, also benefitted from a leave in December 1947 – but decided not to return to France, even though he had a good relationship with his employer:

> When the English learned that so many former POWs would arrive in Germany for their leave, they opened liberation offices. The French had not given to the German free workers – contrary to their promise – a certificate of liberation. Thus, those who wanted could get from the English military administration such a document. As for myself, I took the decision to accept it as well because, during four years, I had waited for this, to come back to my country[124].

Like Hagemann, about 90,000 converted prisoners of France benefitted from this special leave after the conclusion of their work contract. Around 12,500 of them did not return to France after the four weeks[125].

The others were encouraged to stay in France as long as possible by a number of special measures, some of them wanting the Germans to stay permanently in the country. This reflected a major turn in French policy, who definitely drifted away from considering the Germans in France as enemies and now rather considered them as means to revitalise the French demography. The free workers had for example, the possibility to acquire French citizenship after a period of five years of residence. Subsidies were available to move their family to France and they could benefit from family allowances, as any other citizen[126]. Even more surprisingly: marriages between Germans and French were now explicitly fostered by the Ministry of Work and Social Security, only three years after the end of the occupation. The prisoners were regularly reminded of this measure for example, during the spring of 1948, in a flyer with the headline "Do you wish to stay in France?" and "you can marry in France and after the necessary duration of stay, claim French citizenship"[127].

Until the end of 1947, 100,000 prisoners all over France subscribed to conversion into a free worker. These were mainly prisoners of the last groups to be repatriated who thus enabled themselves to an earlier liberation. Less than 40,000 prisoners converted into civil workers in 1948, a fact that tends to show that the prisoners were mostly motivated by the idea of an anticipated liberation and not, as the French government had hoped, by the perspective of a durable settlement in France. Until March 1948, only some one hundred converted prisoners had brought their families from Germany to

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123 Oral testimony of Johannes Börner to the author, Ouistreham, 28 June 2011.
124 Testimony of Rudolf Hagemann, published in Frauenlob and Hagemann, *Mémoiren*, p. 132.
125 Böhme, *In französischer Hand*, p. 138; Théofilakis, *Les prisonniers de guerre*, p. 325.
126 CICR, Agence centrale des prisonniers de guerre, Délégation en France, Renseignements pour les travailleurs civils allemands en France, 15 October 1947, BA-Ko, B 150/355.
127 Avis de la Sous-Direction de la Main-d'œuvre étrangère auprès du Ministère du Travail et de la Sécurité Sociale, spring 1948, published as a German translation in Böhme, *In französischer Hand*, p. 302.

France[128]. However, in the end 137,987 prisoners all over France subscribed, between July 1947 and autumn 1948, to work contracts for one year – that is 29.1 per cent of the prisoners in French hands at the beginning of the programme in July 1947[129]. Only the French employers had to notice the actual change in status of the Germans in France. For the majority, they were still considered "POWs" although they were no longer prisoners but free foreigners.

2) Those who stayed

The number of Germans who decided to stay in France after the end of their work contract and after the last repatriations in late 1948 is estimated at about 20 per cent of all the free workers, that is to say around 27,600 people[130]. It remains difficult however, to know precisely their duration of stay after 1948 and thus the level of integration into the country after the end of their initial contract[131]. However, through several examples, we can attempt to better understand what motivated some of the former prisoners to remain in France. A general reticence about returning to family homes in the Soviet zone can be noticed.

To some, Germany no longer offered a professional perspective. The prisoner Helmuth Lohmann who worked at Jean Philippe's father's farm in Cambes-en-Plaine was a trained printer. After his liberation, it became evident to him that Germany was not yet capable of offering sufficient professional security. Jean Philippe remembers Helmuth's return to Cambes:

> At one point, they became free prisoners, that is to say they could return to Germany. As for him, before leaving, he had bought so many things I cannot remember, food, towels, etc. His suitcase was full of it. And then he stayed for six months in Germany and one day we saw him coming back in Cambes-en-Plaine. He said to my father: "Listen, do you want to take me back, because in Germany, it's a mess." My father said to him: "Well, of course, Helmuth!" So he stayed for two more years. But he was totally free[132].

The German family of the prisoner Bernhard Krause had suffered severely under the Nazi regime at the end of the war. He probably stayed in France because of a traumatic experience:

> When my father left [for the war], no one asked about his opinion. They came to pick him up and he had to leave. My grandmother has been shot in Germany. Yes, because, when they came to pick up my father, she did not want to let her son leave. So she protested. My grandfather, as for

[128] Théofilakis, *Les prisonniers de guerre*, p. 324.
[129] Ibid., pp. 139-140.
[130] Ibid.
[131] In a report dated June 1950, the ICRC mentions for January 1949, 55,000 transformed German ex-POWs and 13,000 German immigrants in France, for December 1949, respectively 40,000 and 15,000, and for June 1950, 30,000 and 20,000; cf. Théofilakis, *Les prisonniers de guerre*, p. 327.
[132] Oral testimony of Jean Philippe to the author, La Cochère, 24 November 2011.

> him, ran away with my aunt, that is to say my father's younger sister, and my grandmother was shot there. And my father was taken to the war[133].

Other soldiers had lost their family during the Allied bombings of the German cities. France thus became a new haven for those prisoners who had lost everything in Germany. Integration then happened due to the lack of other possibilities. Véronique Krause tells about her father that "he did not speak again about Germany, only sometimes, rare childhood remembrances but he avoided talking about it"[134]. Werner Pomikal's family lived in the Soviet occupation zone of Germany. After a short stay at home, Werner decided to come back to France. His widow remembers his return to Fleury-sur-Orne:

> He went to the Russian zone and his mother had died, so his father told him: "Listen, myself and grandfather were right, the Russians are here and they will stay for a while, if you see a better future somewhere else, you have to leave, don't stay here, don't stay here if you think that you would be better off somewhere else." So that's why that he left, that he came back here[135].

Wolfgang Sachtleben, from Magdeburg, also in the Soviet occupation zone, chose to stay in Normandy after the end of his war captivity instead of returning to his parents who had lost everything, three times in a row, during the bombings of the city between 1943 and 1945[136]. In 1948, he met his future wife, whom he married as early as 1950, five years only after the end of the war. Two children were born of this marriage, a girl in 1951 and a boy in 1956. Other former prisoners decided to stay in France because their wife or their fiancée had met another man during their captivity.

The necessity to stay in France or the desire to return home were dependent on the individual situation of every prisoner, as well as the financial and mental capacities to overcome the end of captivity. The bond with Germany, the desire to transmit the language or certain other traditions thus varied according to the individual attitude of everyone regarding his own past and his conception of integration in France. It is interesting to see that Werner Pomikal spoke German with his children whereas Bernhard Krause categorically refused to do so, although preciously keeping his Tyrolean leather trousers and singing German songs at family celebrations.

In parallel, those former German POWs who did not return to Germany but were unable to immediately find a new home in France formed for several years, a migrating manpower in France. Going from farm to farm offering their services, they tried to earn money and managed to save a part of it. Near Vimoutiers, the farmer Jean Chorin employed former German POWs until the early 1950s[137]. In Cintheaux, between Caen and Falaise, the Vandermersch family even employed a former German POW until

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133 Oral testimony of Véronique Krause to the author, Giel-Courteilles, 22 February 2012.
134 Ibid.
135 Interview of Colette Pomikal, widow of a German POW, realised on 9 June 2009 in Fleury-sur-Orne by Nathalie Lemarchand, Centre régional de culture ethnologique et technique de Basse-Normandie.
136 Sachtleben, "Témoignages", pp. 213-215.
137 Oral testimony of Jean Chorin to the author, Vimoutiers, 23 September 2011.

the mid-1960s: a plumber whose wife and four children had tragically died during operation Gomorrah, the bombing of Hamburg in the summer of 1943[138].

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In the second half of the 1940s, the French public discourse remained clearly hostile to all things relating to the Germans and Germany, as we have seen over the course of this thesis. After four years of enemy occupation and deep inner fractures of French society, increased during the occupation period, the Germans had to remain a common enemy to all French, in order to rebuild the national identity and the national union. In the eyes of general De Gaulle, making the Germans the main enemy of France was not only a priority for foreign policy but also and above all, for the interior affairs of France. Hence, the massive employment of German POWs for the benefit of the French national economy was also intended to become another proof of France's victory over Nazi Germany and the rebirth of the Republic. While France traditionally considered itself as a country of immigration through inclusion and assimilation, the Germans were at first clearly excluded from this process at the end of the war. The idea of Franco-German antagonism acted to build the French identity in opposition to the "German character".

But the employment of the Germans in the civil economy, leading to the transformation of the two formerly anonymous groups of "German POWs" and "French civilian population" into "working prisoners" and "employers" who knew each other, had a reverse consequence on the Franco-German relations, which now no longer developed in the public sphere but in the private space. In fact, instead of French having authority over the Germans – as one could have expected after four years of enemy occupation, and the long lasting Allied control over these prisoners – the relationship between the prisoners and their civil environment was marked with pragmatism and banality. Certainly, some French employers and civil workers took their theoretical power over the Germans in a context of widespread anti-German feelings, as an opportunity for violence and abuse. But generally, the French civil society in Normandy acted with humanity towards the Germans, and that was not only out of economic interest.

Since "the Germans" were no longer an anonymous group but prisoners who now lived under the same roof as their employers' families, stereotypes could less easily be applied. Whereas, during the occupation, these banal relations to German soldiers could prove very dangerous during and after the Liberation if uncovered by the Résistance, the private relations between Frenchmen and German POWs were less likely to hurt public opinion as they could be continued within the overall feeling of revenge: "I feed my prisoner, but only to have a better economic output." The anti-German propaganda lost much of its impact on the opinion of the people concerned. Also, those French citizens who still feared the German prisoners were more likely to be those who had no individual contact with one of them. Locally, sensitivities survived and were generally due to personal bad experiences with Germans during the war.

[138] Oral testimony of Bernard Vandermersch to the author, Falaise, 26 August 2011.

For the Germans, the integration into the French civil society was not a choice, but a direct consequence of the uncertainty about their repatriation or their prospects back home. In fact, at the end of their employment, forced or voluntary, the great majority of the German POWs in Normandy chose to return to Germany. Freedom was for many of them the realisation of a hope which had been difficult to maintain. The possibility of integration in France was accepted when a life in Germany was considered more difficult. France often remained the second choice – even though sincere cordial relations with the French may have developed during captivity. Many other parallels with forms of labour migration, forced or not, past and present, can be observed[139].

After a period during which the Germans were clearly excluded from the French model of immigration, they were now needed to fill the gap in French post-war demographics. Also, the experience of German mass employment showed to many that the cultural differences between French and Germans were in the end, not that important. In fact, many now could ask themselves if there was not a bigger cultural distance between a Norman and a Frenchman from Corsica, than between a Norman and a German from the Rhineland. Very early after the end of the war, the French immigration policy switched to an inclusion of the Germans, alongside other peoples from North-Western and Northern Europe. However, those migrants from the Mediterranean basin were now to be excluded from the French integration model. Ultimately, the reversal of the balance of power in the French-German relations after the transfer from Allied to French custody lost much of its political significance when Germans and French had built up individual relations that could no longer be distinguished from those existing with other members of the society.

[139] A fruit of constraint, the integration of the Germans in Normandy sometimes became perennial: in 1994, the year of the 50th anniversary of the Allied landings in Normandy, the former prisoner Werner Pomikal created a town-twinning between Fleury-sur-Orne and Waldbüttelbrunn, in Lower Franconia. Another former German prisoner even became the president of a French veterans' association in the Pays d'Auge region.

Conclusion

Through the analysis of the German presence in the region of Normandy between 1944 and 1948 and using a methodological approach grounded in a view of history as seen "from below", this study has investigated the disconnect between the conception of a nation from a political point of view and the direct and indirect effects of the lasting cohabitation of populations culturally separated for generations through national discourses of enmity. The regional aspect of this study highlights the specifics of French geography, with Normandy being a part of a larger European region with a long running history of military engagements[1]. Moreover, a regional history of Europe is capable of throwing light on phenomena that might otherwise be obscured from view when considering history from a national perspective[2].

By the end of the German occupation, the Norman population was not only longing for a return to pre-war living conditions, but also for the recovery of French national sovereignty and dignity. The German POWs present in the region represented the German occupation and thereby the source of destruction and loss of French sovereignty over their own soil. The possibility to use these prisoners was seen as an opportunity to reverse the balance of power between Germany and France, both by the civilian population and by the French authorities, albeit each for their own reasons. Consequently, the evolution of the relations between Germans and French in Normandy after the liberation was shaped as much by dynamics originating among the population itself as by interests expressed by the successive ruling authorities, with these two interdependent political forces challenging and responding to each other.

Furthermore, these forces impacted differently on the relations between Germans and French, depending on the sphere of engagement where these relations would play out. On the one hand, popular dynamics mainly set the tone in shaping the relations between groups of French and Germans within the public space, especially during the first phase between the summer of 1944 and the summer of 1945. On the other hand, this force had little or no impact on the individual relations between the natives and the Germans that took place in the private sphere during the second phase, mainly from the summer of 1945. While the politically sanctioned low level distribution of German POWs as a workforce for the French economy caused a proliferation of individual contacts during this second phase, publicly expressed opinion regarding the German question remained predominately negative; or at least individuals whose personal experience deviated from the public opinion did not feel at liberty to express their views openly.

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[1] Cf. for example R. Holmes, *Fatal Avenue, A Traveller's History of the Battlefields of Northern France and Flanders 1346-1945* (London, 1992).

[2] Cf. for example T. Snyder, *Bloodlands, Europe between Hitler and Stalin* (London, 2010). A series of reasons make it difficult to draw genuine comparisons between Normandy and other European regions. Among these are the prominent place of the German enemy as a part of the French national identity, the Allied liberation of the region of Normandy and the long Allied presence after the liberation, and the transfer of Allied captured German POWs to large scale employment in the French civil economy.

During the first phase, the attitude in the public arena towards the German POWs was marked by the need on the part of the French to form a national unity. This fuelled the perception that every German was the enemy of France[3]. In fact, after the German occupation had precipitated the internal break-up of French society, the Germans became a collective scapegoat for the social discord within France; in the wake of De Gaulle's glorification of a *France combattante*, liberating itself from the enemy, collective violence against the German POWs was used symbolically to exorcise the burden of defeat, occupation, and humiliation[4]. These events were quite specific to France. While up to 355,000 German POWs were held and employed in the civil economy of Great Britain after the end of the war in Europe, the symbolism of the victory over Germany was different for the British population. A possible explanation for this may be Britain's physical and cultural separation from continental Europe, and a national identity that held France and not Germany as the natural opponent – a fact which the Entente cordiale of 1904 had not removed from the collective conscience[5].

The prisoner transfers from Allied to French authority, and the subsequent distribution of prisoner manpower to the civil economy opened up of a new sphere of engagement for Franco-German relations: the private sphere. The extensive distribution of German prisoner workers within the economy of Normandy from 1945 onwards provided many French civilians with an opportunity to form a differentiated image of the Germans through numerous personal relations, which was independent of the received wisdom of public opinion. In fact, as soon as the German POWs had left the anonymity of working parties to be employed individually or in small groups by civil employers, for example in farms, relations with the French took on a mostly pragmatic form, marked with economic interest. The initial appetite for revenge, motivated by the reversal of the balance of power, was tempered by the fact that the employers had to pay for the prisoner workforce and maintain it in good physical condition in the interest of the national economic recovery. With respect to the symbolic role of violence against Germans in the public space, similar forms of violence within the private sphere would only be instrumental, if for example, a farmer had to re-affirm in front of his family or his French employees his opposition to the Germans in general, particularly in cases where he was suspected of having collaborated with Germans between 1940 and 1944.

A private sphere of engagement for relations between POWs and civilians did not always appear where prisoners were held and employed. In contrast to France, Eastern European countries, formerly occupied by Germany, and ruled by communist regimes, a low level distribution of German POWs into the civil economy was almost non-existent. In Poland, but also in the Soviet Union, prisoners were mostly employed in labour

[3] Buton, *La joie*, p. 126; cf. also Girard, *Le bouc émissaire*.

[4] Not all formerly occupied areas had the opportunity for revenge. In the case of the Crown dependencies of the Channel Islands, under German occupation between 1940 and 1945, roughly 20,000 German POWs were captured in May 1945 on Jersey, Guernsey, Alderney and Sark and removed to Britain almost immediately. Cf. C. Cruickshank, *The German Occupation of the Channel Islands* (Stroud, 2004), pp. 311-331.

[5] This historical opposition is publicly presented at the Bayeux Memorial, opposite the entrance of the Commonwealth cemetery with graves numbering in excess of 4,600. A Latin epitaph reads "We, once conquered by William, have now set free the Conqueror's native land."

battalions connected with large public companies[6]. In Eastern Europe relations with the civilian population were kept to a minimum, not only to promote economic output of the workforce, but also to prevent any forms of fraternisation. In France, regional differences in the integration of the Germans into the local communities can also be observed and measured with the degree of low level distribution of the German workforce, since in some areas, like the coal mine basins of northern France, the prisoners were mostly deployed in groups or working parties, and only rarely on an individual basis such as in rural areas like Normandy[7].

Within the privacy of Norman houses and farms where one or several German prisoners lived and worked, or in the small rural communities away from the main roads where relations were shielded from public scrutiny, contacts between Germans and Normans were generally marked with a form of peaceful pragmatism. The findings of Robert Gildea with respect to the occupation period are equally apposite for the period covered by this thesis: "relations between French and Germans under the occupation cannot be reduced to German oppression facing French patriotism. Despite the obvious imbalance of power between the parties, the interactions between both were multifaceted, subtle and complex[8]." This equally applies to the Franco-German cohabitation after the Liberation, when the balance of power had been reversed. The relations between German POWs and their employers and their families, as well as those with the French workers, continued to be mostly peaceful. This forced cohabitation enabled both groups to see the other no longer simply through the stereotyped spectrum-shift of propaganda and rumours, but to consider him as a person in his own right, with his past, his future projects, his joys and his pains.

The normalisation of the individual relations in the private sphere was facilitated by the relative cultural and ethnic proximity of Germany and France, founded not only on a common European and Christian culture[9], but also on a common past that was already rich in voluntary or forced Franco-German encounters and cohabitations. As we have seen, in many cases, the experience of living as a foreign worker in Germany helped many Normans to construct a relationship with their German workers on the basis of mutual understanding and empathy. Moreover, the improvement of the relations between French and Germans was shaped by the active role of promoters of human and Christian values, such as the local clergy. Initiatives of rapprochement remained generally unchallenged when they originated from French veterans and former POWs who in many communities were natural authorities[10]. Thus, the rapid and peaceful integration of

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[6] Kochanowski, *In Polnischer Gefangenschaft*. Cf. also Kochanowski, "Hatred within Limits: German Prisoners of War and Polish Society, 1945-50", in Moore and Hately-Broad, eds, *Prisoners of War, Prisoners of Peace*, pp. 41-47.

[7] G. Philippe, "La France de la Libération et les prisonniers de guerre allemands, 1945-1948." Master's thesis, Université de Lille 3, 2005.

[8] Gildea, *Marianne*, p. 45.

[9] Ibid., p. 404.

[10] Between 1957 and 1963, French veterans' associations initiated a total of 120 town twinnings between French and German municipalities, as for example between Saint-Étienne and Wuppertal in 1962. Cf. C. Defrance, 'Les jumelages franco-allemands', *Vingtième Siècle, Revue d'Histoire* 99 (2008/3), pp. 189-201. Cf. also F. Cochet, 'La captivité de 1939-1945 et les jumelages des villes : du rêve au réveil', in S. Caucanas, R. Cazals and P. Payen, eds, *Les Prisonniers de guerre dans l'histoire : contacts entre peuples et cultures*, (Toulouse, 2003),

the German POWs in parts of France's rural society after World War II shows that the cultural distance between Germans and French was not a fundamental issue. Despite the general radicalisation of warfare after 1939, a strong resilience of societal bonds can be observed in the Western theatre beyond that date.

However, this complex stratification of the relations between French and Germans was not taken into consideration by the official discourse and played little part in the collective memory. In fact, the official discourse, intended to be universal, was capable only of accounting for a part of the microhistory; it instinctively discarded those individual narratives that conflicted with the dominating discourse. In Ernest Renan's words: "The essence of a nation is that all the individuals have many things in common, and also that all have forgotten many things. Every French citizen must have forgotten St. Bartholomew's Day, the massacres in southern France in the 13th century"[11]. In this case, oblivion served to reinforce national cohesion[12]. The reconstruction of the national identity firstly required the German presence to be terminated. Philippe Buton writes that "for the French, the Liberation is equivalent to the departure of the Germans from their municipalities"[13]. The memory of the period 1940-1944, in order to play the role of a cementing factor in the unity of France after the war, rapidly departed from historical reality to culminate in the resistantialist myth created by the Gaullists and the Communists. The manifold characteristics and the cultural and social impact of the German presence in France during and after World War II were thus overshadowed in the collective consciousness by the direct political use made of this foreign presence, showcased as an enemy presence by intellectuals and de facto leaders, serving the reconstruction of the French national identity, in opposition to the other. Only those characteristics of the foreign presence that served this political goal were to be memorialized and promoted, while those features that would tend to nuance or weaken the discourse of national identity were tacitly silenced or disregarded. Narratives of the poor living conditions of the prisoners in 1945 and then of the forced but mostly non-violent cohabitation with the German POWs were indirectly silenced, either because they were not made public, in the media for example, or because, when published, they generated no response. As the decades passed, it became ever more inconceivable that after the "dark years" of war, the French and Germans had managed to live side by side in relative harmony. By the early 1960s the Germans, who had previously been held up as the antagonist, to help reunite the French as a nation, once again were required to be identified as the historical adversary, to justify the need for an official reconciliation.

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pp. 293-304; F. Cochet, 'Le rôle des anciens prisonniers et des anciens déportés français dans le rapprochement franco-allemand (1945-1965)', in A. Fleury and R. Frank, eds, *Le Rôle des guerres dans la mémoire des Européens : leur effet sur la conscience d'être européen*, (Bern, 1997), pp. 123-135.

11 E. Renan, "Qu'est-ce qu'une nation?", in *Œuvres complètes*, vol. 1 (Paris, 1948), p. 892. Quoted in B. Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London, 2006), p. 6.

12 Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, pp. 187-206.

13 Buton, *La joie*, p. 141. This context seems also to have prevented a broad propagandistic exploitation of the German POWs held in France, contrary to what happened in the United Kingdom during the war, cf. Held, *Kriegsgefangenschaft*.

The erasure from collective memory of the participation of the German POWs in the French post-war economy also originated in De Gaulle's conception of a France capable of self-liberation and recovery. The large-scale employment of German nationals for the economic reconstruction of France was at odds with the image of France's *"grandeur"*; of a France arising from its ashes by its own force and proficiency. Significantly, while De Gaulle acknowledged the capture of German POWs as proof of French virility, there was no acknowledgement of their subsequent participation in the French economy. In a similar way, the actual hopelessness and misery of many German POWs in post-war France stood not only in such stark contradiction to the collective memory built around the occupation period, but it also contradicted the notion of France fighting for universal human rights through its very *grandeur*[14].

What role did the forced cohabitation between French and Germans for over eight years within Normandy and other French regions play in the general evolution of the Franco-German relations after World War II? Did the forced encounters prepare the ground for a political rapprochement by creating a solid basis of differentiated and nuanced knowledge of the other, capable of overcoming mutual differences and hatred? In answering this question, it must be acknowledged that the individual relations between French and Germans during and after World War II, both in Germany and France, have not – in a direct manner – contributed to the rapprochement between Paris and Bonn after the birth of the German Federal Republic in 1949. The rapprochement was largely a process driven by geopolitical necessities. Officially, the period of military occupation and war captivity stood (and still stands) as a negative starting point, a nadir in the history of Franco-German relations, from which both countries were to recover through the process of rapprochement[15].

In fact, throughout the period of the war and the liberation, the idea of the Germans as France's main enemy served the political goal of unifying a divided French society and returning France to full sovereignty and statehood: once this goal was attained and the *grandeur* recovered, the official policy could become more pragmatic, even more generous, towards Germany and the Germans. This evolution was significant also from the perspective of future European integration[16]. The correct treatment of the defeated Germans by the French was considered a warranty for future relations between

[14] The fact that the German POWs did not enter the French national memory at a later stage might best be explained within the context of the officialising of the Franco-German reconciliation in the early 1960s – despite the fact that the German Federal Republic set up an academic commission dedicated to the history of the German POWs of World War II at the same time. The activity of more than fifteen years of the "Maschke commission" and the thirteenth volume of the collection *Geschichte der Deutschen Kriegsgefangenen des Zweiten Weltkriege*, *In französischer Hand*, published in 1971 under the direction of Kurt W. Böhme and dealing with the German POWs in France, remained widely unknown in France.

[15] Only rarely was the German prisoner captivity in France considered a positive starting point for this process, as for example in the press of the French occupation zone in Germany. Cf. Théofilakis, *Les prisonniers de guerre*, pp. 506-523, here especially p. 516. See also Ibid., p. 569.

[16] Gaullist fears of loss of sovereignty and German domination had a brief surge during the debates around the planned European Defence Community in 1950, which collapsed after Gaullist representatives' vote against it prevented the ratification of the plan by the French parliament; this episode however did not durably affect the process of rapprochement between France and West Germany.

France and Germany and therefore for the security of France and of Europe[17]. The comparison with Eastern Europe shows that France accepted the risk of a Franco-German rapprochement "from below" to serve its economic and political interests, whereas the Eastern Bloc was heading for international isolation and did not initially pay much attention to German sensitivities to the POW question[18].

But the process of Franco-German reconciliation, which culminated in the Elysée Treaty in January 1963, also showed that the hatred between French and Germans had never been as structural and deeply rooted as the political leaders both before and during World War II would have had the people believe. The longer the German presence in France lasted, the more it was likely to prove that the similarities between French and Germans outnumbered the differences, and that the idea of a Franco-German antagonism was a mere artificial construction born with the rise of nationalisms in the 19th century[19]. Moreover, the forced cohabitation and a common Franco-German past of deprivation and suffering[20] became themselves determining elements for the national identities on both sides of the Rhine in the second half of the 20th century, ultimately supporting the wide acceptance of the political agenda to institutionalise the "Franco-German friendship" after decades of mutual demonisation[21]. Therefore, it can be supposed that the common Franco-German past and the resulting better knowledge of the other helped promote the approval by the majority of a policy of rapprochement unprecedented in the history of the two nations.

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In many regards, the German presence in Normandy between 1944 and 1948 bears the characteristics of any other presence of foreigners. In fact, in this case study, all indicators hint to the fact that the prolonged cohabitation took on the shape of a "cross-community migration"[22], thus contributing to undermining the cultural compartmentalisation of the national groups on the local level. The cultural proximity however, as well as the resilience of strong societal bonds, made possible a mental shift in France, which deviated from a consideration of the Germans as enemies, to be excluded from the French national community, towards a notion of the Germans as potential beneficial

17 Théofilakis, *Les prisonniers de guerre*, p. 168.
18 The last German POWs in Soviet hands were repatriated as late as 1956.
19 Espagne, "Limites", p. 119; cf. also M. Jeismann, *La patrie de l'ennemi. La notion d'ennemi national et la représentation de la nation en Allemagne et en France de 1792 à 1918*, (Paris, 1997). Exhaustive studies on other French regions such as Alsace and Lorraine or, for example, Corsica, would allow a genuine comparison with the evolution of the Franco-German relations in Normandy after the war. Nowadays, one can come across former German POWs in most French regions, which hints at a situation that, similarly to Normandy, allowed Germans to settle down just a few years after the end of the occupation. Similar cases can be found in Britain: Bert Trautmann, to quote a famous example, was a German POW in British hands before deciding to stay in England after his liberation and becoming a professional goal keeper with Manchester City F.C. between 1949 and 1964.
20 Gildea, *Marianne*, p. 397.
21 U. Krotz, "Parapublic Underpinnings of International Relations: The Franco-German Construction of Europeanization of a Particular Kind", *European Journal of International Relations* 13 (2007), pp. 385-417.
22 Harzig and Hoerder, *Migration*, p. 67.

contributors to the French society, even though this shift was not equally perceived at the local and the national levels. This phenomenon can best be observed with two messages from Charles de Gaulle in 1941 and 1945. In a broadcast speech of October 1941 De Gaulle replied to several assassinations of German soldiers by French communist resistance fighters:

> It is absolutely normal and absolutely justified that the Germans are killed by the French. If the Germans would not have wanted to receive the death from our hands, they simply could have stayed at home. Sooner or later, by the way, they are all destined to be shot, either by ourselves, or by our allies[23].

In a letter sent in June 1945 to the minister of Justice, De Gaulle, now as head of the Provisional Government of the French Republic, expressed his will to favour within the French immigration policy the Northern Europeans, including the Germans, to the disadvantage of "Mediterraneans and Orientals", who were accused of having "for half a century deeply modified the composition of the French population":

> Without going as far as using, as in the United States, a rigid system of quotas, it is preferable that the priority is given to the Nordic naturalisations (Belgians, Luxembourgers, Swiss, Dutch, Danish, English, Germans, etc.). A proportion of 50 per cent for these elements could be envisaged[24].

In less than four years, the Germans had thus been transformed in De Gaulle's view from a status of a national enemy, promised certain death, to a welcome pool of manpower whose integration was required to reinforce the country's economy and its demography. This change of priorities hints again to the fact that the germanophobia which had characterised the French national identity during the war was in reality quite superficial. It also reflects the pragmatism that dominated French decisions in the field of migration politics, leading to a shift of priorities towards a model of integration which would not challenge the overall French position regarding the German question in terms of international politics. The fact that a number of Germans were capable of permanently settling down in Normandy after the end of their captivity, should be read as a reflection on their integration into the local communities and the lack of prospects at home, rather than a general change of France's political climate. Notwithstanding the strength of the negative image of the Germans in the French national discourse, this relatively smooth integration of the German POWs working within small communities can be seen as an indicator of the resilience of another strong component of the French identity, that is to say the assimilation into the French society of foreigners from similar cultural areas[25].

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[23] Speech of general De Gaulle, London, 23 October 1941, published on http://www.mediaslibres.com/tribune/post/2008/10/17/733-discours-de-gaulle-octobre-1941, accessed on 3 November 2011.
[24] Document quoted by Noiriel, *Le creuset*, p. 39.
[25] Ibid., passim.

While the presence of German POWs in Normandy between 1944 and 1948 represented an important presence of male foreigners among the civilian population, it was only after the Allies had started transferring their prisoners to French custody (from February 1945), that the French authorities gained power over this massive foreign presence. After four years of Wehrmacht administration, and more than one year of Allied control, the Germans were now to obey the national authorities of the country they lived in. Considering the evolution of the Norman opinion hostile until 1945-46, before becoming indifferent to the Germans present in the region, it can be said that the opinion was the most anti-German when the German prisoners were under a foreign authority. Ultimately, it was not so much the German presence that was criticised, but the framework that governed it, a framework that was at first German and then Allied; both restrictions on French national sovereignty. The moment this sovereignty was restored, with the transfer of the German prisoners to the French authorities, the public progressively ignored the Germans in its midst and turned its attention to more pressing issues at hand.

More generally the German presence across Europe during and after World War II did not merely entail the forced stay of numerous foreigners, bearers of their own culture, in regions with equally strong identities. The Germans did not transpose their cultural space of origin into the places they inhabited, nor did they completely surrender to the culture of the host country. As Harzig and Hoerder have shown, migrants contribute to the creation of what is called a "third space", generated by everyday relations with the indigenous population and by mutual cultural exchange between the natives and foreigners[26]. In Mexico City, the existence of such a "third space" is openly acknowledged as part of the Mexican national identity on the Plaza de la Tres Culturas ("Square of the Three Cultures"): it celebrates the birth of the modern independent Mexican nation from both its pre-Columbian and historic Spanish colonial heritage.

Though being considerably less extensive than the Spanish colonial rule in Mexico, the phase of German presence in Normandy initiated the creation of such a "third space", bearing characteristics of a shared past and shared space which the French and Germans had experienced together. This also bears on the question of the "homecoming", not only of the German prisoners, but also of the Norman civilian population itself. In particular, the heavy Allied military "occupation" of Normandy after the end of the battle prevented the civilian population from "turning the page" of war, from "returning home"; the actual situation, marked by a lack of French authority over their national soil and their former enemy, was starkly at odds with the people's mental projections made during the occupation for the post-war life. Due to the unequal distribution of Allied troops over the French territory during the liberation of 1944, the situation can hardly be generalised for all of France. The regions of the northern half of the country where the German presence had been most pronounced during the occupation were the same as those liberated by Allied troops, and hence where the

[26] Harzig and Hoerder, *Migration*, p. 82. For a similar argument relating to the French presence in Algeria, cf. J. K. Gosnell, *The politics of frenchness in colonial Algeria, 1930-1954* (Rochester, NY, 2002).

population experienced heavy Allied military presence sometimes until 1946. The areas of central and southern France where the French resistance and regular armed forces succeeded in capturing most of their German POWs and especially in the areas unoccupied before November 1942, had experienced a German occupation that took on a very different shape when compared to the northern half of the country. The uniform national discourse about the self-liberation of the French as promoted by De Gaulle therefore conflicted with different local realities, resulting in different degrees of frustration, depending on the history of the Liberation, the role played by Allied troops and French fighters, and the physical presence of German POWs. In Normandy, the liberation turned out to be anything but an immediate return to pre-war conditions, thus delaying the process of "cultural demobilisation"[27].

The war had transformed "home", not only through a process of physical destruction and human loss, but also through the cultural impact brought by the presence of foreigners – predominantly and most lastingly – Germans, but also of British, Americans, Poles and Canadians. During the Liberation, while the appearance in Normandy of the first American bubblegum and Coca-Cola bottles entered the local and national psyche, the cultural impact of the German presence remained unspoken and implicit, overshadowed by the long resounding echo of the official discourse with its overtones of Franco-German antagonism. However, in a way that was similar to the prisoners returning to Germany, the Germans who stayed in France contributed to the transformation of Normandy[28]. They left through their simple presence, their work, and through the families they sometimes founded, especially in the rural communities, a cultural and frequently a genetic heritage, the scope of which remains difficult to evaluate. These prisoners who for one reason or another had been denied the chance to return to their own homes, settled in Normandy and ultimately integrated into a society whose evolution they had played a large part in shaping.

[27] J. Horne, 'Demobilizing the Mind: France and the Legacy of the Great War, 1919-1939', *French History and Civilization* 2 (2009), pp. 101-119.

[28] Sometimes, the integration of the Germans in Normandy appears even more natural than the often difficult return of POWs to reality in the home country after the end of the war, and where few things lived up the prisoners' expectations. F. Biess, *Homecomings, Returning POWs and the legacy of defeat in postwar Germany* (Princeton, 2006). Even though Ottoman POWs of World War I had decidedly contributed to the construction of the nationalist framework in post-war Turkey, they were sometimes considered "contaminated" with germs that would endanger the health of the nation after their return from captivity from camps in Russia and Egypt. Cf. Y. Yanikdag, *Healing the Nation, Prisoners of War, Medicine and Nationalism in Turkey, 1914-1939* (Edinburgh, 2013).

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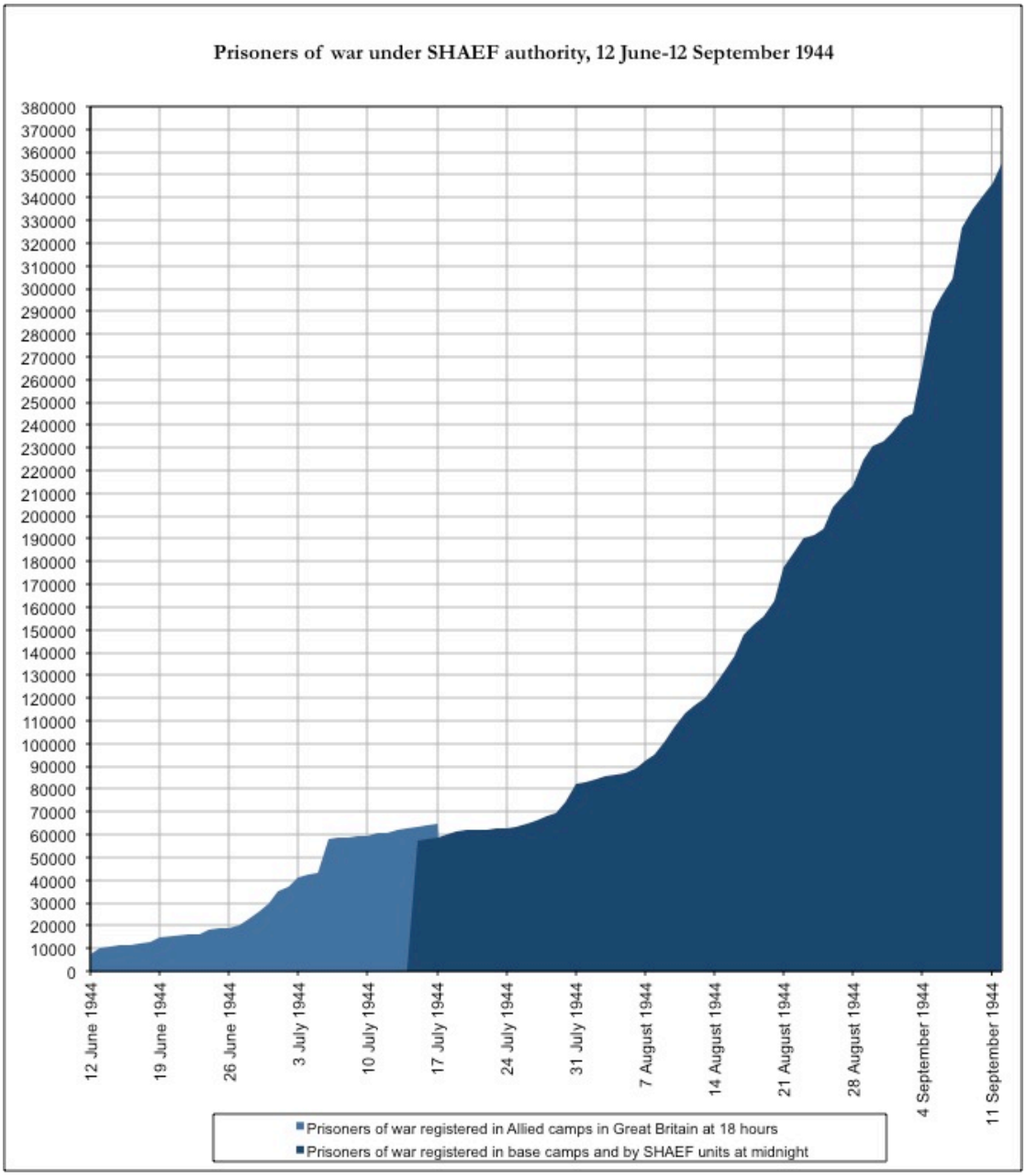
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Annexes



Source : SHAEF, G-1, Daily prisoner of war report, 12 June-30 November 1944, TNA, WO 219/1449

No information exists for 15 June 1944. The step on 6 July is due to the fact that, from this date, the figures include approximately 10,000 prisoners captured in northern Cotentin in transit, still present on the continent and waiting for their transfer to Great Britain. The doubling of data between July 15 and 17 is due to the fact that, until 17 July, we dispose of the number of the figures of prisoners registered by American and British base camps in Great-Britain and, between July 6 and 17, we have the figures of prisoners in transit on the continent. From 15 July, the figures given by SHAEF group the total of prisoners from the operations in northern Europe in Allied hands, on the continent and in Great Britain.

Allied labour camps for German prisoners of war in Normandy

Authority	Place	Name	Opened	Closed	Capacity
US	Cherbourg	Labor Enclosure 114	November 1944 (?)		350
US	Utah Beach	PWL 25 A	November 1944 (?)		210
US	Utah Beach	?	November 1944 (?)		4 000
US	Utah Beach	?	November 1944 (?)		5 000
US	Utah Beach	*15 labour camps*	November 1944 (?)		100 – 400
US	La Glacerie	112 A	October 1944		8 000
US	Cherbourg	PWL 31	February 1945		700
US	Cherbourg "Arsenal"	PW Enclosure 56 C	October 1944		3 100
US	Cherbourg "Terraplane"	Labor Stockade 112 D	December 1944		1 000
US	Cherbourg "Arsenal"	Stockade 112 F	September 1944		1 000
US	Tourlaville	PWE 104 LSCo	November 1944		900
US	Saint-Pierre-Eglise	PWE 109 LSCo	January 1945		600
US	Cherbourg	Stockade 112 G	April 1945		250
US	La Glacerie	Stockade 120	March 1945		570
US	Colleville	Stockade RSCo 55 A	January 1945	June 1945	750
US	Couville		July 1945		
US	Valognes	PWE 30 Bakery	February 1945		505
US	Chef-du-Pont	Stockade 54 C	May 1945		800
US	Valognes	Stockade 28	June 1945		285
US	Carentan	Stockade 63 A	June 1945		500
US	Lithaire	Stockade 254	April 1945		200
US	Mosles	Stockade 22	?		260
US	Vaubadon	Stockade 35	July 1945		1 020
US	Philip Morris	Block 2	May 1945		2 900
US	Philip Morris	Stockade 7	May 1945		2 900
US	Philip Morris	Block 1	June 1945		1 050
US	Philip Morris	Block 3	August 1945		1 250
US	Philip Morris	1585 Motor Pool	November 1945		670
US	Herbert Tareyton	1416 Lbr Spvn Co	?		800
US	Herbert Tareyton	1419 Lbr Spvn Co	?		640
US	Herbert Tareyton	1508 Lbr Spvn Co	?		1 100
US	Herbert Tareyton	1531 Lbr Spvn Co	January 1945		1 100
US	Herbert Tareyton	1556 Lbr Spvn Co	October 1945		510
US	Aéroport du Havre	Camp Wings	?		800
US	Fort de Sainte-Adresse	Camp Home Run	?		630
US	Rouen	1603 Lbr Spvn Co	?		600
US	Port du Havre	26 A Engr Encl	March 1945		780
US	Port du Havre	26 A Engr Encl	?		300
US	Le Havre	16th Port Encl No 2	?		1 400
US	Le Havre	16th Port Encl No 3	April 1945		780
US	Le Havre	16th Port Encl No 4	November 1945		2 000
US	Le Havre	16th Port Encl No 5	May 1945		1 300
US	Le Havre	16th Port Encl No 7	?		1 100
US	Le Havre	Transatlantic Docks	July 1945		900
US	Le Havre	0 -684 Prov Group A	?		1 050
US	Le Havre	1472nd Engrs	May 1945		250
US	Le Havre	1051st Engrs	?		580
US	Le Havre	Lucky Strike	?	January 1946	500

Chart to be continued on the following page.

Continuation of the chart on the preceding page.

Authority	Place	Name	Opened	Closed	Capacity
US	Le Havre	Q 181 Encl 1	December 1944		5 400
US	Le Havre	Q 181 Encl 2	?		1 400
US	Petit-Quevilly	Stockade 3	December 1944		670
US	Forges-les-Eaux	1603 Lbr Spvn Co	?		?
US	Pavilly	Lbr Spvn Co Camp	June 1945		250
US	Alizay	E 517	April 1945		2 500
US	Duclair	Twenty Grand	?		1 000
US	Philip Morris	Stockade 7	February 1946		500
US	Carentan	Camp AGRC	?		410
UK	Sully/Vaucelles	N° 1 PW Labour Brick	November 1944	March 1945	3 200
UK	Fleury-sur-Orne	N° 2 PW Labour Brick	November 1944	March 1945	3 200
UK	Audrieu	N° 3 PW Labour Brick	November 1944	June 1945	3 200
UK	Arques-la-Bataille	N° 4 PW Labour Brick	December 1944	January 1945	3 200
UK	Petit-Quevilly		January 1945	May 1945	3 200

Sources: Visiting reports of the International Committee of the Red Cross, ACICR; Historical reports of the Normandy Base Section, NARA, RG 498; Historical reports of the Chanor Base Section, NARA, RG 498; War diaries of British labour camps, TNA, WO 171; K.W. Böhme, In amerikanischer Hand/Europa, pp. 106-107.

British labour companies for German prisoners of war and organisation in Normandy, Autumn 1944 – spring 1945

Centre	Place	Unit	Period of activity
N° 1 PW Labour Brick	Sully/Vaucelles	720 German Labour Company	November 1944 – March 1945
		721 German Labour Company	
		722 German Labour Company	
		723 German Labour Company	
		724 German Labour Company	
		725 German Labour Company	
		726 German Labour Company	
		727 German Labour Company	
		728 German Labour Company	
		729 German Labour Company	
N° 2 PW Labour Brick	Fleury-sur-Orne	710 German Labour Company	November 1944 – March 1945
		711 German Labour Company	
		712 German Labour Company	
		713 German Labour Company	
		714 German Labour Company	
		715 German Labour Company	
		716 German Labour Company	
		717 German Labour Company	
		718 German Labour Company	
		719 German Labour Company	
N° 3 PW Labour Brick	Audrieu	700 German Labour Company	November 1944 – June 1945
		701 German Labour Company	November 1944 – April 1945
		702 German Labour Company	
		703 German Labour Company	
		704 German Labour Company	November 1944 – May 1945
		705 German Labour Company	November 1944 – April 1945
		706 German Labour Company	
		707 German Labour Company	
		708 German Labour Company	
		709 German Labour Company	

Chart to be continued on the following page.

Continuation of the chart on the preceding page.

Centre	Place	Unit	Period of activity
N° 4 PW Labour Brick	Arques-la-Bataille	730 German Labour Company	December 1944 – January 1945
	Petit-Quevilly		January – May 1945
	Arques-la-Bataille	731 German Labour Company	December 1944 – January 1945
	Petit-Quevilly		January – May 1945
	Arques-la-Bataille	732 German Labour Company	December 1944 – January 1945
	Petit-Quevilly		January – May 1945
	Arques-la-Bataille	733 German Labour Company	December 1944 – January 1945
	Petit-Quevilly		January – May 1945
	Arques-la-Bataille	734 German Labour Company	December 1944 – January 1945
	Petit-Quevilly		January – May 1945
	Arques-la-Bataille	735 German Labour Company	December 1944 – January 1945
	Petit-Quevilly		January – May 1945
	Arques-la-Bataille	736 German Labour Company	December 1944 – January 1945
	Petit-Quevilly		January – May 1945
	Arques-la-Bataille	737 German Labour Company	December 1944 – January 1945
	Petit-Quevilly		January – May 1945
	Arques-la-Bataille	738 German Labour Company	December 1944 – January 1945
	Petit-Quevilly		January – May 1945
	Saleux (Somme)	739 German Labour Company	December 1944 – January 1945
	Petit-Quevilly		January – May 1945

Source: War diaries of labour companies, TNA, WO 171.

Structure of 147th Labor Supervision Center, Le Havre, 8 May 1945

Labor Supervision Center	Labor Supervision Company	Labor Service Company
147th Labor Supervision Center	1522 Labor Supervision Company	8191 Labor Service Company
	1527 Labor Supervision Company	8194 Labor Service Company
	1683 Labor Supervision Company	8184 Labor Service Company
		8610 Labor Service Company
	1565 Labor Supervision Company	8899 Labor Service Company
	1431 Labor Supervision Company	8345 Labor Service Company
	1571 Labor Supervision Company	8203 Labor Service Company
	1414 Labor Supervision Company	8888 Labor Service Company
		8884 Labor Service Company
	1674 Labor Supervision Company	8889 Labor Service Company
	1416 Labor Supervision Company	8895 Labor Service Company
		8896 Labor Service Company
		8346 Labor Service Company
	1465 Labor Supervision Company	8395 Labor Service Company
	1227 Labor Supervision Company	8220 Labor Service Company
	1464 Labor Supervision Company	8394 Labor Service Company
	1545 Labor Supervision Company	8217 Labor Service Company
	1462 Labor Supervision Company	8392 Labor Service Company
	1971 Labor Supervision Company	8971 Labor Service Company

Source: Headquarters, 147th Labor Supervision Center, Northern District, Normandy Base Section, Communication Zone, European Theater of Operations, APO 562 US Army, 314.7 MLS, Subject: Weekly Historical Report For Week Ending 2400 Hours 12 May 1945, 14 May 1945, NARA, RG 338, Box 4728, Entry 37042.

Elements composing the Labor Supervision Centers of 16th Port-Area (Le Havre), January 1946

Labor Supervision Center	Camp	Labor Supervision Company	Labor Service Company
128th Labor Supervision Center	Philip Morris Block 2	1919 Labor Supervision Company	8518 Labor Service Company
			8519 Labor Service Company
			8345 Labor Service Company
			7117 Labor Service Company
		1521 Labor Supervision Company	8192 Labor Service Company
			8194 Labor Service Company
		1527 Labor Supervision Company	8361 Labor Service Company
			8191 Labor Service Company
	Philip Morris Stockade 7	1571 Labor Supervision Company	8184 Labor Service Company
		1683 Labor Supervision Company	8252 Labor Service Company
			8199 Labor Service Company
			8145 Labor Service Company
		1497 Labor Supervision Company	8259 Labor Service Company
			8199 Labor Service Company
		1921 Labor Supervision Company	8247 Labor Service Company
			8212 Labor Service Company
		1601 Labor Supervision Company	8539 Labor Service Company
	Philip Morris Block 1	1586 Labor Supervision Company	8538 Labor Service Company
			8492 Labor Service Company
	Philip Morris Block 3	1943 Labor Supervision Company	8193 Labor Service Company
			8263 Labor Service Company
			7437 Labor Service Company
	Philip Morris	?	1585 Motor Pool
136th Labor Supervision Center	Herbert Tareyton	1416 Labor Supervision Company	8887 Labor Service Company
			8253 Labor Service Company
			8346 Labor Service Company
			8893 Labor Service Company
		1419 Labor Supervision Company	8349 Labor Service Company
			8890 Labor Service Company
		1508 Labor Supervision Company	8031 Labor Service Company
			9198 Labor Service Company
			8506 Labor Service Company
		1531 Labor Supervision Company	8212 Labor Service Company
			8227 Labor Service Company
			8228 Labor Service Company
			8235 Labor Service Company
		1556 Labor Supervision Company	7183 Labor Service Company
			7182 Labor Service Company

Chart to be continued on the following page.

Continuation of the chart on the preceding page.

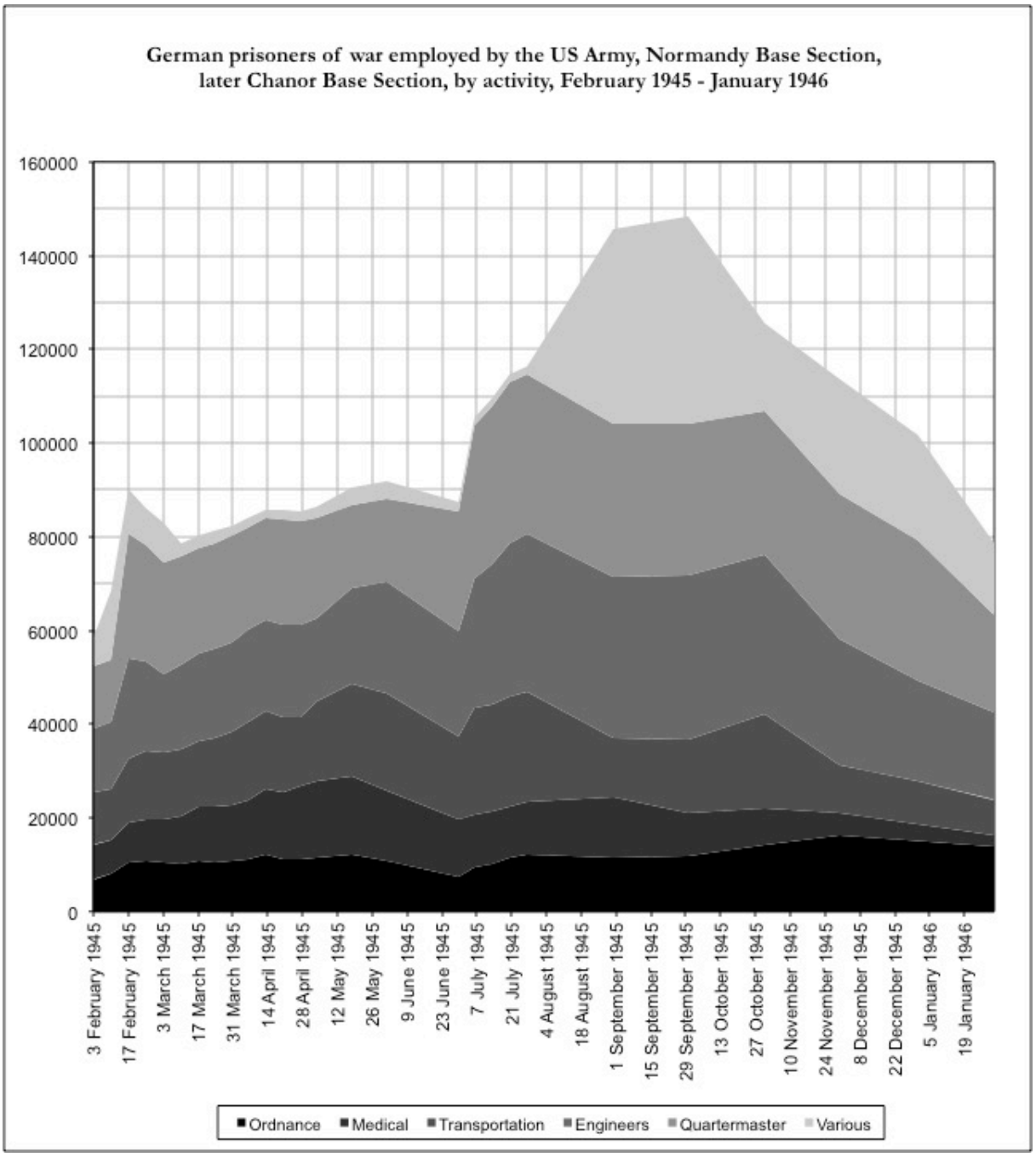
Labor Supervision Center	Camp	Labor Supervision Company	Labor Service Company
138th Labor Supervision Center	Camp Wings	1606 Labor Supervision Company	7394 Labor Service Company
			8505 Labor Service Company
			8509 Labor Service Company
	Camp Home Run	1219 Labor Supervision Company	8024 Labor Service Company
			7132 Labor Service Company
	? (Rouen)	1603 Labor Supervision Company	8166 Labor Service Company
			8167 Labor Service Company
			8357 Labor Service Company
		1588 Labor Supervision Company	8156 Labor Service Company
	26 A Engr. Encl.	1429 Labor Supervision Company	8891 Labor Service Company
			8892 Labor Service Company
		1021 Labor Supervision Company	8851 Labor Service Company
			8354 Labor Service Company
	16th Port Encl. No 2	1517 Labor Supervision Company	8204 Labor Service Company
			8205 Labor Service Company
			8222 Labor Service Company
		1589 Labor Supervision Company	8213 Labor Service Company
			8214 Labor Service Company
			8502 Labor Service Company
	16th Port Encl. No 3	1589 Labor Supervision Company	8223 Labor Service Company
			8224 Labor Service Company
			8225 Labor Service Company
	16th Port Encl. No 4	1520 Labor Supervision Company	8503 Labor Service Company
			8504 Labor Service Company
			2809 Labor Service Company
		1676 Labor Supervision Company	8206 Labor Service Company
			8215 Labor Service Company
			8216 Labor Service Company
			8518 Labor Service Company
			8161 Labor Service Company
	16th Port Encl. No 5	?	?
	16th Port Encl. No 7	1532 Labor Supervision Company	8508 Labor Service Company
			8600 Labor Service Company
		1220 Labor Supervision Company	8033 Labor Service Company
			8035 Labor Service Company

Chart to be continued on the following page.

Continuation of the chart on the preceding page.

Labor Supervision Center	Camp	Labor Supervision Company	Labor Service Company
147th Labor Supervision Center	Transatlantic Docks	1289 Labor Supervision Company	8045 Labor Service Company
			8458 Labor Service Company
		1433 Labor Supervision Company	8363 Labor Service Company
			8899 Labor Service Company
			8439 Labor Service Company
		1427 Labor Supervision Company	7405 Labor Service Company
	0 -684 Prov. Group « A »	1462 Labor Supervision Company	8392 Labor Service Company
			8395 Labor Service Company
		1464 Labor Supervision Company	8394 Labor Service Company
		1474 Labor Supervision Company	8403 Labor Service Company
		1481 Labor Supervision Company	8411 Labor Service Company
		1486 Labor Supervision Company	8220 Labor Service Company
			8416 Labor Service Company
	1472nd Engrs	1545 Labor Supervision Company	8217 Labor Service Company
	1051st Engrs	1674 Labor Supervision Company	7405 Labor Service Company
149th Labor Supervision Center	Q 181 Encl. 1	1487 Labor Supervision Company	8151 Labor Service Company
			8417 Labor Service Company
			8491 Labor Service Company
		1490 Labor Supervision Company	8152 Labor Service Company
			8153 Labor Service Company
			8420 Labor Service Company
			8490 Labor Service Company
		1529 Labor Supervision Company	8154 Labor Service Company
			8459 Labor Service Company
			8461 Labor Service Company
		1530 Labor Supervision Company	8460 Labor Service Company
			8469 Labor Service Company
			8461 Labor Service Company
		1555 Labor Supervision Company	8450 Labor Service Company
			8462 Labor Service Company
		1579 Labor Supervision Company	8438 Labor Service Company
			8507 Labor Service Company
		1581 Labor Supervision Company	8257 Labor Service Company
			8447 Labor Service Company
			8779 Labor Service Company
			8262 Labor Service Company
	Q 181 Encl. 2	1519 Labor Supervision Company	8258 Labor Service Company
			8268 Labor Service Company
			8180 Labor Service Company
			8449 Labor Service Company
		1670 Labor Supervision Company	Pas de prisonniers de guerre
		1686 Labor Supervision Company	8188 Labor Service Company

Source: Comité International de la Croix-Rouge, Rapport de visite, Labor Supervision Centres de la région du Havre, visités par M. R. Porchet le 28 janvier 1946 (en mains américaines), undated, ACICR, collection without signature.



Source: Historical reports of Normandy Base Section, NARA, RG 498.