

TAKING CONTROL

Women of Lorient, France Direct their Lives Despite
the German Occupation (June 1940-May 1945)

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Thesis submitted to the faculty of the Virginia
Polytechnic Institute and State University in partial
fulfillment of requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

in

History (Area Studies)

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December, 2002

Blacksburg, Virginia

Taking Control

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Abstract

This thesis argues that from June 1940 when German soldiers occupied Lorient, France until May 8, 1945 when the Lorient “Pocket” surrendered, although the women of this port city faced drastic changes, they took control of their everyday lives. They did what it took to feed and clothe their families, working, standing in lines, buying on the black market, bartering, demonstrating, and recycling. They developed relationships with German soldiers which ran the gamut. Due to aerial raids in the context of the Battle of the Atlantic, they sought shelter, buried their dead, took care of their wounded, looked for new lodging, and helped each other. They even tried to have some fun. After evacuation in early 1943, scattered to the four winds, in the American held “Lorient Sector,” they served as advocates for others and made inquiries to the American 66th Infantry Division Counter-Intelligence Service. At the Liberation women were easy targets for blame, and some from Lorient were punished, notably for “horizontal collaboration” with Germans. When the Fiftieth Anniversary of the Liberation of Lorient was celebrated in 1995, the story of the women of Lorient was essentially left out.

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Preface & Acknowledgments

I have always been interested in World War II, most likely because I was born only nine years after it ended to parents, who as teenagers had listened over the radio to details of this unfolding conflict and had been profoundly moved by it.

When at Christmastime 1981 I met my future parents-in-law in Larmor-Plage, near Lorient in Brittany, France, we took a ride along the Atlantic coast. As they pointed out portions of the collapsing Atlantic Wall, their memories poured forth. My father-in-law Alexis at age twenty-six, serving in the Colonial Infantry had been sent to Madagascar by Vichy France. When the English invaded that island in May 1942, he had been ordered to resist. After a period of uncertainty where he and his fellow soldiers laid low wondering what the triumphant English would do to them, Madagascar was handed over to the Free French Forces, which Alexis joined. Subsequently, we have filmed him telling his stories that continue on to French Indochina, Senegal, and Cold War Berlin where he hunted spies.

Twenty-one years old in 1940, my mother-in-law Mimi had lived in German Occupied Lorient. She had gotten so tired of seeking shelter during the air raids that she began standing out of doors trying to decide where the bombs hit. An incendiary bomb had fallen through their greenhouse but had failed to explode. When the post office

where her father worked was destroyed, he as well as everyone else walked out unscathed from the basement.¹



Figure 1: What remained of the Lorient Post Office (Jan 1943). Permission granted by **AML**.

¹ There is proof of this in the Lorient Archives: A Prefectural Report: Postes, Télégraphes et Téléphones "The personnel who took refuge in a shored up cellar were able to walk out unscathed with the exception of two who were slightly wounded," *Les Archives Municipales de Lorient* (The Municipal Archives of Lorient in France, hereafter **AML**), Box number 16 W 8.

She remembered pointing out the absolute opposite route to a German soldier asking his way. One day she and her mother, afraid of being raped by German soldiers, had momentarily hid themselves and their bicycles off the road. Yet as a refugee in Plouay, Mimi had also cycled to a farm for the very scarce ingredients needed to bake a celebratory cake when her cousin's baby was born.



Figure 2: Mimi on her “Petite Reine”,² the main means of civilian transportation.

² « Little Queen »

When Plouay was liberated, she had kissed an American soldier. Mimi proudly gave her new dog an American name, “Welcome.” In Plouay Mimi had also seen women, whose heads were shaved, lined up against the wall of the church and shot. “Abominable,” she would add when recounting this latter incident. Over the years as she told more stories, her general message seemed to be that they were all just trying to get by, and her refrain was that the war years had ruined her youth.

Mimi’s compelling pieces of memory left me with the desire to get a better feel for everyday life for women during the German Occupation of this port city. I also set out to test whether French women there were just trying to live from day to day and how the Occupation interrupted the lives of the younger ones. What I found was women courageously conducting their lives in order to take care of their families under very harsh conditions.

I first wish to thank Dr. Frederic J. Baumgartner, the Chairman of my thesis committee, who patiently guided me from a first draft which amounted to little more than a research report to an acceptable thesis. His was not an easy row to hoe. Thank you for reading, critiquing, and sharing your knowledge. Having learned greatly from Dr. Sue Farquhar and Dr. Amy Nelson’s excellent Area Studies Methods course, I was honored when they also agreed to serve on my committee. Thank you for encouraging, for reading the thesis, and for providing such valuable feedback. I am indebted as well to Dr. Arthur Hirsh who, during two independent studies in 1999-2000, taught me academic writing techniques while making sure I read the classics concerning World War II and

France. He also strengthened my background in French history from 1789 to the present. I also wish to thank Dr. Jacqueline Bixler, Area Studies Director, for awarding me five hundred dollars towards doing research in the Lorient Archives, an incredible privilege.

Madame Patricia Drénou, Director of the *Archives Municipales de Lorient*, very kindly agreed to extend hours to make my brief stay as fruitful as possible. Mr. Jean-François Noblet, *Agent de Valorisation du Patrimoine*, was truly there for me, making suggestions, photocopies, and phone calls. I am also very grateful to Dr. Luc Capdevila, *maitre de conférences en histoire contemporaine à l'université Rennes 2*, for suggesting that I stop by his office while in France. I appreciate his explanations, the articles he gave me, as well as his introductions to Dr. Fabrice Virgili and Dr. Daniëlle Voldman at *l'Institut de l'Histoire du Temps Présent (IHTP)*.

The National Archives at College Park, Maryland would have been overwhelming if Mr. David Giordano, Military Reference Archivist, had not been there to assist. As soon as I mentioned the 66th Infantry Division, he handed me a description of the content of relevant boxes. Mr. Robert Thompson, Archives Motion Picture Technician, directed me to a touching silent film made by the U.S. army somewhere in Brittany in which old men, young women, and children came out to greet arriving American soldiers.

Marie-Thérèse Cloerec, Mimi's first cousin, very kindly granted three telephone interviews in 1999 during which she recounted many memories of the war years. She was twelve years old in 1940, lived in nearby Port-Louis, and spent part of the

Occupation with Mimi. I also wish to thank Madame Denise Duchadeuil, one of Mimi's close friends, for writing down five pages of memories of her life in Occupied Paris, in March 2001. Finally, although I did not meet her, I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to Madame Yvette Bardouil Cadet who so very courageously wrote the story of her family, faced with terrible trials in Lorient during the German Occupation, for the *Archives Municipales de Lorient*.³ Her document was essential to this thesis.

Above all, without the loving support and tolerance of my husband Christian and daughter Shannon I would never have realized a Master's degree or a thesis. At the beginning, it was especially jolting for a fifth grader to see her mother absorbed in studying and writing papers rather than in taking care of her full time. But she has started high school now and is quite independent.

³ Yvette Bardouil Cadet, *Une petite fille dans la guerre, Récit d'Yvette Bardouil*, (AML 7 HB 125, 1996), 1-34. Hereafter, Yvette's memoir.

Chapter 1

Thesis statement and literature

Thesis Statement

To give women the place they deserve on the historical scene, to grant them an historical status, to measure the gap between 'events' as defined in the history books and the weight of the everyday, is one means of understanding, from the inside, the real importance of the war.

Dominique Veillon⁴

The examination of the “attitude” of women who did not take sides but who instead concentrated on the day to day is of interest as well. One can also assess the extent of the disruptions the war caused and the importance of the defeat to civilians through the prism of the life of women. They were in the front ranks of those subjected to deprivations and transformations caused by severe shortages.⁵

⁴ « Donner aux femmes la place qu'elles méritent sur la scène de l'histoire, leur octroyer un statut historique valable, mesurer le décalage entre les 'événements' au sens plein du terme et le poids du quotidien, c'est pourtant l'un des moyens de comprendre, de l'intérieur, l'importance réelle de la guerre. » Dominique Veillon, « La vie quotidienne des femmes sous l'Occupation, » in *1939-1945: combats de femmes Françaises et Allemandes, les oubliées de l'histoire*, ed. Evelyne Morin-Rotureau (Paris : Editions Autrement, 2001), 32.

⁵ « La vie quotidienne des femmes sous l'Occupation, » 32-33.

Up until now, only snatches of stories about the women of Lorient, France during World War II have been written.⁶ It is noteworthy that they courageously took control of their lives to provide for their families despite the extraordinary circumstances they could not avoid.

The Germans occupied Lorient in June 1940. German U-boat Commander-in-Chief Karl Donitz chose this city as his headquarters. The German Todt Organization built a submarine base there, a veritable fortress, over a four year period. U-boats left this harbor to participate in the Battle of the Atlantic. For this reason Lorient was bombed by the Allies more times than there are days in a year. The aerial raids became so destructive in the first two months of 1943 that a majority of the population was forced to evacuate the city, seeking refuge in the surrounding area and beyond. After D-Day, June 6, 1944, General George Patton's 3rd Army began operations in Brittany. In August, the 4th Armored Division failed to take Lorient, where thousands of German soldiers were holed up and would remain so until May 8, 1945, VE Day. From January to May 1945,

⁶ Christian Bougeard, ed., *Bretagne et Identités Régionales Pendant la Seconde Guerre Mondiale, Actes du Colloque international (15-17 novembre 2001)* (Brest : Centre de Recherche Bretonne et Celtique, 2002), 24, 26-27, 79, 86, 275-276, 346, 348. ; Louis Bourguet-Maurice and Josyane Grand Colas, *Et la tanière devint le village* (Rennes : Editions du Quantième, 1997) 13, 16, 42, 59, 70-72, 75, 79. ; Luc Capdevila, « La 'collaboration sentimentale' : antipatriotisme ou sexualité hors-normes ? (Lorient mai 1945), » 24 January 2001, <http://www.ihtp-cnrs.ens-cachan.fr/publi.../cahier31/coll_lorient_capdevila_31.html> (30 January 2002), 1-11. (This a scholarly analysis of information discovered by Dr. Capdevila at the *Archives Départementales d'Ille-et-Vilaine*); Jean Le Berd, *Lorient sous l'occupation* (Rennes: Editions Ouest-France, 1986), 2-3, 15, 17-18, 20-21, 26-28, 52-53, 69, 71-73, 78, 81-84, 86-88, 90-94, 99, 112, 117-118, 125, 129, 136, 140-141, 153-154. ; Hervé Le Boterf, *La Bretagne dans la guerre* (Paris : Editions France-Empire, 2000), 79, 122, 150-153, 196, 272, 292, 302, 304, 306, 366, 385-386, 437. Roger Leroux, *Le Morbihan en Guerre 1939-1945* (Mayenne : Joseph Floch Imprimeur Editeur, 1979), 17-18, 21-22, 27, 29-30, 33-37, 40-44, 49-56, 70, 76-77, 83-84, 87, 89, 97-98, 113-118, 122, 125-126, 130-131, 133, 151, 156-157, 168, 176-177, 184-185, 187, 190, 194, 196, 198-204, 226-228, 231-236, 271-272, 295, 297-298. ; Jean-Paul Queuille, *Lorient dans la guerre* (Montreuil-Bellay : Editions C.M.D.), cover, 7-8, 11, 13, 15, 17, 23, 25, 27-29, 31, 37, 46-47, 57, 89, 91, 95, 101-102, 107, 109, 115-117. ; Eric Rondel, *Lorient * Saint Nazaire, Les Poches de l'Atlantique* (Editions Astoure, 2001). ; 31-32, 49, 118, 141, 186. (N.B. Some of the pages recorded in this footnote refer *indirectly* to the women of Lorient.)

the American 66th Infantry Division “contained” the Germans in their “Lorient Pocket” operating from the surrounding area, the “Lorient Sector.”⁷

This thesis examines how, despite all of this, the women of Lorient conducted their lives. They went out to see arriving German soldiers, bent the truth, and buried their valuables. Some were involved in the Resistance. They stood in lines for food, bought on the black market, bartered, demonstrated for bread, butter and potatoes, and clothed their families.

They gave German soldiers the benefit of the doubt, had German lovers, or feared the Germans. They reacted to aerial raids by seeking shelter, burying their dead, visiting their wounded, finding new lodging, and helping each other. When possible, they sent their children to school and maintained contact with daughters and sons no longer living at home. They even tried to have some fun.

In the “Lorient Sector,” some ran internationally recognized organizations and others acted as advocates. They kept their families together by making inquiries to American authorities and by exploiting unlawful postal “circuits.” Some informed for the Germans; others informed for the Allies. They ran their lives.

⁷ Chapter V “Score Is Evened,” <<http://bv.net/~gaffer/07-05.htm>> (1 June 2002), 2 and 3 of 9.

The Literature

There is an abundance of noteworthy scholarship concerning France and the World War II era. The principal concerns of the books highlighted below are collaboration, the hardships of daily existence, reactions to war, gender in relation to war, and the Resistance. They are important to this thesis because they not only provided essential information, but they further suggested paths of research, and later, ways of analyzing the information gathered.

Vichy France, Old Guard and New Order, by Robert O. Paxton, was the breakthrough book on this period published in 1972. Through research in the German archives, Paxton showed that the Vichy government under Marshal Pétain had cooperated extensively with its conquerors.

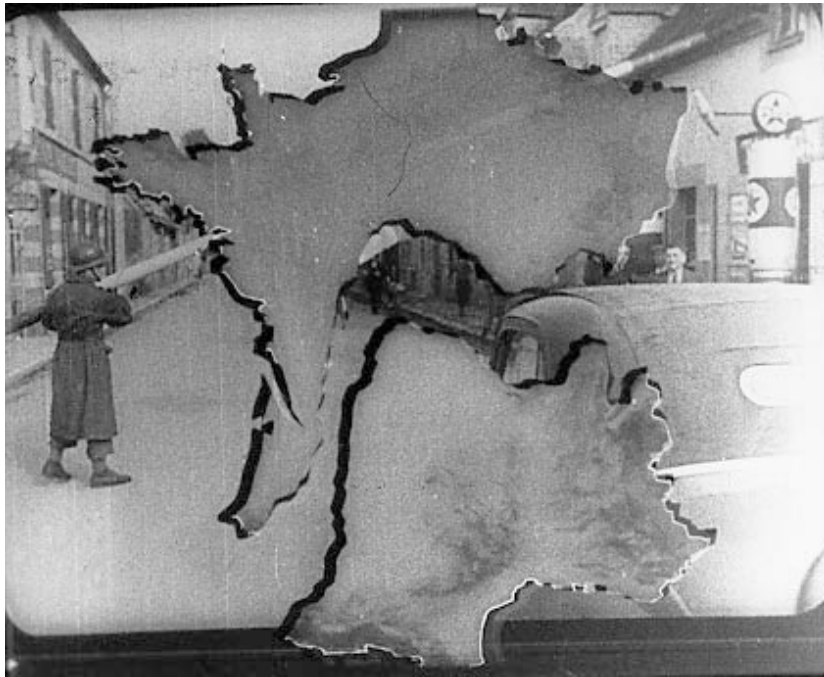


Figure 3: France divided along the Demarcation Line (occupied zone at top). Copyright release granted by Ina.

Paxton argued that Vichy, ignoring that Germany had defeated France militarily, worked enthusiastically with the Nazis in view of an important position, due to a fleet and empire it still controlled, in Hitler's future Europe, as Germany's equal. But as Paxton pointed out, Hitler held all the trump cards: an army occupying France, police, and French POWs. Also, Paxton informed his readers, France was forced to assume total "occupation costs." He concluded that things worked out for a while since Vichy was interested in its right to be and Hitler in this "useful fiction."

Paxton concluded that the Vichy government ultimately failed, losing support of its citizens, falling short of maintaining order, causing the "standard of living" to fall, as well as lacking control over the flow of mandatory French workers to Germany. Furthermore,

the attempt by Vichy to carry out a “National Revolution,” a series of rightwing moral reforms, under enemy occupation was doomed from the start.⁸

Wishing to open his discussion beyond collaboration, Philippe Burrin developed the concept of “accommodation” in *Living with Defeat, France under the German Occupation 1940-1944*. Burrin went farther than politics and a body of concepts, moving towards the comprehension of “numerous choices of adaptation made by French society as a whole.” Based on his research in French, German, and Italian archives, he argued that the setting for these choices was a blurred impression of the Germans, uncertainty about the outcome of World War II, disagreement over what was best for the country, as well as the oppressiveness of procuring food and other necessary commodities.⁹

Dominique Veillon pointed out in her introduction to *Vivre et Survivre en France 1939-1947* a theme encountered in the “everyday grayness” described by people evoking 1939-1947. They mostly remembered accomplishing material tasks. Veillon stated that whereas the topics of Vichy and the Resistance have been studied a great deal, historians have hardly touched on day-to-day life for the 38 million French during World War II. So she investigated this “exceptional” period in which “the banal is extraordinary.” While listening to people speak about this historical moment, she did not hear them emphasize politics or battles; instead they spoke of the flight of eight million

⁸ Robert O. Paxton, *Vichy France, Old Guard and New Order 1940-1944* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1972), 51-53, 58-59, 62, 262, 281, 361, 364, 366-369, 371, 375.

⁹ Phillippe Burrin, *Living with Defeat France under the German Occupation 1940-1944* (London: Arnold, 1996), viii.

French as the Germans invaded in May 1940 (*l'exode*), or their country's defeat, or rationing.

She discussed her sources at length, finding rewarding the examination of "private archives," notebooks, notes, handwritten accounts, as well as memoirs of politicians since even they included such topics as the price of food on the black market. The National Archives also provided a wealth of information. Reading prefect and police reports revealed the rise and rate of dissatisfaction of the people. The Food Supply Ministry reports covered the results of rationing as well as black market controls. The number of letters seized by postal officials betrayed growing discontent. This correspondence also divulged people's distress. Women's magazines provided a feel for the times, especially recipes. Veillon also scrutinized illustrations and news reports shown at the cinema. She consulted the *IHTP* study called "*Le temps des restrictions*" (The time of restrictions) in order to better understand the impact of shortages on people's lives. She discovered that people became used to waiting for very few commodities. Of course, Veillon pointed out, those living in the country did have more. She discovered that there were substitutes for everything, and people learned to get by. This was also a time of generosity. Veillon concluded that Jews were being persecuted, members of the Resistance hunted down, and the Allies were bombing France, but everyday concerns were more significant.¹⁰

¹⁰ Dominique Veillon, *Vivre et Survivre en France 1939-1947* (Paris: Histoire Payot, 1995), 7-11.

In *We Will Wait, Wives of French Prisoners of War, 1940-1945*, Dr. Sarah Fishman contended that women whose husbands were POWs faced alone a lost war, received little money from the state to counterbalance the absence of their husbands' earnings, suffered through lack of food and provisions, and brought up children. Fishman found that although these women were independent, they longed to revert to a situation where they would take care of the children and their husbands would earn a living and control the finances.

Fishman felt that her research elucidated a self-contradictory statement concerning the effect of "twentieth-century wars on society...continuity beneath apparent change." These women believed in their traditional role. Fishman further stated that recent research has gone deeper than the fact that women entered the workforce during war; it has also made clearer "the paradoxical shift from wartime liberation of women to their postwar domestication."¹¹

Continuing her analysis, Fishman turned to the "politics of gender" and war. According to secondary literature that she examined,¹² to wage battle with arms is a masculine pursuit. She further argued that the adversary is depicted as feminine. Combat is represented as sexual mastery. Men at war form close personal relationships, stirring "homoeroticism and homophobia." Fishman proposed that men fight idealistically for women back home; on the other hand, they feel ill will towards the opposite sex that

¹¹ Sarah Fishman, *We Will Wait, Wives of French Prisoners of War, 1940-1945* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991), xi-xiv.

sends them to war and death. War is “sexual disorder.” Men, not around to enforce order, imagine that women will unleash their sexual desires.

Fishman’s research showed that French POWs moved to Germany in 1940 numbered 1,580,000. (940,000 were still being held in December, 1944.) 790,000 had spouses and 616,200 had children. Their wives had to assume burdens that were their husbands’ exclusive rights according to the French Civil Code. Fishman discovered that society portrayed POW wives as “hard-working, long-suffering heroines” or sexually unleashed seductresses or children requiring guiding and protecting.

In the rest of her book, she set out to examine the everyday circumstances of POW wives, the way Vichy interpreted their lives, as well as the Vichy handling of these women. She did so to enlighten the relationship between the “politics of war...and gender.” Based on interviews, Fishman also probed what it felt like to be a POW wife.

Fishman’s research highlighted that the Vichy government created two administrative divisions to care for these women. The guiding light was “paternalism;” the “agencies” would act as the absent husband, thus neglecting to notice these women’s survival skills. She also discovered that POW wives organized their own associations based on what they had in common, absent husbands held by the conqueror. She argued that they did not seek to revolutionize their roles, but merely to help each other assume the new responsibilities thrust upon them.

¹² Jean Elshtain, *Women at War* (New York: Basic Books, 1987). ; Helen Cooper et al., editors, *Arms and the Woman: war, gender, and literary representation* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1989).

Fishman used a variety of sources including articles and stories from women's magazines, novels, letters and essays that these women wrote themselves, as well as "personal testimonies" gathered both in the 1940s and the 1980s. Fishman remarked concerning the newer testimonies that, "There is no reason to suspect exaggeration. If anything, time has tempered the accounts of difficulties and hardships..."¹³

Margaret Collins Weitz targeted in her book, **Sisters in the Resistance, How Women Fought to Free France**, an audience that does not speak French but wishes to understand a complicated and disturbed time in France, 1940-1945. Reading it, she noted, would further provide one with insight to interpret events in France since World War II.

Weitz worked at the French National Archives, but she focused her monograph on interviews conducted in the 1980s with over eighty people in the Resistance. She narrowed the pool of stories to be included by maintaining her goal of imparting knowledge.

Women played a significant role in the Resistance by carrying out "mundane, repetitive, everyday tasks," which is one reason why their stories have not been fully told, according to Weitz. Since the backdrop was a military occupation, their seemingly commonplace pursuits were important and dangerous.

¹³ Fishman, xiv-xxi.

She continued that “oral narratives help fill in the broader historical canvas and provide rich psychological insights.” Nonetheless, they have their drawbacks. For example, the women interviewed would not criticize their fellow combatants. So Weitz could not effectively explore whether “sexual harassment” had occurred. She also remarked that the more educated the interviewee, the more she analyzed and examined her thoughts and feelings.

Weitz noticed that women who actually recorded their experiences did so seemingly in search of a new Resistance writing. Elsa Triolet decided to call the “art of the Resistance...an *avant-garde* art.” Marianne Bardini created a narrator to tell her story. Weitz quoted Paul Fussell to further add that some fiction is inevitably involved when one writes about her/his experiences. She further pointed out that historian Richard Cobb from Oxford based his monograph on “works of literature,” justifying this “on the grounds that experience not shared is an almost uncrossable barrier.” She concluded by accepting the bits of fiction that she may have included.¹⁴

In ***Reign of Virtue, Mobilizing Gender in Vichy France***, Miranda Pollard analyzed “official documents” in order to study the diverse ways in which “gender identities and power” were brought about and maintained. She argued that Vichy required the “politics of gender” to carry out its National Revolution. It sought to bring France back to an imaginary time when people knew what their role and responsibilities were, thus creating order. She stated that according to those in charge in Vichy, the

interwar years, characterized by great unrest, had caused France to be conquered. “A fundamental signifier of disorder had been the blurring of gender, the impact of modernism on sexual identity.” It was now time for men and women to return to their rightful sexual roles.

Pollard reminded her readers that when the Third Republic collapsed in 1940, women could not vote, were not feminists, and had no say-so in “public” debates. Their place was in the home providing for the family. She maintained that when Germany defeated France, this “exploded [the] boundaries of public and private, destroyed the sanctity of home and dramatically politicized family.” Out of this void arose the feasibility of women restoring France via the family. They would provide “social cohesion and...continuity” as well as an occasion for fundamental transformation.

In Pollard’s view “gender, women, and antifeminism *matter*” for four reasons. Exploring them can alter “dominant political narratives,” taking into account Vichy’s manipulation of the meaning of gender to build the image of France as desired. An analysis of this kind will also clarify Vichy’s ambitions; work done to achieve its ends, successes and lack of success. Since the ways Vichy viewed women allow measuring how women existed socially in the early forties, the resulting changed narrative can then enable the testing of other representations in such areas as “resistance, oppression,

¹⁴ Margaret Collins Weitz, *Sisters in the Resistance, How Women Fought to Free France 1940-1945* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1995), viii-ix.

collaboration, or *attentisme*.” Finally, Pollard wished to contribute to the movement of inserting French women into the history of World War II,¹⁵ as does this thesis.

¹⁵ Miranda Pollard, *Reign of Virtue, Mobilizing Gender in Vichy France* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1998), 5-8.

Chapter 2

Lorient during World War II

German soldiers marched into Paris on June 14, 1940. The next day, on June 15 they took over Rennes, the capital of Brittany. The *Préfet Maritime* of Lorient, Admiral Penfentenyo, now initiated efforts to resist the impending German arrival. He ordered that all ships in Lorient prepare to get under way, and fifty left before sunset. Warehouses and oil depots were on fire. Un-seaworthy ships had been scuttled. The fishing and merchant fleets took volunteers on board. The *Victor-Schoelcher* loaded more than six thousand crates of gold belonging to the Banks of Belgium and Poland, and left. The *Barbut* got underway, carrying the future Resistance fighter “Colonel Rémy” as well as money from the Bank of France in Lorient. Ships kept leaving until the Germans came six days later.¹⁶

¹⁶ Queuille, 9, 11.



Figure 4: Lorient and its surrounding area. Copyright release granted by **SCREP SAS**.

The German army bombed Lorient on June 17-18.¹⁷ On June 21 they arrived. Two platoons of French naval riflemen armed with automatic weapons and two 47 mm guns waited to fight back in Guidel at the *Cinq-Chemins*.¹⁸ Germans arriving from the west at 10 a.m. positioned guns 50 yards away from the French barrier. The confrontation lasted two hours. When an unconfirmed and false report reached the French that Admiral Penfentenyo had died, a colonel ordered a cease-fire and they waved a white flag. Six Frenchmen and seven Germans had been killed in the

¹⁷ AML, 4 RB 3.

¹⁸ Queuille, 9, 15.

skirmish.¹⁹ Lorient was given the choice of either flying a white flag or being subjected to further aerial bombings and artillery fire. At 5 p.m. German soldiers entered Lorient, which then surrendered.²⁰

On the first full day of the Occupation, June 22, in *Le Nouvelliste Du Morbihan*, a local newspaper, a notice signed “WELCKER, Commander-in-Chief of German troops,” called for “calm and order.” It declared that economic activity would be maintained. It warned against “thoughtless acts.” The Mayor and police were to be obeyed as usual and would be held responsible for maintaining order. Strong drinks would not be sold; only wine, cider, beer, soft drinks and fruit juices would be allowed. After 10 p.m. people could no longer drive around or assemble unless they were doctors, priests, or midwives. “Resistance and acts of sabotage... [were] pointless” and would result in severe repression if they occurred.²¹

Lorient was changing. The Nazi flag flew over all public buildings; road signs were written in German in gothic lettering in black on a white background; posters went up telling people to turn in their arms.²² The Germans issued further warnings. If a German soldier were killed, ten French people would be shot. Listening to British radio could be punished by death.²³ But since an armistice had just been concluded,²⁴ the people of

¹⁹ Le Berd, 19.

²⁰ Queuille, 11.

²¹ Le Berd, 21.

²² Queuille, 19.

²³ Leroux, 22.

²⁴ It was signed on June 25, 1940. Paxton, 3.

Lorient could keep their radios. France would go on German time. Authorization was necessary to drive around in a car or motorcycle. Prices could not be raised.

Public utilities were up and running again by June 27, 1940. But this did not signal a return to normal. There was now a curfew from 11 p.m. to 6 a.m. Store hours were from 8 a.m. to 7 p.m. Hotels and restaurants could operate from 8 a.m. to 10 p.m.

Newspapers would be censored.

Although the German command in Lorient had been appointed in June, on July 19 a restructuring took place. Military commander Ahland and Commanding officer of the city and port Captain Reimann were relieved. Major Thiele then took over as head of the new *Kreiskommandantur*. He was described as “affable, deeply Catholic, [and] desirous of keeping on good terms with the civilian population.” Colonel Hostbach became Commander of the Sector of Lorient.²⁵

Requisitions began. On July 20 Lorient was to supply: 443 beds, 123 straw mattresses, 318 bolsters, 115 slop pails, 140 pitchers, 55 pitchforks, 17 shovels, 18 wheelbarrows, 50-10 liter buckets, 80 tables, 80 benches, and 80 chairs.²⁶

Admiral Donitz, Commander-in-chief of the Third Reich’s submarine forces, had arrived in Lorient on June 23. The first U Boat refueled there on July 7. By August 2, the

²⁵ Leroux, 32-34. Apparently Major Thiele was too favorable towards the French for his own good. Fellow Germans criticized him for letting people go when they were accused of slight offenses. He had also “dared” voice his regret for “taking measures against” certain Jews whom he respected. On June 11, 1941 at the *Soldatenheim* in Vannes, an S.S. officer is said to have insulted him on purpose, and when Thiele answered sharply, he shot him to death. Thiele’s death was then covered up as a suicide. Leroux, 73-74.

²⁶ Leroux, 35.

naval dockyard was ready to make repairs.²⁷ Donitz occupied his Northern Atlantic Headquarters, only a few kilometers from Lorient, in a requisitioned manor in Kernevel, on August 29.



Figure 5: Admiral Donitz amongst his men. Permission granted by **AML**.

Construction of the Kéroman submarine base began in February 1941. Over 10,000 workers in the *Todt* Organization poured thousands of cubic meters of concrete. Since “Kéroman I,” a “bunker,” could only house certain boat types, it was determined that the construction of “K2” would begin in May 1941.²⁸ A third unit finished in 1943

²⁷ Queuille, 19.

²⁸ Bourguet, 31, 34-35.

enabled this base to house or repair 40 U-boats at a time. It was heavily defended.²⁹

The building of a submarine base as well as the bringing in of manpower caused Lorient problems of food, requisitions, and expropriations.³⁰

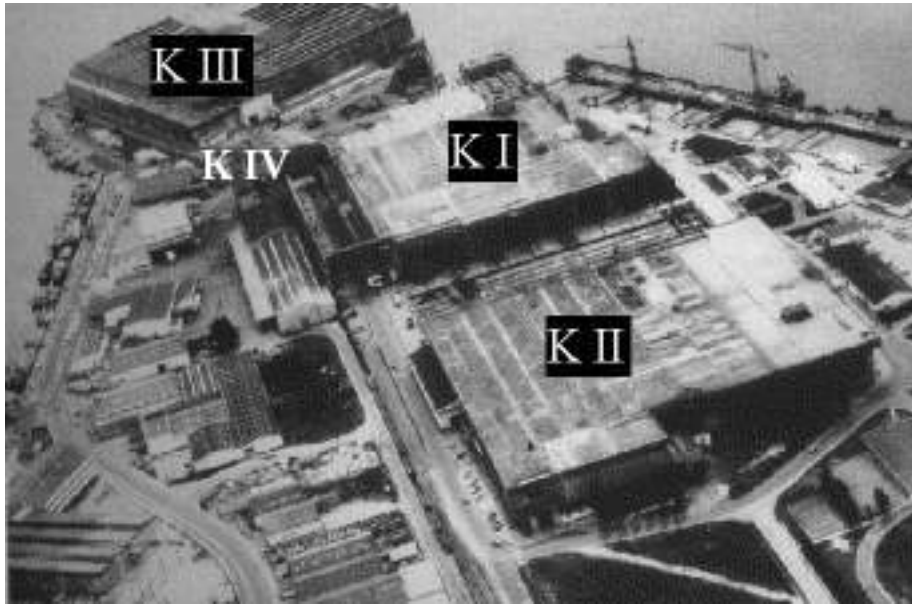


Figure 6: Aerial view of Keroman U-boat base. Permission granted by **Jean-Paul Nadeau – Brest**.

U-boats left Lorient to attack vessels carrying vital supplies to Great Britain, thus participating in the Battle of the Atlantic from September 1940 to May 1943.³¹ As a result, Great Britain bombed Lorient fifty times from September 1940 to April 1941. Even more intense Allied bombings began at the end of 1942 because half of the American ships heading for Great Britain were being destroyed by U-boats. In January 1943 in

²⁹ Queuille, 19.

³⁰ **AML**, 4 RB 3.

³¹ Bernard Edwards, *Donitz and the Wolf Packs, The U-Boats at War* (London : Cassell, 1999), 22, 213.

Casablanca Churchill decided that since the submarine bases were indestructible, they would instead annihilate the cities where they were located,³² thus destroying surrounding infrastructures.

The most terrible Allied attacks in Lorient began on the night of January 14 and 15, 1943 when two hundred bombers in waves of ten dropped ten thousand incendiary bombs on the naval dockyard as well as the western and southern portions of Lorient. Eighty fires resulted. One hundred twenty buildings and two churches were destroyed. The dockyard was damaged. Again at 7:30 p.m. two hundred flying fortresses attacked for two hours causing four hundred fires. It took three days to contain them. Eight hundred buildings were destroyed; one hundred people in and around Lorient died.

January 23, 1943 marked the beginning of the end for the city of Lorient. The Post Office was destroyed that afternoon. The Mayor's Office was ruined in an evening attack. The telephone system went down. Gas no longer flowed. The Naval Dockyard "occupied by the Germans" was also heavily damaged. Five hundred buildings had been demolished. Twenty-five people died and thirty were wounded.³³

³² Queuille, 31. There were also submarine bases in Brest, Saint-Nazaire, and La Pallice. Bourget, 29.

³³ Queuille, 31.



Figure 7: Destruction of Lorient – Photo 1. Permission granted by **Yann Lukas (Ouest France)**.



Figure 8: Destruction of Lorient – Photo 2. Permission granted by **Yann Lukas (Ouest France)**.



Figure 9: Destruction of Lorient – Photo 3. Permission granted by Yann Lukas (Ouest France).

Civilian removal had begun as witnessed in a letter written on January 26. “The evacuation of the inhabitants in and around Lorient continues with the limited means available. We are thinking of keeping in Lorient only workers employed by the Germans, those indispensable for providing fresh supplies, food and public health, as well as the upper grades in the various public utilities...” Somewhere between fifty and sixty thousand people would be evacuated over a two-week period.³⁴

³⁴ AML, 16 W 8.

By the end of January three-fourths of Lorient had been destroyed. Citizens were officially evacuated on February 3, at which time Lorient became a forbidden city and was bombed methodically until totally destroyed by May 17.



Figure 10: Awaiting Transportation for Evacuation. Permission granted by **AML**.

The final toll was devastating as far as damage to buildings. In all 90% *intra muros*³⁵ was destroyed. On the other hand, only three hundred fifty-three civilians had been killed. Robert Jolly proposed in his 1984 thesis that concrete shelters kept the

³⁵ "within the walls"

number of deaths this low.³⁶ On June 25, 1954 the Deputy Mayor of Lorient certified for the record that “the city of Lorient [had] sustained between September 25, 1940 and May 8, 1945, date of its liberation, 370 aerial bombings.”³⁷

People working for the *Todt* Organization as well as German soldiers continued to labor unhindered inside the U-boat base; however, it was much harder for them to build blockhouses. German artillery had also been damaged considerably.³⁸

The Germans in the area, refusing to surrender, regrouped in Lorient in August 1944 forming a pocket of 26,000 soldiers which finally gave up only when Germany did on VE Day. Mines had to be removed, and then reconstruction began on December 19, 1946.³⁹

In conclusion, the Germans maintained control of Lorient due to its strategic importance. Simultaneously, however, local bureaucrats continued working, establishing detailed records of bombings and the evacuation of Lorient. And as shall be shown in the next chapter, they also managed compensation of requisitioned properties and accidental deaths of civilians at the hands of the occupiers. Furthermore, they seem to have implemented Vichy and German policies directed at Jews and gypsies. Copies of reports written by Lorient bureaucrats were sent up chains of command to various

³⁶ Robert Jolly, “La Vie Quotidienne Dans Le Morbihan Sous L’Occupation, 1940-1945 » (Master’s thesis, Université de H-B Rennes, 1984), 160.

³⁷ **AML**, 16 W 8.

³⁸ Queuille, 47.

³⁹ **AML**, 4 RB 3.

prefectures and agencies, as well as to Vichy and German officials. Lorient was administered by its own, which would corroborate certain of Paxton's conclusions concerning collaboration.

Chapter 3

Women of Lorient from occupation to evacuation

Thousands of women ⁴⁰ took control of their lives in this city despite the German Occupation, Allied bombings, evacuation, a change in status to “refugee,” and a subsequent American military campaign which included the containment of German soldiers in Lorient until May 1945.

On June 21-22, 1940 they came out to see the arriving occupiers and witnessed the marching off of POWs, thinking mistakenly that they would be released quickly. A few joined the Resistance. Some worked, many needing the money. Most took care of a family, spending a great deal of time and energy acquiring food and clothing. Some made the effort to see the Germans as fellow human beings. Certain women had sexual relations with occupiers. Others felt terror towards some German units. Above all, women in Lorient responded to the bombings, protecting their loved ones as best they could and providing them with shelter. They tried to stay in touch with their older children already out on their own. And they made an effort to enjoy themselves when possible.

Some women were Jewish, one of whom decided not to stay. On June 19, 1940, two days before the Germans arrived in Lorient, she and her husband chose to escape

⁴⁰ Although the female/male percentage remains elusive, sixty thousand people lived in Lorient in 1940. Le Berd, 19.

on the trawler *la Tanche*. When it hit a mine, they perished along with 188 other souls.⁴¹ Two years later, in July 1942 when the Germans ordered French police to arrest all Jews residing in France whose countries of origin were at war with Germany, one month later in nearby Larmor-Plage Madame Hanen, a Greek storekeeper, and her two daughters were deported to Auschwitz. Only two other arrests in this category were made in this department.

There is evidence that women who were gypsies in the Morbihan were made to suffer also. In November 1940 French police under German orders arrested 32 men, 28 women, and 56 children considered “nomads” and sent them to a camp in the *Loire-Inférieure*.⁴² This fitted into the context of the Vichy government’s effort to renew the “homogeneity” of France. Their perception was that its absence over the previous forty years had helped cost France its 1940 defeat. So these nomads, needing to be

⁴¹ Leroux, 22. The Jewish question is a source of ignominy for the French; however, Leroux’s research suggests that the Morbihan, Lorient’s *département*, need not be ashamed. In October 1940 a proactive Vichy government proclaimed a *Statut des juifs*. It defined as Jewish anyone having three Jewish grandparents, and prohibited Jews in the civil service, the press, the movies, as well as the radio. (Anyone who held a war veteran’s card from World War I or who had served during the phony war and Battle of France could, though, retain his position in the civil service.) Simultaneous to this statute, Vichy declared that prefects could have foreign Jews confined to “special camps.” Leroux, 50. Weitz reported that “Approximately 25,000 foreign Jews were ultimately rounded up and sent to special French camps where conditions were often harsh—in some instances, worse than the Nazi concentration camps of the time.” Weitz, 29. But according to Leroux’s research, the prefect in the Morbihan never sent anyone to such a camp. The Vichy government, in the context of trying harder to protect French Jews than those naturalized, required that a register of naturalized citizens be compiled. In the Morbihan, the mayors gave every person a favorable report. When the prefecture related these results concluding that no one needed to be denaturalized, the Vichy Minister of the Interior asked for a short account of each naturalized citizen’s life, from which he decided that ten individuals should lose their citizenship. In March when the Germans required that Jews and half-Jews be registered in each town, one hundred or less of them *were* in the Morbihan. Leroux, 49-50. On this point, Leroux’s findings belong in parentheses because they were based on the records remaining in the *Archives Départementales du Morbihan*, since certain registers “seemed to have been destroyed at the Liberation.” Perhaps this Breton department did undercount its Jews on purpose, or maybe there were only one hundred Jews in the Morbihan to begin with. It is also possible that the ruined pieces of evidence would have given a different, perhaps darker picture.

⁴² Leroux, 49-51, 133.

“stabilized,” were gathered and confined “often under harsh conditions.”⁴³ It would be worth researching to what extent these women took control of their lives.

On the day the first occupying forces arrived, June 21, 1940, women of Lorient did not cower at home. They went out to watch. Marie-Thérèse, remembering in 1999, recounted that she and her mother witnessed the first Germans appear in Port-Louis, their town just south of Lorient. Three motorcycles with sidecars drove up to a pork butcher’s. The Germans went inside and re-immersed with blood sausages that they ate raw, giving these two French women a real laugh.⁴⁴ Meanwhile the next day in Lorient, a crowd watched as thousands of French POWs were marched away by the Germans.

The atmosphere was almost festive. Members of the French army and navy had voluntarily surrendered following orders the Germans had printed in the local newspaper, thinking that they would be released in a matter of days. At this occasion, German soldiers took pictures while “French girls giggled wildly.”⁴⁵

In account after account, it is mentioned what a favorable first impression the Germans did make throughout France. They were ordered to do so.⁴⁶ Soldiers gave

⁴³ Michael R. Marrus and Robert O. Paxton, *Vichy France and the Jews* (New York : Basic Books, Inc., 1981), 366.

⁴⁴ Cloerec interviews.

⁴⁵ Leroux, 27, 29. These POWs were initially held in camps throughout the Morbihan. By November 21, 1940 they had been sent to Germany. Leroux, 74.

⁴⁶ Leroux, 34.

chocolates and cookies to children. They talked to the people, paraded and played concerts.⁴⁷

Women also got on with the business at hand. Marie-Thérèse's mother who ran a café/restaurant in Port-Louis decided that she did not relish the idea of serving meals to Germans, so she bent the truth, making authorities believe that due to shortages she would have to close that part of her business. She did keep the café open. She also took care of another piece of business. She buried her crystal and silver and gave her best linens for safekeeping to a woman living near the Scorff River.⁴⁸

Very soon women agreed to resist, although it is important to remember that prior to D-Day, June 6, 1944, only one to two percent of Breton adults belonged to Resistance groups.⁴⁹ This seemed to have started in an off-handed manner for Madame Duhautois on July 20, 1940. Out shopping, she heard someone call her by name. Startled to see that it was a German officer, she realized upon closer scrutiny that he had been a legionnaire under her husband's command in Cochin China. "Hermann" came to her home that night and explained that he worked for the army intelligence service. He needed her to keep documents, so she began picking up "bread for her dogs" from the Germans. Inside this bread were the papers. Contact with Hermann was kept up for more than two years until Lorient was destroyed. Madame Duhautois became part of a

⁴⁷ A sample of references as to this good first impression: Queuille, 16-17; Leroux, 67-68 ; Simone de Beauvoir, *La force de l'age* (Paris : Editions Gallimard, 1960), 509, 514, 516-517, 520-521; For a contrasting view, see Veillon, 62.

⁴⁸ Cloerec interviews.

⁴⁹ Luc Capdevila, *Les Bretons au lendemain de l'Occupation, Imaginaire et comportement d'une sortie de guerre 1944-1945* (Rennes : Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 1999), 19.

network in January 1941, and she herself recruited an interpreter at the Prefecture in Rennes to work with them. The group expanded even more, supplying details of “troop movements,” as well as activities at the port, naval dockyards, and submarine base.

Gerda, a secretary at the *Kommandantur* in Lorient, apparently spied for British intelligence, although she may have been a double agent. She was German of Czech extraction and had been married to a Frenchman. Required to return to Germany, she had been trained for her new job. Able to influence the Germans she worked for, she had saved a Frenchman from his sentence of death for hitting a *feldgendarme* in Vannes. She showed her landlady in Lorient an assortment of identity papers and explained an absence of several days by saying that she had been in England. She apparently took great interest in U-boat movements and could turn on the charm to get young Germans talking, or would use prostitutes as informants since their clients included U-boat crew members.⁵⁰ Monsieur Bourguet, today’s “Journalist for the Lorient Mayor’s Office” who worked in the National Archives in America and who also traveled to Germany to research his 1997 book on the Submarine Base in Lorient, mentioned how some bar hostesses, “referred to as women of loose morals,” were in reality very brave, relaying what they learned from German clients to the Resistance, thus ultimately London.⁵¹ Women’s participation in the Resistance, although “critically important” has not gotten much notice. Narratives have usually reflected a masculine point of view, or they have concentrated on the later *maquis* movement rather than on the Resistance

⁵⁰ Leroux, 89, 97-98.

⁵¹ Bourguet, 59.

that started as soon as the Germans arrived. These women have also tended to make themselves inconspicuous, explaining that they “simply did ‘what had to be done.’”⁵²

Anne-Marie Robic, twenty-one, was a liaison officer for the *Francs-tireurs et partisans français*. In July 1944 the Germans brutally killed her along with seven leaders of the *maquis*. A snapshot taken in that same year in the liberated part of the Morbihan showed nine other women liaison officers, although it is not clear if any were specifically from Lorient.⁵³ They were also called “couriers,” needed to avoid telephone conversations that could be overheard and letters that might be examined. These women could collect and convey confidential messages and it would merely look like they were attending to everyday business. But they were exposing themselves to great danger, especially torture.⁵⁴

Some women worked. As director of the Red Cross, Mademoiselle de Penfentenyo tried to help a stranded airman, a Canadian who had survived the crash of his bomber and who was now being hidden on a farm in Lanester, to the northeast of Lorient. When she got word, de Penfentenyo dispatched a volunteer nurse to care for him. But he was so badly burned that their mutual decision was to turn him over to the

⁵² Weitz, 7.

⁵³ Le Berd, 72-73.

⁵⁴ Weitz, 76-77.

Germans for treatment.⁵⁵ It was very risky business to aid an “enemy” airman. German rules concerning this were very clear. The penalty was death.⁵⁶

Teachers observed their students’ reactions to events. In October 1941 Madame Le Corvec noted that the little children in her class were ‘delirious with enthusiasm’ when a German ship was set on fire during a British bombing that they witnessed from the classroom. More than likely these pupils were hearing anti-German or pro-British talk at home.

Women needed money. Although there were not many volunteers from the Morbihan to work in Germany, the superior wages promised were probably tempting. At the end of August 1942, sixty-seven out of the one hundred ninety-two factory workers signing up to go were women, perhaps some from Lorient.⁵⁷ According to Fishman, 80% of the POW wives in her study worked. “Financial hardship was the rule.”⁵⁸ Some wives of POWs in the Morbihan were factory workers. Male skilled workers drafted to go to Germany in November 1942 remembered these women putting pressure on them to go because, according to the terms of the labor agreement in force at the time, *La Relève*, for every three trained French workers sent to Germany, one POW would be

⁵⁵ Leroux, 77, 87.

⁵⁶ *Verordnungsblatt*, #9 (1) 7, **AML**, 16 W 9.

⁵⁷ Leroux, 76-77, 122.

⁵⁸ Fishman, 57.

returned home.⁵⁹ This anecdote supports Fishman's findings of women longing to get their captive husbands back.

The Vichy government promoted a traditional image of France, expecting women to stay at home, care for the family and house, and to reproduce, which may not have been such a hard sell in Catholic Brittany. It argued that the population had decreased because women had earlier shirked childbearing. How could France have possibly won against the Nazis when women had caused an appalling lack of Frenchmen?

But the fact of the matter was that France had lost one and a half million men during World War I,⁶⁰ and many returned home maimed. Furthermore, at the beginning of that conflict, soldiers had not been granted furloughs. These were the factors that impeded an increase in births,⁶¹ the latter not even listed by scholars to explain France's defeat.⁶² But Vichy was in the business of selling the "unreal," to borrow former Resistance fighter and writer Célia Bertin's term. In her view, this government had

⁵⁹ Paxton, 311.

⁶⁰ Weitz, 236.

⁶¹ Mary Louise Roberts, *Civilization Without Sexes, Reconstructing Gender in Postwar France, 1917-1927* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1994), 95.

⁶² Ernest May argued that there were three major reasons why France lost in June 1940. First of all, France and Great Britain were persuaded that Germany would under no circumstances attack France. Secondly, after the bloody First World War, France and Great Britain now planned above all to reduce casualties to a minimum. They would replace soldiers with "technology," the Maginot Line and better tanks. The reality of this strategy, though, was that "reaction times" were longer and officers commanding the battles had less independence. Thirdly, the ponderous French system of government did not lend itself well to taking National Defense decisions. "Political needs" at home motivated foreign policy. Not only that, the Third Republic mistrusted the military establishment, seeing it as "conservative, Roman Catholic, even royalist." In a backlash, the military did not retire older officers that needed to go, and they isolated themselves into categories. This led to "line commanders and their operations officers" refusing to communicate with "staff officers." Ernest R. May, *Strange Victory, Hitler's Conquest of France* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2000), 8-10.

created a “schizophrenic [...] universe,” its “discourse” having very little to do with the “facts.”⁶³ Pollard would agree.

In her memoir recounting her life as a ten year old in Occupied Lorient, Yvette wrote extensively about her mother whose main job, like that of many other women of this city, was taking care of the family. During the Occupation one of their greatest preoccupations was finding enough food. The Morbihan had to supply the Germans first. By August 1940 it was very hard to find butter, cheese, or eggs in Lorient. By August 27 one had to have tickets to buy coal. By December, bread, pasta, rice, sugar, milk products, oil, and soap were also rationed.⁶⁴

The Occupation had thrown France’s economy into disarray. Farmers experienced labor, vehicular, seed, and fertilizer limitations. Their horses were requisitioned. “Means of transportation” were scarce, since the Germans required the available fuel. Companies could not get materials easily and worked for the occupiers as a way of surviving.⁶⁵

Although Marie-Thérèse’s mother benefited from special supplies for her café, she still did not receive real coffee or sugar.⁶⁶ People looked for alternatives. They ground acorns to replace coffee and used saccharin.⁶⁷ In the *Journal de l’Ouest* it was

⁶³ Célia Bertin, *Femmes sous l’Occupation* (Paris : Editions Stock, 1993), 56.

⁶⁴ Queuille, 23.

⁶⁵ Leroux, 112-113.

⁶⁶ Cloerec interviews.

⁶⁷ Queuille, 25.

suggested that carrots could also replace coffee. After washing, peeling, and slicing them thinly, it recommended roasting them in the oven until they turned brown. All one had to do after that was grind or crush them. The article ended with the assurance that this ersatz tasted good at breakfast served with a bit of milk and requiring very little sugar.⁶⁸ In 1941 an entire newspaper article praised the qualities of the Jerusalem artichoke, an available (and distasteful) vegetable.⁶⁹

Resistance defined broadly could include such acts as “resisting German rationing and finding ways to procure more food.”⁷⁰ For a high price on the black market, people could procure lard and eggs. They also bartered in shops.⁷¹ Visiting family in the southwest of France in 1941, Yvette and her family were able to procure rare food to take back to Lorient. They were willing to risk possible train searches on their way home to smuggle in such precious commodities as duck grease, eggs, and poultry. Yvette’s father and cousin would cycle to the country to buy butter, flour, and pork fat on the black market; although, at times the Germans or French gendarmes would confiscate their goods.⁷²

Procuring food got harder as the Occupation continued. By the fall of 1941 eggs, butter, and fruit had disappeared. At the end of that year, people in the Morbihan could get per day: 10 ounces of bread for an adult; per week: 2 ounces of cheese; per month:

⁶⁸ *Le Journal de l'Ouest (JO)*, July 1 – October 30, 1940.

⁶⁹ *Annees 40*, AML 4 HB 3, 29.

⁷⁰ Weitz, 9.

⁷¹ Cloerec interviews.

1 pound of meat, 10 ounces of fat, 1 pound of sugar, 8 pounds of potatoes, 4 liters of wine, and 4 ounces of coffee. Every 10 days they could procure an allotment of tobacco.

Only children got 8 ounces of preserves and 4 ounces of chocolate per month.⁷³

That year women waiting in lines blamed distribution services, wholesalers, and the Germans for the shortages. In the spring of 1942, women in Lorient demonstrated for bread, the basis of the French diet, which by now could only be bought five days a week. This precipitated the visit of the Regional Prefect to Lorient. Women also publicly demanded butter, which resulted in some being delivered.

On April 27 three hundred fifty women demonstrated in front of the Mayor's Office. They demanded bread, butter, and potatoes. A small group of them were asked inside for talks. The next day seventy-five women showed up again, and once more the mayor saw them. Four hundred women protested in Port-Louis that day and were heard. Another demonstration that took place on April 29 was broken up by the *feldgendarmes* as was the one at Kerentrech where arrests were made. Two subsequent protests were dispersed by French police on April 30th and May 4th. Nevertheless, on May 6 a large shipment of butter arrived.⁷⁴

⁷² Yvette's memoir, 20-21.

⁷³ Queuille, 25.

⁷⁴ Leroux, 113, 117, 169.

Even for such high occasions as Yvette's first communion in 1942, her family could not possibly prepare the traditionally elaborate meal. They instead made do with what they found using their ration cards. She was able, though, to wear a special dress, and what appears to be an official picture was taken. Her brother Francis stationed with the navy in Toulon sent her a rosary and a certainly rare *leather* purse.⁷⁵

There were no potatoes in March, April, or May 1942. The harvest had been good, but finding enough gas for deliveries was a problem which affected civilians, since as aforementioned the Germans were supplied first.⁷⁶ The list of rare foods lengthened.

Although green vegetables were accessible, dry beans were not. Stocks of them existed, but they were not delivered. Fish was hard to come by. The better fish was demanded by the Germans or sent to other departments. Fuel for boats was difficult to obtain. Tuna sail boats faced British assaults. Access to the Lorient harbor was often barred. Fishermen sold their catches on the black market. The Germans demanded a disproportionate amount of the available meat (beef, pork, veal, and mutton), and the Morbihan was also responsible for supplying some meat to the *Seine* and the *Nord* Departments. In the last six months of 1942, a mere forty-four pig carcasses were available for civilian consumption for the entire Morbihan.⁷⁷

Clothing was also a problem. In 1995 one woman in Lorient remembered looking for parachutes of illuminating bombs in order to make blouses. Much to her chagrin she

⁷⁵ Yvette's memoir, 22.

⁷⁶ Leroux, 114.

⁷⁷ Paxton maintained that the French had less to eat than those in any other country in Western Europe. Paxton, 360.

never found a silk one.⁷⁸ This woman was resourceful. Colette spoke of an “industrious woman” who transformed a worn out linen sheet into three blouses and several dish rags.⁷⁹ While her mother was still hospitalized from her bombing raid wounds, little Yvette’s aunt made her an apron out of one of her old ones so that she would be properly attired to go back to school.

Everyday life under Nazi Occupation was humiliating enough, but when regulations began restricting clothing; this was a “stinging wound,” to use Veillon’s phrase. People considered it intolerable that the State would intrude in such a private sphere where normally they could properly claim the right to select. Clothing reflected the person, and the “middle class” was not at all grateful to lose its power of choice. Shoes and clothes disappeared increasingly; previously the selection available as well as the high “quality” of these items had given France recognition. Leather shoes could no longer be sold after November 7, 1940; the *Grumberg* Plan required France to send its leather to Germany.⁸⁰ As Paxton pointed out, Hitler saw France as “the richest source of supplies in Occupied Western Europe.”⁸¹

Despite shortages, or in some cases because of them, fashion continued. When the “wooden-soled” shoe appeared in 1941, the trend was even picked up by fashion

⁷⁸ **AML** 7 HB 28, 158.

⁷⁹ This is a Parisian story. Colette, *De ma fenetre* (Paris : Librairie Arthème Fayard, 1987), 75.

⁸⁰ Veillon, 155.

⁸¹ Paxton, 51.

designers.⁸² Madame Duchadeuil also spoke of how inventive women were and how fashionable they looked.⁸³ In *Eye of Vichy* women were seen drawing a black line up the back of their legs to imitate stockings.⁸⁴ These trends may have been true in Paris, but on the contrary in Lorient, older women wore the Breton costume complete with headdress and wooden clogs. So did younger street merchants, perhaps to attract the attention of German occupiers and later American soldiers, potential customers. A photograph of a winter street scene shows middle aged women dressed in conservative suits and hats. Younger women were typically photographed wearing skirts, blouses, and sweaters, or lightweight below-the-knee dresses.⁸⁵

Women of Lorient gave the Germans the benefit of the doubt. Herr Berg kept Marie-Thérèse's family informed. He also contacted the wife of an escaped POW to tell her where her husband was hiding. A German officer who knew eight languages helped Marie-Thérèse regularly with her Latin homework at her mother's café. The Germans were usually well-behaved in this establishment. Marie-Thérèse's mother was forced to keep ten German officers' horses behind her café. The two soldiers responsible for taking care of these equines were made welcome in the cellar during bombing raids. Marie-Thérèse remembers their praying along with everyone else in Latin.

⁸² Veillon, 158.

⁸³ Madame Denise Duchadeuil, letter to author, 5 March 2001.

⁸⁴ Vichy propaganda films edited in such a way as to expose scandalous behavior on the part of the French during the war years. *Eye of Vichy*, dir. Claude Chabrol, 110 minutes, A co-production with FIT Production/ L'Institut National de L'Audiovisuel/ TF1 Films Production with the participation of Canal +/ Sylicone/ La Sofica Bymages/ Le Centre National de la Cinématographie, 1993, videocassette.

⁸⁵ Queuille, 14, 28, 37, 42, 102; Le Berd, 52-53, 136; Bourguet, 70.

Women interfaced with Germans when their property was requisitioned. Sometimes this went quite smoothly. Mimi's mother was allowed to inspect her grandparents' requisitioned estate at will by simply asking permission at the *Kommandantur*. She could even report wear and tear on it to German authorities.

Women wrote to their mayors, fighting for their rights over requisitions. Marie stated that since her land in Larmor-Plage had been taken over by "German authorities" in December 1940, three apple trees had been uprooted and left on the ground. Consequently, the farmer using this land estimated his losses at 500 kilos of apples per year, and Marie wanted to recover the wood. The mayor suggested that the farmer write to request compensation and authorized Marie's removal of the wood. Then in 1942 Marie addressed a letter to the Prefecture of the Morbihan in Vannes, *Service des Réquisitions*, requesting compensation for a requisitioned apartment building. In October her account at the *Crédit Lyonnais* was Credited FF 3675, representing a six month remuneration. She felt cheated, protested, and was ultimately awarded the yearly sum of FF 9800, an annual increase of FF 2450. A war widow and mother of four young children wrote a plaintive letter stating that although her house was intact, all of her personal property had been removed. Cleaning women working for the occupiers confirmed that the Germans had hauled everything away by truck. The mayor had advised her to write to the Prefecture in Vannes in hopes of establishing that her property had been requisitioned so that she could be compensated.

When the Germans were blamed for the deaths of civilians, remuneration did not necessarily follow. In September 1942 a widower, on behalf of himself and his eight-

month old baby, requested payments for the death of his twenty-six year old wife, hit by a German truck, while she was riding her bicycle in Lorient. The truck had been driven by a Frenchman, accused of drinking a lot, who had apparently swerved to avoid hitting a car right after lunch (Perhaps he had had too much wine or beer with his meal.). Since the driver was French, the Germans refused to pay either funeral or burial expenses which amounted to FF 11,390. They told the widower to try the Prefecture instead. The reckless driver *did* get three months in prison. Requests for indemnity could go on for years; there was always something missing in the dossier, or the Germans simply claimed that a given accident had never happened. Often letters continued flowing past the Liberation. One 16 year old girl who had lost her mother in an accident involving a German vehicle did receive some compensation.⁸⁶

Some women chose German lovers. On the top floor of one of the apartment buildings where Yvette and her family lived were two German soldiers and two women. It sounded like they were having a good time and seemed like they had all of the food they needed. Yvette's parents cautioned her not to speak about them. These women were capable of kind gestures, sharing such rare items as coffee with Yvette's family when her sister was gravely ill.⁸⁷ Certain French women slept with Germans for "material advantage." They enjoyed the products that were not abundant or were even absent. This was particularly true for those with officers as lovers.⁸⁸

⁸⁶ AML, 16 W 12.

⁸⁷ Yvette's memoir, 16.

⁸⁸ Weitz, 273.

It was not healthy to criticize French women flirting with German soldiers. In December 1940 a manager of the local kaolin mine reproached a woman in a café for kissing two Germans. The soldiers attacked him, and a bayonet pierced one of his lungs.⁸⁹ What was this businessman's motivation? Perhaps he knew this woman personally or she worked in his factory. Maybe, subconsciously at least, he considered women as children needing to be reminded of acceptable behavior, and since he held a responsible position in industry it was his privilege or even duty to do so. He may not have believed that the Germans would understand French, or he may have assumed that they would ignore such a mundane exchange between a Frenchman and Frenchwoman.

Tired young men on U-Boat decks returning to the Lorient submarine base would peruse the crowd for women who would take their minds off their anxiety for a couple of hours. "They catch sight of ankles and the beginnings of calves quickly masked by long and lightweight summer dresses that make the blood rush to their temples and their heads swim each time their hearts beat..." These prostitutes were shown as being in control. "They are mothers when they pass by with wide combs, their fingers in their thick hair still damp from a shower taken an hour before. They are at once expert lovers when they know how to give and receive grips and innocent when they pretend, as if it were always the first time, to discover the extraordinary power of love."⁹⁰ Germans established controlled bordellos for their troops in France. There were not enough

⁸⁹ Leroux, 70.

⁹⁰ Bourguet, 13, 16.

prostitutes, so some French women were compelled to join this profession. Certain prostitutes passed information to the Resistance. And some *male* Resistance members were successfully concealed in houses of ill-repute.⁹¹ A German brothel was blown up in 1942 in Lorient. Nine died and twelve were wounded.⁹² In 1995 a man who had been thirteen when the occupation of Lorient began recounted that when a brothel was hit by a bomb, people commented on how precise British intelligence was.⁹³

Women also feared the Germans. Marie-Thérèse's mother was especially afraid of the SS. They had mutilated her washerwoman's son's body so badly that it took her employee four visits to be sure she was identifying the right corpse. Five members of a family in nearby Quimperlé that ran the hardware store were captured by the SS and deported to Buchenwald where they perished. An SS officer, a dentist, started calling on fourteen year old Marie-Thérèse every evening. Fortunately she came down with bronchitis, which they passed off as TB. Mimi came to take her cousin to live in Lorient for awhile, and Marie-Thérèse's mother told the dentist that her daughter had gone to a sanatorium. They never saw him again.⁹⁴

Above all, women of Lorient faced the bombings. They did not know when these would occur, if they and their loved ones would survive or be injured, or in what state their homes would be as a result. The September 27, 1940 bombing devastated more

⁹¹ Weitz, 275.

⁹² Queuille, 57.

⁹³ **AML** 7 HB 28, 167.

⁹⁴ Cloerec interviews.

than one family. Although they had sought shelter, Berthe's toddler died and she was left in a coma. Her surviving daughters, Yvette and Louise, ten and fifteen years old, were forced to grow up overnight.

Women showed common decency. In the immediate aftermath of the bombing, an old lady and neighbor had the presence of mind to prepare the little girl's body for burial. She then welcomed Louise, Yvette, and their father into her home, "very warmly kiss[ing]" them before leading them to view it.

Family took care of family. A cousin in Pont-Scorff took in Louise and Yvette,⁹⁵ and then they were welcomed by their father's sister in Locmiquélic.⁹⁶ From this point on Louise assumed the mother role. She waited in lines for food for her aunt and kept her father's finances straight. She and Yvette visited Berthe once she came out of her coma, carefully concealing their sister's death, protective of their frail mother. Months later when Berthe left the hospital, they moved to a new address in Lorient. Louise helped around the house and continued to stand in lines for food. When this street was bombed too, Louise and Yvette furnished the next apartment, buying everything from bedroom furniture to dishes and cooking utensils from an antique store. Louise then found work with the local newspaper, *Le Nouvelliste*. This extra income allowed her father to cycle to the country to buy food on the black market. In 1942 Louise contracted pulmonary tuberculosis. At first she continued to work at the newspaper office

⁹⁵ Yvette's memoir, 9.

⁹⁶ This was the second of eight moves this family would make. Yvette's memoir, 12.

but was soon confined to bed. Her father began working nights at the naval dockyard to pay for her special shots. Now Berthe became the mother again, sitting at her daughter's bedside and making arrangements to send Yvette to relatives due to the contagious nature of Louise's illness. Louise, who had been a teenager studying to become a seamstress before the tragic bombing of 1940, died in her seventeenth year and was buried in November 1942. Yvette, returning home for the funeral, survived yet another bombing while awaiting a connecting train in Nantes.⁹⁷

Women showed courage. Berthe could hardly walk after recovering from her coma. Nevertheless, when it came time to move out of her sister-in-law's home and back to Lorient, she walked along with her husband, children and their possessions (loaded onto a wheelbarrow) to a boat that landed them in Lorient. Then they crossed most of the city on foot too.

Under such dismal circumstances the women of Lorient were good friends to each other. Céline, her husband, and their baby who shared a hospital room with Berthe tried to calm her down when she worried about her toddler, perhaps suspecting the truth, that she had been killed. In the last half of 1941 in another apartment building, three neighbor women were true friends, spending a great deal of time with Berthe since she was often by herself and not very mobile. While Berthe was taking care of dying Louise, neighbors stood in lines for food for her and visited.⁹⁸

⁹⁷ The day the Germans occupied the rest of France. Yvette's memoir, 26-27.

⁹⁸ Yvette's memoir, 12-14, 16, 24. Yvette often employed the word "solidarity" to describe Lorient during the Occupation.

Women were devoted. Two nurses helped Berthe practice walking in the hospital hall day after day. After she left there, a nurse traveled daily all the way to Locmiquélic to change her bandage. This entailed walking, taking a boat and risking getting caught in an aerial raid.⁹⁹ Volunteer nurses worked for Civil Defense, searching for survivors and pulling bodies out from under collapsed buildings.¹⁰⁰

Strangers were kind to each other. The funeral held for the thirty victims of the September 27, 1940 bombing drew a huge crowd “still in a state of shock, silent, deeply overcome with emotion,” willing to share the pain of the families. When Yvette’s family was later moving to a new apartment in Lorient one Sunday, a woman observing them at the pier offered Yvette a twenty-franc mark “out of compassion.”¹⁰¹ The mutual aid office (*bureau d’entr’aide*) pleaded for baby cradles, pieces of material, coupons, and clothing.¹⁰²

Women dealt with the constant interruption of their children’s schooling. While she was living with her aunt, Yvette went to school regularly for about a month. Then one morning there was an air raid. Later when residing on the rue Merville in Lorient, her mother kept her home each time a siren went off. When they moved back to their old neighborhood, Yvette returned to her original school sporadically. Children would arrive exhausted or scared. Many had spent the night in shelters. Yvette would sometimes

⁹⁹ Yvette’s memoir, 13.

¹⁰⁰ Jolly, 155.

¹⁰¹ Yvette’s memoirs, 10, 14.

¹⁰² *JO*, July 1 – October 30, 1940

attend classes at a “clandestine” school run by the “Little Sisters of the poor” where classes and homework were given in anticipation of future interruptions.¹⁰³

Women worried about their children who were out on their own. Yvette’s twenty year old brother Francis was on a ship in Mers-el-Kebir on July 3, 1940¹⁰⁴ and they had no idea if he were alive or dead after the maddening British attack on the French fleet.

One day Yvette’s mother received a letter from her family in the Southwest at Tilh, written on the required (and very succinct) Vichy form saying they must really come and visit. She realized that this was a coded message concerning her son. The family got permission and a pass and headed to the occupied south. There they learned that Francis had been allowed to come to France from Dakar to check on his family. Arriving initially in the Free Zone of France, he had subsequently risked armed Germans, the French police, German shepherds, watchtowers, and a young woman who had tried to turn him in, but had been found by a farmer who hid him three weeks and then let his family in Tilh know where he was. After their visit with him, Yvette’s father accompanied Francis as far as Lourdes to make sure he got back safely to the Free Zone from where he would return to Africa. After the French fleet was scuttled in Toulon,¹⁰⁵ Francis was able to come home and live.

¹⁰³ Yvette’s memoir, 125, 32, 15, 21-22.

¹⁰⁴ « ...the British Navy carried out a preemptive raid on the French fleet at Mers-el-Kebir (Algeria) and seized French ships in British harbors, on the assumption that Vichy’s verbal assurances were insufficient guarantee that the Germans might not seize the French fleet whenever they wished. Over 1,200 French sailors died in that painful act of Realpolitik.” Paxton, 43.

¹⁰⁵ November 28, 1942, seventeen days after the Germans took over the French unoccupied zone in reaction to the Allied landings in North Africa on November 7/8. Paxton, 280-281.

Women tried to have some fun. When Yvette and her family evacuated Lorient, they became refugees in her father's old neighborhood. Here he had a boat and would row them around on Sundays. A photo captured one of these happy moments. Another snapshot captioned "What a day!" showed them gathered with two other families. The men were either raising a glass or a bottle of wine and most people were smiling. In September 1940 Mimi, her father, Marie-Thérèse, and five others posed for pictures at the beach.



Figure 11: At the beach, September 1940 (Marie-Thérèse is holding a racket)

Mimi, an excellent seamstress, was photographed with her mother in 1941.



Figure 12: Dressed up, 1941

There were pictures of her cousin's wedding celebration in the spring of 1942.



Figure 13: Wedding festivities, 1942

That summer Mimi's picture was taken at the beach with friends including "Pépito," her Spanish boyfriend. His real name was Anastasio Fernandez. His father was a Colonel under General Franco, but Pépito had chosen the Republican cause. After the Civil War of 1936, he had come to Lorient. During the Occupation he worked for the Germans, "like everyone else," stated Marie-Thérèse.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁶ Cloerec interviews.



Figure 14: P pito and Mimi (back to back), 1942

These pictures like the narrative of this chapter reflect a certain degree of normalcy. Perhaps this was what the women of Lorient were ultimately striving for as a focus that would give hope.

This thesis concentrates on how the women of Lorient handled the hardships of daily life and how they reacted to war. It reinforces Veillon's conclusions to a great extent, differing somewhat in two areas. Unlike Veillon's findings, there is very little mention of the *exode* except to state that it did put a strain on Lorient's resources for a time.¹⁰⁷ Also differing from Veillon's results is a shift in emphasis away from food gathering as a primary concern. As arduous as the latter was, the women of Lorient faced an even greater hardship, the bombings.

This study also varies from Fishman's emphasis on women alone, because in Lorient, husbands *were* present to a certain extent. Their work at the naval dockyard, government departments, public services, and private industries were important to the German war effort. Furthermore, evidence points to a number of women in Lorient taking care of their families and homes without having to earn the money, thus fulfilling the unattainable dream of Fishman's POW wives.

In terms of the Resistance, the experiences of women who participated in Resistance activities in Lorient seem to corroborate Weitz's results. Her book proved a valuable tool for interpreting various data, some even beyond the scope of the Resistance. For instance, her information concerning French camps enriched this chapter's discussion of the treatment of Jews in the Morbihan.

¹⁰⁷ Queuille, 7.

Chapter 4

Women of Lorient as Refugees

Plouay

At some point, presumably in early 1943, Mimi, her mother and father ended up refugees in a village North of Lorient called Plouay.¹⁰⁸ They rented rooms on one side of a street and kitchen facilities on the other from a butcher's wife named Madame Denmat. In Plouay Marie-Thérèse remembered young men being hidden from roundups for the *STO, le Service du Travail Obligatoire*.¹⁰⁹ In her view, this was a matter of life or death because they could easily die once in Germany. Women dressed Madame Denmat's nephew up to look like an old lady; "she" was sitting in a corner of the kitchen when the Germans peeked in and left, never to discover "her" real identity. On another day young Frenchmen were made to parade in front of a German truck so that the strongest could be selected, as was one named Jean. He quickly ran into the church behind, hiding in the armoire that held the priest's garments. A German stuck his bayonet in it several times, but carefully so as not to tear the beautiful robes. The truck eventually left, Jean exited the church, and resumed his normal life.

Pépito followed Mimi to Plouay, staying at Madame Denmat's. He had joined a large Spanish Resistance group. Marie-Thérèse remembered helping to hide him from

¹⁰⁸ According to a letter asking for dishes, dated December 23, 1943, there were 3200 refugees in Plouay. **AML**, 16 W.

¹⁰⁹ This conscription of young French people for work in German factories was initiated in February 1943. France thus became the number one provider of skilled foreign workers to Germany. STO workers together with French POWs

the Germans, behind a woodpile, in 1943.¹¹⁰ The Resistance benefited when those who had fought in the Spanish Civil War joined it, because they had military training.¹¹¹ A “convoy” of Spanish Republicans was sent to Lorient to work for the *Todt* Organization in January 1942, among them Carrero and Sanchez Castillo. Both already belonged to the Resistance group “*Front National*,” and now contacted their counterparts in Lorient. As a result, twenty “Groupes d’Action” (action groups) were formed. They began sabotaging “sources of electrical energy” in Lorient in March.¹¹² Perhaps Pépito belonged to one of these groups.

Four days before D-Day on June 2, 1944, an employee of the French Red Cross in Plouay reported that when a British plane “fell,” he headed its way on a motorcycle while the stretcher-bearers and several young ladies followed on bicycles. The Germans were just ahead of them, but let them care for the wounded aviator, the stretcher-bearers carrying him to the German ambulance. He was hospitalized in Plouay, and the person writing this report visited him the next day, found him better, and concluded, “This small exercise was good for us because we noticed that we are starting to be ready.”¹¹³

Perhaps he had heard or read enough to think that he needed to be prepared for the imminent Allied landing.

represented 3.3% of the entire French population. Young men sought to escape this draft by joining the *maquis*, a type of Resistance in which members lived in secluded places. Paxton, 292, 311.

¹¹⁰ Cloerec interviews.

¹¹¹ Radio interview with John Sweets, NPR, “Weekend Edition,” September 16, 2002.

¹¹² Roque Carrion, “Les espagnols et la Resistance à Lorient,” <<http://bteysses.free.fr/espagne/Lorient.htm>> (13 September 2002), 1-3.

¹¹³ **AML**, 16 W 8.

American Troops in the Lorient Sector

After D-Day, Allied forces turned to “breakout and pursuit” of the Germans in Brittany. On July 10, 1944 General Eisenhower told General Montgomery that he hoped for the capture of all harbors from Le Havre to Nantes in order to secure a ‘broad avenue of entry’ for every American soldier available to participate in the push to final victory in Europe. The 4th Armored Division commanded by General Wood along with the 13th Infantry took Rennes on August 4. Patton’s Chief of Staff then reminded Wood that his next move was towards Quiberon, Vannes, and Lorient.¹¹⁴ Combat Command A (CCA) secured Vannes and Auray; Combat Command B (CCB) arrived just outside Lorient by August 7 but met fierce opposition when it tried to assault that city from the northwest at Pont-Scorff. Even though CCA had arrived, officers in charge assessed that the Germans were too well-protected and well-supplied to risk attacking them.¹¹⁵ The 6th Armored division arrived from Brest to relieve the 4th Armored on August 15. By the end of September Lorient was no longer important to the Allies.¹¹⁶ All sights were set on Berlin.

The American 66th Infantry Division participated in the blockade of the Lorient Pocket. Its intelligence information, of course, concerned a much greater area than the

¹¹⁴ Martin Blumenson, *European Theater of Operations, Breakout and Pursuit*, vol. 6 of *U.S. ARMY IN WORLD WAR II* (Washington, D.C.: Office of the Chief of Military History Department of the Army, 1961), 346, 357, 361, 363.

¹¹⁵ Apparently this was a mistake. According to the top German leader in Lorient, General Fahrmbacher, if Americans had attacked between August 6 and 9, 1944, they could have taken a disorganized Lorient. Blumenson, 364.

city of Lorient, what it referred to as the “Lorient Sector.” Since Lorient’s citizens had been scattered in February 1943, perhaps some of these women refugees in the Lorient Sector that American reports mentioned were originally from Lorient. These reports also concerned civilians that the Germans released periodically from the Lorient Pocket, again a larger area than Lorient.¹¹⁷ What follows are traces of civilian women from the Lorient Sector as well as the Pocket from “secret” Counter-Intelligence Reports as well as “Journals.”

There were “bad” women.¹¹⁸ One was declared loyal after investigation and another suspect because she was “rumored to have had relations with the Germans.”¹¹⁹ Before they could work for the Red Cross, Counter-Intelligence had to clear women.¹²⁰ A female residing 200 yards from German lines was questioned and told to leave by the next day at sunset.¹²¹ A woman prisoner in the “BEL AIR” detention center was handed over to the French. Three more women were subjected to “background checks.”¹²² Two others were investigated for possible involvement in the black market.¹²³ Another was

¹¹⁶ Blumenson, 367, 386.

¹¹⁷ Guidel, Quéven, Lanester, Ploemeur, Lorient, Larmor-Plage, Port-Louis, Etel, Quiberon, Groix, and Belle-Ille. Queuille, 80.

¹¹⁸ In a French source, Jolly told of a woman receiving 18 months in prison for looting. She was caught in the act of stealing personal property belonging to a woman originally from Lorient and now a refugee. Jolly, 163.

¹¹⁹ 366 - 2 G - 2 A/A Report 66th INF DIV. (with Incl's); Headquarters 66th Infantry Division Office of CIC Detachment APO 454 U S ARMY; Counter-intelligence Report 1 January to 23 January 1945, National Archives College Park, Maryland (**NACP**).

¹²⁰ 366-2 G-2 A/A Report 66th INF DIV (with Incl's) Journal 25 February 1945 to 26 February 1945, **NACP**.

¹²¹ 366-2 G-2 A/A Report 66th INF DIV (with Incl's) Journal 4 January 1945 to 5 January 1945, **NACP**.

¹²² 366 – 2 G – 2 A/A Report 66th INF DIV (with Incl's) Journal 4 January 1945 to 5 January 1945, 27 January 1945 to 28 January 1945, **NACP**.

¹²³ 366 – 2 G – 2 A/A Report 66th INF DIV (with Incl's) Journal 24 January 1945 to 25 January 1945, 30 January 1945 to 31 January 1945, **NACP**.

receiving letters from a German interpreter working in Lorient. A “personalit[y] in Areas Still Under Enemy Control” was thought to be a collaborator.¹²⁴ Three women residing in Lorient arrived on a Red Cross Boat, holding papers written by German medical authorities certifying that they had a “VD infection.” They were handed over to Quimper “civilian authorities” and placed in a hospital.¹²⁵ This brings to mind the prostitute who defended her professional activities as patriotic during the Occupation. After all, she had successfully “infected twenty-eight German soldiers, thus contributing to the war effort.”¹²⁶

There were also “good” women. At least two from the same family were informers for the Americans.¹²⁷ A café employee also helped the Allied cause by reporting that she had overheard a suspect “ask questions of [a] military nature of military personnel.”¹²⁸ Madame Cockburn, the newly wed French wife of an American Army officer was “reported to have been active” in the Resistance during the German

¹²⁴ 366 – 2 G – 2 A/A Report 66th INF DIV (with Incl’s) Counter-Intelligence Report No. 3 7 February 1945 to 23 February 1945, **NACP**.

¹²⁵ RG 94 (The Adj. Gen.’s Office) WWII Oper. Reports 1940-48 66th ID 366 – 2 3-1-45 to 5-31-45 Journal Lorient Sector, 3 March 1945 to 4 March 1945, **NACP**. Clause 27 of the German *Verordnungsblatt*, 13, stated that “any woman, suffering from a contagious venereal disease...will be punished with the sentence of hard labor or imprisonment...” or worse. So these three women were fortunate to be handed over to the Allies. Perhaps their lovers cared for them and wanted them to receive medical treatment that they could not administer, holed up in Lorient. Possibly the Germans sensed that their cause was lost and that they would be surrendering at some point, so why bother with punishment?

¹²⁶ Ted Morgan as cited by Weitz, 275.

¹²⁷ 366-2 G-2 A/A Report 66th INF DIV (with Incl’s) Journal 24 January 1945 to 25 January 1945, **NACP**.

¹²⁸ 366-2 G-2 A/A Report 66th INF DIV. (with Incl’s) Journal 3 January 1945 to 4 January 1945, **NACP**.

Occupation. She was interviewed on February 10, 1945.¹²⁹ Perhaps her knowledge facilitated Counter-Intelligence tasks.

Women came making inquiries. One asked about her husband who had been picked up by the *Police Militaire* in August 1944. American soldiers sent her to the *Deuxième Bureau* (French Intelligence) and volunteered that he was probably near Cherbourg.¹³⁰ Four women were allowed to see members of a ship's "crew" being held at the "Bel Air" center.¹³¹ Another was sent to French "civil authorities" since her brother was being held on charges of theft.¹³² The wife of a man detained by Counter-Intelligence until being turned over to the French in November 1944 came asking for *his* ID, which she was given.¹³³

Women were caught up in events. Counter-Intelligence noted that in order to get his father and sister released (and into a hospital) from the Lorient Sector "of the German Pocket," a young man had taken their IDs to the Germans. Since they were never given back, the Americans would now have to arrest anyone trying to pass themselves off as these people.¹³⁴

¹²⁹ 366-2 G-2 A/A Report 66th INF DIV. (with Incl's) Journal 0700 10 February 1945 to 0700 11 February 1945, **NACP**.

¹³⁰ 366-2 G-2 A/A Report 66th INF DIV (with Incl's) Journal 4 January 1945 to 5 January 1945, **NACP**.

¹³¹ 366-2 G-2 A/A Report 66th INF DIV (with Incl's) Journal 31 January 1945 to 1 February 1945, Journal 8 February 1945 to 9 February 1945, **NACP**.

¹³² 366-2 G-2 A/A Report 66th INF DIV (with Incl's) Journal February 6, 1945 to February 7, 1945, **NACP**.

¹³³ 366-2 G-2 A/A Report 66th INF DIV (with Incl's) Journal 1 February 1945 to 2 February 1945, **NACP**.

¹³⁴ 366-2 G-2 A/A Report 66th INF DIV (with Incl's) CI Report No. 2 24 January 1945 to 7 February 1945, **NACP**.

Women served as advocates. A teacher (or administrator) stopped by to ask the CIC to look for a student's missing enrollment information that she thought had accidentally gotten mixed in with the December letters collected for censorship. A Mother Superior phoned to check up on a "request." Another nun was mentioned because she "accompani[ed] refugees from German-held Guidel." The head of the Red Cross in Quimperlé, was called in for interrogation over mail that was illegally finding its way into the German-controlled area.¹³⁵ So, women interfaced with American soldiers, but apparently only on matters of business. Counter-Intelligence noted, and seemingly with chagrin, that someone (left-wing units, ex-collaborators, or supporters of fascism, they speculated), was prohibiting women in this area from having anything social to do with US troops.¹³⁶ Perhaps the women themselves did not wish to establish social contacts with them. As refugees they were most likely organizing their existence around the dream of getting home and starting their real lives again. And in general, these Breton Catholic women would not have sought temporary flings. Besides, they had already spent upwards of four years dealing with the "other," German occupiers. Perhaps American soldiers looked suspiciously like a new set of "others."¹³⁷

¹³⁵ 366-2 G-2 A/A Report 66th INF DIV. (with Incl's) Journal 25 January 1945 to 26 January 1945, 18 January 1945 to 19 January 1945, **NACP**. For the ten thousand French people still living in the Lorient Pocket, life was awful. Germans raped and killed some of them, pillaged, or set fire to homes. Certain civilians had no bread for six months. There was little tobacco, no matches, no electricity, and no wood. Queuille, 89. Certainly, many of these oppressed people had family and friends in the already liberated surrounding areas or beyond. Being able to send and receive mail could be comforting. The favoring of these exchanges by the Red Cross would merely have constituted aid to victims of war.

¹³⁶ 366-2 G-2 A/A Report 66th INF DIV. (with Incl's) CI Report 1 January to 23 January 1945, **NACP**.

¹³⁷ This latter idea issues from a thesis discussion with Dr. Sue Farquhar on November 20, 2002.

Chapter 5

Women of Lorient and Liberation



Figure 15: Women offering flowers to American Liberators. Copyright release granted by **Gilles Danet (Telegramme)**.

Lorient Liberated By the Americans

Lorient was one of the last places in Brittany to be liberated on May 8, 1945. It was not a popular uprising like the one that had liberated Paris.¹³⁸ Instead, the Americans accomplished it with very little help from the Resistance. One possible explanation for this is that people in and around Lorient, wanting to be freed but afraid of the war, waited to be liberated by others to avoid (further) suffering.¹³⁹ At any rate, few

¹³⁸ Sweets interview.

¹³⁹ Capdevila, *Bretons*, 14, 20, 21.

women remained in that devastated city to witness this event. As refugees in the surrounding areas, many had already been liberated sometime after D-Day.

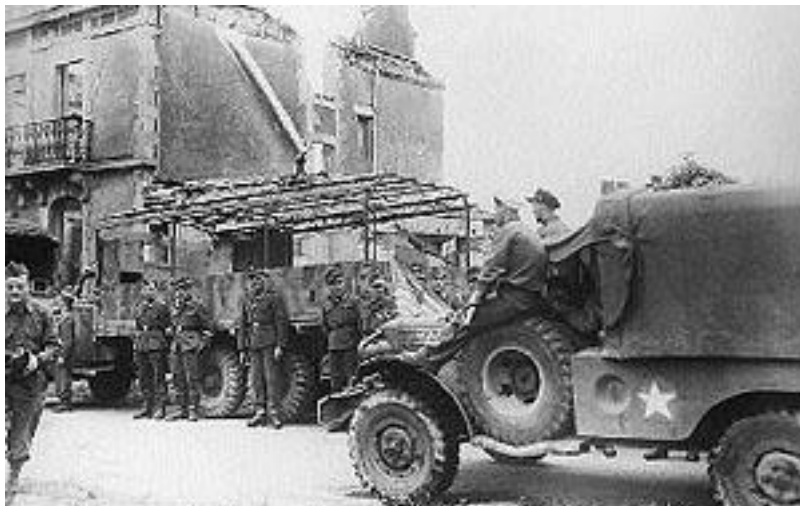


Photo: 10 mai 1945: les Américains entrent à Kénigedon sous le regard des troupes allemandes qui viennent de déposer les armes. En médaillon, le général Farnbacher, commandant des troupes allemandes, remet son arme aux officiers alliés.

Figure 16: Liberation of Lorient. Copyright release granted by **Gilles Danet (Telegramme)**.

The Aftermath or Punishment

Head Shavings

Plouay, freed in the summer of 1944,¹⁴⁰ is where Mimi witnessed the shooting of shorn women placed against a wall of the village church. This was most likely meant to serve as a lesson because the women had been informers.¹⁴¹ In 80% of these situations, the Resistance shaved women's heads.¹⁴² Luc Capdevila concluded that the shavings were demonstrations by the Resistance to prove that they were in charge; whereas, Fabrice Virgili proposed that they represented "patriotic" rapport, a "dialogue" between the Resistance and the crowd. August 1944 was the peak for head shavings (313). It is estimated that 20,000 of them occurred from 1943 to 1946.¹⁴³ This was a punishment meted out to *women*. Burrin proposed that since not many virile Frenchmen were left at home during the Occupation (victims of the Battle of France, or in Germany as POWs or STOs), this conjured up anxieties over the possibility of losing spouses. It also created persistent ill will towards the menace to "national virility" that the presence of young German soldiers represented, thus stressing Frenchmen's mortification over being defeated. They imagined Frenchwomen taking out their anger over national weakness by sleeping with the victorious Germans. Frenchmen resisted the Occupation by putting a tight lid on their "senses" to maintain their incorruptibility. When women had relations with Germans, this subverted that incorruptibility and produced strong feelings of violation and desecration. "At the liberation all of these feelings were passionately

¹⁴⁰ Perhaps on August 7 since there is a photo, apparently posed for, of an American lieutenant in his jeep surrounded by a crowd of French civilians at the *Place de l'église*. *Album Mémorial La Bretagne en Guerre*, 392. **AML**, 5 HB 6.

¹⁴¹ Conversation with Dr. Capdevila, January 30, 2002 in Rennes, France.

¹⁴² Capdevila cited by Virgili, 123.

¹⁴³ Approximately twenty thousand people's heads were shaved, including a (very) few men's. Virgili, 87-88, 83-84.

unleashed in the shaving of women's heads, as if it was meant to purify the national body."¹⁴⁴

The Aftermath or Punishment

"Horizontal Collaboration"

A Sample of 194 women of Lorient Analyzed by Capdevila

Of the 436 people in the Lorient Pocket suspected of collaboration and sent to a camp in Sarzeau in May 1945, almost 90% were women, which is uncommonly high. The French brought 194 women before the courts, 189 of them for being mistresses of German soldiers and 5 for affiliation with the *Parti National Breton* (PNB).¹⁴⁵ This particular sample of women, discovered in the Rennes Archives, is uncommon. First of all, these women had chosen to stay in the Lorient Pocket; whereas, 90% of all civilians had left by February 1943. Secondly, the norm was for more men than women to be accused of collaboration. Thirdly, these women were not questioned by the Resistance

¹⁴⁴ Burrin, 204.

¹⁴⁵ Capdevila, « La 'collaboration sentimentale' », 1. A faction of this Breton National Party advocating independence for Brittany had collaborated militarily with the Germans. There was a Breton *Waffen SS* group which had served as support to the German security service along with the French Popular Party's police as well as the French militia. They also trained as shock troops in Germany in view of carrying out raids in Brittany.

but by a police captain, an official of the French Republic now reestablished. And finally, they were charged with “sentimental collaboration,” nothing more.

Women having slept with German soldiers were most often described as perverted. They were imagined as having a good time, taking many lovers, feasting (while all the good French people faced shortages), and dancing. Because they had sexual relations with Germans, they were capable of informing too. Thus people imagined sexual activity, moral conduct, the action of collaborating, and “national identity” acting together.

It is true that almost all of these women worked for the *Todt* Organization or for the German military. They had voluntarily done so, some to escape the possibility of being sent to Germany to work, a majority in order to earn money. Germans paid good salaries, often supplying food and accommodations. Otherwise it was hard to find work, especially by 1943. They did all kinds of menial jobs for the Germans.

They were alone, either “single, widowed, divorced or separated,” which occasionally meant that their husbands were prisoners who did not keep in touch. Most of them were younger than twenty-five. Often either their mother or their father had died. However, they were still family oriented. They were not highly educated. Four of them had been involved in abortions.

Some stayed in the Lorient Pocket because the Germans required their work or due to “military security.” Some believed that they would be tracked down and killed if they left. Others wanted to stay with their lovers. Some feared unemployment.

Information was gathered concerning their work, but the legal proceedings instituted against them were based only on their having slept with Germans. They were practically presented as prostitutes. The investigating police officer required so many details concerning their private lives that it was almost as if their “sexuality” were a gross violation of law.

Most of these women had had no more than two lovers from 1940-1945. Their relationships continued for a good while. In other words, despite how they were imagined, these women were not “lost girls, prostitutes, or single mothers.” As a matter of fact, most used birth control, a form of power unauthorized for French women.

They were in trouble because women did not have their own “political identity”; they were assigned their husband’s or lover’s. Moreover, their sexuality was regarded as deviating from an accepted norm because a woman’s very sexuality was on trial; so was her “feminine identity.” The fact that French men punished French women for ‘Horizontal Collaboration,’ for having slept with Germans, during the purges in the Liberation era reveals a system of representing women socially, as well as men and women’s relationships, within a French “patriarchal society on the decline.”

As punishment these women's civil rights were taken away. Often they were denied access to the Morbihan; some could not return to any of the five Breton departments. Just two out of one hundred ninety-four women were set free.¹⁴⁶

The Liberation and the period immediately following it were very uneasy throughout France. Some would even argue that the country was on the verge of a civil war. It was a time to settle scores and to blame. In Lorient and its surrounding area, women were convenient targets to censure.

¹⁴⁶ Capdevila, « La 'collaboration sentimentale' », 1-2, 4-9.

Chapter 6

Lorient and Memory Or Women Ignored

The Fiftieth Anniversary of the Liberation of the Lorient Pocket

In 1995 the city of Lorient organized a commemoration of the end of German Occupation. Newspaper articles covering these events recorded memories of the five years. Thus the press participated in the construction of Lorient's collective memory, ignoring women for the most part.

Memories of people who had been children or young adults in 1940 were explored because many of them were still alive and relatively young fifty years later. Several remembered thinking that the first aerial raids were like an enjoyable fireworks display.¹⁴⁷ Yvette's memoir echoed this. She would accompany her father to the attic to make sure that no incendiary bombs had fallen in. "The sight, if it hadn't been so dangerous, was superb." The sky was lit up with bullets that looked like red shooting stars; shells were exploding simultaneously. Parts of the city would also be on fire at times.¹⁴⁸ A young naval firefighter during the Occupation remembered searchlights moving across the skies and red tracers aiming for Allied planes. He came out of a

¹⁴⁷ AML 7 HB 28, 158.

¹⁴⁸ AML 7 HB 28, 21.

shelter on February 7, 1943 (during one of the worst bombings) to witness a “tempest of fire” through which he made his way crouched down with a handkerchief across his mouth.¹⁴⁹

There was unease in invoking this era even fifty years later. One interviewee emphasized that 1940-1945 was now in the past, a past that did not necessarily need to be disclosed. Another, a former member of the Resistance, stated that all could reproach themselves for conduct during the Occupation.¹⁵⁰

Certain articles seemed almost an effort on the part of Frenchmen to save face. Outside of the Pocket, stated one such piece, were members of the *FFI* (the French Resistance army) who “liberated” Lorient. (As already established, the *Americans* freed the city.) Another article, after explaining that *FFI* units reorganized within the French 19th Infantry Division, stated that by May 1945 fifteen thousand infantrymen “backed up by” the American 66th were placed around the Atlantic Pockets. According to a member of the 7th Battalion of the *FFI*, American troops merely stayed behind French lines, did not use their tanks, but would back them up with artillery if asked. (Americans also provided supplies and health assistance.) He concluded that Americans were not great soldiers but that they did have a lot of equipment, which was “their main force when faced with a trained army.”¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁹ **AML 7 HB 28**, 168.

¹⁵⁰ **AML 7 HB 28**, *Revue de Presse*, “50ème Anniversaire de la libération de la poche de Lorient », 157.

¹⁵¹ **AML 7 HB 28**, 158, 163, 175.

The British were bungling. One reporter wondered why they had not assailed the Lorient submarine base while it was under construction (as Donitz, in his memoirs, noted they should have). The first possible reason, the journalist speculated, was that the British did not have enough ready aircraft at the beginning of the war. Secondly, “low altitude” attacks were hazardous due to the *DCA*, the anti-aircraft defense protecting Lorient. Thirdly, false German information created the illusion that they were encountering real problems at their construction site - landslips, long, deep cracks, and poor workmanship. The British let their guard down as a result. Furthermore, the reporter wondered why the British had destroyed Lorient. Wasn't this a “sword thrust into water,” since they left the strength of the German forces intact? The only explanations he could come up with were that they were preparing for a ground attack, or that this was a “show of force,” to prove that they controlled the air.

Certain articles, filling in details about the Lorient Pocket as a fortress, emphasized its impenetrability. Perhaps what is implied then is that there was no need for the French to have tried to assail it. One piece stated that from December 1942 the Germans began building a system of defense, a *Festung*,¹⁵² into which they could fall back and hide from the Allies if necessary. When it was needed in August 1944, it was two-thirds ready. Coaxial, it consisted of “combat posts” on every ridge from the Laita to the Etel, two rivers. Inside, three lines of opposition had been prepared in front of the fortress's “defense line.” The Germans would also use Groix, Belle-Ile, Houat, and Hoedic islands as well as the Quiberon peninsula. The Germans got their supplies via

ten German patrol boats maintaining a sea link between Lorient and Saint Nazaire. In mid-December 1944 the French Navy did try but failed to break this route up by taking

Houat Island.

A very powerful part of Lorient's collective memory was evoked in an article reminding its readers that 52 bodies had been discovered at the citadel in Port-Louis ten days after the German surrender. At another site, the Penthievre fort, sixty-nine cadavers were also found, "immured."¹⁵³ Three further sources referred to these gruesome discoveries. A German Catholic chaplain wrote of accompanying six of these men in their final hour at the fort. He obtained permission for them to write to their loved ones, gave them communion, located a crucifix for them to kiss, and prayed with them individually before they were shot. And although he remarked that these men had not been tortured, it was noted that many of the bodies uncovered at these sites showed traces of mutilation. Lips, for instance, had been sewn together with wire. When the Allies forced General Fahrmbacher to view the common grave at Port-Louis, he exclaimed, "I never wanted this."¹⁵⁴ Marie-Thérèse told of a friend later taking her through the torture chamber in Port-Louis where she saw blood still on the walls.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵² "fortress"

¹⁵³ **AML** 7 HB 28, 160, 163, 174.

¹⁵⁴ Le Berd, 148-151 ; Le Boterf, 566-567 ; Queuille, 108-113. The chaplain stated that 93 individuals, and not 69, had been executed at the Penthievre fort.

¹⁵⁵ Cloerec interviews.

Jacques Stosskopf, a Lorient legend, was also brought up. In 1942 he was the Lorient naval dockyard's assistant manager. From Alsace, thus able to speak fluent German, he was allowed access to the submarine base, which was extremely rare for a Frenchman. People mistook him for a collaborator since he attended meetings in Vichy on a regular basis. But in fact he was giving memorized information to someone in the intelligence service there who was passing it on to the Americans. In October 1942 in order to look like he was cooperating with the Germans, he had to draw up a list of arsenal employees to serve in the *STO*. Although he was able to whittle down the number from 600 to 246, people still demonstrated, shouting the slogan "Laval to the execution stake, death to Stosskopf."¹⁵⁶ The Gestapo sent for Stosskopf on February 21, 1944. He was shot at the Struthof death camp on September 2, 1944.¹⁵⁷

Stosskopf's story is recounted in three further sources.¹⁵⁸

Contrast all of the above to the number of times that women were mentioned. They were referred to once in connection with horizontal collaboration. This occurred when a reporter cited the reasons given by one of his interviewees for being cautious about the memories he shared. Families of collaborators or of women who had "deserved" to be shorn might still be living, and they had feelings. Only three further anecdotes directly or indirectly involved women. A lady who had been twelve when the

¹⁵⁶ Laval was the prime minister of Pétain's Vichy government. Paxton, 134. Most likely the worst collaborator in the regime, he was executed by the French on October 15, 1945. Henry Rousso, *Pétain et la fin de la collaboration Sigmaringen 1944-1945* (Brussels: Editions Complexe, 1984), 408.

¹⁵⁷ AML *Jacques Stosskopf, 1898-1944 Une histoire secrète*, text researched and written by Jean-François Noblet, *Agent de Valorisation du Patrimoine*, and AML 7 HB 28, « Stosskopf, l'homme de l'ombre, » 166.

¹⁵⁸ Bourguet, 32-33, 57, 77, 82-83; Le Berd, 71-72; Queuille, 19, 23.

Germans arrived remembered seeing their side-cars and a field kitchen. Fearing these “Barbarians” who were setting up camp below their farm, she and her siblings entreated their mother to put on her scapular. They thought she would be safe disguised as a nun. A woman who had been seven in 1943 remembered her grandfather asking a farmer to help them evacuate Lorient. They put as much as they could in his cart. Then her mother pushed her brother in his carriage all the way to Lochrist, approximately thirty miles. Germans had individuals in Lorient (more than likely women) do their laundry. Those involved were none too proud of it and were criticized for cooperating with the enemy.¹⁵⁹ The women of Lorient during the Nazi Occupation deserve a far greater place in that city’s collective memory than this. But by 1995, the memory of this war period had perhaps been reduced to a code. It was less painful for men to remember the bad women who had consorted with the conquerors rather than the fact that the men of Lorient had not been able to stand up to the German occupiers.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁹ **AML 7 HB 28**, 167.

¹⁶⁰ This latter idea emanated from a thesis discussion with Dr. Amy Nelson on November 7, 2002.

Conclusions

After June 1940, the women of Lorient faced extreme changes, the German Occupation, scarcities, Allied bombings, evacuation, and an American military campaign. Nonetheless, they ran their lives, focusing on maintaining as much normality as possible.

They strived to keep themselves and their loved ones fed, clothed, and sheltered, women's tasks. Maintaining these routines allowed them to struggle through the severe and evolving realities.

These women faced their new circumstances immediately, coming out to watch the arriving occupiers, finding them surprising but non-threatening. Witnessing their POWs being marched off, they were still not alarmed, assuming mistakenly that they would soon be released. Taking advantage of this period of transition, those lucky enough to own a business could balance the need for money with the desire not to serve the Nazis. Others continued to work as usual, needing the money. At this time, a handful of women joined the Resistance too.

Despite poor distribution, women of Lorient procured necessities, coping with rationing. They used substitutes and served what they found, trying new recipes concocted in view of the circumstances from women's magazines.¹⁶¹ They bought on

¹⁶¹ Veillon, 165.

the black market and bartered. They demonstrated successfully for bread, butter, and potatoes. They made new clothes out of old ones, and even recovered parachutes to use as fabric.

Their relationships with the Germans varied. By giving them the benefit of the doubt, women could stay informed and receive help. Some treated Germans as fellow human beings, extending shelter to them during the bombings. Certain found the conquerors reasonable enough when it came to requisitions, since they were allowed to inspect their seized property and request compensation. Women came to the realization, though, that the Germans were less ready to accept the blame for civilian deaths. Some had German lovers and thus material advantages. Many were tried for this and lost civil rights as a result after the Liberation. Prostitutes enjoyed brisk business, but ran the risk of contracting venereal diseases. Women feared the SS with reason since they tortured and deported civilians.

Above all, the women of Lorient struggled with the bombings. They were devastating when they occurred, and it was terrifying not to know when the raids would happen. At these moments, they sought shelter, spending sleepless hours in wet cellars with their loved ones. They buried their dead and visited the wounded in hospitals. Their children assumed adulthood precociously, standing in lines for food and looking for new lodging. With courage women helped each other, extending solidarity to strangers as well. When possible, they sent their children to school and stayed in touch with older ones no longer living at home. In contrast to the deafening sounds of bombs exploding

and the harsh colors of fires, women of Lorient sought to preserve common humanity.

This included weddings, communions, parties, and days at the beach.

Evacuated in 1943, women of Lorient once again located shelter in the surrounding areas, some renting from villagers. Here some witnessed young Frenchmen evading the *STO* and others hid Resistance fighters. Certain volunteered with the Red Cross, rescuing Allied aviators under the watchful eyes of the Germans.

In the summer of 1944 while Brittany was being liberated by the Allies, a sizable number of German soldiers took refuge in Lorient. The American 66th Infantry Division settled in to contain this Lorient Pocket. Women in the area interfaced with the 66th Infantry Division's Counter-Intelligence Service, which kept detailed records. Some women were suspect. Certain were thought to have had "relations" with the Germans. If they volunteered for the Red Cross, they had to receive American clearance. If they were thought to have anything to do with the black market, they were investigated. Some women were helpful. Certain informed for the Americans, and the newly-wed wife of an American officer who had been in the Resistance shared information. Women made inquiries through Counter-Intelligence, looking for loved ones or serving as advocates.

One nun accompanied civilians as they were released from the Lorient Pocket.

American troops liberated Lorient on May 8, 1945. Women were there to offer them flowers. But France was tottering on the brink of civil war, and women were being blamed and punished for what had gone on over the last four years. Men in the Resistance shaved women's heads or worse. If, as in Plouay, these women were

suspected of having informed for the Germans, they were executed. One hundred eighty-nine women from the Lorient Pocket were tried for “horizontal collaboration” and deprived of certain civil rights. Men thus transferred the blame and perceived themselves as freeing France from moral blemish, which was better than nothing since they had not succeeded in freeing their homeland of the Germans.

Pollard would certainly agree that the story of the women of Lorient informs the history of World War II, adding a further layer of description. Research proves that these women courageously took control of their lives during the German Occupation, the evacuation, and as refugees. At the Liberation, however, men took back that control, subjecting women to blame and punishment. The Fiftieth Commemoration of the Liberation in 1995 should have been the moment to add nuances to the record rather than to perpetuate false claims and omit the story of these women.

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